

ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ

WORLD HERITAGE LIST

N° 364

A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination : Great Zimbabwe National Monument

Location : Province of Masvingo

State Party : Zimbabwe

Date : June 25, 1985

B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

That the proposed cultural property be included on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria I, III and VI.

C) JUSTIFICATION

Thirty kilometers from Masvingo (formerly Fort Victoria) lie the impressive ruins of Great Zimbabwe, meaning "stone houses", covering an area of approximately 80 hectares. This dead city has long been celebrated. In 1552 the Portuguese chronicler Joao de Barros, based on reports by Arab tradesmen, admirably described its stone walls "of impressive size which it seems no mortar holds together". 16th-century Portuguese travelers did not question the legend, which the Arabs spread, that said the city of stone had been built by Solomon and the Queen of Sheba in the land of Ophir mentioned in the Book of Kings. The marvellous yet absurd legend continued to find advocates in the colonial period following rediscovery of the site by Adam Renders in 1868.

The pioneering works of David Randall-MacIver in 1905-1906, corroborated since by numerous finds of dated archaeological artefacts and by Carbon 14 analysis, have proved that Great Zimbabwe was founded in the 11th century on a site which had been sparsely inhabited in the prehistoric period, by a Bantu population of the Iron Age, the Shona. In the 14th century it was the headquarters of the principal city of a major state extending over gold-rich plateaux; its population exceeded 10,000 inhabitants. In about 1450, this capital was abandoned, not as a result of war, but because the hinterland could no longer furnish food for the overpopulated city, and deforestation made it necessary to go farther and farther to find firewood. The resulting migration benefited Khami, which became the most influential city in the region, but signalled waning political power.

When in 1505 the Portuguese settled in Sofala, the region was divided between the rival powers of the kingdoms of Torwa and Mwene-Mutapa (which the Europeans converted into Monomotapa). From the 11th to the 15th century, the wealth of Great Zimbabwe was associated with gold trading, controlled by the Arabs, and extensive trade activities on the east coast of Africa where Kilwa (included on the World Heritage List in 1981) was the main trading centre. In addition to jewelry which had escaped greedy European gold hunters at the end of the 19th century, archaeologists' excavations in Great Zimbabwe unearthed glass beads and fragments of porcelain and china of Chinese and Persian origin which bear testimony to the extent of trade within the continent. A 14th-century Arab coin from Kilwa was also found; it was reissued in 1972.

The 720-hectare territory managed by the National Museums and Monuments Administration includes the three main areas of Great Zimbabwe :

1) The Hill Ruins forming a huge granite mass atop a spur facing northeast/southwest were continuously inhabited from the 11th to 15th century, and there are numerous layers of traces of human settlements. In the 13th century, walls of rough granite rubble stones were built connecting the granite blocks and forming two distinct enclosures accessed by narrow, sometimes covered, passageways. This acropolis is generally considered a "royal city"; the west enclosure is thought to have been the residence of successive chiefs and the east enclosure, where six steatite upright posts topped with birds were found, considered to serve a ritual purpose.

2) The Great Enclosure below the hill to the south dates from the 14th century. In the form of an ellipsis, it is marked off by a wall of cut granite blocks laid in a regular course. The wall measures 7 meters high and is 5.5 meters thick at the base; a frieze with two rows of chevrons adorns the top. A second inner wall was never completed. Between the two walls, a narrow passage leads to an 11-meter high conical tower; it is not known what purpose the tower served. Nearby stands a smaller conical tower. Inside the Great Enclosure, a series of living quarters in pisé have been noted. The pisé (daga) was made from a mixture of granitic sand and clay. Huts were built within the stone enclosure walls. Inside each community area, other walls mark off each family's area, generally comprising a kitchen, two living huts and a court.

3) The Valley Ruins are a series of living ensembles scattered throughout the valley. Each ensemble has similar characteristics; many constructions are in pisé (huts,

indoor flooring and benches, holders for recipients, basins, etc.) and dry-stone masonry walls provide insulation for each ensemble. Finds made in the inhabited areas and the dumping ground have furnished precise information about the farming and pastoral activities of the inhabitants at the time of Great Zimbabwe's heyday (cultivation of sorghum, millet, beans and peas, and goat and sheep raising), and about earthenware and smithing craft activities.

ICOMOS recommends that Great Zimbabwe be included on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria I, III and VI.

Criterion I. A unique artistic achievement, this great city has struck the imagination of African and European travelers since the Middle Ages, as evidenced by the persistent legends which attribute to it a Biblical origin.

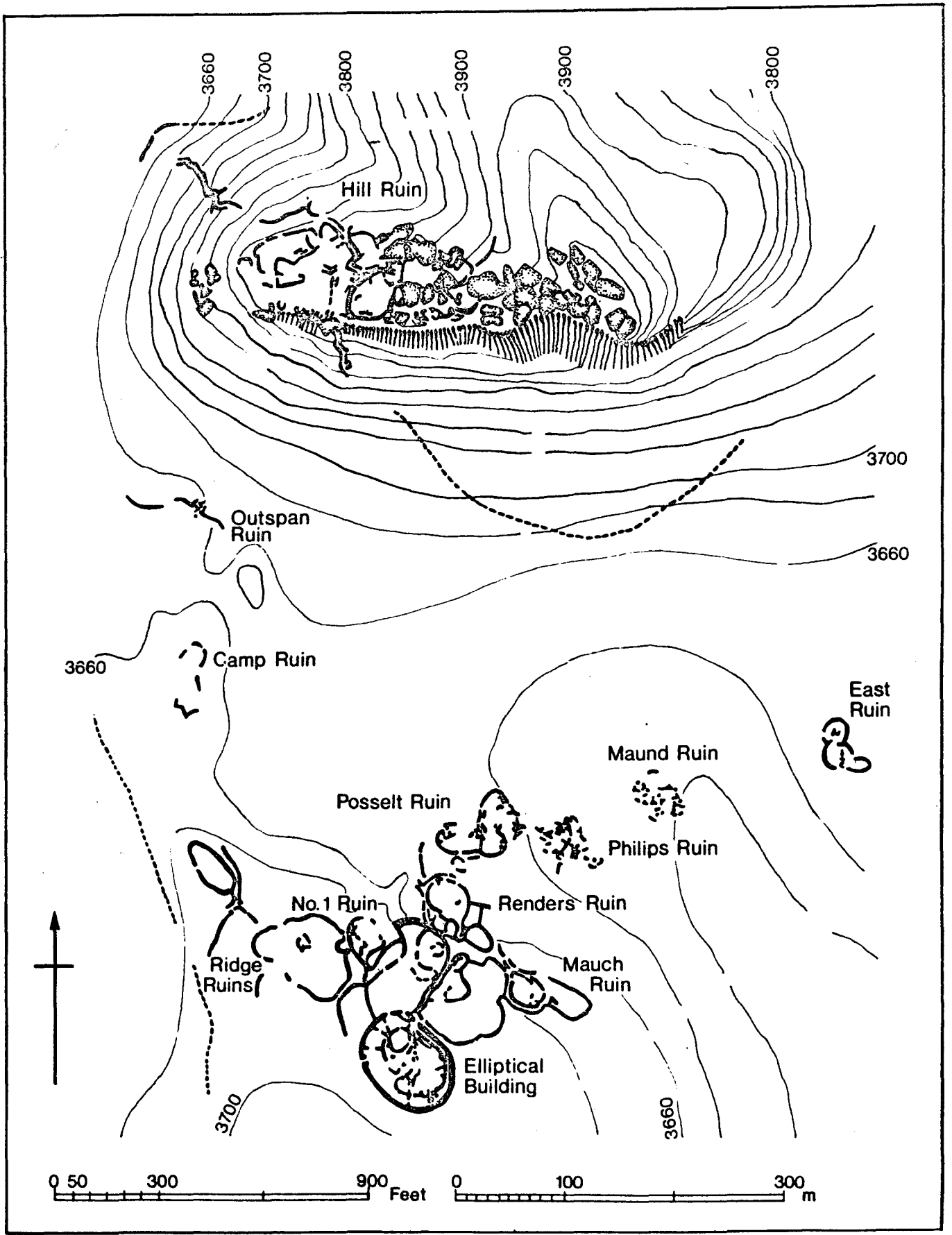
Criterion III. The ruins of Great Zimbabwe bear a unique testimony to the lost civilisation of the Shona between the 11th and 15th centuries.

Criterion VI. The entire Zimbabwe nation has identified with this historically symbolic ensemble and has adopted as its emblem the steatite bird, which may have been a royal totem.

Having noted the outstanding value of the nominated cultural property, ICOMOS however deems it appropriate to recommend that a special effort be made by the international community for the safeguarding of this site. The Hamo Sassoon mission (UNESCO, 1982) noted the devastation occasioned by the collapse of the stone walls resulting from various causes, and recommended protection for the pisé (daga) structures which are affected by climatic conditions and endangered by visitors to the site. It should also be noted that, further, though the site has been protected since 1893, familiarity with it is only partial : the necropolises have not been located, some living quarters have been located but not unearthed. It would appear necessary to postpone the installation of tourist facilities which are expensive and dangerous (like the project to build a road around the site) in order to better investigate, conserve and manage one of the most important archaeological sites on the continent of Africa.

UNESCO missions, implemented by ICOMOS, should contribute to this endeavor by carrying out photogrammetric surveys, and by examining methods for conserving the stone structures (1986-1987).

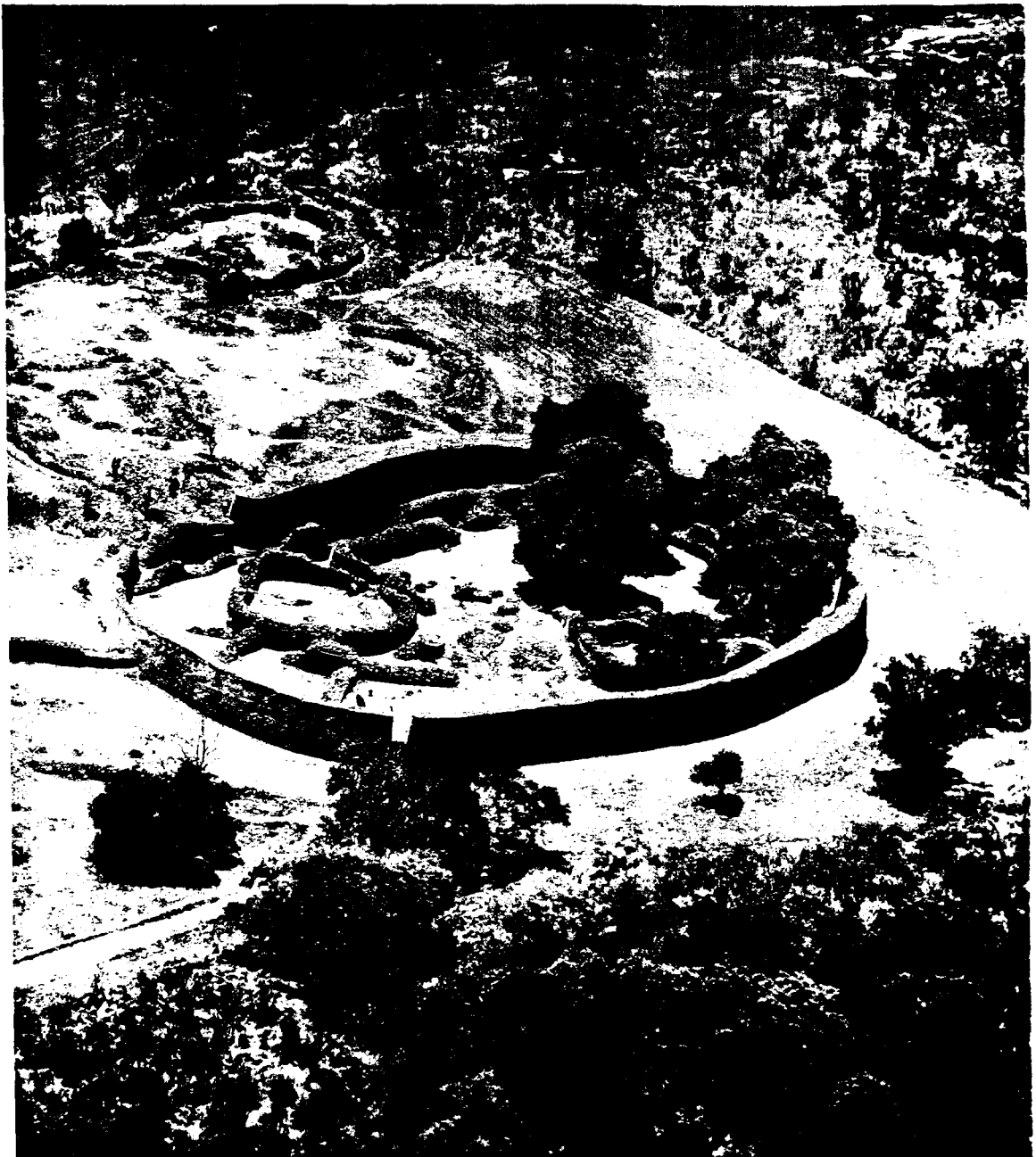
ICOMOS, April 1986.



Site plan of Great Zimbabwe.



Mur du Grand Enclos.



ZIMBABWE : vue générale du Grand Enclos.