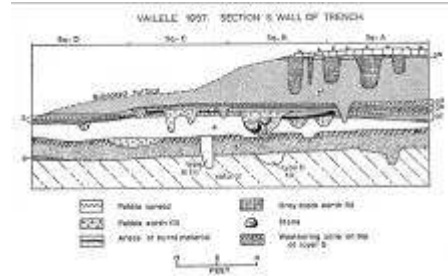


What is Archaeology?



Archaeology is the study of past human cultures from the physical remains they left behind..

There are three basic types of remains:

Artefacts: are portable remains made or used by humans e.g. adze, pottery.

Features: are non-portable remains made or used by humans e.g. umu pit, mound.

Human and animal bones: occur as burials and residue from settlements.

Methods

In archaeology three main methods are used to discover and understand past human activities:

1. **Survey:** where archaeologists seek out sites and collect various information about them.
2. **Excavation:** where archaeologists dig up remains that are buried beneath the soil.
3. **Analysis:** where archaeological materials recovered by excavation are examined, classified, and identified so that their functions can be reconstructed.

Analyses:

Typology: classification and grouping of artefacts and features, according to similarities and differences.

Chronology: Estimation of the time when an artefact or feature was in use. To estimate age some of the most commonly used scientific methods are:

- **Radiocarbon method** which is used to measure the decomposition of the ^{14}C isotope in organic material such as bone, wood, nuts, and shells.
- **Seriation**, which uses the classification system to sort types into series so as to show which are older and which are younger.
- **Stratigraphy**, which is used when excavating to gather information about which remains are found on the surface and which are found in deeper layers. The latter are usually younger than the former.

Prior to the use of scientific methods chronology was often provided by oral traditions and genealogies. Historical calendars and texts could also be used.

Other analyses:

GIS: Geographical information systems. Using all kinds of digital geographical information (maps etc.) to build digital databases that can be used as survey data and to analyse past settlement patterns and land use.

Osteology: The identification of material. Human skeletal remains can be analysed to show the age, gender, stature, disease and traumas of individual people and groups. Faunal remains are by the type of animal, and age. Butchering or cut marks can also be found, which help us to understand how animals are processed for food.

aDNA (ancient DNA) analyses: These can give us information on genetic relationships among people and among animals.

Micro analyses: These can provide information on the composition and craftsmanship of artefacts or the source of the material the artefacts are made from.

Theory

To obtain a deeper understanding of past human relationships, interactions, exchanges and the social organisations of societies methods and analyses have to be evaluated within a theoretical framework.