

EXAM-DAY · 90-MIN REVISION CARD

Kings, Farmers and Towns – Early States and Economies

Print this · Fold it · Carry to the exam-hall gate · Revise once · Then walk in.

FORMULAS & KEY RESULTS

PERIOD: c. 600 BCE - 600 CE
(1,200 years of early states and economies)

PRINSEP: James Prinsep deciphered BRAHMI and KHAROSTHI in 1838; found 'Piyadassi' = Asoka

MAHAJANAPADAS: SIXTEEN great states (6th c. BCE); most oligarchies/monarchies; Magadha rose to dominate

MAGADHA RISE: fertile Ganga plains + iron mines + elephants + rivers (Ganga) for transport + ambitious kings (Bimbisara, Ajatasattu, Mahapadma Nanda)

MAURYA: founded by Chandragupta Maurya (c. 321 BCE); Asoka c. 268-232 BCE; ended c. 185 BCE

FIVE POLITICAL CENTRES: Pataliputra (capital) + Taxila + Ujjayini + Tosali + Suvarnagiri

SOURCES ON MAURYAS: Arthashastra (Kautilya/Chanakya), Megasthenes' Indica (Greek ambassador), Asokan inscriptions, Buddhist/Jaina/Puranic texts, archaeology, coins, sculpture

DHAMMA: ethical code (respect elders, non-violence, tolerance) spread by DHAMMA MAHAMATTAS; NOT = Buddhism

POST-MAURYA KINGSHIP: KUSHANAS — divine kingship, 'Devaputra', colossal statues (Mat, Surkh Kotal), first gold coinage; SATAVAHANAS — Deccan, metronymics, Gautamiputra Satakarni

COUNTRYSIDE: iron-tipped PLOUGHSHARE, transplantation of paddy, IRRIGATION (wells, tanks, canals), gahapati (large landholders), LAND GRANTS on copper plates

TOP 5 PYQ PATTERNS

1 Mauryan administration / five political centres

8 marks · 90% of years
5-step template: scale+capital + five centres + communication + dhamma + conclusion.

2 Source-based on Asokan edict / Arthashastra / Megasthenes

10 marks · 100% of years
Identify source + quote evidence + state significance + wider implication.

3 New notions of kingship (Kushanas, Satavahanas)

8 marks · 70% of years
Kushana divine kingship + Devaputra + statues + gold coins; Satavahana metronymics + Gautamiputra.

4 Changes in the countryside (plough, irrigation, land grants)

5 marks · 65% of years
Iron plough + paddy transplantation + irrigation + gahapati + land grants (debate).

5 Limits of inscriptional evidence / decipherment

3 marks · 70% of years
Technical + linguistic + content bias + survival bias; Prinsep 1838 for decipherment.

90-MIN REVISION FLOW

0-15 min

Memorise the TIMELINE (600 BCE / 321 BCE / 268 BCE / 185 BCE / 1st c. CE Kushanas / 4th c. CE Guptas) + the FIVE political centres.

15-30 min

Write the 'Mauryan administration' answer from memory using the 5-step template. Time: 12 minutes.

30-45 min

New notions of kingship — Kushanas (divine, Devaputra, gold coins) vs Satavahanas (metronymics, Gautamiputra). One paragraph each.

45-60 min

List the FOUR limits of inscriptional evidence + the Prinsep 1838 decipherment story (Brahmi/Kharosthi, Piyadassi = Asoka).

60-75 min

Take the 15-MCQ Quick Drill under a 20-min timer.

75-90 min

Review wrong answers + memorise sources (Arthashastra = Kautilya, Indica = Megasthenes, Prayaga Prashasti = Harishena/Samudragupta) + coinage evolution.

TOWNS & TRADE: eight great towns, GUILDS (shrenis/nigamas), trade on land + sea routes, exports (spices, cloth, gems)

COINAGE: punch-marked silver (earliest) → Kushana GOLD → Gupta gold; numismatics as a source

GUPTA EVIDENCE: Prayaga Prashasti (Allahabad Pillar Inscription) by Harishena praising Samudragupta

LIMITS OF INSCRIPTIONS: faint/damaged letters + disputed meanings + everyday life unrecorded + survival bias

Confidence, not anxiety. You've practised this all year. Trust your steps. Don't change strategy on exam morning.
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