

H-104: History and Civilization

Mid semester assignment

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Questions:

1. Where did the word 'history' come from? What is historiography?
2. How did Carr differentiate between facts of the past and facts of history?
3. What were Elton's views regarding what is history? Write a note on Carr-Elton debate.
4. What are the benefits and pitfalls of using written/ textual sources of history?
5. What are the main characteristics of civilization according to V. Gordon Childe?
6. What are the major theories of origin of civilization? Explain any one in detail.
7. Write a note on Egyptian pyramids.
8. Write a brief note on Mesopotamian script.

Answers:

- 1) In Greek *histor* which translates to "one who knows" or "witness" gave rise to the word *historein* i.e. "to witness", "give testimony", "recount." This gave rise to the word *historia* "an account of what one has learned or witnessed," "a historical narrative or record." This passed into Latin as *historia*, meaning "recounting of past events", and eventually to English as History.

The term historiography refers to the history of historical writing. It involves the study of writing of events throughout the history and the perspectives of the historians. In simple terms, **historiography** is the history of history. Rather than studying actual events - like, The making of Taj Mahal - to historical analysis, the subject of historiography is the history of the history of the event: the way it has been written, the sometimes conflicting objectives pursued by those writing on it over time, and the way in which such factors shape our understanding of the actual event at stake, and of the nature of history itself.

- 2)
- 3) According to Elton the study of history comprehends everything that man has said, thought, done, or suffered. He also said that historical study is not only the study of the past but the study of present traces of the past. He felt that history's real value as a social activity lies in the standards it sets for all of us. Reason distinguishes man from the rest of creation and the study of history justifies itself so far as it assists reason to work and improve upon itself. The study of history contributes to the improvement of man, it does so by seeking the truth with the rational reconstitution of past.

Car Elton debate

The old historiographical debate between G.R. Elton and E.H. Carr is one of the most notable among historians. Carr, contended that Elton's notion of "ultimate history" was laughable and history was based on the perspective of the historian who wrote it. Elton countered that the 'facts of history' are unchangeable and it was down to historians to discover them. Elton praised Carr for rejecting the role of accidents in history and said that Carr's philosophy of history was an attempt to provide a secular view of history as the working of God's master plan with progress playing the part of God.

4) Advantages

- They help in crosschecking data or information collected from oral and other sources of historical knowledge; this helps to reach reliable conclusions.
- They also provide more detailed information than oral sources. Example: dates, illustrative pictures and names of participants in events.
- Very important to know about the culture, language, literature, skill, ideologies etc.
- They may be written or translated into other languages
- Cannot be easily distorted or infected with.
- Can tell the exact or possible time period of a particular historical event.
- Can tell about any particular historical event or at least can provide any hint.

Disadvantages

- Maybe some type of metaphor satire so all characters of event should be very carefully noted and judged

- May contain false things or might have errors which may lead to confusion or distortion of ideas
- They are expensive, written records require a lot of time and resources to prepare, this makes them expensive to produce.
- Applicable to educated people only, these are limited to a few people in the society.
- Based mainly on writer's opinion, many writers are biased in the sense they write in their favour of example: Eurocentric and Afrocentric ideas.

5) Gordan Childe identified ten scales of civilization:

- Appearance of urban centres- the settlement of people in cities or towns.
- Full-time specialists - craftsman, merchants, officials, priests etc., who instead worked for organizations that could command surplus from peasants.
- Monumental public building – building of statues, public buildings with or without machinery.
- Sizeable surplus product, withdrawn by elite from taxes or tribute.
- Isolating of ruling groups, including priests, civil and military leaders, and officials. That is the development of a class structure.
- Appearance of written language and numerical notation, from which there emerge predictive sciences.
- Arithmetic, geometry and astronomy – essential for the advancement of citizens.
- Development of the sophisticated artistic style.
- Appearance of distant trade.
- Social solidarity, which is represented and misrepresented by the ideological means in the temple or sepulchral shrine.

6) The major theories of origin of civilization are:

1. The social surplus theory
2. The hydraulic hypothesis
3. The circumscription theory
4. The success in competition theory
5. The war finance theory

The hydraulic Hypothesis

According to historian Karl A. Wittfogel, any culture having an agricultural system that is dependent upon large-scale government-managed waterworks productive (for irrigation) and protective (for flood control) qualifies as a Hydraulic civilisation. In this type of civilisation, the leaders who control the works (and control the legitimate force needed to build and maintain them) come to have real administrative power over the farmers.

Small-scale agriculturalists submit to the leaders in order to build and maintain large-scale irrigation works or large projects to protect them from flooding. These projects require strong leaders, organized management, and legitimate enforcement power to engineer the projects, form and coordinate work groups, supply them with materials and food, and ensure that everyone contributes their share of the labour.

The projects thus create a legitimate, accepted structure of leaders and followers. Also, the leaders use their labour-mobilizing power to construct non-hydraulic works such as temples, palaces, roads, etc.

- 7) Great Pyramids of Egypt are some of the most magnificent man-made structures in history. The pyramids are the stone tombs of Egypt's kings - the Pharaohs and one of the world's greatest historical mysteries. They have stood for thousands of years, filled with many hidden secrets: clues about what life (and death) was like in Ancient Egypt.

Their massive scale reflects the unique role that the pharaoh, or king, played in ancient Egyptian society. The Egyptians believed that if the pharaoh's body could be mummified after death the pharaoh would live forever. The tombs were designed to protect the buried Pharaoh's body and his belongings. The tomb walls were painted with scenes from the dead person's life. By examining the objects (artifacts) and paintings in the tombs, we have been able to understand a lot more about life in Ancient Egypt.

Most of the pyramids can be found on the western side of the Nile River, just into the dry desert. The dry desert heat worked to keep the Pharaohs' body and his belongings from decomposing and rotting away. The Great Pyramid is the largest and most famous of the pyramids. It was built for the Pharaoh Khuf. It is over 140 meters high and took 20 years to build.

- 8) The earliest writing was based on pictograms. Pictograms were used to communicate basic information about crops and taxes. Over time, the need for writing emerged and signs were developed which led to creation of scripts. The principal languages of ancient Mesopotamia were Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian Amorite, and later Aramaic. They have come down to us in the "cuneiform" script. The subject which studies Mesopotamian languages and the sources written in them is called Assyriology. Mesopotamian languages in the cuneiform script are mostly written on clay tablets, though they could also be carved on stone.

The Cuneiform script is so called because each individual stroke has the shape of a wedge. The earliest tablets with written inscriptions represent the work of administrators, perhaps of large temple institutions, recording the allocation of rations or the movement and storage of goods. Temple officials needed to keep records of the grain, sheep and cattle entering or leaving their stores and farms and it became impossible to rely on memory.
