

1.1.1. Academic Discipline of history

The term history is come from Greek word “istoria” (historia) which means inquiry or knowledge acquired through investigation. History is an organized and critical study of the past human thoughts, sayings and activities based on interpretation of evidences. As an academic discipline, history uses to know the past events (political, social, and economic), appraise present situation and predict the future political, social, and economic developments. It also deals with change and continuity of historical developments over time, and the cause and effect patterns that determine change and continuity. Historian study human past categorizing into pre-historic and historical period. Historical period starts when art of writing is begun in 4000BC whereas Pre-historic period belongs to a period before the starting of the art of writing (before 4000BC).

Studying history helps us to:-

- Learn from best successes of the past human activities and not to repeat their mistakes.
- Establish identity of families, social groups, institutions, and countries.
- Enables students to increase the intellectual skill of critical thinking on societal problems, analyzing and solving problems.

Misuses of history: - mistakenly use of history manifested by the following aspects.

- Selecting or neglecting historical events for one’s own interest.
- Judging the past from the perspectives (values) of the present.

1.1.2. History & Other Sciences

Differences

- Natural scientists study physical world whereas historians study past human’s activities.
- Natural scientists use experiment while historians not
- Natural scientists present their findings in neutral way whereas historians add their personal judgement or views on their scientific findings.
- Social scientists far more regularly use theoretical models and hypothesis, but historian use seldom.

Similarities

- All use systematic methods involving rigorous checks, use of evidence, and analysis.
- All scientists and historians run to discover new knowledge
- All work to solve society’s current problem.

1.1.3. Historiography

Historiography is the history of historical writing. It is a discipline dealing with the methods and techniques of how to conduct historical research and documentation. Human history dated back to the emergence of human society. However organized and systematic study and writing of

history associated with the beginning and development of art of writing. European's history writing tradition started by Greek historian known as Herodotus (ca. 484-425 B.C). He is considered as "father of history". He wrote a long account, "Histories", of the wars between the Greeks and the Persians. Herodotus succeeded by Thucydides (ca. 455 – 400 B.C) who chronologically, critically and accurately wrote about the war between Athens and Sparta known as the Peloponnesian War (ca. 431-408 B.C).

During the 1800s, scientific and systematic study of history developed and history became a field of study in many schools. It was Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886) from the German Historical School who laid the foundations of modern academic history. Thus Ranke is considered as "father of modern historiography"

Key Elements in the Study of History

Modern historical study contains a number of key elements of history.

- **Sources:**

Sources are historical documents, materials, information or statements that are supported by genuine evidence. This evidence is obtained from sources of history. No one can write history without sources that have genuine evidences.

- **Interpretation:**

Evidences are raw material for history writing and interpretation is giving meaning to the evidences. After deeply examining and understanding historical evidences; historians can interpret, write and presents historical facts. Previously historical evidences were not given emphasis but since the beginning of 19thc historical facts were written strictly based on evidences.

- **Objectivity:**

Objectivity is writing unbiased or undistorted history. The past is studied or written only if they are based on truth. Objectivity is presenting all facts without any bias. However, no history can be completely objective. This is why histories are constantly being rewritten. But historians should present as much as possible the truth, unbiased or the accurate history.

- **Method:**

Historical writing method is ways of analyzing and presenting the past accounts as an evidence for historical writing. It comprises the techniques and guidelines historians use primary and secondary sources evidence to conduct research and write history depending on accounts of the past. The major steps in writing history include collection of historical information (evidence), source criticism, interpretation and writing objectively.

Ethiopian Historiography

Traditionally Ethiopia is known by recording history of the kings' chronicles that narrate about the achievements of the Ethiopian emperors since 14th c to 20th c. Hagiographers also made their own contributions to the development of the recorded history of the country. Hagiographers are those who write the saints lives "(Gedel)." However both chroniclers and hagiographers have their own limitations. Careful and critical examination should be made to use these historical accounts.

In Europe, Ethiopian studies were founded in the last quarter of the 17th century by a German historian named Job Ludolf (1624-1704). Ludolf also wrote the first modern history of Ethiopia, which was published in 1684. After mid19thc other Europeans began to study Ethiopian history and at the end of 19thc Ethiopian history writers also emerged.

Institutionally Ethiopian history began to be studied following the establishment of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) in 1963 at the then Haile Sellassie I University (to days Addis Ababa University).

Problems of Ethiopian historiography:

North bias: until the establishment of Ethiopian Studies (IES), Ethiopian studies focused on the north because the northern part of the country had the following advantages over the south:

- a. The north had a written alphabet that served to keep records.
- b. Ancient Greek, Roman and Arab writers had left important information about the region.
- c. Several sources on the Christian kingdom are also available in the Egyptian Coptic Church archives.
- d. The north provided archaeological sources for the study of the history of the region.

Lack of comprehensiveness: most Ethiopian history studies inclined on the political history of the county; that neglects economic, social, cultural and other aspects of the society including the north.

Lack of objectivity: lack of objectivity or bias due to; family attachment, lack of access to pertinent sources, absence of sufficient knowledge on the political, social and cultural realities of the country. All these have affected Ethiopian history in many ways.

1.1.4. Sources of History

Primary sources and secondary sources are the two main types of sources used for historical research.

Primary sources: have direct relation and nearness to the event they describe such as monuments, inscriptions, coins, letters, diaries, memoirs, chronicles, documents of contracts and agreements, photographs, films and eyewitness accounts.

Secondary sources: do not have direct relation or nearness to the event they describe such as most history books, research articles, oral sources could be taken as either primary or secondary sources. Eyewitness oral information is a primary source whereas oral information obtained from others or transmitted from generation to generation is secondary source.

Nevertheless both sources need critical examination and understanding before starting to write history, otherwise, there is the possibility of misrepresentation or wrong interpretation of historical evidences.

1.1.4. Periodization in History

History is usually studied on the basis of periodization. Periodization in history is to divide or categorize human past chronologically into shorter, generalized and named blocks of periods. For example savagery period, stone age period, hunting and gathering period, medieval period, colonial period, etc. Periodization helps historian to study based on specific time frame and present past events according to their sequential time frame arrangement.

Historians follow different approaches to the periodization of history:-

1. Periods based on human behavior, the process of tool making, and economic life.

This periodization starts with the beginning of upright movement of hominids about 2.5 million years B.P (before present).

No	Approach	Stage of development	Date
1	The Human behavior Approach	Savagery	2.5 million-8,000 B. P
		Barbarous	8,000-5,000 B. P
		Civilization	5,000 B.P to the present
2	The human tool making approach	Stone Age	Old Stone Age (2.5 million-8000 B.P),
			Middle Stone Age (transitional)
			New Stone Age (8,000-5000 B.P).
		Bronze Age	5,000- 4000 B.P
3	The Human economic life approach	Iron Age	4,000 B.P to the present
		Hunting and gathering	2.5 million - 8,000 B. P
		Farming and animal husbandry	8,000 B.P -1750 A. D
		Age of Industry	1750 A.D to the present

Table 1.1 Approaches to the periodization of history

2. Based on the starting of art of writing

This periodization categorizes history of humankind into broad category called pre-history and history. The beginning of the technique of writing around 4000 B.C marked the dividing line between the two periods. All events that took place before 4000 BC are studied under prehistory. Whereas events took place after 4000 BC are studied under history. However under historic period only a small part of the human past has been recorded, but needs to be recorded. The distinction between pre-history and history varies from country to country from region to region. This is because of time difference in the emergence of art of writing in different regions. The period of history is divided into three minor periods called ancient, medieval and modern; mostly in European history. This periodization time gap is not uniform all over the world rather varies from continent to continent or from country to country.

No.	Places	History period category	Causes for category and time gap
1	Europe	Ancient	Rise of civilization in ancient Greece about 1, 250 B.C and lasted up to 476 (end of the 5th century AD), when the west Roman Empire collapsed.
		Medieval	end of the 5th century AD up to the 1500 when early capitalist relations began in Europe
		Modern	From about 1500 up to the present.
2	Ethiopia	Ancient	The process of state formation began about 1000 B.C to the decline of <i>Zagwe</i> dynasty 1270 A.D.
		Medieval	from 1270 up to the end of <i>Zemene mesafint</i> 1855 A.D.
		Modern	since rise of Emperor Tewodros 1855 to present

Table 1.2. Periodization in European and Ethiopian context

3. Based on continental/ country's experience

For example periodization in African history is distinctive from the rest of the world as a result of European colonization. Starting 15th c Afro-European relations disrupted African civilization and in the end led to the colonizati