

Oren Cohen

Mr. Marinis

Global Studies 9

25 March 2025

Great Zimbabwe Culture

Throughout history, geography has defined the social, economic, and political aspects of societies around the world. The Great Zimbabwe culture emerged in southeastern Africa during the 11th century, sitting on a high plateau surrounded by hills (Cartwright, 2019; Great Zimbabwe, 2025). Its location played a large role in its economic advances, with fertile land, natural metals, and abundant crops being rooted in the area (Bialo, 2025). The people utilized the vast grasslands for farming and cattle herding, while nearby gold mines fueled foreign trade alongside their flourishing economy (Cartwright, 2019). Geography impacted Great Zimbabwe's economic growth, agricultural success, and architectural development (Great Zimbabwe 2025).

Great Zimbabwe's economic progress was heavily affected by its geography and surplus of gold in the region. Great Zimbabwe was located near rich gold mines, which played a key role in its economy. As a result, they traded gold along the Swahili Coast, expanding their access to valuable materials and goods (Cartwright, 2019). In addition, its close proximity to the major Arab port city, Sofala, resulted in their resources being even more widespread across trade routes (Bialo, 2025). Through the exchange of trade goods, Great Zimbabwe was able to flourish economically and establish itself as a dominant power in the region. However, in the 15th century, trade began to decline due to the exhaustion and overuse of gold by the Great Zimbabwe

people (Cartwright, 2019). The people maximized the use of their natural riches in order to expand their economy and invest in foreign trade. Ultimately, Great Zimbabwe advanced economically due to its geographical placement and the abundance of resources in the area.

The agricultural advancements of Great Zimbabwe Culture were largely influenced by the fertile land present in the region. As the society arose, they were highly dependent on crops and agriculture as a source of food and nutrition. They planted crops such as sorghum, millet, pumpkins, and watermelons all around the area (Cartwright, 2019). Due to the arable land available in the area, such crops were able to be planted and grown successfully. Additionally, Mark Cartwright states, “to a society which, from the 10th century, prospered from farming” (Cartwright 2019). This statement clearly reveals Great Zimbabwe’s agricultural success, and the fertility of the land they farmed. Not only did they engage in farming, but they did so efficiently and progressed over time. Overall, Great Zimbabwe’s agricultural prosperity stemmed from the rich and cultivable grasslands in the area.

The Great Zimbabwe people skillfully used their natural resources to enhance their architecture. Their use of surrounding materials such as granite, mud, and rock helped them build durable and long-lasting structures. For instance, the Hill Complex, Great Enclosure, and Valley ruins feature “daga structures”, which are mud-brick buildings that have survived for centuries. The Hill Complex’s walls, made from natural granite boulders and blocks, are 6 meters thick and 11 meters high (Great Zimbabwe, 2025). These achievements exhibit the people’s architectural expertise and impressive ability to utilize natural resources. They frequently interacted with their environment and used simple materials to build complex and advanced structures. In conclusion, the Great Zimbabwe Culture used raw materials found in their surroundings to achieve architectural success and build stable structures.

Geography significantly influenced the economic prosperity, agricultural success, and architectural accomplishments of the Great Zimbabwe culture. The region's rich gold deposits boosted trade, enabling the exchange of resources across Africa. Fertile and arable land supported agricultural growth, whilst the use of mud-brick and granite allowed for the construction of strong and enduring buildings. In conclusion, Great Zimbabwe's geography played a large role in shaping the civilization's achievements and its everlasting legacy.

Works Cited

Bialo, Ellen. "Great Zimbabwe." *World History: Ancient and Medieval Eras*, ABC-CLIO, 2025, ancienthistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/2249689. Accessed 24 Mar. 2025.

Cartwright, Mark. "Great Zimbabwe." *World History Encyclopedia*, World History Encyclopedia, 14 Mar. 2019, www.worldhistory.org/Great_Zimbabwe. Accessed 24 Mar. 2025.

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Great Zimbabwe." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 6 Mar. 2025, www.britannica.com/place/Great-Zimbabwe. Accessed 24 Mar. 2025.