

Carbon 14 Dating How Far Back Can It Be Considered Reliable?

Great Question!! (Which means – the answer is not so simple.)

First of all, how are the old civilization ages determined? Not by Carbon 14. Like the geologic column, these ages are determined by a “scheme.” The “scheme” for the geologic column is based on the millions of years expected to build mountains, erode mountains, and fit with evolutionary dogma. The civilization age “schemes” attempt to fit the preconceived notion of the long ages between the Stone, Bronze, Iron, and Modern Ages. These are “dated” by the appearance of the artifacts. The stone artifacts are the oldest, then the Bronze, etc. Then, of all things, they also add the civilization’s “pottery” as “confirmation.” However, we know this is all nonsense. Forget the “Stone” age. What does Scripture say?

Gen 4:22 And Zillah, she also bare Tubalcain, an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron: and the sister of Tubalcain *was* Naamah.

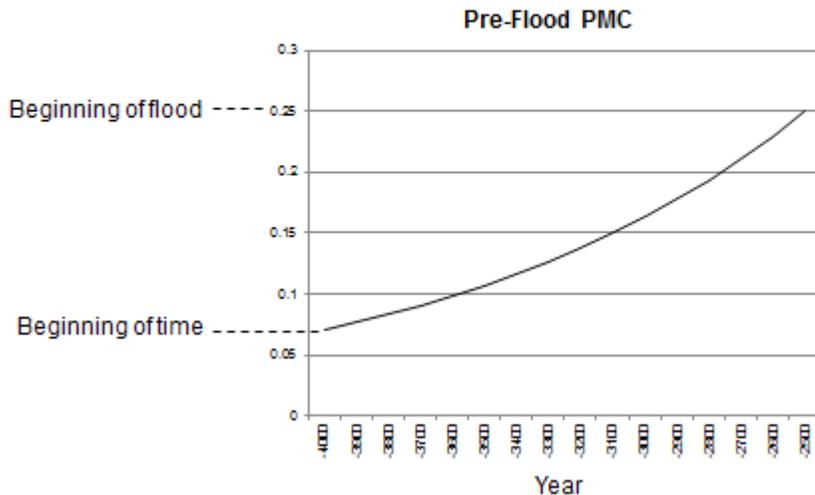
Yes – Brass (bronze) and iron were used together way back in Genesis Chapter 4!! To what extent that an ancient culture used (or uses today) stone, bronze, and iron depends on what’s available; both physically and “knowledge-wise” for that civilization. (Some civilizations today still use stone and bone. Are they ten’s of thousands of years old? Of course not.)

So what about Carbon 14? To answer your question, let’s talk about what we know about Carbon 14 dating and then pull it together. First of all, Carbon 14 dating methods do not determine an “age.” They determine a “ratio” between what the specimen Carbon 14 content is, and what the current atmospheric Carbon 14 content is. So, if a specimen has 10% of the current atmospheric Carbon 14 in it, we would say the pmc (percent modern carbon) is “10%.” When did it live? Well, what was the Carbon 14 content in the atmosphere at the time that the specimen lived? Let’s look at three scenarios.

First:

Prior to the flood, we have enough data to show that the pmc (percent modern carbon) in the atmosphere at that time ranged between 0.07% and 0.25%. That’s very small and a very small range for those 1500 years.

PMC Correction Factors



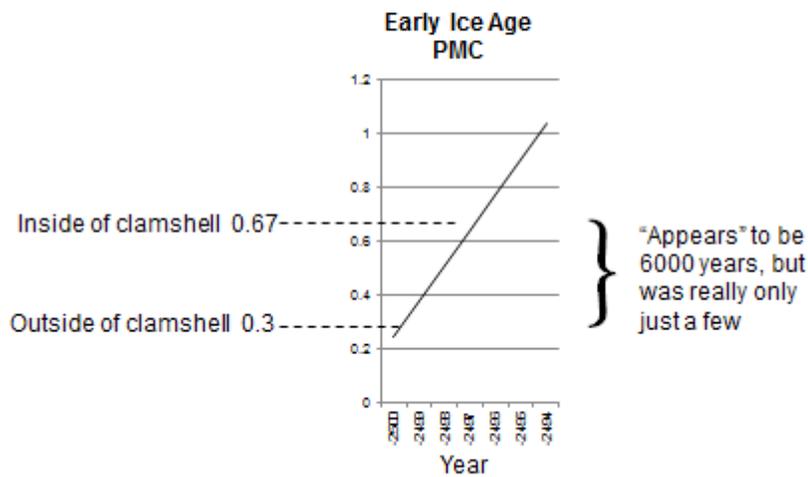
The graph above tries to show this curve for these 1500 years. This graph has been “stretched” **vertically** in order to show such a narrow range. How do we know this is true? Because every prediluvian specimen ever found falls within this range. This presents a very major problem with “dating” all prediluvian specimens. Creatures that lived during this time potentially lived for many hundreds of years. That being the case, the ingestion of their Carbon 14 would have varied with age. So, about all we can say is, this specimen must have lived before the flood.

Second:

According to flood models, immediately after the flood, the Carbon content in the atmosphere would have increased very rapidly. How do we know this is true? For one, you have probably heard mocking statements like, “You can’t trust Carbon 14. Did you hear about the mammoth that had a tusk of {such and such} age but his ankle bone had an age of {a significantly different}?!?” Well, if the Carbon 14 content was changing rapidly and different cells in the body are replaced at different rates, of course the ages “appear” to be significantly different. When it comes to “measurements,” never throw away data just because you don’t like it. The question is, “What is the data trying to tell us?” With the mammoth, it is difficult to tell because we don’t know the cell replacement rates of the tusk or bones. But how about clams? Clam shells grow from the inside out. The Leibnitz Labs in Keil, Germany was puzzled by this 0.07% to 0.25% pmc that is very obviously present in ancient specimens. They were so puzzled that they spent two years trying to find out why it was there. The Carbon 14 content should be so low that it should be totally undetectable in ancient specimens. But it wasn’t undetectable. In fact, it is always detectable. (HHhhmmm.... Sounds like the earth must be young.) Anyway, they studied this “problem” for two years. At the end of their research project they concluded,

“So far, no theory explaining the results has survived all the tests.” Of course not! They can’t accept the fact that the earth is very young. That’s why the Carbon 14 is always detectable. These specimens are not that old! Anyway (back to my story) they measured the Carbon 14 contents of a particular “ice age” clam. The ice age would have occurred shortly after the flood. In every case, the “apparent age” of the inside of the clam shell “appeared to be” 6000 years younger than the outside.

PMC Correction Factors

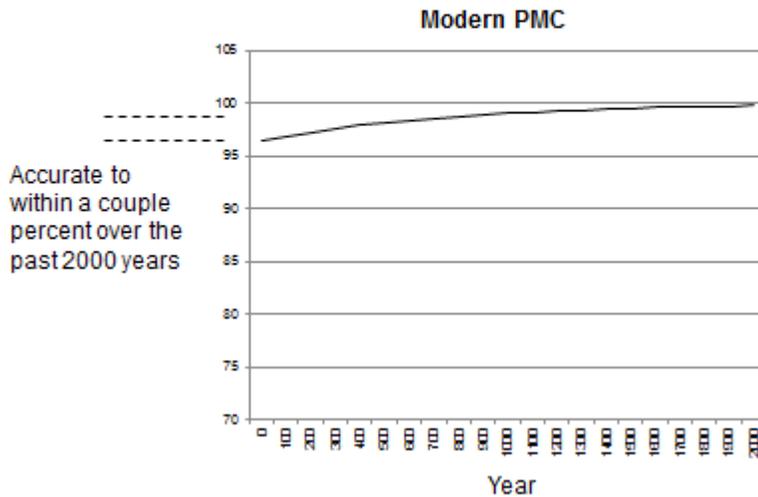


Unlike the previous graph that was stretched vertically, this graph has been stretched **horizontally** because the curve is so “steep.” Otherwise it would look almost like a straight vertical line.

Third:

The Carbon 14 content (and therefor “ratio”) for the past 2000 years can be verified historically fairly accurately. So, let’s look at that graph:

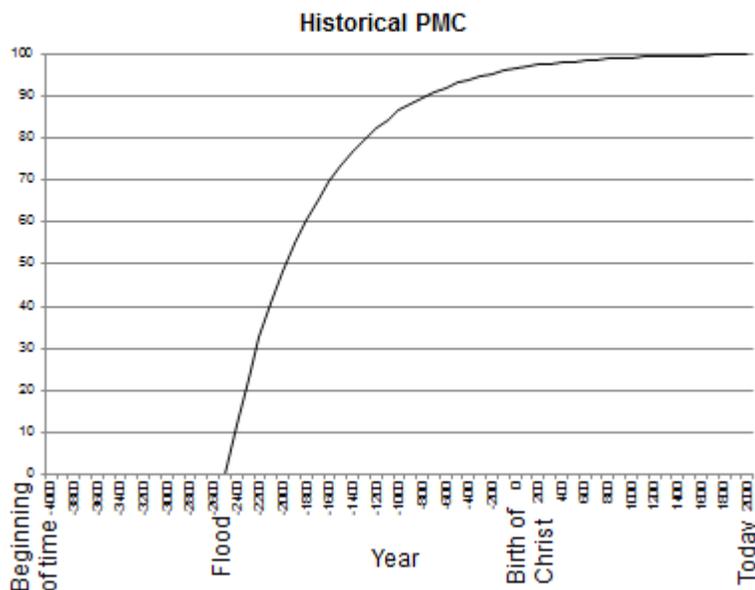
PMC Correction Factors



Notice the slight slope upwards. The Carbon 14 content in the atmosphere is still increasing! So much for an “old earth!” IF the earth were even one million years old, the Carbon 14 content would have certainly reached equilibrium by now!!

OK – So what happens when we pull all three of these graphs together? Let’s put all three together on the “same scale.” In other words, they won’t be “stretched” in either direction.

PMC Correction Factors



Oh my!?! Do you see the big “curve?” How do the second and third graphs fit together? Is that a sharp curve? A long rounded curve? We don’t really know. This large rounded curve has been included using “curve fitting” techniques to match the “slope” of the ends of the two curves it attaches to.

You asked about Hezekiah. Well, he lived much closer to Christ than the flood so I would be more confident of the Carbon 14 data for his time period than, say, 500 years prior to him. But, even then, how accurate are you looking for? Don’t forget that volcano burps cause temporary atmospheric Carbon 14 anomalies. And – don’t forget – when a scientist tells you an artifact dates to 700 BC, did he “correct” for the fact that the Carbon 14 in the atmosphere would have been less than the current content? Remember, the testing gives you pmc (percent modern carbon;) not age. The scientist probably isn’t going to tell you whether this was corrected or what other assumptions were made because he “picked” a date that fits his scheme. (OOPS. Didn’t mean to be cynical. It’s just that – everyone has an agenda.) Bible scholars (unfortunately) argue over many Biblical dates and will use the data that supports their belief.

One last comment: The astute mathematician may note that there should be a couple other minor “adjustments” to the data. My point is to show the “general shape” of this complex curve for the atmospheric carbon 14. Although a couple other “adjustments” would make the graph more “accurate,” the actual differences would be so minor that it is not worth the extra verbiage to need to discuss these. So – In the interest of keeping the explanation simple, I have chosen to ignore a couple minor adjustments.

Well – now I have a question for you. Did that answer your question? 😊

Jay Auxt
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ps. Personally I believe that the thousand years prior to Christ “should” be easy to determine by Carbon 14 data but this will require significant research by scientists with verifiable history and Carbon 14 data without the mysteries of “correction factors.” To date, no one (to my knowledge) has done that research.