UNIT ONE: HISTORY AND HISTORIANS CRAFT (MT1)

1.1. The Meaning and Uses of History

- History is a branch of **social science** that deals with what human beings did **in the past**.
- It is the totality of the thought, sayings and deeds of people who lived before us.
- It studies the political, economic, social and cultural life of past societies.
- It studies **changes** in the development of societies.
- **All things that have happened in the past** in the life of individuals, countries or humanity as a whole is also called 'History'.

•Only a small part of the human past is recorded.

•Both the recorded part and the part which still awaits to be recorded are commonly called history.

What is Prehistory?

•Prehistory, unlike history, is the study of events before human society developed the art of writing.

•It is the study of very distant past.

•**Archaeology** is the science in which archaeologists dig out artifacts and fossils of the past.

•**Artifacts:** are material objects that were used in the past.

•**Fossils:** remains of dead plant, human beings & animals.

•The study of artifacts and fossils helps us to reconstruct what happened before writing started.

The Uses of History

History is a key tool:

- to understanding of national and international issues including democratic principles and nationalism.
- to understanding of the present society and may forecast about future society.
- to develop the critical skill for collecting, analyzing informations and making arguments.
- not to repeat the mistakes of the past times.

1.2. Methods of Historical Study

Elements of History: Sources, Objectivity, Periodization

1. Sources

- No one can write history without sources.
- In history, every statement must be supported by evidence.
- This evidence is obtained from sources of history.
- Historians use **two main types** of sources in their study.
- They are called **primary** sources and **secondary** sources.

Primary sources

- are surviving traces of the past available to us in the present.
- are original or firsthand source of information
- have direct relations to the events they describe.
- come directly from the period under study.
- are nearer in time and place to the event. Exa.

- monuments, inscriptions, coins, letters,
- tools, ornaments
- diaries, memoirs, chronicles,
- documents of contracts/agreements
- eye-witness accounts/travel accounts.

Secondary sources

- are interpretation of primary ones, written long after the event has occurred.
- Most of them are historical reconstructions.
- do not have direct relation or nearness to the event they describe. Exa.,
  - Most history books and research works
  - Novels, plays
  - biographies

Oral sources (Oral Data)

- are either oral traditions or oral history.
- Are valuable to study and document the history of non-literate societies.

- Oral traditions could be taken as both primary and secondary sources.
- Oral traditions are information transmitted by word of mouth from generation to generation
- Primary sources are **more reliable** than secondary sources.
- Critical **evaluation** of both primary and secondary sources is very important for authenticity.
- There may be the possibility of **misrepresentation** of historical evidences.

Sources of Ethiopian History

- The most important primary sources of Ethiopian history are:
  - fossils, ruins of buildings,
  - inscriptions, chronicles
  - letters and codes of laws
- The old inscriptions and documents about Ethiopia were written in Sabean, Geez, Amharic, Arabic, Greek and other European languages.
- The major part of secondary sources for of Ethiopian history are history books, novels, plays and oral traditions.

The Trends Historical Writing

- In the past, artistic value of historical writing was given too much emphasis.
- In those days, historical writing was taken just like the writing of fictions.
- Historical evidence was denied; no one bothered to support historical statements by sources.

Basic steps that We Shall Follow to study History are:

- Recognize topic from the past
- collect evidences of past events,
- evaluate that evidences,
- present a meaningful discussion of the subject on paper in a simple, readable and attractive way.

2. Objectivity

- Objectivity depends not on getting the facts right only but also distinguishing between the real or significant facts.
- We identify the real or significant facts on the basis of the subject of our study.
- Objectivity is also meant presenting what all the facts say without any bias for or against.
- In short, it is the utmost duty of the historian to present the reality as they really were and in the way they really occurred.

3. Dating, periodization, Chronology

- Time is an important factor in the study of history.
- After all history is studied on the basis of **periodization**.
- Events occur in time. But their duration in time could be short or long.

3. We express the duration of events in time by using certain units. These units are called:

- *decade*,- *a* period of ten years
- *Century*- a period of hundred years
- *Millennium*- one thousand years
- **Chronology** is the sequence of events in time.
- To put events chronologically, we depend on certain kinds of calendars.
- **Gregorian calendar**: time is counted forward and backwards from the time of the birth of Jesus Christ.

•The time before the birth of Christ is referred to as **BC** (Before Christ), whereas the time after the birth of Christ is expressed in **A.D**. (a Latin term, "Anno Domini’’**-** "in the year of the Lord).

•**Islamic Calendar:** follows the event called the Hejira to count time forwards and backwards.

•B.H, stands to the years before the **Hejira** and A.H, refers to the years after the Hejira.

•Apart from the above two ways, we can also refer to the time in the past in terms of B.P (Before present).

•B.P is mostly used to refer to very distant times in the past.

The Study of Ethiopian History

- **The world's oldest written history comes from China.**
- Archeologists have discovered records of Chinese history written before **1000 BC.**
- Western historical writing began in ancient **Greece**.
- The first Greek historian, **Herodotus** (484-425 BC) was known as the **"Father of History"**.
- His most famous successor, **Thucydides** wrote critically and accurately.
- **History emerged as an academic discipline** in the second half of the 19th c.
- **Leopold Von Ranke** (1795–1886) founded history as an independent discipline in **Berlin**.
- Ranke is praised as the "**father of modern historiography**."

- **“Ethiopian Studies”** was founded in Europe in the 17th century by a German historian named **Job Ludolf** (1624 - 1704).
- Ludolf published ***Historia Aethiopica*** in 1684.
- After the middle of the 19th century, several Europeans took part in Ethiopian studies.
- Ethiopian writers also appeared towards the end of the 19th century.
- The establishment of the Institute of Ethiopian studies (**IES**) in the early 1963 at the **Haile Sellassie I University College** changed the pattern of Ethiopian studies which until then focused only on the northern part of the country.
- Ethiopian studies focused only on the north until the 1960’s, because the northern part has the following advantages over the south:

a) **Arab, Egyptian, Greek**, **and Roman** writers had left important information for the study of northern history.
b) The north has **a written language** that served to keep records and so, many chronicles of the Christian kings are available.
c) Since the **archaeology** of northern Ethiopia is well studied it also provided an auxiliary sources.

- When we come to the south, even the available physical remains are not yet studied.
- Few Europeans ventured to penetrate the southern part of the country since the middle of the 19th century.
- But the scanty information left by such ventures is barely enough to construct the history of the states and peoples of the region.

- Moreover, the south has no written language and so has not kept records of its past. Therefore, compared to the north, in the south there is lack of sources of history.
- Besides, scholars have been reluctant to collect and use oral traditions as reliable historical sources until the 1960's.
- In this regard, the first problem in the study of Ethiopian history is an **imbalance of sources**.
- Very few scholars were interested in the study of the southern part of the country.
- Even the northern part, which is relatively well-studied, **lacked comprehensiveness**.
  - Because most studies focused only on political histories.
  - Although we have studies in economic history, there are none in social and cultural histories.

•Another problem in the study of Ethiopian history is **lack of objectivity** in the sources themselves, like for instance, the chronicles of the Christian kings.

•Many scholars who conducted the studies were attached to one or the other **ruling dynasty**.

•As such, they were susceptible to **biases** in favor of their attachment.

Features, Interdependence and Achievements of Major Civilizations

Several civilizations all round the world. They have commonly shared features and also attributes that differ one from one another.

- Many of civilizations appeared along big rivers and other **water bodies**. They were **agrarian** states. Example.
  - Mesopotamia-along Tigris and Euphrates Rivers
  - Egypt and Kush/Meroe-along the Nile River
  - Indian-along Hakra and Indus Rivers
  - China-Hwang He River
  - Rome-Tiber River
  - Aztec, Inca and Maya- not far from Atlantic
  - Carthage-around Mediterranean Sea

- Civilization generated additional wealth out of **trade**. Crafts activities were also common practices.
- They have historic **cites** with cultural and commercial significance. Exa.,
  - Memphis and Thebes-Egypt.
  - Harapa and Mohenjo Daro-India
  - Athens, Sparta-Greek
  - Ashur and Nineveh-Assyria
  - Masvingo-Zimbabwe
- Some of civilizations were based on **city states**.
  - Greek (known as polis)
  - Mesopotamia/Summeria
  - Carthage

- Many of civilizations are ruled by successive **dynasties**.
  - China-Shang, Chou, Ch'in
- Many of civilizations were **big empires** and were divided into provinces. Exa.,
  - Persia, Egypt, Rome, Aztec
- Some of Civilizations have well developed **philosophy**
  - Greek, China (Confucianism)
- Civilizations were known in certain kinds of **achievement**.
  - Obelisks-Aksum
  - Cuneiform-Mesopotamia
  - Ziggurat-New Babylonia
  - Pyramids, Maya and Egypt
  - Hieroglyphics and Papyrus-Egypt

- Darics and Pony Express-Persia
- Great Wall-China
- Stone Houses-Zimbabwe
- Amphitheatre-Coliseum, Rome
- Rock Hewn Churches-Zagwe
- Numerals-India
- Medicine-Greek
- Hammurabi Codes of Law-Old Babylonia

- Some civilizations are marked by certain **religions**.
  - Zoroastranism-Persia
  - Hinduism and Budhism-India
- **Most of them were theocracies.**
- They were characterized by **social casts**.

- All civilization have **external relations** and interdependence in commercial, technological and military spheres.
  - Aksum-Byzantine cooperation against Persians
  - Aksumite dependence on Egypt for bishop
  - Greco-Aksumite worship of common gods
  - Kushites adapted Hieroglyphics from Egypt
  - And Persians Cuneiform from Mesopotamia
- They also faced attacks from neighbors and powers from far apart.
  - Egypt was invaded by Hyksos, Libyans, kushites, Assyrians, Persians, Macedonia, Greeks, Rome, Muslim Arabs
  - Kush was overran by Egyptians
  - Carthage by Romans

- Romans by Germans, and Seljuk and Ottoman Turks
- Persia, Greece by Macedonia
- India by Aryans
- American by European invaders
- Summeria by Akkads
- Zimbabwe by Portuguese

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