PRELIMS PYQS PROGRAM
2013 TO 2026
DAY – 01: HISTORY
EXPLANATIONS

Q1. Correct Answer: (B)

Why this question: UPSC tested the ability to distinguish archaeological evidence from assumptions. The question rewards cautious interpretation of seals and figurines rather than projecting later institutions onto the Harappans.

Option analysis:

(A) No securely identified palace-temple complex comparable to Mesopotamian examples is established.

(B) Female figurines and a seal often interpreted as a male deity support the limited inference of represented divine figures; interpretation remains debated.

(C) No conclusive evidence establishes horse-drawn chariots in Harappan warfare.

(D) Incorrect because A and C overstate the evidence.

Value addition: Harappan script remains undeciphered; avoid treating the 'Mother Goddess' and 'Pashupati' labels as settled identifications.

Q2. Correct Answer: (C)

Why this question: UPSC tested site identification and the ability to avoid confusing early historic inscriptions with Harappan archaeology.

Option analysis:

(A) Harappan craft/industrial centre in Sindh.

(B) Important pre/early Harappan site in Sindh.

(C) Correct–-Sohgaura is known for an early historic copper-plate inscription, not as a Harappan site.

(D) Harappan site in Gujarat.

Value addition: Pair sites with distinctive evidence: Lothal-dockyard debate, Dholavira-water system, Kalibangan-ploughed field, Chanhudaro-bead making.

Q3. Correct Answer: (A)

Why this question: UPSC linked Harappan archaeology to contemporary water security and sustainable urban planning.

Option analysis:

(A) Correct—Dholavira in Kutch is renowned for reservoirs and water harvesting.

(B) Known for a ploughed field and fire altars.

(C) One of the largest Harappan sites, in Haryana.

(D) Harappan site in Punjab, but not known for this system.

Value addition: Dholavira is a UNESCO World Heritage property (inscribed 2021); relate to arid-zone adaptation and heritage conservation.

Q4. Correct Answer: (C)

Why this question: UPSC returned to a familiar Harappan artefact but asked material identification—an example of basic facts tested after a gap.

Option analysis:

(A) A semi-precious stone used in beads, not the figurine.

(B) Many Harappan figurines are terracotta, but not this one.

(C) Correct—bronze, made using lost-wax casting.

(D) Not the material.

Value addition: Bronze 'Dancing Girl' demonstrates metalworking; compare Priest-King steatite sculpture and red sandstone male torso.

Q5. Correct Answer: (A)

Why this question: UPSC tested whether candidates could infer carefully from material culture without overreaching into social ownership claims.

Option analysis:

(A) Correct—spindle whorls suggest household spinning; graduated weights/measures indicate standardised measurement.

(B) Incorrect—courtyard houses do not prove common property.

(C) Incorrect for the same reason.

(D) Incorrect because the common-property inference is unsupported.

Value addition: Harappan urban planning, standardised weights, craft production, household architecture and limits of archaeological inference.

Q6. Correct Answer: (A)

Why this question: UPSC tested a core philosophical term, not a biographical fact. Similar questions require precise distinctions between Buddhist and Jain ideas of self and liberation.

Option analysis:

(A) Correct—Nirvana is the extinguishing of craving, aversion and ignorance.

(B) Buddhism rejects a permanent, unchanging self; this wording is not the best definition.

(C) Nirvana is not simply a heaven or place.

(D) Too vague and not the doctrinal definition.

Value addition: Connect the Four Noble Truths, Eightfold Path, dependent origination and anatta.

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Q7. Correct Answer: (C)

Why this question: UPSC repeated the geography of the Buddha's life from 2015, showing that foundational location mapping can recur with a changed option set.

Option analysis:

(A) Avanti and Gandhara were important regions but are not the correct pair in the key.

(B) Gandhara-Kamboja is not the key pair.

(C) Correct—Kosala and Magadha were central to the Buddha's activity.

(D) Adds regions not accepted by the official key.

Value addition: Map Lumbini, Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, Kushinagar, Sravasti, Rajgir and Vaishali.

Q8. Correct Answer: (D)

Why this question: Near-repeat of 2014: UPSC checked whether candidates could identify the political geography around the Buddha rather than memorise a single year's wording.

Option analysis:

(A) Incorrect—Avanti is not included in the keyed pair.

(B) Incorrect—Gandhara is not included.

(C) Incorrect because Avanti is added.

(D) Correct—Kosala and Magadha.

Value addition: Prasenajit of Kosala and Bimbisara/Ajatashatru of Magadha are useful ruler associations.

Q9. Correct Answer: (B)

Why this question: UPSC tested the distinction between Buddhist traditions and the ethical ideal of Mahayana.

Option analysis:

(A) Incorrect—Bodhisattva ideal is especially central to Mahayana, not Theravada alone.

(B) Correct—Bodhisattvas pursue enlightenment with compassion for all beings.

(C) Incomplete because the third statement about postponing final nirvana for others is also accepted.

(D) Incorrect because A is false.

Value addition: Compare arhat ideal, Bodhisattva ideal, Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana without treating labels as perfectly uniform.

Q10. Correct Answer: (B)

Why this question: UPSC tested sectarian taxonomy, a high-discrimination area where one wrong religious affiliation changes the answer.

Option analysis:

(A) Incorrect—Sautrantika and Sammitiya are Buddhist schools.

(B) Correct in broad terms; Sarvastivada is associated with the existence of dharmas in past, present and future.

(C) Incorrect because A is false.

(D) Incorrect because B is accepted.

Value addition: Know Theravada, Mahasanghika, Sarvastivada, Sautrantika, Madhyamaka and Yogachara at a basic comparative level.

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Q11. Correct Answer: (C)

Why this question: UPSC tested iconographic identification. The distractors are related to Buddhist bodhisattva imagery, so superficial familiarity is insufficient.

Option analysis:

(A) Bodhisattva of compassion.

(B) A title associated with Avalokiteshvara.

(C) Correct—Maitreya is the future Buddha.

(D) Another form/name associated with Avalokiteshvara.

Value addition: Connect Maitreya with Gandhara/Mathura art and distinguish Buddha figures from Bodhisattvas.

Q12. Correct Answer: (D)

Why this question: UPSC tested a cluster of related features, not a single definition. The correct strategy is to assess each statement independently.

Option analysis:

(A) Incomplete—other features are also associated.

(B) Incomplete—image worship/ritual is also included.

(C) Incomplete—deification is also included.

(D) Correct—all three are associated with Mahayana developments.

Value addition: Early aniconic Buddhist art used symbols; anthropomorphic Buddha images developed prominently in Gandhara and Mathura contexts.

Q13. Correct Answer: (B)

Why this question: UPSC tested the historical development of Buddhist schools and the emergence of devotional/Buddha-centred tendencies.

Option analysis:

(A) Incorrect—Sthaviravada is not a Mahayana school in the way the statement claims.

(B) Correct—Lokottaravada is linked to Mahasanghika; Mahasanghika tendencies helped shape later Mahayana developments.

(C) Incomplete because statement 2 is also correct.

(D) Incorrect because statement 1 is false.

Value addition: Mahasanghika, Lokottaravada and Mahayana are related but should not be treated as identical.

Q14. Correct Answer: (A)

Why this question: UPSC tested the regional geography of Buddhism and brought the lower Krishna valley into focus.

Option analysis:

(A) Correct—Dhanyakataka is associated with the Amaravati region of Andhra.

(B) Gandhara was a major north-western Buddhist centre.

(C) Kalinga is associated with Dhauli and other Buddhist sites.

(D) Magadha was central to early Buddhism but is not this site.

Value addition: Dhanyakataka-Amaravati-Satavahana context; map Nagarjunakonda, Amaravati and the Krishna valley.

Q15. Correct Answer: (B)

Why this question: UPSC tested names and religious vocabulary, using Nayaputta as a distractor associated with Mahavira.

Option analysis:

(A) Nayaputta is associated with Mahavira/Jain tradition, not the Buddha.

(B) Correct—Shakyamuni ('sage of the Shakyas') and Tathagata are Buddha epithets.

(C) Incorrect because Nayaputta is mismatched.

(D) Incorrect.

Value addition: Other Buddha epithets: Bhagavat, Sugata; Mahavira: Jina, Vardhamana, Nayaputta.

Q16. Correct Answer: (C)

Why this question: UPSC tested doctrinal precision through a multi-statement question. It combines jiva, ajiva, karma and tapas.

Option analysis:

(A) Incorrect—penance/austerity is an important means of stopping and shedding karmic matter.

(B) Incorrect—Jainism recognises souls in plants and other life forms, including subtle one-sensed beings.

(C) Correct synthesis of the doctrine.

(D) Incorrect—Jainism strongly affirms individual souls (jiva).

Value addition: Five vows: ahimsa, satya, asteya, brahmacharya and aparigraha; compare Jain jiva with Buddhist anatta.

Q17. Correct Answer: (D)

Why this question: UPSC tested text-religion association. The distractors deliberately mix Buddhist and Jain textual traditions.

Option analysis:

(A) Incorrect—Nettipakarana and Avadanashataka are Buddhist works.

(B) Incorrect—Nettipakarana is not Jain.

(C) Incorrect—Nettipakarana is Buddhist.

(D) Correct—Parishishtaparvan and Trishashtilakshana Mahapurana are Jain texts.

Value addition: Pair texts with traditions: Pali Tipitaka/commentaries and avadana literature (Buddhist); Hemachandra's works and Jinasena's Mahapurana (Jain).

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Q18. Correct Answer: (B)

Why this question: UPSC tested a distinctive Jain metaphysical concept through a descriptive statement.

Option analysis:

(A) Buddhism does not posit an eternal soul in all matter.

(B) Correct—Jainism recognises jiva in a wide range of life forms, including earth-bodied and water-bodied beings.

(C) Not the specific doctrine.

(D) Not the specific doctrine.

Value addition: Jain classification of one-sensed beings; connect ahimsa with care in everyday conduct.

Q19. Correct Answer: (B)

Why this question: UPSC tested a fine distinction between a broad cosmological category and a class of supernatural beings.

Option analysis:

(A) Deva is one of the four gatis.

(B) Correct—Yaksha is not a separate gati.

(C) Human existence is one gati.

(D) Tiryanch includes animals, plants and other non-human living beings.

Value addition: Four gatis: deva, manushya, tiryanch and naraka; liberation (moksha) is beyond these rebirth states.

Q20. Correct Answer: (B)

Why this question: UPSC tested the use of foreign travellers as historical sources and careful reading of absolute words such as ‘completely’.

Option analysis:

(A) Incorrect; accounts describe insecurity and robbery.

(B) Correct—ordeals and duties at ferries/barriers are recorded.

(C) Incorrect because A is false.

(D) Incorrect because A is false.

Value addition: Compare Megasthenes, Faxian, Xuanzang and Yijing: period, ruler, purpose and observations.

Q21. Correct Answer: (B)

Why this question: UPSC tested the historiography of ancient India: inscriptions became readable through nineteenth-century epigraphic work.

Option analysis:

(A) Important Indologist/epigraphist, but not the answer.

(B) Correct—James Prinsep deciphered Brahmi in 1837.

(C) Major Sanskrit scholar, not the decipherer.

(D) Founded the Asiatic Society; not the answer.

Value addition: Also remember Kharosthi decipherment, Alexander Cunningham and the role of epigraphy in reconstructing Mauryan history.

Q22. Correct Answer: (A)

Why this question: UPSC linked epigraphy, sculpture and a relatively less familiar archaeological site—an example of moving beyond standard textbook monuments.

Option analysis:

(A) Correct—Kanaganahalli in Karnataka yielded the relevant sculptural inscription.

(B) Famous Buddhist site, but not this specific find.

(C) Known for Ashokan rock edicts in Kharosthi.

(D) Known for an early historic copper plate.

Value addition: Kanaganahalli is near Sannati; distinguish it from Sanchi and the north-western edict sites.

Q23. Correct Answer: (A)

Why this question: UPSC connected an ethical quotation to a primary source and tested recognition of Ashoka's dhamma policy.

Option analysis:

(A) Correct—Major Rock Edict XII advocates restraint and mutual respect among sects.

(B) Known for the Prayaga/Allahabad pillar inscription.

(C) Associated with Xuanzang and later Buddhist patronage.

(D) Vijayanagara ruler of a much later period.

Value addition: Major Rock Edict XII: inter-sectarian respect; distinguish dhamma from a narrowly sectarian doctrine.

Q24. Correct Answer: (B)

Why this question: UPSC tested close reading of a normative text and the distinction between legal prescription and social practice.

Option analysis:

(A) Incorrect—statement 1 is not accepted in the official key.

(B) Correct—statements 2 and 3.

(C) Incorrect because it includes statement 1 and omits 2.

(D) Incorrect because statement 1 is false.

Value addition: Arthashastra is a normative treatise; compare it with inscriptions, Buddhist/Jain texts and foreign accounts.

Q25. Correct Answer: (B)

Why this question: UPSC tested map literacy of Ashokan inscriptions. Two familiar sites are correctly placed; two are deliberate state swaps.

Option analysis:

(A) Incorrect—two pairs are correct.

(B) Correct—Dhauli and Jaugada are in Odisha; Erragudi is in Andhra Pradesh.

(C) Incorrect—Kalsi is in Uttarakhand, not Karnataka.

(D) Incorrect for the same reason.

Value addition: Locate Dhauli, Jaugada, Erragudi/Yerragudi, Kalsi, Girnar, Sopara, Shahbazgarhi and Mansehra.

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Q26. Correct Answer: (B)

Why this question: UPSC tested the administrative vocabulary of inscriptions and the territorial machinery of the Mauryan state.

Option analysis:

(A) Too local for the grouping.

(B) Correct—these officers are associated with district-level administration/inspection and revenue functions.

(C) Not the keyed level.

(D) Not the keyed level.

Value addition: Compare mahamatras, rajukas, yuktas, pradeshikas and dhamma-mahamatras.

Q27. Correct Answer: (D)

Why this question: UPSC tested specialised administrative and institutional vocabulary through pair matching.

Option analysis:

(A) Incorrect—taniyur is not simply a Brahmin-grant village.

(B) Incomplete because eripatti is also correct.

(C) Incorrect because taniyur is mismatched.

(D) Correct—eripatti supported irrigation tanks; ghatikas were educational institutions.

Value addition: Related terms: brahmadeya, devadana, nagaram, ur, sabha and nadu.

Q28. Correct Answer: (C)

Why this question: UPSC tested chronology across regional powers, demanding broad periodisation rather than exact dates alone.

Option analysis:

(A) Incorrect—Pala foundation precedes Bhoja's prominence.

(B) Incorrect—places the Cholas too early.

(C) Correct sequence: Mahendravarman I (7th c.), Gopala (8th c.), Bhoja (9th c.), Parantaka I (10th c.).

(D) Incorrect—Chola power under Parantaka I is later.

Value addition: Build a century timeline: Pallavas, Palas, Gurjara-Pratiharas, Imperial Cholas.

Q29. Correct Answer: (C)

Why this question: UPSC deliberately used a comparative frame: candidates had to separate archaeological evidence from textual evidence and spot an incorrect metal claim.

Option analysis:

(A) Incomplete—the horse-related statement is also accepted.

(B) Incorrect—the claim that Harappans knew only copper and iron is wrong; they used copper/bronze, gold, silver and other materials, while iron was not a standard Harappan metal.

(C) Correct according to the official key.

(D) Incorrect because the metals statement is false.

Value addition: Do not convert 'limited evidence for horse' into an absolute claim that no horse remains have ever been reported; evidence and interpretation remain debated.

Q30. Correct Answer: (B)

Why this question: UPSC connected regional political history with maritime trade and geography, rewarding map-based knowledge of the eastern coast.

Option analysis:

(A) Not the keyed Kakatiya port.

(B) Correct—Motupalli, associated with Kakatiya maritime commerce and a famous trade charter.

(C) Important port in later periods, but not the keyed answer.

(D) Not the answer.

Value addition: Link Motupalli with the Bay of Bengal, Kakatiyas, trade concessions and the wider Coromandel coast.

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