

Introduction to Historiography

HDS 301



**University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre
Open and Distance Learning Course Series Development**

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Vice-Chancellor's Message

The Distance Learning Centre is building on a solid tradition of over two decades of service in the provision of External Studies Programme and now Distance Learning Education in Nigeria and beyond. The Distance Learning mode to which we are committed is providing access to many deserving Nigerians in having access to higher education especially those who by the nature of their engagement do not have the luxury of full time education. Recently, it is contributing in no small measure to providing places for teeming Nigerian youths who for one reason or the other could not get admission into the conventional universities.

These course materials have been written by writers specially trained in ODL course delivery. The writers have made great efforts to provide up to date information, knowledge and skills in the different disciplines and ensure that the materials are user-friendly.

In addition to provision of course materials in print and e-format, a lot of Information Technology input has also gone into the deployment of course materials. Most of them can be downloaded from the DLC website and are available in audio format which you can also download into your mobile phones, IPod, MP3 among other devices to allow you listen to the audio study sessions. Some of the study session materials have been scripted and are being broadcast on the university's Diamond Radio FM 101.1, while others have been delivered and captured in audio-visual format in a classroom environment for use by our students. Detailed information on availability and access is available on the website. We will continue in our efforts to provide and review course materials for our courses.

However, for you to take advantage of these formats, you will need to improve on your I.T. skills and develop requisite distance learning Culture. It is well known that, for efficient and effective provision of Distance learning education, availability of appropriate and relevant course materials is a *sine qua non*. So also, is the availability of multiple plat form for the convenience of our students. It is in fulfilment of this, that series of course materials are being written to enable our students study at their own pace and convenience.

It is our hope that you will put these course materials to the best use.



Prof. Abel Idowu Olayinka

Vice-Chancellor

Foreword

As part of its vision of providing education for “Liberty and Development” for Nigerians and the International Community, the University of Ibadan, Distance Learning Centre has recently embarked on a vigorous repositioning agenda which aimed at embracing a holistic and all encompassing approach to the delivery of its Open Distance Learning (ODL) programmes. Thus we are committed to global best practices in distance learning provision. Apart from providing an efficient administrative and academic support for our students, we are committed to providing educational resource materials for the use of our students. We are convinced that, without an up-to-date, learner-friendly and distance learning compliant course materials, there cannot be any basis to lay claim to being a provider of distance learning education. Indeed, availability of appropriate course materials in multiple formats is the hub of any distance learning provision worldwide.

In view of the above, we are vigorously pursuing as a matter of priority, the provision of credible, learner-friendly and interactive course materials for all our courses. We commissioned the authoring of, and review of course materials to teams of experts and their outputs were subjected to rigorous peer review to ensure standard. The approach not only emphasizes cognitive knowledge, but also skills and humane values which are at the core of education, even in an ICT age.

The development of the materials which is on-going also had input from experienced editors and illustrators who have ensured that they are accurate, current and learner-friendly. They are specially written with distance learners in mind. This is very important because, distance learning involves non-residential students who can often feel isolated from the community of learners.

It is important to note that, for a distance learner to excel there is the need to source and read relevant materials apart from this course material. Therefore, adequate supplementary reading materials as well as other information sources are suggested in the course materials.

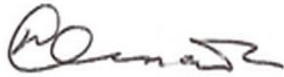
Apart from the responsibility for you to read this course material with others, you are also advised to seek assistance from your course facilitators especially academic advisors during your study even before the interactive session which is by design for revision. Your academic advisors will assist you using convenient technology including Google Hang Out, You Tube, Talk Fusion, etc. but you have to take advantage of these. It is also going to be of immense advantage if you complete assignments as at when due so as to have necessary feedbacks as a guide.

The implication of the above is that, a distance learner has a responsibility to develop requisite distance learning culture which includes diligent and disciplined self-study, seeking available administrative and academic support and acquisition of basic information technology skills. This is why you are encouraged to develop your computer skills by availing yourself the opportunity of training that the Centre’s provide and put these into use.

In conclusion, it is envisaged that the course materials would also be useful for the regular students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria who are faced with a dearth of high quality textbooks. We are therefore, delighted to present these titles to both our distance learning students and the university's regular students. We are confident that the materials will be an invaluable resource to all.

We would like to thank all our authors, reviewers and production staff for the high quality of work.

Best wishes.



Professor Bayo Okunade

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Course Introduction

This course is a study of the writing of history. It introduces us to what history is all about; to other men's interpretations of the past; and to the problems encountered in the writing of history. And by exposing the rigours of the discipline and its usefulness, it makes us appreciate the importance of history in any nation.

The subject matter of history is the past. History examines the actions of men and women who existed in the past. It does this through the instrumentality of the fragmentary evidence about the past which exists in the present. The historian thus goes through archives, searching for documents and private papers. He collects traditions from people which he makes use of, in addition to other relevant sources in order to discover significant things about the past.

The writing of history has spanned several centuries and its development into an academic discipline testifies to the importance of history in the society. History, as the study of the past, makes a society or nation to have knowledge about itself. A nation without self knowledge is a nation drift. History, also illuminates the present and satisfies men's curiosity about the past. Thus, there is hardly any nation that does not have its own written history in the present age.

The present status of history naturally presupposes the existence of professional historians, that is, people who are trained in the art of writing history. These historians are prolific about the 'histories' of specific groups or communities, cultures, nations and continents.

But there have been a set of thinkers, historians and philosophers, who feel that history should not just consist in the investigation of particular areas of the past. According to such thinkers like Herder, Hegel, Marx, Buckles, Spengler, and Toynbee, the historian should also be preoccupied with the discovery of the grand order that laid beneath the historical developments. To this end, they have come up with several theories to explain the entire historical process. Their approaches varied but all their ideas have been classified as the 'speculative philosophy' of history.

Another school of historians have been trying since the beginning of this century, to analyze critically the nature of history as a specific discipline and a branch of knowledge. Their attention has been focused on the procedures and categories used by the practicing historian.

In other words, rather than preoccupying themselves with the entire historical process, like the first group, they are concerned with the methods of inquiry adopted by the practicing historian; the task of the historian; the manner in which the historian arrives at his explanations; and the relations between history and other forms of investigation. Thinkers in this school include people like Dilthey, Croce and Collingwood.

The contribution of this latter group is especially valuable in that it has brought into the open several of the problems faced by the historian in the process of writing history. One is the problem of knowledge. This problem centres on whether the past could be known given the fact that a past action or event is gone forever and cannot be recalled. How then is the historian to ascertain what really happened in the past?

Another problem is that created by the sources available to the historian. The information at the disposal of the historian are so skeletal and fragmentary that he has to put his interpretative ability to work more than would have been necessary if the sources were more fleshy. And this role of interpretation has made several thinkers to believe that history is what the historian makes of it.

There is also the case of historical explanation. What kind of explanation does the historian give a particular event? And how is he sure that, that is all that could be said about a particular event? This means that his explanations could be faulted by others and in addition, the way a particular historian sees an incident and explains it would be different from what another historian has to say about it.

This brings us to the issue of objectivity in history. Can history really be objectives? The historian deals with past human actions. In interpreting and analyzing those actions the subjective element is introduced. In fact, it is even present in the selection of the relevant source material.

For, how do you determine which data is important and which is not, if not based on your own yardstick of what constitutes 'important data'? which could well be different, from other people's perception of it? The interpretation given to a particular incident or action by a historian would thus be different from what others have to say about the same issue.

This is due to the fact that different people have different background, tastes, experiences, biases, exposures etc. all of which consciously or unconsciously condition their judgements. All these procedures and problems are adequately examined in this course.

We shall also be looking at different views of history. The Christians see history as unfolding the divine order of God. They see the hand of God in history. The Muslims also share this providential view of history.

They see history as God's chosen instrument for the gradual improvement of mankind and for man's preparation for the final reckoning at the inevitable end of the world.

The idea of continuity runs through the traditional African views of history- continuity between the living, the dead, and the unborn. Their view of history is thus a cyclical one i.e. one that revolves round without a break or climax.

In addition, this course will also examine the relationship between history and some other disciplines like sociology, geography, economics, archaeology, psychology, philosophy and other humanities. In other words, what can history gain from these other discipline?

Several writers have emphasized the importance of the hero in history. Thus we shall analyse the role of the hero in history and see who the hero is and what special position he holds in historical developments.

Any serious disciplines should have its methodology and not just operate on an ad hoc scheme. We shall therefore close this course with a discussion of historical methodology based on all our preceding discussions.

Course Objectives

The course, Introduction to Historiography is very useful and invaluable to all students of history. Its objectives are:

1. To let us know what history is all about.
2. To give us an understanding of what is involved in the actual writing of historical works.
3. To help us appreciate the problems faced by the historian while making a preliminary investigation in the field work
4. To acquaint us with the different sub-divisions in, and approaches to history.
5. To enable us understand and appreciate the usefulness of history as an academic discipline in our society.

Study Session One: The Study of Historiography

Introduction

This study session introduces you to the whole concept of historiography. It explains the term in details and, examines the utility of history i.e. the benefits or advantages derivable from the study of history.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 1

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 1.1 Understand what is meant by "Historiography"
- 1.2 Appreciate the usefulness of history in any society e.g. Nigeria.
- 1.3 Appreciate the significance of historiography.
- 1.4 Evaluate the significance of history
- 1.5 Assess the benefits a country stands to gain from the study of its history

1.1 The meaning of the concept historiography

'Historiography' is a broad term which has a wide usage and embraces a number of issues. We shall first look at what historiography is not before defining it.



Image Title: Historical measurement tools

Source

Historiography is not exactly the same as the collection of historical evidence or the editing of historical sources. It is also not restricted to the exercise of historical thought and imagination or the criticism of historical writing. It is much more than the philosophy of history or the history of history writing. But, it is related to all the above concepts and it overlaps some of them. In other words, it is much more than all the above ideas. So what is historiography?

1.1.1 Historiography as a tool of historical writing

The term, historiography has a broad usage. In the first place, it is seen as the craft of writing history therefore, it is the art of historical writing. It is the means for communicating in writing what the historian thinks he knows about the past.

In another sense, the crop of historical writings available in an area or a nation is also referred to as historiography. Thus when we speak of Chinese historiography we could be referring to all, or at least the known written histories of the people of China; and Nigerian historiography would mean the available historical works on Nigeria.

1.1.2 History: An Act discovering past actions

Historiography in another aspect is preoccupied with other men's interpretation of history. It is the study of other people's understanding of the historical process and the historian's craft. By historical process, we mean the trend of past events and the historian's craft is the task before the historian, i.e., the discovery of what happened in the past.

Historiography does not deal with specific histories in the sense that it does not seek to discover what happened in the past nor give an account of past actions. That is 'history'. But it looks into what

others have said about history and how they have interpreted the past. Historiography therefore traces the trend of historical thought both in particular localities and in the world at large.

In-Text Question

Communicating in writing what the historian thinks he knows about the past.

True/False

In-Text Question

True

1.2 History and historiography as intertwined concepts

It is important to state that historiography is the subject matter of history. In other words, without the study of the past called history, there would be nothing like historiography. Historiography is thus seen to be derived from history. This brings us to the necessity of history. In the next portion of this study session, we shall examine the justifications for history as an academic discipline and as a worthwhile pursuit.

1.2.1 The necessity of History

In the first place, history is necessary because it provides societies with knowledge about themselves. It is only through knowledge of its history that a society can have knowledge of itself. A society or a nation without recollection or self knowledge, according to **Arthur Marwick**, a distinguished historian, is a society adrift.

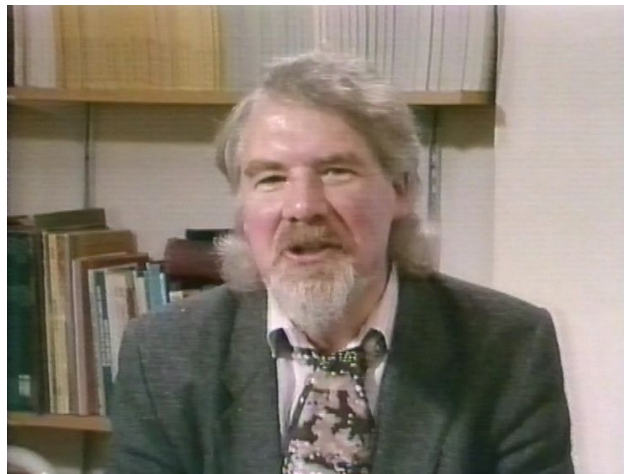


Image of Professor Arthur Marwick

Source

A society has to know itself and understand its relationship with the past and with other societies and cultures. History meets this need. It makes people aware of the character of their own time. This it does by providing them with information about their past which they can study as well as compare and contrast with other peoples' experiences.

1.2.2 Conquering curiosity through History

The major result of history is that, it familiarizes us with variation in social forms i.e. .it educates us on the varieties of life, and so cures us of a fear of change.

However, history does not only provide societies or nations with knowledge about themselves, it also meets the need of the individual man. Most individuals have an inborn curiosity and sense of wonder about the past. History satisfies this curiosity by providing the necessary information about the past.

1.3 Illuminating the past and present through History.

Apart from providing knowledge, history also helps us to understand the present. To ignore history is to refuse to understand the present.



A study of history equips us with the knowledge of the past, which we can use to weigh and evaluate the present. For instance, the present political scene in Nigeria can only be understood if one is familiar with our past.

The yearnings of the people for a stable Third Republic; the apathy to military government; the nervousness of the military government about any disruption of their transition to civil rule

programme; and the general political atmosphere in Nigeria can only make sense to somebody who is familiar with both the remote and the immediate historical developments in the country.

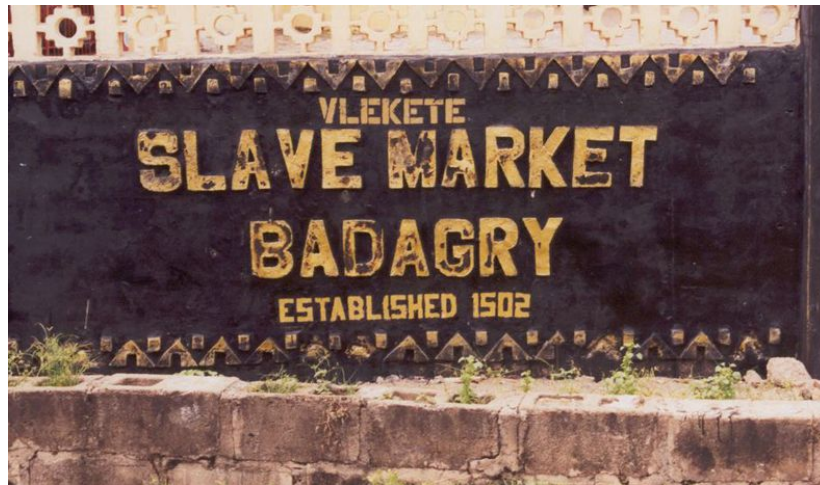


Image Title: Vlekete slave market. Showing History of Slave Trade in Nigeria

Source

1.3.1 Problem solving method

In this sense, history is useful in meeting new situations and in solving the problems of the present. This is because a full understanding of human behaviour in the past makes it possible for us to solve the problems of the present more intelligently.

1.3.2 A bridge of all disciplines

As a mediating discipline, history is also very useful and important. This is because everything has a history. You have the history of medicine, of banking, of legal practice, of teaching of religion, of commerce etc. History, as a discipline thus covers a wide range of issues. A nurse would definitely find a knowledge of the history of nursing in her locality very useful, while a military personnel could also find the history of the force very invaluable. History therefore, becomes a meeting ground for different disciplines and this makes it fascinating.

1.4 Fundamental Justification of the past

From all what have been said about the necessity of history, one thing comes out clearly as being the fundamental justification for the study of history, and that is the fact that man must know his past to be better equipped to handle the present.



Figure 1.1: Showing how history help us understand the past, present and future

Source

1.4.1 History as a study of man's activities

Historiography is a term derived from the study of history and it has many usages. It is the study of the writing of history and it also refers to the body of literature that exists on the history of any particular people considered in terms of the ideas it contains. And lastly it is a study of other men interpretations of the past.

1.4.2 Why History is studied

In the study session, we also discussed the reasons why we need to study history. All the reasons revolve round the point that we need to study history to be able to have knowledge about our past and the past of other peoples.

1.4.3 Understanding the society through History

The study of history makes us understand ourselves and our age better and it prepares us to be able to handle present problems intelligently. Knowledge of the past of other people gives us a model against which we can compare and contrast our own societies.

1.5 Understanding Human institutions through History

History acquaints us with the diverse kinds of organization of human societies and cures us of a dread of change in society. And, as a mediating discipline, history is relevant to all aspects of life.

Summary of Study Session 1

In Study Session 1, you have learned that:

1. Historiography is the collection of historical evidence.

2. The editing of historical sources.
3. Historiography is the study of history writing
4. Historiography helps the craft of writing history
5. The yield of such writing considered in its rhetorical sense and the study of other men's interpretation of history.

Self Assessment Questions (SAQS) for Study Session 1

Now that you have completed this session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on self-Assessment Questions at the end of this module.

SAQ 1.1 (Tests Learning Outcome 1.1)

Why do we study History?

SAQ 1.2 (Tests Learning Outcome 1.2)

What opportunity does history give us?

SAQ 1.3 (Tests Learning Outcome 1.3)

Can it be said that the neglect of History affects the growth of societies?

SAQ 1.4 (Tests Learning Outcome 1.4)

Does history give knowledge about the past societies?

SAQ 1.5 (Tests Learning Outcome 1.5)

What impact can history have on policy formulation of the contemporary societies?

Notes on the Self-Assessment Question (SAQs) for Study Session 1

SAQ 1.1

History is studied because it provides us with a useful knowledge about the past.

SAQ 1.2

History gives the opportunity to illuminate the past through the eye of the present

SAQ 1.3

The neglect of history creates the contemporary problems bedeviling modern societies in Africa; this neglect makes these problems intractable as this impedes the business of statecraft.

SAQ 1.4

The knowledge of other societies through history did not only provide adequate information about these societies, but the leeway to solving problems confronting the society with a sense of history.

SAQ 1.5

The knowledge of history helps a society to formulate viable and progressive policies capable of withstanding socio-economic problems inherent in the business of nation-building.

Study Session Two: The Subject Matter of History

Introduction

In study session one, focus was on 'historiography' which was derived from the study of history. This study session will attempt to define history and explore the different uses of the term. This study session will also examine the nature of the past that the- historian deals with.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 2

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 2.1 Understand the meaning of 'history' and the task of the historian.
- 2.2 Appreciate the relationship between the past and present.
- 2.3 To reconstruct the past from present records.
- 2.4 Interpret past events through historical records.
- 2.5 Understand that the past is beyond its scope

2.1 What is History?

The word 'history' has three levels of meaning: In the first place, it refers to the entire human past-the totality of past human actions and experiences. In this usage, history is seen as being synonymous with the past. So instead of saying 'the past', people sometimes say 'history ' As in such statements like "Let us take an excursion into the history."

2.2.1 History as Interpretative Tool

History connotes man's attempt to describe and interpret the past. In the other word, history can be seen as the account of past events as constructed by man. We shall consider two definitions of history given in this regard.

G. Barraclough defines history as the "attempt to discover on the basis of fragmentary evidence the significant things about the past". The key word in Barraclough's definition is 'discover'. This means that the task of the historian is to discover - find out - what happened in the past.

2.1.2 Critical reconstruction of the past

It is also clear that the historian is not only concerned with all that happened in the past but with the 'significant' things about the past. **G.R. Collingwood's** definition of history is also worth considering here according to **Collingwood**, history is a "study at once critical and constructive, whose field is the human past and its entirety, and whose method the construction of the past is from documents written and unwritten, critically analysed and interpreted.

2.2 History: a process of reflecting on fragmentary evidences

Thus history is not just a body of ascertained facts; it also involves the analysis and interpretation of such facts. It is difficult for the historian to reconstruct the past in its entirety because the past has vanished and what the historian has left are fragmentary evidences which at best could only be faint reflections of the actual past.

2.2.1 History as an academic discipline

The third level of meaning of the word 'history' is that which is involved when one speaks of history as an academic discipline and as a systematic study of the past. This is the idea portrayed when one talks of a Professor of 'history' or a degree in 'history'. The second sense of history is the most regular notion of history and it is with this that we shall be mostly concerned in this course.

2.2.2 Human past as the primary focus of the historian's study.

The past has some characteristics which we shall now examine. Once a past action took place, it vanished never to be seen again. Thus, the past which the historian deals with is not like a laboratory specimen which could directly be observed and recalled when necessary. The historian cannot recapture the past as it really was. All he has are traces of the past that are found in both written and unwritten forms: These are called the sources of history.

2.3 Sources as a means of peeping into the past.

These sources cannot be equated with the past itself because they are so skeletal and fragmentary. The statements of the past found in documents, or collected as traditions which the historian deals

with are only fading reflections of the past. For example, the Benin Massacre of 1897 was an event which had vanished. The historian who writes about that now is only able to do so because of the records of the incident which still exist.

2.3.1 The Inaccuracy of the past

These records of past events are not accurate. They do not, tell all that had happened in the past, neither do they answer all the questions of the historian. In other words, the facts are distorted, and at other times they represent the views of the author of the document and not what really happened: What we are saying in essence is that facts of the past do not come to us in a finished form; they still have to be processed by the historian.

The connection between the past and the facts

On the other hand, we should emphasize the point that not all facts about the past are historical facts. It is only what is significant about the past that constitutes history, just as we have seen in **Barraclough's** definition of history. For example, births and deaths are common occurrences in everyday life, and so the task of the historian does not include a catalogue of all births and deaths just for its own sake.

But why has the death of a person like Chief Obafemi Awolowo become a significant aspect of the past of Nigeria? This is because his death was, and is still considered a loss to the nation due to the importance attached to his political career. Thus, while a number of others have died before and after him, and their deaths were not treated as significant by the historian, the death of Awolowo has become a-part of the nation's history.

2.4 The historian and his age.

What makes a past occurrence significant depends on the ideas and attitudes of the age about which the historian is writing; the ideas of the historian's age as reflected in his own preferences and interpretations; and what his research is all about

2.4.1 Historian and his interpretative method

Having examined the nature and the facts of the past it is clear that it is not possible for the historian to discover all that took place in the past. The traces of the past, as we have them in documents and other sources are dormant until they are infused with life by the historian. This the historian does by interpreting and analyzing the facts before him.

2.4.2 Interpretation and Analysis

History is a critical analysis and interpretation of past events. It is not a catalogue of past events, but a thorough analysis of the past. The historian does this by trying to provide the causes and motives for a course of action. He tries to interpret what had happened in the past.

These twin elements of interpretation and analysis have raised history above the level of mere chronicle. And it is this same element of interpretation that made a number of scholars like **Oakeshott** and **Collingwood** to point out that history is what the historian makes of it.

We shall not delve too much here into the tasks of interpretation and analysis before the historian, as that is treated in details later in Study session 10. But for now, it should be clear that what the historian does is not just to reiterate past events but to analyze and interpret them. The rules of interpretation and analysis have introduced a subject element into historical writing.

This is because the historian is intimately involved in the task of historical writing when he is interpreting and analyzing his data. He brings his biases, prejudices, experiences and general outlook to life to bear on his work. This explains why different historians give different explanations to the same issue.

For instance, several historians have attempted to explain the cause of the fall of the Old Oyo Empire at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Robin Law attributes it to the inherent weaknesses in the constitution of Oyo which later created enormous problems which the Alafin could not handle.

This provided the occasion for other factors to come in. **J.A. Atanda**, however, sees the over ambition of the functionaries of the central government of the empire as the root cause of the problem that eventually led to the collapse of Old-Oyo. Yet, the **Rev. Samuel Johnson** has another interpretation of the fall of the empire in his *History of the Yorubas*.

According to him, the fall of Oyo represented the punishment of the Oyo inhabitants by God because of their iniquities.

2.4.3 Relationship between the Past and the Present

In a sense, history is a process of interaction. It is a dialogue between the historian in the present and the facts of the past. In the words of **E.H. Carr**, history is a "continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past".



Image of E.H. Carr

Source

What this means is that, while interpreting the past, the historian who lives in the present looks at the past through the eyes of the present. His own personality and ideas are products of the present and he brings these to bear on the past. Thus, the historian is continually assessing the past by the scales of the present.

2.5 Historical Prejudices.

There is another interpretation to the relationship between the past and the present. Each age, or generation sees the past in the light of its own preoccupations and prejudices and makes a different evaluation of what is significant in its own past.

For instance, while 20th century historians in Europe have been more interested in economic and social history, their predecessors in the nineteenth century dealt with such issues like nationalism, governments and great men.

The shape and content of history also vary according to the methods and materials available to different generations. The certification of oral evidence and recent discoveries of archaeology in Africa in the 20th century have also led to an explosion in the historical studies based on Africa.

Summary of Study Session 2

In Study Session 2, you have learned that:

1. History is the study of the human past based on the traces of the past which exist in the present. The subject matter of history is the human past. Due to the fact that a past act is gone forever and cannot be recalled by the historian, the historian makes use of certain sources; written and unwritten, to discover what took place in the past.
2. The historian documents only the significant and important events of the past, but his task is more than recording the facts.
3. He has to interpret and analyse his data. In fact, a subjective element is introduced into his writing.
4. His experiences, biases, prejudices and ideas are brought to bear upon his material. This explains why different historians give different interpretations or analyses to the same issue.
5. History is also a dialogue between the past and the present, because we look at the past through the eyes of the present. The historian did not live in the past, he exists only in the present and so analyses the past with the tools of the present.

Self Assessment Questions (SAQS) for Study Session 2

Now that you have completed this session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on self-Assessment Questions at the end of this module.

SAQ 1.1 (tests learning outcome 1.1)

What is history?

SAQ 1.2 (tests learning outcome 1.2)

What constitutes stumbling blocks for historians in the reconstruction of the past?

SAQ 1.3 (tests learning outcome 1.3)

What constitutes the presence of subjective elements in historical writing?

SAQ 1.4 (tests learning outcome 1.4)

How does fact of history speak for itself?

SAQ 1.5 (tests leaning outcome 1.5)

What is the significance of history to the development of societies?

Notes on the Self-Assessment Question (SAQs) for Study Session 1**SAQ 1.1**

History deals with the reconstruction of the past through available evidence before the historian; this task is carried out through interpretation and analysis.

SAQ 1.2

The historian finds it difficult to reconstruct the past in its totality because the past is too vast evidence of the past that exists in the present is too fragmentary and not accurate. The past is beyond his scope. It is not humanly possible to do so.

SAQ 1.3

The background of the historian coupled with the historian's personal outlook constitutes subjective elements in historical writing. The historian does not analyze his materials very well due to his experiences, biases and prejudices.

SAQ 1.4

The facts of history speak for themselves if they are adequately interpreted by the historian who makes these facts meaningful through his constructive and historical mind.

SAQ 1.5

History is important to the development and growth of societies because past historical circumstance provides the platform for how present problems are solved while positive projections are made for the future.

Study Session Three: Different Approaches to History I

Introduction

There are many approaches to the study of history. Different people have different interpretations of history. In this study session, we shall examine other men's interpretation of history, which is called "philosophy of history". We shall also look at the different philosophies of history that exist and trace their developments. These are the critical philosophy of history and the speculative philosophy of history.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 3

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 3.1 Explain the different interpretations that have been given to history.
- 3.2 Discuss how theories can also be used in historical studies.
- 3.3 Identify the thoughts of any historian whose work is real.
- 3.4 Define the term philosophy'.
- 3.5 Explain what is meant by 'philosophy of history, in the light of your definition of the first question.

3.1 Philosophy of History

The term, philosophy of history, has three main meaning: It refers to the fields of high-level theorizing or thinking about the currents that underlie historical development and historical research. It is believed that there are some forces or currents resulting in the exposition of some certain abstraction which is tagged 'philosophy of history'.

3.1.1 Outlook of History and attitudes of historians

History is used to describe the basic outlook, ideas or attitude which a historian or a school of historians brings to bear on the particular historical problem they are dealing with.

3.1.2 Historical Methodology

Methodology', here refers to the processes through which a historian at work passes.

In this study session, we shall be using the term 'philosophy of history' to reflect our first definition more than the other two though they are also relevant to the content of this study session.

3.2 Types of Philosophies of history.

There are two categories of philosophies of history; one is the speculative philosophy of history while the other is the critical or analytical philosophy of history. We shall now examine them in succession.

3.2.1 Speculative Philosophy of History

The speculative approach to historical writing is largely characterized by European thinkers, though it had earlier origins in the 18th and 19th centuries. It refers to attempts to provide a comprehensive explanation or interpretation of the entire historical process.

These European thinkers, (which I will call philosophers henceforth) believed that history should be more than a succession of unrelated events which lack any sequence or plot. They therefore attempted to go beyond actual happenings to the motives behind them and to reveal the underlying plot of history.

In as much as human life and existence did not lack direction, history, according to those philosophers also obeyed a grand design. They set for themselves the task of discovering the meaning and purpose of the whole historical process i.e. the past. The approach to this task, however, varied from one philosopher to the other. Let us look at the religious approach first.

3.2.2 Religious Approach or Theological Origin

Two outstanding scholars whose views are worth examining in this area are **St. Augustine** who wrote *The City of God* early in the Christian era, and **Bossuet** who wrote *Discourse on Universal History* in 1681. According to them, history confirms to a linear development i.e. a continuous progression in which the influence of divine wisdom can be discerned. History is ordered by a higher wisdom. So all that happens in history depends on the orders of providence



Figure 3.1: St. Augustine

Source

3.3 Secular approach

In the secular approach to the speculative philosophy of history, the idea of divine influence or intervention is erased. A few examples of the thoughts of some philosophers in this area are useful at this stage.

Immanuel Kant 1724-1804: in his article titled "Idea of a universal history from a cosmopolitan point of view", published in the Berlin monthly in 1784, he saw history as a continuous, though not straightforward, progression towards a better state of affairs. Nature has a plan - a long term plan which it is pursuing.

The ultimate effect of which will be to the advantage of mankind as a whole. The essence of nature is to ensure the full development of man's potential. Thus, for **Kant**, history is moving towards a better life for mankind.



Figure 3.2: Image of Immanuel Kant 1724-1804

Source

3.3.1 Man's Geographical circumstance and his understanding of history

According to **Herder**, before we can understand human history, we must first understand man's place in the universe. Man is the highest product of the organizing force that animates the universe. History, for **Herder**, is a result of the interplay of two sets of forces, viz: the external forces which constitute human environment and an internal force which is the spirit of man or the spirit of various people comprising the human race.

3.3.2 Geography and the understanding of history of societies

Therefore, to understand the history of a nation we must understand its geographical and climatic backgrounds and the spirit which animates the people. This spirit finds expression in whatever the members of the nations do. Historical events thus operate according to the laws of nature. The purpose of history, according to Herder is the attainment of humanity i.e. a state of affairs where men are most truly themselves.

3.4 Sociological forces and understanding of history

According to **Friedrich Engel** who wrote a series of study sessions on the "philosophy of history". According to him, the history of the world with all its changing scenes 'is the process of development and the realization of spirits'. Historical phenomena are manifestations of those spirits.

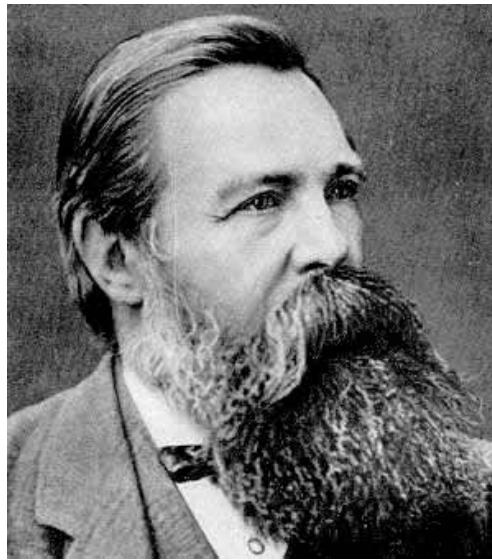


Figure 3.3: Friedrich Engel

Source

Every nation has its own characteristic principle or genius which reflects itself in the nation's religion, political principle or moral code, and in other phenomena associated with it. Every nation also has a peculiar contribution to make to the process of world history.

A nation's opportunity strikes once on the world scene, and when it does, other nations must give way to it. At that particular epoch, it is the nation whose hour has struck that is the chosen vehicle of the world's spirit and not the others. When he was writing in the 19th century, **Hegel** identified four such epochs on the world historical scene. They were the Oriental epoch, the Greek epoch the Roman epoch and the Germanic epoch.

Hegel also propounded a doctrine of the moving forces in historical change. According to this doctrine, certain individuals e.g. heroes and great men, are merely chosen instruments of destiny. In the pursuit of their own goals, such individuals produce far-reaching results which they never contemplated.

This would help us understand **Hegel's** 'dialectic of the idea. This is the notion that one idea gives rise to its opposite and the eventual resolution of the two forms a synthesis. The new synthesis again produces its opposite which in turn is resolved to form a newer synthesis. It is this dialectic of the idea which Hegel used to explain historical development.

3.4.1 Understanding Historical Processes

Auguste Comte 1798-1857 in his writing in 1822, developed the law of the three stages through which he sought to explain the historical process.



Figure: Auguste Comte 1798-1857

Source

According to him, the history of mankind is patterned on three stages which are clearly traceable. The first stage was the theological period characterized by primitive savagery. In this stage, **Comte** included the civilizations of Greece, Rome and the middle ages.

The period ended with the development of monotheism (belief in one god) in religion. The second stage was the metaphysical phase which corresponded with the renaissance, the rise of science and the development of industry.

It was a period of criticism and negative thoughts and it also witnessed the breakdown of old institutions, culminating in the French Revolution. The last stage is the positivist era which is the present phase. It is a period of scientific and technological developments.

3.4.2 History from dialectic perspective

Karl Marx 1818-1883 a German philosopher borrowed two doctrines from **Hegel** which he reshaped to form his own theory of history. The first was the idea of the dialectic. According to **Marx**, the dialectic applies not only to the realm of thought but also to material things as well.



Figure 3.4: Karl Marx

Source

The second was the view that the different aspects of a society's life are organically related. What brings about this relationship, according to **Marx**, is not a national spirit or genius as postulated by **Hegel** but the economic aspect of life. To explain a social situation adequately we must consider the prevailing economic conditions in the society, and to understand why those conditions are so, we must consider their dialectical development.

The dialectic of history, according to **Marx**, obtains in the steady progression of events towards a morally desirable goal which is the classless society in which no one is oppressed. In this dialectical process, the chief actors are not peoples or nations but economic classes each having its own contribution to make. There are other philosophical historians like the English philosopher, *A. J. Toynbee* and *Oswald Spengler* who have tried to provide a meaning for history.

3.4.3 Importance of the Speculative Approach to history

This approach to the study of history has made a significant impact on the development of modern historiography. By maintaining that history should have a meaning, this philosophical history has encouraged practicing historians to go beyond mere chronicling of events which was a major feature of 18th century historical writing.

Secondly, **Auguste Comte** and the positivists have influenced historical writing by their emphasis on the scientific approach. Historians have consequently discovered scientific means of collecting historical data. This led to a great accumulation of historical data in the 19th century.

Also, a number of the ideas discussed by the philosophers have enriched the research methodologies of the modern historian. For example, **Hegel's** notion of a national spirit has been adopted by a

number of historians as a form of historical explanation. **Marx's** emphasis on the economic factor has made historians to look into the economics of particular areas in their search for explanation.

On the whole, the speculative approach to history has played an important role in the development of the modern scientific approach to history. However, this is not to deny the contributions of other factors, such as the growing Importance of the natural sciences and the emergence of a new empirical approach to the study of society, e.g. sociology.

3.5 Critical or Analytical Philosophy of History

The critical philosophy of history was developed in the 19th century and it grew to prominence in the 20th century. Its main focus is on the procedures and categories used by practicing historians in processing their material. It does not deal with the course of historical development but with the nature of history as a specific discipline and a branch of knowledge.

Scholars belonging to this school did not accept the idea that history would be unintelligible without a grand design and pattern. Their own stand was against that of the speculative philosophers of history.

Prominent figures in the school were *Wilhelm Dilthey* and *Benedetto Croce* who believed that history is intelligible and could be easily comprehended. What needs illumination is not the current of force that underlies the historical process but the conditions that make historical knowledge possible, the assumptions upon which historical enquiry is founded and the principles which it follows.

Collingwood also belonged to this school. According to him, the historian should not preoccupy himself with trying to provide an all embracing vision of the entire historical process; instead he should be concerned with the articulation and justification of the existing historical procedures.

Summary of Study Session 3

In Study Session 3, you have learned that:

- 1 Historical approaches deal with historical enquiry.
- 2 The ways in which historians describe and classify their materials are philosophical

- 3 The manner in which they arrive at, and substantiate explanations and hypotheses depends largely on their findings.
- 4 The assumptions and principles that underlie procedures are not static.
- 5 The relationship between history and other forms of investigation is germane to historical scholarship.

Self Assessment Questions (SAQS) for Study Session 3

Now that you have completed this session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on self-Assessment Questions at the end of this module.

SAQ 3.1 (tests learning outcome 3.1)

What purpose does historical process always tends to achieve?

SAQ 3.2 (tests learning outcome 3.2)

What is the significance of economic factor in the historical development?

SAQ 3.3 (tests learning outcome 3.3)

What are the main branches of philosophy of history?

SAQ 3.4 (tests learning outcome 3.4)

What is the rationale behind analysis of historical understanding?

SAQ 3.5 (tests learning outcome 3.5)

What is the term philosophy of history?

Notes on the Self-Assessment Question (SAQs) for Study Session 3

SAQ 3.1

Historical process though not the finality of historical events, but always prepares the ground for the unfolding and manifestation of historical events which might be useful in the future.

SAQ 3.2

The build up to significant historical event all always have economic undertone, this became unavoidable because history deals with human societies. The quest of human beings to dominate

others through the set of certain behavioral traits cannot be delinked from economic objectives which those traits intend to achieve. Every society on the other hand relates with other societies with the quest of dominance, the dominance in this context often times is economical.

SAQ 3.3

The main branches of philosophy of history are; the speculative philosophy and the critical and analytical philosophy of history. These are the major approaches to history. The former tries to elucidate the purpose and meaning of the historical process while the latter attempts to explain the nature of historical understanding and the procedures adopted by the historian.

SAQ 3.4

The main rationale behind analysis of historical understanding by the historian is to illuminate the past through the availability of fragmentary historical evidence, this analysis helps to identify contemporary problems since the past historical experience helps to identify these problems with the capacity to proffer lasting solution to them.

SAQ 3.5

Philosophy of history is a process that helps a lot of practicing historians to improve on their research. Philosophy of history also helps a researcher to adopt a precise historical methodology that suits particular historical events.

Study Session Four: Different Approaches to History II

Introduction

Due to the fact that history covers the whole spectrum of human experience, it is too vast for a single mind to handle. Historians have thus tended to specialize in the different areas of human life. This has led to a number of branches in history and each branch represents a specific approach to history.

This study session therefore looks at these branches of history in details and the major branches or subdivisions are: social history, economic history, intellectual history, business history, political history and culture history.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 4

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 4.1 Discuss the contents of each of the branches of history.
- 4.2 Explain the difference between each of them.
- 4.3 Know the impact of the branches on historical reconstruction
- 4.4 Assess the interconnectedness of the branches
- 4.5 Identify the appropriate branch that is useful for the reconstruction of a particular historical event.

4.1 Examining History from social perspective

Social history is the study of the structure and process of past human actions and interaction in a given society. There are different views as to what should constitute content of social history. Some historians believe it should be a detailed portrayal of social life in the past while others believe that social history should cover the whole range of human life and culture. However, in analyzing the interaction among humans in the past, social historians have borrowed a lot of theories from sociology.

4.1.1 Examining History from Economic angle

Economic history is the study of the economies of societies in the past. It is preoccupied with the overall growth of the economy over time and the determinants of that growth or stagnation or decline as the case might be. It is also concerned with the distribution of income within the economy.

4.1.2 Clear-cut distinction between economic history and Economics

It is important that the economic historian should master the principles of economics, because he would need to apply them in analyzing the economy. And the difference between economic history and economics is that while economics deal with the present, economic history is preoccupied with the past.

4.1.3 Intellectual History

Intellectual history deals with the records of the activities of the human mind, especially ideas. It attempts to explain who produced what intellectual or cultural achievement, when he did it and how he did it. But intellectual history is much more than a mere synthesis of ideas, it is an examination of the impact of such ideas on human society.

It also attempts to trace and understand how ideas are disseminated in a society and relationship between the vested interests to individuals or groups and their ideas.

4.2 Business History

Business history is an offspring of economic history. It is concerned with the activities of businessmen in the past and it studies the written records of decision making by individuals seeking private profit through the production of goods and services. At the core of business history lays the conviction that human decisions made with the profit motive have shaped the course of economic and social change over time.

4.2.1 Distinct features of economic history and business history

The difference between economic history and business history is the fact that business history places more emphasis on the role of man in economic development while economic history deals with trends in economic development.

4.2.2 Political History

Political history was for a long time the dominant and most popular variety of history. It concentrates on the distribution and use of political power in any society. It examines power relations within a society and the political interaction among several societies.

4.3 Culture History

Culture history is concerned with the historical development of non-literate peoples. The cultural historian is concerned with groups and not individual actors and he relies to a great extent on non-documentary sources.

4.3.1 Rationality behind historical writing

History must be written in such a way that its significance and essential rationality must be brought out vividly. To do this, one must go beyond the actual events to reveal the plans, which lay behind them. By implication, history cannot be a mere change of events, there must be a hidden plan or meaning according to which events are unfolding

4.3.2 History from the view of philosophical historian

Philosophical historian tries to illuminate history by bringing out the grand objectives by which events are moving. In short the philosophical historian seeks to penetrate behind the surface of historical phenomenon to the reality. Facts of history in the view of philosophical historians conform to a pattern, which pure reason can bring out into the open.

4.4 Philosophical approaches to history

In examining philosophical approaches to history, it could be asserted that philosophical approaches to history has, however, made a tremendous impact on the development of modern historiography.

Generally by insisting that history has meaning and that historical facts must be presented as a coherence and intelligible piece. Philosophical approaches to history has influenced professional historian to get away from mere chronicles of events and democratizing which was characteristics of historiography at the end of the 18th century.

4.4.1 Impact of philosophical approach to historical research

A number of ideas have been thrown up by the philosophical historians which have been developed by modern historians to gain more insight into their discipline. These ideas have enriched the research methodology of modern historical scholarship.

4.4.2 Scientific approach to the study of history

The scientific approach to the study of history is also called critical approach. It is characterized by evaluation of materials, attempts at some explanation of events and also critical analysis.

4.4.3 Human experience as a pre-condition to understanding history

History encompasses the whole spectrum of human experience, therefore, enormous for a single mind. Modern historians have tended to specialize in one area or another of human endeavors.

4.5 Rationalizing historical research based on economic factor

History emphasizes on the dominance of economic factor in human affairs, the argument was put forward by Karl Marx when he placed emphasis on the concept of “class struggle”. However, this has constrained historians to look beyond the surface in their search for explanation in history and in particular to look for anything that might suggest economic interest.

Summary of Study Session 4

In Study Session 4, you have learned that:

1. 1 different varieties of history and each variety represents a distinct approach to historical research.
2. The sub-divisions of history which we examined are social history, economic history, culture history, business history, political history and intellectual history.
3. Historical events shape human experience.
4. Philosophical approach to history enriches historical research
5. Examination of historical events demands different approaches.

Self Assessment Questions (SAQS) for Study Session 4

Now that you have completed this session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on Self-Assessment Questions at the end of this module.

SAQ 4.1 (tests learning outcome 4.1)

What is intellectual history?

SAQ 4.2 (tests learning outcome 4.2)

What is the task of economic historian in the reconstruction of historical events?

SAQ 4.3 (tests learning outcome 4.3)

What is the major pre-occupation of business historian?

SAQ 4.4 (tests learning outcome 4.4)

What is the rationale behind historical writing?

SAQ 4.5 (tests learning outcome 4.5)

Why do historical events cover different perspectives?

Notes on the Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) for Study Session 4

SAQ 4.1

Intellectual history deals with a history of ideas, a study of the human mind and a study of the relationship between individuals and their leaders, more importantly, a study of the dissemination of ideas.

SAQ 4.2

The tasks of economic historian include the study of economics with the objective analyzing past economics using the variable of the structure and process of society, also the process of income distribution in any given society.

SAQ 4.3

Business historians engage in the study of the activities that deal with economic decisions, the findings of these historians are strengthened by the implication and outcomes of these economic decisions.

SAQ 4.4

The rationale behind historical research is to illuminate the past events through the availability of fragmentary evidence, these findings help in proffering solution to the contemporary problems and general improvement of the society.

SAQ 4.5

Historical events cover different perspectives because history cannot be interpreted from one angle because better understanding of past historical events can be enhanced if they are examined and interpreted through the approaches stated in this Study Session.

Study Session Five: Christianity and Islam's Views of History

Introduction

Having examined secular views about history in the last two study sessions, we shall now discuss the religious view of history i.e. the religious interpretation of historical developments. Both Islam and Christianity see history as having been ordered by God. Their views are linked with the role of Providence or God in human affairs thus, one can tag those views as the providential views of history. In discussing the Christian and Muslim views of history, you will be introduced to some of the works of their historians to illustrate whatever conclusions you make about them.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 5

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 5.1 Discuss the Islamic view of history
- 5.2 Discuss the Christian interpretation of history
- 5.3 Appreciate the reason for these providential views of history.
- 5.4 Give the interpretation of the bible about the history of mankind?
- 5.5 Examine what Islamic writers or preachers say about historical development?

5.1 Christianity's View of History

Christianity is seen by some writers as a religion of history in that it speaks more in term of events than of ideas. The early Christian church believed that the whole course of history gains full significance only when considered in the light of a central happenings in which God created the human race, ordered its existence and redeemed it from eternal woe.

5.1.1 The impact of the divine in the historical event

St. Augustine's *City of God* is an example of the Christian's view of history. According to him history is ordered by a higher power. Great turning points in history are representatives of the divine providence of God, the rise and fall of states thus depended upon God. In this work. St. Augustine

categorized world history into seven epochs which he relates to the creative powers of God. He used the Bible which in a sense is another historical work, as the basis of his categorization.

5.1.2 Verdict on mankind based on biblical interpretation

St. Augustine traced human history from Adam to the advent of Jesus Christ. The contemporary world, according to him, is the second to the last stage in human history. God shall close human history at the end of the world by judging mankind and bringing the righteous back to Paradise from where man was initially expelled.

5.2 The nexus between history and biblical events

The view of history can be described as a cyclical one because it traces human history from Adam in the Garden of Eden - Paradise through several other stages and come back to Paradise again.

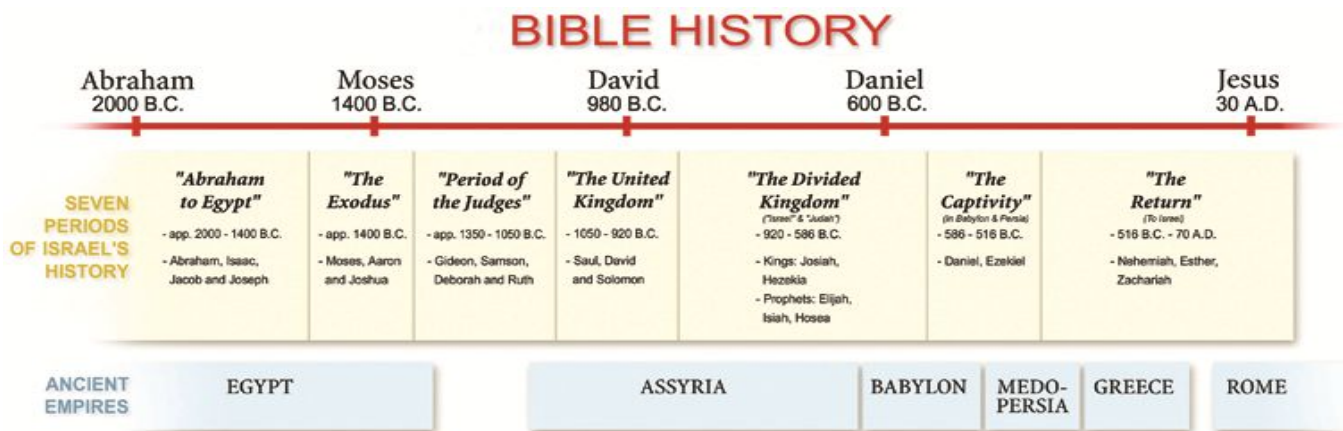


Figure 5.1: Biblical History

Source

A number of other early Christian writers shared this view of history. They could discern the workings of God in the universe and the central purpose of God is to return man to Paradise. And this is where Jesus Christ comes into the picture. He is seen as one sent (by God) to show men the way to salvation.

5.2.1 Religious belief about God intervention in human affair

Thus the Christian view of historical development is intricately linked with the role of God in human affairs. History is seen as the fulfillment of certain prophecies i.e. certain plans of God. They also see history (the term is now used to mean the study of the past) as a vehicle of moral and religious teaching. According to them it possesses practical utility and educative value.

5.3 Islam and shaping of history

Islam is conceived as a historical religion. This is because of the following reasons. One, Prophet Mohammed saw himself as the culmination and fulfillment of a historical process which began at the beginning of the world and was leading to the end of the world. He thus fostered an awareness of history.

In the development of Islamic civilization, great emphasis was placed on historical precedent. The events and ideas of the early Islamic era were provided as the precedent for later ages. This helped to sharpen the historical consciousness of Muslims. Muslims see history as God's chosen instrument for the gradual improvement of mankind and for man's preparation for the final reckoning at the inevitable end of the world.

5.3.1 Spiritual interpretation of historical event

This purpose of history was clearly revealed to all by the coming of Prophet Mohammed and Islam. The control of history's progress from then on was within the reach of human beings if they followed God's plan for their lives as laid out in Islamic injunctions.

5.3.2 Islamic scholars and historical writing

The earliest historical works produced by Muslims were biographies of individuals connected in one way or the other with Islam. Later, there were political histories but they too reflected the biographical emphasis by concentrating on the activities of Islamic rulers and statesmen. After this, some Islamic writers began to produce world histories (their focus was not the whole world, but the Islamic world).

One of such writers as **Ibn Khaldun** of Tunis (1332-1406) his work, *Universal History* covered even non-Muslim areas. In 1377, he constructed a coherent system of the historical process in purely human terms and devoted his *Muqaddimah* (Introduction to his Universal History) to its exposition.

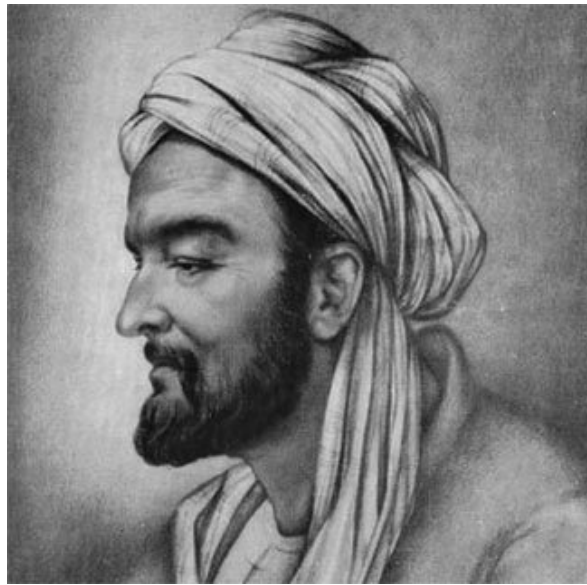


Figure 5. 3: Ibn Khaldun

Source

5.4 History as an instrument of social change in Islamic society

Human society is patterned on certain material and psychological forces whose operations provoke changes in the society. History is a cyclic motion (with slight but continuous forward movement) of growth and decay within the various forms of human's societies.

5.4.1 Purpose of history to the Muslims

It is clear now that the Muslims see history as serving the purpose of God in human affairs. They also consider the study of history to be of immense practical importance. According to Muslim historiography, history is useful because of the following reasons.

5.4.2 Islamic commands as historical necessity

Since mankind has consistently refused to follow the divine laws, preferring to wallow in greed, pride, sin and luxury, mankind is condemned to an empty and unending circle of the rise and fall conditioned by natural and inevitable consequences of the predominant animal instinct.

5.4.3 Limitation of Islamic historiography

In Islamic historiography, there were few universal histories in the sense of encompassing or dealing with world developments, but even then such universal history, were universal only in the Muslim sense. They were hunted in their scope to the Mediterranean world and were unconnected about developments over the Muslim compass.

5.4.4 Biographical pattern of Islamic historiography

A biographical pattern or emphasis persisted in Islamic historiography and indeed biography was the most important area cultivated by Islamic historiography. And in biographical emphasis, much premium was placed on the life of those connected with Islam.

Summary of Study Session 5

In Study Session 5, you have learned that:

1. Both Christians and Muslims have a providential view of history.
2. They see the hand of God in the historical developments.
3. Both Christianity and Islam share the belief that the world will eventually come to an end sometime in the future.
4. Christianity and Islam are also considered as religions of history because of the existence of strong historical elements in them.
5. The two religions also see history as being of tremendous practical use especially in terms of its educative value. The common message of the two religions is thus that man does not have the total control over historical development.

Self Assessment Questions (SAQS) for Study Session 5

Now that you have completed this session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on self-Assessment Questions at the end of this module.

SAQ 5.1 (tests learning outcome 5.1)

What is Christian perception of history?

SAQ 5.2 (tests learning outcome 5.2)

What is the purpose of God in human history according to Christian historiography?

SAQ 5.3 (tests learning outcome 5.3)

What is the purpose of history according to Islamic injunction?

SAQ 5.4 (tests learning outcome 5.4)

What corrective measure does Islam have on history?

SAQ 5.5 (tests learning outcome 5.5)

What moral lessons do Islam and Christianity teach?

Notes on the Self-Assessment Question (SAQs) for Study Session 5**SAQ 5.1**

Christian view of history is forward looking and providential Christianity as a religion is based on the premise that post mortem existence is real. This made Christian view of history to be cyclical rather than linear, while it shares the same providential characteristic of the Jewish view.

SAQ 5.2

The purpose of God in human history according to Christian historiography is to bring man back to paradise and set them free from religious bondage.

SAQ 5.3

The usefulness of history according to Islamic injunction is lead by example and to also encourage man to be dependent on God, his maker at all times as this will bring the desired peace in human society.

SAQ 5.4

Islam as a religion edifies. It proves the truth of positive ways of living and the corrections of the world view expounded by it.

SAQ 5.5

Islam and Christianity teach positive examples; they also teach people how to handle their own affairs in this fleeting world. They also teach political leaders how to govern properly.

Study Session Six: Marxist Views of History

Introduction

The Marxist approach to, and interpretation of history is very important. The body of principles tagged Marxism are believed to have been derived from the ideas of Karl Marx (1818 - 1883), a German Philosopher. He developed the idea of 'historical materialism' which emphasizes the importance of material forces in historical development. In this study session, we shall examine the ideas of Marx about the historical process and the significance of such ideas for historical scholarship.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 6

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 6.1 Understand the idea of 'historical materialism'
- 6.2 Explain the difference between 'forces of production' and 'relations of production'.
- 6.3 Appreciate the significance of the Marxist interpretation of history.
- 6.4 Who Karl Marx was
- 6.5 Identify the significance of historical occurrences and class struggle.

6.1 Historical events from the perspective of Karl Marx

Karl Marx (1818-1883) was a German Philosopher who attempted to interpret the course of history. His important works were *The German Ideology* 1845/6, *A Critique of Political Economy* 1889, and *Communist Manifesto*. He had a close colleague, Friedrich Engels with whom he worked and shared a lot of views.

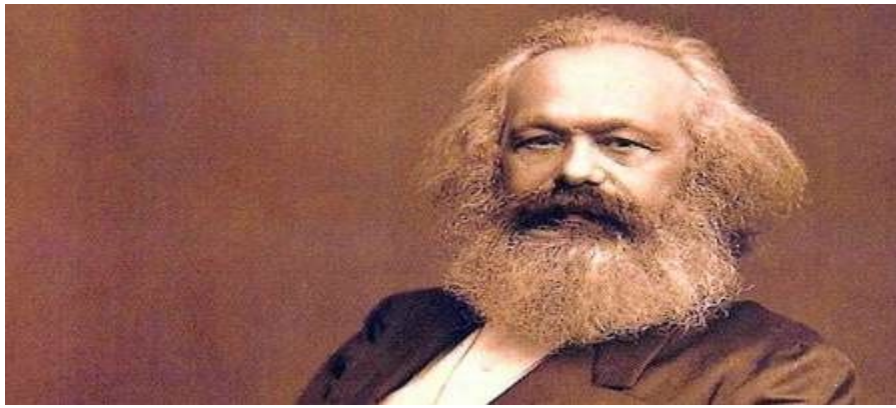


Figure 6.1: Karl Marx

Source

A lot of writings have however been derived from the works of these two. But they are all regarded as the Marxist approach to history. His major ideas can be summed up as the materialist conception of history - he saw history from the material (economic) perspective. And this perception of history is what is now called "historical materialism" or "dialectical materialism".

6.1.1 Dialectic approach of history

The writings of Marx were influenced by the ideas of Hegel, another German Philosopher. Marx borrowed two ideas from Hegel and he reconstituted them to portray his own views. The first was the idea of the dialectic, while the second was the idea that all aspects of a society's life were organically related. The dialectic, according to Marx applies not only to ideas but also to material things. And what brings about the organic relationship in a society is the economy.

6.1.2 The Theory of Historical Materialism

In explaining his idea of historical materialism i.e. the role of material things in history, Marx used some terms which such as, 'forces of production' or 'productive forces' are the material objects like tools, raw materials, etc. and the labour force employed in the production of goods. 'Relations of production' refers to the ways in which men co-operate with one another in order to produce goods.

6.2 Historical materialism and production process

Marx's idea of historical materialism could thus be summed up as follows: The general character of any society refers to the manner in which goods are produced. The economic structure is thus seen as the foundation or based upon which the 'superstructure' of the society is built.

6.2.1 The superstructure of production process

The 'superstructure' is made up of the political and legal institutions as well as the dominant ideas of the society. The economic base of the society has two elements; the forces of production and the relations of production. These two form the mode of production because they are closely connected. This mode of production of material life determines and affects the social, political and intellectual life processes of the society.

6.2.2 Economic base as the foundation of historical process

In other words, the economic aspect of society is the real foundation upon which the rest of society is based. The legal and political institutions of any society are built on the economic base and there is a consequent development of definite forms of social consciousness. This means that the characters of these legal and political institutions are determined by the economic foundation of society.

6.3 Modes of production as parameters of different Historical Experience

According to **Marx**, different forms of society are based on different modes of production. He distinguished three major forms of society in the history of Europe down to his own time. The first was the 'ancient society' epitomized by classical Greece and the Roman Empire which was based on slavery.

The second was the 'feudal society' as exemplified by medieval Europe which was based on serfdom in agriculture and the guild system in manufacturing. The third was the 'capitalist society'. His example of the capitalist society was Europe of the 17th century onwards which was based on wage labour. However, it should be noted that the three stages outlined above are not universally applicable to all societies; they only represent Marx's own observation in Europe.

6.3.1 The 'Class Struggle'

Another idea of Marx about history, which demands special attention though still related to his concept of historical materialism, is the 'class struggle'. Marx opined that, in societies, people are grouped according to their economic interests. These economically based groupings are called 'classes'.

These classes have different objectives, for example, in the capitalist society the proletariat (working class) has the objective of improving their conditions and increasing their wages while the

bourgeoisie (the class that owns the capital) have the objectives of maximizing their profits at the expense of the working class. And the actions of these sets of people bring about historical change.



Figure 6.2: Protest- a form of class struggle in a society.

Source

6.3.2 The clash of forces of production and relations of production

As societies advanced; there was the development of new forces of production which existed alongside with the old ones, the evolvement of a new stage where further development of the new forces of production was hindered by the existing relations of production. This incompatibility is called 'contradiction'.

The solution is that the out-dated elements have to be swept away to allow the new to develop without hindrance. This contradiction between the new forces of production and the existing relations of production means a conflict between the class who is developing the new forces of production and another committed to the preservation of the old order of production.

6.4 Economic interest as a pointer to class struggle

In the capitalist society for example, the proletariat class wants the conditions to change while the bourgeoisie class wants the conditions to be maintained. This situation results in a struggle between the two classes. Therefore, to say that all history is the history of class struggles as Marx did is to reassert the predominant role of the economic structure.

The struggle between the two classes could eventually lead to a social revolution that would transform the society's mode of production and its entire structure.

6.4.1. The Significance of the Marxist View of History

In an attempt to provide a single, all embracing explanation of historical development and change, the theory of 'historical materialism' has been heavily criticized by a number of scholars both on logical and factual grounds. But some of the ideas it contained suggest a new approach to historical interpretation and explanation. And this has proved to be very useful to historical methodology.

6.4.2 Marx and historical curiosity

Marx' emphases on the predominance of the economic factor and also his notion of class struggle have challenged historians to look beyond the surface in their search for explanation in history. Consequently, a number of historians have taken a closer look at the role of the economic factor.

6.4.3 Marxism and historical diversion

Marx thus made it difficult for historians to look at their subject in exactly the same way as they had done before. Marx's analysis of the working class has encouraged a lot of historians to begin to look into labour history which examines the tradition of struggle in societies. It looks at the way the working class (proletariat) has attempted to organize itself collectively.

6.4.4 Marx and landmark intellectual contribution

It can therefore be seen that the ideas of Marx have made a tremendous impact on historiography. And it has been said with some justification that Marx redrew the map of history.

Summary of Study Session 6

In Study Session 6, you have learned that:

1. Karl Marx, in his attempt to explain the historical process came up with the idea of historical materialism.
2. The course of human history is determined by material things namely, the economy. The society is built on an economic foundation and this foundation determines the nature of the political and legal institutions in the society.
3. Major changes in the society are explicable only in terms of the economic factor.
4. The class struggle is said to represent the contradictions in the economic structure of the society.
5. The emphasis which Marx placed on the role of the material factor in historical development may be faulted, on certain grounds; he had certainly made a great impact on historiography by presenting a new approach to historical explanation.

Self Assessment Questions (SAQS) for Study Session 6

Now that you have completed this session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on self-Assessment Questions at the end of this module.

SAQ 6.1 (tests learning outcome 6.1)

What is the nature of economic structure of a society according to Karl Marx?

SAQ 6.2 (tests learning outcome 6.2)

What is historical materialism?

SAQ 6.3 (tests learning outcome 6.3)

What are those social forces that make up class struggle as postulated by Karl Marx?

SAQ 6.4 (tests learning outcome 6.4)

What is class struggle?

SAQ 6.5 (tests learning outcome 6.5)

What impact does Marx intellectual contribution has on modern historical scholarship?

Notes on the Self-Assessment Question (SAQs) for Study Session 6

SAQ 6.1

The economic structure of any society as described by Marx comprises of certain forces like social and economic relations of production, mode of production as dictated by those with the means of production as this relations create unbalanced economic interaction among members of the society.

SAQ 6.2

Historical materialism comprises of so many variables that make up the economic structure of a society, variables such as economic configuration of a society which is determined by social and economic character of a society, historical materialism becomes relevant due to the instability of the factors of production.

SAQ 6.3

The forces that make up class struggle are embedded in the social and structures of a society. This includes, new forces of production that tend to destroy old relations of production, attempt to destroy the old economic order creates contestation among various economic class that make up the society.

SAQ 6.4

Marx opined that, in societies, people are grouped according to their economic interests. These economically based groupings are called 'classes'. These classes have different objectives, for example, in the capitalist society the proletariat (working class) has the objective of improving their conditions and increasing their wages while the bourgeoisie (the class that owns the capital) have the objectives of maximizing their profits at the expense of the working class. And the actions of these sets of people bring about historical change.

SAQ 6.5

Marx intellectual contribution on modern historical scholarship opened up historical research from the prism of economic factor as the fundamental basis of historical change in any society. His contributions however have a fundamental limitation of examining historical events from economic angle alone.

Study Session Seven: Traditional African Concepts of History

Introduction

In this study session, you will be introduced to the conception of the past in traditional African societies; the uses to which history was put in such societies; the forms in which it was preserved; and the general nature of history in such societies.

Despite the fact that traditional African societies were not literate they still had clear concepts of history both as the past and as the study of the past. Their ideas of the past were influenced greatly by their world view and philosophy of life. History, as the study of the past, performed practical roles in the traditional African societies.

Consequently, these societies developed several ways of preserving their knowledge of the past. It should, however, be added that the nature of history in traditional African societies was different from what it is now.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 7

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 7.1 Discuss the world view of traditional African societies
- 7.2 Discuss the interpretation of history in such societies
- 7.3 Discuss the functions of history in traditional African societies, and
- 7.4 Critically appraise the nature of history in such societies.
- 7.5 Elaborate on the methods of preserving significant historical events

7.1 The Traditional African view of the World

In order to understand the traditional African idea of history, it is necessary to first look at their general world view. This is because their conception of history was greatly determined by their view of the world. Traditional African societies viewed life as a continuous process.

7.1.1 Spiritual existence of societies during pre-literate era

A given community was seen, not just as a self contained entity with defined physical boundaries, but as part of a continuum which extended back into the period of the ancestors and stretched forward into the future.

7.1.2 Role of the ancestors as historical explanation of a given society

The African idea of time was cyclical (it went round in cycles) and there was an intimate relationship between the past, the present and the future. The ancestors who lived in the past and the generation yet unborn as well as the living were all seen as part of the society. It was believed that each community was founded by an ancestor or group of ancestors who also established the basic institutions of the community.

7.2 History and religious relevance of the ancestors

Future development of the society must therefore be established on the basic welfare of the continuum. The ancestors and what they represented were a living reality and reverence for ancestors even became worship. And because of the importance of the ancestors and the dead a lot of issues were explained in religious idioms.

7.2.1 The African Traditional Philosophy of History

In traditional African societies, history was seen not merely as a study of the past but as an attempt at understanding the past as a guide for action in the present. History was an attempt at understanding the basic charter of society as defined by the ancestors and applying it to the present and the future.

7.2.2 Human action as a subject of history

History was a means of preserving the position of the living society as an integral part of the transcendental community or continuum which comprised the dead, the living and the unborn. Human action was believed to be subject to control by forces beyond man. Historical events were therefore explained in terms of chance, fate, miracles and supernatural intervention of ancestors in human life.

7.3 History as a fundamental pillar of social structures

As a result of the concern for continuity in traditional African societies, history, as the past, was seen as a very crucial issue that possessed a perpetual significance for the present and it was made to perform some functions in the society.

7.3.1 Functions of History in Traditional African Societies

History was used to define the origins and corporate existence of groups or communities. It was only through history that some knowledge of the lineage, group or community could be gained concerning its origin, achievements, heroes and villain and in short, its place in the continuum.

7.3.2 Unity of purpose, the sustenance of functional political and social structures

History was also used as a means of keeping the society together and to sustain the wholesome interrelationships within it. It could be said that history served as a repository of knowledge on issues like the basis and structure of political authority; kinship ties; and structure of chieftaincy titles. For example people resorted to history as an arbiter in cases of rival claims of ownership of land.

7.4 Bringing the past to the present through history

History was used to inculcate sound morals into people. The deeds of past heroes were cited as imitable examples while faults of villains were also singled out as pitfalls to be avoided by members of the society. Historical examples were also cited as an authority to justify specific stands on moral issues.

7.4.1 History as instrument of preserving cultural values

History was also used to boost the morale of the society and-to safeguard its communal security. Important episodes and glorious achievements of the past were restated or re-enacted in the form of festivals, to make the people proud of their heritage. An example of such festivals was the Edi festival in Ile-Ife commemorating the city's victory over the Ugbo.

On the other hand, unpleasant episodes of the past like defeat in wars were de-emphasised and sometimes removed from the people's traditions (i.e. oral history). Because of the vital role of history in traditional African societies, the people thus preserved their history in a number of ways.

7.4.2 Preservation of History and the Traditional African Societies

History was preserved in the memories of the professional historians and ballad singers at the courts of the rulers.

Examples of those professional historians were the Griots of the Western Sudan, the Arokin of Old-Oyo and the Ihogbe of the Benin Kingdom. Their duty was to compile accurate genealogies of rulers and their notable achievements which they recited on special occasions such as the death of a ruler or the enthronement of his successor. History was also enshrouded in the oral literature of divinatory cults.

Among the Yorubas, the oral literature of the cult of Ifa (a local diety) called Odu-Ifa was believed to contain, among other things, reports of past events and ideas, like names of settlements, peoples, and other objectives-which existed in the past.

7.4.3 Sustaining memory enhancer through history

Among the Yorubas, history was also preserved in appellations and cognomens (e.g. Oriki - praise poem) of people or towns. Human cognomens reflected the origin and achievements of the individual or group concerned. Cognomens of towns reflected their lineages and highlighted the important achievements of any prominent lineage.

Proverbs and songs were also used to preserve history and ritual re-enactments, ceremonies and festivals all served as repositories of historical knowledge. History was also recorded in art. For example, the coming of Europeans into the Benin Kingdom and the introduction of firearms by them were all preserved in carvings which still exist today.

7.5 Limitations of history in traditional African societies

Having discussed the forms in which history was preserved in traditional African societies, we should also take note of the nature of history as it existed in such societies. History was mixed with myth and so it is difficult to separate fact from fiction. Apart from being merged with myth, history was also mixed with religion and philosophy.

The repositories of the histories of the society were also in many cases the priests and diviners. In some cases, history was distorted to enable it serve the purpose of safeguarding the sanity of the people. Accurate chronology was of little relevance to this history, the emphasis of the traditional African societies was rather on its social function.

Summary of Study Session 7

In Study Session 7, you have learned that:

1. Traditional African concepts of history were informed by their general world view which saw the society as part of a transcendental continuum comprising the dead, the living and the unborn.
2. History was seen as a means of preserving this continuum. To achieve this, it had to perform certain functions, the most important of which was to maintain the wholesomeness of the society.
3. As a result of the fact that traditional African societies were not literate, history was preserved in the memories of the professional historians, in the oral literature of divinatory cults (sacred poetry), in cognomens, proverbs, songs, ritual reenactments, ceremonies and festivals.
- 2 History in traditional African societies was mixed With myth, religion and philosophy; it was not accurate in terms of chronology and it contained a lot of distortions.
4. Despite these shortcomings, history served a useful purpose in traditional African societies.

Self Assessment Questions (SAQS) for Study Session 7

Now that you have completed this session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on self-Assessment Questions at the end of this module.

SAQ 7.1 (tests learning outcome 7.1)

What do you understand by transcendental continuum in traditional African cosmology?

SAQ 7.2 (tests learning outcome 7.2)

What was the function of history in traditional African societies?

SAQ 7.3 (tests learning outcome 7.3)

What was the mode of preserving history in traditional African societies?

SAQ 7.4 (tests learning outcome 7.4)

Was history an instrument of preserving cultural values?

SAQ 7.5 (tests learning outcome 7.5)

Outline the limitations of history in traditional African societies

Notes on the self-Assessment Question (SAQs) for Study Session 7

SAQ 7.1

Transcendental continuum in traditional African societies was anchored upon the belief that the ancestors of these societies were part of day to day administration of the state. By implication, the dead and the living co-habit on a daily basis, this cosmological belief provided the platform for revering the ancestors.

SAQ 7.2

History was a veritable tool of forging oneness among different cosmological beliefs which cut-across different cultural values. Through this, peace was preserved. The preservation of peace enhanced the sustenance moral values that were predominant in different communities.

SAQ 7.3

History was fundamental preserved through sacred poems that were constantly recited by those that were specially trained in reciting these poems. Because of this, history was held in high esteem as its preservation served as a determining factor of general atmosphere of peace that these societies desired.

SAQ 7.4

History was a potent tool preserving cultural values because the cosmological beliefs of succeeding generations were preserved through historical circumstances in which these beliefs evolved, their evolvment remained paramount to the development of cultural values, and this development was made possible through history

SAQ 7.5

History had many limitations in the traditional Africa, these limitations were demonstrated in the way history was distorted deliberately for selfish reasons. Historical facts were regarded as myth and were not held in high esteem. Chronological problem was another fundamental limitation of history, this absence of chronology wittled down the potency of instrument as an instrument of digging into the past. Despite these limitations, historical to traditional African societies was a way of life because it enhanced the fundamental pillar of peace which these societies rested.

Study Session Eight: The Problem of Knowledge in History

Introduction

The task of the historian, as you have seen in the previous study sessions, is to discover what happened in the past. But can the past be vividly recaptured? In other words, how do you know or ascertain that what the historian discovers is the truth about the past? A lot of writers have questioned the existence of historical knowledge.

And these questions have been based on the nature of the knowledge and the methodology of history i.e. the materials they work with, and the role of the historian in historical interpretation.

Is it possible for the historian to know what took place in the past given the fact that he did not exist in the past and so never witnessed any of the events? And how much of the past can he really know from the evidences of the past that exist in the present? Moreover, by the time he has interpreted and analyzed his evidences, would his work be representative of what really took place in the past?

This study session will examine this problem of knowledge in history by answering the questions raised above and this would lead us into the nature of knowledge and the methodology of history.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 8

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 8.1 Discuss what is meant by historical knowledge?
- 8.2 Appreciate the problems that hinder historical knowledge
- 8.3 Think of solutions to those problems.
- 8.4 Identify the problem about getting a true knowledge of what happened in the past
- 8.5 know the truth about historical knowledge

8.1 The Nature of Knowledge

A number of the skepticism that is expressed about getting a true knowledge of past events are based on certain conceptions about the nature of knowledge. Some believe that direct observation is the only credible foundation for knowledge. In other words, for you to claim to know something, you must have directly observed it and you cannot know anything without having seen it first.

8.1.1 The problem of absolute knowledge

The historian did not directly observe the events he is writing about, he cannot claim to have a true and absolute knowledge of the past. This view is defective in a number of ways. Some events could be directly observed and still one may not get a true knowledge of what happened. For instance, one could be misled by appearances which of course, are not the same as reality, so, discrepancies between appearance and reality could create a problem of knowledge.

8.1.2 The problem of historical evidence

In another sense, the senses of observation could be playing tricks on you e.g. your eyes and ears. In such cases you may have to check apparent observations by testimony or indirect evidence. In additions, direct observation is irrelevant when one considers knowledge that is obtained from the realm of thought. Moreover, as far as historical knowledge is concerned, there are some facts which come to the historians accurately without his having to observe them directly.

8.2 Problems of Knowledge in History

The problems that hinder the attainment of truth in history are believed to be inherent in the methodology of history which has to do with: the materials the historian works with and the primacy of the role of the historian in historical interpretation.

8.2.1 The Materials the Historian Works with

What the historian works with are not events themselves but statements about the events called 'facts'. These facts link the historian to the past, the past has vanished, but these facts contain traces of the past.

Traces, because they do not cover the whole spectrum of the past, are just pale reflections of what happened in the past. These facts are either written or transmitted orally and they constitute the sources used by the historian. These sources are not exact descriptions of what took place in the past. In other words, they do not furnish the historian with adequate details about the past.

8.2.2 Limitations of historical facts

Historical facts are just in the form of observations, recollections and reports and they contain some elements of subjectivity. you can thus see that historical knowledge does not come to us in a pure form. How much of historical knowledge can one therefore derive from such imperfect sources? Since the facts of history do not come to us in a pure form, one has to process and refine them in the mind.

8.3 Validity of facts by historian

The historian has to establish the area in which the evidence will be useful, and decide what conclusion the evidence points to. The historian has to make the facts useful. According to *E.H. Carr*, facts speak only when the historian calls on them. This means that facts cannot speak for themselves until the historian interprets them.

8.3.1 The nexus of historical fact and historical mind

Historical evidence thus bears meaning only in relation to the historian's mind - to the question raised by the historian. And evidence about the past i.e. facts, becomes historical evidence only when somebody uses it in historical interpretation.

Let us illustrate this with the immediate causes of the Owu war which took place at the beginning of the 19th century as analyzed by *Mabogunje* and *Omer-Cooper* in their work titled *Owu in Yoruba History*. The event that provided the occasion for the chaos that caused the Owu War, according to these two scholars, was a fight between an Owu man and an Ijebu woman 'selling alligator pepper in Apomu market.

8.3.2 Determining historical events

Since historical events are considered important by historians that has made it an historical fact. Several other people must probably have fought in that Apomu market before this particular fight and nobody has considered those other fights to be of any historical significance. Thus, the possibility of historical knowledge is doubted because the facts of history facts are not external to be historian. What this means is that historical facts are not a knowable entity waiting only to be discovered by the historian. Historical evidence is determined and selected by the historian.

8.4 Flaws of historical sources and interpretation by historian

Moreover, the different sources of history have some inherent flaws. Oral evidence is subject to the frailty of the human memory and in that sense it is very fallible. Written documents also do not state

exactly what had happened in the past. They contain only what the author of the document thought, and are consequently subjective.

As a result of the imperfect nature of historical sources, the historian can only get some knowledge about the past by making certain inferences and deductions based on those sources. The use of inference by the historian thus introduces an element of uncertainty into historical knowledge.

To start with, how can one be certain that the reasoning on which the inference is based is correct? Secondly, what is the guarantee that the particular inference being drawn from the evidence is the only one that can reasonably be drawn from the available data? And thirdly, there is a subtle danger inherent in the use of inference and that is the possibility of an inference or ordinary guess becoming a statement of fact.

This danger could be caused by the natural tendency among human beings to confuse what they have actually heard and seen with what they have inferred.

8.4.1 The Primacy of the Role of the Historian in Historical Interpretation

History is not a catalogue of facts. Just as we have explained in the preceding section. The facts of history have no meaning until the historian interprets them. The historian thus supplies motives for past actions, causes for certain incidents, and analysis for past phenomena. These call for a critical assessment of the available data and a disciplined use of the historical imagination.

Given this central role of interpretation in history, how accurate and true is the knowledge produced by the historian? Interpretation, we all know, is not an objective exercise in the process of interpretation. His tastes, ideas, biases, prejudices, degree of knowledge and experience as well as his philosophy of life and social status, all condition whatever interpretation he gives to his materials.

8.4.2 Who determines history?

It is because of the importance of the role of interpretation which historian performs that some writers have said that history is nothing but the historian's experience.

According to **Collingwood**, "all history is the history of thought" because history is the re-enactment in the historian's mind of the thought whose history he is studying. And **G. Barraclough** said, 'the history we read, though based on fact, is, strictly speaking, not factual at all but a series of accepted judgments'.

8.4.3 The problem with historian and his judgment of historical events

The significance of facts lies in the fact that they are questioning the possibility of true historical knowledge in the writing of history. Since the judgment of the historian might not be valid in all instances due to his prejudices and biases that might have enveloped what actually constitutes historical events, what constitutes historical events itself is problematic.

8.5 Facts as a pointer to historical past

It must be accepted that the historian cannot achieve a final or absolute knowledge about the past. His knowledge can only be relative, and based on the materials at his disposal. As far as interpretation is concerned, it is not done according to the whims and caprices of the historian, but is conditioned by the available facts. Moreover, the historian's interpretation is limited by the scope of his knowledge and as his horizon broadens; his perception of the truth becomes clearer.

Summary of Study Session 8

In Study Session 8, you have learned that:

1. The problem of knowledge in history has to do with the issue of 'truth' in history.
2. The imperfect nature of historical evidence has made people to doubt the accuracy of the kind of knowledge such materials are expected to generate.
3. The primacy of the interpretative role of the historian has also tended to make historical knowledge the creation of the historian.
4. Some of these historical problems seem intractable especially as the nature of historical evidence cannot be amended by the historian. Therefore, the historian must accept the fact that he cannot have a total and absolute knowledge of the past.
5. Historians have some knowledge based on the critical use of their sources and as the scope of their own awareness broadens, it is expected that they would have a clearer perception of the truth.

Self Assessment Questions (SAQS) for Study Session 8

Now that you have completed this session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on Self-Assessment Questions at the end of this module.

SAQ 8.1 (tests learning outcome 8.1)

What makes the materials of the historians to be inaccurate?

SAQ 8.2 (tests learning outcome 8.2)

What danger involved in making inferences from historical evidence?

SAQ 8.3 (tests learning outcome 8.3)

What problem lies in the interpretative role of the historian?

SAQ 8.4 (tests learning outcome 8.4)

What constitute historical events?

SAQ 8.5 (tests learning outcome 8.5)

What gives conviction to a historian about the validity of his historical evidence?

Notes on the Self Assessment Question (SAQs) for Study Session 8**SAQ 8.1:**

Historian materials are inaccurate because some of them do not come to the historian in a pure form; this shows that some of these materials reflect the prejudices and the biases of the owners of these materials. In a situation where the materials come to the historian in a pure form, such as the oral evidence, deliberate distortions constitute severe a hindrance to its accuracy.

SAQ 8.2:

The danger involved in making inferences from historical evidence is that, the reasoning on which the inference is based may not be correct be there may be other valuable inferences that may be drawn from the same evidence. By implication, the inferences of the historian may not actually constitute solid historical conclusion by that historian.

SAQ 8.3:

The interpretative role of a historian faces problems such as subjectivity disposition of such a historian which may be deliberate to protect self interest of the historian during the course of research. The interpretative capacity of a historian could create unnecessary embellishment of already existing analysis and facts.

SAQ 8.4

Since past events do not constitute historical events, those events regarded by a historian as historical events are those that are determined by a historian. The efficacy of this is usually enhanced by the potency of historical evidence before a historian.

SAQ 8.5:

The validity of historical evidence is enhanced by critical interpretation of the evidence by the historian. This can also be complemented by the validity of other evidence from other historical sources, at this point; the inference capacity of such a historian comes to test due to the necessity of his own judgment. The validity of the judgment is equally enhanced as the scope of the historian's awareness broadens.

Study Session Nine: The Question of Sources

Introduction

The historian deals with a past to which he has no direct access. This is because the past had vanished and past events cannot be recalled by him for critical analysis. He only handles traces of the past which come to him in form of statements about the past. These statements are either oral or written and at best they are just pale reflections of what actually happened in the past. The facts of history and evidences of the past thus constitute the sources or material at the disposal of the historian.

In this study session, you will be introduced to how the historian treats his sources and the standards of scrutiny applied to them. This study session will also focus on the different sources used in the writing of history

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 9

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 9.1 Understand the nature of historical sources
- 9.2 Identify the different sources that exist.
- 9.3 Appreciate the fact that the historian has to be thorough in his task.
- 9.4 Assess each of the sources available for the writing of African history.
- 9.5 Identify what makes historical sources imperfect.

9.1 The Nature of Historical Sources

Historical facts do not come to the historian in a processed form; the processing has to be done by the historian. These facts are in the form of recollections and observations which contain a subjective element. Historical evidences are not always external to the historian. This means that they are not waiting to be discovered and used by the historian without any processing.

The historian is the one to determine which of the facts a historical fact as his judgments will depend on his own particular perspective of the past.

9.1.1 Variations about what constitute historical fact by historian

What does not qualify as an historical fact with one historian or one generation of historian may be so at a different time depending on the perspective from which the historical analysis is being undertaken. Historical facts do not speak for themselves except the historian calls on them. And the kind of information the historian derives from the sources depend, to a large extent on the kind of issues raised in his mind in approaching the sources.

9.1.2 The Historian and His Sources

The Historian's sources could be either written or oral. In dealing with the written sources called documents, the historian has to scrutinize and carefully assess the evidence very well. He first has to confirm the authenticity of the documents i.e. to establish the authenticity of the evidence. He should ask questions like; who wrote the document? When and where was it written? He should also determine whether the source is primary or secondary.

In other words, are the ideas contained in the document the author's original or obtained from other works? Is the information contained in the document first hand or hear-say? He also has to determine whether the writer of the document was contemporaneous with the events which he wrote about.

9.2 Assessing the validity of historical facts

It is also the task of the historian to find out the aim of the writer of the document written for the contemporary period? Documents that were written for contemporary use contain very little by way of bias and they present straight forward facts. The ones left for posterity are very subjective because they contain what the writer wants the historian to know.

9.2.1 Problem of discerning self-serving documents

The historian must thus be wary of using self-serving evidence which is specifically produced to justify an action. Memoirs, and reminiscences belong to this category. They contain facts but are also full of prejudices. Examples of documents written for contemporary use are financial accounts, records of court cases, memoranda, and private correspondence.

The historian also has to discover the background of the author of the document in order to be able to analyze his skill, competence and any possible bias. For example, records left by the British Colonial administration in Nigeria, though factual, contain a fundamental bias against the native population. This bias could be subtle in some cases while it is apparent in others.

9.2.2 Importance of historical imagination in evaluating historical evidence

It is significant to corroborate the evidence contained in his documents. The historian has to confirm the information provided by a particular document with what other documents have to say on the same issue. It is thus his duty to evaluate the proper significance of the evidence.

The use of historical imagination is also essential in the assessment of historical evidence to get at the truth. Historical imagination means evaluating an evidence in the light of general human experience or in the light of what is already known about a given topic.

9.3 Selection of materials: Objectivity or subjectivity?

It is germane for the historian to select his material. This selection is necessitated by the fact that it is impossible for the historian to handle all existing facts. He has to select only those facts that are relevant to the aspect of his investigation. In doing this, he must not suppress any relevant evidence; all relevant evidence must be taken into consideration even if they do not support the historian's view point.

9.3.1 Chronicles as an important historical document

Chronicles: are taken to include the whole of literacy sources that are written for posterity. Their authors say what they think about men and events and in using them, the historian has to allow for their personal feelings. These literacy sources require careful scrutiny and the historian needs to know everything possible about their authors to be able to identify personal distortions. Examples of chronicles are memoirs and reminiscences.

9.3.2 Strengths and weaknesses of historical records

Records are all documents arising from administration and business, and thus intended primarily for the contemporary use. Their importance lies in the fact that their compilers had no thought for the future and so their own personal biases are not reflected' in 'the documents.

But it has been discovered that some records are generally compiled from other chronicles and so they rarely reveal the whole truth. Thus in using records as evidence, the historian has to discover the materials behind them and the impression which such materials were intended to produce.

Examples of records are official documents obtainable from public record officers, libraries and archives. Newspapers can also be classified as records. They are important because they are strictly contemporary. However, they contain a lot of bias and propaganda. But they give a mass of factual information unobtainable else where.

9.4 Oral information as non- documentary Source

Oral information requires special handling. It is affected by the inaccuracy of the human memory and it sometimes contains a lot of distortions which the historian should try to identify by comparing the information it provides with those from other sources. When the historian deals with the remote past about which there is very little surviving evidence either oral or documentary, he needs to look into other sources like archaeological evidence.

Archaeology is the systematic excavation of the material remains of past human culture which are later interpreted. Linguistic evidence is also useful to the historian in this regard from the study of languages, useful historical inferences are made.

9.4.1 Islamic manuscripts as Sources for the Writing of African History

There are very few written sources available for the writing of pre-colonial African history. These sources are in two groups. The first group contains Islamic manuscripts. These manuscripts were found in Islamic areas or areas visited by Muslims. Some of them date back to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. An example is the '*Tarikh al Fatash*' by *Mahmud Kati of Timbuktu*.

9.4.2 European records as sources of writing African history

The second group contains records left by the Europeans. They are in the form of traveler's accounts e.g. the records of the travels of Henry Barth; and records of the European exploration in Africa e.g. the exploration of the Lander brothers. These records contain important information about the peoples of Africa.

There are also records compiled by the foreign traders in West Africa between the 15th and the 16th centuries. These traders included people from Sweden, Portugal and Denmark. Their records could be found in European archives. Nevertheless, these written sources are inadequate because they do not cover the whole of Africa.

Even where they exist, they do not give enough information about the people. Therefore, the African historian has to supplement them with other sources which include oral sources. Apart from this, they contain a lot of bias, and the historian using them has to be very careful.

9.4.3 Examining strengths and weaknesses of oral sources

Oral sources or oral traditions are very abundant in Africa especially, in centralized communities where they were highly developed due to the presence of professional historians in the society. Oral traditions provide a lot of details about the African past.

In handling them, the historian should be able to distinguish significant evidence from ordinary details. He should also watch out for oversimplification of issues by informants. Due to the fallibility of the human memory, the historian should be aware of the problem of chronology in oral traditions, and certain gaps are also left unfilled by the traditions. Distortions are present in oral information and the historian should attempt to corroborate oral information with evidence from other sources.

9.5 The infallibility of archaeology, linguistic and ethno botany.

A potent vehicle of multidisciplinary approach to the study of African past. Archaeology has also helped in the study of the African past; it is particularly useful in the study of pre-literate societies. For example in Benin, Ife, Nok and Igbo-Ukwu in Nigeria archaeology has helped in the reconstruction of the history of the people. Similar works have also been carried out in northern Ghana, Western Uganda and Zimbabwe.

Archaeology has thus been very useful to the historian writing about the African past. It provides him with information about the material culture of the people from which the historian can make valid inferences. Archaeology is also very useful in dating. Organic materials excavated by archaeology can be dated.

The Carbon dating system developed by archaeology provides rough estimates rather than precise dates. Nonetheless, this has been of great use to the historian. The problem of archaeology lies in the issue of inferences made by the historian. Inferences introduce a subjective element in to the materials and the historian should be very careful when it comes to this.

Other sources used by the historian in writing about the African past include linguistic evidence as well as the findings of other disciplines like Ethno botany and Ethnozoo which are studies of the uses of plants and animals by various peoples.

Historical inferences are made from the study of languages and their inter relationship, while similarities and differences in plant and animal life are also used to make inferences about the people that domesticated them. It is thus clear from the foregoing that the historian has a lot of sources at his disposal which he has to assess and make good use of.

Summary of Study Session 9

In Study Session 9, you learned that:

- 1 There are different kinds of sources available to the historian.
- 2 There are sources that have an inherent subjective elements because they aim to justify a particular course of action
- 3 All sources have to be properly scrutinized by the historian who wants to use them.
- 4 A good historian is the one that collects all relevant sources and uses them for his work even when some of them do not agree with his own view point or hypothesis
- 5 Most contemporary records are free from any major bias on the part of their authors.

Self Assessment Questions (SAQS) for Study Session 9

Now that you have completed this session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on self-Assessment Questions at the end of this module.

SAQ 9.1 (tests learning outcome 9.1)

Explain the term chronicles as a source of historical writing?

SAQ 9.2 (tests learning outcome 9.2)

Outline the sources important for the writing of African history?

SAQ 9.3 (tests learning outcome 9.3)

What are the written documents available for the writing of African history?

SAQ 9.4 (tests learning outcome 9.4)

Examine the strength and weakness of oral sources of history?

SAQ 9.5 (tests learning outcome 9.5)

What is the significance of multi-disciplinary approach to reconstruction of African history?

Notes on the Self Assessment Question (SAQs) for Study Session 9

SAQ 9.1

Chronicles are taken to include the whole of literacy sources that are written for posterity. Their authors say what they think about men and events and in using them, the historian has to allow for their personal feelings. These literacy sources require careful scrutiny and the historian needs to know everything possible about their authors to be able to identify personal distortions. Examples of chronicles are memoirs and reminiscences.

SAQ 9.2

The sources important to the reconstruction of African past include oral evidence, written account and archaeological account. Both oral and written accounts must be approached with caution by a historian due to personal distortion which at times calls to question their validity, but archaeological account has credibility of accuracy with low tendencies for distortion, but a historian will have to use his discretion to determine the historical date of archaeological account since it gives relative dating not specific dating.

SAQ 9.3

Written account available for the reconstruction of African past include, chronicles, Islamic manuscripts and European accounts, archival document though belongs to a primary source, but can also be classified as written account. However, the credibility of these written accounts can only be ascertained by the historians especially through their imaginative interpretations and inferences.

SAQ 9.4

Oral traditions provide a lot of details about the African past. In handling them, the historian should be able to distinguish significant evidence from ordinary details. He should also watch out for oversimplification of issues by informants.

Due to the fallibility of the human memory, the historian should be aware of the problem of chronology in oral traditions, and certain gaps are also left unfilled by the traditions. Distortions are present in oral information and the historian should attempt to corroborate oral information with evidence from other sources.

SAQ 9.5

Multi-disciplinary approach is a potent tool for the reconstruction of African past because it gives an incisive and deeper understanding the past events. It also helps in corroborating historical evidence by a historian from different disciplines as this enhances the quality of the reconstructed historical events

Study Session Ten: Historical Explanation

Introduction

The task of the historian is not only to establish what happened in the past but also to explain the events and assess them. The historian's main approach to this issue of explaining the past takes the form of raising questions which ask, explicitly or implicitly, 'how?' and 'why?' those events came to pass and how important they were in the scheme of things. This study session therefore focuses on the issue of explanation in history and the problems it involves.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 10

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 10.1 Understand the importance of explanation in history.
- 10.2 Identify the different kinds of explanations given by the historian.
- 10.3 Appreciate the problems involved in historical explanation.
- 10.4 Define the term 'explanation'
- 10.5 Those philosophical problems that are involved in historical explanation

10.1 The Explanation of 'How' a Past Event Happened

In answering the question 'how' the historian provides a narration of events or series of events leading to the situation to be explained. Series of past events are thus described in a coherent and chronological manner.

This is the approach used in books like *Samuel Johnson's History of the Yorubas* and *Joseph Egharevha's Short History of Benin*; and in the works of classical historians like Herodotus and *Livy*, and in the works of *Clarendon* and *Gibbon* in seventeenth and eighteenth century England. All these works have been described as 'narrative history.'

Such historical works help in the establishment of facts but they have been denounced because of their lack of analysis. However, their importance lies in the fact that before we can ask why any

event took place we must first know what the relevant events were and the sequence in which they took place. And this is what is done by narrative history.

10.1.1 The Question of 'Why' a Past Event Took Place

The question 'why,' requires a more difficult approach of explanation than is called for in the question 'How.' The historian who attempts to answer the question 'why' in his explanation is said to be writing 'analytical history' as distinct from narrative history.

In an analysis, the facts of past events are woven into the reasons or causes which form the elements of explanation and chronology takes a secondary position, though it is not distorted. In other words, the historian is more concerned with finding the underlying causes, reasons or factors responsible for the situation to be explained.

10.1.2 Differences in historic significance of facts by different historians

These reasons or factors are arranged in an order which clarifies their relative importance to one another. This order varies with different historians; some historians prefer to put the most important factor first, while others prefer to treat it last.

10.2 Option of narration and analysis in history

It is also important to note that different historians put different scales of importance on the same set of events. What is important to historian (A) may be of little significance in the estimation of historian (B). However, one should note that the analytical historian also introduces some bit of narration into his work; it is only that the analysis dominates the narration. In other words, the narrative and analysis sustain each other effectively.

10.2.1 The importance of multi-factor approach in historical explanation

The historian is seldom content to give only a single reason as his explanation. He adduces a multiplicity of factors; he examines this himself through close observation of a separate chain of development. He may then conclude that one factor outweighs the others in bringing about the situation to be explained.

The point here is that the historian is almost trained to search wide for other factors which interacted with, delayed, stimulated, or perhaps triggered off his most important factor. Moreover, the historian

is only being true to life by adopting the multi-factor approach. This is because in reality, life is a complex affair and it is not usually as a result of a single phenomenon.

Variation of factors in historical explanation

In the process of presenting his explanation, the historian resorts to clarification and in doing this, he adopts the use of such labels as 'political,' 'economic,' 'social,' 'religious,' 'cultural,' 'ideological,' etc. The historian also categorizes his materials according to the level at which it occurred. Thus the historian may distinguish between:

- 1 Long-term factors which brought about a situation which made event X possible.
- 2 Medium - term factors which brought about a situation in which event X became possible.
- 3 Short - term or immediate factors which triggered off event X.

10.3 Writing style: An effective tool to deeper historical explanation

The historian has to establish the order of significance among the factors he adduces, and what he identifies as his most important factors may occur at any of the levels of explanation which he postulates.

In essence, his most important factor could be in either the long-term, medium term or short-term range. But the task of the historian is not yet complete; he has to give his total presentation in a persuasive literary form. His identification and assessment of factors is just a skeleton.

The flesh that he has put on them is the fitting together of the ideas, concepts and the narrative to create a coherent unit. In his presentation, the historian must attempt to convey the reality of life which is continuous and uniform and not just segmented into factors and sectors.

10.3.1 Problems in Explanation

The historian encounters a number of problems in the task of explaining past event. The first problem has to do with the extent to which the historian should look for the explanation of events in the lives of individual men. Is it right to weave history around the lives of great men? Greatness, in this context has nothing to do with moral greatness, neither does it carry any sense of approval.

It only refers to the extent to which the individual concerned has influenced or even dominated the history of his own times or even of subsequent times.

10.3.2 Problems of heroic interpretation of historical events

The historian has to come to terms with what importance he should attach to the hero or great man in history. History, 'is a complex undertaking' and the historian must be wary of using approaches which tend to simplify what is not; such as the idea of interpreting history, past events as just being the handiwork of certain individuals tagged 'heroes'.

10.4 Problem of identifying human action behind historical event

History no doubt deals with human activities, and when the historian attempts to discover the motive behind the general actions of people, he faces a big problem. To account for human action, even in the present is very difficult. Therefore, for the historian to attempt to discover the motives of people in the past is to venture into the intractable.

This problem has been greatly compounded by the assertions of psychologists that man's actions are determined by conscious and unconscious motives. So if a past actor found it very difficult to recognize some of his motives (unconscious motives) at the time of action, how is the historian writing several years later to identify such motives?

10.4.1 The role of accident in historical explanation

Another philosophical problem which confronts the historian while attempting to explain the past is how to handle incidents which are regarded as accidents and unexpected even by contemporaries. The issue is that the definition of what is an accident is elusive. This is because it is part of the human nature to explain events and situations.

Two broad views have been put forward about accidents in history this is because life in general is an "irrational, meaningless series of events which are only superficially connected, a mere chapter of accidents.

10.4.2 Accident as an important factor of historical explanation

It is important to state that accident might not be the most important factor of historical explanation, but it is one of the real factors in historical research and there cannot be relegated during historical research, it is important to reckon with it if the problem of historical explanation must be avoided, accidents are those events and actions which were unforeseeable in the contemporary state of knowledge.

10.4.3 Limitation of accident as a factor of historical explanation

The problem of the historian as far as the above definitions of accident is concerned, is how to explain events that were unforeseeable in the contemporary state of knowledge. There is yet another problem connected with historical explanation. This has to do with conditional causation. Historians write of certain events or situations as having being either 'sufficient' or 'necessary' causes or causal factors in bringing about the situation to be explained. This implies that:

1. If factor x was present, then situation Y which is being explained was a necessary consequence though one which could have been brought about in other way. This means that x led to Y; but Y could have also been caused by other things (either A,B or C)
2. Only if factor x was present could situation Y have come about though, it might still not have happened. 'This means that situation Y could only take place if factor X was there, though Y might still not have happened.

This kind of analysis commits the writer to a determinist view of history i.e. events or situations are predetermined by other crucial factors. Conditional statements like the ones in the above paragraph are very useful in predictions about the future, but when it comes to the explanation of past events, they are very restrictive.

3.1 The making of a good historian through multiple explanation of historical events

It is thus clear from the above that it is only a bad historian or a lay-man that would adduce only a single reason in explaining a past event and that historical explanation is more complicated than is sometimes imagined.

Summary of Study Session 10

In Study Session 10, you have learned that:

1. The historian does not establish facts, he also explains them and he raises the questions 'how' and 'why' past events happened. In answering the question 'how' he describes what happened and produces a narrative history. The question 'why' requires more than narration.
2. The historian has to produce the reasons, factors or causes of certain past events. He does not give only one factor but produces a multiplicity of factors which are also assessed in order to discover their relative importance.
3. The historian weaves everything together to produce a coherent work.

4. The historian faces a number of problems in his bid to explain the past. How does he explain the motives in the minds of past actors? How should he treat events seen as accidents in history? And of course he is in a fix when it comes to conditional causation.
5. Historical explanation shows that the writing of history is not as simple as it seems and that the task of explanation puts a lot of rigours on the historian.

Self Assessment Questions (SAQS) for Study Session 10

Now that you have completed this session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on self-Assessment Questions at the end of this module.

SAQ 10.1 (test learning outcome 10.1)

What is chronological explanation of historical events?

SAQ 10.2 (tests learning outcome 10.2)

In what ways can a historian demonstrate through his interpretative skills how a past took place?

SAQ 10.3 (test learning outcome 10.3)

How can human motives be identified when embarking on historical explanation?

SAQ 10.4 (test learning outcome 10.4)

What reasons does historian give in his explanation of historical events?

SAQ 10.5 (test learning outcome 10.5)

What portrays a historian good scholar?

Notes on the Self-Assessment Question (SAQs) for Study Session 10

SAQ 10.1

Chronological explanation of history simply means the sequential narration of historical events, the concept of chronology is very important in historical explanation because it gives deeper and better explanation of historical events with the historical details arranged accordingly.

SAQ 10.2

A historian demonstrates his interpretative skills when digging into the past by adducing factors responsible for the historical event, this can be effective if these factors are assessed as this will reveal their significance, this significance can be sustained further through the power of narration and chronology and narration which the historian possessed.

SAQ 10.3

Human motives can be identified in historical scholarship when the historian embarking on a research stumbles on the materials; the motives are identifiable through the deductive reasoning of the historian which has the capacity to discover distortions, biases and prejudices of the writers of the materials used.

SAQ 10.4

Historian gives his reasons based on his power of interpretation and the depth of the materials available to him which enable him to reconstruct the past. Since the past is gone, what remains is the fragmentary evidence that is available in the historical records.

SAQ 10.5

A good historian is automatically a good scholar because his research and works are devoid of personal prejudices, biases and deliberate distortions that could be projected for personal gains and interests, the outlook of works of a good scholar carries with it balanced arguments that do not take any position for or against contending historical forces.

Study Session Eleven: The Pursuit of Objectivity

Introduction

The task of the historian is closely linked with the pursuit of truth. He seeks to ascertain what happened in the past as well as explain how and why it happened. In the attempt to analyse what happened in the past, it has however been discovered that different historians give different, and even conflicting interpretations to the same set of events.

And one wonders which of the accounts should be taken as being the authentic fact. This has raised the issue of objectivity in history and the question is frequently asked that "can history be objective?"

This question has raised a lot of problem for historians. And these problems arise from the definition of 'objectivity' because the term has proved elusive to a standard definition in historical circles. So the result of this is that each historian's response to the question of whether history can be objective is determined by his own definition of the term, 'Objectivity'. Two different standpoints thus emerge about the possibility of an objective history: some people believe that history cannot be objective and others feel that history can be objective.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 11

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 11.1 Understand what is meant by objectivity in history.
- 11.2 Appreciate the problems that hinder objectivity in history.
- 11.3 Determine how objective a historian could be in his treatment of the past?
- 11.4 Understand the explanation of historical objectivity and to also mention the factors that you feel may hinder it
- 11.5 Succinctly defined the concept historical objectivity.

11.1 On the Notion that History cannot be Objective

A number of people believe that history can never be objective. This view is borne out of their conception of what constitutes objectivity. 'Objectivity' is seen as freedom from bias and prejudice.

This means that an objective work should not be affected by bias and the personality of the writer should not be reflected in his work.

11.1.1 Objectivity as a means of accepting historical writings

By extension, objectivity means that the findings of the writer should be able to warrant acceptance by all who seriously investigate them because History conforms to these standards. By implication, such writing is objective.

11.1.2 Subjective factors of historical writing

The following factors have been adduced as being responsible for this lack of objectivity in history. One is the fact that the historian is necessarily selective. He has to select what to investigate about the past because he cannot possibly write about all that happened in the past. Even within the field chooses for study, he selects some facts for special emphasis and ignores others altogether.

This means that the only facts which find their way into historical works are those which have some degree of importance. But the idea of what is important in history is relative, to a large extent, to the person making the judgment of importance.

In-Text Question

A number of people believe that history can never be objective. True or false

In-Text Answer

True

11.2 Differential interpretations of historical events

Apart from the role of the selective factor, another thing that hinders objectivity in history in the light of the above, definition is the fact that the historian is intimately involved with his materials especially when it comes to interpretation and analysis. Thus different historians react to the same issue in different ways.

The following have been discovered to be the causes of disagreement among historians.

11.2.1 Personal Bias

This refers to the personal likes and dislikes of the historian. For example, Carlyle, a British historian, admires great men while Wells, another historian does not. Thus Carlyle makes his writings centre round the ideas and actions of his hero which he presents as the prime mover in the history of his time, while Wells presents a different interpretation of history.

Prejudices: These are assumption associated with the historian's membership of a certain group. They are the assumption he makes as belonging to a particular nation, race or social class or as professing a particular religion.

11.2.2 Conflicting theories of Historical Interpretation

Theories of historical interpretation are theories of the relative importance of different kinds of casual factors in history. For example, a Marxist will see the ultimate explanation of all historical events in the operation of economic factors while another historian may refuse to regard any single type of casual factor as decisive in history.

In-Text Question

Different historians react to the same issue in different ways. True or false

In-Text Answer

True

1.3 Underlying Philosophical Conflicts

It deals with conflicts arising from different moral and metaphysical beliefs. The historian's moral beliefs, his conception of the nature of 'man' and his world view will affect his interpretation of historical events.

1.3.1 Historical language as a barrier to objectivity

The normal everyday language used by the historian has been said to constitute a barrier to objectivity in history. Human language is not purely objective or value-free. There is an element of evaluation in a language even if the historian does not evaluate consciously, the language which he uses makes evaluation unavoidable. In fact, the richness of natural language allows, and even encourages the possibility of saying the same thing in several ways or for finding a number of competing explanations and the impossibility of deciding such a dispute on impersonal grounds.

1.3.2 Different historical views on Objective

There are two sides to this concession of objectivity to history. The first is one adopted by the Rankean school of thought, while the other is adopted by the Relativists.

In-Text Question

There is an element of evaluation in a language even if the historian does not evaluate consciously, the language which he uses makes evaluation unavoidable. True or false

In-Text Answer

True

1.4 The Rankean View of Objectivity

This is derived from the ideas of a German called *Leopold Von Ranke* (as shown in **fig 14.1**). He was born in 1795 in Germany and he obtained a doctorate degree in Classical Philology from the University of Leipzig in 1815. Later, he turned to History and almost from the beginning of his career as a historian; he made it a cardinal principle that thorough mastery of historical sources is an indispensable condition for an understanding of the past.

History must be grounded in sources and it must be objective. Objectivity to him was describing past events as they really happened. The historian must not look at events in the light of the present but the past must be treated as the past. It is not the task of the historian to interpret or analyse the past.

All he has to do is to find out the truth about the past and this he can achieve from a thorough study of his sources. The historian has to be honest to his sources and by doing this he would be able to write an objective history.

1.4.1 Criticisms against Rankean view

However, the views of Ranke and his followers about objectivity in history have been attacked on several grounds. The first is that it is not practically possible to record events as they really happened. The past is gone and the sources of historical evidence about the past that exist are fragmentary and inaccurate. Moreover, the sources - documents used by the historian - already contain a subjective element even if the historian does not interpret them.

It is what the author of the chronicle considered important and worthy of note that he recorded, and as it has been pointed out earlier that what is considered important may differ from one person to the other. Coupled with this is the fact that documents about the past especially chronicles could have been written to justify an action.

Even when they were not consciously written with that purpose, they still contain the authors impression and thoughts which do not represent what really happened. Another critique of Ranke's view centres round the fact that even in selection of facts the judgement of the historian is involved. This means that history is not really external to the historian. He is closely involved with his sources.

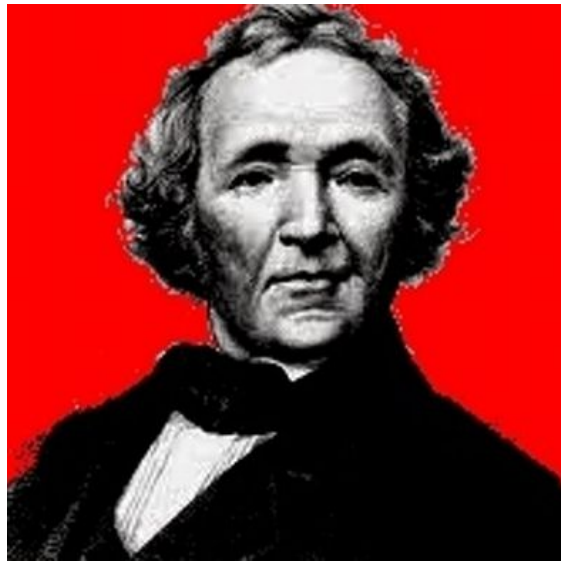


Figure 11.1 Leopold Von Ranke

Source: https://pbs.twimg.com/profile_images/1229894290/von_ranke_400x400.jpg

1.4.2 Positivists views on objectivity

Another view of history that was popular in the 19th century and very similar to the Rankean view was the Positivist's view. The positivist, were a school of historian led by Auguste Comte (as shown in **fig 11.2**) and they believed that historical explanation should take the form of the formulation of laws which would reflect the principles illustrated by the individual facts.

This was expected to raise history to the level of a science and thus make it objective. The problem with the above view is that history cannot be treated like the natural sciences because events, both past and present and human actions are not subject to observable natural laws. Human beings are complex and unpredictable. Moreover, situation too cannot be predicted at certain times. Thus history does not lend itself to the formulation of laws.



Figure 11.2 Auguste Comte

Source:

http://a2.files.biography.com/image/upload/c_fill,cs_srgb,dpr_1.0,g_face,h_300,q_80,w_300/MTE1ODA0OTcxMTg5NzY1NjQ1.jpg

1.4.3 The Relativists' View of Objectivity

Underlying this view of history is the fact that historians have come to terms with the practical problems that hinder the historian from presenting the past as it really was. This approach accepts the existence of irreducibly different points of views among historians, but disputes the conclusion that this rules out all objective knowledge of the past.

Objectivity is here taken in a relative sense, and a history is thus said to be objective if it depicted the facts accurately from its own point of view, but not in any other way.

From this standpoint, a historian has an understanding of what really happened because however biased he may be, his standpoint is still based on some evidence. It is the insight arising from the historian's perspective, and not the truth about the past which the historian at best can present.

Relativism thus embodies the notion that all great historians are essentially equal though, they may find it impossible to agree upon any interpretation of the nature of history.

1.4.4 How to achieve relative objectivity in historical research

In other words, there is a sense in which history can be objective. The term, objective denotes respect for 'Truth'. This respect for truth should manifest itself in the following areas:

In the selection of evidence: There should be no obvious indication of partisanship, prejudice or bias in the selection of evidence. No attempt should be made to suppress an evidence in a deliberate effort to project a particular view point. In essence, the evidences adduced should not be from a single source therefore other sources should be used as well.

In interpretation: The conclusions made by the writer should be borne out from the evidence he adduces and there should be no trace of bias, prejudice and partisanship in the interpretation proffered. In addition, the presentation should be internally unified.

In-Text Question

Underlying the relativist view of history is the fact that historians have come to terms with the practical problems that hinder the historian from presenting the past as it really was. True or false

In-Text Answer

True

Summary of Study Session 11

In Study Session 11, you have learned that:

1. There has been a lot of skepticism about the fruitfulness of the pursuit of objectivity by the historian.
2. Some people believe that history can be objective and each of these two standpoints is determined by the definition of objectivity adopted by its exponent.
3. When objectivity is taken to be 'freedom from bias and prejudice' there is this conclusion that history cannot be objective.
4. When history is interpreted as respect for truth, the possibility of objective histories became very real.
5. There can never be absolute objectivity, but relative objectivity in history.

Self Assessment Questions (SAQS) for Study Session 11

Now that you have completed this session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on self-Assessment Questions at the end of this module.

SAQ 1.1 (test learning outcome 1.1)

What factors affect objectivity in historical research?

SAQ 1.2 (test learning outcome 1.2)

Identify the problems with the Rankean view of history?

SAQ 1.3 (test learning outcome 1.3)

What is the significance of respect or truth as an important variable of historical research?

SAQ 1.4 (test learning outcome 1.4)

How can relative objectivity be achieved in history?

SAQ 1.5 (test learning outcome 1.5)

How can language of a researcher constitute a barrier to objectivity in historical writing?

Notes on the Self-Assessment Question (SAQs) for Study Session 11

SAQ 1.1:

Personal bias, group prejudice and the historical sources constitute a barrier to historical research because the quest to establish the interests of a researcher downplays certain fundamental evidence that would have given a research modicum of truth.

SAQ 1.2:

The problems with Rankean view on objectivity is the inability to interpret a particular source based on historian interpretative skills as this could sustain subjectivity in such a research. Another problem is the lack of rigour that is capable of unwarranted judgment of the researcher.

SAQ 1.3

Respect or truth in historical research shows that a historian is willing to reconstruct the past based on how events happened without any attempt to smuggle in his own interest, this does not give the work a rigorous outlook alone, but respect for certain fundamental professional ethics which reveal quality of such research.

SAQ 1.4

It is true that achieving absolute objectivity is feasible; an attempt to achieve this is simply a utopian. Despite this obstacle, it is possible to achieve relative objectivity in historical research; this can be

achieved through historian's readiness to put aside his prejudices, biases and interest by constructing historical events the way they happened through the eyes of fragmentary evidence, imaginative and interpretative skill of the historian.

SAQ 1.5

Personal bias and prejudices could be more compelling for a historian than the evidence before him. This unprofessional conduct leads to deliberate distortion of historical fact as the language of the historian will reveal how significant historical analysis is downplayed for self interest.

Study Session Twelve: History and the Related Disciplines – 1

Introduction

The search for knowledge and the truth of the past of man should be a cooperative enterprise in which many disciplines will work together as interdependent units. Every discipline concerned with specialized aspects of human life and activity must be relevant to the history of man in his totality.

Moreover, since man has adapted his life to his physical environment and has also attempted to adapt the environment to his needs by the development of technology, disciplines in the physical and biological sciences have a bearing on history. This does not mean that all other disciplines are subsidiary to history.

The point is that there is unity in all knowledge, especially when such knowledge relates to the study of man. Just as other disciplines are needed for a satisfactory and full historical understanding, history constitutes an important ingredient of other studies about man.

Differences in orientation, perspective and specialization in historical study indicate relationships with particular disciplines. Historians dealing with different kinds of history (i.e. political, social, economic, cultural etc) require knowledge of the techniques and methodologies of these other disciplines in order to exploit the relevant and often specialized documents.

In the task of explaining the past, the historian also needs to be acquainted with some other disciplines. For example, in the analysis of motives in the studies of individual men, a knowledge of the principles of psychology and even psychiatry becomes relevant.

Historians also seek the assistance of other disciplines in order to obtain additional information from unfamiliar documents. For example, the historian studying pre-colonial African history about which there are limited documents has to utilize insights from Archaeology, Linguistics, Anthropology, and other disciplines. This study session will therefore examine the relationship between history and the social sciences.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 12

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 12.1 Understand the need for an inter-disciplinary approach to history.
- 12.2 Identify what history stands to gain from the social sciences.
- 12.3 Explain the effects of the social sciences on the writings of history.
- 12.4 Know how disciplines are grouped together in the course of historical research
- 12.5 Know the relationship which exists between History and Economics.

12.1 History and the Social Sciences

Social Sciences are the disciplines which deal with the human society and are basically different from history in the bodies of theories they present, their peculiar techniques and methodologies.

The Social Sciences include disciplines like; Geography, Anthropology, Economics, Sociology and Psychology. They contain theories and generalizations about the operation of society and processes of change which are the subjects of history. Such generalizations supply insights that prove useful to historians looking for foundations for explanation of complex events.

12.1.1 Alignment of a historian and social scientist

In using the concepts of the social scientist, the historian does not profess to be a social scientist in the sense of formulating laws for the society. Instead, he remains different from the social scientist in his concern for the human past in concrete situation. By his interpretation of available historical data and use of social science concepts, the historian is enabled to present a greater ray "of analysis.

12.1.2 History and Geography

There are several ties between history and geography. Diplomatic history and military history require some basic geographical knowledge. Domestic history also needs to be set within the appropriate geographical context. It is very important to place a historical work in its geographical context.

People, who are makers of history, have a scene of action i.e. their geographical environment and this has affected them in a number of ways. Therefore, in order to understand the people and their historical developments properly, one needs to understand their geography.

In-Text Question

Diplomatic history and military history does not require any basic geographical knowledge. True or false

In-Text Answer

False

12.2 Historical actors and their geographical abode

The vegetation of Nigeria, has been classified in three major zones viz:

-  The Mangrove Swamps
-  The Evergreen Forest
-  The Savannah

Each of these zones has affected the way of life of the people living there and their historical developments. Communities in the fresh water delta of the Niger Delta could only fish, boil-salt (produce salt) and trade as a result of their vegetation.

They could not farm at all. River systems, mountain ranges, and sourcing of natural deposits have each affected the history of Nigerian people. Maps are also very useful. They depict clearly the location of people their geographical contiguity to one another and thus helps to put historical findings into proper perspective.

12.2.1 History and Economics

The historian needs some rudimentary knowledge of economics since a lot of man's activity in societies is concerned with economic matters. This has led to the rise of economic history which is "that part of history which requires a knowledge of economics for its full understanding" because it is the study of the economy of a society in the past. The economic historian has chosen to study one part of history in great depth and that depth is to be obtained primarily by the use of economic tools.

12.2.2 Solving historical questions with economic analysis

A historian may raise questions that will require an economic analysis. In such cases, he will need to acquire some economic tools of analysis. These tools are in the forms of new economic history deeply rooted in the methodology of economic science.

1. ***Quantitative History***: it is a form of economic history concerned with the concepts of economic growth and the study of national economic statistics in the aggregate.

2. ***Econometric History***: This differs from economic history only in degree. It places more emphasis on the statistical method and upon the precision of definition and categorization. It uses computers calculations and tries to reconstruct measurements which might existed in the past but which are no more.

12.3 History and Psychology

Due to the fact that history deals with the actions of men, it unavoidably ventures into the realm of Psychology i.e. study of the minds of men and human behaviour. This relationship has two sides to it. In the first place, psychology gives the historian some psychological insights into the minds of men. Secondly, the historian makes use of the discoveries of modern psychology in his analysis.

12.3.1 History and other aspects of psychology

There are several aspects in psychology. There is Ego psychology. Psychiatry is another aspect, as well as social or group psychology. Ego psychology and psychiatry have been very useful in biographical studies where individual character formation is the issue.

Although modern historiography has ceased to regard heroes as the primary makers of history, some situations may arise in which the understanding of an individual may be the key to an understanding of the course of events.

12.3.2 Social psychology, history and group behaviour

Social psychology or group psychology have yielded to the historian useful insights into group behaviour. For example in a historical analysis of group attitudes like ethnic prejudice, messiahnic zeal or religious fervour, historians have profited by using such psycho-analytical concepts as 'Displacement,' 'Projection,' 'Compensation,' 'Ambivalence and 'Depression'.

In-Text Question

Psychology has several aspects which include one of the following

- a) Psychiatry Psychology
- b) Social Psychology
- c) Ego Psychology
- d) All of the above

In-Text Answer

The Answer is (D)

12.4 History and Sociology

These disciplines are all concerned with the study of man in the society. The difference between them is one of approach. It is the insight of sociology which the historian has that would enable him to identify the social structure of the society he is studying, to which he may then apply the principles of sociology.

12.4.1 History and Anthropology

Some sociological works deal with the production of broad general formulation covering significant areas of human action and drawing upon historical material. History, in turn, benefits from the theories produced by sociologists which are anthropological in nature. Historians now acquaint themselves with the language of the anthropologists to enable them to be very precise in their analysis of human behaviour and social interaction.

12.4.2 Sociological classification of societies through history

The historian may borrow the sociologist's classification of society into class, status groups, and according to power. He could also borrow the sociologist's theories in analyzing the society. For example, the historian of modern Africa is dealing with a society that has undergone rapid and even traumatic changes as a result of the sociological definition of social change which he may apply to his own analysis.

Anthropologists have built up a number of historical models in Africa, some of which have stimulated productive reconstruction by historians, but not all of them have been generally accepted.

12.4.3 History and geography

Geography helps the historian to place his study in the proper geographical context and the effect of geography on men is tremendous especially, in the way it determines their ways of life and historical development.

In-Text Question

Some sociological works deal with the production of broad general formulation covering significant areas of human action and drawing upon historical material. True or false

In-Text Answer

True

History, economics and other scientific disciplines

The economic historian needs to borrow the economist's tools of analysis in order to get a clear understanding of past economies. Psychoanalyses are very useful when it comes to the issue of establishing human motives and explaining group action.

The theories of the sociologist are particularly helpful to the historian because they enable him to understand the social structure of the society he is studying and to be precise and thorough in his analysis of human behaviour and social interaction.

Animals and crops - Ethnobotany and Ethnozoo - are relevant to history. The biological sciences are also relevant in such studies as the history of agriculture.

The medical sciences have also been used in African history to study the relationships between peoples, through blood groups and typology. The study of pattern of diseases and epidemics also have an effect on the growth, fertility and virility of the populations.

The mathematical Sciences, also have a relationship with history especially economic history. Statistics is used, for example, in studies of the slave trade in an attempt to estimate the total numbers of Africans taken over to the Americans, or the effect of such trade on the population and historical development of Africa. Computers are also being used by American historians to handle the figures in economic history.

In-Text Question

The economic historian does not needs to borrow the economist's tools of analysis in order to get a clear understanding of past economies. True or false

In-Text Answer

False

Summary of Study Session 12

In Study Session Twelve, you have learned that:

- 1 History stands to gain a lot by adopting some of the insight of the social sciences. This is particularly facilitated by the fact that both history and other disciplines especially social sciences deal with human beings.
- 2 History is not an isolated discipline
- 3 History interacts with other disciplines in its pursuit of truth about the past.

- 4 It is easy for history and these other disciplines to come together because in the final analysis, they are all concerned with same objective.
- 5 History and other related disciplines expand and enrich our knowledge in order to enhance our understanding of the world and place of humanity in the universe.

Self Assessment Questions (SAQS) for Study Session 12

Now that you have completed this session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on self-Assessment Questions at the end of this module.

SAQ 12.1 (test learning outcome 12.1)

What is the role of archaeology in the reconstruction of the past events?

SAQ 12.2(tests learning outcome 12.2)

Access the role of linguistic in the reconstruction of the past?

SAQ 12.3 (tests learning outcome 12.3)

What is the purpose history with other disciplines in the historical research?

SAQ 12.4 (tests learning outcome 12.4)

What is the relationship between social sciences and history as disciplines?

SAQ 12.5 (tests learning outcome 12.5)

Is history an isolated discipline?

Notes on the Self-Assessment Question (SAQs) for Study Session 12

SAQ 12.1

Archaeology provides useful information about the past because the excavated materials dug from the ground provide relative dating about the historical activities of their users. In doing this, a historian is exposed to deeper historical understanding of the society he is studying.

SAQ 12.2

Linguistics as a discipline helps in understanding the language of societies under study. Through linguistics, a historian will be able to know the historical past of the societies under study especially the kind of language spoken by various groups that made up these societies, this gives historical research the rigour it deserves.

SAQ 12.3

The main purpose of history with other disciplines in intellectual research is corroboration of facts as this sustains the pursuit of objectivity.

SAQ 12.4

Fundamentally, the relationship between history and social sciences as disciplines is that, the two disciplines deal with human beings and their actions, these actions became subjects of historical interpretation by scholars of history and social sciences.

SAQ 12.5

History is an isolated discipline because its relationship with other disciplines reveals its versatility; this versatility makes other disciplines to see history as a reference point drawing facts that enrich certain intellectual discovery during research.

Study Session Thirteen: History and the Related Disciplines - II

Introduction

In the last study session, you have learnt about the necessity for an inter-disciplinary approach to the study of history. This study session is a continuation of the previous one, and it examines the relationship between history and the other Arts on the one hand, and between history and the Physical Sciences on the other hand.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 13

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 13.1 Discuss the relationship between history and the other Arts.
- 13.2 Discuss the relationship between history and the physical sciences
- 13.3 Assess the value of the inter-disciplinary approach to history.
- 13.4 Identify what history stands to gain from relating with the physical sciences
- 13.5 Distinguish between physical sciences and humanities

13.1 History and the Other Arts

The Arts are those disciplines that deal with man as an enigma and attempt to reflect different aspects of man. Such disciplines include Linguistics, Philosophy, Literature and Archaeology. Due to the fact that those disciplines deal with man, they are relevant to a degree in a comprehensive view of historical studies.

13.1.1 History and Linguistics

Linguistics is the study of languages and their relationships. It is a very fruitful means of learning about cultural change and contact in the past. The study of loan words (i.e. words or vocabulary items borrowed by one language from another language) for example, can show the ways in which the speakers of one language have been related to another group of people from which their language has borrowed items.

13.1.2 History, Linguistic and historical interaction of African communities

It has been shown by a linguistic analysis of Kanuri loan-words in Hausa carried out by **Joseph Greenberg** that the Hausas had obtained several of their political titles from the Kanuris. This would indicate that the Borno Empire exercised some influence on the Hausa States in the past.

Also it has been established that the Hausa States learnt about writing and aspects of Arabic culture through the Kanuris. This thus proves that Islamic influences penetrated Hausaland via the Borno Empire.



Figure 13.1 Joseph Greenberg

Source: <http://jewishcurrents.org/old-site/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/340959.501.jpg>

13.2 History and linguistic relationship of African people

Another way in which linguistics has proved its relevance to African history is in the area of language classification. From the study of the linguistics geography (i.e. distribution of languages) in the Middle-Belt in Nigeria, Ballard has been able to make historical inferences about migrations of people within the region.

Linguistics has also attempted to reconstruct the vocabularies of long-extinct mother forms (proto-types) of existing languages. Thus Guthrie used his reconstruction of proto-Bantu to infer the stage

of cultural development reached by its speakers. According to him, they could work iron as well as practise agriculture.

13.2.1 Dating of linguistically related words through history

Another usefulness of linguistics to history lies in the study of the processes of language change over time which has led to the use of linguistics for dating. The methods used are called "Lexicostatistics and Glotto-ehronology".

From an analysis of two related languages based on a standard word list, it is possible to estimate how long ago they were separated from a common stock. For example, linguists have shown that the Igala, the Idoma and the Yoruba became separate languages about two thousand years ago, and that the Ijaw language of the Niger Delta is five thousand years old than the Igbo, Edo and Yoruba.

13.2.2 History and Philosophy

The relationship between philosophy and history is mutual. A number of philosophers are concerned with historical issues while some historians are also concerned about philosophical questions in history.

In-Text Question

The relationship between philosophy and history is mutual. True or false

In-Text Answer

True

13.3 History and philosophical questions

Historians are concerned with philosophical questions such as the discovery of the underlying currents and forces in history, and the issue of meaning in historical practice. These philosophical preoccupations of historians have issued in the critical and speculative philosophies of history discussed in Study Session Three.

It should however be noted that, some of those philosophies of history were not propounded by historians but by philosophers e.g. Hegel and his idea of the dialectic. Karl Marx too was not a historian, he was a philosopher and his views i.e. philosophy of history has had a tremendous effect on historiography as we discussed in Study Session Three.

13.3.1 Economic factor as a limitation of philosophy of history

It has introduced the element of the significance of the economic factor into history and even though some historians do not agree with him *in toto*, they have been challenged nonetheless in their approach to historical explanations.

13.3.2 History and Archaeology

Archaeology is the systematic excavation of the remains of past human culture. These remains, called artifacts are interpreted and historical inferences are made from them. Archaeology is particularly useful in the study of the remote past for which there exists very few documentary evidence.

The African historian trying to study the very distant past has, of a necessity, to rely on archaeology. This is because little or no documentary evidence exists about the remote past and even the oral traditions that exist are not very reliable. Archaeological evidence is thus useful as a supplement and corrective to oral evidence.

In-Text Question

Historians are not concerned with philosophical questions such as the discovery of the underlying currents and forces in history, and the issue of meaning in historical practice. True or false

In-Text Answer

False

13.4 Archaeology: Correctional historical method

The earlier statements of European visitors that Africa did not produce advanced civilizations have been disproved by the discovery of fine works of arts and tools at Nok, Ife, Benin and Igbo-Ukwu (as shown in **fig. 13.2**) in Nigeria and large architectural structures in Zimbabwe.

In terms of time dimension, archaeologists in East Africa have recorded the fossils of skeletons which suggest that man might have developed there over a million years ago. Archaeology has also been useful in dating. The Carbon method has been useful in establishing approximate dates i.e. rough estimate of some of the artifacts. And this has been useful to the historian.



Figure 13.2 Igbo-Ukwu Art

Source: <http://www2.clarku.edu/~jborgatt/salemstate/igboukwu.jpg>

13.4.1 History and Literature

The relation between history and literature is mutual. Every literary work has a historical context; this means that they are products of a particular age and society. To completely understand them, one has to make references to the historical context from which they sprang. For example, for a proper understanding of *Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*, one needs to understand the historical context from which they sprang.

13.4.2 Literature as a fundamental tool of historical interrogation

On the other hand, literature either in the form of prose, or drama could be a 'source' for historical reconstruction. They may provide reliable information on the ideas of their age and what the age looked like generally. The historian may get insights into social attitudes, perceptions of social status and responses to matters of belief and prejudice.

Literature, either fictional or factual suggest to the historian questions which he ought to follow up in other sorts of sources. They offer often tenuous clues to the historian. *Ngugi Wa Thiongo* and *Micere Githae's The Trial of De dan Kimathi* offers useful information to the historian interested in Kenyan history on the Mau-Mau revolt in Kenya amidst the embellishments and fiction contained in the work.

13.4.3 History and the Physical Sciences

It is a bit difficult to see any relationship between history and other scientific disciplines. However, it is clear that the studies of the domestication of animals and crops-Ethnobotany and Ethnozoo- are relevant to history. The biological sciences are also relevant in such studies as the history of agriculture.

In-Text Question

Literature, either fictional or factual suggest to the historian questions which he ought to follow up in other sorts of sources. True or false

In-Text Answer

True

13.5 Relationship between history, medical sciences and mathematical sciences

The medical sciences have also been used in African history to study the relationships between peoples, through blood groups and typology. The studies of patterns of diseases and epidemics also have an effect on the growth, fertility and virility of the populations. The Mathematical Sciences also have a relationship with history especially economic history.

Statistics is used, for example, in studies of the slave trade in an attempt to estimate, the total numbers of Africans taken over to the Americas, or the effect of such trade on the population and historical development of Africa. Computers are also being used by American historians to handle the figures in economic history.

In-Text Question

The medical sciences cannot be use in African history to study the relationships between peoples, through blood groups and typology. True or false

In-Text Answer

False

Summary of Study Session 13

In Study Session 13, you have learned that:

1. History is not an isolated discipline.
2. It interacts with other disciplines in its pursuit of truth about the past.

3. It is easy for history, and these other disciplines to come together because in the final analysis, they are all concerned with the same objectives
4. History and these disciplines expand and enrich our knowledge and understanding of the world and the place of humanity in the universe
5. History is an important branch of knowledge

Self Assessment Questions (SAQS) for Study Session 13

Now that you have completed this session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on self-Assessment Questions at the end of this module.

SAQ 13.1 (test learning outcome 13.1)

What is the value of inter-disciplinary approach to historical research?

SAQ 13.2 (test learning outcome 13.2)

What is the limitation of philosophical approach to the study of history as postulated by Karl Marx?

SAQ 13.3 (tests learning outcome 13.3)

What role does linguistics play in the interrogation of historical past of African societies?

SAQ 13.4 (test learning outcome 13.4)

Is archaeology a correctional tool correcting distorted historical events by the European writers?

SAQ 13.5 (test learning outcome 13.5)

What is the role of literature as a discipline to historical interrogation?

Notes on the Self Assessment Question (SAQs) for Study Session 13

SAQ 13.1

Significantly, the value of inter-disciplinary approach to historical research is to achieve objectivity, this could be achieved through corroboration of facts from different fields as this reveals the rigour which historical research requires.

SAQ 13.2

The limitation of philosophical approach as faulted by classical historians is its narrow outlook which examines historical events from the prism of economic factor, this narrow interpretation ignores other fundamental perspectives through which historical events can be interrogated, and this is professionally and ethically unbalanced because objectivity which is the hallmark of historical research is ignored.

SAQ 13.3

The role of linguistics cannot be downplayed because certain historical events that are shrouded in obscurity could be easily interpreted through linguistic interpretation which supports the history of various groups of African past.

SAQ 13.4

Through archaeology, the distorted historical past could be corrected, this is because excavated artifacts reveal the historic dates of their users through radio carbon dating which specifies relative dating. This fundamental corroboration sustains objectivity.

SAQ 13.5

Literature either in the form of prose, or drama could be a 'source' for historical reconstruction. They may provide reliable information on the ideas of their age and what the age looked like generally. The historian may get insights into social attitudes, perceptions of social status and responses to matters of belief and prejudice.

Study Session Fourteen: The Hero in History

Introduction

The historian deals with the past actions of human beings. This means that the focus of history is man, great, noble and humble in their past; and it is the actions of those men which constitute history.

But a number of historians in their bid to explain the past have concentrated their efforts on the great men or heroes of history. Such historians see the heroes as the prime movers in history, without them there would be nothing worthy of note in history.

The actions, ideas and attitudes of the heroes are seen as the determinant factor in history around which other things converge. One of the people who shared such views about great men is Carlyle. According to him, "history is the biography of great men".

However, this view of the importance of the hero in history has been attacked by a lot of modern historians and with that denouncement; emphasis has shifted from the great men to the ordinary people

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 14

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 14.1 State the meaning of 'heroes'
- 14.2 Evaluate their role in history
- 14.3 Determine the relative significance of the role of the ordinary people
- 14.4 Know the importance of a hero in historical development
- 14.5 Know the significance attached to actions of heroes in history.

14.1 The 'Hero' Defined

The hero is the great man in history. His greatness does not derive from moral virtue neither does it carry any sense of approval. But it refers to the extent to which the individual concerned has influenced or even dominated the history of his own time and perhaps of the subsequent times.

Thus the notorious Bashorun Gaa, who overshadowed the Alafins of the eighteenth century Oyo or Afonja, whose ambition opened a way for the Fulani into Yoruba land could be described as heroes.

14.1.1 Charismatic nature of heroes in history

Some heroes were charismatic leaders like *Shaka the Zulu*, *Kwame Nkrumah*, some were religious leaders like *Uthman Dan Fodio* while some were rulers like Emperor Menelik of *Ethiopia* (as shown in **fig 14.1**).

Oranmiyan and *Oduduwa* in Yoruba history are also seen as heroes. *Bayajidda* was the hero of *Daura* *Sayf bn Yazzan* was another hero that came into the area which later became the Bornu Empire.

14.1.2 Critique of the Role of the Hero

Opinions are divided as to the role of the great men in history. Karl Marx sees the heroes as 'representatives of powerful forces which they themselves did not control'. This means that great men have no control over their actions. They are no more than puppets in the hands of what Marx called powerful forces.



Figure 14.1 Emperor Menelik of *Ethiopia*

Source: <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/6c/Minilk.jpg>

14.2 Historic heroic feat: Independent or dependent?

It is important to state that the possibility of individual human beings is important in history. For if great men were not responsible for their own actions it would be nonsensical to now attribute any significance of them as having dominated the history of their own time or of subsequent times.

Other historians did not go to the extreme of Marx to reduce great men or heroes to mere puppets. But they have generally accepted that biography constitutes only an adjunct to history. They have thus sought to de-emphasise the theory of the all-pervading influence of the Great man or hero.

14.2.1 Heroic actions: Simplistic interpretation of history

Historical events depend on human beings, to assess or interpret historical events only from the point of view of the importance of the hero amounts to an over simplification of the historical process. A number of other factors affect or determine how things happen. For example, if we took greatness to be synonymous with leadership, then one could say that the effectiveness of leadership is highly dependent on the loyalty of the followership.

14.2.2 Balancing historical judgment

How does one handle the role of the ordinary people? Some other writers have reacted to the concept of the role of the hero in history by coming up with an opposite concept of the role of the 'people' or 'masses' in history.

A view of history that interprets the past only from the point of view of the role of the masses is as bad as the one that focuses only on the great men. There should be a balance in historical judgment and one should be wary of leaning towards either of the extremes.

In-Text Question

It is important to state that the possibility of individual human beings is important in history. True or false

In-Text Answer

True

14.3 Heroic historical actions and possibility of distortion

This concept of the role of the hero characterized much of what was written on Pre-Colonial African history. Heroes were romanticized. And these heroes were in most cases the rulers. Thus rulers like *Mansa Musa*, *Idris Aloma* and *Ali-Ghaji* were presented as being very significant in that they tremendously influenced their societies. The courts of those rulers were described and their diplomatic relations narrated. In short, attention was focused on the rulers at the expense of the masses.

14.3.1 Masses history and the impossibility of historical validity

However, twentieth century historians now look at the underprivileged and the down-trodden. They now focus on urban centres, ghettos, slums and raise questions like the effects of industrialization on the people.

There has emerged labour history which traces the tradition of struggle among the working class. Social history has also been developed to look at the interaction between people in the past.

14.3.2 The importance of heroes and masses' action in historical interrogation

The ever going emphasis on social history and the history of the ordinary people does not mean that great men are no longer important or that their roles should be glossed over. One cannot, for example, dissociate *Nkrumah* from the struggle of the independence of Ghana while *Shako the Zulu* cannot be expunged from materials which exist on early Zulu history.

One still needs to understand such heroes in order to get a key understanding of the course of historical events. But modern historiography has ceased to regard heroes as the primary makers of history.



Figure 14.2 Kwame Nkrumah and Shako the Zulu

Source: <http://atlantablackstar.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/KN13.jpg>

14.4 Heroes and their historical actions

It is absolutely correct that historical actions are the product of the past events; the magnitude of the impacts of these actions cannot be delinked from historical actors. Often times, the consciousness of historical events remains in human society when such events are witnessed key historical actors who are usually the leader; this does not negate the actions of the masse

who are also historical actors. This historical fallacy constitutes an impediment to historical interrogation of the past.

14.4.1 Heroes and masses: Clash of historical impact

Significantly, both the masses and the heroes make the society. The actions of these two classes contribute significantly to the historical past of every society. The potency of reconstructing the past of any society becomes conspicuous when the roles of various groups that make up the society are reconstructed through historical interpretation.

14.4.2 Actions of heroes and their historical interpretation

It is not heroes that are real actors in history, but their actions, what bestows the heroic status on these heroes the popularity they enjoy in history is the impacts of their actions on their society and the effects of these actions on the future generations that interrogate these actions.

In-Text Question

It is absolutely correct that historical actions are the product of the past events; the magnitude of the impacts of these actions cannot be delinked from historical actors. True or false

In-Text Answer

True

14.5 Economic justification of heroic actions in history

The economic interpretation of heroic action by Marxists could be too narrow in its analysis, but this does not negate the interpretation of Marx and his cohorts because heroes consciously and unconsciously took decisions that are economically motivated in order to protect their own interest, but holistically, other factors might have become propelling for these actors.

14.5.1 Masses and Heroes defined in history

From the foregoing, it is clear that heroes are not the only factors that make impacts in history, but the combination of centrifugal forces that make up a society. The objective interrogation of actions of these forces could be established if their actions are comprehensively examined and dissected by historians who are reconstructing the past.

In-Text Question

Heroes are not the only factors that make impacts in history, but the combination of centrifugal forces that make up a society. True or false

In-Text Answer

True

Summary of Study Session 14

In Study Session 14, you have learned that:

1. In some historical explanations the heroes have been regarded as the primary makers of history.
2. This view has been contested by others, who feel that the hero is being glorified at the expense of the ordinary people.
3. The result has been a change in the direction of historical interpretation and the focus of historical research has been extended to the ordinary people.
4. Modern writers have also ceased to regard heroes as the prime movers of history
5. Both the masses and the heroes are important actors in history.

Self-Assessment Questions (SAQS) for Study Session 14

Now that you have completed this session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on self-Assessment Questions at the end of this module.

SAQ 14.1 (test learning outcome 14.1)

How do you define great men or heroes in history?

SAQ 14.2 (test learning outcome 14.2)

Do heroes alone constitute historical actions?

SAQ 14.3 (test learning outcome 14.3)

Are heroes conscious of their actions in history?

SAQ 14.4 (test learning outcome 14.4)

What forms the basis of argument against heroes in history?

SAQ 14.5 (test learning outcome 14.5)

Outline the importance of heroes and masses in history?

Notes on the Self- Assessment Question (SAQs) for Study Session 14

SAQ 14.1

The heroes are the great men in history. Their greatness does not derive from moral virtue neither does it carry any sense of approval. But it refers to the extent to which these individuals concerned have influenced or even dominated the history of their own time and perhaps of the subsequent times.

SAQ 14.2

Objectively, heroes alone do not constitute historical actions because there are other forces that make the society, the political domination of these heroes makes their actions to remain indelible in the historical trajectory of the society.

SAQ 14.3

It could be argued that heroes in history took their actions consciously and unconsciously, their socio-political dominance in society serves as constant reminder of their historical actions that had been undertaken consciously and unconsciously.

SAQ 14.4

The basis of argument against heroes in history is that, heroes are being glorified at the expense of the ordinary men, and that ordinary men are equally important in historical events since heroes alone do not constitute the entire society.

SAQ 14.5

The heroes and masses constitute the society, for historical objectivity to be ascertained it is important to critically examine their roles in historical actions as this gives deeper understanding about the activities of past societies in history.

Study Session Fifteen: The Historical Method

Introduction

From the previous courses, we have seen the definition of history, the task of the historian, and the problems faced by the historian. History is the search for truth about past events and the task of the historian is to find out what happened in the past. Evidences about the past are what he uses in his reconstruction of the past.

But those evidences do not speak for themselves, rather they have to be interpreted and analysed by the historian. In the course of doing this, the historian faces a number of problems arising from the nature of the sources, the issue of knowledge, the pursuit of objectivity and historical explanation.

How does the historian treat these problems? Individual historians do not have personal ways of handling these general problems. There are general standards applicable in each of the above cases. This would imply that there is method in history and that historical writing is not just a haphazard exercise. This lecture therefore looks at the methodology of history.

Learning Outcomes for Study Session 15

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 15.1 State the historian's task
- 15.2 Identify the problems he encounters in carrying out this task
- 15.3 Suggest ways of solving such problems
- 15.4 Know the truth about history
- 15.5 Identify the significance of historical research and historical facts

15.1 The Methodology of History

In historical research a number of general rules guide the historian; these are in forms of definitions of what is expected of the historian. They are not explicitly contained in any document but they can

be surmised from the experience of several practicing historians. This standard has to do with the way the historian treats his sources and the way he analyses his evidence.

15.1.1 Treatment of Sources

Before a historian begins to think of sources he must first have a research topic i.e. his proposed line of investigation. He then goes to look for the relevant evidence.

15.1.2 Selecting relevant historical sources

In selecting the relevant evidence he has to get as many sources as possible. All relevant materials available to him must be gathered, written, oral or unusual evidence from other disciplines. In gathering written documents he has to comb libraries, archives, and public record offices and anywhere else he is sure of getting relevant materials.

In-Text Question

In historical research a number of general rules guide the historian; these are in forms of definitions of what is expected of the historian. True or false

In-Text Answer

True

15.2 Collection of oral sources and possibility of distortion

Oral sources have to be collected through recorded interviews. In some cases, some oral traditions are already recorded in writing but the researcher would still conduct his own interviews especially if his topic does not deal with the remote past.

15.2.1 Corroborating oral sources through interdisciplinary approach

In cases of projects dealing with the remote past where there are few documents, the historian may need evidence from other disciplines like archaeology, linguistics, and from some science disciplines like ethnobotany, ethnozoology and the biological sciences.

15.2.2 Guiding against distortion of historical evidence

No attempt should be made to suppress an evidence' in a deliberate effort to project a particular viewpoint, also there should be no obvious indication of partnership, prejudice or bias in the selection of evidence.

15.3 Corroborating historical evidence

Having gathered all the relevant sources and information about the topic he is researching on, the historian then has to ascertain the facts contained in the sources. He does this by comparing different sources in order to corroborate the evidence. Having corroborated the evidence, the historian then proceeds to explain the facts.

15.3.1 Establishing historical verdict through evidence

The explanation offered by the historian has to be analytical and in depth. The historian then tries to provide reasons, factors or causes for the events. It should be noted here that whatever conclusions are made by the historian in the process of analyzing the evidence should be free of any trace of bias, prejudice and partisanship.

15.3.2 Establishing historical judgment through multiplicity of factors

In explaining his evidence, a good historian would not use a mono casual explanation. He should not give a single factor as the explanation of the event. He has to adduce a multiplicity of factors.

In-Text Question

Having gathered all the relevant sources and information about the topic he is researching on, the historian then does not need to ascertain the facts contained in the sources. True or false

In-Text Answer

False

15.4 Allowing facts to speak for themselves

In analyzing his material, the historian should avoid labeling certain events as inevitable. In other words, the adoption of a determinist view of history by the historian in his explanation limits his search for more possible and plausible explanation.

15.4.1 Historical interpretation from different perspectives

The historian, after providing his factors has to establish their relative importance. He has to clarify his explanations. This is facilitated by the use of such labels as 'religious,' 'ideological,' 'social,' 'economic,' cultural, etc. He may also find it necessary to distinguish between long - term, short term, and medium factors and he then assesses them to determine their order of significance.

15.4.2 Theoretical significance of historical interrogation

To facilitate his analysis and interpretation, the historian borrows the insights of some other disciplines like the social sciences and philosophy. He stands to benefit by employing some of the theories and principles formulated by these other disciplines.

In-Text Question

In analyzing his material, the historian should avoid labeling certain events as inevitable. True or false

In-Text Answer

True

15.5 Updating as an important factor of historical method

For historian's analysis to be more precise and vivid, he thus necessarily has to keep himself abreast of the latest findings in those fields. Finally, he has to present his material in a coherent form. He employs his literacy skills to weave all his findings and conclusions into a whole - partly narrative, partly analytical piece.

1.5.1 Objectivity and historical method

No historical method is complete without objectivity, this became necessary because the whole essence of historical research is to establish the truth about the past events. Since the past can only be reconstructed through the instrumentalities of fragmentary evidence, such evidence and historical facts are prone to distortion mainly for selfish purpose.

This intellectual self-centeredness can only be corrected through objective historical research as this enables the historian to interact independently with his facts without any attempt to suppress certain facts for the purpose of achieving unwarranted objectives that could be damaging to historical method.

In-Text Question

No historical method is complete without objectivity, this became necessary because the whole essence of historical research is to establish the truth about the past events.

In-Text Answer

True

Summary of Study Session 15

In Study Session 15, you have learned that:

1. Historical research is not as simple as it may appear.
2. The situation goes through a lot of rigours so that what he produces would be as objective as possible
3. If objectivity is to be achieved for an authentic research, their genuiness must be established and their contents ascertained.
4. Historical analyses have to be very thorough and clear.
5. Factors are given for events; several clarifications are made; and importance is attached to the events. All these are to show that as an academic discipline, history is very rigorous and its standards of practice are by no means inferior to that of any other branch of knowledge.

Self Assessment Questions (SAQS) for Study Session 15

Now that you have completed this session, you can assess how well you have achieved its Learning Outcomes by answering these questions. You can check your answers with the Notes on self-Assessment Questions at the end of this module.

SAQ 15.1 (test learning outcome 1.1)

What are the problematic areas of historical practice?

SAQ 15.2 (test learning outcome 1.2)

Why should historical sources be assessed?

SAQ 15.3 (test learning outcome 1.3)

What is the significance of historical interrogation?

SAQ 15.4 (test learning outcome 1.4)

How come historical events cannot be interpreted from one perspective by different historian?

SAQ 15.5 (test learning outcome 1.5)

What is the significance of multi-disciplinary approach to historical research?

Notes on the Self-Assessment Question (SAQs) for Study Session 15

SAQ 15.1

The problematic areas of historical practice include nature of sources, pursuit of objectivity and historical explanation. These areas are important aspects of consideration if objectivity is to be achieved, since objectivity is the hallmark of historical research, its attainment encompasses all these areas.

SAQ 15.2

Historical sources should be assessed because they are fragmentary, since the past is gone and it cannot be recalled, the remnant of the fragmentary evidence must be assessed critically in order to avoid the possibility of prejudice and bias that could be damaging to historical research.

SAQ 15.3

Since a historian is not a chronicler who narrates events, the historian has the obligation of critical analysis of his sources before drawing his conclusion about a particular event. It is also important for a historian to also make proper comparison of his sources before giving his judgment, otherwise he might be indulging in unprofessional conduct that could call to question the transparency of his work.

SAQ 15.4

An important historical event cannot be interpreted from one perspective by different historians because historians have different sense of judgments. The interpretative abilities of these historians also differ, due to this the event in question cannot be viewed from one perspective, but the facts of such an event remain sacred.

SAQ 15.5

Multi-disciplinary approach exposes the rigour of historical research, this became imperative because historical research has gone beyond the conventional way of interrogation. Historical issues that are shrouded in obscurity can easily be revealed through this approach. Through this, the prospects of attaining relative objectivity can be guaranteed.

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