

The Three Basic Techniques of

ARCHAEOLOGY

OBSERVATION

DISCOVERY

RECORDING



WHERE TO DIG

The artefacts archaeologists search for are often buried and must be dug up, or excavated. That's why an archaeological expedition is often called a dig.

1. Ruins that can be seen were the first sites to be explored. Name at least three examples in which at least part of an artefact (for example, a monument) could be seen without digging.

Archaeologists look for mounds that look different from natural hills. In the Near East many of these mounds, called **tells**, can be found. As houses collapsed (or towns destroyed), they were levelled off. New houses (or towns) were later built on top of the debris or on the layer of soil that had formed.

2. Draw a diagram of a tell.

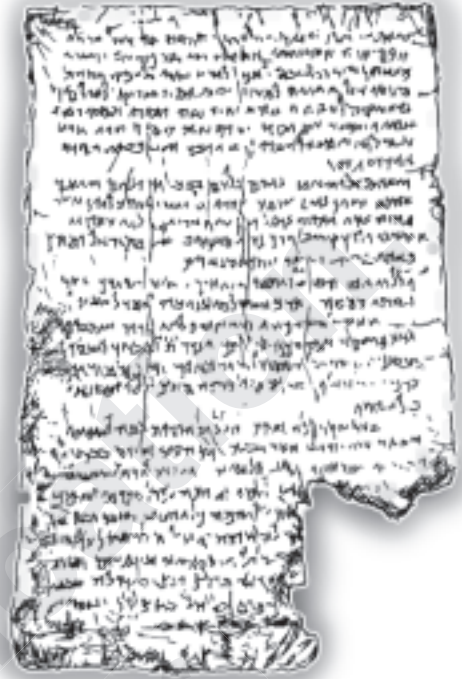


3. In many cases, when a town was destroyed by a disaster, years later people again settled at the same site. Explain.

CHRONOLOGY

There are two kinds of chronology: absolute and relative. It is called absolute chronology when the dating can be verified—for example, according to written records. It is called relative chronology when the dating cannot be substantiated by written records or other certain methods. Instead, it must be compared to other things found nearby.

It is important for an archaeologist to note the objects with which an artefact is found as well as its exact location. What is found with it is often a clue to its age.



Match the Experts

1. Match the finds on the left with the expert on the right who might help an archaeologist date a find.

Paintings of animals on a cave wall

Pottery in which pollen was used to temper the clay

A piece of vase, ground into powder, to be tested for the glow it gives off

A tablet with ancient writings on it

Human remains left by retreating glacier of last Ice Age

1. Chemist

2. Linguist

3. Paleontologist

4. Geologist

5. Botanist

1. On another sheet of paper draw a map and locate the site of ancient Troy.
2. The site at Hisarlik revealed nine layers. In the bottom layer were pottery and ivory objects, but there were no bronze artefacts. Keeping in mind this fact and also the civilisations then known to historians, explain why Schliemann, in his haste, concluded that the second layer from the bottom was Homeric Troy.

3. Homer's Iliad inspired Heinrich Schliemann to find Homeric Troy. It describes an apparently real war between the Greeks and the Trojans; however, the cause of the war was obviously legend. Research the legendary cause of the Trojan War. Draw a series of pictures to illustrate the legend. (Add more boxes if needed.)

THE MAYA

The Mayan civilisation of southern Mexico and Central America was the most brilliant pre-Columbian civilisation ever discovered. It flourished from the third century to the sixteenth century, when the Spaniards arrived.

An American by the name of John Lloyd Stephens had read about ancient ruins in the jungles of Central America and in the Yucatán. In 1839 he decided to go to Central America to find and study the ruins. He asked his English artist friend, Frederick Catherwood, to join him.

After an extremely treacherous journey, they arrived in the village of Copán, in Honduras. It was said that the ruins there were well preserved. At last their native guide led them to a pyramid and other monuments even more wonderful than they had hoped.

Stephens explored while Catherwood made careful and detailed drawings of the sculptured stones that covered the stairways, walls and monuments. When Stephens and Catherwood questioned their guide about who had built the abandoned city, the guide could not tell them. No-one knew. From Copán, they went to other forgotten cities.

When Stephens published his book two years later, it caused a great sensation. He and Catherwood had put an end to the theory that only savages had lived in America. The people who were responsible for these artefacts were wonderful artists and architects.

The work of Stephens and Catherwood inspired other archaeologists and scholars to study the area. They learned that a brilliant people called the Maya had built the abandoned cities. The Maya had invented a hieroglyphic form of writing and two kinds of numbers (similar to the way that we use both Arabic and Roman numerals.) They also had invented a sign for zero, which Europeans didn't have until it was brought from India in the eighth century!) What's more, they had worked out a nearly perfect calendar!

The archaeologists also learned something strange. Every twenty years (more often in the large cities) the Maya set up new pyramids, palaces and other monuments. This went on for about 500 to 600 years. Then suddenly it all stopped. Copán erected its final monument in 800. Tikal, the largest Mayan city, built its last monument by 869. Although archaeologists have tried to guess what caused the abandonment, no-one can be sure.

