**FUNDAMENTALS OF HISTORIOGRAPHY**

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**Introduction**

The concept of history has been a difficult concept to be defined and to be generally accepted by historians. It is difficult to formulate a definition of the term that cannot be challenged on the given ground. This is possible because of the existence of different philosophers with different philosophies on the subject matter of history/historiography. This is because of the varying interest/emphasis placed on various aspects of the discipline by history scholars.

Over time, the study of history has evolved to a systematic account/investigation from the tradition of anecdote narratives of the origins, trends, dynamics and impacts of important phenomena that have defined and influenced the evolution that has occurred in the society from one period to another.

The study of history is therefore advanced and discussed by different historians, scholars, philosophers; this is because historians agreed/disagree on the varying definitions of the concept of history. To the father of history (Herodotus) and his successors Thucydides, Tacitupt viewed history as any written narrative of events.

The varying conceptualization of the term will be discussed and a meeting point will be drawn for the purpose of this study.

**What is History?**

According to F. E. F Ayokhai and AI, C. Okoli (2008) history is the study of society from the standpoint of its post. They further assert that it is an attempt to study the past to understand the present and possibly, evasion or predict the future.

Croce, B. (1941) says history consists essentially in seeing the past through the eyes of the present and in light of its problems and that the main work of the historian is not to record, but to evaluate; for if he does not evaluate, how can he know what is worth recording ?.

Marwick, A. (1970) in his opinion; provided a tripartite definition of history. First, he sees history as ‘the entire human past as it happened’. Secondly; as men attempt to describe and interpret the past, and thirdly; as a systematic study of the past. However, it must be noted that in contemporary times, history as a field of knowledge encompasses not only past events but also their consequences.

Carr, E.H (1961) on the other hand, defines history as a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past.

The encyclopedia Britannica defines history as a discipline that studies the chronological records of events based on a critical examination of source materials and usually presenting an explanation of their courses.

The study of history, therefore, never yielded itself to an easy solution, no wonder James choice (1979) sees history as a dream yet to be awakened from. Hence; it is pertinent to note that, there is yet to be unanimity regarding the exact meaning of history, but it is possible and desirable to identify certain meeting points of the varying definitions. It is important to note that, History is humanistic, its concerns are on human actions and inactions in the past, it involves other actions that emanate from human society, it focuses on aspects or parts of events but not on the whole of the events.

Fafunwa, A.B (1974) stressed that “history is to a people what memory is to the individual. A people with no knowledge of their past would suffer from collective amnesia, groping blindly into the future without guide-posts of precedence to shape their course.”

**Why we Study History**

There are various reasons why the study of history is important as well as the reason behind the teaching of history in the various institution of learning. The study of history does the following:

i. It enlarges the knowledge of one and helps in appreciating the world beyond national boundaries.

ii. History is paramount for the justification of positions, legal claims; to a large extent; resolve disputes.

iii. It enables one to know the truth about the past by analyzing facts from mere myth, legend and fairy tales.

iv. It makes people to be knowledgeable about their selves, understand their past, appreciate and promote their culture.

v. It enables the society to orient itself amidst the bewildering currents of human diversities.

vi. It develops in one, the mentalities that are suitable and compatible with international and intellectual integrity.

vii. The Knowledge of history is very useful for our understanding of the present and the problems of the past, for a good grasp of the present and preparation for the future.

viii. Historical knowledge is entertaining, there is always apt attention when history is being taught and the learner full of curiosity to know or learn more.

ix. The historian is a reservoir of knowledge that society consults.

x. It is a reservoir of life lessons that helps one/people to avoid mistakes or repeat mistakes of the past.

**Sources of History**

Just as there are sources of water; such as rain, stream, well, river, etc., so also are sources of history. Hence, to write history; the historian relies largely on some sources to construct his/her work.

**What is Source?**

It is a place, things from which something comes or is gotten; it is an avenue for getting something.

**What is Historical Source?**

According to R.O., Ajetunmobi (2004) sources of history could be used from two perspectives. The first perspective relates to origin, that is, place and person. While the second perspective is the most commonly used, refers to the source and auxiliary sciences and arts, archaeology, drama, etc., that make the information available or that facilitate historical deductions.

The word sources, implies a place, person, or thing that information is obtained from. Thus; sources of history/historical sources are pieces of information obtained for historical documentation. These include the place, time, person, period, avenue, etc.

In a nutshell, historical sources are the ways, manner or avenue a historian explore to get the required information/material he uses to write/document history or reconstruct history.

The sources of history include Written Source, Oral Tradition, Archeology, Linguistic Materials, Ethnographic Materials, anthropology, etc.

**Written Sources**: The written sources of history refer to pieces of work that involves rather than doing something practical or giving spoken answers. Written sources of history are derived from official documents, diaries, letters, maps, newspapers, inscriptions on stones, etc.

Merits of Written Source:

1. It is not easily distorted or easily changed.
2. It relatively provides storage of historical epoch.
3. It ensures the permanent storage of events for future references.

Demerits of Written Sources:

1. It can be rendered unreliable in the case where an author deliberately omits important information for one reason or the other.
2. It could be misinterpreted/misunderstood by readers.
3. In some cases, some historians write with bias minds to suit/favour a certain area.

**Oral Sources/Tradition:** Oral tradition is that source of history that is preserved orally and narrated to the next generation. It is usually transferred from generation to generation. The oral tradition consists of present generation report and report of the previous generation(s).

Merits of Oral Tradition:

1. It provides first-hand information from people who were eyewitnesses.
2. It enables the historian ask questions to get a clearer picture of his research.
3. It is always and readily available since its source is the people.

Demerits of Oral Tradition:

1. Information/events can easily be forgotten since it has to do with the human mind, thus; this could affect the accuracy of information.
2. Language barrier may affect or frustrate the process of getting the required information.
3. There is the challenge of lack of chronology in narration by the narrator.

**Archaeology**: Archaeology is the study of human activities through the recovery and analysis of material culture/remains. Archaeological sources or discoveries made as a result of excavation and exploration of ancient remains and monuments which includes; skeletal remains, artifacts, tools, ruins of buildings and tombs, etc. These remains are usually subjected to scientific examination via the radio-carbon method for its dates.

Merits of Archaeological Sources:

1. It gives information about the past which no written records provide.
2. Information obtained from archaeological source is reliable since it is backed by evidence.
3. It helps to tell about the life, culture and the technology of the past on a given group of people.

Demerits of Archaeological Sources:

1. Information gotten from this source may not be accurate especially in the dating of fossils.
2. It is expensive because it requires expensive equipment for dating and digging.
3. There are few archaeologists in Nigeria and sourcing for information via archaeology requires the use of a specialist.

**Linguistic Materials**: Linguistics is the scientific study of materials that has to do with the study, analyzing language form, meaning, and context. It also deals with the socio-cultural, political and historical factors that influence a language. Linguistic materials include materials derived from the study of the meaning of words, places and names.

Merits of Linguistic Sources:

1. It is easier and cheaper since no or less payment is required for the study of languages spoken.
2. It helps to inform about the migration, origin and settlement patterns of a given group of people.
3. Linguistic source of information cannot be destroyed easily since language cannot die.

Demerits of Linguistic Sources:

1. Classification of language is often difficult and complicated since linguistic experts are few.
2. It is limited by the language barrier because linguistic source requires people with versatile language understanding.
3. Information can be distorted in the process of translation.

**Ethnographic Materials**: Ethnography is the in-depth study of a culture or facet of culture. Ethnographic materials or sources cover a range of empirical data embedded in human societies and cultures such as in the life, customs, beliefs and various practices of communities. These include institutions of all kinds, culture, political, social, economic activities of a community.

Merits of Ethnographic Sources:

1. It helps to provide a comprehensive perspective of people.
2. It observes the behaviours of people in their natural environments.
3. It helps to reveal the interrelationship among the multifaceted dimensions of group interaction amongst people.

Demerits of Ethnographic Sources:

1. There is much dependence on the observations and interpretations of the researcher.
2. It is difficult to check or ascertain the validity of the conclusion of the researcher.
3. The problem of bias is almost impossible to do away with or eliminate.

**Anthropology**: Is the study of human beings concerning human evolution. Anthropology seeks to study human beings in aspects that range from biology and evolutionary history or the comparative study of humans. This, as a source of history, applies the methodologies and objectives of studying the social and cultural aspects of a people in relation to their beliefs, relationships and customs especially in the changes that occurred within the given area of research interest.

Merits of Anthropology Sources:

1. Tracing of historical facts is not a problem because there are many anthropologists to help out.
2. It helps in the explanation of settlement and growth of a different group of people.
3. It helps us to understand the traditional ways of life of people.

Demerits of Anthropology Sources:

1. It is very difficult to understand why people think the way they do.
2. Facts here are not usually conclusive to justify historical evidence because such facts don’t stand the test of time.
3. The issue of racial and cultural differences comes into play, hence; the anthropologist has the challenge of understanding another society.

It is also important to note that historical sources are classified/grouped into three (3).

**Classification of Historical Sources**

Historical resources are classified or grouped into three(3) which includes: Primary Sources, Secondary Sources, and Tertiary Sources.

Primary Sources refers to the uninterrupted information, raw accessed data, information, that is related to the past and harnessed by the historian for historical reconstruction/construction. In a nutshell, the primary source is pure and undiluted and unadulterated information available to the historian. Example of primary sources includes anecdote, artifacts, archival materials, interviews, original documents/reports, eye-witness accounts, folktales, songs, homiletic, letters, diaries, minutes, ledger, etc.

Secondary sources, on the other hand, refers to sources of historical information which personal biases, opinions, prejudices, are expressed either orally or in writing. This category of sources consists of inference based on primary sources and data collected from time later than the events that happened during a long period before the records were created. Secondary sources are interpretive and contain an explication of/and judgments on primary materials. In order words, the contents of this source are no longer originated as it was handed because it had faced various explanations and utilization to achieve various purposes. Example of secondary sources includes textbooks, journals, magazines, newspapers, academic publications, etc.

Tertiary Sources: These are not farfetched from the secondary sources; the only difference is that materials that characterized the secondary sources are published works while tertiary sources are not. Examples of tertiary sources include unpublished projects, dissertations, thesis, a panel of enquiry reports, unpublished papers, internet sources, etc.

**The Concept of Historiography**

The concept of history embraces the past, present and future, though the future is not known but real by the peoples understanding of the past and the present; this is because time, past, and present are both perhaps, present in time future.

The concept historiography cannot be discussed in isolation without history, thus; necessitated a brief definition of the concept of history above.

Hence, historiography is simply defined as the history of history; this implies that historiography is the study of how history was written, why it was recorded and by whom? It also looks at how historical events have been written or reinterpreted by historians.

Ajetunmobi in Harold N. Lee (2004) defines historiography as “the process of ascertaining and recounting the course of history...” The tasks of historiographer are to establish knowledge of past events from present evidence. Historiography does not establish past events, it seeks to establish knowledge of past events.

The Social Science Encyclopedia vol.6 defines historiography as the craft of writing history. It is also defined as the writing of history, especially the writing of history based on the critical examination of sources, the selection of particular details from the authentic materials in those sources, and the synthesis of those details into a narrative that stands the test of critical examination. Ajetunmobi further defines historiography as the art and science of writing history.

To Authur, M., historiography is not the writing of history but the study of the writing of history.

Historiography is also defined as the technique, method, science, art and general mechanisms that guide the writing of history. It deals with laws governing the compilation and writing of history.

Furthermore, historiography is the general body of history. It is interested in the approaches, methods, perspectives, trends or style that defines the act of historical writing in given historical records. In a nutshell, historiography is the totality of historical writing.

**Approaches in Historiography**

The word approach refers to the way or manner at which something is handled. The Cambridge English dictionary defines approach as a way of doing or considering something, in other words, the Longman dictionary defines approach as a method of doing something or dealing with problems.

The understanding of the concept of historiography is enhanced if the approaches to historiography are understood. The historiographer determines what to write on depending on the availability of material (data).

There are different approaches to historiography, thus:

a. Business history

b. Diplomatic history

c. Cultural history

d. Comparative history

e. Ethno history

f. Economic history

g. Political history etc.

**Types of historiography**

Historiography is grouped into two major types which are:

a. particularistic historiography

b. universal historiography

Particularistic historiography: as the name implies, this is a branch of historical writing that centers on a particular area of history, the historian choose to write on an event (epoch)concerning the availability of materials at his/her disposal. Example of particularistic historiography includes: Writing on a historical epoch within a given period, region, etc. These include; African history, Roman history, European history, etc.

Universal historiography (perspectives): This centers on global history which analysis the transnational connectivity of historical epochs and developments.

Universal historiography deals with the events that are global not on events particular to a region alone. Example of universal historiography: Social history, gender history, environmental history, diplomatic history, etc.

**Note**: Historiography is grouped into Ancient, Medieval, Modern and Contemporary History, which will be briefly explained:

**Ancient History**: Ancient history refers to the totality of past events from the beginning of writing/construction of human history and extending it to the post-classical history period. Ancient history spans through all the continents that were inhabited by humans within the period 3000 BC-AD 500.

The concept "ancient history" is broad and not to be mistaken/confused with the term "classical antiquity". Classical antiquity is usually used to refer to Western history in the ancient Mediterranean from the beginning of the recorded history of the Greek in 776 BC.

Although ancient history is being disputed in respect to its ending date, some scholars of the West extraction use the Roman Empire fall in 476 AD, the Platonic Academy closure in 529 AD, the emperor Justinian I death in 565 AD, the coming of Islam, or the Charlemagne rise, to mark the end of ancient and classical European history.

**Medieval History**: The medieval history or period is also known as the middle ages or the dark ages. This spans from the 5th to the 15th century. This period is said to have begun with the collapse or fall of the Roman Empire and stretched to the beginning of the Renaissance or the age of discovery. The proponents of this period argued that there were no scientific accomplishments made, also; there wasn’t any great man born neither any great art produced.

**Modern History**: Modern history is also referred to as modern period or the modern era, the period is believed to have begun around 16th century. It is the period refers to after the post-classical era (Middle Ages). Modern history is divided into two which includes; the early modern era and late modern era (after the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution). It is important to note that the early modern period started around the 16th century while the late modern era started around the mid-18th century.

**Contemporary History**: Contemporary history is interested in historic epochs that are of immediate relevance to the present time. This period is believed to have started around the mid-20th century, around 1945.

**Importance of historiography**

The importance of historiography includes but not restricted to:

a. It helps the historian and another reader of history understand why historical event/epoch is differently interpreted over time.

b. It helps the historian understand the generalization and specialization of history. To the generalist, he gets an overall sense of how historians view things/issues and while the specialist place importance on details over an epoch

c. Historiography helps the historian in studying history critically. In other words, help us study history with a critical eye.

d. It helps the historian understands how factors that shape and alter the writing of history shapes and alter our interpretation of history.

e. Historiography offers a level of transparency regardless of the audience because it allows others to see where the historian gets his information from.

f. It is therefore important for historians to learn and love historiography because it helps the historian understands how to write history better.

**Dating in history**

Dating in the life of an individual is so significant that he or she often use and make reference to, such dates we celebrate include birth date, wedding date, etc.

Just as in the case of an individual attaching so much importance to certain dates, so also some cultures/traditions. Hence, dating is an integral part of a man’sexistence and thus; dating in history cannot be overemphasized; example: the amalgamation of Nigeria and her independence, the birth of Jesus Christ and Prophet Mohammed, etc.

There are five methods of dating in history. Historical dating are dates made reference to mark an event that occurred in a community/society, nation/country or continent/ world. Dating in history includes:

a. BC/AD

b. BCE/CE

c. AUC (AB Urbe Conditum)

d. AH (Anno Hegirae) &

e. French

**BC/AD:**  This system of dating uses Christ birth year as the zero points, it emphasizes that all other years are based upon BC/AD. BC means before Christ meaning before His birth while AD means after His death. It is important to state that often; the BC/AD system of dating is the most commonly used.

**BCE/CE:** This is the system of dating adopted by individuals believed to be non-Christians; this is as a result of their unwillingness to acknowledge the Messiahship of Jesus. BCE/CE indicates the same periods as in BC but stands for “Before the Common Era”.

**AUC** (AB UrbeConditum): It is believed that this system of dating existed before BC/AD and thus replaced by the BC/AD system. This system is a Roman-style of dating centered on the existence founding of the Roman city. Though there was no precise history before the founding of the Roman City, they used the abbreviation AUC (Latin, AB Urbe Condition) in the year that equates to 753BC to indicate it.

**AH (**Anno Hegirae): The AH system of dating, first came into use in the Arab world which later spread to other continents of the world. The dating is used to mark the flight (Hejira) of Prophet Mohammed from Mecca to Medina (Yathrib) when his life was sought for. This dating system is mostly used by the Muslim faithful all over the world to signify the importance of his flight after his death.

**French:** The French dating system sought to eradicate religion from the dating system, it changed days, weeks and months. It marked French switching from monarchy to a republic. Though this dating system did not last due to the people’s revolt, it was scrapped after about thirteen years to its introduction.

It is important to note that the dating system of a social system often reflectspeople’s significant events or historical epoch.

**Facts of History/Historical Facts**

To the historian, facts are any information that is explored as evidence or a part of the report the historian used in the construction or reconstructing of history.

Facts are things that are concrete, actual or real and are used as basis for further interpretations.

Worthy of note is that when writing history, many facts are assembled or gathered but few are chosen. The way the historian approaches historical events is a major decision within the historiographical context. Facts of history such as names, dates and places are not meaningful without the historian. Such facts can only be useful if explored and utilized by the historian by way of assembling it with other historical evidence. Thus, the process of collecting,assembling evidence is understood as historical facts.

It is worth mentioning that facts of history are meaningless without interpretation or judgment. This interpretation/judgment forms an essential ingredient in the understanding of history.

The practice of history begins with evidence and sources. The availability of sources is often the key determinant of what become most popular.In historical research, two processes are involved: first, the collection and collation of data from all available sources and there are many of these including written document, epigraphy, linguistics, etc. It is apt to infer that a fact of history is a document or records about the past, it answers the basic question; what happened? How did it happen? Who did it? Where? Time? Place? Etc.

It is from the facts of history that the historian derives information or the explanation of the facts he uses to construct or reconstruct history. According to Carr, E.H (1961), the historian without his fact is rootless and futile; the facts without the historian are dead and meaningless. He further defines history as a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past. In other words, in historical research, the facts of history are as important as their interpretations.

It is pertinent to deduce from the above that facts of history are not historical facts, for example; Caesar’s crossing of the Rubicon on 10th January, 49BC is a historical fact, but the crossing of the Rubicon by millions of people before Caesar’s crossing interested nobody. It was historians who decided that Caesars’ crossing of the Rubicon with legions behind him was a historical fact. It is not a basic fact of history that the historian is primarily concerned nor is the accuracy of his essential responsibility/duty to maintain. The fact commonly belongs to the category of the new materials espoused by E.H Carr of the historian rather than history itself. They speak only when the historian calls on them. It is the historian who decides which facts to focus on and in what context.

According to Okpeh, O. (2012) for facts of history to become historical facts, it must go through certain procedures. He opined that the facts must be interpreted, processed and documented. Okpeh further outlined the conditions to be met in considering facts of history in becoming historical facts which include:

1. Facts must be original
2. Facts must be valid
3. Facts must be authentic
4. Facts must be interpreted by the historian
5. Facts must be acceptable by a body of historians.

Furthermore, it is vital to state that facts must first be assembled by the historian, afterwards; selects his facts to construct/reconstruct history. For a fact about the past to become historical or considered, by the historian, it has to be first accorded prestige and significance through a conscious process of selection conducted by him (historian), facts are also needed to be recognized and accepted.

**Objectivity in History**

It is generally believed by so many that obtaining objectivity in history is unachievable. The debate of objectivity in history heated the polity in the 19th century. Hence, since objectivity is a major characteristic a given knowledge is expected to possess to claim to be scientific, historians rose to the responsibility of projecting history and argued on the place of objectivity in history as a field of study and as a science-based on its peculiarity as the case of the subjects. For this study, a brief look into the concept of objectivity will be considered.

**What is Objectivity in History?**

The concept of objectivity in history is a term historian, researchers and students should be careful about. Objectivity in its simplest term means impartiality, the detachment of a historian to try to be free from any form of prepossessions and prejudices which are obtainable as humans since humans are made of varying emotions. Objectivity in history requires that an objective history should be based on a concerted effort and deep research that will be able to stand the test of time. Though; the concept of absolute objectivity is rather applicable to any field of study either of the social sciences, arts or the sciences. Objectivity is the ability of the historian arriving at a historical decision without allowing self-interest, fear, anger, personal sentiments, biases, believes, emotions and other variables attached to him to influence or interfere with his work.

For Carr, objectivity in history is based on two factors. Firstly, the historian should have the capacity to rise above situations he is surrounded in his society and his ability to identify the level of his participation/involvement in any situation.

Secondly, the projection of a historian’s vision into the future should be in a manner that will give him more lasting and profound insight intothe past. This is to say, the possibility of total objectivity is unachievable, but to a large extent once certain attributes peculiar (as mentioned earlier) to historical research are followed, objectivity is thus; obtained.

**Objectivity, Subjectivity and Biases**

Objectivity refers to the individual's conception and perception existing independently. it is the undistorted information (data) assembled by the historian, not allowing the emotion or personal biases relating to any phenomena that are opposed to one's thoughts, feelings, etc. Historical work is objective once it is independent of either particular thoughts that could influence one’s decision.

On the other hand, subjectivity refers to the expression of the personal emotions of the historian, here; the historian thinks of the subject of his work and not on the object. The historian subjects his/her self to emotions, feelings, prejudices, etc.

Biases, this is a situation where the historian's mental inclination or tendency is put into use especially an irrational preference or prejudice or influence.

According to Norman, H.; objectivity and subjectivity in history explains the difference between facts (objective) and interpretation or opinion (subjective). While objective information can be described, information derived by subjectivity consists of mere statements of judgments, assumptions, suspicion, etc. It is important to note that objective information is closer to truth and does not vary, alas; subjective information varies to a great extent from person to person and far from the truth.

Carr further opines that; there are too many facts the historian follows, the procedure of selecting only the significant ones is “the facts of history”.

**Who is an Objective Historian?**

An objective historian is a historian who can rise above the limited vision of his situation in society and history. He must have the ability to project his vision to the future in a manner that will give him more lasting and profound insight into the past. Since no historian can claim to write the ultimate history of an epoch, the historian is urged to write history that is durable and objective.

It is therefore advisable to, before reading any historical work, study the historian first and find out about the author. This will help the reader understands the mind of the author and his writings.Objectivity in history loses value when it is applied to nothing and loses usefulness when applied to everything. Thus; objectivity cannot be absolute because the historian is the problem of historical objectivity.

**Conclusion**

The significance of history to the society cannot be overemphasized, thus; the angle at which a historian constructs or reconstructs history is known as historiography. No historian will be able to construct/reconstruct history without having his facts to guide him. Though the selection of such facts is usually a tedious and herculean task to the historian. In writing or constructing history, the historian is expected to do away with any form of emotions, biases, prejudices (political/religious), etc., as to be able to achieve objectivity in his/her writing.

It is, therefore, the submission of this work to help the students of history and the society at large to understand the concept of history and some basic methodology required in the writing of history as against the postulation of so many that history is not objective but more of a fairytale/folktales and a fiction.

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