

Great Zimbabwe

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Zimbabwe

•The word *zimbabwe* means stone buildings in the Bantu-based Shona language spoken in south-east Africa. The term *Great* was added to this particular set of ruins to distinguish it from the hundreds of other zimbabwes in the area.

•Great Zimbabwe was located in the heart of the country of Zimbabwe, in south-east Africa. The civilization flourished between the 12th & 15th centuries, and the ruins left behind are the largest found south of the Sahara.

•Although the civilization may have had as many as 18,000 inhabitants in 1400, it seems to have disappeared mysteriously. The Portuguese discovered only ruins when they stumbled upon Great Zimbabwe in the early 1500s.

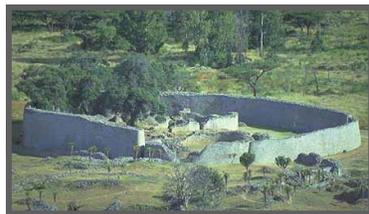


Ruins

•When the Portuguese found the ruins of Great Zimbabwe, they immediately believed that Egyptians or Phoenicians had created them.

•They noted that the enormous walls of the fortress known as the 'Great Enclosure' were created with interlocking stone, without cement. These walls were up to 32 feet high and 17 feet thick! It is speculated that this is where the king lived.

•These ruins covered an area of 193 acres and included conical towers and temples as well as living areas for the people.



Economy

•Great Zimbabwe was established on a plateau near the Zambezi river. The region around the Zambezi was rich in gold and copper, and the inhabitants of Great Zimbabwe controlled the flow of gold to the east coast.

•Although Great Zimbabwe was located far inland from the coast, it was active in the trade that flourished along the Swahili Coast. It was Zimbabwe that provided the gold that Arab and Asian merchants sought as part of Indian Ocean trade.

•The gold was floated down the Zambezi river to the coastal port of Sofala, and from there was transported to the major port of Kilwa for foreign products.

•Although Zimbabweans traded for these products, their contact with the coast was limited, and thus never felt the political or cultural effects of Islam. They preserved their own culture and traditions.

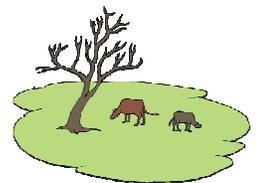
•Much like the west African state of Mali, Zimbabwe controlled long distance trade for its wealth, but depended on farming and cattle herding for daily survival.



Decline?

•Historians are not sure why Great Zimbabwe was abandoned. They speculate that the cattle may have overgrazed the grasslands, forcing the residents to relocate.

•There is also speculation that people depleted nearby forests of trees that they used for firewood. These two factors probably forced the decline of this civilization.



Global History
Great Zimbabwe

Name _____

1. What does Zimbabwe mean?

2. Why was great added to it?

3. Where was Great Zimbabwe located?

4. When did it flourish?

5. How big was the civilization?

6. What happened to it?

7. What was advantageous about being near the Zambezi river?

8. How was Great Zimbabwe active in Swahili coast trade?

9. How was Great Zimbabwe's contact with the coast limited?

10. What was the effect of their semi-isolation?

11. How was Great Zimbabwe like Mali?

12. What did the Portuguese note about the Great Enclosure?

13. Who did they think built it?

14. What do historians think may have caused the decline of Great Zimbabwe?