

**Source 2** From a Qin imperial edict. When the First Emperor decided to standardise weights and measures, his order was published on bronze plates. Attached to the plates were wooden measures.

In the twenty-sixth year of his reign [221 BCE], the Emperor unified all the lands under heaven, brought peace to the people, and mounted the throne as Emperor. [He] ordered the prime minister to reform the measures and weights. For those who do not know the new system, this [object] is a standard model for making more copies.

**Source 3** Hsun-tzu, a Confucian scholar of the third century BCE, commenting on the methods of the rulers of the state of Qin in the last years of the Warring States period. These same methods were used throughout China under the Qin dynasty.

The Qin rulers employ their people harshly, terrorise them with authority, embitter them with hardship, bribe them with rewards, and destroy them with punishments.

## Developing my skills

In 213 BCE, Qin Shihuang ordered the burning of many books. He followed this up by executing hundreds of scholars who kept their books. **Source 4** gives the official reasons for these harsh measures. Now use the five questions to see if you can recognise the bias in this source. **Source 6** provides other evidence.

**Source 4** Advice given by Prime Minister Li Si to Qin Shihuang

Your Majesty rules a unified Empire in which the difference between right and wrong is as clear as your own total authority. Yet there are people who unofficially spread teachings that are against official orders... they openly criticise your commands... The people are thus encouraged to be disrespectful. If this lying is not stopped the imperial authority will be weak... all people owning books... should destroy them.

**Source 5** Qin Shihuang



**Source 6** From Sima Qian's book *Shiji*

But the First Emperor was greedy and short-sighted, confident in his own wisdom, never trusting his meritorious officials, never getting to know his people... outlawing books and writings, making the laws and penalties much harsher, putting deceit and force foremost and humanity and righteousness last, leading the whole world in violence and cruelty.



# 8.7 SkillBuilder

## Recognising different perspectives

### What are different perspectives and interpretations?

There will always be different interpretations in any study of history because different conclusions can often be drawn from the same primary source evidence. Primary sources often give different perspectives, because not everyone will have seen an event or problem from the same point of view.

Some primary sources are biased (one-sided or prejudiced) or were created as propaganda (attempts to persuade people to accept a biased view).

### Why is it important to recognise different perspectives, especially bias and propaganda?

To find the truth on any matter, we have to be aware that what someone says or writes about it may be one-sided and an attempt to persuade and possibly to deceive. This is as important when trying to make up our minds on current issues as it is in trying to understand the past. For example, when buying a product you do not necessarily trust what advertisements say about it.

### How to recognise different perspectives in primary sources

When you read an interpretation of a historical event or development you need to ask:

- 1 What is the subject or main idea of the source?
- 2 Who created the source?
- 3 Why was it written?
- 4 Does it try to persuade and if so how does it do this?
- 5 Is the source supported or contradicted by the evidence of other sources?

### The example of Qin Shihuang's achievements

Qin Shihuang wanted to be seen as a great and powerful ruler who brought peace and happiness to his people. **Source 1** is an example of his propaganda. **Sources 2 and 3** provide other evidence. The five questions have been applied to **Source 1**.

- 1 *What is the subject or main idea of the source?* The main idea is that the First Emperor's reforms have unified China, given its people certainty about the laws, protected them from wrongdoers and made them hardworking, responsible, happy and grateful to their ruler.
- 2 *Who created the source?* Qin Shihuang ordered it to be written.
- 3 *Why was the source written?* It was written to tell people that the emperor acted for their benefit.
- 4 *Does it try to persuade and if so how does it do this?* It tries to persuade by giving a distorted account of what was happening.

**Source 1** From an inscription ordered by Qin Shihuang. It was carved in 219 BCE.

...Great are the Emperor's achievements ...

All people under heaven

Work with a common purpose.

Tools and measures are the same ...

The written script is made the same ...

He defines the laws, leaving no one in doubt,

Making known what is forbidden ...

No evil is tolerated,

So all strive to be excellent people ...

None dare to be lazy ...

The ordinary people know peace ...

People help each other,

There are no robbers or thieves:

People delight in his rule ...

Wherever life is found,

All acknowledge his supreme rule ...

It makes no mention of forced labour, high taxes and the cruelty of the emperor's punishments.

- 5 *Is the source supported or contradicted by the evidence of other sources?* **Source 2** supports the statement about measures and weights. **Source 3** contradicts most of the source by accusing the Qin rulers of causing misery and suffering rather than happiness.