

The City With No Palace

PASSAGE · NON-FICTION

SKILLS TRAINED

Working memory

Delayed recall

Critical analysis

HOW TO USE THIS SHEET

About 20 minutes

- 1 Read the passage twice, slowly. Take about six minutes.
- 2 Turn to the next page and cover this one. No looking back.
- 3 Write what you remember, then mark it on the last page.

On a dusty plain beside the River Indus, in the province of Sindh in Pakistan, stand the brick foundations of a city that was already ancient when Rome was a village. Its builders' name for it is unknown. Local people called the mound Mohenjo-daro, which means roughly “mound of the dead”, and archaeologists have used that name ever since.

The city was built about four and a half thousand years ago and was one of the largest in the world at the time, holding perhaps forty thousand people. Serious excavation began in 1922, when an Indian archaeologist named Rakhaladas Banerji realised that a mound topped by a ruined Buddhist shrine had something far older underneath it.

What came out of the ground was unlike other ancient cities. The streets ran on a grid, the main ones wide enough for carts, crossing at right angles. Houses were built of baked brick rather than mud brick, which takes fuel and effort and lasts. Most striking of all were the drains: covered channels running beneath the streets, fed by pipes from bathing rooms inside ordinary houses. Some homes had wells of their own.

Near the centre stood a sunken tank about twelve metres long, lined with tightly fitted brick and sealed underneath with a layer of bitumen to stop leaks. Steps led down into it at either end. Nobody knows what it was for, though washing of some ceremonial kind is the usual guess. It is called the Great Bath, which is a description rather than an explanation.

The bricks themselves carry a clue. Across the city, and across other settlements hundreds of kilometres away, they were made to the same proportions — one part thick, two parts wide, four parts long. Stone weights found at these sites follow a matching set of standard sizes. Somebody, somewhere, was agreeing on measurements across a very large area.

And then the absences. Excavators found no palace. No royal tomb stuffed with treasure. No vast temple, no carved scenes of kings winning battles, no monuments to anybody at all. Compared with Egypt or Mesopotamia, where rulers put themselves on every wall, Mohenjo-daro is oddly silent about who was in charge.

It is not silent about everything. Thousands of small carved seals have been recovered, most showing an animal — a humped bull, an elephant, a strange one-horned beast — above a short row of signs. There are around four hundred different signs. Nobody can read them. The inscriptions are short, usually five symbols or so, and there is no second language alongside them to compare, which is how most ancient scripts have been cracked.

So the city can show us its plumbing, its brick sizes and its bull seals, and tell us nothing about its laws, its gods or its kings. The most carefully planned city of its age has handed down drains we can measure and a script we cannot read.

- 5 The writer says the name Great Bath “is a description rather than an explanation”. What is the difference being pointed out?

- 6 The passage ends with drains we can measure and a script we cannot read. Why set those two things against each other in the final line?

PART C Mark your own work

Now go back to the passage. Tick every answer you got right. You do not need the same words as the answer below — if you wrote the same idea in your own words, it counts.

- ☐ 1 • In 1922, when the archaeologist Rakhaldas Banerji realised an older city lay beneath a mound topped by a ruined Buddhist shrine.
- ☐ 2 • A sunken tank about twelve metres long with steps down at either end, lined with tightly fitted brick and sealed underneath with bitumen to stop leaks.
- ☐ 3 • The same measurements appear at settlements hundreds of kilometres apart, so separate towns were not simply building to local habit. Some shared system of agreement or authority must have reached across a very large area.
- ☐ 4 • Plenty did survive — houses, drains, seals, the Great Bath — so the missing items are a real pattern rather than a gap in the evidence. In Egypt and Mesopotamia rulers made sure they were on every wall, so a well-preserved city showing nobody in charge genuinely needs explaining.
- ☐ 5 • A description just says what the thing looks like — a big tank for washing in. An explanation would say what it was actually used for and why, which nobody knows, so the name quietly disguises a gap in our knowledge.
- ☐ 6 • To sum up the whole imbalance of the evidence. The city's physical planning is unusually clear while everything about its people's ideas is lost, and putting the two side by side shows that being well preserved is not the same as being understood.

FACTS RECALLED IN PART A

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QUESTIONS CORRECT

— / 6

DATE

THE STRATEGY Interleave it

Do not finish one topic and then start the next. Mix them: twenty minutes of this passage, then some maths, then back to it tomorrow alongside something different. Jumping between subjects feels messier and slower than doing one at a time, and your results on the day will look slightly worse — but weeks later you remember far more, because every switch back forces you to work out which approach this task needs.

WHERE YOU ALREADY DO THIS

Think about how you practise something you are good at — a sport, an instrument, a game. Do you drill one thing over and over, or move between several? What happens when you change?

FOR THE PARENT OR TEACHER · This sheet trains delayed recall, not reading speed. Let your child read the passage once, then cover it completely before Part A — no glancing back and no prompting, because the effort of hauling a half-remembered fact

out of memory is what fixes it there. At this level, reward the quality of the reasoning in the inference and purpose answers rather than the exact wording.