

## Sources of history

We get to know about our past through those things that were connected to us in the past. It might be a building, an artefact, a written text, a painting or perhaps a coin. These are all sources of history as they provide us with information which helps us to learn about our past.

The sources of history can be broadly grouped into two categories:

- Literary sources
- Archaeological sources

### Let's Know More

The National Archives of India (NAI) at Janpath in New Delhi has thousands of rare and old books and documents which can help us to know about our past.

### Literary sources

The literary sources of history are available in the **archives** of museums and libraries. Let us read about some of them.

### Chronicles

A chronicle is a factual, written account of important or historical events in the order of their occurrence. Many historians, court scholars and poets have written about the rulers in whose kingdom they were invited to stay. Such records are called chronicles.

Some famous court chronicles are:

Tabaqat-i-Nasiri, written in Persian by Minhaj-us-Siraj, is the account of Muslim **dynasties** that originated in Iran and Central Asia. It consists of 23 **volumes**.

Ain-i-Akbari and Akbarnama, written by Abu'l-Fazal, are important sources of history during Akbar's reign. They contain detailed description of his life and times.



▲ Abu'l-Fazal presenting Akbarnama

### Autobiographies

- Baburnama is an **autobiography** of the Mughal emperor Babur. It presents detailed life-history of Babur, the first Mughal emperor of India.
- Jahangirnama was written by Mughal emperor Jahangir. It not only provides the history of his reign, but also the details of art, politics and his personal life.



Babur



▲ Jahangir

## Accounts of travellers

Travellers from all parts of the world visited the courts of Indian rulers. They wrote detailed accounts of their experience in the country. Historians found these accounts very authentic and reliable. Infact, most of what we know about the history of our country is through the accounts of these travellers. Hiuen Tsang (China), Fa Hien (China), Al Beruni (Persia), Ibn Batuta (Morocco) and Nicolo Conti (Italy) were some of the travellers.

### Case Study

Fa-Hein was the famous Chinese monk who travelled from China to visit India, during the rule of Chandragupta II. His primary aim was to visit the Buddhist religious places and search the Buddhist books of Discipline. He reached India in AD 399 and remained here till AD 411. He visited Taxila, Mathura, Kannauj, Samath and many other places. Fa-Hien did not write anything specific about the political condition of India nor did he mention the name of Chandragupta II. However, we get to know a lot about the Gupta period from his accounts.



▲ Fa-Hein



▲ Ramayana

## Religious literature

Indian epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata have helped us to find about the lives of people in the period in which these epics were written. These epics have been translated into many regional languages.

## Oral sources

Oral sources of history have no written records. They are passed on from one generation to another in the form of tales, stories and myths. Oral sources are not

## Let's Dig Out

Collect some amazing facts about Ramayana and Mahabharata and share them in the class.

reliable as the stories tend to change while being told and retold by different people. Stories of invention of fire and wheel are some examples.

## Archaeological sources

Archaeological sources can be divided into three categories—monuments, inscriptions and artefacts. They give us an unbiased knowledge about the past. Evidences of earlier civilisations were found buried that had been excavated later.

## Monuments

Monuments are structures which have a historical significance. They educate us about the events of the past. They provide information about the period in which they were built, the social life of the people, their religion, culture and beliefs.

Temples, forts, palaces, tombs,

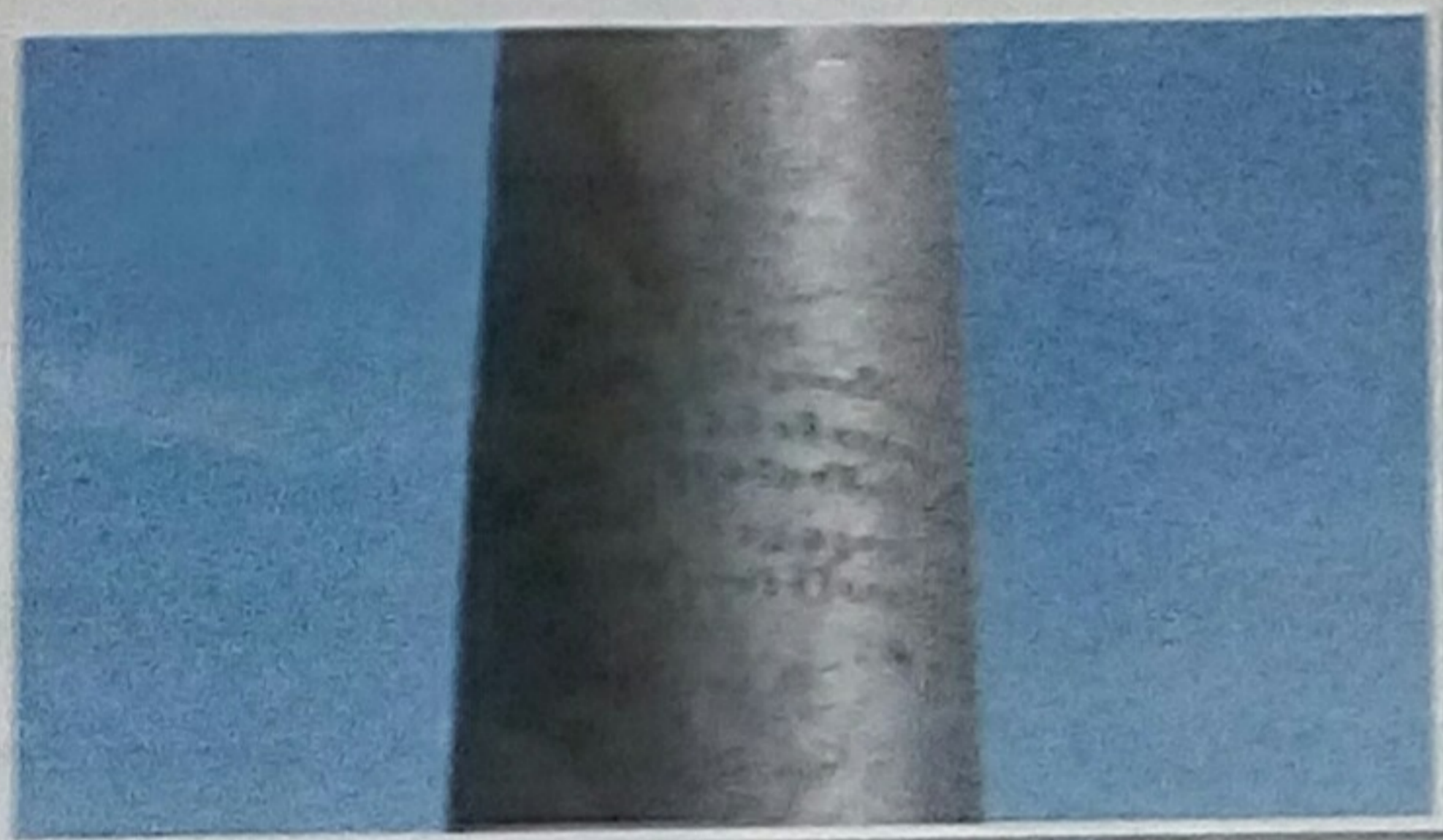
minarets and stupas are some of them. Red Fort, Taj Mahal, Purana Qila, Jantar Mantar and Qutub Minar are some of the famous monuments of India.



▲ Qutub Minar



▲ Mehrangarh Fort



▲ Inscriptions from the Gupta period

## Inscriptions

Inscriptions are the written records engraved on the cave walls, pillars, walls of temples and clay tablets. Kings often got their orders inscribed so that people could read and obey them. We get to know about the powerful dynasties from these inscriptions.

## Artefacts

An object that is made by a person such as a tool or a work of art for decoration, especially of historical importance is called an artefact.

Tools, sculpture, jewellery, pottery and coins are some examples of artefacts.



▲ Greek coin



▲ Dancing girl of Mohenjo-daro

## Historians and archaeologists

Historians are the experts who study and write about the past. They refer to the information found in **manuscripts**, **inscriptions** and **archaeology**. They write about the past.

Archaeologists are the scholars who study about the past through excavation of sites.

The work of historians and archaeologists is same as that of detectives, who use various sources to find out about our pasts.

## Let's Do It

Organise an 'Activity Week' in the class. Conduct the following activities.

1. Visit some local monument, a historical place or a museum.
2. Display and study the stamps.
3. Go out in some muddy area and practise writing on mud or clay tablet.
4. Do coin rubbing activity on a paper.

At the end of the week, write a short report on all that you have learnt through all these activities.

## Let's Recap

- Sources of history can be broadly grouped into 2 categories—literary and archaeological.
- The literary sources of history are chronicles, autobiographies, accounts of travellers, religious literature and oral sources.
- The archaeological sources include monuments, inscriptions and artefacts.
- Historians and archaeologists study about the past.

## Let's Know

- **Archives:** collection of historical documents
- **Dynasties:** a sequence of rulers from the same family
- **Volume:** collection of written or printed sheets bound as a book
- **Autobiography:** life history of a person written by that same person
- **Manuscript:** a document written by hand