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## THE RHODESIA RUINS : THEIR PROBABLE ORIGIN AND SIGNIFICANCE.\*

By DAVID RANDALL-MACIVER, M.A., D.Sc., F.R.G.S.

THOUGH the problems of the origin and date of the ruins in Rhodesia had been before the public for about a generation, from the time, in fact, that Mauch rediscovered Zimbabwe, yet up to the present year remarkably little progress had been made towards their solution. In part this was due to the difficulty of exploring a country that has only recently been opened up, in part to the concentration of attention upon a single group out of all the ruins which were available for study, and in part to the want of system with which any investigations had been conducted.

The British Association, when it arranged to visit South Africa in 1905, resolved to make an effort to end this uncertainty, and asked me to precede them by some months in order to explore and to prepare a special report upon the subject of the ruins. Owing to the great improvements effected in the means of communication, and to the exceptional facilities afforded to me, I was able to conduct my researches over a great extent of country, and to obtain observations which have led me to very definite conclusions, which may be briefly summarized in this paper.

It is proper to recall that this was not the first occasion on which the British Association had manifested its interest in this subject, for it was with the aid of a grant from that society that Mr. Theodore Bent, in 1891, made a partial exploration of the site called, *par excellence*, Zimbabwe, as a result of which he published his well-known volume 'The Ruined Cities of Mashonaland.' To Mr. Bent, as his successors must gratefully acknowledge, is due the credit of having awakened the popular interest and enthusiasm ; but to him, in great measure, is

\* Research Department, February 9, 1906.

also due the responsibility for the unscientific trend which that interest has taken. Before there was sufficient evidence on which to base any suggestions whatsoever as to origin or date, popular opinion settled the question to its own satisfaction, decided that the Rhodesian ruins must be of immense antiquity, and (following the mediæval chroniclers in a genuinely mediæval spirit) pronounced them to be the work either of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, or at least of some of their Oriental contemporaries. The halo of melodramatic romance, once created, is difficult to dissipate, but I propose to make the effort.

First, to summarize the state of the question as it stood a year ago.

1. Many articles had been found by the several persons who had dug at Zimbabwe and elsewhere, but not a single object had been obtained from the ruins which an archæologist could recognize as more than a few centuries old.

2. There was no authenticated instance of a single inscription having been found in the country.

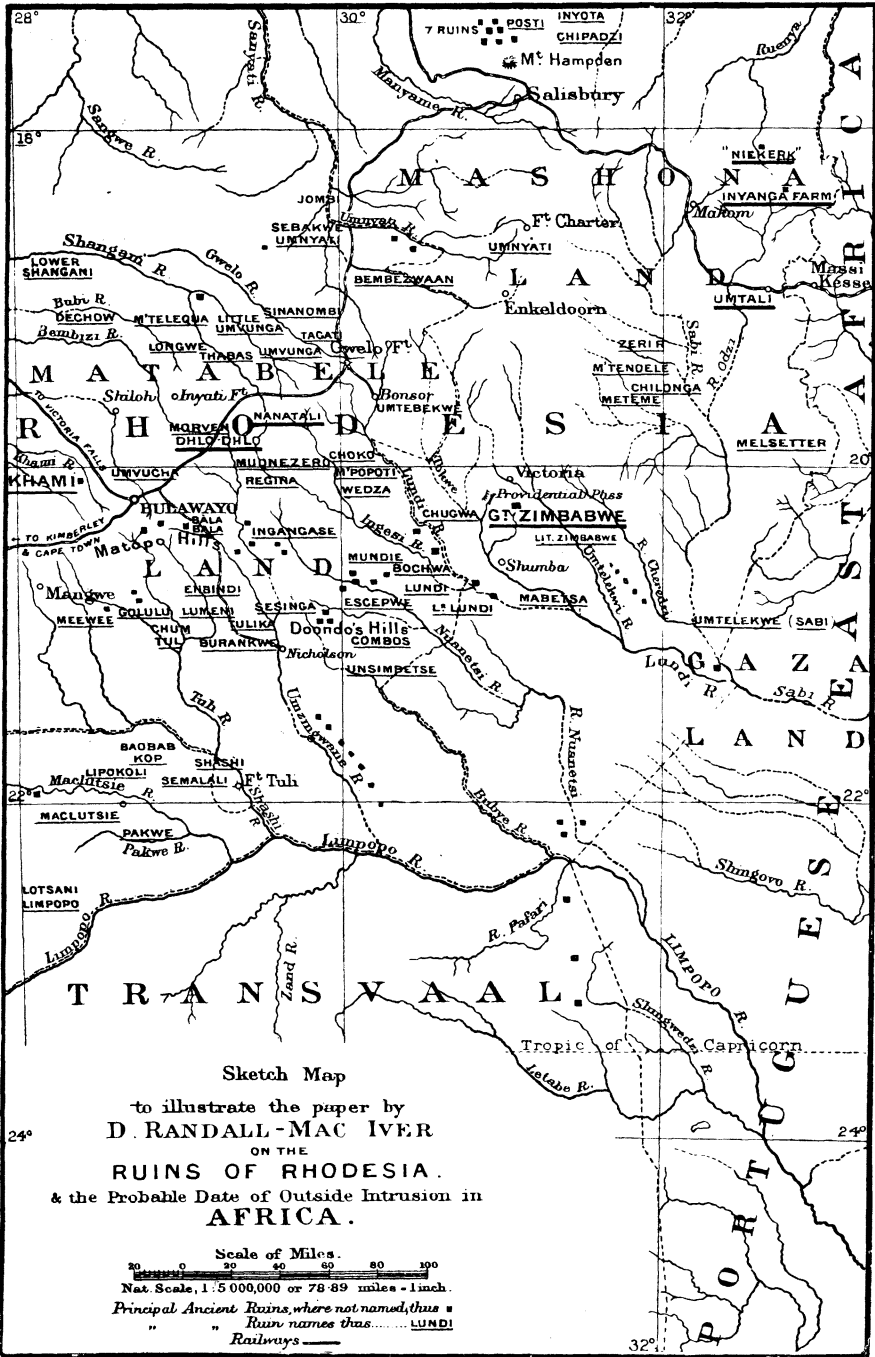
3. On the other hand, the weapons, ornaments, etc., which had been found could be recognized in almost every case as typical products of African peoples; and—

4. Some articles which were not African could no less definitely be recognized as Oriental imports of mediæval date. These were Nanking china, Celadon china, Persian fayence, and Arabic glass.

5. An expert surveyor had shown that the measurements on which Mr. Swan had based his astronomical deductions as to the date of the Great Zimbabwe were entirely erroneous. So that Mr. Swan's work shared the fate of Piazzi Smyth's, which on the face of it always looked probable.

There was, therefore, in spite of the popular opinion to the contrary, no case whatsoever, even a year ago, on which it could be argued that the ruins were of any great antiquity. At the same time, it was generally felt that the observations which had been made were by no means of a satisfactory character. It was possible that the collections which had been made were not representative, and that the foundation-levels had not been properly examined. Underneath the mass of what was undoubtedly mediæval there might exist older strata. The Kaffir things which had been found might not belong to the original inhabitants, but to subsequent settlers. And the latest of the untrained excavators, who had been permitted to carry out excavations at the Great Zimbabwe, asserted this to be the case. He had, indeed, been able to produce no specimens which could prove his assertion that the alleged different levels belonged to widely different periods of time, but it was possible, nevertheless, that the statement might prove to be true.

It was my task, therefore, to carry out such representative excavations as should determine—



1. Whether more than one period of time was represented in the ruins.

2. What was the approximate date of the period or periods.

3. Whether, apart from the question of chronology, the ruins had been built by the people who left there implements and ornaments of African types, or whether these were the result of a mere casual occupation.

I consider that my excavations have given the answer to these questions, and have proved—

1. That the Rhodesian ruins belong to one period only.

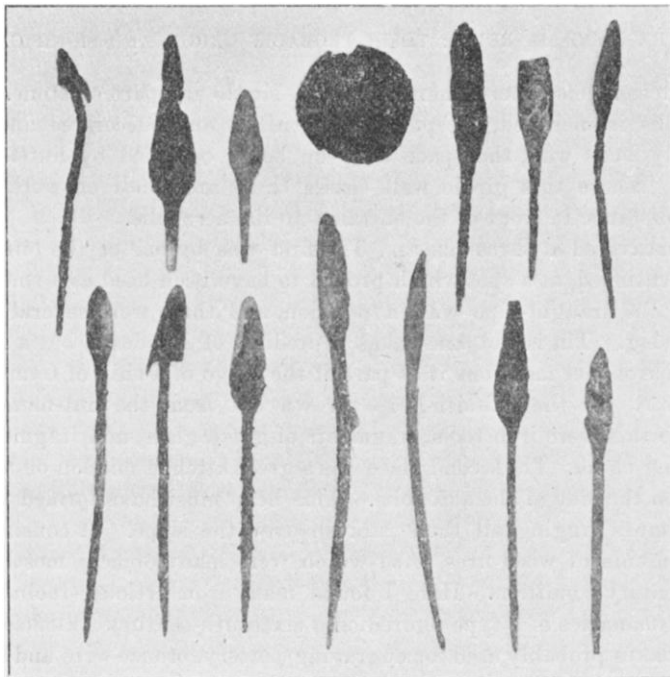
2. That the period in question is mediæval and post-mediæval.

3. That the buildings were constructed by the people whose implements, weapons, and ornaments are found there—that is to say, by a negro or negroid race closely akin to the present dwellers in the country.

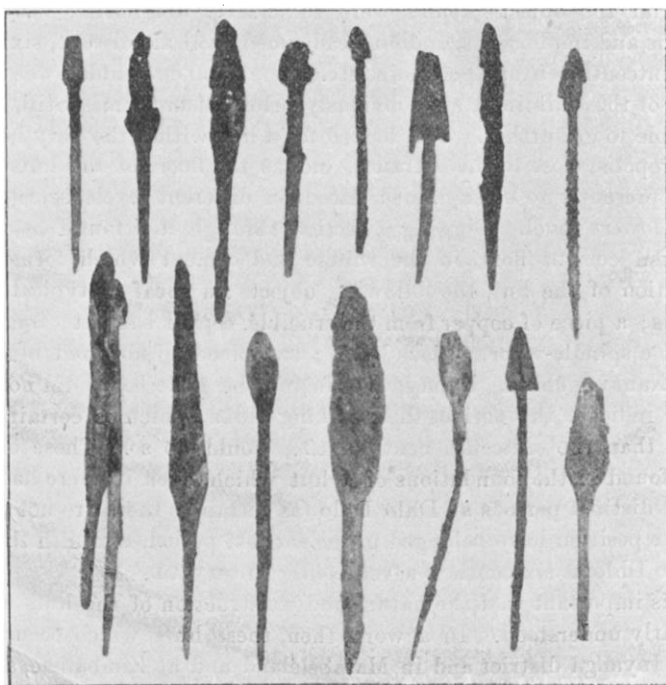
The space available compels me to condense my account on the present occasion within very narrow limits, but I will endeavour to bring the chief points before you, and there will be ample opportunity, in the discussion which is to follow this paper, to cross-question me on all matters of detail.

The sites which I explored were seven in number. Three, in the more northern part of the country, contained rude buildings of stone which are more primitive in character and actually a little more ancient in date than the better-known constructions of Matabeleland and the Victoria district. These three sites are—The Rhodes estate at Inyanga, a remote place 16 miles north of the Rhodes estate which I have named the Niekerk ruins, and Umtali. The other four are Dhlo Dhlo, Nanatali, Khami, and the Great Zimbabwe, which exhibit a more elaborated style of building, but do not differ in any essential points from the more northern sites. As, however, the most decisive evidence of date and origin was obtained from the southern ruins, I shall deal chiefly with them in this paper.

Dhlo Dhlo, in the Insiza district, is a fort—or, to be more exact, a fortified kraal—the plan of which is very similar to that of rough hill forts at Inyanga. The central portion forms a sort of acropolis, well built with slabs of very slightly dressed granite. The walls, as in all these buildings, form, not angles, but curved arcs. The principle of construction, in fact, is everywhere the ellipse, though adaptation to every irregularity of the ground produces a plan which is generally very unsymmetrical. At Dhlo Dhlo the walls of the acropolis rise on the north-west front in three tiers, ornamented with the four characteristic motives of chess-board, herring-bone, chevron, and cord pattern. (Be it remarked, in passing, that these patterns are all characteristically African, and found in every corner of the continent, north, south, east, and west.) Except on the principal front, where the ground is less



DEPOSIT OF IRON WEAPONS AND A COPPER INGOT FOUND BENEATH THE INTACT CEMENT FLOOR OF A PLATFORM IN THE HEART OF THE CITADEL AT DHLO DHLO.



DEPOSIT OF IRON WEAPONS FOUND BENEATH THE INTACT CEMENT FLOOR OF A PLATFORM IN THE HEART OF THE CITADEL AT DHLO DHLO.

broken than elsewhere, there is only a single rampart of stone. The acropolis is encircled, except on the front, by an undecorated and very roughly built wall, the space between being occupied by hut-foundations. Where this girdle wall ceases there are small outworks at a short distance in front of the entrance to the acropolis.

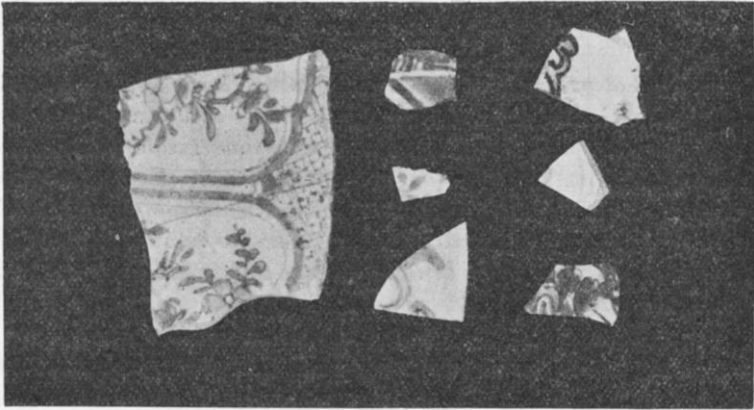
I excavated at three places. The first was by one of the outworks just mentioned, at a spot which proved to have been used as a smelting-place; the draught-pipe was in position, and there were several pieces of tin slag. Tin is not known as a product of Rhodesia, but a Portuguese chronicler mentions it as part of the cargo of a ship of Cambay in 1519 A.D. In the rubbish-heap thrown out from the hut-foundation next to this were iron tools, fragments of green glass, and fragments of Nanking china. The second place was a great kitchen midden on a steep slope on the side of the acropolis. This heap must have formed by the inhabitants flinging all their rubbish over the slope. It consisted of the contents of wood fires, with which were many objects, mostly in a fragmentary condition. Here I found many iron articles (including a pair of manacles of a type figured on a sixteenth-century Valencia tile), stone flakes probably used for engraving pottery, bronze wire and bronze sheathing, copper bangles, cores of copper produced in casting, fragments of bell-metal, beads—some of which were of glaze and porcelain—fragments of Nanking china, etc.

So far the objects found were sufficiently diagnostic, viz. Kaffir weapons and implements, Indian beads, mediæval metalwork, sixteenth or seventeenth century porcelain, etc. The kitchen midden was in the centre of the buildings, and obviously belonged to them. Still, it was advisable to go further. So I looked for a hut within the very heart of the acropolis, close to the entrance, and, as the floors of the huts (for a reason presently to be explained) stood on different levels, selected one on the lowest level. Digging a section through it, I found below the unbroken cement floor, in the rubble and cement which formed the foundation of the hut, the following objects: a sheaf of typical Kaffir assegais; a piece of copper from the crucible, copper bangles; fragments of tin; a spindle-whorl; glaze beads; two pieces of flowered blue-and-white Nanking china. Even if the tin and the glaze beads did not sufficiently indicate the period, the Nanking china, which is certainly not earlier than the sixteenth century A.D., would do so. These objects, being found in the foundations of a hut which, even if there had been several distinct periods at Dhlo Dhlo (as certainly there are not), must from its position have belonged to the earliest period, establish the date of Dhlo Dhlo as sixteenth to seventeenth century A.D.

It is important that the nature and construction of the huts should be clearly understood. In a word, then, these huts, which occur alike in the Inyanga district and in Matabeleland and at Zimbabwe, are the really essential part of the settlement in each case. The stone walls,

which have been so much admired, are merely more or less elaborate ring fences enclosing them. At Dhlo Dhlo, Nanatali, Khami, and Zimbabwe the huts are built of a strong concrete or cement, made probably from powdered granite, very similar to what Lobengula used in his kraal. They are circular in form, and often partitioned into several sections. Thus there is commonly an inner circle, 5 metres in diameter in typical cases, from which partition walls, about 5 metres in length, radiate to meet the circumference of the outer ring. The walls in many cases are still standing to a height of several feet. The floor, like the walls, is of cement, a layer of it being placed upon rubble of stones, a foundation which is strengthened at intervals by wooden posts.

Now, these huts are not confined to one site, but are found in every



NANKING CHINA FOUND AT DHLO DHLO.

The large piece with (blue) flower-pattern was beneath the intact cement floor of a platform in the heart of the citadel.

place which I explored, with the exception of Umtali, where an equally African type (that of stone rings to support wooden posts, which occurs also on the Inyanga sites) replaces them. They are not sporadic, for they are found in every part of an area so immense as that of the Niekerk ruins, where there are over 50 square miles of uninterrupted settlement. They are not subsequent to the stone walls, for they occur not only outside and inside them, but also built into one indivisible mass with them, so that at the Niekerk ruins and Nanatali they present almost the appearance of bastions. At Dhlo Dhlo the whole interior of the Acropolis, and at Zimbabwe the whole interior of all the buildings, have been filled with these constructions of rubble and cement, which fit as closely to the sides of the stone walls as water frozen into a glass. At Zimbabwe the cement is outside as well as inside the stone walls; it forms a bed over the original bottom of rock or sand, a bed in which the stone walls are set like molars in a jaw.



Whatever, therefore, is found *in* or *underneath* the floors of such huts must necessarily be contemporary with the stone building.

At Dhlo Dhlo, as I have remarked in passing, the huts in the Acropolis stood on different levels. This was sometimes due to the prejudice of the old builders in favour of having horizontal floors for their dwellings. The foundation was in any case built up with varying depths of rubble from the uneven ground, but where the bed rock dipped a great deal, it was easier to make separate levels for the floors of adjoining huts than to raise them all to a uniform height. Sometimes, however, there was a real ceremonial reason for the distinction, as appears from a study of Nanatali.

Nanatali, with its monoliths on the wall and its symmetrical plan, is the most attractive of all the buildings which I have seen. It is also one of the most instructive. A study of the ground plan reveals the significant fact that here we have a direct translation into stone of exactly that principle of construction which I have been describing in the cement huts, for the main hut, which occupies the northern half of the enclosure, is connected with the stone girdele wall round it by *stone* partitions radiating out from it like the spokes of a wheel; and when we realize that precisely the same principle of construction is found within the elliptical temple at Zimbabwe, it will be evident that it is unnecessary to fly to the Orient to find analogies for the plan of the latter building.

Again, Nanatali has a no less useful lesson to teach with regard to the levels. In the centre of the northern half of the enclosure is the principal hut. This stands on an artificial platform of cement and stones strengthened by posts, which rises  $2\frac{1}{2}$  metres above the surrounding ground; but the other three huts, which the plan shows to be no less integral parts of the whole building, are on a different level, fully 2 metres below the first. From its size, its position, and the fact that it possesses a special entrance of its own, and that all access to it from other sides is barred, it is evident that the main hut was that of the chief. It was, therefore, in deliberate recognition of his dignity that it was erected on a higher plane than the others.

Nanatali was evidently inhabited only for a very short time. I found in one of the huts a large iron nail with screw head, two iron spears, an iron band, and twisted copper; and in a *débris* heap outside one of the entrances, a copper implement and two dakka pipes of soapstone.

Of Khami I need only say, in this place, that the results obtained from it were exactly the same as were obtained from the other ruins. There was not a trace of superposition of periods, and the objects found were just like those found on the other southern sites, viz. Kaffir spears, assegais and axes of iron, soapstone pipes, copper and bronze metalwork, tin, blue-and-white porcelain, and a mediæval iron key.

Next I may treat of Zimbabwe. The "elliptical temple" is a most interesting building, the finest example of its kind, but that kind is only the same that has been noted on other sites in Rhodesia. The "temple" has, in fact, scarcely a feature which cannot be explained on the view that it is a royal kraal, of which the plan is derived from a combination of the Inyanga or Dhlo.Dhlo fort with such a building as Nanatali. It is simply more massive, and has no other point of superiority over several of the other ruins. And, without wishing to disparage it, I think it necessary to protest against the highly exaggerated idea of its perfection which is so generally entertained by



NANATALI: FRONT, SHOWING ENTRANCE, STONE RING WALL, AND CEMENT WALLS OF THE CHIEF'S HUT ON A PLATFORM INSIDE.

those who have not seen Zimbabwe. It evinces no knowledge of architecture; only a certain skill in piling up stones. The famous "temple" is inferior to Nanatali in symmetry and beauty.

The first question to be decided was whether there were any traces on the surface of secondary building. As to this, I can say unhesitatingly that the assertion that certain walls have been rebuilt is erroneous, and is due to an imperfect knowledge of the characteristics of the Rhodesian ruins in general, and of the shoddy methods of their builders.

Next, it was necessary to test the assertion that there was a superposition of periods. The last excavator had nearly rendered this impossible by ruthlessly sweeping out of the interior almost everything

that stood above ground down to floor-level. He had, however, left a small corner in enclosure 15, only about 1 metre in diameter, but standing almost to its original height. By a curious piece of good fortune, this was the part of which he had published a section, distinguishing six or seven strata above the level of the floor. It was evident at the first glance that these strata were an illusion; the whole height of the mass (1·9 metre from the floor upwards) was homogeneous cement, and it had been the platform of such a hut as has been described above. The excavator in question states that he destroyed a "modern Makalanga" hut which stood on this patch, and the destruction is unfortunately complete. But in the cement foundation of that hut I found the usual supporting wooden baulks, one of which was over a metre long, and so would have passed through several of the supposed chronological strata. As a matter of fact, this excavator, not understanding how such platforms were made, had mistaken the layers formed by the separate blocks of cement for chronological periods. That there was no difference in character between the contents of the mass at different depths I found by digging. The rubbish thrown in with the cement contained exactly similar articles at all depths; and at 3·3 metres below the level of his "modern" Makalanga hut I found spindle-whorls, coils of copper for bracelets, and pottery, all of just the same kind as occurred on the level of that hut.

This is the lowest spot in the temple; the articles I refer to were found below the level of the foundation walls, and consequently the walls of the "temple" were erected on a higher level than one which contains typical Kaffir products.

Like the other ruins, therefore, the "elliptical temple" was built by Kaffirs, and its date is decided by fragments of china, Nanking ware, and mediæval Arabic glass. The interior was wholly, or almost wholly, occupied at one time by circular platforms of cement of the kind which have been described, but only traces of these now remain.

From the valley ruins I obtained analogous results; there was no superposition of periods anywhere, and off the ground-rock I recovered mediæval Persian fayence, glaze and glass beads, as well as many Kaffir articles.

There can, therefore, be no reasonable doubt as to the date of the elliptical temple and other buildings at Zimbabwe. They are contemporary, to within a century or so, with Dhlo Dhlo, Nanatali, and Khami, not earlier than 1400 or 1500 A.D., and possibly even later.

Simply as an inhabited site, Zimbabwe may have been occupied a little longer, for below the level of the walls I found a thin stratum of ashes containing "Makalanga" objects, 0·8 metre thick, which *might* have been formed by an earlier settlement. This settlement, however,

of which there was no other trace, would not extend the date of its occupation more than a few generations. If such a hypothetical settlement existed, it would have been contemporary with the roughly built ruins of Inyanga and the Niekerk ruins. For that these hill forts, intrenchments, and pit-dwellings date from slightly before the Portuguese period I infer from the absence of imported mediæval articles, as well as from Dos Santos' statement that certain ruins a little north of them near the Zambezi were deserted in his day (Dos Santos wrote in 1609). Inyanga and the Niekerk ruins, however, cannot be *considerably* older than Zimbabwe, as they constitute a series of which Umtali is the most southern link, and at Umtali was discovered a building which possessed the characteristics of the developed Zimbabwe style, as well as a fragment of mediæval ware. Kaffir articles were found in abundance on these northern as well as on the southern sites, there was no superposition of periods, and the details of the building, as well as the objects found, were of native African kind.

Having referred to a Portuguese writer, I will conclude this account by stating that while the Portuguese penetrated so little beyond the Zambezi and the coast that it was not to be expected that they would be able to give any account of the buildings in the interior, yet there are extant two passages which support the inferences that I have drawn from excavations. They state explicitly that the houses of a Monomotapa in 1506 were of "stone and clay" (Alcaçova), and that buildings described as similar to the elliptical temple of Zimbabwe were actually being inhabited by the "captains" of the "king of Benomotapa" in the sixteenth century (De Goes).

If I have spoken very positively upon the antiquity and the origin of the ruins in Rhodesia, it is because I regard these questions as having been decided by the results of my field-work. On the second part of the theme which is to be discussed, viz. the character of the foreign intrusions on the East Coast of Africa and the date to which they should be ascribed, I speak with much more diffidence, since I bring no new or expert knowledge to bear upon it. The authorities are accessible to all, and have been studied by others more closely than by myself. Yet I may venture to draw attention to one or two points. It is not always appreciated that there is little documentary evidence, and there is no archæological evidence extant to prove that the civilized world had any considerable knowledge of, or intercourse with, East Africa prior to the time of Mohammed. The dates of the Arab and Persian settlements, which the Portuguese of the sixteenth century found lining the coast from Cape Delgado to Cape Guardafui, are known from the chronicle of Kilwa. The most ancient is Magadoxo, which was founded not earlier than the tenth century A.D. Sofala itself, as the chronicle states, was first colonized from Magadoxo, and there is, therefore, no justification for ascribing to it an earlier date than the eleventh century

A.D. That in the days of the Roman Empire the Mozambique coast and the Zambezi were beyond the ken of geographers seems apparent both from Ptolemy and from the Periplus of the "Red sea." For the identification of the sites mentioned in these two works, reference may be made to the standard authority of Guillain, who considered Rhapta, the most southern place mentioned, to have been situated on the Rufiji—that is to say, in 8° of S. lat. The documentary evidence, therefore, on the one hand, absolutely forbids us to suppose that Arabs, or any other people known to the ancient geographers, penetrated as far south as Cape Delgado; and, on the other hand, it is too defective to justify the inference frequently drawn from the mere catalogue of place-names, viz. that any considerable trade existed in Græco-Roman times, even with what is now British and German East Africa. Until the spade of the explorer comes to our assistance, we can only safely affirm that these countries were not absolutely unknown at that period. *À fortiori*, if I would suspend judgment with regard to so late a time as that of the Roman Empire, I refuse to discuss anything so shadowy as the possibility of a yet earlier trade with any country further south than Somaliland, the Punt of the Egyptians.

Ethnological data are not in any way inconsistent with this attitude. Granting, what seems to be the case, that the racial type of the peoples at present existing all down the East Coast betrays Semitic *métissage* in varying amounts, yet it cannot be proved that south of the equator the intrusion of this foreign racial element is not comparatively recent.

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Before the discussion, the Chairman (Sir THOMAS HOLDICH) read the following communications:—

From Dr. ARTHUR EVANS, F.R.S.: My opinion on the question of Zimbabwe can have no special value. I know nothing personally of that part of Africa. On the other hand, I was long ago negatively convinced that the supposed evidence of early contact with Arabia or Phœnicia had no real basis. In fact, it seemed to me that there was nothing in the architecture or the remains discovered in common with either early Arabian or Phœnician models as far as they were known. On the occasion of a lecture by Mr. Hall at Oxford, I pointed out the great presumption that there was that the existing ruins were simply enlarged examples of native kraals. I regard Mr. MacIver's researches as having been carried out by the true scientific method, and, so far as the dating goes, I think that he has made out a satisfactory case for their late mediæval origin. But I have not the local knowledge to express myself in any other than in general terms.

From Prof. J. W. GREGORY, F.R.S.: Looking at the date of the prehistoric mining in Rhodesia from a mining point of view, it is certain that some of the mines were modern, but that others may be of considerable antiquity. It is clear, from their size and extent, that a large amount of gold has been derived from them, and by mining methods unlike those adopted, to my knowledge, by any un instructed negro people. That the original mining instructors were either Phœnicians or people under Phœnician influence, is supported by the shape of their ingots. They were "astragali," to use the term by which Diodorus described the tin ingots obtained by the Phœnicians from Cornwall. The shape of Cornish