



The Riddle of King Solomon's Mines

By Arthur Nettleton



AS A result of the application of modern dating techniques, Africa's greatest mystery is a step nearer solution. By measuring the amount of cosmic radiation in logs removed from the foundations of Great Zimbabwe, in Rhodesia, scientists expect to determine the age of this mysterious structure and find out whether it served as a gold-collecting centre during the forty-year reign of the fabulously rich King Solomon.

Great Zimbabwe has in fact figured prominently in efforts to find the source of the gold which he lavished on the Temple in Jerusalem and on his palaces.

He even had chariots of gold, and his soldiers carried shields beaten from this valuable metal.

It has been estimated that, to meet Solomon's demands, at least £50,000,000-worth of gold ingots were imported annually into Israel for twenty years. Yet the site of the mines which yielded this immense wealth is now uncertain, despite several expeditions in search of it.

To produce gold in the quantities needed by Solomon, incredibly rich veins of ore would be required, or the gold-field would have to be unusually extensive. Yet no mines big enough to satisfy this situation have so far been located in Africa.

The mystery deepens when it is realised that the workings must have been near the surface, for only primitive methods of mining were available in Solomon's time.

The screen covering the mystery was raised slightly in 1868, however, when a lone explorer stumbled upon an odd structure while tracking elephants seventeen miles south-east of Fort Victoria, Southern Rhodesia.

Festooned with creepers, it looked like an abandoned temple in the shape of an ellipse. Towers were spaced along the walls, and particularly mysterious were narrow passages running parallel with the curtain wall and leading to an inner walled area.

Monoliths stood within this area, and two conical towers were noted, the taller one being 32 ft. high.

The most astonishing feature was the method of construction followed in erecting the great outer wall, the maze of passages, and platforms. There was no sign of cement or mortar, the thousands of small stones having been cut neatly to uniform size and fitted together accurately.

Nor was this astonishing structure the only one in the vicinity. Nearby the solitary adventurer saw a fortress commanding the area from the summit of a 350 ft. hill.

Here again great skill had been used by the builders, for they had dovetailed the walls into the natural rock and had arranged the pathways from the base to the summit through fissures, in such a way that nobody unaware of their intricacies could reach the top without being seen.

It has been calculated that 100,000 tons of granite are contained in this stronghold, and it is a mystery how the builders managed to erect it without mechanical aids. Even today the job would give contractors almost insuperable difficulties.

Further discoveries in the neighbourhood include the remains of a city, giving rise to the assumption that Great Zimbabwe in its hey day was an important centre of activity guarded by an Acropolis, and that the walled enclosure was used for religious rites in some distant era.

Yet it carries no inscriptions or other carvings which would support this theory.

Stranger still, there are no signs of quarrying in the vicinity. In fact, stone of the same kind is not to be found nearer than 200 miles from Great Zimbabwe!

There are, however, indications that gold ore was brought there to be turned into ornaments. Excavations in the neighbourhood have unearthed many gold trinkets.

The discovery of this jungle centre in 1868 was only

The ruined citadel of Zimbabwe is seen complete in the aerial view opposite: the conical towers and broken remains of the interior walls are shown in the other two pictures. The gigantic exterior walls (this page) are made of hand-dressed stones, but no chippings have been found nearby and where the dressing was done is unknown. If scientists can determine the age of the ruins, it may help to solve some of the riddles they pose.



the start of the quest for King Solomon's mines. It was soon followed by the finding of other similar structures, though they were on a much smaller scale.

Especially significant was the discovery of many ancient mine workings and the remains of furnaces. The man who initiated further searches was an explorer who accidentally fell down a shaft. At first he believed it to be a natural feature, but a closer examination showed that it was man-made.

Countless other expeditions were organised during the second half of the 19th century and were still being mounted 30-40 years ago, as a result of reports that veins of gold were to be found in the shafts.

This Rhodesian gold rush threw new light on the mystery of King Solomon's Mines. Today there are known to be at least 20,000 ancient man-made shafts in Rhodesia where gold has been tapped.

From these discoveries it seems likely that the Old Testament king did not obtain huge quantities of the precious metal from one concentrated source, but from innumerable small mines, and that Great Zimbabwe was the place where it was collected and guarded before it was sent to Jerusalem.

Nevertheless, a number of intriguing questions have yet to be answered. How did the gold get to its destination? History is silent about this.

Were the consignments carried northwards across Africa by long trains of porters? Or was the gold taken over the much shorter distance to the old seaport

of Sofala, on the east coast of the continent, and shipped to its destination from there?

Great Zimbabwe is barely 300 miles from that port, which was used in Solomon's time by Syrian traders in ivory.

Again, whilst many structures similar to Great Zimbabwe have been found in the African jungle, they are of inferior construction and were probably built at a later time by tribes who had seen the original temple and fortress.

Clearly, Great Zimbabwe fits more closely into the conception of Solomon's "Ophir" than any of these other relics. The absence of carvings or inscriptions is puzzling, however.

The only embellishments on this imposing temple are projecting slabs of granite on one of the outer walls, in the form of a double row of triangles. There is nothing to tell the story of this citadel where religious rites must have been held long years ago.

And the most perplexing mystery of all? Nobody has yet satisfactorily explained why no human skeletons or bones have been found in the neighbourhood.

Thousands of people must have worked and worshipped in Great Zimbabwe, but no burial-places have been found there, and vultures don't eat bones.

This absence of human remains is an enigma which gives Africa the right to still be regarded as the Dark Continent, and complicates the centuries-old conundrum of the whereabouts of King Solomon's mines.

STOCKS (continued from page 439)

adventures of a smuggler's son, one William Tinney, who was punished for robbing a poor widow in 1817. Managing to escape from the stocks, he climbed the church tower and slid down the bell-rope before running off to sea, never to return there.

In several instances you may come across a set in which a whipping-post has been incorporated. Here one of the terminal uprights is higher than the other and to it are affixed iron clamps by which a wrongdoer was held by the wrists and given a sound thrashing for committing such crimes as blasphemy and perjury.

There exists some doubt pertaining to the last occasion

on which stocks were actually used in practice. Some authorities erroneously hold that it was at Rugby, Warwickshire in 1865, whereas it actually occurred in Newbury, Berkshire seven years later, though the instrument was resurrected from cold storage for the purpose.

To-day other and what we regard as more humane means of punishment are used in this country and we can pride ourselves in the fact that in the Space Age we are now more civilized. However that may be, stocks are no less interesting from the historical point of view, showing full well how the law was administered by and to our ancestors.