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Sources of History

Topics covered

- Various sources of history
- The need to preserve sources of history

This picture shows two sides of a coin. Write the information you get from it:

The country it belongs to:

The value of the coin:

The year in which it was made:

The languages used:



VARIOUS SOURCES OF HISTORY

Like this coin, coins of earlier times also give information. They are **clues** that tell us something about the past. Coins and other such clues are called the sources of history.

Many things have happened and millions of people have lived on earth before us. They have left many different types of clues. If there are many sources—many clues—historians get a full picture of that period. If there are just a few sources, we get only some idea of that particular time. We learn about the past *only* through the sources of history that experts have been able to study and understand.

Think and answer

- What would happen if we did not have any sources or clues from the past?
- Would this be a good or bad thing?



The main sources of history

Coins

Artefacts and monuments

Written material

Oral sources

Coins

Coins give a lot of information:

- The name or picture on a coin tells historians which ruler or king had the coin made.
- The date tells them when he ruled.
- The writing on the coin tells them which language was used at that time.
- If the coin is made of gold or silver, they learn that the kingdom was wealthy.

The earliest coins were not very well made. They were just bits of metal with deep marks. Coin-making got better over the centuries.



Old coins

Did you
Know?



The earliest coins in India were mostly of silver. The metal was heated to soften it. Designs like the sun, trees, hills and various animals were pressed (punched) on to them. These coins are called 'punch-marked' coins.

Artefacts and Monuments

Things made and used by earlier people are called **artefacts**. Household goods, things made of clay like dishes or toys, jewellery and coins are some artefacts that have been found. The study of such artefacts, and of the buildings of early times, is known as **archaeology**. An expert in archaeology is an archaeologist.

From artefacts, archaeologists learn how people lived in earlier times. For example, a clay toy with wheels tells archaeologists that the people knew how to use clay to make toys. They can also guess that the people may have had vehicles with wheels.

Very often artefacts are buried underground. Archaeologists uncover them by digging very carefully. In some places, they have found whole towns buried underground!



A clay toy from ancient Greece



Archaeologists work very carefully so that buried artefacts are not damaged—sometimes they use brushes.

People have also left behind buildings which can still be seen. These historical buildings are called monuments. Historians learn a great deal from such monuments.

Did you Know?



About 1,900 years ago, the town of Pompeii in Italy got buried under ash from a volcano. When archaeologists uncovered it, they learnt how the people of that time had lived.



The pyramids of Egypt have been standing for over 4,600 years! The writings, paintings and artefacts inside the pyramids tell us a lot about the ancient Egyptians.



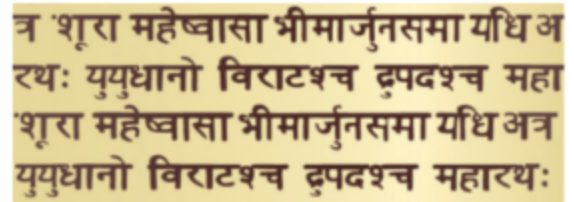
The Taj Mahal in Agra is nearly 400 years old. It is decorated with precious stones, which tells us that the ruler who built it, Shah Jahan, was very wealthy.



Nowadays there are many accurate scientific methods which tell experts how old an artefact is.

Written Records

Written records or, written material, are writings from early times. Sometimes these are in a language like Sanskrit that people can read. Many ancient Indian books are written in Sanskrit.



An example of Sanskrit writing



The writing of the ancient Egyptians—after a lot of work, experts were able to read this.

Sometimes ancient writings are in a language which nobody can read. In such cases experts have to work very hard to understand the writing. It is like trying to read a secret writing.

Written records are of different types:

1. Sometimes a king or someone else in his **court** (the people around him) wrote about his rule. This is how we know a lot about Indian rulers like Babur and Akbar.



A page from the book, called *Baburnama*, that Babur wrote—in it he says that he became a ruler when he was 12 years old—just a little older than you! Babur loved nature. He has described the animals and plants of India. Such paintings are also sources of history.

Hiuen Tsang came to India from China more than 1,300 years ago. He came to study Buddhism, the religion that follows the teachings of Buddha who had lived in India. His writings give a lot of information about India of that time.



Discuss

SI

Which animals are shown in the page from the *Baburnama*?

2. People who were not rulers wrote about their lives or about the times in which they lived. Some foreign visitors wrote about the places that they visited. Many visitors to India described the things that they saw; their writings are an important source of information about India's history.

Did you Know?



Early writings were not always on paper. In India, palm leaves were used. In Europe and West Asia, writing material called parchment made from sheepskin or goatskin, was used.

3. Religious books also give some idea of earlier times. For example, the Vedas (pronounced Veds) are Hindu religious books written by early people called the Aryans. They help us to understand how the Aryans lived.

4. Written records are also found on rocks, stones or metals. These are called **inscriptions**. They give historians information too. We have learnt about the great Indian ruler Ashoka, who was born over 2,300 years ago, through such inscriptions.

Oral Sources—Stories, Songs and Poems

When your family talked to you about their early life, you learnt a part of your family history. Similarly, people have told stories **verbally** (through spoken words) about their lives. These are called oral sources. Songs, poems or folk tales that tell us about people's lives or of historical events, are also oral sources. From these, historians learn about things which may not be found in written records.



THE NEED TO PRESERVE SOURCES

Inscriptions on a pillar put up by Ashoka

We learn about the past *only* through the sources of history. Every source can tell a story. By looking at sources carefully and trying to understand them, archaeologists and historians get a picture of the people and events of the past. This is why *everybody* should realize how important it is to take care of *all* historical sources.

Archaeologists, historians and other people all need to look after historical sources. For example, in times of war, museums that preserve a lot of historical sources are in danger. People who worked at such museums at that time, hid their artefacts and brought them out again when peace returned. They **preserved** knowledge for us all.



Values and Life Skills

Ordinary people can look after historical sources.

- How can we respect historical buildings and monuments?
- What should we do with old photographs, letters and papers? Are they waste materials, or are they useful?

REMEMBER



1. We get information about the past through the sources of history. If there are many sources we get a good idea about a period; just a few sources means that we get an incomplete idea about a period.
2. We know about the past only through the sources of history which historians and archaeologists have studied and understood.
3. The main sources of history are: coins, artefacts and monuments, written records and oral sources.
4. It is essential that we respect and look after the sources of history.



WORDS

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Clue | something that helps to find the answer to a problem, or to know the truth |
| Artefact | something made and used by earlier people like tools, pottery etc. |
| Archaeology | the study of past human beings and their lives by finding and examining their buildings, tools, dishes, etc. |
| Court | the group of people who attend to or are followers of a king or prince |
| Inscriptions | writing on coins, monuments, stone or metal |
| Verbally | through spoken words and not through writing or actions |
| Preserve | keep something safe or in good condition; make something stay the same |



EXERCISES



A. Fill in the blanks.

Copy the following table on sources of history in your notebook and complete it by filling the blanks.

| | | | |
|---------|--|--|---|
| 1. | 2. Artefacts and monuments a. b. Jewellery c. | 3. Written records a. b. c. d. Inscriptions | 4. a. b. c. d. Folk tales |
|---------|--|--|---|

B. Write true or false.

Correct the false sentences in your notebook.

1. Old coins are not of much use to historians.
2. Archaeological remains may be above the ground or underground.
3. The writings of Babur and Hiuen Tsang have given us information about India of earlier times.
4. We cannot read Sanskrit in which early Indian books are written.
5. The Vedas help us to understand how the Aryans lived.
6. We should look after only those historical sources that are important.

C. Match the following.

| A | B |
|-----------------|--|
| 1. Oral sources | a. writing on metal, stone or rocks |
| 2. Monuments | b. things like dishes and tools made by earlier people |
| 3. Artefacts | c. old buildings of historical interest |
| 4. Archaeology | d. stories, songs, poems |
| 5. Inscription | e. the study of artefacts and monuments of earlier times |

D. Choose the correct answers.

1. The earliest coins **were not very well made/were beautiful gold and silver coins.**
2. Buried artefacts **can be dug out by gardeners/have to be removed very carefully.**
3. Written records **are always easy to read/may be difficult to read.**
4. Oral sources are **carefully written down/only told verbally.**

E. Answer the following questions.

1. Why are sources of history important?
2. Explain why sources of history are like clues.

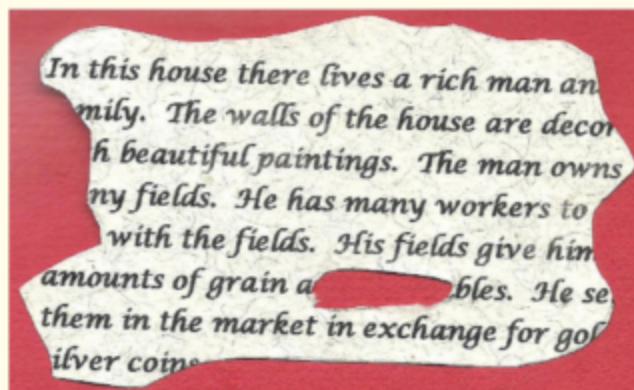
3. Why do archaeologists use brushes when searching for artefacts?
4. From which place did Hiuen Tsang come to India? Why did he come?
5. Explain how the information from oral sources can be different from information found in written records.
6. Why is it important to preserve and care for the sources of history?

THINGS TO DO



SI A. Picture study

Some written records are damaged and historians have to guess what they say. Look at this writing on a damaged piece of paper and work out what it says.



B. On your own

TP 1. Visit the history in your city.

If your town has monuments or museums that tell about the past, visit them. Take a notebook to record your visit.

- At the museum, find out what historical artefacts it has and learn more about them.
- At a monument, find out when it was built and why.

2. What old items are there in your family? Bring one or two to class and share their history.

TP C. In a group

1. The Clue Bag Game for two or more teams:

Your teacher will have a bag with 'sources of history' like coins, books, letters, parts of some toys, bits of pottery and other similar things. As your teacher shows each object, take turns to guess what the source tells you. Whichever team makes good guesses scores two points for each clue.

2. Bring old coins and postage stamps to class. Have an exhibition. Discuss what can be learnt from them.

WEBLINK

TP Archaeologist at work: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x9pGbpIPU-Y>
(accessed on 27 July 2017)

Folk song from Himachal Pradesh: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jnSFLQkXIFs>
(accessed on 27 July 2017)