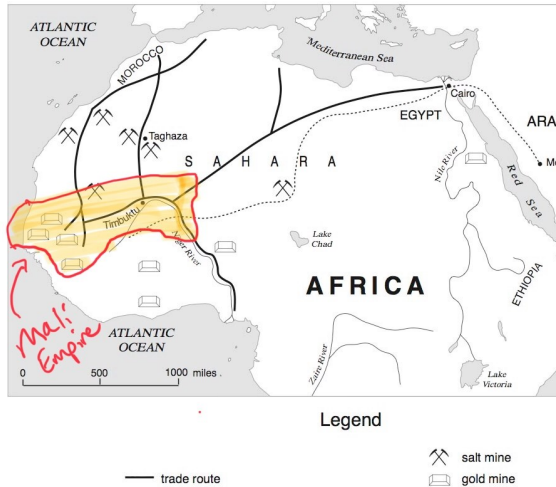


Mali

Several kingdoms benefited from the increased wealth that the trans-Saharan and Indian Ocean trades brought to Africa. In West Africa the kingdoms of **Ghana** (800s-1200s CE) and **Mali** (1200s-1400s CE) emerged. By the twelfth century, wars with neighboring societies had permanently weakened the Ghanaian state. In its place rose several new trading societies, the most powerful of which was **Mali**.



The government of Mali profited from the gold trade across the Sahara, connecting West and North Africa through trade. It also taxed nearly all other trade entering West Africa; and, therefore, became even more prosperous than Ghana had been. Most of Mali's residents were farmers, who cultivated sorghum and rice. However, the great cities of *Timbuktu* and *Gao* accumulated the most wealth and developed into centers of Islamic life in the region. Mali became instrumental in spreading Islam throughout West Africa. Timbuktu in particular became a world-renowned center of Islamic learning. By the 1500s, books created and sold in Timbuktu brought prices higher than most other goods.



Mali's founding ruler, Sundiata, became the subject of legend. His father had ruled over a small society in West Africa in what today is Guinea. When his father died, rival groups invaded, killing most of the royal family and capturing the throne. They did not bother to kill Sundiata because the young prince was crippled and was not considered a threat. In spite of his injury, he learned to fight and became so feared as a warrior that his enemies forced him into exile. His time in exile only strengthened him and his allies. In 1235, Sundiata, "the Lion Prince," returned to the kingdom of his birth, defeated his enemies, and reclaimed the throne for himself. Sundiata became an astute and capable ruler. Most scholars believe he was a Muslim and used his connections with others of his faith to establish trade relationships with North African and Arab merchants. Sundiata cultivated a thriving gold trade in Mali. Under his steady leadership, Mali's wealth grew tremendously.

Hausa Kingdoms

The Hausa city-states rose to prominence in northern Nigeria in around the 13th century. The prosperity of the region was based on agriculture, cultivation of cotton and indigo, and trade with other states in northern and western Africa. The Hausa were known for fishing, hunting, agriculture, salt-mining, and blacksmithing. The Hausa had a common language, laws, and customs. By the mid-14th century, rulers of the principal Hausa cities had built fortresses and established walled towns as the enduring centers of power in Hausaland. Those cities became part of the trans-Saharan trade and subsequently became wealthy. In addition, they became enmeshed in the slave trade. In the 14th century, Hausaland spread as far west as the major Sudanic kingdoms of Mali and the Songhai Empire and east to the kingdom of Bornu. Hausaland often fell under the dominance of those strong kingdoms in West Africa and was never a unified political entity.



Hausa traders came in contact with Muslim merchants from northern Africa as early as the 11th century. By the 14th century, the rulers in the Hausaland area adhered at least nominally to Islam. Leadership in the early Hausa states had been based on ancestry. Those who could trace their relations back to ancient times were considered royal. With the introduction of Islam, many Hausa rulers adopted this new religion while at the same time honoring traditional ways. This position allowed the elite to benefit from the advantages of both systems. Much of the traditional pagan ritualism persisted, however, especially among the commoner class, and it wasn't until the 1800s that a substantial portion of the Hausa had converted to Islam, although the majority still followed the traditional Hausa pantheistic religion.

Ethiopia



The Solomonic Dynasty of Ethiopia (or Solomonic Restoration) is a period of history in Ethiopia between **1270 to 1520 C.E.** It is so called because, in 1270, the Zagwe dynasty was overthrown by a king claiming lineage from Aksum and, hence, from King Solomon through his son with the Queen of Sheba: Menelik I. There had already been a long history of **Christianity in Ethiopia** dating to the ancient Kingdom of Aksum, 100-940 C.E.

Medieval Ethiopia was a largely rural civilization, in many respects not unlike that of medieval Europe, and covered an extensive area of the East African plateau which was at least nominally subject to the Emperors. Given Ethiopia's terrain and difficulty of communications, the early Solomonic monarchs could not construct a bureaucratic empire. Although the court periodically moved around the country to demonstrate the emperor's might, administrative flexibility and continuity could be provided only through the regional lords. As long as they kept their jurisdictions tranquil and tribute was delivered regularly, the fiefs could be passed from father to son, until their authority became hereditary right. Emperor Amda Sion came to power in 1314. He used his power and influence to consolidate the dynasty's rule over older Christian feudal areas. He conquered more territories in the south and awarded new fiefs to soldiers that fought under his command. He also encouraged the expansion of Ethiopian monasticism in order to spread Christianity.

During the Solomonic period of Ethiopian history, the state engaged in recurrent warfare on its southeastern front over religious and economic differences. The Christian highland and the Muslim coast were in constant fighting, often for the right to control trade routes. Islam was associated with Merchants and commerce; while Christianity remained loyal to the feudal system. But overall the dynasty maintained its indirect lordship until the 1520s.



Swahili Coast Cities



The arrival of Islam brought with it cultural changes. Apart from spreading the new faith, the presence of Islamic merchants on the Indian Ocean coast influenced the developing language of Swahili, a Bantu language melded with Arabic vocabulary.

The coastal towns that formed the core of the Swahili world at its peak in the period between 1000 and 1500 CE had their roots in smaller fishing and trading towns, some of which date back to the middle of the first millennium CE. Around 1000, the coast seems to have become more firmly embedded in Indian Ocean trade networks and culture. Especially in the Dar-al-Islam. The result was the Islamization of the coast and the expansion of the coastal villages into towns and cities.

Like many maritime trading cities, the cities of the Swahili coast were city-states. That is to say, there was no Swahili empire or any other overarching political structure on the coast. Each city was self-governing and controlled its own hinterland, but the political reach of the city leaders rarely extended far beyond the gates of the city. Occasionally one town would conquer another, but immediately the leaders of the conquered city would begin plotting a return to independence, and few defeated cities remained politically subordinated for long. The cities were usually ruled by kings, but

the powers of the kings seem to have been rather limited and in many instances were symbolic. Some towns would go for long periods of time without a king, suggesting that kingship was not central to government. Rather, the real power lay with elite merchants, who are usually described as *waungwana* in Swahili or as "patricians" in English. Parts of each city were reserved exclusively for patricians, and it was they who chose one of their number to be king. Many of these Swahili patricians had the leisure to participate in Islamic scholarship and because of their commercial contacts with Arab merchants they often intermarried with visiting or immigrant Arab families.

The growing wealth of the patrician merchants resulted in a major transformation of Swahili cities in the middle of the 14th century. The stone houses they built were large and were meant to demonstrate their creditworthiness to potential business partners. They included guest apartments where visiting merchants could live and storage areas where their guests could keep their trade goods. Inside the houses were carved plaster niches, called *zidaka*, where imported Chinese porcelain and other signs of wealth could be displayed. By 1500 C.E. the Swahili cities were thriving commercial centers.

Great Zimbabwe

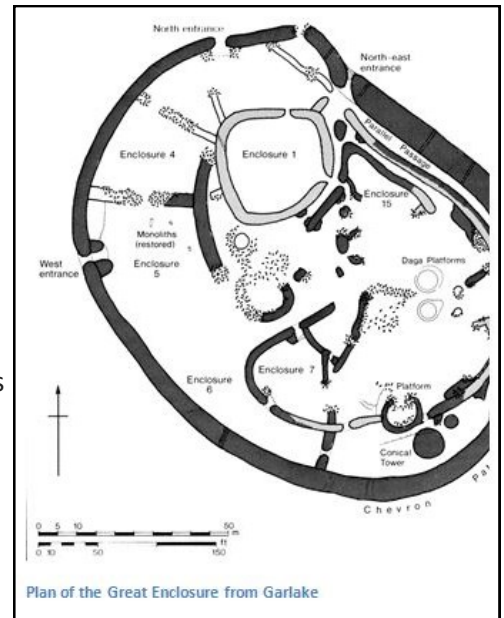


Zimbabwe was the most powerful of all the East African kingdoms between the **1300 and 1450 C.E.** It was situated between the Zambezi and Limpopo rivers in modern day Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Zimbabwe built its prosperity on a mixture of agriculture grazing, trade in ivory, and above all, gold. Zimbabwe had rich gold fields, and it traded with the East African coastal Swahili city states as well as with Persia, India, and China. Just as in Ghana and Mali, the kings taxed any gold that traveled through the land.

As in the Swahili cities, a testament to the kingdom's wealth can be seen through its architecture. Though most houses in the region had traditionally been constructed from wood, by the ninth century chiefs had begun to construct their “*zimbabwes*”, the Bantu word for “dwellings”, with stone. By the end of the thirteenth century, a massive wall of stone, 30 feet tall by 15 feet thick, surrounded the capital city, which became known as the **Great Zimbabwe**. The stone wall was the first large one on the continent to be built without mortar. Inside the wall, most of the royal city's buildings were made of stone. In the late fifteenth century, nearly 20,000 people resided within the Great Zimbabwe. Great Zimbabwe is believed to have served as a royal palace for the local monarch. As such, it would have been used as the seat of political power.

Great Zimbabwe was the first significant empire to emerge in South Africa. Great Zimbabwe was ruled by a hereditary monarchy of Shona elite who reached the peak of their power and influence in the mid-fifteenth century. Its ruler governed with the help of a court comprising family members along with military and religious advisors, while distant regions were ruled by governors appointed by the king. The great chiefs who ruled over this were known as *mambos*. The mambos of Great Zimbabwe appear to have held some power over provincial chiefs in their dominion by loans of cattle to communities located farther afield from the capital and that may have struggled to feed their populace. The mambos also demanded tribute, or the handover of a specified kind of commodity that, like taxes, came due on a seasonal basis.

Over time, overgrazing so damaged the environment surrounding Zimbabwe that residents of the bustling capital city abandoned it by the end of the 1400s. The wall still stands in the modern country of Zimbabwe.



The outer wall of Great Zimbabwe, which showed 'an architecture unparalleled elsewhere in Africa or beyond.