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THE STUDY & REVISION COLLECTION

General Studies

GS I-IV

Prelims foundations & Mains answer practice

80 CHAPTERS | EXPANDED STUDY EDITION

Concepts. Illustrations. Mains answers. Revision.

UPSC Point | October 2026

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GS I / ANCIENT INDIA

01. Reading the past: sources and chronology

KEY TERMS | Corroboration · Stratigraphy · Relative chronology · Absolute dating · Epigraphy · Numismatics · Prescriptive text · Provenance

Understand the concept

History is reconstructed by comparing evidence. Archaeology studies material remains; inscriptions record texts on durable surfaces; coins illuminate authority and exchange; literary sources convey ideas as well as events. A text may preserve an earlier tradition but survive in a much later manuscript. Date the event, composition and surviving copy separately. Corroboration reduces the risk of treating a ruler's claim as an objective description.

01 / Start with the question, not a list of sources

A historical source is evidence for a particular question; it is not automatically a complete account of its period. A royal inscription may be excellent evidence for the image a king wanted to project but weak evidence for the actual living conditions of cultivators. A coin proves that an issuing authority claimed a particular title, while its circulation requires investigation through find-spots and hoards. Reliability is claim-specific. Asking whether a whole source is simply “true” or “false” misses how historians work.

Separate **primary evidence**, produced in or close to the period being studied, from a later historical reconstruction. Even a primary source may be partisan, conventional or mistaken. Conversely, a later account can preserve earlier materials unavailable elsewhere. The strongest explanation states what is directly observed, what is inferred, and what remains uncertain. This is especially valuable in ancient history, where ordinary people's voices survive unevenly.

02 / How chronology is established

Relative chronology places things in a sequence: a sealed lower occupation layer usually predates an undisturbed upper layer. This principle needs careful use because pits, rebuilding, roots and later disturbance can move objects. A pottery style may help compare settlements, but similar forms need not have appeared everywhere simultaneously. Archaeologists therefore combine stratigraphy with multiple dating indicators rather than treating one object as a universal calendar.

Absolute dating aims to estimate a calendar age. Radiocarbon analysis concerns suitable once-living material; a charcoal sample dates the biological material, not automatically the building beside it. A reused wooden beam may be older than the structure. Dates also carry uncertainty ranges. In literary history, distinguish the time depicted in a story, its composition, successive additions and the surviving manuscript. An epic is therefore not a single dated photograph of society.

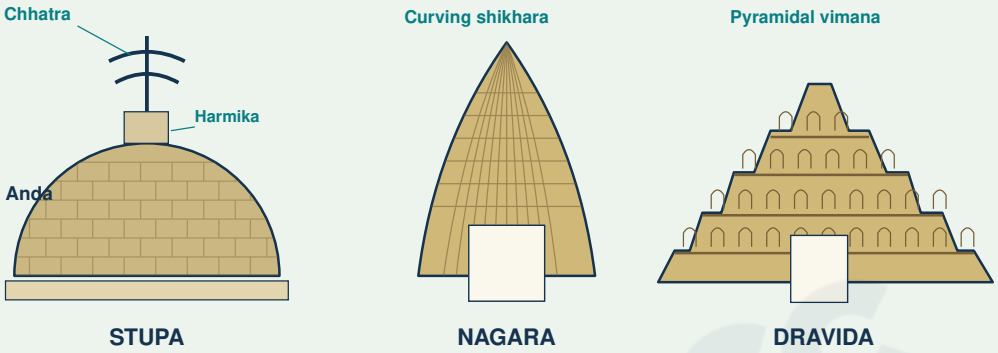
GS I / ART AND CULTURE

ILLUSTRATED STUDY NOTES • UNDERSTAND → CONNECT → REVISE

Read the building: form follows ritual



01 / THE CONCEPT, VISUALLY EXPLAINED



Stupa

Anda: hemispherical mound; harmika: railing above; chhatra: umbrella; pradakshina: circumambulation.

Nagara temple

Curvilinear shikhara rises above the garbhagriha; mandapa is an assembly hall.

Dravida temple

Pyramidal vimana above the sanctum; gopuram is the entrance gateway, not the sanctum tower.

Indo-Islamic forms

Arch, dome and minaret vary by period and region; trabeate and arcuate techniques can coexist.

02 / RETAIN & APPLY



SUBJECT ILLUSTRATION · DECORATIVE

MAINS CONNECTION

Identify function, construction and patronage before assigning a stylistic label.

AVOID THIS EXAM TRAP

Broad style labels do not make every temple within a region identical.

REVISION DRILL

Close the notes. Redraw the relationship. Add one qualified example to your answer.

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