

2. Sources of History

2.1 Material sources

2.2 Written sources

2.3 Oral sources

2.4 Sources of ancient Indian history

2.5 Precautions to be taken while writing history



Try this.

- Make a list of things in your house which belong to your grandparents' time.
- Collect information about an old structure in your locality.

A number of objects used by our ancestors still exist. Some inscriptions from the past have been recovered. Sources like these help us to understand our history. History can also be learnt through customs and traditions, folk arts, folk literature as well as historical documents. All these are known as 'sources of history'. These are of three types : material sources, written sources and oral sources.



Can you tell?

Structures such as forts, rock-cut caves, *stupa*, etc. are known as material sources of history. Try to guess what other structures can be called material sources.

2.1 Material Sources

Man uses a variety of things in his day-to-day life. They are known as artefacts. Artefacts used by humans in the past provide us valuable information about life in the ancient times. We can decide the period of ancient artefacts like earthen pots by studying the shape, colour and

designs on ancient potsherds. The ornaments and other artefacts throw light on social interaction. We get information about the diet of the people from the remains of foodgrains, seeds and bones of animals found in excavations. Also, we find the remains of houses and buildings built in different historical periods. We also find ancient coins and seals. All these give us information about human activities in the past. All such artefacts, articles, monuments or their ruins are called the 'material sources' of history.



Do you know?

Foodgrains do not last long. They get easily infested and turn into powder.

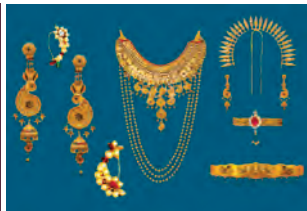
In ancient times, people used to roast foodgrain before grinding them. If a few grains got charred while roasting, they were thrown away. Such charred grains can remain intact for a very long period. During excavations, such charred grains can be recovered. When these are inspected in a laboratory, we come to know what grain it is.



Coins



Potsherd



Ornaments

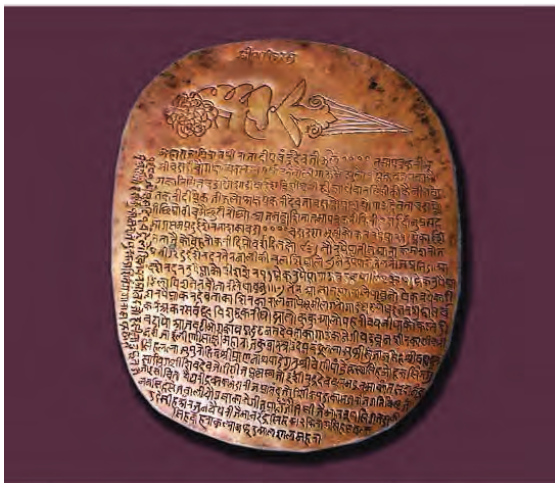


Earthen Pots



Do you know ?

Written sources of history include inscriptions carved on temple walls, walls of rock-cut caves and rocks; inscriptions on copper-plates, pots, bricks and on writing sheets made from palm leaves and birch bark, etc.



A copper-plate



Inscription on a rock

2.2 Written sources

The Stone Age people have recorded many events and expressed their emotions in paintings on rocks. It was only after thousands of years that man learnt the art of writing.

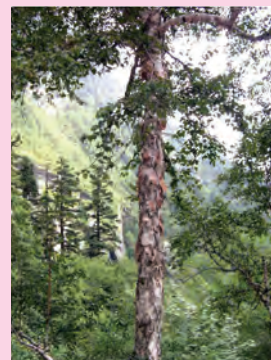
In the beginning, humans used symbols and signs to record their thoughts and ideas. However, it took thousands of years for a script to develop from these.

In the beginning, man wrote on potsherds, unbaked bricks using pointed objects. He also used birch (*bhurja*) tree bark to write on. As his experience and knowledge increased, he began to write in different ways. He began to record the events that took place around him. Accounts of the proceedings of royal courts were also written systematically. Many rulers had their orders, judicial decisions, donations etc inscribed on stone or copper-plates. Over a period of time, many forms of literature developed. They included books on religious and social subjects, plays, poetry, travelogues and scientific works. All this literature helps us to understand the history of the various historical periods. These sources are known as the 'written sources of history'.



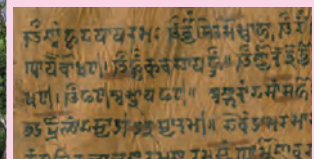
Do you know ?

Bhurjapatra means writing sheets made from the bark of a birch tree.



Birch (*Bhurja*) tree

Bhurja is the Sanskrit name of the birch tree. Birch trees are found in Kashmir.



Bhurjapatra



Do this.

- Visit a museum in your locality. Write an essay describing the artefacts displayed there.
- Collect the traditional verses such as 'owis'.
- Collect folk songs. Present one of them in the cultural programme of your school.

2.3 Oral sources

Owis, folk songs, folk tales and similar literature is passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth. This literature is not in the written form. Its authors are unknown. This type of literature preserved by oral tradition forms the 'oral sources' of history.



Do you know?

- An *owi*

पांडुरंग पिता । रूक्मिण माझी बया ।
आषाढ वारीयेला । पुंडलिक आला न्याया ॥

- Lines from a folk song

‘महानगरी उजनी’ * (Ujjain)
लई पुण्यवान दानी
तेथे नांदत होता राजा
सुखी होती प्रजा
तिन्ही लोकी गाजावाजा
असा उजनीचा इक्राम * राजा’ * (Vikramaditya)



Do you know?

Sources of Ancient Indian History

Material Sources

Artefacts	Structural remains
Rock paintings	Caves
Pottery	Houses
Terra cotta objects	Stupas
Beads	Rock-cut caves
Ornaments	Temples
Sculptures	Churches
Metal objects	Mosques
Coins	Pillars
Weapons	

Written Sources

- Inscriptions on Harappan seals
- Vedic literature
- Mesopotamian clay tablets
- Manuscript copies of Mahabharata and Ramayana
- Jain and Buddhist literature
- Writings of Greek historians, Travelogues
- Travelogues by Chinese travellers
- Books on Grammar, Puranas and inscriptions

Oral Sources

The Vedic, Buddhist and Jain literature of ancient India was preserved by oral tradition. It is now available in the written form. Even so, the oral tradition is still alive. When oral compositions are used for history writing, they are included in the oral sources.

2.4 Sources of ancient Indian history

The ancient period of Indian history extends from the Stone Age to the eighth century CE. We learn about the Stone Age period of Indian history through archaeological excavations. Since scripts had not developed at that time, no written sources are available. However, information about the ancient period from 1500 BCE onwards can be derived from Vedic literature. In the beginning, the Vedas were not in the written form. The ancient Indians had developed the technique of memorizing and reciting them. The Vedas were written down later on. The Vedas and the post-Vedic literature form an important source of ancient Indian history. It includes the Brahmanas, the Upanishads, the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata, the Jain and Buddhist literature, plays, poems, stone and pillar inscriptions, travelogues of foreign travellers etc. We also learn about ancient Indian history through material

sources like archaeological remains, ancient monuments and coins found in excavations.

2.5 Precautions to be taken while writing history

It is necessary to take precautions while using these sources to write history. A written document cannot be said to be authentic just because it is old – it needs to be examined critically as to who wrote it, why and when it was written. The conclusions drawn on the basis of various genuine documents have to be cross-checked and corroborated with one another. Such a critical analysis is very important in the writing of history.



What would you do?

- You have found an old coin.
 - Keep it to yourself.
 - Give it to your parents.
 - Give it to a museum.



Exercise

1. Answer in one sentence.

- (1) In the past, what materials were used for writing?
- (2) What information is obtained from Vedic literature?
- (3) Which literature is preserved by oral tradition?

2. Classify the following sources as material, written and oral sources.

Copper-plate, folk tales, pottery, beads, travelogues, *owis*, inscriptions, Vedic literature, *stupa*, coin, Puranas

Material sources	Written sources	Oral sources
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3. Observe the picture of earthen pots and try to make models of them.

4. Observe any coin and note the following things.

Inscription on the coin

Metal used

Year of the coin

Symbol on the coin

Picture, language, shape and denomination of the coin

5. Do you know a few things by heart? Present them in your group.

For example : poems, prayers, tables, etc.

Activity :

Collect pictures/photos of material and written sources and exhibit them.

