

Great Zimbabwe

People love a good story, particularly if it's a mystery. Perhaps you've heard about *The Lost City of Atlantis* or *The Bermuda Triangle*? How about the search for the source of the gold mentioned in the Biblical story of King Solomon's mine?

Although Solomon is remembered for his wisdom, he was also known for his wealth. English fortune hunters thought they had discovered King Solomon's mine in 1868 when they came across the ruins of an ancient stone city in Southern Africa. They were wrong. But what they had stumbled onto was something that many consider a treasure – the Great Zimbabwe ruins.

At least a thousand years ago, ancestors of modern Zimbabwe built a series of stone structures, the remains of which are still visible in several sites around the country. What was life like for these people? Archeologists have put together a partial picture, based on the evidence found at the ruins.

The spirits of ancestors played an important role in the life of the people of ancient Zimbabwe. A medium could help a family contact the spirit of dead family members to get advice about crops. They also could be turned to for help in avoiding a disaster or in finding out about or removing a curse.

In their art, the people of ancient Zimbabwe placed greater importance on the process, or the spirit of the work, than on the details of the finished product. That meant that preservation wasn't important. Wooden or woven items were more common than stone, and much of what was created in early Zimbabwe has long since decayed. One image that has endured is the soapstone carving of bird forms, which were probably used to communicate with the spirits of the dead.

The legacy of Great Zimbabwe still sparks the pride and imagination of the country's residents today. In 1980, after many years of struggle, the government of

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colonial Rhodesia was returned to the hands of the native people. The name Zimbabwe was chosen for the new nation, and an ancient bird became the national symbol.

- Many people find treasure seekers like those searching for King Solomon's mine to be offensive. Why might that be?

- How does a society's attitudes about death affect its people's feelings about their own demise?

- In your opinion, was everyday life more or less tedious a thousand years ago than it is today?