

LES1: HISTORICAL EVIDENCE: HOW TO INTERPRET EVENTS IN THE PAST

Use a dictionary to discover the meanings of these words. Write them down. .

archaeologist

palaeontology

anthropologist

historian

ethnologist

bias

prejudice

LES1: HISTORICAL EVIDENCE: HOW TO INTERPRET EVENTS IN THE PAST

How do we know if we historical stories from the past are true, unbiased and can be trusted? Historical evidence should reveal accurate, unbiased information (what is the missing word?) about past events, places and people that help us to better understand what happened in history.

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY

PRIMARY

Original material, first hand testimony or evidence, without any interpretation or analysis.

Examples: Diaries, letters, interviews, oral histories, paintings, photographs, newspaper articles, webpages, blogs, government documents, poems, novels, plays and music, original artwork, poems, speeches, letters, memos, personal narratives, interviews, autobiographies, emails, social media posts.

SECONDARY

These sources offer an analysis or restatement of primary sources. They try to describe or explain primary sources.

Examples: Textbooks, books and articles (from newspapers & magazines) that interpret or review research works, histories, biographies, surveys or any of the other types of primary sources.

Classify the above examples of evidence into the four types of evidence below. Add some of your own ideas.

TYPES OF EVIDENCE

WRITTEN

ORAL

VISUAL

PHYSICAL

Equestrian figure



Since the 1940s, low-fired ceramic figures have been unearthed throughout the Inland Niger Delta region, of sub-Saharan Africa. Using a mixture of coarse clay and added grog (crushed pot sherds), the potters modeled the figures by hand. Most surviving examples are solid, but a few are hollow and built with clay coils. Surfaces are polished and covered with a red slip (clay wash). Research, including local oral traditions, indicates that all ethnic groups in the Delta region used these figures. The earliest known written reference to them occurs in a letter of 1447. In it, a visiting Italian merchant remarked that the figures were kept in sanctuaries represented the famous founding rulers of the region. The elaborate dress of the figures suggests ceremonial military attire, and they may represent warriors who were once allies of the Malian emperor Sundjata Keita (c. 1210-c. 1260). Based on stylistic comparisons with similar figures, these works can be tentatively dated to between the 13th and 15th centuries.

<http://africa.si.edu/collections/rsdadvnNav.asp?BrowseMode=3&offset=51>

Activity: Analyse the above source using the 5Ws.

PRIMARY		SECONDARY		TERTIARY	
WRITTEN	ORAL	VISUAL		PHYSICAL	
WHO	Who made the source - did they have an opinion or bias?				
WHAT	What information does the source give? Is it the full story?				
WHY	Why was the source made?				
WHEN	Was it made in that time period?				
WHERE	Where was the source made?				

SOURCE: ARCHAEOLOGICAL: artifacts: sculptures, pottery and buildings

A manuscript page from Timbuktu showing a table of astronomical information



Original books from Timbuktu have been written by local scientists, historians, philosophers, and versemakers. Astronomers studied the movement of stars and relation to seasons, crafting charts of the heavens and precise diagrams of orbits of the other planets based on complex mathematical calculations; they even documented a meteor shower in 1593...—"In the year 991 in God's month of Rajab the Godly, after half the night had passed stars flew around as if fire had been kindled in the whole sky—east, west, north and south...It became a nightly flame lighting up the earth, and people were extremely disturbed. It continued until after dawn." [4]:26–27

The manuscripts were passed down in Timbuktu families and were mostly in poor condition. [5] Most of the manuscripts remain unstudied and uncatalogued, and their total number is unknown. The manuscripts are slowly being preserved and digitized by world historical organisations

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timbuktu_Manuscripts#/media/File:Timbuktu-manuscripts-astronomy-tables.jpg

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LES1: HISTORICAL EVIDENCE: HOW TO INTERPRET EVENTS IN THE PAST (MEMO)

Use a dictionary to discover the meanings of these words. Write them down. .

Source: Online Cambridge Dictionary,
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/> (Retrieved: January 2023)

archaeologist

someone who studies the buildings, graves, tools and other objects of people who lived in the past

palaeontology

the study of fossils as a way of getting information about the history of life on Earth and the structure of rocks

anthropologist

someone who scientifically studies humans and their customs, beliefs and relationships

historian

someone who writes about or studies history

ethnologist

a person who studies different societies and cultures

bias

the action of supporting or opposing a particular person or thing in an unfair way, because of allowing personal opinions to influence your judgment

prejudice

an unfair and unreasonable opinion or feeling, especially when formed without enough thought or knowledge

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Examples: Textbooks, books and articles (from newspapers & magazines) that interpret or review research works, histories, biographies, surveys or any of the other types of primary sources.

Classify the above examples of evidence into the four types of evidence below. Add some of your own ideas.

TYPES OF EVIDENCE

WRITTEN

books, encyclopedias, memoirs, diaries, letters, webpages, blogs, essays, magazines, newspapers, journals, research reports, surveys, Conference proceedings, government documents, theses & dissertations, social media posts, emails.

ORAL

oral transmissions, recorded sounds, interviews, T V, radio programs, podcasts, movies and videos, speeches

VISUAL

photographs, stone inscriptions, paintings, cartoons, social media posts

PHYSICAL

coins, artefacts, monuments, archaeological sites, clothing, tools, transport.

Equestrian figure



Since the 1940s, low-fired ceramic figures have been unearthed throughout the Inland Niger Delta region, of sub-Saharan Africa. Using a mixture of coarse clay and added grog (crushed pot sherds), the potters modeled the figures by hand. Most surviving examples are solid, but a few are hollow and built with clay coils. Surfaces are polished and covered with a red slip (clay wash). Research, including local oral traditions, indicates that all ethnic groups in the Delta region used these figures. The earliest known written reference to them occurs in a letter of 1447. In it, a visiting Italian merchant remarked that the figures were kept in sanctuaries represented the famous founding rulers of the region. The elaborate dress of the figures suggests ceremonial military attire, and they may represent warriors who were once allies of the Malian emperor Sundjata Keita (c. 1210-c. 1260). Based on stylistic comparisons with similar figures, these works can be tentatively dated to between the 13th and 15th centuries.

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Activity: Analyse the above source using the 5Ws.

PRIMARY		SECONDARY		TERTIARY			
WRITTEN		ORAL		VISUAL		PHYSICAL	
WHO	Who made the source - did they have an opinion or bias? These ceramic figures were made by potters throughout the Inland Niger Delta region of sub-Saharan Africa. As the figures were dressed elaborately and kept in sanctuaries, it suggests that the potters thought these figures represented important people.						
WHAT	What information does the source give? Is it the full story? A mixture of coarse clay and added grog (crushed pot sherds) was used to make the figures. The elaborate dress of the figures suggests ceremonial military attire, and they may represent warriors who were once allies of the Malian emperor Sundjata Keita (c. 1210-c. 1260). This may not be the full story as a visiting merchant wrote about it and not a local person. He thought that they represented the founding rulers of the region.						
WHY	Why was the source made? To honour the famous founding rulers of the region.						
WHEN	Was it made in that time period? Probably: based on stylistic comparisons with similar figures, these works can be tentatively dated to between the 13th and 15th centuries.						
WHERE	Where was the source made? Niger Delta region, of sub-Saharan Africa.						

SOURCE: ARCHAEOLOGICAL: artifacts: sculptures, pottery and buildings

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PRIMARY		SECONDARY		TERTIARY			
WRITTEN		ORAL		VISUAL		PHYSICAL	
WHO	Who made the source - did they have an opinion or bias? They were written by local scientists, historians, philosophers, versemakers and astronomers.						
WHAT	What information does the source give? Is it the full story? Astronomers made charts of the heavens and precise diagrams of orbits of the other planets. They documented a meteor shower in 1593. They wrote about their observations using the knowledge that they had at the time and mathematical calculations.						
WHY	Why was the source made? To record observations.						
WHEN	Was it made in that time period? The dates of the meteor shower seem to indicate that it was.						
WHERE	Where was the source made? Original books from Timbuktu						