

Uncovering the Past-Can You Dig It?

Archeology is the study of people and things from the past. There are many ways to discover the past. To learn about the past, historians must look at many different sources, both written and non-written and try to find out what they mean.

Written sources- Anything written down can give clues about people and events of the past. Books, letters, diaries, speeches and Songs can help explain events in history, as well as markings on tombs, calendars and maps. The largest problem with written sources is they only go back to 3,000 BCE when writing developed. The period of history before writing is known as pre history. To learn about prehistoric times, historians must rely on non written sources.

Non Written sources-

Oral tradition and legends- Oral stories that are handed down through the generations and are passed down by word of mouth. Over time, these stories become exaggerated, but usually hold some truth. Legends can be found in all countries and many cultures share similar legends.

Fossils- the remains or imprints of once living plants or animals.

Artifacts- An artifact is a man-made object from long ago. Everyday objects such as Kitchen midden, ancient "trash," can be as valuable as treasure to an archeologist because they tell a lot about a culture. Archeologists dig up artifacts at sites for examination. A site is where the excavating, or digging up remains occurs. Once a site is located, archeologists carefully begin to dig into the layers of the earth recording the exact location of every object. Each layer of earth is called a strata or bed. Stratigraphy

the study of remains found in different layers of earth, helps us to date artifacts by examining the surrounding rocks. Items are not always found in even layers because of natural forces such as animals or digging. These occurrences often will cause folds or faults to happen on the earth's surface.

To determine how old something is, archeologist use cultural dating and scientific dating. Cultural dating is comparing objects with information they already have.

EXAMPLE:

Scientific dating involves analyzing the objects in a laboratory. Two examples of scientific dating are dendrochronology and radioactive Carbon dating.

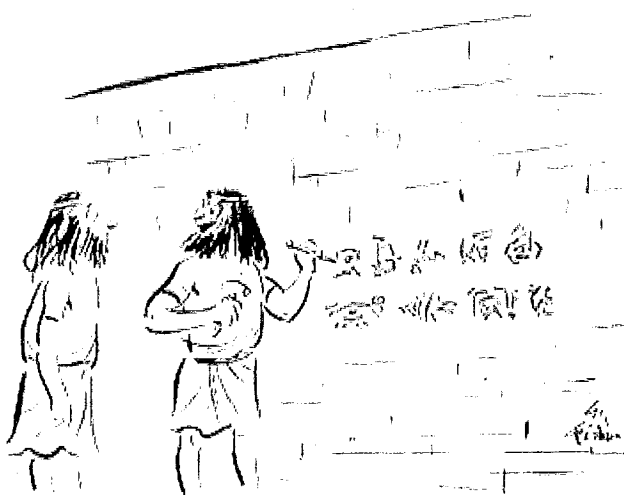
1. Dendrochronology is the oldest form of scientific dating. It involves the counting of the number of tree rings to help determine the age of wooden objects.
2. Radioactive Carbon 14 dating- By analyzing the amount of Carbon left in items, scientists can help date the age of dead objects. Living things stop producing carbon once they die so archeologist can date objects based on the amount of carbon it has left. This has some restrictions however. The object must have been alive and this type of dating does not work on objects less than 1,000 years old or older than 60,000 years old. Pollution will also affect the accuracy of carbon. Even with these restrictions, carbon dating is one of the most useful techniques for archeologists,

Different kinds of sources offer different information. A primary source is especially valuable. This first hand information was recorded at the time of the people or the events as they happened. Secondary sources are created by people who studied the original sources. Examples:

Primary source-

Secondary source-

Archeologists sometimes discover new items will appear in a certain area. This is most likely a result of cultural diffusion. Whenever different cultures come in contact, they exchange goods and ideas. This can be a result of trade, migration or even war. Archeologist piece together their finds by studying the people's culture (shared way of living), community (where they lived), communication (exchange of ideas), religion (what they worshipped and valued) and traditions (beliefs and actions handed down from their ancestors). They use extreme care and have immense patience. Often archeologists will work at the same site for several years!



"It doesn't mean a thing, but boy, will it drive them crazy a thousand years from now!"