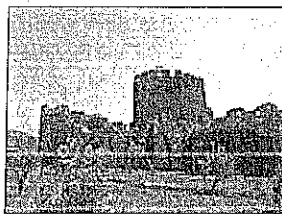


The Byzantine Influence: Religion, Culture, and Alphabet (Overview)

When the nations of Serbia, Montenegro, and the Russian Federation emerged from Soviet rule in the 1990s, they all chose for their coat of arms an eagle with two heads facing to the right and left. While the citizens of those Slavic nations probably knew that the image was the ancient symbol of the Russian czars, many of them might not have realized that the czars took the symbol from an older tradition: the emperors of the Byzantine Empire. From late antiquity until the early modern period, the two-headed eagle was often used to represent the city of Constantinople (modern Istanbul), which was ideally located to look west to Europe and east to Asia. After the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in the mid-15th century, Russian grand prince Ivan III adopted that image to show that Russia was the inheritor of Byzantium's traditional role as the dominant cultural, religious, and political force between the east and the west. Russia's cultural debt to the Byzantines goes much further than just the coat of arms—the Eastern Orthodox religion, the Cyrillic alphabet, and Russian culture and architecture were all borrowed from or heavily influenced by the Byzantines. Even the title "czar" is derived from the old Roman and Byzantine title "Caesar."

Byzantium: The Legacy of Greece and Rome

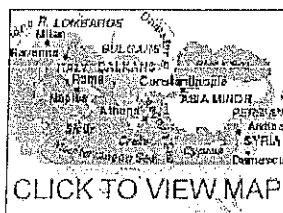
In AD 330, the Roman emperor Constantine I made the old Greek settlement of Byzantium into the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire. The city, soon renamed Constantinople, continued to thrive while the Western Roman Empire weakened and fell to waves of barbarian invaders. The cultures of the Latin-speaking west and the Greek-speaking east soon diverged. Christianity, which had become the dominant religion in the empire during the reign of Constantine, evolved along somewhat different lines in the east and the west. Although they were both officially part of the same church, the pope in Rome and the patriarch in Constantinople vied for secular power and influence over issues of church doctrine.



Between 330 and 1204, the Byzantine Empire was the dominant cultural and political force in the eastern Mediterranean. Constantinople's strong navy and strategic location on the Bosphorus gave it control over shipping in the Black Sea and the Aegean Sea, as well as control over trade between Asia Minor and Europe. The city's imposing Theodosian walls made it impregnable to attack for nearly nine centuries. Culturally, the city was the heir to the artistic, scholarly, and religious traditions of both Greek and Roman culture. Visitors to the city were stunned by the majesty of the church of Hagia Sophia and by the extraordinary artistry of the Byzantine mosaics and icons.

The Slavs and Byzantines Come into Contact

The first significant contact between the Byzantines and the Slavs began around the fifth century AD, when nomadic invaders from Central Asia pushed the Slavic tribes out of their homeland in central Europe. While the eastern Slavs moved into the territory that now makes up Russia, Belorussia, and Ukraine, the southern Slavs traveled south into Byzantine territory in the Balkans. The Slavs took over Byzantine towns and farmland, and their descendants now inhabit the nations of Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, and Bulgaria. Bulgaria was named after a Turkic tribe known as the Bulgars, who invaded the Balkans after the Slavs but were soon assimilated into the Slavic population.



Living side-by-side, it was inevitable that the southern Slavs would be influenced by Byzantine culture. Once it was

clear that the Slavs were in the Balkan lands for good, the Byzantine emperors began to open diplomatic and trade negotiations with them. The Slavs traded agricultural products and raw materials for such refined Byzantine products as silk, glass, or jewelry. The Slavs were also impressed by the culture and architecture of Byzantine society. Slavic merchants, envoys, and travelers returned to their homes with tales of the wonders of Constantinople.

Many Byzantines were eager to convert the pagan Slavs to Christianity, both to save their souls and to make them more docile neighbors. Many Slav leaders were interested in Christianity because they saw it as the faith of a more advanced culture and because they knew that conversion to Christianity would improve their standing with the Byzantines on matters of trade and diplomacy.

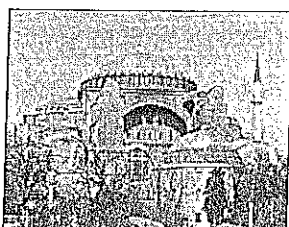
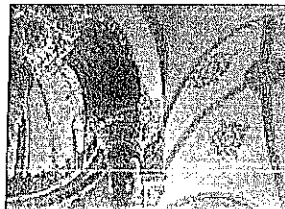


Perhaps the most significant event in the conversion of the Slavs to Orthodox Christianity occurred in the ninth century with the missionary work of two brothers, Saint Cyril and Saint Methodius. Cyril provided the first alphabet to write down the Old Slavonic language, and his brother Methodius used the Cyrillic alphabet to begin a translation of the Christian Bible into Old Slavonic. The brothers and their followers conducted very successful missions in the south Slavic countries of Great Moravia, Panñonia, and Bulgaria. Some of the Slav converts in the Balkans later began their own missionary expeditions into the lands occupied by Slavic populations to the north.

By the late 10th century, in part because of the work of Cyril and Methodius' followers, the Eastern Orthodox Church was becoming increasingly influential in the areas of northeastern Europe inhabited by the eastern Slavs. The people of Kievan Rus, the eastern Slav state that would later provide the nucleus for the state of Russia, had had contact with Byzantine traders along the northern coasts of the Black Sea, although they were perhaps as interested in raiding Byzantine settlements as trading with them. In 988, Prince Vladimir I of Kievan Rus converted to Orthodox Christianity and soon led a mass conversion of his subjects. Within decades, Christianity had replaced paganism as the dominant belief system among the eastern Slavs.

A Cultural Legacy

The adoption of Orthodox Christianity had a number of important cultural consequences. In architecture, churches in Slavic countries adopted such Byzantine architectural elements as domes and a layout based on the Greek cross (in which all arms are of equal length), as opposed to the Gothic style that was arising at the time in Western Europe. Byzantine influence affected the design of such secular buildings as palaces as well. In art, the Slavs adopted the tradition of the Greek icon—a sacred image, either in mosaic, fresco, or painting, which served as a medium for the veneration of saints. That highly symbolic artistic tradition, which derived in part from classical Greek and Roman artistic traditions, influenced Russian art for centuries. Slavic literature was also heavily influenced in its early years by the Byzantine legacy. The Slavic writing system was developed by Byzantine monks, and many of the first texts written down in the Glagolitic and Cyrillic alphabets came from the Byzantine theological and literary traditions, like the works of Saint John Chrysostom and the medieval epic *Digenes Akritas*. Much of the transcribing of those works was done by Orthodox monks in Serbia, Bulgaria, and Kievan Rus, who ordered their monasteries according to the guidelines set down by the Byzantine monk Theodore Studites.



Physical reminders of the influence of the Byzantines still stand in Slavic countries. Hagia Sophia, the magnificent centerpiece of old Constantinople, inspired visitors from Bulgaria and Kievan Rus to recreate the majestic church in their own cities. There are spectacular 11th-century cathedrals of Saint Sophia in both Kiev in Ukraine and Novgorod in Russia, and the capital of modern Bulgaria derives its name—Sofia—from its ancient church of Saint Sophia. The name "Sophia" comes from the Greek word for "wisdom"; Hagia Sophia is Greek for "Holy Wisdom." The term blends the dual traditions of Christianity and Greek philosophy that defined

Byzantine society, and it is a fitting reminder of the legacy of that complex culture.

1. Do you think the fact that Russia and many other Slavic countries adopted the Orthodox form of Christianity practiced in Constantinople, as opposed to the Catholicism practiced in Rome, affected their later relationships with Western Europe?
2. Russia, Serbia, and other Eastern European countries have in the past adopted the old Byzantine symbol of the two-headed eagle for their coat of arms. What could the two-headed eagle have represented to each of those political entities?
3. How important is a written language for spreading cultural ideas? Do you think Orthodox Christianity would have spread among the Slavic people if Saint Methodius and Saint Cyril had not provided a translation of the Bible in a Slavic language?

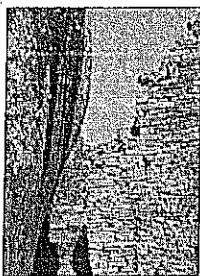
Great Zimbabwe (Overview)

About 250 miles inland from the southeastern coast of Africa lies Great Zimbabwe, the most impressive set of stone ruins in southern Africa.

During its period of greatest prosperity, probably in the 14th century AD, Great Zimbabwe was the capital of a trading empire. Living on grasslands near gold mines, the people likely raised herds of cattle and exchanged gold with both African and non-African peoples. The city was located nearly due west of Sofala, a major port for Arab traders, and there is archaeological evidence that Great Zimbabwe's inhabitants traded for goods from as far away as China.

The Ruins

The Great Zimbabwe ruins consist of two large structures, called by archaeologists the Hill Complex and the Great Enclosure, together with several smaller structures. The Hill Complex is situated at the top of a ridge at the north end of the valley. It is a large walled structure, constructed without mortar, built over and around boulders. Unlike most ancient large stone structures elsewhere in the world, the walls at Great Zimbabwe are built of stones small enough for a single man to carry. The width of the walls helps them maintain their stability despite that comparatively small block size.



Within the Hill Complex are large enclosures to the west and east and several smaller enclosures. It seems likely that the Hill Complex housed the king and his court. The eastern enclosure of the complex appears to have been a center for rituals and ceremonies. Early archaeologists found six birds, carved out of soapstone, at the top of approximately three-foot-tall soapstone columns in that area, along with other apparently ceremonial items. The Hill Complex also includes a cave that has an interesting property: if you talk loudly inside it, you can be heard clearly from the other set of ruins across the valley, almost half a mile to the south.

The Great Enclosure lies across the valley from the Hill Complex and is the most visually impressive of the Great Zimbabwe buildings. It consists of a massive mortarless wall, 17 feet thick and 36 feet high at its largest, that encloses an elliptical area. Within the wall are a roughly circular enclosure, which was built before the outer wall, and also an earlier half wall. A narrow passage runs between the newer outer wall and the older wall for about one-third of the perimeter. There is also a solid tower at one end, approximately the same height as the outer wall. Several smaller walls subdivide the area within the enclosure.

Archaeologists have determined that none of the stone walls, impressive as they are, ever supported roofs or formed parts of dwellings. Instead, houses were built out of *daga*, a type of building clay that was used for floors and walls, with thatched roofs and wooden supports. Some of the lower walls were apparently built outward from the huts, perhaps to mark off additional space associated with each hut. Because those huts were made of more temporary materials, they have long since collapsed—leaving only a layer of clay on the ground. As a result, some of the smaller valley ruins feature sets of small, unconnected walls that did not appear to serve any purpose until archaeologists reconstructed the original hut locations.



When Was It Built?

Great Zimbabwe was not the first stone structure of its type constructed in the region. Beginning sometime in the 11th century AD and continuing until the middle of the 13th century, there was an important trading center at Mapungubwe (about 200 miles south of Great Zimbabwe) that was probably also a political center. The Mapungubwe structures possessed some similarities to those at Great Zimbabwe in their style of stonework and in the location of important structures at the tops of hills.



Sometime during the late 12th or early 13th century, the center of trade apparently moved north to Great Zimbabwe. At that time, construction began on the Hill Complex building and on the circular enclosure on the site of what would become the Great Enclosure. At some point significantly later, the Great Enclosure itself was built, together with some of the smaller valley ruins and additions to the Hill Complex. A third period saw the construction of additional inner partitions in the Hill Complex and the Great Enclosure, together with more of the valley ruins. (Archaeologists disagree significantly on the dating of the second and third

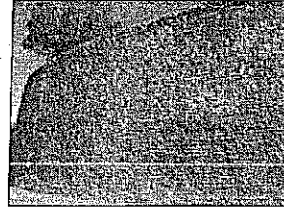
construction periods.)

Archaeologists estimate that the city at Great Zimbabwe was at its height sometime around the early or mid-14th century. From the extent of the housing remains at the site, it seems likely that it supported a population of as many as 18,000 people at that time. By the end of the 15th century, however, the important trading center had again moved north, to the Zambezi River region. It may be that Great Zimbabwe was still a viable city at that time, but it was not an important contact for the Portuguese traders in the region.

Still a Matter of Debate

When Europeans first saw the ruins of Great Zimbabwe, they thought they had found the legendary palace of the queen of Sheba or a site built by the Phoenicians. Careful archaeological studies, however, showed that even at the oldest levels, most of the artifacts were pottery and tools of African manufacture, which implied that the builders of the ruins were African. Furthermore, by analyzing how the walls fit together, archaeologists determined that the architectural work had improved (rather than deteriorated) over time, which is consistent with the normal trend of native builders becoming more proficient over the years.

The question of which African people built the ruins remains unclear to this day. Most archaeologists favor the theory that the Shona people (related to the Karanga who now inhabit the district) were the builders. At the time of the discovery of Great Zimbabwe, the Karanga people defended the ruins as holy places, yet they did not live in them nor claim to have built them.



Scholars continue to study the archaeological evidence around Great Zimbabwe and to hypothesize about a variety of issues, including precisely who built it; how important ceremonial and religious aspects were in creating the site; what the purpose of the Great Enclosure was; and what the main sources of wealth and power were for Great Zimbabwe.

Great Zimbabwe: Discussion

1. What do you think are some of the things that make it difficult for archaeologists to determine who built Great Zimbabwe and what they used it for?
2. Why was it important for Gertrude Caton-Thompson to choose an excavation site that was previously untouched?
3. To what extent do you think the evolution of archaeologists' theories about Great Zimbabwe might reflect, or be affected by, European history in Africa and European attitudes toward native Africans?

Ghana and Mali: Trans-Saharan Trading Empires (Overview)

Measuring at least 800 miles from north to south and about 3,000 miles from west to east, the Sahara Desert stretches across most of northern Africa. Crossing it is an arduous task, but for several hundred years, it was the site of a set of flourishing trade routes controlled by rich empires.

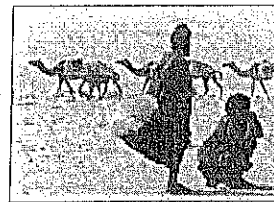


The traders who crossed the desert were known as Berbers. They consisted of several groups of nomads who traveled across the Sahara in camel caravans. There were several different camel routes, and each had planned stops at specific oases—places with permanent access to water, generally with a settlement nearby. The Berber tribes controlled (by force of arms) the oases on particular routes, as well as key territories both to the north and to the south of the desert. One important route included the salt mine at Taghaza, in the middle of the Sahara. At that mine, salt blocks were quarried from the ground in 200-pound blocks and transported, two per camel, to the African nations to the south. Salt was such an important import in the region south of the Sahara that some sources said it was exchanged for an equal weight of gold.

Just to the south of the Sahara were cities where the Berber caravans from the north met the routes of Sudanese traders from the south. There, salt, horses, copper, and dates from the north were exchanged for gold, ivory, kola nuts, and slaves from the rain forests and other regions to the south. Over time, those rich cities became richer and more powerful, and they gained control of larger territories to form empires. Those trading empires patrolled the trading routes in their territory to keep them safe from bandits and robbers. The source of their wealth came from tariffs levied on goods traded in their cities and from their monopoly of much of the gold trade.

Medieval Ghana

Ghana was located at the western end of Africa, just south of the Sahara in modern Mali and Mauritania (medieval Ghana did not actually include any of the modern nation of Ghana). It controlled the most important trading cities at the time. While the first historical reference dates from about AD 800, it is unknown when the medieval kingdom of Ghana was first established. It is certain that by 1000, Ghana was a wealthy and powerful empire.



Ghana's main item for trading was gold. The area near Ghana included many rich gold mines. (Historians are uncertain whether the gold mines were within Ghana or if Ghana simply controlled the trade routes that led from the mines.) The Soninke kings of Ghana strictly controlled the sale of gold: any gold nuggets transported through or mined in Ghana became the property of the king. The miners and merchants directly traded only gold dust.

Beginning in about 1054, the Almoravids, a group of Muslim Berbers, conquered many of Ghana's key trading cities, including the capital itself. The Berber coalition did not remain united, and Ghana regained independence within several years. However, Ghana was left weakened, both militarily and economically. Several vassal states took advantage of Ghana's weak position to try to gain independence, and a struggle for power resulted. The volume of trade in Ghana's principal cities declined. Furthermore, the central area surrounding the capital had been so damaged by overgrazing by the invaders that it was no longer capable of producing crops to support the cities.

Medieval Mali

In about AD 1203, the Susu, who had been part of Ghana's empire, captured Ghana's central territory and became the dominant power. They followed by invading the territory of the Malinke, south of Ghana. About 30 years after the Susu conquest of Ghana, the southern Malinke, led by their legendary general and king Sundiata, repelled the Susu and invaded their territories. Ultimately, they conquered the Susu and established the empire of Mali from their capital at Niani.



The new empire of Mali, employing the trade practices of Ghana on a somewhat larger scale, became a rich and powerful state. After Sundiata, the *mansas*, or emperors, continued to expand Mali's territory. During the reign of Mansa Musa in the early 14th century, Mali reached its greatest extent. It included all the territory that had been ruled by Ghana, plus additional holdings, and reached from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the cities of Timbuktu and Gao in the east.

Neither Ghana nor Mali had written languages during those periods. However, Arab historians kept contemporary written records of Mali during Musa's reign. According to those chronicles, in 1324, the Muslim Musa went on a religious pilgrimage to Mecca. The trip was also intended to establish diplomatic relations with the rulers of North Africa and the kingdoms of the Near East. Musa brought so much gold with him that, on his arrival in Egypt, the price of gold in Cairo dropped significantly for years.

Most of Mali's kings were Muslim, with Muslim scribes and officials in their courts, and most went on pilgrimages to Mecca if they lived long enough. The majority of the common people, however, kept their pagan beliefs and traditional ceremonies, and the *mansas* continued the traditional observances and rituals as well as their Islamic duties.

A great empire, Mali lasted more than 200 years, but it was plagued by problems of succession. The rules of succession were not well established, and several times there were disputes and even civil wars led by princes competing for the throne. During periods of weakness, provinces took the opportunity to rebel and become independent. During the 15th century, a nomadic group from the southern Sahara conquered the strategic trade city of Timbuktu, and the eastern territory of Gao gained power and conquered a large section of the empire. Mali remained a country for several more decades, but it was no longer the rich empire it had once been.



Ghana and Mali: Trans-Saharan Trading Empires: Discussion

1. What traits attributed to Sundiata in the oral histories indicate his "kingliness"?
2. To what extent do you think oral histories can be considered reliable sources?
3. What are some of the reasons that rich and powerful states, like Ghana and Mali, decline?