

Module : Humanities and Social Sciences

Level : 1st year

Teacher: Dr. Nassima Amirouche

Lecture 5: History

Objectives:

- To define history
- To highlight the importance of studying it.

1. Etymology

The word history comes from the Ancient Greek ἱστορία (historía), meaning "inquiry; knowledge acquired by investigation". Events occurring before the invention of writing systems are considered prehistory. History was borrowed from Latin (possibly via Old Irish or Old Welsh) into Old English as stær ("history, narrative, story"), but this word fell out of use in the late Old English period .Meanwhile, as Latin became Old French (and Anglo-Norman), historia developed into forms such as istorie, estoire, and historie, with new developments in the meaning: "account of the events of a person's life (beginning of the 12th century), chronicle, account of events as relevant to a group of people or people in general (1155), dramatic or pictorial representation of historical events (c. 1240), body of knowledge relative to human evolution, science (c. 1265), narrative of real or imaginary events, story (c. 1462)".

"History" is an umbrella term that relates to past events as well as the memory, discovery, collection, organization, presentation, and interpretation of information about these events. Historians place the past in context using historical sources such as written documents, oral accounts, and material objects including art and artifacts.

History also includes the academic discipline which uses narrative to describe, examine, question, and analyze a sequence of past events, and investigate the patterns of cause and effect that are related to them. Historians seek to understand and represent the past through narratives. They often debate which narrative best explains an event, as well as the significance of different causes and effects. Historians also debate the nature of history and its usefulness by discussing the study of the discipline as an end in itself and as a way of providing "perspective" on the problems of the present.

Stories common to a particular culture, but not supported by external sources (such as the tales surrounding King Arthur), are usually classified as cultural heritage or legends. History differs from myth in that it is supported by evidence. However, ancient influences have helped spawn variant interpretations of the nature of history which have evolved over the centuries and continue to change today. The modern study of history is wide-ranging, and includes the study of specific regions and the

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study of certain topical or thematic elements of historical investigation. History is often taught as part of primary and secondary education, and the academic study of history is a major discipline in university studies.

2. Description

The study of history has sometimes been classified as part of the humanities and at other times as part of the social sciences. It can also be seen as a bridge between those two broad areas, incorporating methodologies from both. Some individual historians strongly support one or the other classification. In the 20th century, French historian Fernand Braudel revolutionized the study of history, by using such outside disciplines as economics, anthropology, and geography in the study of global history.

Types of Sources

A primary source is a first-hand or contemporary account of an event or topic. They are the most direct evidence of a time or event because they were created by people or things that were there at the time or event. These sources have not been modified by interpretation and offer original thought or new information. Primary sources are original materials, regardless of format.

Letters, diaries, minutes, photographs, artifacts, interviews, and sound or video recordings are examples of primary sources created as a time or event is occurring. Oral histories, newspaper or journal articles, and memoirs or autobiographies are examples of primary sources created after the event or time in question but offering first-hand accounts.

Secondary sources usually use primary sources and offer interpretation, analysis, or commentary. These resources often present primary source information with the addition of hindsight or historical perspective. Common examples include criticisms, histories, and magazine, journal, or newspaper articles written after the fact. Some secondary sources may also be considered primary or tertiary sources - the definition of this term is not set in stone.

Traditionally, historians have recorded events of the past, either in writing or by passing on an oral tradition, and have attempted to answer historical questions through the study of written documents and oral accounts. From the beginning, historians have also used such sources as monuments, inscriptions, and pictures. In general, the sources of historical knowledge can be separated into three categories: what is written, what is said, and what is physically preserved, and historians often consult all three. But writing is the marker that separates history from what comes before.

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There are varieties of ways in which history can be organized, including chronologically, culturally, territorially, and thematically. These divisions are not mutually exclusive, and significant intersections are often present. It is possible for historians to concern themselves with both the very specific and the very general, although the modern trend has been toward specialization. The area called Big History resists this specialization, and searches for universal patterns or trends. History has often been studied with some practical or theoretical aim, but also may be studied out of simple intellectual curiosity.

3. History and Prehistory

The history of the world is the memory of the past experience of Homo sapiens around the world, as that experience has been preserved, largely in written records. By "prehistory", historians mean the recovery of knowledge of the past in an area where no written records exist, or where the writing of a culture is not understood.

The major differences between History vs Prehistory are:

History	Prehistory
The study of time period succeeding prehistory is called history	The study of the time period preceding history is called prehistory.
History is the study of the past starting from the time period when the writing system was introduced and written records were maintained.	Prehistory is the study of the past, even before writing was invented and written records were maintained. It is the study of the time period between the usage of stone tools and the invention of the writing system.
Written records of the past events are the source of information.	Artefacts, Carvings on rocks etc are the sources of information while studying prehistory.
Research on History is carried out by historians. Rare manuscripts written on leaves, dried animals skins, and papers are some of the sources used to study history.	Research on prehistory is carried out by archaeologists and anthropologists who use excavation, geology, molecular genetics, palaeontology etc. Hence a wide variety of social and natural sciences are

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	used to study prehistory.
Study of History can be classified into different domains like Ancient History, Contemporary History, Modern History, Political History, Military History, Cultural History, Economic History, Environmental History, History based on different Geographical locations, People's history, Intellectual history etc.	Prehistory studies 3 different time periods – stone age, bronze age and iron age.

Prehistoric Achievements

While we are unable to credit named individuals with various critical inventions or developments, we do know that by the end of the prehistoric period and the start of the historical period, many essential steps towards organizing human life socially had been taken. Basic tools for hunting, gathering, planting, cooking, and even art and cultural artifacts had been produced. Religious practices, often associated with the attempt to control the environment or to attract good fortune and to ward off bad fortune, had developed, together with religious art. Throughout much of the world, a basic developmental pattern emerged; the hunting-gathering nomadic lifestyle gave way to a settled, agrarian lifestyle often found alongside rivers.

Why do we study History?

To study history is to study change: historians are experts in examining and interpreting human identities and transformations of societies and civilizations over time. They use a range of methods and analytical tools to answer questions about the past and to reconstruct the diversity of past human experience: how profoundly people have differed in their ideas, institutions, and cultural practices; how widely their experiences have varied by time and place, and the ways they have struggled while inhabiting a shared world. Historians use a wide range of sources to weave individual lives and collective actions into narratives that bring critical perspectives on both our past and our present. Studying history helps us understand and grapple with complex questions and dilemmas by examining how the past has shaped (and continues to shape) global, national, and local relationships between societies and people.

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The Past Teaches Us About the Present

Because history gives us the tools to analyze and explain problems in the past, it positions us to see patterns that might otherwise be invisible in the present – thus providing a crucial perspective for understanding (and solving!) current and future problems.

History Builds Empathy Through Studying the Lives and Struggles of Others

Studying the diversity of human experience helps us appreciate cultures, ideas, and traditions that are not our own – and to recognize them as meaningful products of specific times and places. History helps us realize how different our lived experience is from that of our ancestors, yet how similar we are in our goals and values.

“Doing” History is Like Completing a Puzzle or Solving a Mystery

Imagine asking a question about the past, assembling a set of clues through documents, artifacts, or other sources, and then piecing those clues together to tell a story that answers your question and tells you something unexpected about a different time and place. That’s doing history.