

CHAPTER 2 SOURCES OF THE STUDY OF HISTORY

Objectives

At the end of chapter, students should be able to:

- identify the sources of History and dating;
- explain the meaning of historical skills;
- describe the ancient and modern approaches to history.

Introduction

This chapter sets to study the meaning of sources and types of sources used in the study of history. It also studies the skills needed for the examination and analyses of historical information. The chapter further studies the ancient and modern approach to the study of history.

2.1 Meaning of Sources

Sources are pieces of information used in the reconstruction and the study of history. They are pieces of information of an event that happened in the past. They are only used in historical construction after establishing them as facts because the study of history is based on facts.

2.2 Sources of History

Sources of history are divided into the following:

- (a) **Oral sources:** These are sources that are stored in the memory and it is transmitted with word of mouth. Oral sources are further divided into: oral tradition which deals with the traditional origin of the people such as Oduduwa legend, Bayajidda legend etc, oral accounts which deals with verbal transmission of information such as praise songs, folklores etc.
- (b) **Written sources:** These are sources of history that come in written form. Written sources appear in Arabic language; in European languages such as English, Spanish, Portuguese and Indigenous languages such as Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Written sources are found in textbooks, journals, diaries etc.
- (c) **Archaeological sources:** These are sources that is based on the material remains of people who lived in an area in the past. Examples of archaeological sources are bones of human beings and animals, pots, iron implements etc. Archaeological sites in Nigeria are the Nok, Igbo, Ukwu etc.

- (d) **Linguistic sources:** These are sources that deal with the study of the language of the people in order to establish linkages between them in the past. Linguistic sources have shown that some languages such as Hausa and Kanuri had relationship in the past.
- (e) **Anthropological sources:** These are sources that is based on the study of the customs, traditions and belief of the people in order to understand their culture and behaviour. Colonial anthropologists studied the culture and traditions of groups such as Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo etc.
- (f) **Physical objects:** Physical objects which are used in the past can be used to reconstruct history. These physical objects could be farm implements, ornaments, artwork which are found in the museum.

2.3 Dating of Sources

Dating is the process of applying scientific methods in order to establish the date of an object. Example of dating is the radio-carbon dating used by archaeologists to establish a date of an object found in the soil. Some of these objects have can be dated as a thousand years.

2.4 Historical Skills

Historical skills are the methods used in the examination and assessment of the reliability of sources before they are used in historical reconstruction. Examples of historical skills are: collection of data which involves bringing together different types of sources; interpretation/analysis of evidence which involves the cross examination of sources in order to get facts; ability of a historian to derive the truth from fragmentary sources; ability of a historian not be biased that is not to be partial in his/her judgment; and comparing different types of sources such as oral, written, archaeological in order to arrive at the truth.

2.5 Ancient and Modern Approaches to the Study of History

There are different approaches to the study of history:

- (i) Greek historians saw history as a struggle of power among nations who wanted to conquer and dominate one another. An example of such historians is Polybius who came up with this approach in 2nd century A.D.
- (ii) Muslim and Christian scholars saw history as a will of God. That is all historical activities worked out according to divine plan. Example of such scholars is Ibn Khaldun. Hegel also saw history as God's purpose working out man's freedom.
- (iii) Historians saw history in the 19th century as a principle working towards the progressive triumph of science which was necessary for the development of the human society.
- (iv) African history views history as an object of nationalism. That is, history is used in the liberation of Africa from colonial domination. This is a modern approach to the study of history.

Summary

- Sources are pieces of information used in the study of history.
- Sources of history are oral, written, archaeological, linguistics and anthropological.
- Dating is the use of scientific methods to date objects, such as bones and iron implements, found in the soil. Examples of dating is the radio-carbon dating.
- Historical skills are methods used in analysing sources before they are used for historical reconstruction. Historical skills include: collection of data, interpretation/analyses of evidence, ability of a historian not to be partial, comparing evidence from different types of sources in order to arrive at the truth.
- There are ancient and modern approaches to the study of history. They include: approach of Greek scholars, who saw history as a struggle between countries, African history which see history as an object of nationalism.

Revision Questions

Objectives

1. Sources are pieces of information used in the study of _____.
 - A. Geography
 - B. Government
 - C. Economics
 - D. History
2. _____ are sources stored in the memory and are transmitted by word of mouth.
 - A. Oral sources
 - B. Written sources
 - C. Anthropological sources
 - D. Historical sources
3. The following are examples of oral sources except _____.
 - A. oral account
 - B. oral tradition
 - C. oral comedy
 - D. rumors
4. Radiocarbon dating is an example of _____.
 - A. analyzing of sources
 - B. writing of sources
 - C. dating of sources
 - D. recording of sources
5. The following are types of sources except _____.

- A. oral sources
 - B. written sources
 - C. archaeological sources
 - D. drama
6. Linguistics sources are the study of the _____ of the people to establish relationships between them.
- A. culture
 - B. tradition
 - C. dressing
 - D. language
7. The study of material remains of the people in the past is called _____.
- A. Archaeological sources
 - B. Linguistics
 - C. Anthropology
 - D. History
8. The method used in analysing the reliability of sources before they are used for historical reconstruction are called _____.
- A. dources
 - B. interpretation
 - C. culture
 - D. historical skills
9. The following are examples of historical skills except _____.
- A. collection of data
 - B. interpretations of evidence
 - C. the historian should not be biased when assessing data
 - D. using fake information
10. _____ sources are the study of culture, tradition and belief of the people.
- A. Archaeological
 - B. Anthropological
 - C. Linguistics
 - D. Written

Essay Questions

1. Mention five types of sources you know.
2. What is the meaning of sources?
3. Explain the meaning of dating in history.
4. Discuss the meaning of historical skills.
5. Discuss the ancient and modern approaches to the study of history.