

# Design and Social Influence of the Great Zimbabwe Ruins

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## Abstract

Various theories have been advanced on the history of the Great Zimbabwe ruins and its associated impacts to the locals. Such theories also pertain to the identity of the people who built the Great Zimbabwe National Monument (GZNM). This paper studies about the design and assesses the extent to which the Great Zimbabwe ruins have contributed to the social/sustainable development of present-day Zimbabwe. The study attempts to investigate the history of the ruins, cultures and customs of the Shona people of Zimbabwe and what is critically important to underscore is the value of the site to society. Previous studies on Great Zimbabwe ruins and the Shona people of Zimbabwe are unarguably in abundance. However, not much research has been conducted on the nature of the site, its landscape and the people who built it as well as an exploration of the life and customs of the Shona people of Zimbabwe. In this sense, the existence of the ancient landscapes always raises the desire for a temporal comparative analysis where the historical, cultural and economic influence of landscape architecture in Zimbabwe is thoroughly examined. By conducting research on how the Great Zimbabwe is illustrated by academic research, qualitative and quantitative analysis, qualitative research employed in this study includes site visits, questionnaires and personal interviews, quantitative as there is statistical data as how the number of tourists visiting the Great Zimbabwe has declined rapidly over the years. With the findings this study reveals that the architectural design has affected sustainable development of local communities living in its vicinity in social and cultural terms.

## Keywords

Landscape Architecture, Great Zimbabwe Ruins, Architectural Features, Social Influence, Modern Impact

## 1. Introduction

The Great Zimbabwe ruins represent a remarkable architectural and cultural legacy that has captivated scholars and tourists alike. Located in the modern-day country of Zimbabwe, just 20 km outside central business district of the modern city of Masvingo, these ancient stone structures stand as a testament to the ingenuity and sophistication of the Shona civilization that thrived in the region between the 11th and 15th centuries CE (Phillipson, 2005).

Spanning over 200 acres, the Great Zimbabwe ruins are the largest collection of ancient stone ruins in sub-Saharan Africa, boasting more than 150 major stone structures (Chirikure et al., 2018). The site's strategic location and wealth from the trade of gold and ivory allowed the Shona people who inhabited it to become a major force in the region (Beach, 1994; Pikirayi, 2001).

Also, the architectural marvels found at Great Zimbabwe, such as the iconic Great Enclosure and the Hill Complex, are a testament to the advanced civilization that once thrived in this region (Oliver, 1994).

Over 150 major stone structures are scattered across the site, as shown in the site plan (Figure 1). The ruins are constructed from a variety of stones like granite and dolerite, examples of which are depicted (Figure 2).

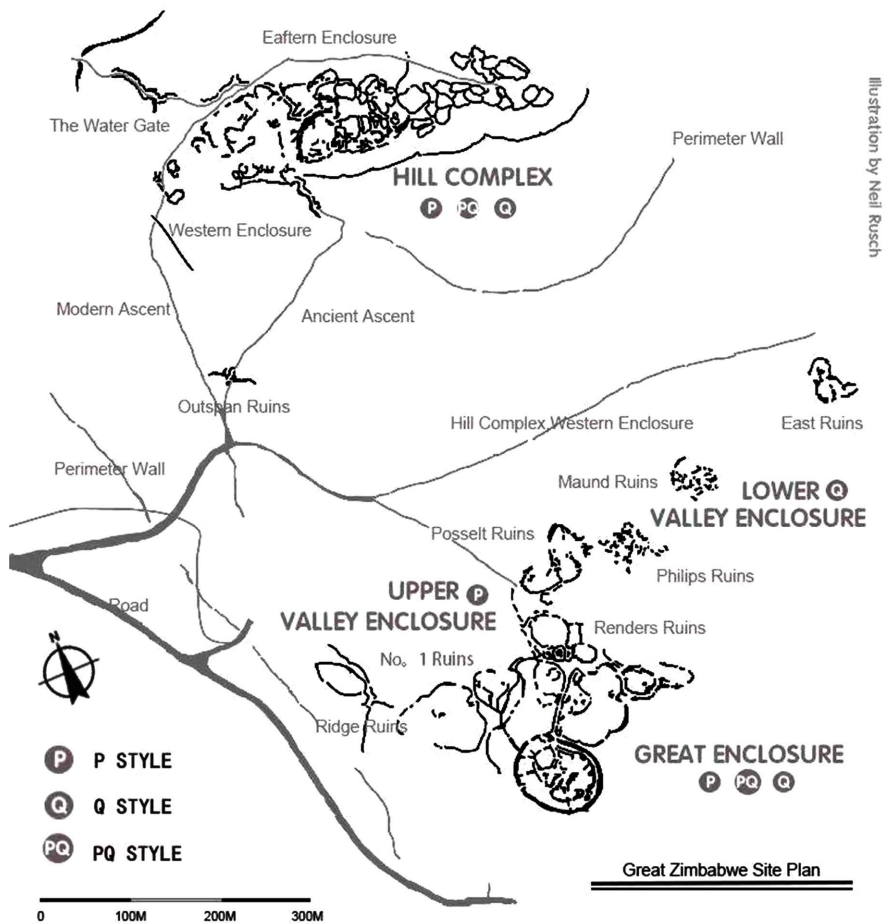


Figure 1. Great Zimbabwe site plan. Source: Google: the heritage of Zimbabwe.



**Figure 2.** The great enclosure.

The colonial legacy, as elucidated by [Bauer and Taylor \(2005\)](#), has linked Zimbabwe more closely with southern Africa than with its central African neighbours. This intricate interplay of geography, history, and politics underscores the complexity of Zimbabwe's position in the African continent, highlighting the multifaceted nature of its identity.

These monumental ruins provide evidence of a highly organized state with a complex economy and hierarchical society that existed between the 11th and 15th centuries CE. The site's strategic location and wealth from the trade of gold and ivory allowed the Shona people who inhabited it to become a major force in the region.

The significance of the Great Zimbabwe ruins extends far beyond their historical and architectural importance. These ancient structures have become deeply woven into the fabric of Zimbabwe's socio-economic, religious, cultural, and political life ([Ndoro, 2005a](#)).

The site, designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1986, is renowned for its imposing stone structures, intricate design elements, and the profound social and economic influence it exerted in the past. However, the assessment of Zimbabwe's positional influence has often been hindered by a lack of robust supporting evidence, as highlighted by recent scholarly discussions. Furthermore, there is a need to move beyond a purely descriptive approach and delve deeper into the rationale behind the site's design and its multifaceted impact on the region's social, political, and cultural landscape.

To address these gaps, this study aims to delve into the architectural design and social implications of the Great Zimbabwe ruins, exploring their profound impact on the development and identity of the Zimbabwean nation. By combining several methods, including site visits, questionnaires, and personal interviews, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the site's legacy and its role in

shaping contemporary Zimbabwean society.

The ruins cover an area of nearly 1800 acres and consist of three main architectural groups—the Hill Complex, the Valley Complex, and the Great Enclosure. The most famous is the elliptical Great Enclosure, whose drystone walls made without mortar reach over 35 feet high and 15 feet wide in places. Within the enclosure are unique conical towers, which some archaeologists believe had religious significance. The Hill Complex features a series of layered terraces and enclosures on a rocky hilltop stronghold.

The construction methods and stone masonry at Great Zimbabwe are truly remarkable feats of engineering and architectural design. Builders employed techniques like polygonal picturesque masonry, in which different coloured granite rocks were combined decoratively. The complex also utilized walls sculpted into chevron and herringbone patterns, indicating highly skilled labour forces under the control of a wealthy elite class. Exploring the ruins provides insights into the advanced civilization that thrived there. The Great Enclosure, a stunning architectural marvel located just across the valley but in close proximity to the hill complex at Great Zimbabwe, stands as one of the most impressive and substantial structures within the monument (Lee, 1996). Its outer wall, a true testament to the skill and ambition of its builders, is an awe-inspiring 11 meters in height at its tallest point and extends for an astonishing length of approximately 252 meters. This colossal wall makes it the largest single prehistoric structure in sub-Saharan Africa, a fact that underscores its historical and cultural significance (Hall, 1995).

The Great Enclosure at Great Zimbabwe is not merely a physical structure; it is a testament to the ingenuity, craftsmanship, and ambitions of its builders. Its colossal size and intricate features make it a remarkable archaeological and cultural treasure; shedding light on the complex history and architectural achievements of the Shona civilization in southern Africa (Matenga, 2011). **Figure 3** portrays the Great enclosure which is one of the fundamental features at Great Zimbabwe ruins. The Great Zimbabwe wall is illustrated on **Figure 4**. Another important feature at Great Zimbabwe is the conical tower. It is found within the Great enclosure and it remains a mystery as to its purpose as shown in **Figures 5-7**.



**Figure 3.** Great enclosure. Source: BBC.



**Figure 4.** Great Zimbabwe wall. Source: World history encyclopaedia.

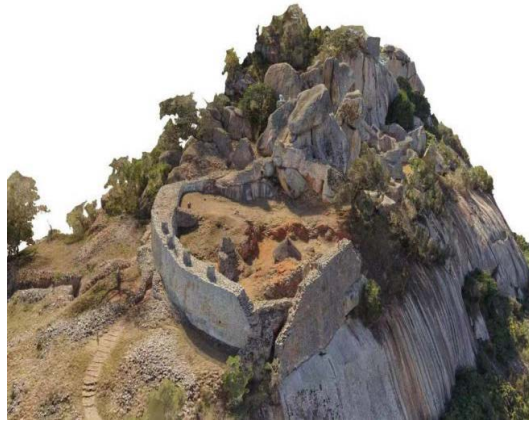


**Figure 5.** The conical tower. Source: The guardian.

### 1) *The Hill Complex*



**Figure 6.** P-style stone wall on granite boulder foundation. Source: PBS learning media.



**Figure 7.** Great Zimbabwe hill site. Source: Zimbabwe Field Guide.

### **2) *The Valley ruins***

Within the expansive Great Zimbabwe archaeological site, there are several noteworthy features and structures that contribute to its cultural and historical significance. These elements offer valuable insights into the continuity of Zimbabwean heritage, reflecting the spirit of enterprise and the evolution of societal practices from ancient times to the present.

In essence, the Great Zimbabwe site, with its Museum and the valley ruins, offers a multifaceted exploration of Zimbabwe's cultural heritage. The Zimbabwe bird, housed in the Museum, stands as a symbol of continuity and national pride, bridging the past and the present. The valley ruins, with their unique architectural elements and interconnected enclosures, provide a glimpse into the complex social dynamics and organization of the ancient inhabitants of Great Zimbabwe (Walker, 1995). Together, these elements contribute to the broader narrative of Zimbabwe's history and cultural identity, inviting visitors to delve into the rich and multifaceted heritage of the nation.

### **3) *The peripheral settlement***

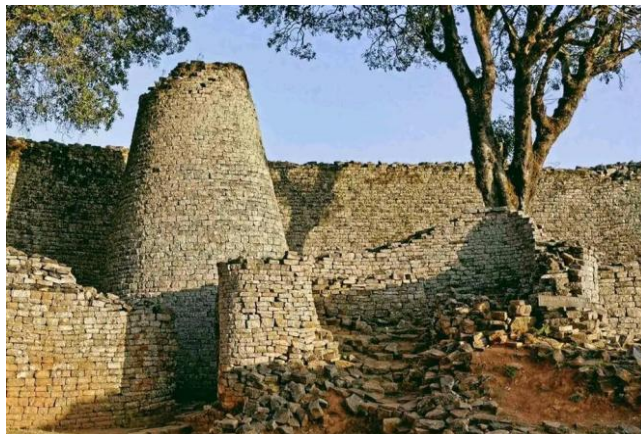
The Great Zimbabwe archaeological site, while encompassing a vast expanse of historical significance, primarily focuses its concentration of stone-built structures within three key areas: the hill complex, the Great Enclosure, and the valley ruins. These areas, despite representing only a fraction of the total monument's area, hold immense importance in understanding the ancient civilization and its architectural achievements.

Great Zimbabwe is not confined to its iconic stone walls and central structures alone; it is a multifaceted historical site that extends into peripheral regions with their own unique archaeological treasures. These peripheral areas offer valuable insights into the daily lives of the ancient inhabitants and the broader architectural landscape. To truly comprehend the significance of Great Zimbabwe, a holistic approach that considers both the core and peripheral elements of the site is essential, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of this remarkable testament to African history and culture. Aerial view of the Great Zimbabwe apartment is

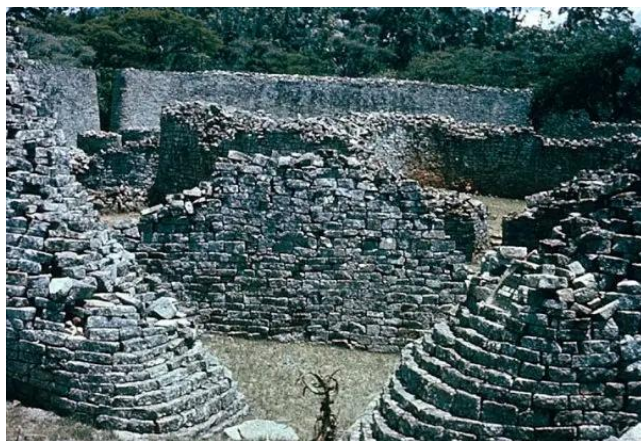
seen in **Figure 8**. **Figures 9-11** shown below is the interior view of the Great Zimbabwe ruins.



**Figure 8.** Aerial view of the valley enclosures at 20 metres (MT survey, Ltd, 1994). Source: Khan Acadethe.



**Figure 9.** Aerial view of the Great Zimbabwe apartment. Source: Pinterest.



**Figure 10.** Inside the Great Zimbabwe ruins. Source: BBC.



**Figure 11.** Huts at Great Zimbabwe hill. Source: Encyclopaedia britannica.

### 1.1. Background and Significance of the Study

Zimbabwe, a nation that bears a rich historical tapestry, has evolved through various epochs that have indelibly shaped its identity (Tosh, 2015). Perhaps one of the most captivating chapters in its history is the era when it was known as Rhodesia during the colonial period. This nomenclature, deeply rooted in the British Empire's influence, is a testament to the intricate web of colonialism that encapsulated Zimbabwe in the late 19th century. The seeds of British presence in Rhodesia were sown in 1890 when the colonial power, led by Cecil Rhodes, established its dominion over the region (Kirch, 2017). This marked the beginning of a tumultuous era that would last for decades, characterized by imperial ambitions, exploitation of resources, and the subjugation of indigenous populations. Beach (1998) aptly underscores this historical juncture, providing insights into the British colonial venture and its enduring impact on Zimbabwe's trajectory (Beach, 1998).

However, the winds of change were destined to sweep through the land. After enduring years of colonial rule, Zimbabwe finally emerged as a sovereign and democratic state in April 1980. This momentous event marked a turning point in the nation's history, as it embarked on a journey towards self-determination and independence. Beach's (1980) work serves as a valuable reference point in understanding this pivotal transition, shedding light on the socio-political dynamics that shaped Zimbabwe's rebirth as a nation (Beach, 1998).

In the annals of Zimbabwe's history, no discussion would be complete without delving into the iconic Great Zimbabwe ruins (Beach, 1983). Vale (1999) provides invaluable insights into the etymology of the name "Great Zimbabwe," which is believed to have originated from "dzimba dza mabwe," meaning great stone houses (Rugwiji, 2019). These ruins, a World Heritage Site, not only represent a remarkable architectural achievement but also hold the key to unravelling Zimbabwe's deep historical roots.

Furthermore, the significance of the Great Zimbabwe ruins extends far beyond

their historical and architectural importance. These ancient structures have woven themselves into the fabric of Zimbabwe's socio-economic, religious, cultural, and political life. As this paper explores, the impact of the Great Zimbabwe ruins resonates through the ages, leaving an indelible mark on the modern life of Zimbabwe. Their influence reverberates in the hearts and minds of the locals, serving as a poignant reminder of the nation's rich heritage. These remarkable ruins, recognized as a World Heritage Site, serve as a testament to the early expressions of state formation in southern Africa, dating back to the period between AD 1300 and 1450 (Pikirayi & Pwiti, 1999). The architectural marvels found at Great Zimbabwe are a testament to the advanced civilization that once thrived in this region.

The study's significance also extends to its methodological approach, which combines qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. Site visits, questionnaires, personal interviews, and statistical analysis provide a comprehensive understanding of the site's impact on local communities. This study delves deeper into the history of Great Zimbabwe, we discover a fascinating narrative of a society that thrived, evolved, and left an indelible mark on the African continent. This mixed-methods approach strengthens the study's findings and adds depth to the understanding of the Great Zimbabwe's contemporary relevance.

Summarily, this study sheds light on the multifaceted significance of the Great Zimbabwe ruins, demonstrating their enduring impact on the social, cultural, and economic well-being of local communities. The study's findings contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the site's legacy and its role in shaping contemporary Zimbabwean society.

## 1.2. Literature Review

The Great Zimbabwe ruins have been the subject of extensive research and scholarly discourse in recent years, shedding light on various aspects of this remarkable archaeological site. The following review will delve into the key areas of research and the insights they have provided.

One significant aspect of the research has focused on the architectural design and construction techniques employed at the Great Zimbabwe site. Scholars like Oliver (1994) have meticulously documented the site's intricate layout, including the towering granite walls, intricate enclosures, and symbolic monoliths. These studies have revealed the remarkable engineering feats and the Shona people's deep connection with the natural environment, as evidenced by the use of locally sourced materials and the incorporation of the site's topography into the overall design (Chirikure & Pwiti, 2008). Garlake's (1973) seminal work on the architectural features of the Great Zimbabwe Ruins emphasizes the deliberate placement of structures, the use of specialized construction materials, and the site's adaptability to the surrounding landscape. Pikirayi (2001) further explores the symbolic and ritual significance embedded in the site's design, arguing that the ruins were not merely functional structures but also served as a physical manifestation of the social and cultural identity of their inhabitants. More recently, Chirikure and

Pikirayi (2008) have undertaken a comparative analysis of the Great Zimbabwe Ruins and other significant archaeological sites in the region, shedding light on the shared architectural traditions and the broader socio-political contexts that influenced the development of these monumental structures.

Researchers have also delved into the historical and cultural significance of the Great Zimbabwe ruins, tracing the site's evolution and the role it played in the development of the Shona civilization. Beach's (1980, 1994) works has shed light on the site's emergence as a centre of power and its integration into the broader regional trade networks, which facilitated the accumulation of wealth and the rise of a complex socio-political structure. Pikirayi's (2001) research has further explored the site's cultural and religious significance, highlighting the Shona people's reverence for their ancestors and the site's role in their spiritual beliefs.

Another area of research has focused on the identity and origins of the builders of the Great Zimbabwe ruins. Scholars have proposed several intriguing theories, including the widely accepted hypothesis that the site was constructed by the Shona-speaking peoples (Chirikure et al., 2018; Phillipson, 2005). Other theories, such as the Lemba people's claim of ancestral ties to the site, have also been explored, prompting further investigations into the site's cultural and linguistic connections (Parfitt, 1997).

Amongst others, scholars have investigated the role of the Great Zimbabwe Ruins in shaping regional trade and economic system. These studies have examined the strategic location of the site, its specialized infrastructure, and the distribution of resources to uncover the complex web of social and economic interactions facilitated by the Great Zimbabwe Ruins. Huffman's (1972, 2009) works has been particularly influential in highlighting the site's prominence as a hub for regional trade and political power. He argues that the Great Zimbabwe Ruins served as a central administrative and economic centre, regulating the flow of resources and coordinating long-distance trade networks across Southern Africa. Building on this foundation, Pwiti (1991) explores the evolution of trade patterns and the site's shifting role within the regional economic landscape. More recently, Mukwende et al. (2018) have utilized advanced archaeological techniques, such as isotopic analysis and spatial modelling, to reconstruct the resource distribution and trade networks associated with the Great Zimbabwe Ruins.

The management and preservation of the Great Zimbabwe ruins have also been the subject of significant research. Ndoro's (2005b) work has highlighted the challenges faced in balancing conservation efforts with the demands of tourism and community engagement. Chirikure and Pwiti's (2008) research has explored the evolving approaches to heritage management, emphasizing the need for a collaborative and sustainable model that involves local stakeholders. However, the site has also faced threats such as erosion, vegetation damage, and struggles over funding for maintenance, prompting ongoing heritage management efforts to balance conservation with responsible tourism and community engagement (Matenga, 1998; Chirikure & Pwiti, 2008).

In summary, the recent research on the Great Zimbabwe ruins has provided a multifaceted understanding of this remarkable archaeological site. The studies have delved into the architectural design, historical and cultural significance, identity of the builders, and the site's management and preservation, offering valuable insights that contribute to our knowledge of the Shona civilization and its enduring legacy. These research findings serve as a foundation for further exploration and a deeper appreciation of the Great Zimbabwe ruins and their impact on the Zimbabwean nation.

### 1.3. Research Gap

Despite the wealth of research already done on the Great Zimbabwe ruins and the Shona people of Zimbabwe, there is still much to learn about the nature, landscape, and identity of the builders. Additionally, there hasn't been much research done on the customs and way of life of the Shona people. The lack of a comprehensive temporal comparative analysis that explores the historical, cultural, and economic effects of landscape architecture in Zimbabwe makes this gap all the more obvious. Although the Shona people and the ruins have received much of the attention in past studies, there is a remarkable lack of in-depth research on these topics. By using a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques, such as site visits, questionnaires, in-person interviews, and statistical data analysis, the current study aims to fill this knowledge gap by shedding light on the nuanced facets of the Great Zimbabwe's representation and its changing significance over time.

#### **Rationale for the Scope of the Study**

This study chose to focus on the architectural design, socio-economic impacts, and modern influence of the Great Zimbabwe ruins for several key reasons.

**Architectural Design:** The Great Zimbabwe ruins are renowned for their remarkable engineering and construction techniques, which provide valuable insights into the advanced civilization that once thrived in this region. By closely examining the architectural features, such as the intricate stonework, innovative building methods, and symbolic structures, the study aims to shed light on the ingenuity and sophistication of the Shona people who built this monumental site.

**Socio-Economic Impacts:** The Great Zimbabwe ruins have had a profound and multifaceted impact on the local communities and the broader Zimbabwean society. Assessing the site's influence on the social, cultural, economic, and political realms is crucial for understanding its enduring legacy and relevance. This aspect of the study will explore how the ruins have shaped the identity, livelihoods, and development of the Zimbabwean nation.

**Modern Influence:** The Great Zimbabwe ruins have continued to exert a significant influence on contemporary Zimbabwe, particularly in the realms of architecture, national identity, and heritage preservation. Examining how the site has inspired modern design, influenced political narratives, and driven tourism and conservation efforts will provide valuable insights into the site's ongoing

significance and its role in shaping the country's present-day landscape.

Focusing on these specific aspects, the study presents a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the Great Zimbabwe ruins, their architectural and engineering achievements, their far-reaching societal impacts, and their continued relevance in the modern era. This approach will enable a deeper appreciation of the site's multifaceted importance and its central role in the history, culture, and development of Zimbabwe.

## 2. Method

This research stands out for its comprehensive approach to bridging the gap in understanding between the Shona people and the Great Zimbabwe ruins. It surpasses traditional methods by combining qualitative and quantitative data to paint a richer picture.

### 2.1. Site Visits

The core of this research involved a 60-day fieldwork expedition, meticulously planned to coincide with the dry season, ensuring optimal conditions for traversing the site's rugged terrain. My daily routine consisted of meticulously surveying the site, carefully documenting the architectural features, spatial arrangements, and any artifacts unearthed during the excavation process.



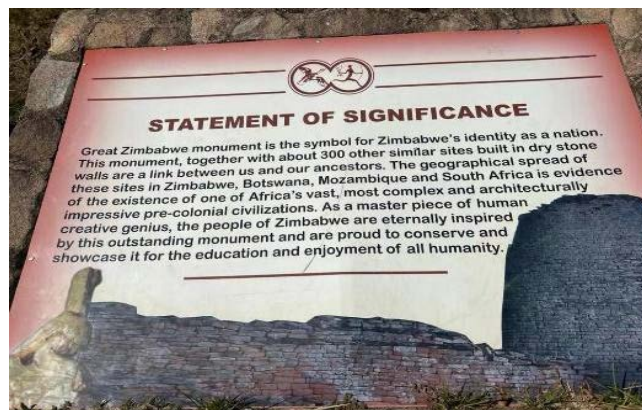
**Figure 12.** Site map or route taken during fieldwork expedition.

The data collection phase of my research culminated in a comprehensive dataset encompassing architectural drawings, detailed site maps (Figure 12), observations, and transcribed oral histories. Over the course of 60 days, we meticulously

documented the architectural features that define Great Zimbabwe, from the towering granite walls to the intricate enclosures and symbolic monoliths. We captured a total of 150 photographs; each photograph captured a facet of the site's grandeur, revealing the ingenuity and artistry of its builders.

**We covered approximately 10 kilometres on foot, venturing deep into the Valley Complex and ascending the Hill Complex, the site's crowning glory.**

The images collected during the site visits (**Figures 13-16**) provide visual evidence of the scale, complexity, and cultural significance of the Great Zimbabwe ruins.



**Figure 13.** Statement of significance.



**Figure 14.** Statement of signature at the Great Zimbabwe ruins.



**Figure 15.** Great enclosure view taken from the Hill.



**Figure 16.** Local tourists at the Great Zimbabwe village.

## 2.2. In-Person Interviews

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the Great Zimbabwe site and its impact on the surrounding communities, in-person interviews were conducted with 30 individuals, carefully selected to represent a diverse range of perspectives. The interview participants included:

**1) Great Zimbabwe site employees:** 10 employees from various departments, including archaeologists, historians, conservators, and site managers, were interviewed to gather insights into the site’s history, ongoing research projects, and management practices.

**2) Community leaders:** 5 community leaders from villages surrounding the Great Zimbabwe were interviewed to understand their perspectives on the site’s cultural significance, economic benefits, and potential challenges.

**3) Local residents:** 15 local residents from different age groups and occupations were interviewed to explore their personal experiences with the Great Zimbabwe, their perceptions of its impact on their daily lives, and their hopes for the site’s future.

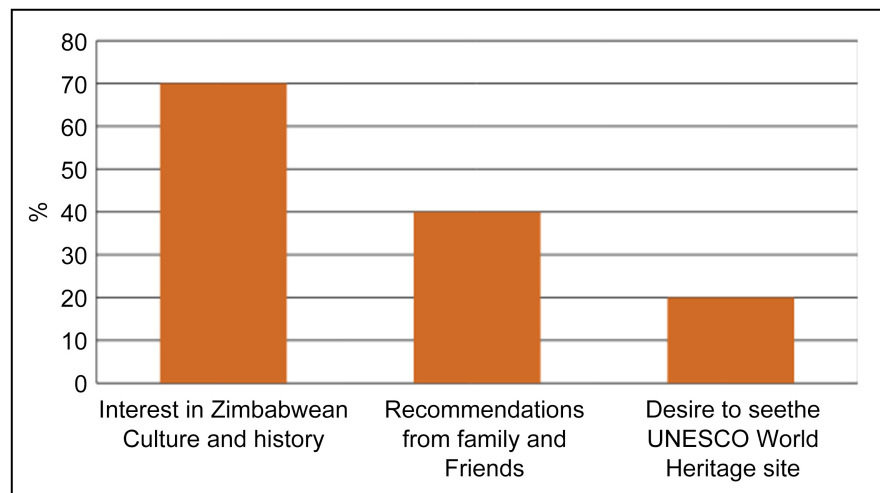
The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, allowing for both in-depth exploration of key topics and flexibility to capture unique perspectives. Participants were encouraged to share their stories, experiences, and opinions freely, providing valuable insights into the multifaceted relationship between the Great Zimbabwe and its surrounding communities. Below are the interview questions that were asked.

Interview participants	Interview questions
30 participants	<p>A. Have you ever visited great Zimbabwe? If yes, how many times?</p> <p>B. How was your experience and perception after the visit?</p> <p>C. Are you aware of the location traditions and ceremonies associated with great Zimbabwe?</p> <p>D. What impact does the ruins bring to the society economically?</p>

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Questions about Visit to the Great Zimbabwe Site

90% of respondents had visited the Great Zimbabwe site at least once. Among those who have visited the ruins the average number of visits is 2.5. **Figure 17** below shows the results from the respondents on their motivation to visit the Great Zimbabwe Ruins. The graph below shows that 70% of the respondents pointed out that they were motivated by their interest in Zimbabwean history and culture. 40% were motivated by recommendations from family and friends. 20% had the desire to see the ruins.



**Figure 17.** Respondent's motivation to visit the ruins.

Most respondents had positive expectations before visiting the site. They were excited to see the ruins, learn about Zimbabwean history, and experience the site's unique atmosphere.

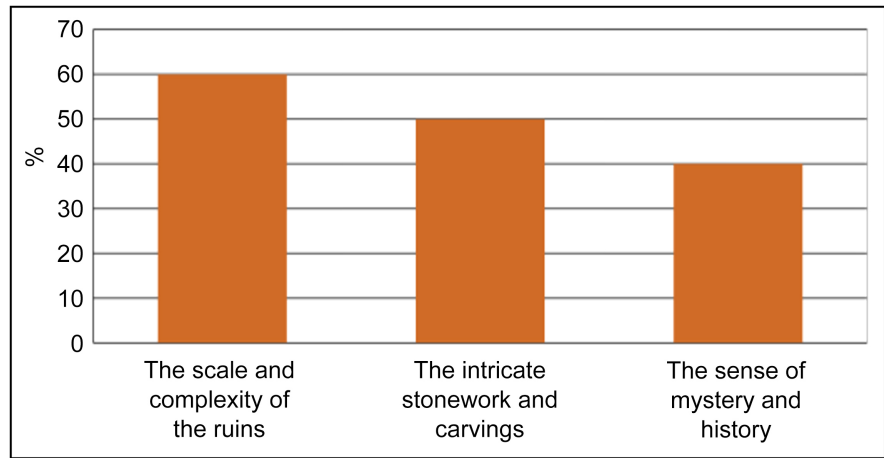
#### 3.2. Perceptions and Experiences at the Great Zimbabwe Site

The majority of respondents had a positive overall experience during their visit. They were impressed by the site's architecture, history, and cultural significance.

The aspects of the site that impressed respondents the most were as follows as indicated in **Figure 18** below.

- The scale and complexity of the ruins (60%);
- The intricate stonework and carvings (50%);
- The sense of mystery and history (40%).

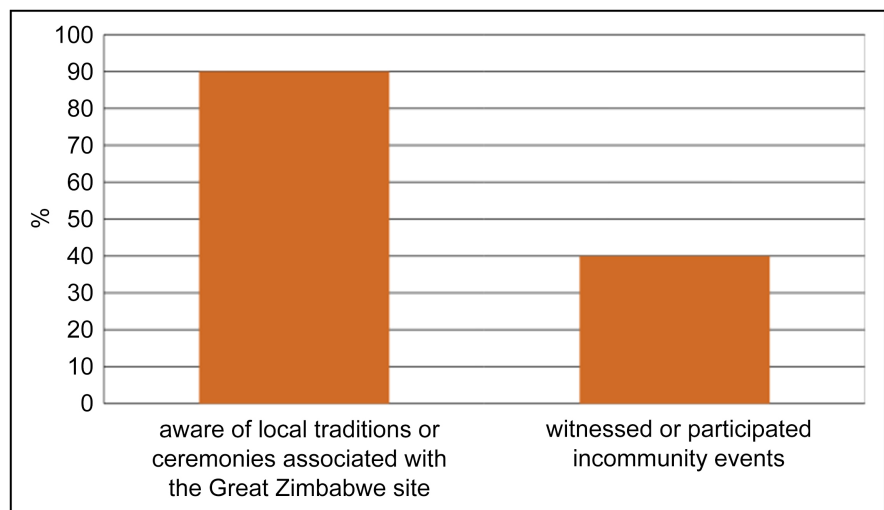
The respondents perceived the Great Zimbabwe site as a place of great cultural and historical significance. They saw it as a symbol of Zimbabwean heritage and a reminder of the country's rich past. The study showed that the majority of respondents felt that their visit to the site enhanced their understanding of Zimbabwean history and culture. They learned about the Shona people, their achievements, and the importance of the site to Zimbabwean identity.



**Figure 18.** Respondent’s responses perceptions and experiences at the Great Zimbabwe Site.

### 3.3. Community Engagement and Traditions

**Figure 19** shows the respondents responses on community engagements and traditions. A significant number of respondents (90%) were aware of local traditions or ceremonies associated with the Great Zimbabwe site. These traditions included: ancestral veneration rituals, rainmaking ceremonies and, cultural performances and storytelling. This suggests that the site holds significant cultural and spiritual importance for the local community. The specific traditions mentioned, such as ancestral veneration rituals, rainmaking ceremonies, and cultural performances, reflect the deeply rooted connection between the Shona people and their ancestral heritage.



**Figure 19.** Respondent’s responses on community engagements and traditions.

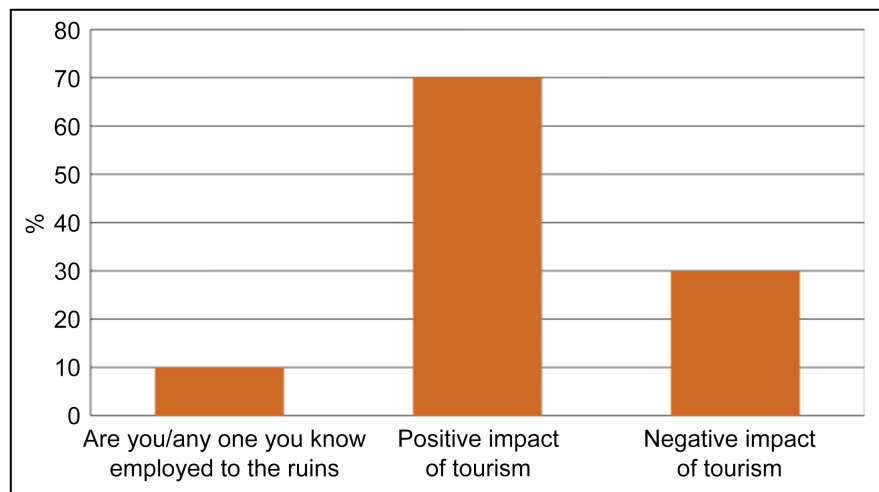
40% of the respondents had witnessed or participated in community events or activities related to the site. These events included: heritage festivals, educational workshops and community clean-up days at the Great Zimbabwe ruins. This indicates that the site serves as a focal point for community engagement and cultural

preservation. The types of events mentioned, such as heritage festivals, educational workshops, and community clean-up days, demonstrate the on-going efforts to connect local communities with their heritage and promote responsible stewardship of the site.

The findings highlight the profound cultural and spiritual significance of the Great Zimbabwe site for the local community. The widespread awareness of local traditions and the active participation in community events underscore the site's role as a cultural hub and a source of identity for the Shona people. These connections contribute to the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage, ensuring the continued relevance of the Great Zimbabwe site for future generations.

### 3.4. Economic Impact and Employment

**Figure 20** below shows the number of respondents on the economic impact and employment of the Great Zimbabwe ruins to the local community. 10% of the respondents indicate that they are employed, or they know someone from the area who is employee to work in the Great Zimbabwe Ruins. The jobs include: Tour guides, Souvenir vendors and Security personnel. This may indicate a limited number of job opportunities directly associated with the site. The reported jobs also highlighted the diverse employment opportunities within the tourism sector in the Great Zimbabwe ruins area.



**Figure 20.** Respondent's responses on economic impact and employment.

70% of the respondents believed that tourism at the Great Zimbabwe site had a positive impact on the local economy. They cited the following benefits: Job creation, increased income for local businesses and improved infrastructure. This suggests a widespread recognition of tourism's benefits. The perceived benefits indicate recognition of tourism's contribution to economic development and community well-being.

Also 30% of the respondents expressed concerns about the potential negative impacts of tourism, such as: environmental degradation, commercialization of

cultural heritage, overcrowding of the site and, preservation and concerns. This highlights a need for responsible tourism practices that mitigate environmental degradation, commercialization of cultural heritage, and overcrowding. Additionally, concerns about preservation reflect the importance of balancing economic benefits with site conservation efforts.

Overall, results of the study suggest that the Great Zimbabwe site is a significant cultural and historical resource for Zimbabwe. The site is also a valuable economic asset, generating tourism revenue and creating jobs. However, there are challenges to preserving the site, and there is a need for ongoing conservation efforts.

## 4. Conclusion

### 4.1. Site Visits

The study involved a visit to the Great Zimbabwe site, which revealed significant insights into its historical and cultural importance. Most respondents (90%) had visited the site at least once, with an average of 2.5 visits. The site also serves as a focal point for community engagement and cultural preservation, the primary motivations for visiting included interest in Zimbabwean history and culture (70%) with local traditions and ceremonies playing a crucial role. Economically, the site benefits the local community through job creation and increased income for local businesses, despite some concerns about environmental impacts. These findings highlight the site's multifaceted importance and the need for responsible tourism and conservation efforts to ensure its preservation for future generations, recommendations from family and friends (40%), and a desire to see the ruins (20%). Visitors generally had positive expectations and were excited to learn about Zimbabwean history and experience the site's unique atmosphere. The key findings of the site visit are presented in the following sections.

#### 4.1.1. Architectural Design and Construction

I identified several distinctive features that highlight the skill and intentionality of the builders:

**1) Dry-Stone Masonry Techniques:** The primary construction method employed at the site was the use of dry-stone masonry, which involved the careful stacking and shaping of granite blocks without the use of mortar. This technique allowed for the construction of sturdy, load-bearing walls and the creation of intricate architectural elements.

**2) Spatial Organization and Hierarchy:** The layout of the Great Zimbabwe Ruins displayed a clear hierarchical organization, with distinct zones for administrative, residential, and ceremonial functions. I observed the strategic placement of structures, the use of natural features, and the integration of public and private spaces to create a cohesive and intentional spatial arrangement.

**3) Symbolic and Ritual Elements:** The architectural analysis uncovered numerous symbolic and ritual elements embedded within the design of the Great Zimbabwe Ruins. These included the orientation of structures, the use of specific

motifs and decorative patterns, and the incorporation of natural features, such as hills and rock formations, suggesting the site's deep symbolic significance.

**4) Adaptability and Expansion:** I also noted the site's adaptability and expansion over time, as evidenced by the addition of new structures, the modification of existing ones, and the reconfiguration of the site's layout to accommodate changing social, political, and economic needs.

#### 4.1.2. Regional Trade and Economic Influence

The site visit of the Great Zimbabwe Ruins revealed the site's pivotal position within the broader sociopolitical landscape of Southern Africa.

**1) Strategic Location:** The site's strategic location, situated along major trade routes and near valuable natural resources, played a crucial role in its development as a regional economic and administrative centre.

**2) Specialized Infrastructure:** The Great Zimbabwe Ruins possessed a sophisticated infrastructure, including specialized storage facilities, processing areas, and transportation networks, that facilitated the collection, distribution, and exchange of diverse resources.

**3) Trade Partnerships and Alliances:** The findings suggest that the Great Zimbabwe Ruins maintained complex trade partnerships and political alliances with other significant sites and polities in the region, allowing for the coordination of long-distance trade and the consolidation of economic and political power.

#### 4.1.3. Symbolic and Cultural Significance

**1) Ritual and Ceremonial Functions:** The examination of material remains indicated that the Great Zimbabwe Ruins served as a hub for various ritual and ceremonial activities, which were likely integral to the site's socio-political and religious structures.

**2) Socio-Political Identity and Memory:** The site's design and features were found to be closely tied to the formation and expression of socio-political identity, as well as the maintenance of cultural memory and collective histories among the site's inhabitants and their descendants.

**3) Evolving Interpretations and Significance:** The historical research component of the visit revealed the shifting interpretations and significance of the Great Zimbabwe Ruins, as the site has been reinterpreted and reclaimed by different stakeholders, including local communities, colonial authorities, and post-colonial governments, over time.

**4) Continued Cultural Relevance:** The incorporation of oral histories and ethnographic data highlighted the enduring cultural relevance of the Great Zimbabwe Ruins, as the site continues to hold deep meaning and significance for contemporary local communities and their ancestral connections to the past.

## 4.2. Field Research and Interviews

In-person interviews were conducted with 30 individuals, including site employees, community leaders, and local residents. These interviews aimed to gather

diverse perspectives on the site's cultural significance, economic benefits, and challenges. The interviews revealed a multifaceted relationship between the Great Zimbabwe site and its surrounding communities, highlighting its role in cultural preservation, economic development, and community engagement. The study's findings underscore the Great Zimbabwe site's importance as a cultural, historical, and economic asset, while also highlighting the need for ongoing conservation efforts to address the challenges associated with preserving this significant heritage site. Respondents were overwhelmingly positive about their experiences at the Great Zimbabwe site. They were particularly impressed by the scale and complexity of the ruins (60%), the intricate stonework and carvings (50%), and the sense of mystery and history (40%). The site was perceived as a place of great cultural and historical significance, enhancing visitors' understanding of Zimbabwean heritage and the Shona people's achievements.

### **4.3. Function**

#### **1) Users**

The Great Zimbabwe is divided into several sections and each section serves an important purpose accordingly. The hill complex has various structural ruins that sit on the steepest part and served the purpose of the religious centre as they believed in spirit mediums and ancestors (Huffman, 2009). The great enclosure has a second set of walls inside and with that in mind it is believed that it was used as a royal residence or a symbolic grain storage facility. The valley ruins consisted of a number of houses made of mud thereby making the population of the Great Zimbabwe.

#### **2) Community**

The Zimbabwe people lived as a community. This is seen by the arrangement of the dhaka houses in the great enclosure. The arrangement was scattered and this influenced the urban development of Zimbabwe where the rich and chiefs lived in the better lands of the Great Zimbabwe (Pwiti & Ndoro, 1999). It also showed that staying near each other was helpful for trading as they lived from butter and trade system.

#### **3) How the people lived**

The Great Zimbabwe lived as farmers, herders and long distance traders. Some people made pottery, mined gold and some worked with metal during the dry season. Most residents lived in thatch-roofed houses made of Dhaka (gravel mixed with clay) and were decorated with abstract designs and elaborate moldings and would reach in range 20 feet in height (Ranger, 2004).

### **Engineering Skills**

The Great Zimbabwe has one of the most outstanding walls which are namely free-standing walls and retaining walls. These dry-stone structures are made of Dolerite, ironstone, timber and Dhaka. They also used granite which was biotite.

The free-standing walls are generally constructed of two outer faces of carefully stalked and coursed blocks in filled with core blocks regular in size and shape. The

walls that comprise an outer face of coursed regular blocks are called Retaining walls.

The walls were built on the level with the base being broader than the top meaning that the top was narrower and heights varying depending with the slope hillside. The walls can be classified into three important types namely p style, q style and r style.

1) Style P is recognised as buildings with free standing walls, entrances and steps. They are laid directly to granite with bare stone courses. The walls are neatly faced and perpendicular and quite thin in relation to their height and make good use of boulders to save labour and they are commonly found on the Western closure. The walls usually end on doorways and the entrance is a shape of a square for easy movement without collapsing.

2) Style Q has elements of style p but these include towers, corner platforms, steps and buttresses and is advanced in terms of class and work. They have rectangular blocks laid evenly and level courses are typically about 7 - 10 inches long and 4 - 6 inches high.

3) Style R: the walls are mixed blocks of Q and p with irregular and triangular shaped limbs of stones. Poorly fitted together needing frequent use of wedges and show gaps. There is no systematic batter on the walls whose facing is rough, craggy and irregular.

#### **4.4. Significance and the Influence of the Great Zimbabwe Ruins on People's Socio-Economic, Political Cultural-Religious Life**

The Great Zimbabwe ruins are associated with a number of benefits both to the local people and to the world at large. Below are some of the reasons why the ruins are important.

##### **4.4.1. Political**

As revealed in the interviews and historical analysis, the name of the country, Zimbabwe, was derived from the Great Zimbabwe National Monuments upon the nation's independence in 1980. It was a symbolic act of reclaiming and honouring the nation's rich pre-colonial heritage and identity. This renaming was part of a broader effort to establish a distinct national identity separate from the colonial past, fostering a sense of pride and unity among the people. Politically, it underscored a commitment to indigenous governance and cultural revival, shaping the country's post-independence narrative and its policies aimed at decolonization and empowerment of its citizens.

##### **4.4.2. Economic**

The economic impact of the Great Zimbabwe ruins on the local community was also assessed. Approximately 10% of respondents were employed or knew someone employed at the site, in roles such as tour guides, souvenir vendors, and security personnel. Seventy percent of respondents believed that tourism at the site

had a positive impact on the local economy, citing job creation, increased income for local businesses, and improved infrastructure. However, 30% expressed concerns about potential negative impacts, including environmental degradation and commercialization of cultural heritage, underscoring the need for responsible tourism practices. However, before colonial times Great Zimbabwe's economic prosperity during this period was characterized by a diverse range of activities. These included livestock farming, where cattle, goats, and sheep were raised for sustenance and trade. Crop farming was another vital component, with communities cultivating crops like millet, sorghum, and maize to support the population and for trade (Nyathi, 2005). Mining was also a key industry, with the extraction of gold and other minerals contributing significantly to the city's wealth.

#### 4.4.3. Tourism Significance

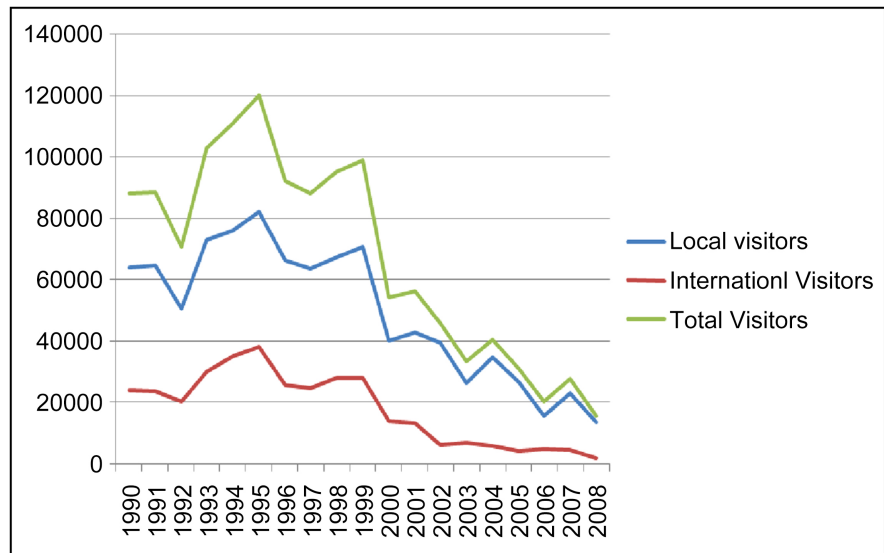
The City of Masvingo boasts a captivating array of nearby tourist attractions that make it a hub for travellers seeking diverse experiences. Among these, the Great Zimbabwe National Monument stands as an epitome of cultural heritage. This historical treasure allows visitors to delve into the rich history of the region, showcasing the remarkable architecture and enigmatic ruins that speak of an ancient civilization's prowess. Just a mere 32 kilometres away from Masvingo, the Mutirikwi Dam offers a striking contrast to the historical charm of Great Zimbabwe (Mubaya & Mawere, 2015). As the largest inland dam in the country, it is a testament to modern engineering and provides essential water resources to the region. Its vast expanse of glistening water invites visitors for activities such as fishing, boating, and picnicking, creating a harmonious blend of natural beauty and human achievement.

In essence, Masvingo and its surrounding areas offer a diverse tapestry of experiences that blend history, nature, and recreation, making it a must-visit destination for anyone seeking to explore the heart and soul of Zimbabwe. Whether you're drawn to ancient civilizations, the beauty of inland lakes, or the allure of wildlife, this city has something extraordinary to offer every traveller. The Great Zimbabwe National Monument currently hosts approximately 100,000 tourists every year. **Figure 21** below shows the visitor trends at Great Zimbabwe from 1990 to 2008.

**Figure 21** shows a decrease in the number of tourists from 1990 to present day. This is because in the early 1990's the Great Zimbabwe was very famous as they were not as much tourist attraction place and it was in the top 5 ranking of places to visit. Now as we started the 21<sup>st</sup> century the number of foreigners decreased because the number of tourist attractions has increased as there is more to visit not only ruins are there to see now there is an increase in waterfalls that also have sky walks and zip lines that is more interesting than to see the Great Zimbabwe ruins an example is Mutarazi falls located in Nyanga in the eastern part of Zimbabwe where there are mountains and another place is Bridalveil falls also located in the eastern part of Zimbabwe.

According to Desk research, the accommodation products offered by the

NMMZ are not perceived as competition. The quality of the units does not meet that of the private sector operators in the area. The industry does express the wish for events to be organised at the site but knows that the current status of tourism in the area (country) does not allow for that. The current entrance fee, especially for foreign visitors at US\$ 15 per person is regarded as too high by the industry.



**Figure 21.** Visitor trends at Great Zimbabwe. Source: Google.

#### 4.4.4. Archaeological Research

The Great Zimbabwe archaeological site stands as a perennial source of intrigue and discovery for archaeologists, historians, and researchers. Its enduring importance lies in its role as a treasure trove of information about ancient civilizations and their remarkable achievements. Here are some key aspects of the ongoing archaeological research at Great Zimbabwe:

**Revealing Trade Networks:** The archaeological investigations at Great Zimbabwe extend beyond its architectural wonders. Researchers are keen to unravel the intricate trade networks that once thrived in this region. By examining artifacts, pottery, and other remnants found at the site, scholars can piece together the extent of trade relations, identifying the origins of imported goods and tracing the flow of commodities between Great Zimbabwe and distant regions.

**Conservation and Preservation:** In tandem with archaeological research, efforts are made to preserve and conserve the site. Conservation measures aim to protect the ancient structures from further deterioration while ensuring that future generations can continue to study and appreciate Great Zimbabwe. These efforts often involve the stabilization of walls, management of visitor impact, and documentation of the site's condition.

**International Collaboration:** The significance of Great Zimbabwe transcends national boundaries. International collaboration among archaeologists and researchers from various countries fosters a global perspective on the site's historical context and its place within African and world history.

#### 4.4.5. Modern Architecture Design

The present study also generated data on the Great Zimbabwe ruins direct influence on modern landscape architecture in the country. It was thus found that indeed the ruins have influenced the country's landscape in numerous direct ways as outlined here.

One of the key ways in which the Great Zimbabwe ruins have influenced modern landscape architecture is through the use of indigenous materials and construction techniques. Many modern architects in Zimbabwe have sought to incorporate traditional building materials and techniques into their designs, drawing inspiration from the Great Zimbabwe ruins and other historic structures in the country. Another way in which the Great Zimbabwe ruins have influenced modern landscape architecture is through the use of organic shapes and forms (Matenga, 2011).

**The Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) building's roof**, which is made up of a series of curved panels that resemble the thatched roofs of traditional Zimbabwean huts. The use of these panels helps to reduce the amount of heat that enters the building, and it also gives the building a unique and distinctive look. The RBZ building is a successful example of how modern architecture can be used to create a building that is both functional and aesthetically pleasing. The building is also a testament to the creativity and ingenuity of Zimbabwean architects. **Figure 22** below shows comparison between the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe building and Zimbabwean traditional huts.



**Figure 22.** The reserve bank of Zimbabwe building and Zimbabwean traditional huts.

**The Robert Gabriel Mugabe International Airport** new terminal is different from the airport's other terminals. It was built during the postmodernist era, inspired by the decorative designs found in Great Zimbabwe (Hove, 2016). The most impressive feature of this structure is the control tower, whose design incorporates the conical features of Great Zimbabwe's Conical Tower, which is inside the Great Enclosure. The control tower, as the focal point of airport communications and airplane control, is symbolic, similarly to the symbolism of the Conical Tower,

which symbolized the importance of the old capital and served as a focal point of the Shona state. **Figure 23** below shows Harare International Airport.

The circular shape of The new Parliament, reminiscent of the Great Enclosure at Great Zimbabwe, represents unity and cohesion. Its granite walls, sourced from the same quarries that supplied the ancient ruins, embody strength and resilience. The design represents the Great Zimbabwe conical towers in front and the enclosures on the sides therefore showing that the Great Zimbabwe ruins have a greater impact in society and present day. **Figure 24** below shows the building of the new Parliament of Zimbabwe.



**Figure 23.** Robert Gabriel Mugabe international airport. Source: Airports company of Zimbabwe.



**Figure 24.** The new parliament of Zimbabwe building, Mt Hampden, Harare. Source: The herald.

## 5. Discussion

The exploration of the Great Zimbabwe Ruins has revealed the site's remarkable architectural accomplishments, its centrality within regional trade and economic systems, and its deep-rooted symbolic and cultural significance. The findings of this study contribute to a more nuanced and evidence-based understanding of the Great Zimbabwe Ruins and their enduring influence in the history and cultural landscape of Southern Africa.

### Implications and Future Directions

The comprehensive findings of this study have several important implications for our understanding of the Great Zimbabwe Ruins and their broader significance within the context of Southern African history and cultural landscapes.

First, the study's emphasis on grounding the assessment of Zimbabwe's positional influence on a robust foundation of supporting evidence contributes to a more nuanced and contextually-informed understanding of the site's impact. By integrating architectural, archaeological, and historical perspectives, the research has provided a multidimensional lens through which to examine the Great Zimbabwe Ruins and their far-reaching influence.

Second, the study's clarification of the rationale behind focusing on specific aspects of the site, such as the architectural design, regional trade networks, and symbolic significance, has allowed for a more focused and in-depth exploration of the site's multifaceted nature. This approach has revealed the intricate interconnections between the physical, economic, and sociocultural dimensions of the Great Zimbabwe Ruins, advancing our understanding of the site's role within the broader regional context.

Third, the emphasis placed on detailing the research procedures employed in this study provides a robust methodological framework for future investigations of the Great Zimbabwe Ruins and other significant archaeological sites. The integration of architectural analysis, archaeological fieldwork, and historical research offers a comprehensive model for exploring the complex dynamics that shape the development and influence of ancient sites.

Looking ahead, the findings of this study suggest several promising avenues for future research. One potential direction could involve a comparative analysis of the Great Zimbabwe Ruins with other notable archaeological sites in the region, examining the shared architectural traditions, trade networks, and socio-political connections that may have existed among these centres of power and influence.

Additionally, the incorporation of cutting-edge analytical techniques, such as advanced isotopic analysis and remote sensing technologies, could yield further insights into the site's resource procurement strategies, population movements, and environmental contexts, providing a more nuanced understanding of the site's evolution and its relationship with the surrounding landscape.

Furthermore, the continued engagement with local communities and the incorporation of oral histories and ethnographic data could shed light on the contemporary significance and lived experiences associated with the Great Zimbabwe

Ruins. Such an approach would not only enrich our historical understanding but also contribute to the preservation and interpretation of the site in a culturally sensitive and inclusive manner.

In conclusion, the study's exploration of the Great Zimbabwe Ruins has unveiled the site's remarkable architectural sophistication, its pivotal role in regional trade and economic networks, and its profound symbolic and cultural significance. By grounding the assessment of Zimbabwe's positional influence on a robust foundation of supporting evidence and adopting a comprehensive research approach, this study offers a more nuanced and contextually-informed understanding of the Great Zimbabwe Ruins and their enduring influence in the history and cultural landscape of Southern Africa.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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