

Topic: Whose Shrine? Archaeological Heritage and the Building of National Identity Through Great Zimbabwe World Heritage Site, 1980-2023

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Abstract

Great Zimbabwe is a UNESCO World Heritage Site that served as the capital of a large Shona kingdom that flourished between the 11th and 17th centuries. For many Zimbabweans today, it serves as a symbol of Zimbabwean identity and national heritage. Different groups including research institutions, spirit mediums, tourism officials, the Zimbabwe construction industry and church groups have competing interests over the archaeological heritage of Great Zimbabwe. These actors adopt the name and architectural motifs of the site, and in some cases use of the site for ritual ceremonies. This study examines the contestation over the use of the site for national identity purposes and how that affects its management and conservation. Drawing on semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGD) and archival research, this thesis reveals that clashes over competing uses of the site for national identity purposes are mainly caused by divergent understandings of the site's cultural, historical, economic and political significance. Postcolonial theory and the concept of habitus guided the study. The study recommends that the Government of Zimbabwe enacts laws that enable everyone to use the site without compromising its integrity.