

THE BRITISH MUSEUM



The wealth of Africa Great Zimbabwe

Presentation

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www.britishmuseum.org



What can we learn about Great Zimbabwe?

Front cover image: Female figure made of soapstone, Great Zimbabwe,
possibly a modern reproduction, British Museum.

WHAT WAS GREAT ZIMBABWE?



Source 1: Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) banknote, 1955
British Museum

WHAT WAS GREAT ZIMBABWE?



What might this be?

Source 1: Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) banknote, 1955
British Museum

WHAT WAS GREAT ZIMBABWE?

What does the fact that it appears on a banknote tell you about its importance?

What might this be?

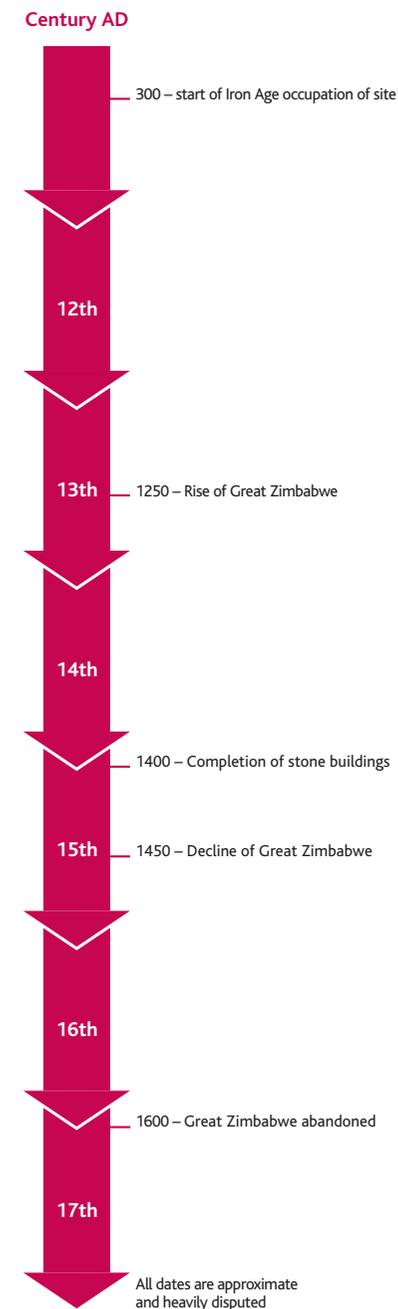
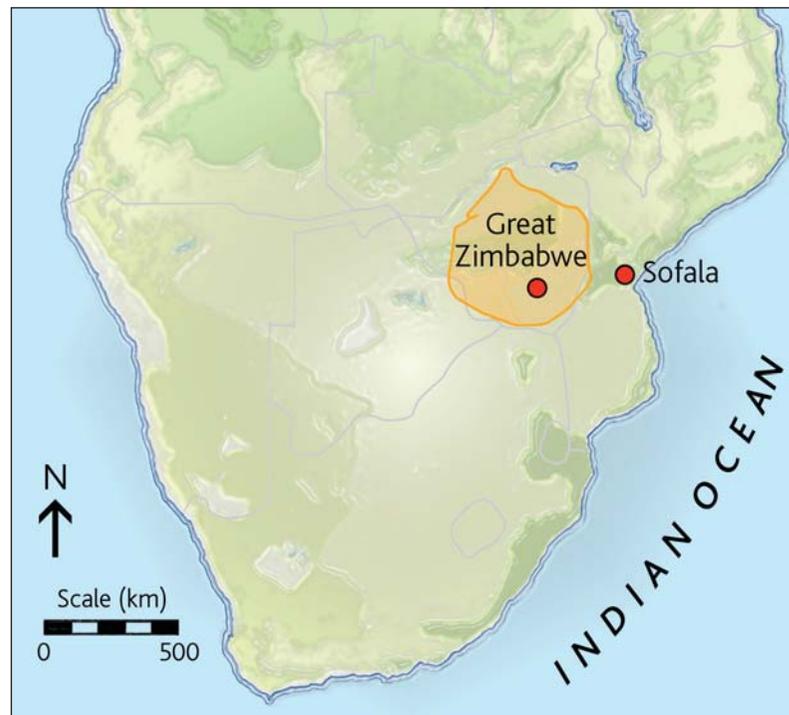


Source 1: Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) banknote, 1955
British Museum

WHERE IS GREAT ZIMBABWE?

(For information about Sofala, see the section on Kilwa and the Swahili Coast)

Why might Sofala be so important to Great Zimbabwe?



THE RUINS OF GREAT ZIMBABWE



Source 2: Great Zimbabwe ruins
© Richard Pluck

THE RUINS OF GREAT ZIMBABWE

Great enclosure



Source 2: Great Zimbabwe ruins
© Richard Pluck

THE RUINS OF GREAT ZIMBABWE

Who might have built them?

Great enclosure



Source 2: Great Zimbabwe ruins
© Richard Pluck

THE RUINS OF GREAT ZIMBABWE

Who might have built them?

Why might they have been built?

Great enclosure



Source 2: Great Zimbabwe ruins
© Richard Pluck

THE RUINS OF GREAT ZIMBABWE

Who might have built them?

Why might they have been built?

What could they tell us?

Great enclosure



Source 2: Great Zimbabwe ruins
© Richard Pluck

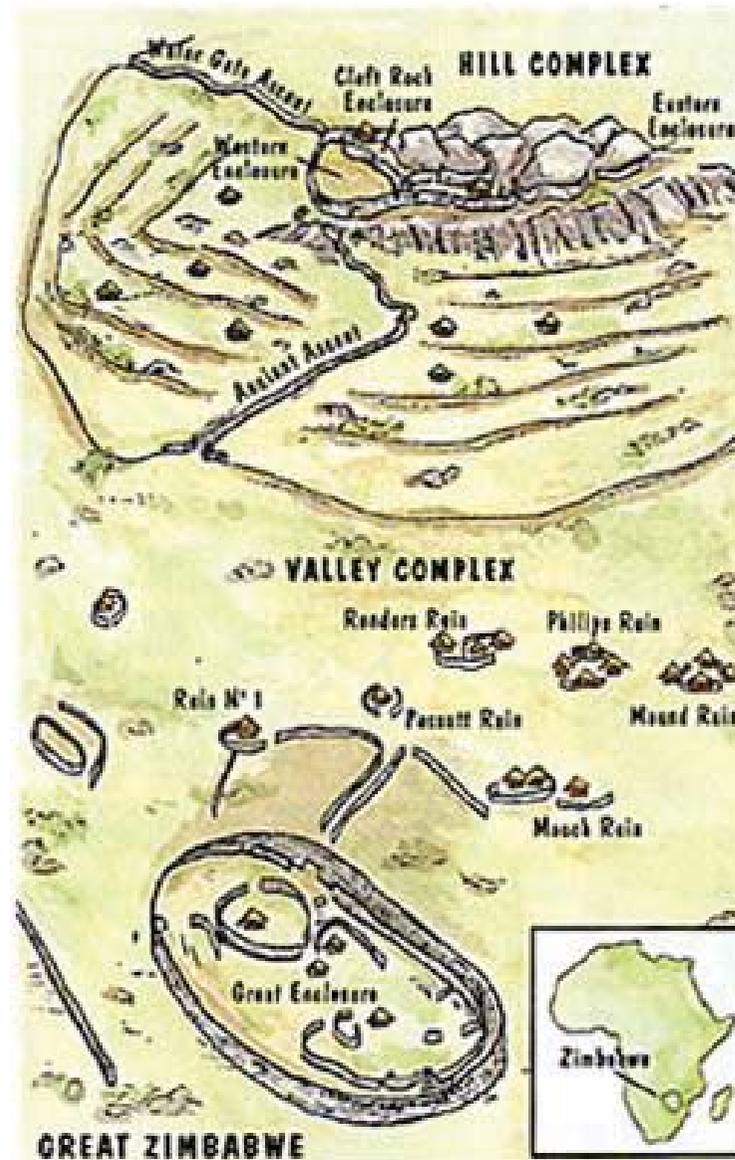
HOW IMPRESSIVE WAS GREAT ZIMBABWE?

Source 3

The Great Enclosure is the largest single ancient structure in sub-Saharan Africa. Its outer wall is some 250 metres in circumference, with a maximum height of 11 metres. It is estimated that the central ruins and surrounding valley supported a population of 10,000 to 20,000.

Encyclopaedia Britannica 2010

How impressive was Great Zimbabwe in terms of size?



Source 6: Plan of the site
© Lynda D'Amico

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Encyclopaedia Britannica 2010

How impressive was Great Zimbabwe in terms of size?

Source 4

Great Zimbabwe was large enough to be called a town, or even a city, but this was urban living at its most basic and unhealthy. The huts were so close together that their eaves (roofs) nearly touched.

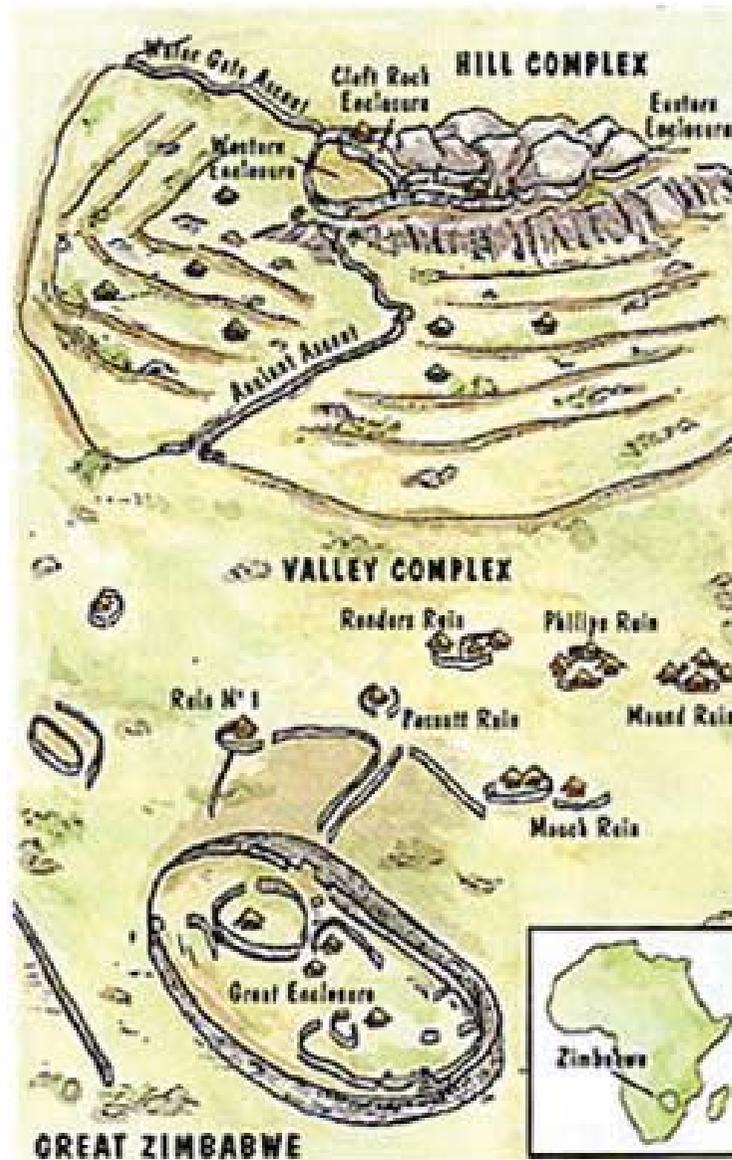
Reader 1997: 314

Source 5

The effect of having so many people on a single site may easily be imagined. A great deal of the valley must have been trampled bare. The noise must have been tremendous. In certain weather conditions the smoke from hundreds if not thousands of cooking fires would have created conditions approaching that of smog.

Beach 1980: 46

What would it have been like to live in?

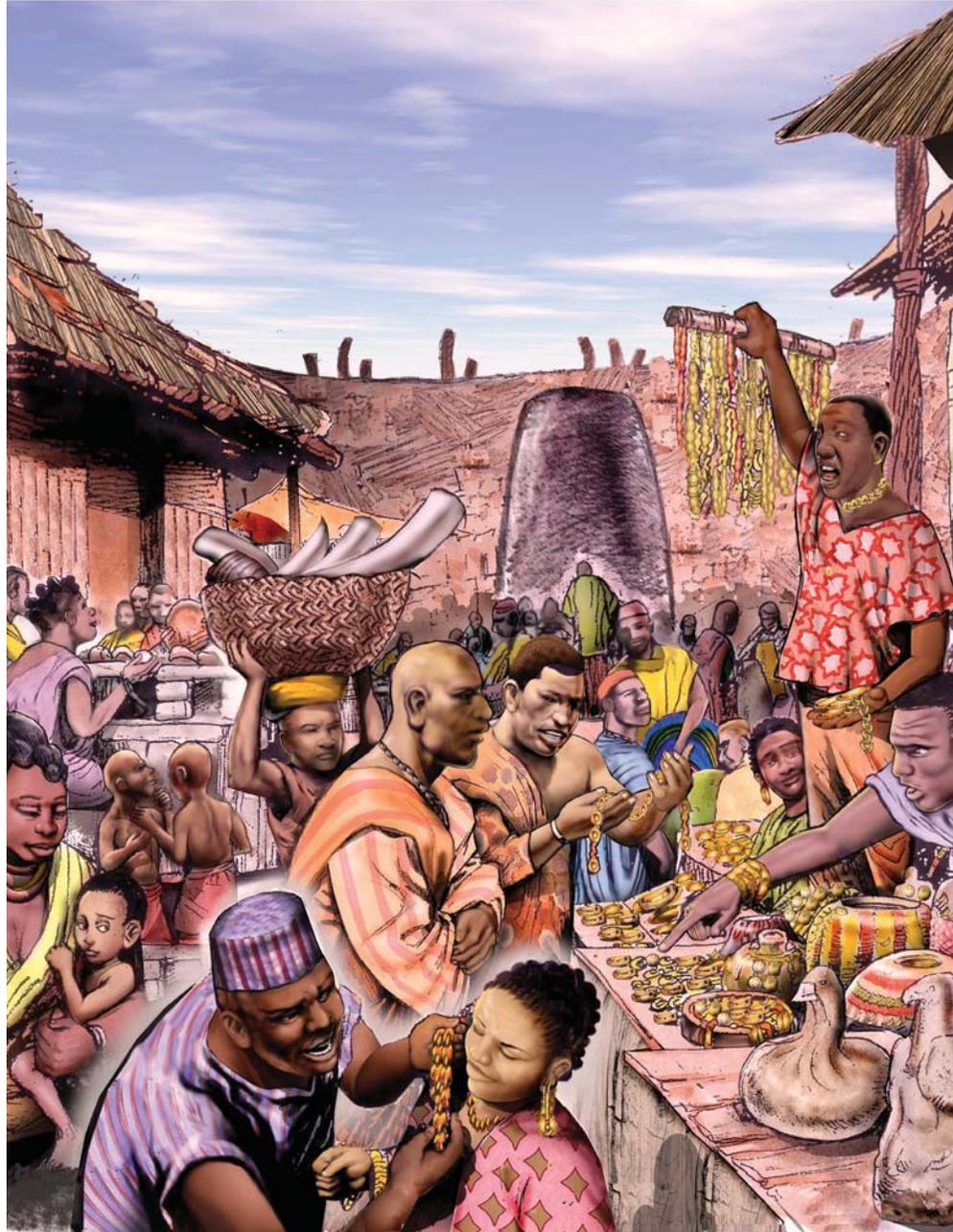


Source 6: Plan of the site
© Lynda D'Amico

WHAT WAS LIFE LIKE IN GREAT ZIMBABWE?

Some of these traders have come from the Swahili Coast of eastern Africa..

Which items would they be buying?



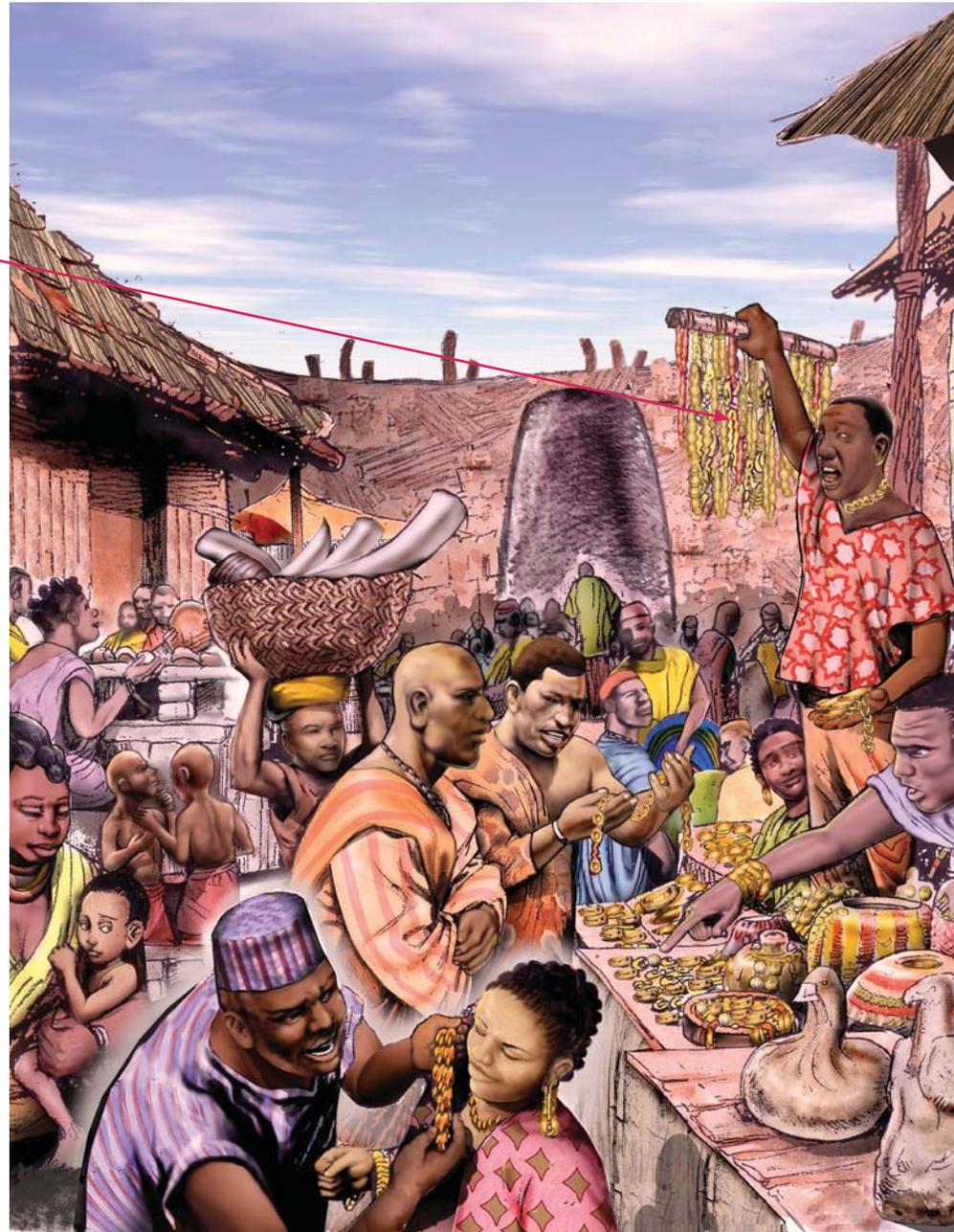
Source 7:
Illustration by Tayo Fatunla

WHAT WAS LIFE LIKE IN GREAT ZIMBABWE?

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Which items would they be buying?

Beads



Source 7:
Illustration by Tayo Fatunla

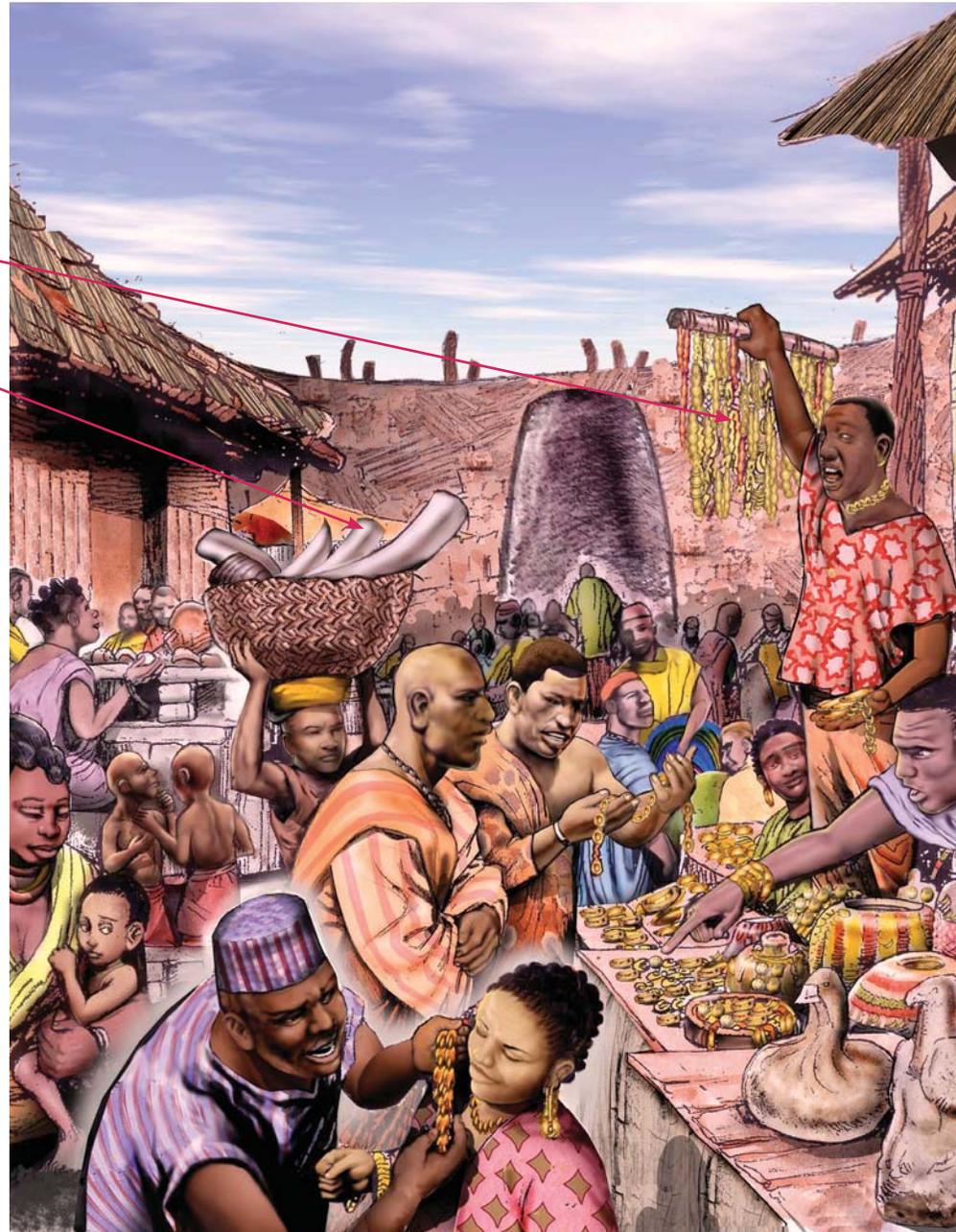
WHAT WAS LIFE LIKE IN GREAT ZIMBABWE?

Some of these traders have come from the Swahili Coast of eastern Africa..

Which items would they be buying?

Beads

Ivory



Source 7:
Illustration by Tayo Fatunla

WHAT WAS LIFE LIKE IN GREAT ZIMBABWE?

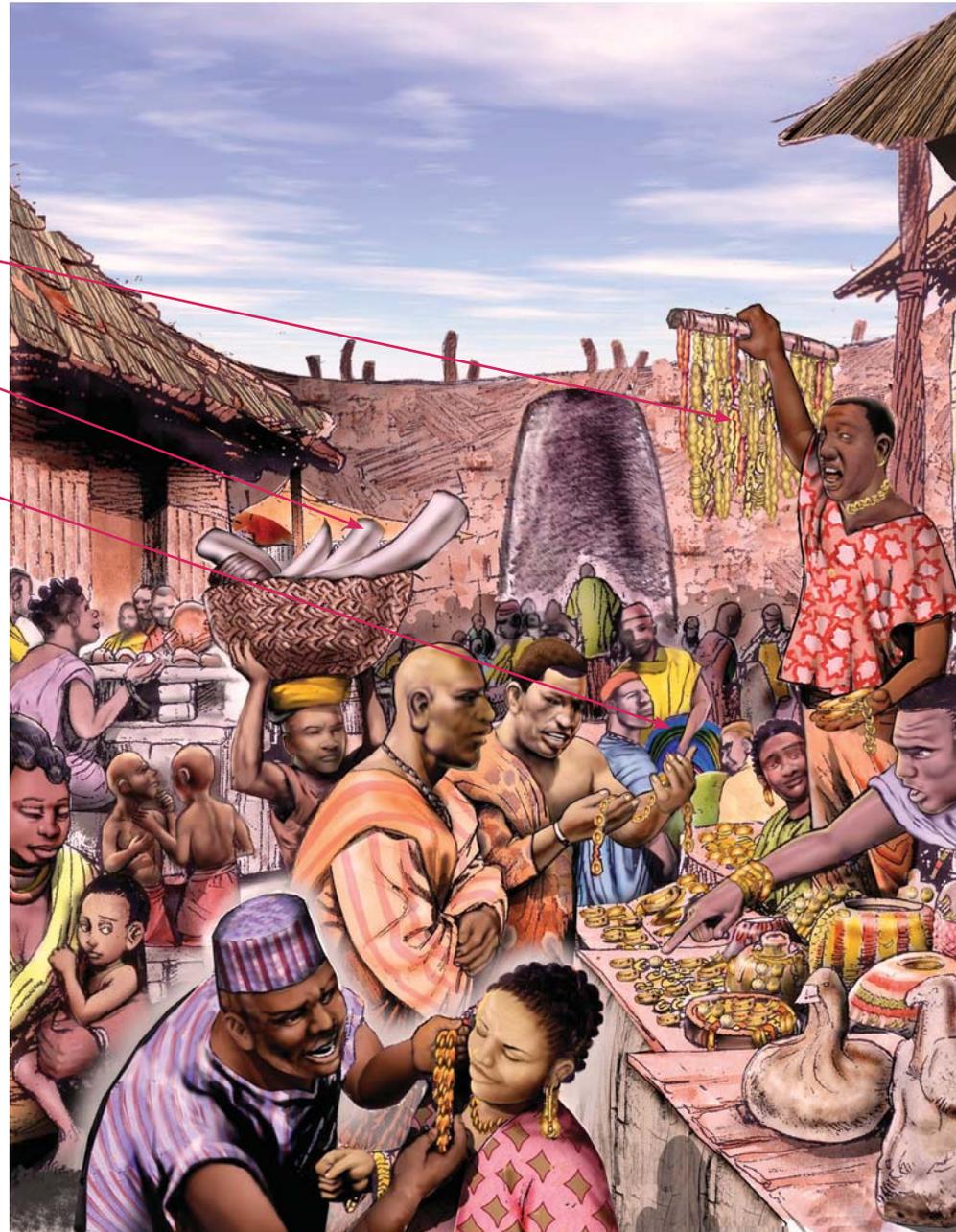
Some of these traders have come from the Swahili Coast of eastern Africa..

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Beads

Ivory

Cloth



Source 7:
Illustration by Tayo Fatunla

WHAT WAS LIFE LIKE IN GREAT ZIMBABWE?

Some of these traders have come from the Swahili Coast of eastern Africa..

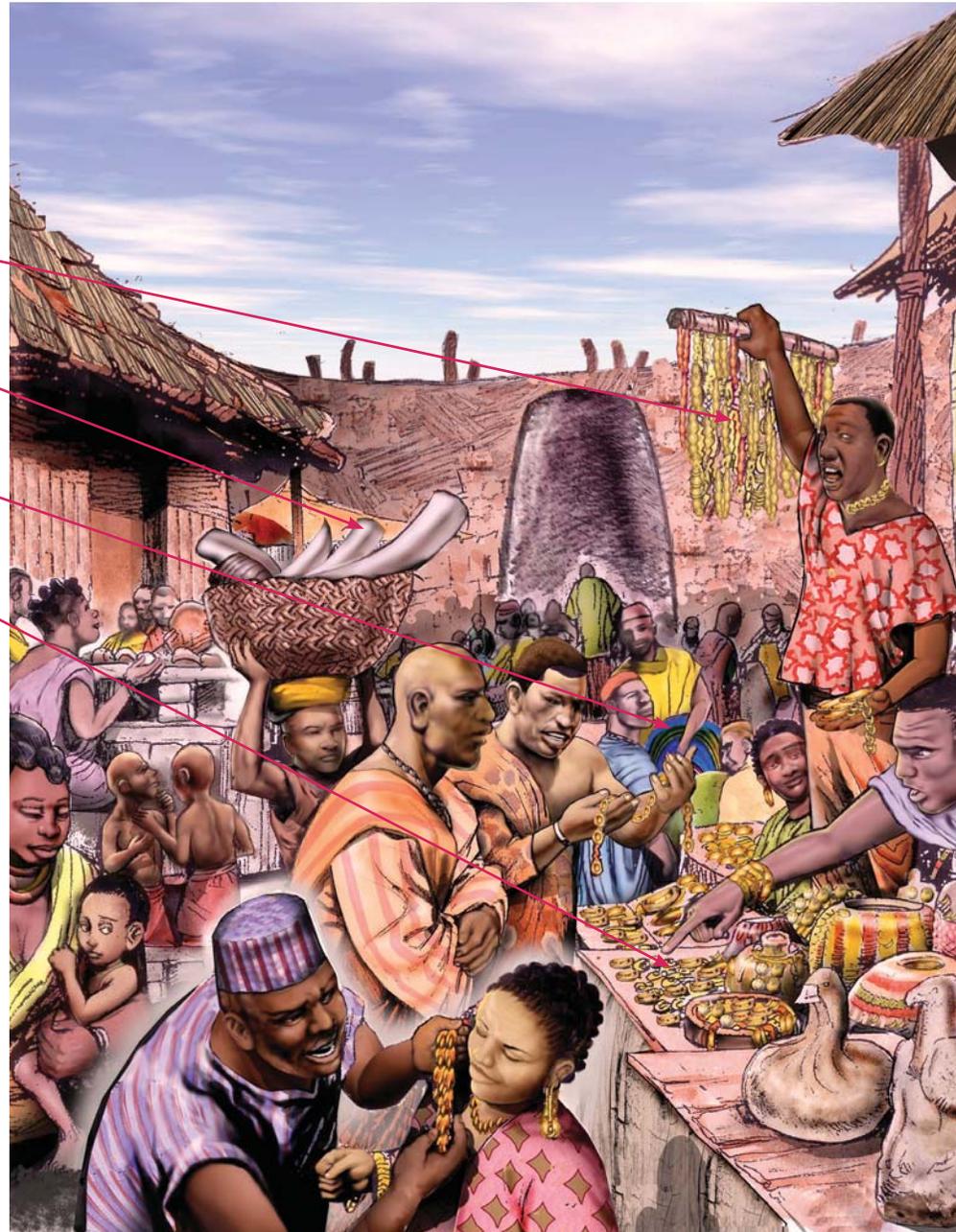
Which items would they be buying?

Beads

Ivory

Cloth

Gold



Source 7:
Illustration by Tayo Fatunla

HOW WAS SOCIETY ORGANISED AT GREAT ZIMBABWE?

Source 8

Shona rulers had many wives. Oral traditions say that the wives at Great Zimbabwe lived below the hill.

Huffman 1981: 135

Source 9

Cattle were more than food – they also served as a form of wealth and a sign of status. The bones from the best cuts of meat have only been found within the larger, stone enclosures. It appears that the ordinary folk did not eat the best cattle but rather turned them over to the elites – the powerful and privileged classes.

Hall and Steffoff 2006: 27–28

Source 10

Walls were used to enclose or screen the huts of the rulers from the gaze of ordinary people, and these social differences were echoed in the pottery styles in that a special class of pottery was developed for the rulers to keep liquids in – almost certainly beer.

Beach 1980: 42

Source 11

There were other signs of their wealth. There were relatively few huts within the buildings so that the rulers had far more living space than the ordinary people, and an astonishing variety of imported goods... Including the finest silks and embroidered materials.

Beach 1980: 43

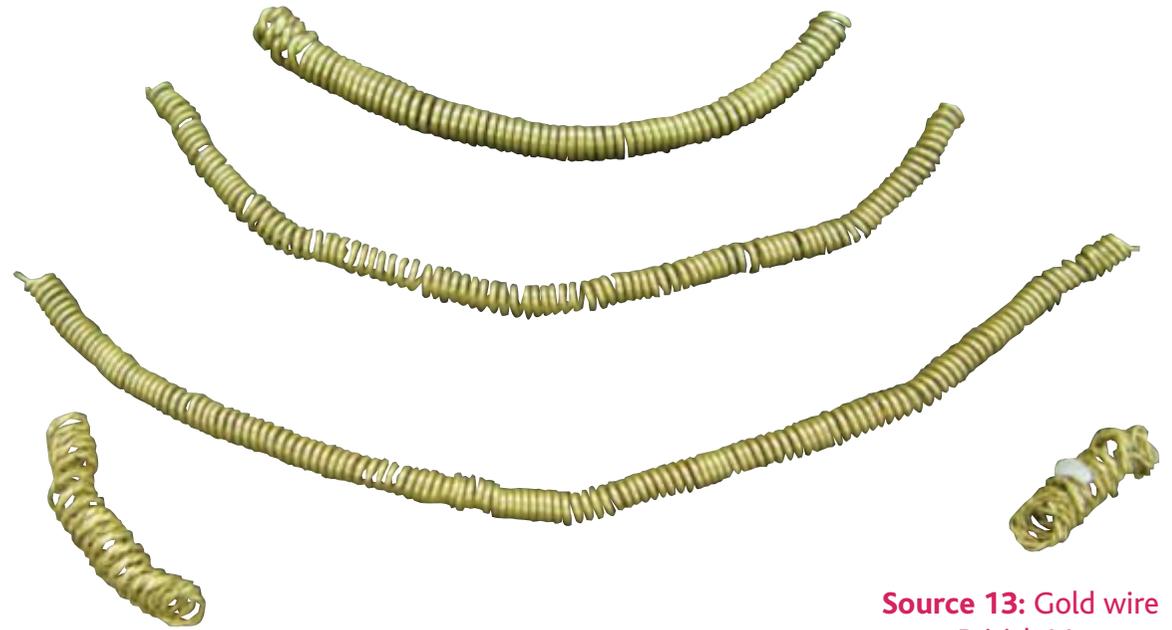


How could you tell a powerful from an ordinary person at Great Zimbabwe?

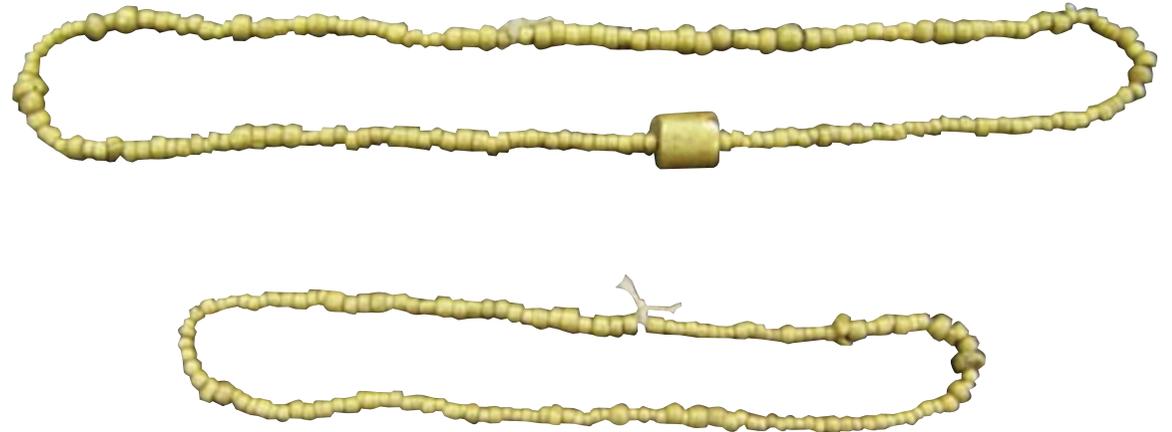
Source 12: Great Zimbabwe ruins
© Richard Pluck

HOW DID GREAT ZIMBABWE BECOME WEALTHY?

Do these items, found at the site,
give you a clue?



Source 13: Gold wire
British Museum



Source 14: Gold beads
British Museum

HOW DID GREAT ZIMBABWE BECOME WEALTHY?

Historians cannot agree on why this site should have been so much larger than the other stone towns (*zimbabwes*) in the region. Here are some of their views.

Source 15

Zimbabwe possesses the most extensive ancient gold-workings known to the world. It is most probable that Great Zimbabwe was the chief metropolitan centre of the ancient miners.

Hall 1905: 295

Source 16

Great Zimbabwe was very probably always a major religious centre. Traditions about the founders of the Shona nation emphasise their religious role and also seem to place Great Zimbabwe in a central position at the time this new society was growing to power.

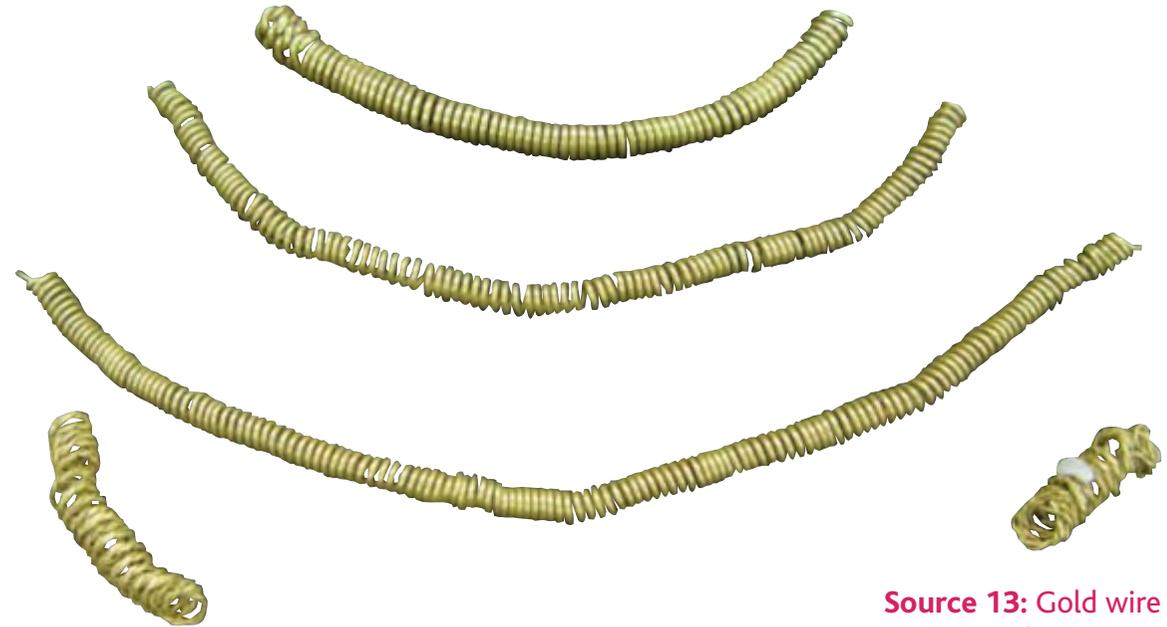
Garlake 1973: 184

Source 17

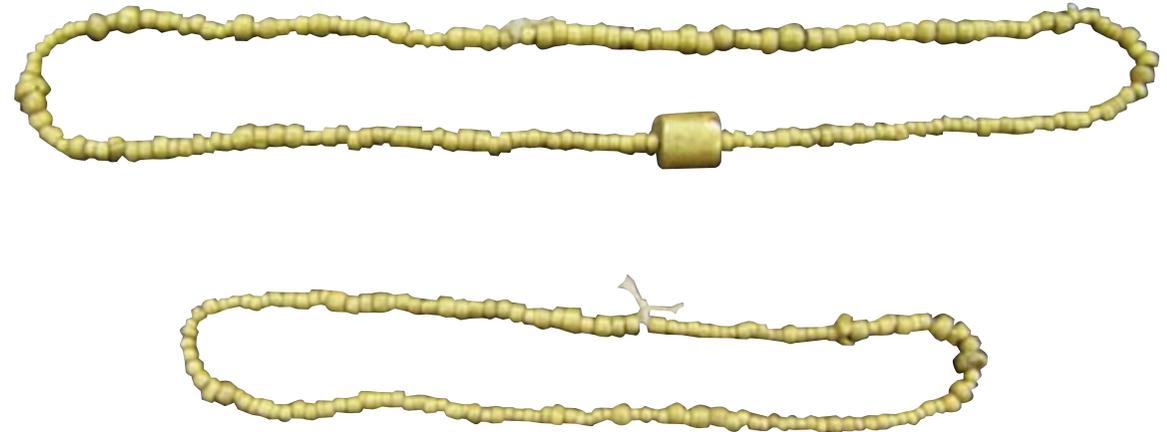
For the rulers of Zimbabwe to have gained enough power either to control the gold trade or to control gold production elsewhere, they must already have developed their wealth by other means; and in the Shona economy the only other means was that of cattle herding.

Beach 1980: 37

What different reasons are given for how Great Zimbabwe became wealthy?



Source 13: Gold wire
British Museum



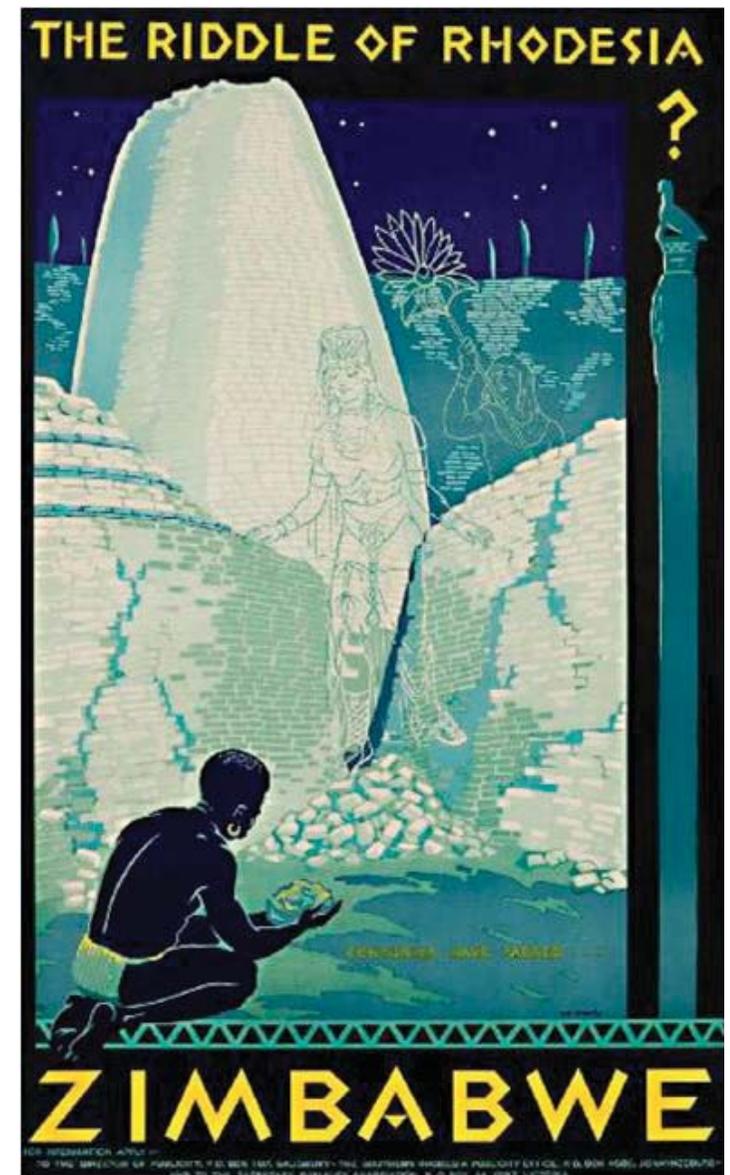
Source 14: Gold beads
British Museum

Which reason(s) do you think are most likely?

Why do historians disagree on this matter?

WHO BUILT GREAT ZIMBABWE?

From 1895 to 1980, the country where the ruins of Great Zimbabwe are to be found was ruled by white people, and was called Rhodesia (it is now called Zimbabwe). These people denied that Africans could have built Great Zimbabwe.



Source 18: Rhodesian poster, 1938
(the woman standing in the centre of the image is the Queen of Sheba)
© Poster Team

WHO BUILT GREAT ZIMBABWE?

From 1895 to 1980, the country where the ruins of Great Zimbabwe are to be found was ruled by white people, and was called Rhodesia (it is now called Zimbabwe). These people denied that Africans could have built Great Zimbabwe.

Source 19

I do not think that I am far wrong if I suppose that the ruin on the hill is a copy of Solomon's Temple and the building in the plain a copy of the palace where the Queen of Sheba lived during her visit to Solomon.

An archaeologist writing in 1871, quoted in Ampim 2004

Source 20

In 1905, British archaeologist David Randall-Maclver became the first European researcher of the site to assert that the dwellings were 'unquestionably African in every detail.'

Ampim 2004

Source 22

In recent years, most Africans have not only claimed the ruins as the product of an indigenous African society but have taken pride in them as a reminder of past glories.

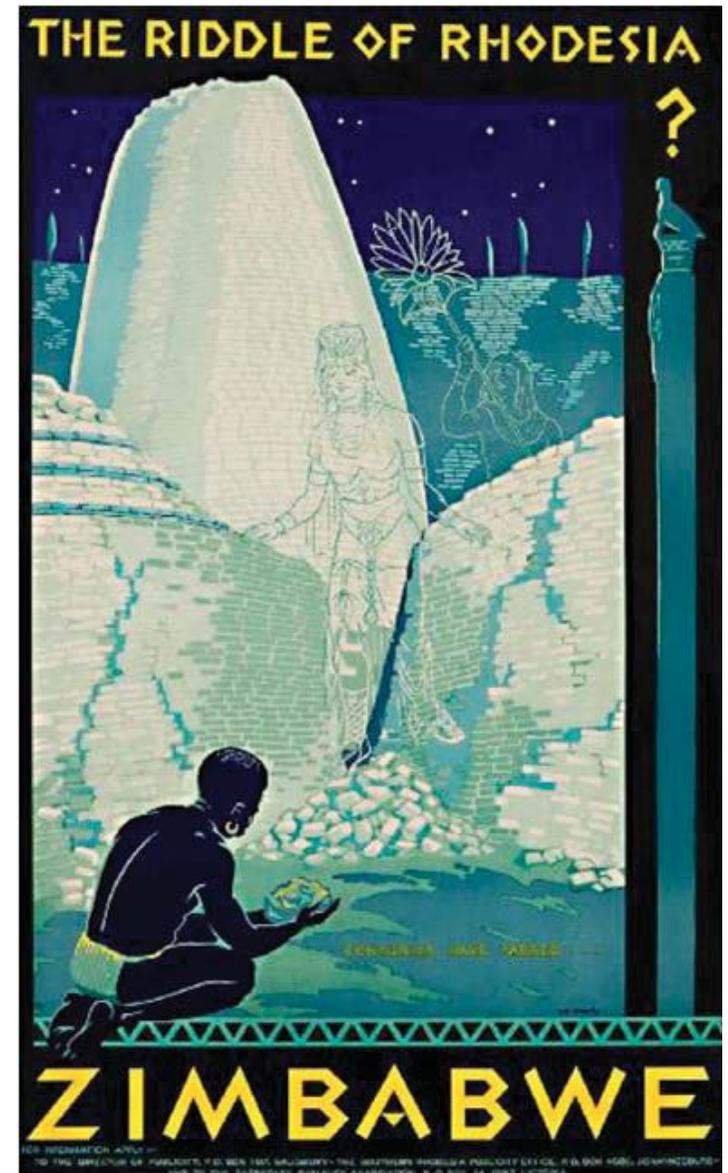
Garlake 1973: 12

Which sources say that Africans built Great Zimbabwe?

Why did white people say that Africans couldn't have built it?



Source 21: 1 cent coin
British Museum



Source 18: Rhodesian poster, 1938
(the woman standing in the centre of the image is the Queen of Sheba)
© Poster Team

HOW DOES MODERN ZIMBABWE REMEMBER ITS PAST?



Source 23: Zimbabwe ten trillion dollar banknote, 2008
British Museum

HOW DOES MODERN ZIMBABWE REMEMBER ITS PAST?

Name of country
(from
Great Zimbabwe)



Source 23: Zimbabwe ten trillion dollar banknote, 2008
British Museum



HOW DOES MODERN ZIMBABWE REMEMBER ITS PAST?

Name of country
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Soapstone bird,
Great Zimbabwe



Source 23: Zimbabwe ten trillion dollar banknote, 2008
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HOW DOES MODERN ZIMBABWE REMEMBER ITS PAST?

Name of country
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Soapstone bird,
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Conical tower from
Great Enclosure,
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Source 23: Zimbabwe ten trillion dollar banknote, 2008
British Museum

HOW DOES MODERN ZIMBABWE REMEMBER ITS PAST?

Why might this banknote have so many of these symbols?

Name of country
(from
Great Zimbabwe)

Soapstone bird,
Great Zimbabwe

Conical tower from
Great Enclosure,
Great Zimbabwe



Source 23: Zimbabwe ten trillion dollar banknote, 2008
British Museum

THE RUINS OF GREAT ZIMBABWE

How many of these questions have you been able to answer?

Who might have built them?

Why might they have been built?

What could they tell us?



Source 2: Great Zimbabwe ruins
© Richard Pluck

Your feedback

Please help the British Museum improve its educational resources for schools and teachers by giving your feedback. The first 250 teachers or tutors to complete the online survey before 12.00 on 1 September 2011 will receive a printed set of illustrations of African civilisations by artist Tayo Fatunla. Visit www.surveymonkey.com/s/wealthofafrica to complete the survey and for terms and conditions.

Find out more

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The Museum's collection of over 200,000 African objects includes material from ancient to contemporary cultures. Highlights on display throughout the Museum include a magnificent brass head of a Yoruba ruler from Ife in Nigeria, vibrant textiles from across the continent, and the Throne of Weapons – a sculpture made out of guns.

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Ancient Civilizations websites

These award-winning British Museum websites have been specially designed for students in Years 5 and 6. Each site is supported by information and guidance for teachers. www.ancientcivilizations.co.uk

The CarAf Centre

These resources have been produced by the British Museum in collaboration with The CarAf Centre, a community educational support centre and registered charity based in the London Borough of Camden. For more information, visit www.thecarafcentre.org.uk

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