

1999-1 Translation

1- 31) While there are almost as many definitions of history as there are historians, modern practice most closely conforms to one that sees history as the attempt to recreate and explain the significant events of the past.

Caught in the web of its own time and place, each generation of historians determines anew what is significant for it in the past.

In this search the evidence found is always incomplete and scattered; it is also frequently partial or partisan.

The irony of the historian's craft is that its practitioners always know that their efforts are but contributions to an unending process.

2- 32) Interest in historical methods has arisen less through external challenge to the validity of history as an intellectual discipline and more from internal quarrels among historians themselves.

While history once revered its affinity to literature and philosophy, the emerging social sciences seemed to afford greater opportunities for asking new questions and providing rewarding approaches to an understanding of the past.

Social science methodologies had to be adapted to a discipline governed by the primacy of historical sources rather than the imperatives of the contemporary world.

33) During this transfer, traditional historical methods were augmented by additional methodologies designed to interpret the new forms of evidence in the historical study.

3- Methodology is a term that remains inherently ambiguous in the historical profession.

34) There is no agreement whether methodology refers to the concepts peculiar to historical work in general or to the research techniques appropriate to the various branches of historical inquiry.

Historians, especially those so blinded by their research interests that they have been accused of “tunnel method,” frequently fall victim to the “technical fallacy.”

Also common in the natural sciences, the technicist fallacy mistakenly identifies the discipline as a whole with certain parts of its technical implementation.

4- 35) It applies equally to traditional historians who view history as only the external and internal criticism of sources, and to social science historians who equate their activity with specific techniques.