LOTUSARISE IAS

FREE SAMPLE

PRELIMS 2027 EDITION

UPSC CIVIL SERVICES PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION

PRELIMS SUMMARY AND FACTS

Ancient Indian History

Every fact UPSC has asked on ancient India, and the facts it is likely to ask, in crisp exam-style sentences and tables, built on Prelims questions from 1995 to 2026, each answered and explained.

Compiled by Arvind KrS

15	184	110	111
CHAPTERS	PRELIMS PYQS 1995–2026, ANSWERED	REVISION TABLES	PYQ RADAR, FACT AND TRAP BOXES



IN THIS BOOK

I How UPSC Asks
II Prehistory, Harappa and the Vedic Age
III States, New Faiths and the Mauryas
IV Post-Mauryan India and the Sangam Age
V Guptas to the Regional Kingdoms
VI Rapid Revision

lotusarise.com

Updated to November 2026

LOTUSARISE IAS

Ancient Indian History: Prelims Summary and Facts

Fact notes for the UPSC Civil Services Preliminary Examination, built on previous year questions from 1995 to 2026

Prelims 2027 Edition · Compiled November 2026 · Compiled by Arvind KrS

Free sample. This sample carries the cover, the full contents, the PYQ analysis chapter and two complete chapters of the book. You may share this sample as it is, without changes.

© 2026 LotusArise IAS. All rights reserved. The complete book is licensed to the purchaser for personal study only. Copying, sharing, reselling or uploading it to any website, drive or group, in whole or in part, is not permitted.

Cover artwork, maps and diagrams: original illustrations created for this book; map boundaries are for reference only. Previous year questions are reproduced in the wording of the UPSC question papers.

Questions or corrections: support@lotusarise.com

Contents

UNIT I **How UPSC Asks** 4

01 How UPSC Asks Ancient History: PYQ Analysis 1995–2026 IN THIS SAMPLE 5

UNIT II **Prehistory, Harappa and the Vedic Age** 10

02 Sources and Prehistory 11

03 The Harappan Civilisation IN THIS SAMPLE 24

04 The Vedic Age, Literature and Philosophy 36

UNIT III **States, New Faiths and the Mauryas** 51

05 Mahajanapadas, Magadha and the Invasions 52

06 Jainism, Buddhism and Other Sects 64

07 The Mauryan Empire IN THIS SAMPLE 82

UNIT IV **Post-Mauryan India and the Sangam Age** 94

08 Post-Mauryan Kingdoms 95

09 Post-Mauryan Economy, Society and Art 106

10 Megaliths and the Sangam Age 121

UNIT V **Guptas to the Regional Kingdoms** 132

11 The Guptas 133

12 Harsha and the Post-Gupta North 150

13 Chalukyas, Pallavas and the Deccan 162

14 Regional Kingdoms and the Arabs 174

UNIT VI **Rapid Revision** 186

15 Rapid Revision Tables 187

FREE SAMPLE Complete book at store.lotusarise.com ›

UNIT I | 1 CHAPTER

How UPSC Asks

What UPSC has asked on ancient India in every Prelims paper from 1995 to 2026: the chapter-wise weightage, the change in question formats, and the themes that keep coming back.

CHAPTERS

01 How UPSC Asks Ancient History: PYQ Analysis 1995–2026 5

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS UNIT

01 **How UPSC Asks Ancient History: PYQ Analysis 1995–2026**

Where the Questions Come From · How Many Questions Each Year · How the Questions Have Changed · Themes UPSC Keeps Returning To · How This Book Is Organised

FREE SAMPLE Complete book at store.lotusarise.com ›

ANCIENT HISTORY PRELIMS SUMMARY

PYQS 1995–2026

How UPSC Asks Ancient History: PYQ Analysis 1995–2026

This book is built backwards from the question paper. Questions on India before about 1200 CE were collected from every Prelims paper from 1995 to 2026, and each of the 184 questions was placed in the chapter of this book that answers it. The counts decided how much space each chapter gets, the recurring themes decided which facts are listed first, and the traps UPSC has set before decided the Prelims Trap boxes.

The figures for 1995–2010 come from the question papers as widely reproduced, since official answer keys are available only from 2011; the figures for 2011–2026 come from the official papers. Questions on art and architecture of this period are counted here, because the full syllabus puts them in ancient history.

SYLLABUS

PRELIMS History of India and Indian National Movement

MAINS · GS PAPER I Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times

CONTENTS

01 Where the Questions Come From
02 How Many Questions Each Year
03 How the Questions Have Changed
04 Themes UPSC Keeps Returning To
05 How This Book Is Organised

FREE SAMPLE Complete book at store.lotusarise.com ›

01 Where the Questions Come From

Two chapters stand far above the rest. Religion (Jainism, Buddhism and the other sects) and the Guptas (their rulers, culture, literature and science) together account for about a third of all questions since 1995. The Vedic age, the Mauryas and the art and economy of the post-Mauryan centuries come next, each with roughly a tenth.

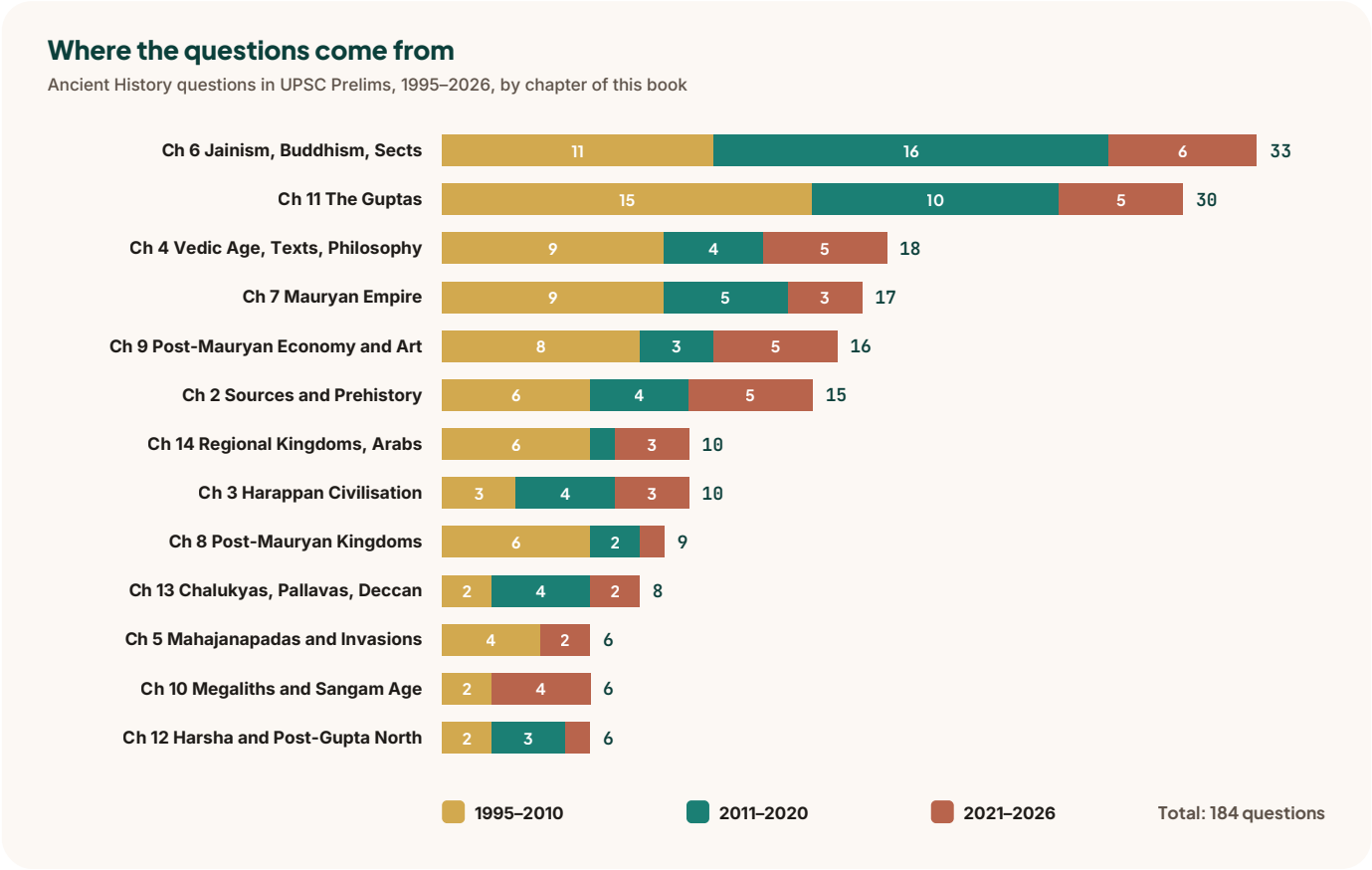


Fig. 1.1 Ancient History questions in UPSC Prelims, 1995–2026, by chapter of this book, split into three periods.

CHAPTER OF THIS BOOK	1995–2010	2011–2020	2021–2026	TOTAL	SHARE
6. Jainism, Buddhism and Other Sects	11	16	6	**33**	18%
11. The Guptas	15	10	5	**30**	16%
4. The Vedic Age, Literature and Philosophy	9	4	5	**18**	10%
7. The Mauryan Empire	9	5	3	**17**	9%
9. Post-Mauryan Economy, Society and Art	8	3	5	**16**	9%
2. Sources and Prehistory	6	4	5	**15**	8%
3. The Harappan Civilisation	3	4	3	**10**	5%
14. Regional Kingdoms and the Arabs	6	1	3	**10**	5%

FREE SAMPLE Complete book at store.lotusarise.com ›

CHAPTER OF THIS BOOK	1995–2010	2011–2020	2021–2026	TOTAL	SHARE
8. Post-Mauryan Kingdoms	6	2	1	**9**	5%
13. Chalukyas, Pallavas and the Deccan	2	4	2	**8**	4%
5. Mahajanapadas, Magadha and the Invasions	4	0	2	**6**	3%
10. Megaliths and the Sangam Age	2	0	4	**6**	3%
12. Harsha and the Post-Gupta North	2	3	1	**6**	3%
All chapters	**83**	**56**	**45**	**184**	100%

PYQ RADAR WHAT THE COUNTS MEAN FOR YOUR REVISION

- Revise Chapters 6 and 11 first and most often: between them they carry more questions than the five smallest chapters put together.
- The Sangam age has risen sharply: no question in 2011–2020, four in 2021–2026 (Korkai and the ports, *vattakirutal*, Sangam literature, the kings of Tamilakam).
- The Mahajanapadas, quiet for a decade, returned in 2025 and 2026 with questions on the rivers of the janapadas and on the first coins.
- Small chapters still matter: the seven chapters with ten questions or fewer together carry 55 questions, more than a quarter of the total.

02 How Many Questions Each Year

The paper had 150 questions until 2010 and has had 100 since 2011, so the raw counts are not strictly comparable. Even so, the pattern is clear. Ancient history was heavily tested in the late 1990s, faded in the 2000s, and has returned since 2020. The 2026 paper set 13 questions on this period, the most in any year since 1995.

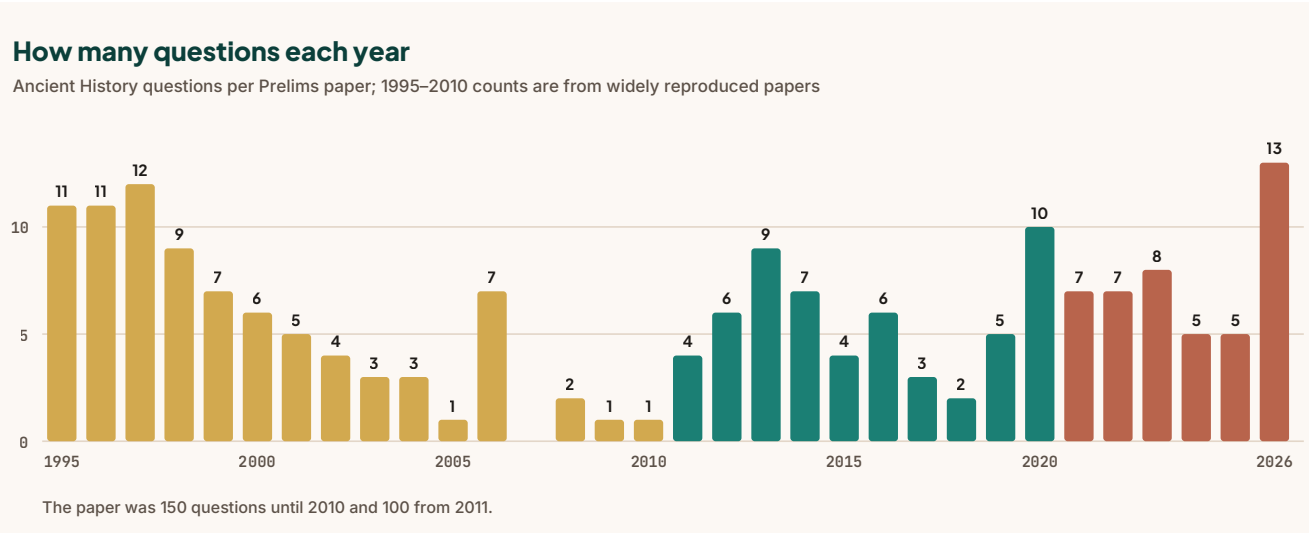


Fig. 1.2 Ancient History questions in each Prelims paper from 1995 to 2026.

FREE SAMPLE Complete book at store.lotusarise.com ›

03 How the Questions Have Changed

What UPSC asks about has changed less than the way it asks. A student who knows the facts but not the question formats loses marks to elimination traps, so each format is described here with an example from this period.

PERIOD	TYPICAL FORMAT	EXAMPLE
1995–2010	One-line recall (who, which, where); match the lists; assertion and reason	"The name by which Asoka is generally referred to in his inscriptions is" (1995); Lothal, Kalibangan, Dholavira and Banawali matched with their finds (2002)
2011–2021	Two or three statements, "which is/are correct?"; pairs with codes	Features of the people of the Indus civilisation (2013); Bodhisattva statements (2016)
2022–2025	"How many of the above pairs/statements are correct?", which defeats elimination	Ashoka's rock-edict sites and their states (2022); rivers of the janapadas (2025)
2026	Evidence and inference: a set of findings, then "which inferences can be drawn?" or "which evidence supports the statement?"	Spindle-whorls, weights and houses in Harappan towns (2026); wells and pulleys in the Rig Veda (2026)

- The 2026 style tests how historians know, not only what they know: the student has to judge whether a piece of evidence supports a conclusion. That is why every chapter of this book says where a fact comes from (an inscription, an excavation, a text) wherever it matters.
- "How many" questions give no credit for partial knowledge: with four pairs, one wrong judgement makes the whole answer wrong. Facts that come in sets (sites and states, kings and dynasties, texts and authors) are therefore given in tables.

04 Themes UPSC Keeps Returning To

Some questions have been asked twice in almost the same words, and many topics come back every few years. These are the safest marks in the paper.

THEME	YEARS ASKED	CHAPTER
Ashoka's inscriptions: his name, sites, content, officials, decipherment	1995, 1997, 1998 (twice), 2016, 2019, 2020, 2022, 2025	7
What Buddhism and Jainism had in common	1996, 2012 (almost the same question)	6
Nagara, Dravida and Vesara as styles of temple architecture	1995, 2012 (the same question)	13
Kingdoms associated with the life of the Buddha	2014, 2015 (the same question)	5, 6
Mahayana, Bodhisattvas and Buddhist sects	1997, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020	6
Harappan sites and what was found at each	1998, 2002, 2019, 2021	3

FREE SAMPLE Complete book at store.lotusarise.com ›

THEME	YEARS ASKED	CHAPTER
Gupta-period texts, authors and scientists	1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2003, 2020	11
Chinese pilgrims (Faxian, Xuanzang, Yijing)	1999, 2004, 2013, 2025	2, 11, 12

PRELIMS TRAP THE COMMONEST TRAPS IN ANCIENT HISTORY QUESTIONS

- **Wrong person, right deed:** the Barabar caves were given to the Ajivikas by Ashoka, not Chandragupta (2013); Faxian came under Chandragupta II, not Samudragupta (2025).
- **Wrong state:** Kalsi is in Uttarakhand and Jaugada in Odisha (2022); Chandraketugarh is in West Bengal (2024).
- **Wrong sect:** Sautrantika and Sammitiya were Buddhist schools, not Jaina (2017); Sthaviravadins were not Mahayana (2020).
- **"Only" and "all":** absolute words in a statement are often what makes it false.

05 How This Book Is Organised

The book follows the order of events, from the Stone Age to the regional kingdoms, in fourteen chapters and a final set of revision tables. Each chapter opens with a **PYQ Radar** showing what UPSC has asked from it and how often. The facts follow in short, exam-style sentences grouped under questions, with tables for anything that comes in sets, **Prelims Fact** boxes for the details most often tested and **Prelims Trap** boxes for the confusions UPSC exploits. Each chapter closes with a one-line revision panel and every Prelims question from 1995 to 2026 on its topics, with the answer and the reason.

FREE SAMPLE Complete book at store.lotusarise.com ›

UNIT II

3 CHAPTERS

Prehistory, Harappa and the Vedic Age

Sources and chronology, the Stone Age and Chalcolithic cultures, the Harappan civilisation, and the Vedic age with its literature and philosophy.

CHAPTERS

02 Sources and Prehistory 11
03 The Harappan Civilisation 24
04 The Vedic Age, Literature and Philosophy 36

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS UNIT

02 **Sources and Prehistory**
The Land, Its Rivers and Its Languages · Texts as Sources: Sacred, Secular and the Bards · Foreign Accounts · Archaeology: Digging, Dating and the Diggers · Inscriptions, Scripts and Coins · Chronology and Eras · Prehistory: Divisions and the First Humans · The Palaeolithic: Handaxes, Flakes and Blades · The Mesolithic and the Rock Art of Bhimbetka · The Neolithic: First Farmers · The Chalcolithic: Copper-Stone Villages

03 **The Harappan Civilisation**
Discovery, Names and Dates · Extent and Frontier Sites · From Villages to Cities: Phases · Town Planning · Important Sites and What Was Found There · Agriculture, Animals and Crafts · Trade, Weights and Measures · Religion and Burials · Seals, Script and Art · Society, Polity and What the Evidence Shows · Decline and the Late Harappan Phase · Harappan and Rig Vedic: Two Different Worlds

04 **The Vedic Age, Literature and Philosophy**
Sources, Dates and the Aryan Question · The Land of the Seven Rivers · Tribes, Chiefs and Assemblies · Rig Vedic Economy, Family and Women · Rig Vedic Religion: Gods, Rita and Sacrifice · The Later Vedic Age: Expansion, Iron and Farming · Later Vedic Polity and Society · The Four Vedas, Brahmanas and Aranyakas · The Upanishads · Vedangas, Law Books, Epics and Puranas · The Six Schools of Philosophy

FREE SAMPLE Complete book at store.lotusarise.com ›

ANCIENT HISTORY PRELIMS SUMMARY

PYQS 1995–2026

The Harappan Civilisation

The Harappan or Indus Valley Civilisation was South Asia's first urban culture and its Bronze Age. Its mature phase lasted from about 2600 to 1900 BCE, across an area larger than Egypt and Mesopotamia combined, and it was forgotten until the 1920s. Nearly everything we know comes from excavation, because its script cannot be read.

SYLLABUS

PRELIMS **History of India and Indian National Movement**

MAINS · GS PAPER I **Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times**

CONTENTS

01 Discovery, Names and Dates
02 Extent and Frontier Sites
03 From Villages to Cities: Phases
04 Town Planning
05 Important Sites and What Was Found There
06 Agriculture, Animals and Crafts
07 Trade, Weights and Measures
08 Religion and Burials
09 Seals, Script and Art
10 Society, Polity and What the Evidence Shows
11 Decline and the Late Harappan Phase
12 Harappan and Rig Vedic: Two Different Worlds
13 Previous Year Questions

FREE SAMPLE Complete book at store.lotusarise.com ›

PYQ RADAR 10 QUESTIONS, 1995–2026

- **Asked:** 1998, 2001, 2002, 2011, 2013, 2017, 2019, 2021, 2025, 2026.
- **Sites and finds** (4 questions): which site had the dockyard, the ploughed field, the signboard, the reservoirs; which site is not Harappan.
- **Features and beliefs** (4): palaces and temples (none), male and female deities, horse-drawn chariots (no), cotton, a "secular" character, animals on seals.
- **Objects and materials** (1): the Dancing Girl is bronze. **Evidence and inference** (1, 2026): what spindle-whorls, graduated scales and courtyard houses tell us.
- **Pattern:** questions test what was found where, and what was absent. Learn the site table in Section 05 and the Trap boxes.

01 Discovery, Names and Dates

- **Daya Ram Sahni** began excavating **Harappa** (on the Ravi, Sahiwal district, Pakistani Punjab) in **1921**; **R.D. Banerji** found **Mohenjo-daro** (on the Indus, Larkana district, Sindh) in **1922**.
- **John Marshall**, Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India, announced the new civilisation in the *Illustrated London News* on **20 September 1924**.
- **Alexander Cunningham**, the first Director-General of the ASI, published a Harappan seal in 1875 without recognising its age.
- **Ropar** (Punjab, on the Sutlej; Y.D. Sharma, 1953) was the first Harappan site excavated in independent India.
- It is called the **Harappan Civilisation** after Harappa, its type-site, the first site where the culture was identified. The names Indus Valley and Sindhu-Sarasvati refer to the rivers along which its sites cluster; the culture was confined to neither.
- Calibrated radiocarbon dates place the **Mature Harappan** phase at about **2600–1900 BCE**; older books give 2500–1750 BCE.
- It belongs to the **Bronze Age** and was the **first urbanisation**; the second urbanisation came in the Ganga valley in the sixth century BCE.

02 Extent and Frontier Sites

- The culture extended from the **Makran coast** of Baluchistan in the west to **western Uttar Pradesh** in the east, and from **Jammu** in the north to **Maharashtra** in the south.
- No other culture of the third millennium BCE covered so wide an area: older estimates put it at about 1.3 million sq km, recent ones at 680,000–800,000 sq km.
- Nearly **2,800** sites are known; most are in India today, though the two largest excavated cities, Harappa and Mohenjo-daro, are in Pakistan.
- The densest cluster lies along the dry **Ghaggar-Hakra** in Haryana, Rajasthan and Cholistan.
- Most Harappan settlements were **villages**; the five largest cities were Mohenjo-daro, Harappa, Ganweriwala, Rakhigarhi and Dholavira.

FREE SAMPLE Complete book at store.lotusarise.com ›

FRONTIER	SITE	RIVER AND PRESENT LOCATION
North	**Manda**	Chenab, near Akhnoor, Jammu
South	**Daimabad**	Pravara (Godavari basin), Ahilyanagar district, Maharashtra
East	**Alamgirpur**	Hindon (Yamuna basin), Meerut district, Uttar Pradesh
West	**Sutkagen-dor**	Dasht, Makran coast, Baluchistan
Outpost	**Shortughai**	Amu Darya (Oxus), north-eastern Afghanistan; for lapis lazuli

The Harappan world: frontier sites and major cities

Mature Harappan phase, c. 2600–1900 BCE. Shaded: approximate area of Harappan sites. Modern boundaries for reference only.

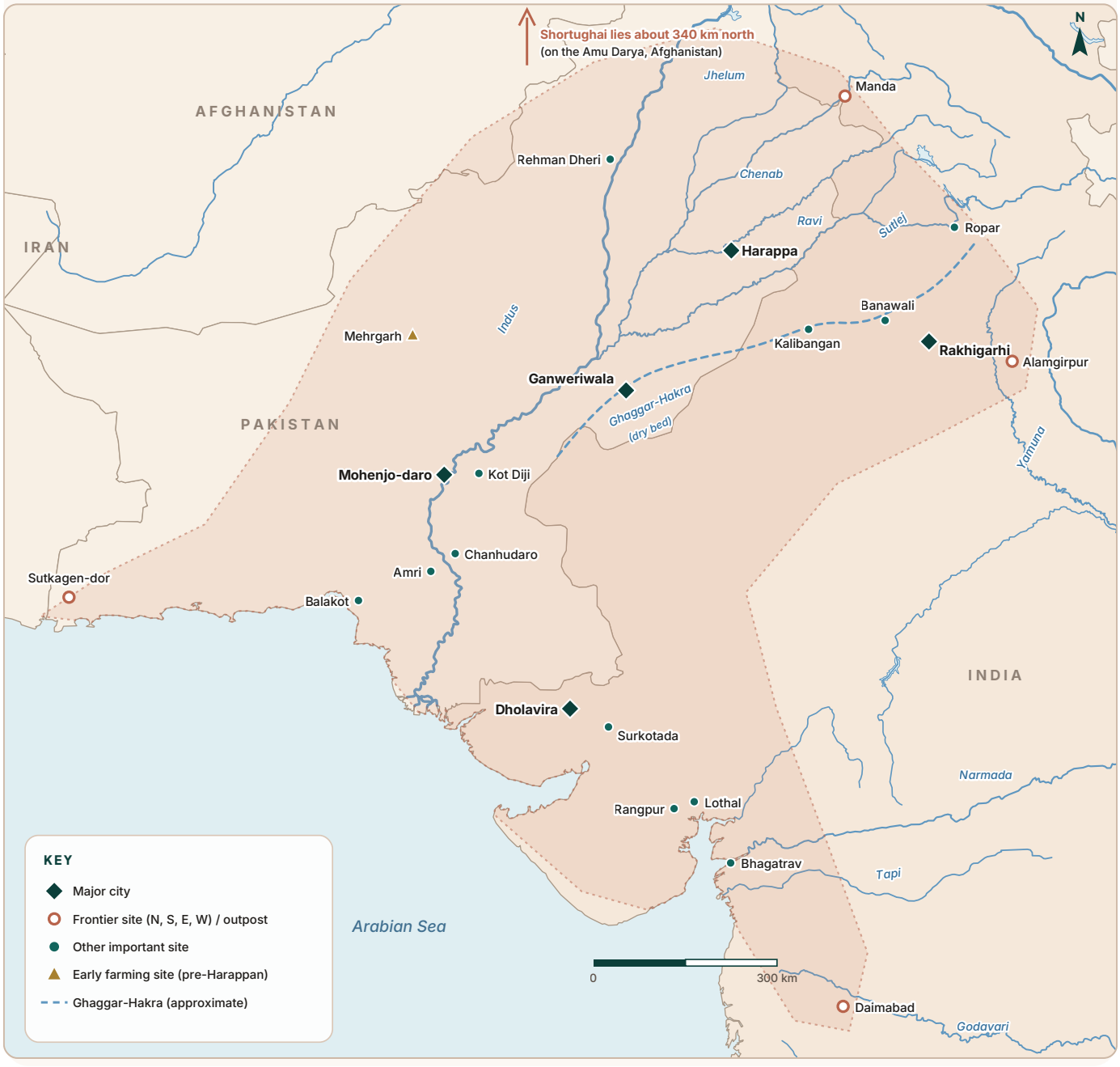


Fig. 3.1 The Harappan world in the mature phase, with the largest cities and the frontier sites.

FREE SAMPLE Complete book at store.lotusarise.com ›

PRELIMS TRAP FRONTIER MIX-UPS

- Manda is on the **Chenab**; Ropar (on the Sutlej) is not the northernmost site.
- Shortughai is an **outpost** in Afghanistan, not the northern limit of the main zone.
- Some lists name Bhagatrav (Gujarat) as the southernmost mature site; Daimabad's Harappan level is late.

03 From Villages to Cities: Phases

PHASE	DATE (BCE)	WHAT CHANGES
Pre-Harappan (Neolithic)	7000–3300	First farming villages, such as **Mehrgarh** (Baluchistan)
Early Harappan (Regionalisation)	3300–2600	Regional cultures (Ravi, **Kot Diji**, Amri); walls, plough, wheel, first signs
Mature Harappan (Integration)	2600–1900	Planned cities, seals, script, standard bricks and weights, long-distance trade
Late Harappan (Localisation)	1900–1300	Cities abandoned; writing, seals and weights disappear; village cultures continue

- Archaeologists now accept an **indigenous origin**: the civilisation grew out of the farming cultures of Baluchistan and the Indus plains.
- The older **diffusionist** view (Mackay, Wheeler) traced it to Mesopotamia, but the Harappan script, seals, town plans and lack of temples are unlike Mesopotamia's.
- A 2025 radiocarbon study of tooth enamel dates the first village at Mehrgarh to about 5200–4900 BCE, later than the conventional 7000 BCE.

04 Town Planning

- Most cities had a raised, walled **citadel** on the west and a larger **lower town** on the east, as at Harappa, Mohenjo-daro and Kalibangan.
- **Dholavira** was divided into **three parts** (citadel, middle town, lower town); **Lothal** was one walled unit; **Chanhudaro** had no citadel.
- Streets crossed at right angles in a **grid**; doors opened on to side lanes, not main streets.
- Houses, of one to twelve rooms, were built round a courtyard; many had their own well and bathroom.
- Bricks followed a fixed ratio of **1:2:4** (thickness, width, length) everywhere: mostly **burnt** brick at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro, **mud** brick at Kalibangan, **stone** at Dholavira and Surkotada.
- **Covered drains** with manholes ran along the streets, the most striking feature of Harappan towns.
- No palace, temple or royal tomb has been found at any Harappan site.

FREE SAMPLE Complete book at store.lotusarise.com ›

STRUCTURE	SITE	KEY FACTS
Great Bath	Mohenjo-daro (citadel)	11.88 × 7.01 m, 2.43 m deep; steps at north and south; made watertight with gypsum and **bitumen**; probably for ritual bathing
"Granary" (great hall)	Mohenjo-daro	Largest building in the city
Granaries	Harappa	Two rows of six units, with circular threshing platforms and two-roomed barracks nearby
Pillared (assembly) hall	Mohenjo-daro	Twenty brick piers in four rows of five
Dockyard	Lothal	Brick basin with sluice gate and wharf, near the Sabarmati and Bhogava
Reservoirs	Dholavira	Rainwater of the Manhar and Mansar streams dammed and channelled into a chain of reservoirs

◆ PRELIMS TRAP BRICKS AND WEIGHTS

Harappan **bricks** were rectangular (1:2:4); the **weights** were cubical. Bricks were both baked and sun-dried, depending on the region.

05 Important Sites and What Was Found There

This table answers more Prelims questions than any other part of the chapter: 1998, 2002, 2019 and 2021 all turned on matching a site with its find.

SITE	LOCATION (RIVER)	KNOWN FOR
Harappa	Pakistani Punjab (Ravi)	Type-site; two rows of granaries; workmen's barracks; red sandstone male torso; Cemetery R-37 and later Cemetery H
Mohenjo-daro	Sindh (Indus)	Great Bath, great hall, assembly hall; bronze Dancing Girl, steatite Priest-King, Pashupati seal, woven cotton; UNESCO site 1980
Chanhudaro	Sindh, 130 km south of Mohenjo-daro	No citadel; **bead factory**; brick with paw-prints of a dog chasing a cat
Kot Diji, **Amri**	Sindh	Early Harappan levels beneath mature ones
Kalibangan	Hanumangarh, Rajasthan (Ghaggar)	"Black bangles"; **ploughed field** (early phase); **fire altars**; mud-brick houses; walled lower town
Banawali	Fatehabad, Haryana	**Terracotta plough model**; good barley; touchstone with gold streaks
Rakhigarhi	Hisar, Haryana	Largest Harappan site in India; 2019 genome study of a Harappan woman
Lothal	Ahmedabad district, Gujarat	**Dockyard**, warehouse with sealings, bead factory, rice husks, double burial, terracotta ship model

FREE SAMPLE Complete book at store.lotusarise.com ›

SITE	LOCATION (RIVER)	KNOWN FOR
Dholavira	Khadir Bet, Kutch	Three-part city; **reservoirs**; stone masonry; **ten-sign signboard**; UNESCO site 27 July 2021
Surkotada, **Desalpur**	Kutch	Stone-walled towns; disputed horse bones at Surkotada
Ropar	Rupnagar, Punjab (Sutlej)	First site dug after independence; a dog buried with a man
Rangpur, **Rojdi**	Saurashtra, Gujarat	Late Harappan villages; rice at Rangpur
Sanauli	Baghpat, Uttar Pradesh	Burials with copper-covered, solid-wheeled carts (2018)
Daimabad	Ahilyanagar, Maharashtra (Pravara)	Bronze hoard: a chariot with rider drawn by two oxen, buffalo, elephant, rhinoceros

◆ PRELIMS FACT NOT HARAPPAN

- **Sohgaura** (Gorakhpur) is known for a Mauryan-period copper plate on famine relief, not for Harappan remains (asked in 2019).
- **Burzahom** (Kashmir) is Neolithic, with pit-dwellings; **Inamgaon** is Chalcolithic; **Chandraketugarh** (West Bengal) is early historic.
- **Painted Grey Ware** belongs to the later Vedic age, not to the Harappans.

06 Agriculture, Animals and Crafts

- The main crops were **wheat and barley**; peas, sesame, mustard and dates were also grown, and **rice** at Lothal and Rangpur.
- The Harappans were among the earliest people to grow **cotton**; the Greeks called fine cotton *sindon*, a word thought to come from Sindh.
- Crops were sown on the flood plains in November and reaped in April, like today's rabi crops.
- Canal traces are known only at **Shortughai**; Baluchistan used **gabarbands** (stone bunds) to store water.
- The **humped bull** was favoured; elephants and rhinoceroses were known; the **horse** is absent in the early and mature phases.
- **Bronze** was made by alloying copper with tin; copper came from **Khetri** (Rajasthan), tin from Afghanistan; **iron was unknown**.
- The **lost-wax** (*cire perdue*) method was used to cast the bronze Dancing Girl.
- Spindle-whorls in many houses show that spinning was done at home, by hand; no spinning wheel has been found.
- Chert blades were mass-produced in the **Rohri hills** near Sukkur; beads were made at Chanhudaro and Lothal.

FREE SAMPLE Complete book at store.lotusarise.com ›

◆ PRELIMS TRAP THE HORSE AND THE CHARIOT

The Harappans used **bullock carts with solid wheels**. They did not use horse-drawn chariots, and horse bones are absent from the mature cities. The Rig Vedic people, by contrast, valued the horse and fought from spoke-wheeled chariots (asked in 2013 and 2017).

07 Trade, Weights and Measures

- There was no metal money; exchange was by **barter**.
- Weights were **cubical**, usually of **chert**, unmarked, in a **binary** series (1, 2, 4 ... 64) and then a **decimal** one; the unit of 16 (about 14 g) was most used.
- Graduated measuring scales of shell and bronze have been found, evidence of accurate measurement.
- Mesopotamian texts from about 2350 BCE call the Indus region **Meluhha**, and name two stations on the route: **Dilmun** (Bahrain) and **Magan** (Oman).
- Meluhha sent carnelian, lapis lazuli, copper, gold and timber; Harappan seals and etched carnelian beads have been found at Ur, Kish and Susa.
- Lapis lazuli came from **Badakhshan**, near the outpost of **Shortughai**.

08 Religion and Burials

- No temple has been found; the Great Bath is the main ritual structure.
- Both **female** (terracotta "Mother Goddess" figurines; a seal with a plant growing from a woman's womb) and **male** deities were worshipped.
- The **"Pashupati" seal** (Mohenjo-daro) shows a horned figure in a yogic posture with an **elephant, tiger, rhinoceros and buffalo**, and two deer below; there is **no bull.** Marshall called him a proto-Shiva.
- The **pipal** tree and the **humped bull** were revered; the one-horned "unicorn" is the commonest animal on seals.
- **Fire altars** occur at Kalibangan, Lothal and Banawali.
- The dead were usually buried extended, head to the north, with pots and ornaments; Harappa has a wooden-coffin burial, Lothal a double burial.

◆ PRELIMS FACT ANIMALS ON THE SEALS

Seals show the unicorn, humped bull, buffalo, tiger, rhinoceros, elephant, goat, antelope and gharial. The **cow** does not appear (asked in 2001), and neither does the horse.

FREE SAMPLE Complete book at store.lotusarise.com ›

09 Seals, Script and Art

OBJECT	MATERIAL	SITE
Dancing Girl	Bronze (lost-wax casting), about 10.5 cm	Mohenjo-daro
Priest-King	Steatite; trefoil-patterned robe	Mohenjo-daro
Male torso	Red sandstone	Harappa
Seals	Mostly steatite, square	All major sites
Figurines, toys, "cakes"	Terracotta	All major sites
Bangles, small ornaments	Faience, shell, stoneware	Many sites

- The **script is undeciphered**: about 400 pictographic signs, written mainly **right to left**, about five signs to an inscription.
- No bilingual inscription has been found, and the language of the Harappans is unknown.
- Pottery is **red with black painted designs**; the dish-on-stand is a typical shape.

10 Society, Polity and What the Evidence Shows

- Houses ranging from one room to twelve, and barracks for workers at Harappa, show differences of wealth.
- Uniform bricks, weights, seals and script over a vast area suggest some form of **central authority**, but no palace or portrait of a king has been found.
- Historians differ on who ruled: priest-kings (Wheeler, Piggott), merchants, several city-states, or a chiefdom.
- The civilisation is often called largely **secular**, since religion left few monumental traces (asked in 2011).

◆ PRELIMS FACT FROM EVIDENCE TO INFERENCE (THE 2026 PATTERN)

- Spindle-whorls in houses but no spinning wheels: spinning was slow, hand work done at home.
- Graduated weights and measuring scales: an accurate, standardised system of measurement.
- Large private houses with their own wells and courtyards: private households and differences of wealth. They do not show common ownership of property.

11 Decline and the Late Harappan Phase

- After about **1900 BCE** the cities were abandoned, and writing, seals, standard weights and long-distance trade disappeared together.

FREE SAMPLE Complete book at store.lotusarise.com ›

- No single cause is accepted; most historians combine several.
- Late Harappan cultures include **Cemetery H** (Punjab), **Jhukar** (Sindh) and **Rangpur** (Gujarat, Lustrous Red Ware); at **Bhagwanpura** (Haryana) late Harappan pottery overlaps with Painted Grey Ware.

THEORY OF DECLINE	PROPOSED BY
Aryan invasion	Mortimer Wheeler (now rejected)
Floods at Mohenjo-daro	Raikes and Dales
Shift in the course of the Indus	Lambrick
Drying of the Ghaggar-Hakra	D.P. Agrawal and Sood
Ecological imbalance and over-use of resources	Fairservis

12 Harappan and Rig Vedic: Two Different Worlds

FEATURE	HARAPPAN	RIG VEDIC
Settlement	Planned cities and towns	Villages; no cities
Horse	Absent	Central; spoke-wheeled chariots
Armour	No evidence of helmets or coats of mail	Coat of mail and helmet mentioned
Metals	Copper, bronze, gold, silver; no iron	Gold, copper (ayas); iron only in the later Vedic age
Writing	A script, undeciphered	Oral; no writing
Worship	Mother goddess, trees, animals, fire altars at some sites	Nature gods and yajnas

Prelims Quick Revision

- **Harappa**: Ravi, Sahiwal (Pakistan); Daya Ram Sahni, 1921. **Mohenjo-daro**: Indus, Larkana (Sindh); R.D. Banerji, 1922.
- **Mature Harappan**: c. 2600–1900 BCE; Bronze Age; first urbanisation.
- **Frontiers**: Manda (Chenab) N, Daimabad (Pravara) S, Alamgirpur (Hindon) E, Sutkagen-dor (Dasht) W; Shortughai outpost.
- **Bricks**: 1:2:4 ratio; **weights**: cubical chert, binary then decimal, unit of 16.
- **Great Bath**: Mohenjo-daro citadel; bitumen waterproofing; largest building there is the 'granary'.
- **Lothal**: dockyard, bead factory, rice. **Kalibangan**: ploughed field, fire altars. **Banawali**: plough model.
- **Dholavira**: three-part city, reservoirs, ten-sign signboard; UNESCO 2021.
- **Rakhigarhi**: largest Harappan site in India (Hisar, Haryana).
- **Cotton**: among the earliest growers; Greek *sindon*.
- **Horse**: absent in early and mature phases; carts had solid wheels.
- **Pashupati seal**: elephant, tiger, rhinoceros, buffalo, two deer; no bull.

FREE SAMPLE Complete book at store.lotusarise.com ›

- **Dancing Girl**: bronze; **Priest-King**: steatite; **male torso**: red sandstone.
- **Meluhha** = Indus region; **Dilmun** = Bahrain; **Magan** = Oman.
- **Script**: undeciphered, about 400 signs, right to left.

Previous Year Questions

2026

Consider the following statements about the archaeological findings in Harappan towns:
I. There is wide occurrence of spindle-whorls in the houses but absence of spinning wheels.
II. Weights and measurement scales, complete with graduations have been discovered.
III. There are houses built in large part with baked bricks, around relatively spacious courtyards, with their own wells, bathing platforms, and large rooms.
Which of the following inferences can be drawn from the above statements?
1. Statement I suggests that spinning was a laborious activity done at home.
2. Statement II suggests the extent of the scientific knowledge that the Harappans possessed.
3. Statement III suggests the emergence of a common property system.
Select the answer using the code given below:

(a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only (c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (a). Spindle-whorls without spinning wheels point to hand-spinning at home, and graduated weights and scales show accurate measurement; large private houses with their own wells point to private property and differences of wealth, not common ownership (Sections 06, 07 and 10). (PROVISIONAL KEY)

2025

The famous female figurine known as 'Dancing Girl', found at Mohenjo-daro, is made of

(a) carnelian (b) clay (c) bronze (d) gold

Answer: (c). The Dancing Girl from Mohenjo-daro is a small bronze figure cast by the lost-wax process (Section 09).

2021

Which one of the following ancient towns is well-known for its elaborate system of water harvesting and management by building a series of dams and channelizing water into connected reservoirs?

(a) Dholavira (b) Kalibangan (c) Rakhigarhi (d) Ropar

Answer: (a). Dholavira dammed the Manhar and Mansar streams and led their water into a chain of reservoirs (Sections 04 and 05).

FREE SAMPLE Complete book at store.lotusarise.com ›

2019 Which one of the following is not a Harappan site?

a Chanhudaro | b Kot Diji | c Sohgaura | d Desalpur

Answer: (c). Chanhudaro and Kot Diji (Sindh) and Desalpur (Kutch) are Harappan; Sohgaura is known for a Mauryan-period copper plate (Section 05).

2017 With reference to the difference between the culture of Rigvedic Aryans and Indus Valley people, which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. Rigvedic Aryans used the coat of mail and helmet in warfare whereas the people of Indus Valley Civilization did not leave any evidence of using them.
2. Rigvedic Aryans knew gold, silver and copper whereas Indus Valley people knew only copper and iron.
3. Rigvedic Aryans had domesticated the horse whereas there is no evidence of Indus Valley people having been aware of this animal.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

a 1 only | b 2 and 3 only | c 1 and 3 only | d 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (c). Statement 2 is wrong: the Harappans knew gold, silver and copper but not iron. Rig Vedic warriors used armour and helmets and valued the horse, which is absent at Harappan sites (Section 12).

2013 Which of the following characterizes/characterize the people of Indus Civilization?

1. They possessed great palaces and temples.
2. They worshipped both male and female deities.
3. They employed horse-drawn chariots in warfare.

Select the correct statement/statements using the codes given below.

a 1 and 2 only

b 2 only

c 1, 2 and 3

d None of the statements given above is correct

Answer: (b). No palace or temple has been found and horse-drawn chariots are Vedic; female figurines and the Pashupati seal show male and female deities (Sections 04, 08 and 12).

FREE SAMPLE Complete book at store.lotusarise.com ›

2011 Regarding the Indus Valley Civilization, consider the following statements:
1. It was predominantly a secular civilization and the religious element, though present, did not dominate the scene.
2. During this period, cotton was used for manufacturing textiles in India.
Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

a 1 only | b 2 only | c Both 1 and 2 | d Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: (c). No temples or priestly rule dominate the cities, and woven cotton and spindle-whorls show cotton textiles (Sections 06, 08 and 10).

2002 Match List I (Ancient Site) with List II (Archaeological Finding) and select the correct answer using the codes given below the lists:
List I: A. Lothal; B. Kalibangan; C. Dholavira; D. Banawali
List II: 1. Ploughed field; 2. Dockyard; 3. Terracotta replica of a plough; 4. An inscription comprising ten large-sized signs of the Harappan script

a A-1, B-2, C-3, D-4
b A-2, B-1, C-4, D-3
c A-1, B-2, C-4, D-3
d A-2, B-1, C-3, D-4

Answer: (b). Lothal: dockyard; Kalibangan: ploughed field; Dholavira: ten-sign signboard; Banawali: terracotta plough (Section 05).

2001 Which one of the following animals was NOT represented on the seals and terracotta art of the Harappan culture?

a Cow | b Elephant | c Rhinoceros | d Tiger

Answer: (a). Bulls, elephants, rhinoceroses and tigers appear on the seals; the cow does not (Section 08).

1998 Which of the following pairs are correctly matched?
I. Lothal: Ancient dockyard
II. Sarnath: First Sermon of Buddha
III. Rajgir: Lion capital of Asoka
IV. Nalanda: Great seat of Buddhist learning
Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

a I, II, III and IV | b III and IV | c I, II and IV | d I and II

Answer: (c). The lion capital of Ashoka comes from Sarnath, not Rajgir; the other three pairs are correct (Section 05; Chapters 6 and 7).

FREE SAMPLE Complete book at store.lotusarise.com ›

UNIT III
3 CHAPTERS

States, New Faiths and the Mauryas

The Mahajanapadas and the rise of Magadha, the Persian and Macedonian invasions, Jainism, Buddhism and the other sects, and the Mauryan empire.

CHAPTERS

05 Mahajanapadas, Magadha and the Invasions 52
06 Jainism, Buddhism and Other Sects 64
07 The Mauryan Empire 82

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS UNIT

05 **Mahajanapadas, Magadha and the Invasions**
The Second Urbanisation · The Sixteen Mahajanapadas · Gana-Sanghas: Rule by Assembly · The New Monarchies · Magadha under the Haryankas · The Shishunagas and the Nandas · Why Magadha Won · The Persian Conquest of the North-West · Alexander's Invasion · Results of the Invasions

06 **Jainism, Buddhism and Other Sects**
The Age of Debate: Shramanas and the New Faiths · The Tirthankaras and the Life of Mahavira · What Mahavira Taught · Jaina Sects, Councils and Texts · Jaina Patrons and Monuments · The Life of the Buddha · What the Buddha Taught · The Sangha and the Buddhist Councils · Buddhist Schools, Mahayana and Vajrayana · Buddhist Texts and Buddhism Across Asia · Buddhism and Jainism Compared · Ajivikas, Charvakas and the Theistic Sects

07 **The Mauryan Empire**
Sources for the Mauryan Age · Chandragupta and Bindusara · Ashoka: Kalinga and Dhamma · Ashoka's Inscriptions · Mauryan Administration and Economy · Society and the Arthashastra · Mauryan Art · The Later Mauryas and the End of the Empire

FREE SAMPLE Complete book at store.lotusarise.com ›

ANCIENT HISTORY PRELIMS SUMMARY | PYQS 1995–2026

The Mauryan Empire

The Mauryas built the first empire to cover most of the subcontinent, from Kandahar to Karnataka. Chandragupta founded it in about 321 BCE with Kautilya's help, Bindusara extended it into the Deccan, and Ashoka, after the Kalinga war, tried to hold it together by dhamma. The dynasty ended in about 185 BCE. Ashoka's own inscriptions make this the first period of Indian history that can be read in a king's own words.

SYLLABUS

PRELIMS **History of India and Indian National Movement**

MAINS · GS PAPER I **Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times**

CONTENTS

01 Sources for the Mauryan Age
02 Chandragupta and Bindusara
03 Ashoka: Kalinga and Dhamma
04 Ashoka's Inscriptions
05 Mauryan Administration and Economy
06 Society and the Arthashastra
07 Mauryan Art
08 The Later Mauryas and the End of the Empire
09 Previous Year Questions

PYQ RADAR 17 QUESTIONS, 1995–2026

- **Asked:** 1995, 1996, 1997 (twice), 1998 (three times), 2000, 2002, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2019, 2020, 2022 (twice), 2025.
- **Ashoka's inscriptions** (9 questions): his name and titles, the Maski edict, sites and their states, the edicts that name the Tamil kingdoms, Rock Edict XII on tolerance, Kanaganahalli, Prinsep's decipherment, district officers.
- **Art** (3): the pillars, the Barabar caves, the Dhauli elephant. **Arthashastra and society** (2): slaves, divorce. **Sources** (2): Mudrarakshasa, the Sohgaura plate. **Kalinga** (1).
- **Pattern:** more than half the questions are on Ashoka's inscriptions. Learn the tables in Section 04.

FREE SAMPLE Complete book at store.lotusarise.com ›

01 Sources for the Mauryan Age

SOURCE	AUTHOR OR TYPE	WHAT IT TELLS US
Arthashastra	Kautilya (Chanakya, Vishnugupta); found by **R. Shamasastry** in 1905	Statecraft, administration, economy; 15 books; final form in the early centuries CE
Indica	**Megasthenes**, envoy of Seleucus	Pataliputra and society; survives only in quotations by Diodorus, Strabo, Arrian and Pliny
Mudrarakshasa	**Vishakhadatta** (Gupta period)	Court intrigue: Chanakya wins over Rakshasa, the Nanda minister, for Chandragupta
Ashoka's inscriptions	Rock, pillar and cave inscriptions	Ashoka's policy, officials, extent of empire
Junagadh inscription	Rudradaman, c. 150 CE	Chandragupta's governor Pushyagupta built the Sudarshana lake
Buddhist texts	Dipavamsa, Mahavamsa, Divyavadana (Ashokavadana)	Ashoka's life and conversion, with legend
Jaina texts	Parishishtaparvan (Hemachandra)	Chandragupta's Jaina end at Shravanabelagola

- **William Jones** identified Megasthenes' **Sandrocottus** with Chandragupta Maurya in 1793, the sheet anchor of ancient Indian chronology.
- The **Sohgaura** copper plate (Gorakhpur) and the **Mahasthan** inscription (Bogra, Bangladesh) order grain to be stored for famine, the earliest such royal orders.

02 Chandragupta and Bindusara

- **Chandragupta Maurya** overthrew **Dhana Nanda** with Kautilya's help in about **321 BCE** and ruled until about 297 BCE.
- Buddhist texts make him a kshatriya of the **Moriya** clan of Pippalivana; the Mudrarakshasa calls him *vrishala* (of low birth).
- In about **303 BCE** he defeated **Seleucus Nicator**, who ceded lands up to the Hindu Kush in return for **500 elephants**; a marriage alliance followed, and Seleucus sent Megasthenes to Pataliputra.
- Rudradaman's Junagadh inscription shows that Chandragupta ruled **Saurashtra** through his governor **Pushyagupta**.
- Jaina tradition says he followed **Bhadrabahu** to **Shravanabelagola** (Karnataka) and died there by *sallekhana* (fasting to death).
- **Bindusara** (c. 297–272 BCE) was called **Amitrochates** by the Greeks (Sanskrit *Amitraghata*, "slayer of foes"); he favoured the **Ajivikas**.
- Antiochus I sent **Deimachus** to Bindusara's court, and Ptolemy II sent **Dionysius**.

FREE SAMPLE Complete book at store.lotusarise.com ›

◆ PRELIMS TRAP TWO KINGS, ONE PLAY

The **Mudrarakshasa** is about **Chandragupta Maurya** and Chanakya. Vishakhadatta's other play, the **Devichandraguptam**, is about **Chandragupta II** of the Gupta dynasty.

03 Ashoka: Kalinga and Dhamma

- Ashoka was viceroy at **Ujjain** before his accession; he was consecrated in about **268 BCE** after a struggle for the throne, and ruled until about 232 BCE.
- He conquered **Kalinga** in the eighth year after his consecration (c. 261 BCE), his only major war; **Rock Edict XIII** records his remorse.
- Kalinga mattered because it controlled the land and sea routes to south India (asked in 2000).
- After Kalinga, **dhamma-vijaya** (conquest by dhamma) replaced conquest by arms; the **bherighosha** (war drum) gave way to the **dhammaghosha** (Rock Edict IV).
- He kept Kalinga, kept the army, and warned the forest tribes (**atavikas**) that he could still punish them.
- **Dhamma** was a code of social conduct (tolerance, kindness, respect for elders and teachers, care for slaves and animals) addressed to every sect, not the doctrine of Buddhism.
- Pillar Edict II defines dhamma as few sins, many good deeds, kindness, liberality, truthfulness and purity.
- **Rock Edict XII** warns that whoever praises his own sect and disparages others out of excessive devotion injures his own sect (asked in 2020).
- Ashoka promised heaven (*svarga*) to those who followed dhamma; he never mentions nirvana.
- He gave the **Barabar** caves near Gaya to the **Ajivikas**, a sect opposed to Buddhism.

Ashoka and Buddhism

- Minor Rock Edict I says he was a lay follower (**upasaka**) for over two and a half years before drawing close to the Sangha.
- In his tenth year he went to **Sambodhi** (Bodh Gaya); in his twentieth he visited **Lumbini**, where he freed the village from *bali* and cut the *bhaga* to one-eighth.
- The **Third Buddhist Council** met at **Pataliputra** in about 250 BCE under **Moggaliputta Tissa**; the Kathavatthu was compiled there. Ashoka's own edicts do not mention it.
- **Mahinda** and **Sanghamitta** took Buddhism to Sri Lanka; **Sona and Uttara** went to Suvarnabhumi.

OFFICIAL	ROLE
Dhamma-mahamattas	Created in the thirteenth regnal year to spread dhamma among all sects (Rock Edict V)
Ithijhaka-mahamattas	Welfare of women (Rock Edict XII)
Rajukas	Rural administration and justice; could reward and punish
Pradeshika, Rajuka, Yukta	**District-level** officers who toured every five years (Rock Edict III; asked in 2025)
Pativedakas	Reporters who kept the king informed at all times (Rock Edict VI)

FREE SAMPLE Complete book at store.lotusarise.com ›

OFFICIAL	ROLE
Anta-mahamattas	Officers of the frontier areas

04 Ashoka's Inscriptions

- Ashoka was the first Indian king to speak to his people through inscriptions; most call him **Devanampiya Piyadasi**, "dear to the gods, of pleasing appearance".
- His personal name **Ashoka** appears in only four inscriptions: **Maski** (found 1915), Nittur and Udegolam (Karnataka) and Gujarra (Madhya Pradesh).
- **James Prinsep** deciphered **Brahmi** in 1837 and read the edicts.
- The relief at **Kanaganahalli** (near Sannati, Karnataka) shows a king labelled "Raya Asoko" ("Ranyo Ashoka"), the only named portrait of Ashoka (asked in 2019).
- No Ashokan inscription is in Sanskrit.

REGION	LANGUAGE	SCRIPT
Most of India	Prakrit	**Brahmi** (left to right)
North-west: Shahbazgarhi, Mansehra	Prakrit	**Kharosthi** (right to left)
Afghanistan: Kandahar, Laghman	Greek and Aramaic	Greek and Aramaic

The Fourteen Major Rock Edicts

EDICT	SUBJECT
I	No animal sacrifice; no festive gatherings (samaja)
II	Medical care for people and animals; names the **Cholas, Pandyas, Satiyaputras, Keralaputras** and Tamraparni (Sri Lanka)
III	Rajukas, pradeshikas and yuktas to tour every five years
IV	Dhammaghosha replaces bherighosha
V	Dhamma-mahamattas appointed
VI	King to be informed at all times
VII	All sects may live everywhere
VIII	Dhamma-yatras; visit to Bodh Gaya
IX	Dhamma-mangala against useless ceremonies
X	Fame worthless without dhamma
XI	Dhamma-dana, the gift of dhamma

FREE SAMPLE Complete book at store.lotusarise.com ›

EDICT	SUBJECT
XII	Tolerance among sects; ithijhaka-mahamattas
XIII	**Kalinga war**; dhamma-vijaya; five Greek kings; Cholas and Pandyas
XIV	Why the edicts were engraved

◆ PRELIMS FACT EDICTS THAT NAME THE TAMIL KINGDOMS

Rock Edicts II and XIII name the Cholas and Pandyas, the lands beyond Ashoka's empire in the south (asked in 1998). Rock Edict XIII also names five Greek kings: Antiochus II (Syria), Ptolemy II (Egypt), Antigonus Gonatas (Macedonia), Magas (Cyrene) and Alexander (Epirus).

Where the Inscriptions Are

MAJOR ROCK EDICT SITE	STATE OR COUNTRY
Shahbazgarhi, Mansehra	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan (Kharosthi)
Kalsi	**Uttarakhand** (Dehradun)
Girnar	Gujarat (Junagadh)
Sopara	Maharashtra (Palghar)
Dhauli, **Jaugada**	**Odisha** (Separate Edicts instead of XI–XIII)
Erragudi	**Andhra Pradesh** (Kurnool)
Sannati	Karnataka (Kalaburagi)
Kandahar	Afghanistan (Greek)

◆ PRELIMS TRAP SITES AND STATES

- Kalsi is in **Uttarakhand**, not Karnataka; Jaugada is in **Odisha**, not Madhya Pradesh (asked in 2022).
- The Kalinga sites, **Dhauli and Jaugada**, leave out Rock Edict XIII, the edict of remorse.
- **Kanaganahalli** is a later sculptured relief near Sannati, not one of Ashoka's edicts.

FREE SAMPLE Complete book at store.lotusarise.com ›

Where Ashoka's inscriptions were found

Selected sites, with the capital and provincial centres. * Minor rock edicts that name him as "Ashoka". Modern boundaries for reference only.



Fig. 7.1 The sites of Ashoka's inscriptions, from Kandahar to Karnataka.

Minor Rock Edicts, Pillar Edicts and Others

- **Minor Rock Edicts** are personal statements of faith: Maski, Brahmagiri, Siddapura, Nittur, Udegolam (Karnataka), Rupnath, Gujarra (Madhya Pradesh), Sasaram (Bihar), Bairat (Rajasthan), Bahapur (Delhi).
- The **Bhabru** (Calcutta-Bairat) edict, addressed to the Sangha, declares his faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha.
- There are seven **Pillar Edicts**; all seven appear only on the **Delhi-Topra** pillar, brought to Delhi by **Firuz Shah Tughlaq**.

FREE SAMPLE Complete book at store.lotusarise.com ›

- The **Allahabad-Kosam** pillar also carries the Queen's Edict (Karuvaki), the Schism Edict, Samudragupta's Prayag Prashasti and an inscription of Jahangir.
- The **Rummindei** pillar marks the Buddha's birthplace at Lumbini; the **Nigali Sagar** pillar records the enlargement of the stupa of the Buddha Konakamana.
- The **Kandahar bilingual** (Greek and Aramaic) claims that hunters and fishermen had given up killing.

05 Mauryan Administration and Economy

- The king was helped by a council of ministers (*mantriparishad*) and by 18 high officers called **tirthas**.
- The **samaharta** collected revenue and the **sannidhata** kept the treasury; about 27 **adhyakshas** (superintendents) ran the economy.
- Princes governed as viceroys at **Taxila**, **Ujjain**, **Tosali** and **Suvarnagiri**; Pataliputra was the capital.
- Megasthenes describes **six boards of five members** running Pataliputra, and six boards running the army.
- Courts were of two kinds: **dharmasthiya** (civil) and **kantakashodhana** (criminal).
- The main land tax was the **bhaga**, usually one-sixth of the produce; **bali**, **udakabhaga** (water tax) and **shulka** (tolls) were other levies.
- Silver **punch-marked coins** (karshapana or pana) were in use.

06 Society and the Arthashastra

- Megasthenes divided Indian society into **seven classes** and said there were no slaves; both claims are unreliable.
- The **Arthashastra** allows **divorce** in certain cases, such as a wife deserted by her husband (asked in 1996).
- The Arthashastra says an Arya can never be made a slave, and that a slave woman who bears her master's child becomes free with the child (asked in 2022).
- Its theory of the state lists seven elements (*saptanga*): king, minister, territory, fort, treasury, army and ally.

07 Mauryan Art

- Ashokan pillars are **monolithic**, highly **polished**, tapering and free-standing, mostly of **Chunar sandstone**; they were not parts of buildings (asked in 1997).
- The **Sarnath lion capital** (four lions; an abacus with elephant, horse, bull and lion separated by wheels) became the State Emblem of India on 26 January 1950.
- The Rampurva bull capital is at Rashtrapati Bhavan; the Lauriya-Nandangarh pillar keeps its lion capital in place.
- The **Barabar caves** (Gaya), such as the Lomas Rishi cave, are the earliest rock-cut caves in India; Ashoka gave them to the Ajivikas (asked in 2013).

FREE SAMPLE Complete book at store.lotusarise.com ›

- The **rock-cut elephant at Dhauli** (Odisha) is Ashokan, far older than the Udayagiri Varaha, Mahabalipuram and the Lingaraja temple (asked in 2015).
- The **Didarganj yakshi**, a polished sandstone chauri-bearer found at Patna in 1917, is often dated to the Mauryan period, though the date is debated.
- A pillared hall of about 80 pillars at **Kumrahar** (Patna) is thought to belong to the Mauryan palace.

◆ PRELIMS TRAP **WHO GAVE THE BARABAR CAVES?**

Ashoka gave the Barabar caves to the Ajivikas, in his twelfth and nineteenth years; his grandson **Dasharatha** gave the nearby **Nagarjuni** caves. Chandragupta Maurya had nothing to do with them, and the Badami caves are some eight centuries later.

08 The Later Mauryas and the End of the Empire

- The Puranas give the dynasty 137 years in all.
- **Dasharatha** gave the Nagarjuni caves to the Ajivikas; **Samprati** is remembered in Jaina tradition as a great patron.
- The last Mauryan king, **Brihadratha**, was killed by his commander-in-chief **Pushyamitra Shunga** in about **185 BCE**, during a review of the army.
- Causes proposed for the decline include weak successors, a division of the empire, financial strain, oppressive provincial rule, and a brahmanical reaction to Ashoka's policies; most historians combine several.

✦ Prelims Quick Revision

- **Sandrocottus** = Chandragupta Maurya (William Jones, 1793).
- **Chandragupta**: c. 321–297 BCE; defeated Seleucus c. 303 BCE; died at Shravanabelagola (Jaina tradition).
- **Bindusara**: Amitrochates (Amitraghata); Ajivika leanings; envoy Deimachus.
- **Ashoka**: consecrated c. 268 BCE; Kalinga c. 261 BCE (Rock Edict XIII).
- **Name 'Ashoka'**: only Maski, Nittur, Udegolam, Gujarra; elsewhere Devanampiya Piyadasi.
- **Brahmi** deciphered by James Prinsep, 1837.
- **Rock Edicts II and XIII**: Cholas and Pandyas; **XII**: tolerance; **XIII**: Kalinga and five Greek kings.
- **Pradeshika, rajuka, yukta**: district officers (Rock Edict III).
- **Kharosthi**: Shahbazgarhi, Mansehra; **Greek and Aramaic**: Kandahar.
- **Kalsi**: Uttarakhand; **Dhauli, Jaugada**: Odisha; **Erragudi**: Andhra Pradesh.
- **Delhi-Topra**: only pillar with all seven pillar edicts.
- **Third Council**: Pataliputra, c. 250 BCE, Moggaliputta Tissa.
- **Barabar caves**: Ashoka to the Ajivikas; Nagarjuni caves: Dasharatha.
- **End**: Brihadratha killed by Pushyamitra Shunga, c. 185 BCE.

FREE SAMPLE Complete book at store.lotusarise.com ›

Previous Year Questions

2025 Ashokan inscriptions suggest that the ‘Pradeshika’, ‘Rajuka’ and ‘Yukta’ were important officers at the

- a village-level administration
- **b district-level administration**
- c provincial administration
- d level of the central administration

Answer: (b). Rock Edict III names the pradeshika, rajuka and yukta, district officers who toured every five years (Section 03).

2022 Consider the following pairs:
Site of Ashoka’s major rock edicts — Location in the State of
1. Dhauli — Odisha
2. Erragudi — Andhra Pradesh
3. Jaugada — Madhya Pradesh
4. Kalsi — Karnataka
How many pairs given above are correctly matched?

- a Only one pair
- **b Only two pairs**
- c Only three pairs
- d All four pairs

Answer: (b). Dhauli (Odisha) and Erragudi (Andhra Pradesh) are right; Jaugada is in Odisha and Kalsi in Uttarakhand (Section 04).

2022 According to Kautilya’s Arthashastra, which of the following are correct?
1. A person could be a slave as a result of a judicial punishment.
2. If a female slave bore her master a son, she was legally free.
3. If a son born to a female slave was fathered by her master, the son was entitled to the legal status of the master’s son.
Which of the statements given above are correct?

- a 1 and 2 only
- **b 2 and 3 only**
- c 1 and 3 only
- d 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (b). UPSC’s key gives (b): a slave woman who bore her master’s child became free with the child; the Arthashastra also says an Arya could never be made a slave, so statement 1 is treated as wrong (Section 06).

FREE SAMPLE Complete book at store.lotusarise.com ›

2020 Who among the following rulers advised his subjects through this inscription?
"Whosoever praises his religious sect or blames other sects out of excessive devotion to his own sect, with the view of glorifying his own sect, he rather injures his own sect very severely."

a Ashoka | b Samudragupta | c Harshavardhana | d Krishnadeva Raya

Answer: (a). These are the words of Ashoka's Rock Edict XII on tolerance among sects (Section 03).

2019 In which of the following relief sculpture inscriptions is 'Ranyo Ashoka' (King Ashoka) mentioned along with the stone portrait of Ashoka?

a Kanganahalli | b Sanchi | c Shahbazgarhi | d Sohgaura

Answer: (a). A relief from the stupa at Kanaganahalli, near Sannati in Karnataka, shows a king labelled 'Raya Asoko' (Section 04).

2016 Who of the following had first deciphered the edicts of Emperor Ashoka?

a Georg Bühler | b James Prinsep | c Max Müller | d William Jones

Answer: (b). James Prinsep deciphered Brahmi in 1837 and read Ashoka's edicts (Section 04).

2015 With reference to the art and archaeological history of India, which one among the following was made earliest?

a Lingaraja Temple at Bhubaneswar | b Rock-cut Elephant at Dhauli | c Rock-cut Monuments at Mahabalipuram | d Varaha Image at Udayagiri

Answer: (b). The Dhauli elephant is Ashokan (third century BCE); the Udayagiri Varaha is early fifth century CE, Mahabalipuram seventh and the Lingaraja temple eleventh (Section 07).

2013 With reference to the history of Indian rock-cut architecture, consider the following statements:
1. The caves at Badami are the oldest surviving rock-cut caves in India.
2. The Barabar rock-cut caves were originally made for Ajivikas by Emperor Chandragupta Maurya.
3. At Ellora, caves were made for different faiths.
Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

a 1 only | b 2 and 3 only | c 3 only | d 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (c). Ashoka, not Chandragupta, gave the Barabar caves to the Ajivikas, centuries before the Badami caves; Ellora has Buddhist, Hindu and Jaina caves (Section 07).

FREE SAMPLE Complete book at store.lotusarise.com ›

2002 The ancient Indian play Mudrarakshasa of Visakhadatta has its subject on

- a a conflict between Gods and Demons of ancient Hindu lore
- b a romantic story of an Aryan prince and a tribal woman
- c the story of the power struggle between two Aryan tribes
- **d** the court intrigues at the time of Chandragupta Maurya

Answer: (d). The Mudrarakshasa shows Chanakya winning over Rakshasa, the Nanda minister, for Chandragupta Maurya (Sections 01 and 02).

2000 Assertion (A): Ashoka annexed Kalinga to the Mauryan Empire.
Reason (R): Kalinga controlled the land and sea routes to South India.

- **a** Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A
- b Both A and R are true, but R is not a correct explanation of A
- c A is true, but R is false
- d A is false, but R is true

Answer: (a). Kalinga controlled the land and sea routes to the south, which explains why Ashoka wanted it (Section 03).

1998 Assertion (A): According to Asoka's edicts social harmony among the people was more important than religious devotion.
Reason (R): He spread ideas of equity instead of promotion of religion.

- **a** Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A
- b Both A and R are true, but R is NOT a correct explanation of A
- c A is true, but R is false
- d A is false, but R is true

Answer: (a). Dhamma was a code of social conduct for all sects, not the promotion of one religion (Section 03).

1998 The Asokan major rock edicts which tell us about the Sangam Kingdom include rock edicts

- a I and X
- b I and XI
- **c** II and XIII
- d II and XIV

Answer: (c). Rock Edicts II and XIII name the Cholas and Pandyas (Section 04).

FREE SAMPLE Complete book at store.lotusarise.com ›

1998 Which one of the following ancient Indian records is the earliest royal order to preserve foodgrains to be utilised during the crises in the country?

a Sohagaura Copper-plate
b Rummindei pillar-edict of Asoka
c Prayaga-Prasasti
d Mehrauli Pillar inscription of Chandra

Answer: (a). The Mauryan-period Sohgaura copper plate orders grain to be stored against famine (Section 01).

1997 Which one of the following edicts mentions the personal name of Asoka?

a Kalsi
b Rummindei
c Special Kalinga Edict
d Maski

Answer: (d). The Maski minor rock edict, found in 1915, calls the king 'Devanampiya Asoka' (Section 04).

1997 Which one of the following statements regarding Asokan stone pillars is incorrect?

a These are highly polished
b These are monolithic
c The shaft of pillars is tapering in shape
d These are parts of architectural structures

Answer: (d). Ashokan pillars are free-standing monoliths, not parts of buildings (Section 07).

1996 Which one of the following texts of ancient India allows divorce to a wife deserted by her husband?

a Kamasutra
b Manavadharmashastra
c Sukra Nitisara
d Arthashastra

Answer: (d). The Arthashastra allows divorce in certain cases, including desertion (Section 06).

1995 The name by which Asoka is generally referred to in his inscriptions is

a Chakravarti
b Dharmadeva
c Dharmakirti
d Priyadasi

Answer: (d). The edicts call him Devanampiya Piyadasi (Section 04).

FREE SAMPLE
PRELIMS 2027 EDITION

Liked the sample? Get the complete book.

You have read 3 of 15 chapters. The complete book covers ancient India from the Stone Age to the regional kingdoms in crisp Prelims facts and tables, with a PYQ Radar, Prelims Fact and Trap boxes and a one-line revision panel in every chapter, every Prelims question from 1995 to 2026 with its answer, and a full chapter of revision tables.

15	6	206
CHAPTERS	UNITS	PAGES

WHAT IS IN THE COMPLETE BOOK

I	How UPSC Asks	1 ch.	p. 4
II	Prehistory, Harappa and the Vedic Age	3 ch.	p. 10
III	States, New Faiths and the Mauryas	3 ch.	p. 51
IV	Post-Mauryan India and the Sangam Age	3 ch.	p. 94
V	Guptas to the Regional Kingdoms	4 ch.	p. 132
VI	Rapid Revision	1 ch.	p. 186

COMPLETE BOOK · PDF

Ancient Indian History: Prelims Summary and Facts

One-time payment, instant PDF download.

₹149 Get the full book