

What is History?

- What if there aren't enough sources... or too many?
- Paucity of Records
- Abundance of Records
- What problems does this pose for the writer?
- The Problem of Selection

But what is HISTORICAL



- Tomato ketchup was once sold as medicine.
- I voted in the 2020 SG General Elections.
- Adolf Hitler was assassinated.
- Ms Kwok wore a blue tee shirt yesterday.
- The ancient Romans often used stale urine as mouthwash.

What is Historical Fact?

Facts of the Past:

- Sir Stamford Raffles signed a treaty with T. Abdul Rahman & Sultan Hussein in 1819.
- Sir Stamford Raffles was clothed when he signed the treaty.
- Some members of Raffles' expedition were with him at the signing while others remained on the ship.

How? For whom?

Significance

Significance

- How is this significant?
- For whom is this significant?
- Where in time does the fact of the past possess significance? **The Present.**

“Life must be understood backwards...
but it must be lived forwards” – Kierkegaard

History in Time

- We look back in time to find answers to present questions.
- Our concerns are grounded in the present.
- Recall: Carr's realisation that Herodotus' view of the Greco-Persian wars as being influenced by the Peloponnesian War being fought in his time.

History is a *dialogue* between the past and the present.

Constructing a Historical Account

Guiding Questions:

- For what?
- For whom?
- What's the norm?

Facts

Evidence

Significance

Perspective

Convention

History in Time

- HOW we look back in time is shaped by the lenses we wear in the present.
- Example: Raffles was not interested in founding a multi-racial, multi-cultural independent nation state, nor make claims to be the founding father of such a community.
- His goal was to secure British trade interests.

Interpretation

Goals?

What is History?

- What we know:
- **Historical Facts** are more than facts of the past because of their significance for the historical account being generated.
- What remains to be answered:
- IF all history begins with interpretation, **on what basis** do we form some interpretation of the past in the first place?

Interpret this text (1)

Genghis Khan often gave other kingdoms a chance to peacefully submit to Mongol rule, but he didn't hesitate to bring down the sword on any society that resisted. One of his most famous campaigns of revenge came in 1219 after the Shah of the Khwarezmid Empire broke a treaty with the Mongols. Genghis had offered the Shah a valuable trade agreement to exchange goods along the Silk Road, but when his first emissaries were murdered, the enraged Khan responded by unleashing the full force of his Mongol hordes on the Khwarezmid territories in Persia. The subsequent war left millions dead and the Shah's empire in utter ruin, but the Khan didn't stop there. He followed up on his victory by returning east and waging war on the Tanguts of Xi Xia, a group of Mongol subjects who had refused his order to provide troops for his invasion of Khwarizm. After routing the Tangut forces and sacking their capital, the Great Khan ordered the execution of the entire Tangut royal family as punishment for their defiance.

**What assumptions do we hold
in interpreting this text?**

Interpret this text (2)

Unlike many empire builders, Genghis Khan embraced the diversity of his newly conquered territories. He passed laws declaring religious freedom for all and even granted tax exemptions to places of worship. This tolerance had a political side—the Khan knew that happy subjects were less likely to rebel—but the Mongols also had an exceptionally liberal attitude towards religion. While Genghis and many others subscribed to a shamanistic belief system that revered the spirits of the sky, winds and mountains, the Steppe peoples were a diverse bunch that included Nestorian Christians, Buddhists, Muslims and other animistic traditions. The Great Khan also had a personal interest in spirituality. He was known to pray in his tent for multiple days before important campaigns, and he often met with different religious leaders to discuss the details of their faiths. In his old age, he even summoned the Taoist leader Qiu Chuji to his camp, and the pair supposedly had long conversations on immortality and philosophy.

**What assumptions do we hold
in interpreting this text?**

Constructing a Historical Account

Guiding Questions:

- For what?
- For whom?
- What's the norm?

Facts

Evidence

Significance

Perspective

Convention

History as Progress

- But what about **History as Progress**?
- Don't we have to believe in progress to survive?
- “History properly so-called can be written only by those who find and accept **a sense of direction** in history itself. The belief that we have come from somewhere is closely linked with the belief that **we are going somewhere**. A society which has lost belief in its capacity to progress in the future will quickly cease to concern itself with its progress in the past...” – Carr

What is History?

- Inherent in the way we represent the past, therefore, is a sense of direction toward some end that we may or may not already have arrived at.

History is a dialogue not only between past and present, but past, present, and progressively emerging goals.