

were supposed to have occurred approximately 450 B.C., this represents a significant time lag between the original writings and the first available copies. In 1947, however, the Dead Sea scrolls were discovered. These scrolls contain copies of parts of at least 500 ancient books. One of the scrolls contained a complete copy of the Old Testament book of Isaiah. The scroll was dated by archaeologists as having been written in 125 B.C. This version of Isaiah proved to be word for word identical with the standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text. The 5 percent of variation consisted mostly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling. In over 1,000 years, then, the book of Isaiah (and presumably the rest of the Old Testament) was copied faithfully. This adds great evidence to the already convincing data which supports the bibliographic reliability of the Old Testament.

In the end, then, the Bible passes the bibliographic test better than any other work of ancient history. As William Green puts it, "...it may be safely said that no other work of antiquity has been so accurately transmitted." (*General Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 181) Thus, we can be sure that the Bible which we read today is faithful to the original eyewitness accounts. Combine that with the fact that the Bible passes the internal test just as well as any ancient document of history and that it passes the external test *better* than any document of its time, and you come to the *scientific* conclusion that the stories and accounts in the Bible are more trustworthy than any of the other accounts we have about the Roman Empire and other facets of ancient life!

ON YOUR OWN

5.5 Suppose archaeologists found a new historical document (a copy of a much older document) in a ruin. A few years later, several copies of that same document were discovered in a nearby location, and it is determined that the same king who commissioned the first copy also commanded that the other copies be made. Would those copies help the document in passing the bibliographic test? Why or why not?

Archaeology in the Absence of Historical Documents

Although archaeology is of immense value in determining the validity of historical documents, archaeology can also stand alone as a means of learning about people and civilizations that are not recorded in historical documents. After all, almost every civilization leaves behind artifacts. We can learn a lot about ancient people from those artifacts, as long as we are careful to understand that in just examining artifacts, we do not have a complete picture. Thus, all conclusions that we draw must be very tentative.

When an archaeologist discovers an ancient artifact, one of the first things he or she asks is, "How old is this thing?" Unfortunately, it is often difficult to provide an exact answer to this question. After all, how in the world would you know how old something is if you just dig it up from the ground? Well, sometimes, the artifact itself can give you the answer. Ancient coins, for example, might have the date they were made printed on them. Also, an artifact might be

referenced in a work of history. For example, suppose a work of history mentions the date at which an Egyptian king died. If an archaeologist can find that king's tomb, then the tomb and the artifacts buried in it can be dated by the reference in the historical document.

FIGURE 5.2
Artifacts With Known Dates



This sarcophagus (a fancy name for a coffin) might hold the remains of a king who is referenced in a work of history. If so, the age of the sarcophagus is known.



This rock with Egyptian writing might have a date on it. If it does, its age is known.

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When the age of the artifact can be determined in this way, archaeologists say that the artifact has a **known age**.

Known age - The age of an artifact as determined by a date printed on it or a reference to the artifact in a work of history

Unfortunately, few artifacts have known ages. Thus, archaeologists must employ other means by which to determine how old an artifact is. One of the more reliable methods is called **dendrochronology** (den droh kron awl' uh gee).

Dendrochronology - The process of counting tree rings to determine the age of a tree

During the life of a tree, its trunk expands. If you cut down a tree and look at the inside of the trunk, you will see that it is made up of a series of rings, which are commonly called "tree rings."