

UNIT 02 / 12 · LEARN & TRY

Early states, economies and inscriptions

Name: _____ Date: _____

Goal: Connect early state economies with a critical reading of inscriptions.

Learn

Early states in the subcontinent developed through changing agriculture, trade, warfare and political institutions. Between roughly 600 BCE and 600 CE, forms of rule and regional economies varied rather than following one uniform path. Agricultural production could support cities and rulers, while taxes and tribute linked producers with political authority. Coins and inscriptions help reconstruct exchange and claims to power, but their meanings need context. An inscription may announce a donation, order or royal achievement; it expresses what its author chose to record. Ashoka's inscriptions are important evidence for his public communication and dhamma, but they cannot directly show how every subject responded. Reading an inscription requires attention to language, script, location, date and audience. Archaeology and other texts can confirm, qualify or complicate its message. Distinguish a ruler's ideal or proclamation from established practice, and avoid treating the absence of surviving evidence as proof that an activity never occurred.

Worked example

Original fictional inscription exercise: A ruler announces protection for traders at a market. The text shows a public claim about policy; records of disputes or excavated market activity would help test its operation.

1. Why might agricultural surplus matter for early urban growth? [2 marks]

2. Original fictional inscription: A ruler says all traders are protected. What does the source securely show? [2 marks]
