

## The Rise of Cahokia

**P1:** The ancient city of Cahokia was located at a site very close to modern St. Louis in the United States. At its apex from A.D. 1100 to 1200, Cahokia covered about 16 square kilometers and probably had a population that peaked at around 15,000. Excavations of the city have revealed that it contained a large number of public plazas that were separated by at least 120 man made earthen mounds, the largest of which was topped by a major temple. Remains have also been found of an elaborate copper workshop that produced sophisticated metal goods likely traded with both nearby and distant settlements. Moreover, the city is noted for its significant economic and spiritual contacts with other communities in the Mississippi area. Although the inhabitants left no written records beyond symbols on pottery, shells, wood and stone, the remains of this elaborately planned community suggest that it was home to a complex society that had great influence over a large geographic area.

**P2:** What accounts for the tremendous population growth of the city and its influence on the surrounding region? Among the main factors currently cited are the city's location on a natural trade route near the confluence of three major rivers (the Mississippi, Missouri and Illinois), its attractiveness as a religious pilgrimage site for inhabitants of other settlements, and the economic value of chert\* that could be collected in nearby streams. The influence of other possible factors is much less clear – for example the **ingenuity** and foresightedness of the city's leadership, the construction of advanced defensive structures, and the emergence of new and more productive agricultural techniques first practiced in Mesoamerica.

**P3:** The importance of the last factor is a matter of some debate. Cahokia's peak in 1100 coincided with the emergence in the region of new methods of agricultural production. These included the "three sisters" method of farming first discovered centuries earlier in Mesoamerica. However, even though the city was ringed by farming communities, due to rapid population growth they were unable to feed the whole population. A related problem was the challenge of waste disposal in such a dense community, and people in Cahokia likely became sick from polluted waterways. Because it was such an unhealthy place to live, modern historians believe that the town had to rely on social and political attractions to bring in a steady supply of new immigrants. Without their arrival, **this problem** would have caused the city to be abandoned much earlier than it eventually was.

**P4:** It is likely that one of Cahokia's massive construction projects, encouraged by the spiritual elite, **bolstered the population of the city**. This was the largest of the city's mounds – now known as Monks Mound – which covered 14 acres, rose 30 meters and was topped by a massive wooden temple another 15 meters high that was presided over by the city's paramount chief. To complete this unique structure, thousands of workers moved vast amounts of earth in handheld woven baskets over the course of several decades. This impressive structure would have been seen throughout the city and made it an appealing pilgrimage destination for people all over the Mississippi area, attracting many visitors, some of whom settled permanently in the city.

**P5:** The city's growth as an important population center was also a result of its ability to establish and maintain economic links with communities as far away as the Great Lakes to the north and the Gulf Coast to the south. This was achieved through the trade of such exotic items as copper, chert, and seashells. Chert, most notably, was used in the production of hoes, a high demand tool for farmers

around Cahokia and other Mississippian centers. Recent research on chert tools discovered at the Silvernail settlement site near modern day Minnesota found that the raw materials used to construct some of them originated near Cahokia.

**P6:** The population of Cahokia began to decline during the 13th century. Scholars have not determined why this happened, but have proposed theories involving environmental factors such as overhunting, deforestation, and flooding, as explanations for the abandonment of the site. Another possible cause is invasion by outside peoples, though the position of the only defensive structures in the city (a wooden stockade and watchtowers) in the main ceremonial precinct, away from the heavily populated areas of the city, suggests that the civilian population of the city faced no threat of invasion from outside forces. There is no other evidence for warfare, so the stockade may have been more for ritual or formal separation than for military purposes. In any case, by 1300 this once thriving city was almost entirely abandoned.

\*Chert = a type of hard rock usually of biological origin

**1. Negative Factual – In paragraph 1, each of the following is mentioned as a feature of the city of Cahokia between A.D 1100 to 1200 EXCEPT:**

- A. Man-made mounds
- B. Several large temples
- C. A manufacturing workshop
- D. Many public plazas

**2. Negative Factual – Which of the following is NOT mentioned in paragraph 2 as a factor in the development of Cahokia?**

- A. The presence of chert close to the city
- B. Its religious significance to non-residents
- C. An exchange of agricultural tools with Mesoamerica
- D. The city's position along a natural trade route

**3. Vocabulary – The word “ingenuity” in paragraph 2 is closest in meaning to:**

- A. ambition
- B. sincerity
- C. faith
- D. cleverness

**4. Inference – What can be inferred from paragraph 3 about agricultural methods used in Cahokia in 1100?**

- A. They were not as advanced as those used in Mesoamerica.
- B. They were sometimes unable to supply enough food for the city.
- C. They were carried out by newly arrived immigrants.
- D. They were seriously affected by environmental pollution.

**5. Vocabulary – The phrase “this problem” in paragraph 3 refers to:**

- A. An unhealthy environment
- B. An insufficient amount of immigrants

- C. Unattractive social and political attractions
- D. The population of the city

**6. Factual Information – Which of the following “bolstered the population of the city”?**

- A. A highly-visible and attractive religious structure
- B. The leadership of influential spiritual elites
- C. Knowledge of complex construction techniques
- D. The selection of a new paramount chief from elsewhere in the Mississippi area

**7. Factual Information – According to paragraph 5, what has recent research on chert tools found at the Silvernail settlement site revealed?**

- A. Chert tools were started to be used after Cahokia became an important city.
- B. The residents of Cahokia were the only producers of farming tools in the area.
- C. Some of the tools used by people at the Silvernail settlement were made of materials from the area near Cahokia.
- D. Agricultural tools were exchanged with people at the Silvernail settlement for copper and seashells.

**8. Rhetorical Purpose – In paragraph 6, why does the author mention the location of the city’s defensive structures?**

- A. To suggest that the city was not abandoned due to warfare.
- B. To explain why diseases spread so quickly in heavily populated areas.
- C. To explain why the city was easily invaded by outside forces.
- D. To present an example of why large cities often decline over time.

**9. Sentence Insertion – In paragraph 1 of the passage, there is a missing sentence. The paragraph is repeated below and shows four letters (A, B, C, and D) that indicate where the following sentence could be added.**

“In fact, artifacts and tools from Cahokia have been discovered in sites as far away as the shores of Lake Superior to the north, and Appalachia to the south.”

The ancient city of Cahokia was located at a site very close to modern St. Louis in the United States. At its apex from A.D. 1100 to 1200, Cahokia covered about 16 square kilometers and probably had a population that peaked at about 15,000, the largest in the surrounding region. **A** During this period the landscape of the city was dominated by the presence of a large number of public plazas separated by at least 120 man-made mounds, the largest of which was topped by a major temple. **B** Remains have also been found of an elaborate copper workshop that produced sophisticated metal goods traded with both nearby and distant settlements. Moreover, the city is noted for its significant economic and spiritual contacts with other settlements in the Mississippi area. **C** Although the inhabitants left no written records beyond symbols on pottery, shells, wood, and stone, the remains of the elaborately planned community reveal a complex society. **D**

A: A

B: B

C: C

D: D

**10. Summary – Directions: An introductory sentence for a brief summary of the passage is provided below. Complete the summary by selecting the THREE answer choices that express the most important ideas in the passage. Some sentences do not belong in the summary because they express ideas that are not presented in the passage or are minor ideas in the passage. This question is worth 2 points.**

**Cahokia was a large prosperous city in North America that reached its peak between about A.D. 1100 and 1200.**

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A: The large construction projects and signs of manufacturing and religious facilities that have been uncovered suggests that Cahokia was a complex and influential society.

B: Scholars in Cahokia may have used symbols recorded on pottery, shells, stones and other materials to record the city's history.

C: Several factors account for the growth of Cahokia, including its location on a trade route, religious significance and access to valuable chert.

D: As a result of pollution caused by its extremely dense population, Cahokia suffered frequent crop failures.

E: It is likely that all of the city's defensive structures were constructed merely for ceremonial reasons.

F: The reason for the decline of Cahokia is unknown, but it may be connected to environmental factors or military conflict.