

G R E A T Z I M B A B W E

W E L L O F A N C I E N T W I S D O M

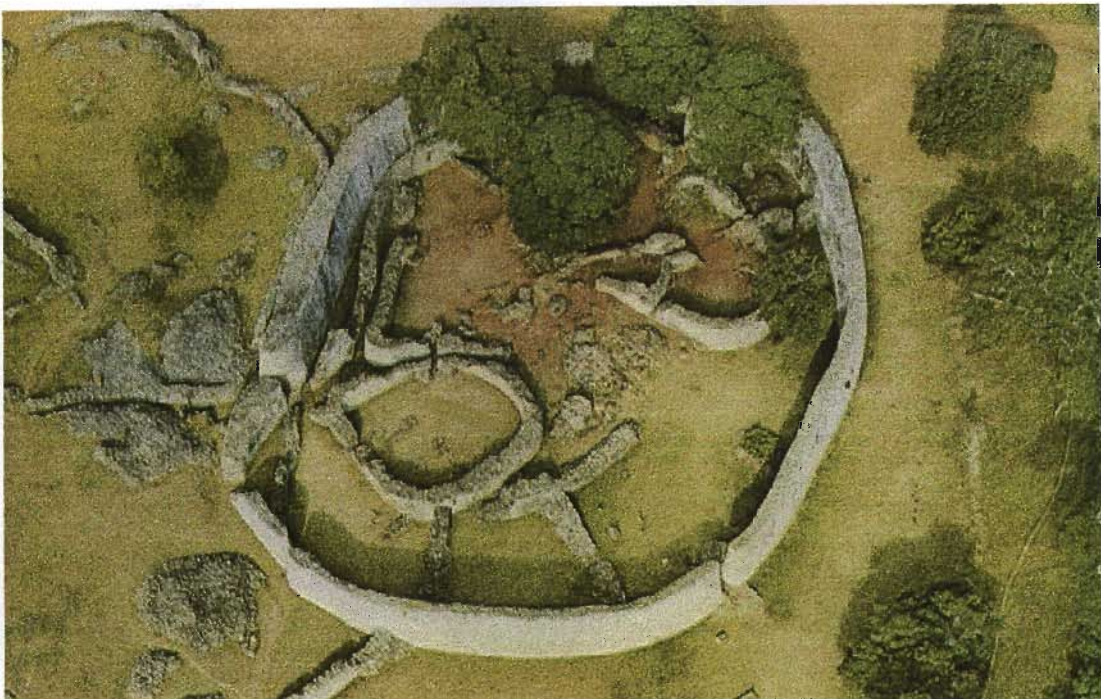
An examination of traditional Karanga mythology, symbolism and ritual towards an interpretation of spatial distribution and contextual meaning of symbolic structures and settlement dynamics of the royal settlement of Central Great Zimbabwe.

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*And, if there is a connection between ornaments and love
that is because that jar is the symbol of the world's womb.*
(Griaule, M. 1965. In: Tzonis, A. 1972:51.)



Aerial view of the Great Enclosure (Garlake 1974)

*Myth explains the why and how of the here and now.
The explanation given is not only authoritative,
because it is given in the form of a myth,
it is true to say that a myth has authority,
because it offers an explanation.*
(Van Baaren, T.P. in Johnson, P-A. 1994:47.)

Abstract

The intention of this thesis is to examine the possibility of seeing mythology and ritual as sources for understanding spiritual, symbolic and spatial structures in architecture. Mythology and ritual are used as sources of creativity for examining a culture's architecture and as a way to understand the creative and cultural processes informing an architectural record. Central Great Zimbabwe is used as a case study for examining this.

Karanga ethnography has not previously been considered as a source for interpreting Great Zimbabwe. However, historical evidence documented in this thesis shows that the Karanga were the creators and occupiers of Great Zimbabwe.

The study pursues the need expressed by P. J. Sinclair to consider the mythology of the region as an informative tool to understanding the symbolic values inherent in the landscape of settlement dynamics and symbolic structures;

...one might expect such aspects of material culture as architectural style and settlement layout, organisation and decorative motifs as well as a choice of subsistence needs to be strongly influenced...larger scale expressions of symbolic values...exist in the expressions of kingship and power...Further illustrations might include the associations of the granite mountains found throughout the plateau margins with the widespread distributions of stone buildings. The mythology of the region has been little considered from this point of view (Sinclair, P. 1987:159).

The study sets out to test Sinclair's observation by examining whether the Karanga symbolic values sourced from the mythology and ritual practices of the region may be reflected in the settlement dynamics and spatio-symbolic expression of Central Great Zimbabwe.

Parts of the study examine Thomas Huffman's fieldwork, documentation and methodology. As the most prolific documenter on Great Zimbabwe, with the most recent interpretations, Huffman's findings are recorded and discussed in detail and his hypothesis for *domba* (initiation centre) function for the Great Enclosure is tested against the information evident in Karanga mythology and ritual.

Since his hypothesis is widely criticised by his colleagues, this criticism is also included in this study as an informative tool to contextualise this field of research and outline the current ethno-archaeological debate concerning the function of the Great Enclosure.

This dissertation takes a different approach to that of Huffman and therefore the outcome of this study deviates from that of Huffman's. This study adopts a **synchronic** approach to history while Huffman's methodology is a structuralist one and takes a more **diachronic** approach. Since both approaches are necessary in this field of study, the synchronic approach here is seen as a way of contributing new information and interpretation to the field.

The intention of the thesis is not to suggest an 'answer' to the 'mystery' of Great Zimbabwe, but to **offer possibilities** and to recognise that this is merely one approach in a very complex, interactive and dynamic research field.

In any qualitative study area, research should lead to still further research and should not be considered to be leading to the 'answer' to a 'problem'. Therefore, this study explores a wide range of disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, psychology, philosophy, religion, history and archaeology in order to broaden and deepen the study. Architecture is neither a science nor an art but sits comfortably between the two domains. It is therefore an **interactive discipline** and is marked by a **divergent flow of creativity**. Rather than taking a convergent approach, which is marked by a structuralist need to solve problems, this study approaches research in a divergent way, where the grappling with the 'problem' itself is seen as a process leading to discovery and possibility rather than to an 'answer'. The study therefore does not examine Karanga mythology as a way to answer the 'mystery' of the stone ruins, nor to provide proof or evidence for an archaeological hypothesis. It is rather a study towards examining ways in which mythology and ritual can be used to broaden and deepen an understanding of symbolism and meaning in architecture.

A method of inquiry which validates the diversity of views and documentation in this field of study is validated by this dissertation and is seen as a valuable way of approaching the history of architecture in Southern Africa at this particular time, where African society is itself undergoing transformation as it reinterprets its past in a 'de-colonised' African context. For that reason, interpreting Great Zimbabwe based on local ethnography is seen as a valuable way of further validating African creativity and local origin.

We can no longer afford to view history one-dimensionally. We need to learn to accept different grounds and more than one belief system. Examining Karanga mythology and ritual is considered in this study as a new way of seeing and interpreting historical artifact in order to **expose the creative domain of discovery**. This approach is relevant to the **paradigmatic shifts** being made in Southern Africa and globally, where society is discovering new ways of seeing itself and concentrating more on its processes than on its products. Society is becoming more tolerant of other perspectives and we need to consider how we can learn more about our society both past and present within the context of so many changing paradigms.

The results of the proposed investigations for this study as outlined above are documented summatively in Part 5, Chapter 9 and generally in the Conclusion at the end of the study.

Acknowledgements

The inception of this dissertation was partly influenced by Mr. Kirk White, a colleague who first suggested this study area as one that might interest me. I remain deeply grateful for this introduction and to his encouragement of the position I eventually took. The many sources he was able to loan to me were also invaluable.

The labouring period of this study was greatly facilitated by my supervisor Professor Rodney Harber, who was committed to allowing my own process of inquiry to take shape without at any time imposing upon the study any preconceived ideas. His facilitatory role has enabled a liberating learning process to develop. His approach as a mentor is much appreciated and I remain inspired by his insight and wisdom.

I would also like to thank the archaeologist Mr. Len van Scalkleck who was able to offer helpful feedback on the archaeological discussion of the document.

Professor Dennis Radford must also be acknowledged for his enthusiasm and support and for encouraging me to present parts of this study at seminars during various stages of its development.

Most importantly, I am in debt to the traditional Karanga people of Zimbabwe whose profound ancient philosophies, social and spiritual insight and impressive stone legacy have been able to inform us, the irreverent people of the twentieth century, of the compelling well of ancient African wisdom within which Great Zimbabwe was created.

This dissertation is dedicated to the Karanga people of Zimbabwe.

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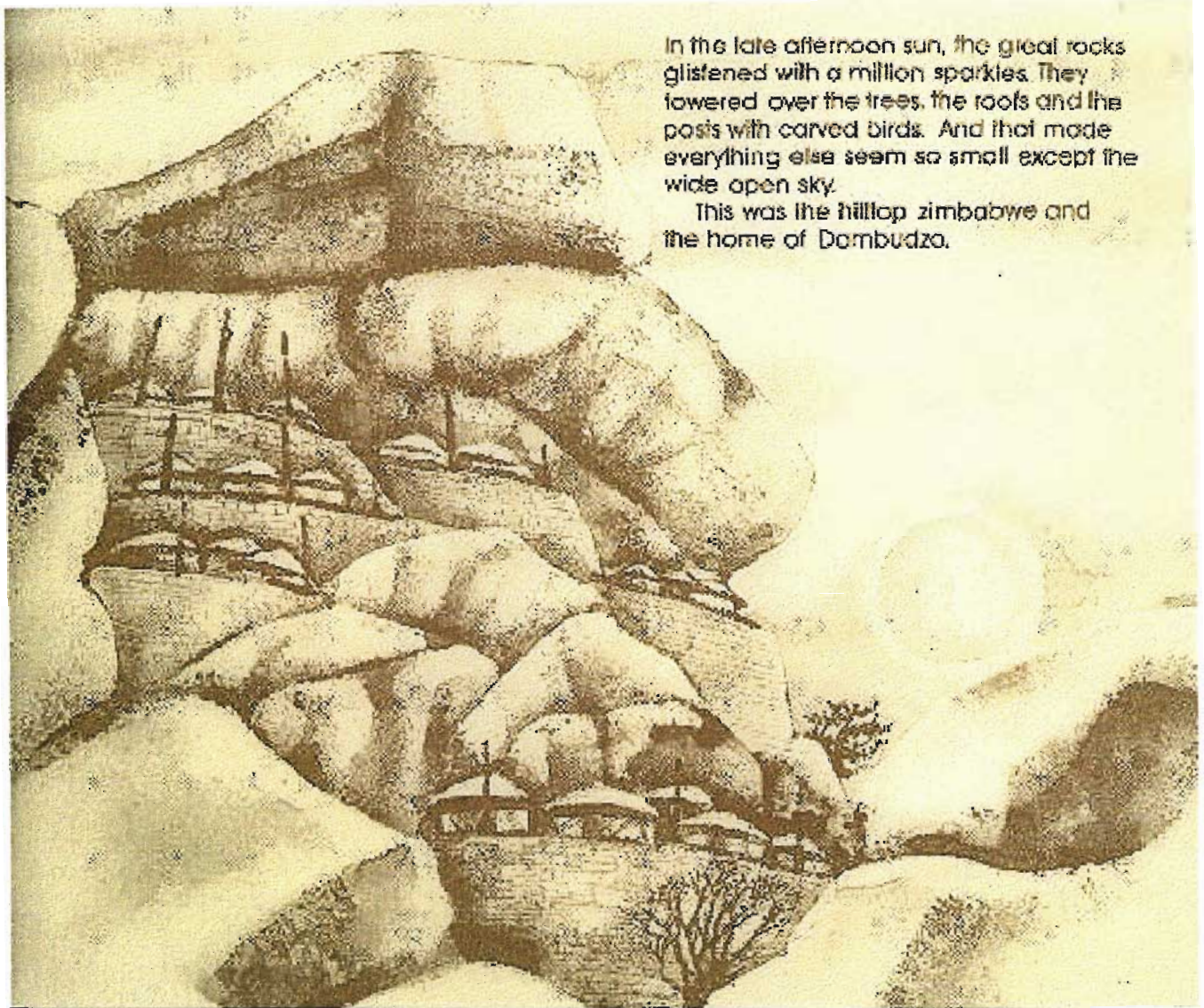
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In the late afternoon sun, the great rocks glistened with a million sparkles. They towered over the trees, the roofs and the posts with carved birds. And that made everything else seem so small except the wide open sky.

This was the hilltop zimbabwe and the home of Dombudzo.

Artist's impression of enclosures below Hill Complex (Asare 1984)

This sketch illustrates the interactive nature of man made and natural forms of the architecture of the Hill Complex, where huts and stone walling weave between the natural rock and boulder outcrops of the mountain..

PART ONE

FORMATIVE CONTEXT



There are more important aspects to the architecture than its technology.

All settlements reflect the society that created them.

Their structures and layout are often determined by the need to express, in symbolic terms, the values of a society.

Hidden in the design there are indications of beliefs, ideology, social relationships and ethnic identity.

Where such messages exist, their decoding must be attempted.

The many interrelated layers of meaning and the relative importance that might be attached to each adds to the complexity of the interpretation.

(Garlake 1994: 20)

1 Historical Perspective

Introduction

Part One of this dissertation provides a formative context for references made throughout the study. The following chapters provide a brief description of the settlement of Great Zimbabwe and its stone enclosures to introduce the reader to this field. In order to set the scene for references made throughout the dissertation, Part One also briefly discusses various discoveries, investigations and hypotheses documented by researchers in this field from the beginning of Great Zimbabwe's documented history to the current ethno-archaeological debate concerning the function of the Great Enclosure.

A Question of Origin

Over the last one hundred years, the origin and function of the stone architecture of Great Zimbabwe has been the intense subject of much investigation by archaeologists and historians. They offer a diverse range of interpretations, issuing from various theoretical positions, which has resulted in much discourse and debate.

Proposals offered by the earliest investigators that Great Zimbabwe was not of local origin were more often motivated by a need to justify colonial expansion;

...these interpretations were closely connected to the world view of the time, which sought evidence for stages of barbarism and civilisation and a moral justification for the colonial settlement of Africa. (Hall, M. 1987:103)

These earlier proposals therefore provide a theoretical antithesis to any current study of Great Zimbabwe, since any serious researcher now accepts the overwhelming ethno-archaeological evidence supporting local origin.

The absurdity of earlier interpretations on Great Zimbabwe are only now, with hindsight, able to be seen as whimsical ideas founded on a political desire to a-contextualise African artifact and colonise the African mind.

Such absurdities were first initiated by the earliest investigator Carl Mauch (1871), who believed that Great Zimbabwe was built for the Queen of Sheba. This speculation further stimulated interpretations by Theodore Bent (1892), Hall and Neal (1904) and R. Dart (1929), explaining the origin as Arabian or Egyptian.

While such earlier investigators upheld the position of foreign origin, later, more significant contributions made through intensive fieldwork by Randall-MacIver (1905), Caton-Thompson (1929), Robertson and Summers and Anthony Whitty (1958) have proved beyond any doubt the local origin of Great Zimbabwe. However, archaeological hypotheses offered by Caton-Thompson and MacIver were heavily criticised, as they were the ideological antithesis of the politics of the day. The British Scientific Association, of the then British institution of colonial Zimbabwe, supported only the efforts of other documenters who upheld the non-local origin position. This helped to vindicate white colonial occupation of Zimbabwe.

Archaeological interpretations continued to mirror the political ideologies of Zimbabwe. Following political independence in the 1960's, new interpretations of the 'mystery' of Great Zimbabwe were provided and supported. The new state of Zimbabwe encouraged fresh interpretations since, as an earlier example of Zimbabwean political and economic success, Great Zimbabwe served as precedent for the new post-colonial Zimbabwe. Contributions made by Peter Garlake and Thomas Huffman are examples of work that grew out of this context.

While some recent researchers have still looked for anything other than an African origin in their interpretation of Great Zimbabwe (Hromnik 1981; Mallows 1984), the more serious research offered by Peter Garlake and Thomas Huffman have utilised the extensive field studies conducted by Caton-Thompson, Summers, Robinson and Whitty. Huffman has particularly utilised oral tradition, ethnography and Portuguese records to interpret the ruins.

The Karanga and Great Zimbabwe

Karanga ethnography has not previously been considered, on any serious level, as a source for interpreting Great Zimbabwe. However, historical evidence documents that the Karanga were the occupants and creators of Great Zimbabwe. Michael Bourdillon describes the stone *zimbabwes* ('houses of stone') of Southern Zimbabwe as being attributed to the "superior economy of the early Karanga" and that the early trade opportunities with coastal Muslims that the Karanga took advantage of enabled the establishment "...at the centre of a growing state a powerful dynasty of rulers...who had sufficient following to build the prominent edifice now known as the Great Zimbabwe" (Bourdillon 1991:9f). Stone construction was used by the early Karanga rulers to further establish their dominance and success;

Wherever there was available granite, migrant Karanga of importance surrounded their homesteads with the imposing stone walls of the Zimbabwe culture (Bourdillon 1991:9).

David Beach also attributes the 'dynasties' of the Zimbabwe culture prior to 1650 to the Karanga people of southern Zimbabwe (Beach 1980:60-61).

Oral tradition of the Karanga people sourced by Ken Mufuka also validates that the stone *zimbabwes* of the southern plateau were established and occupied by the Karanga people (Mufuka 1983).

Contemporary Karanga of the southern Zimbabwe area still practice the religion of the Mwari-cult. Sacrifices are made at the Matopos mountains in southwest Zimbabwe, where the oracle of God (Mwari) is said to be heard (Bourdillon 1991).

Since it appears that the Karanga were the creators of Great Zimbabwe, then it would be appropriate to utilise sources that document Karanga mythology, symbolism and ritual for this study.

However, it must be noted that, while the dominant position taken by current researchers is that the Karanga were the creators of Great Zimbabwe, it may be possible that this position might alter in time with future research. The findings of this dissertation test this current position through a process comparison between symbolic structures of Karanga mythology and ritual and symbolic structures in the architecture of Great Zimbabwe. The findings suggest a strong parity between the two.

Making Connections

While local origin is now accepted and supported, the archaeological debate has recently shifted to the controversy over the function of the Great Enclosure at Great Zimbabwe. Many scientific as well as popular interpretations have been offered, some more convincing than others, but many are still flawed by tendencies to manipulate evidence to support personal theories. The process of inquiring into the assumptions behind recent interpretations is in itself a frustrating exercise. While supporting the evidence that Great Zimbabwe was built by local Shona people, most recent researchers have generally overlooked the potential to integrate Shona culture and religion with material culture and archaeology.

Ken Mufuka relates a revealing conversation that serves to highlight the often-peripheral approach taken to cultural analysis by documenters;

A learned man from Europe once told us that he spent twenty years digging and studying about the Great Zimbabwe. “There is no doubt in my mind that it was the work of the Shona,” he said. “Have you talked to the Shona in this country about Great Zimbabwe?” we asked. “Oh no, they wouldn’t know anything about it”, he said (Mufuka, K. 1983:3).

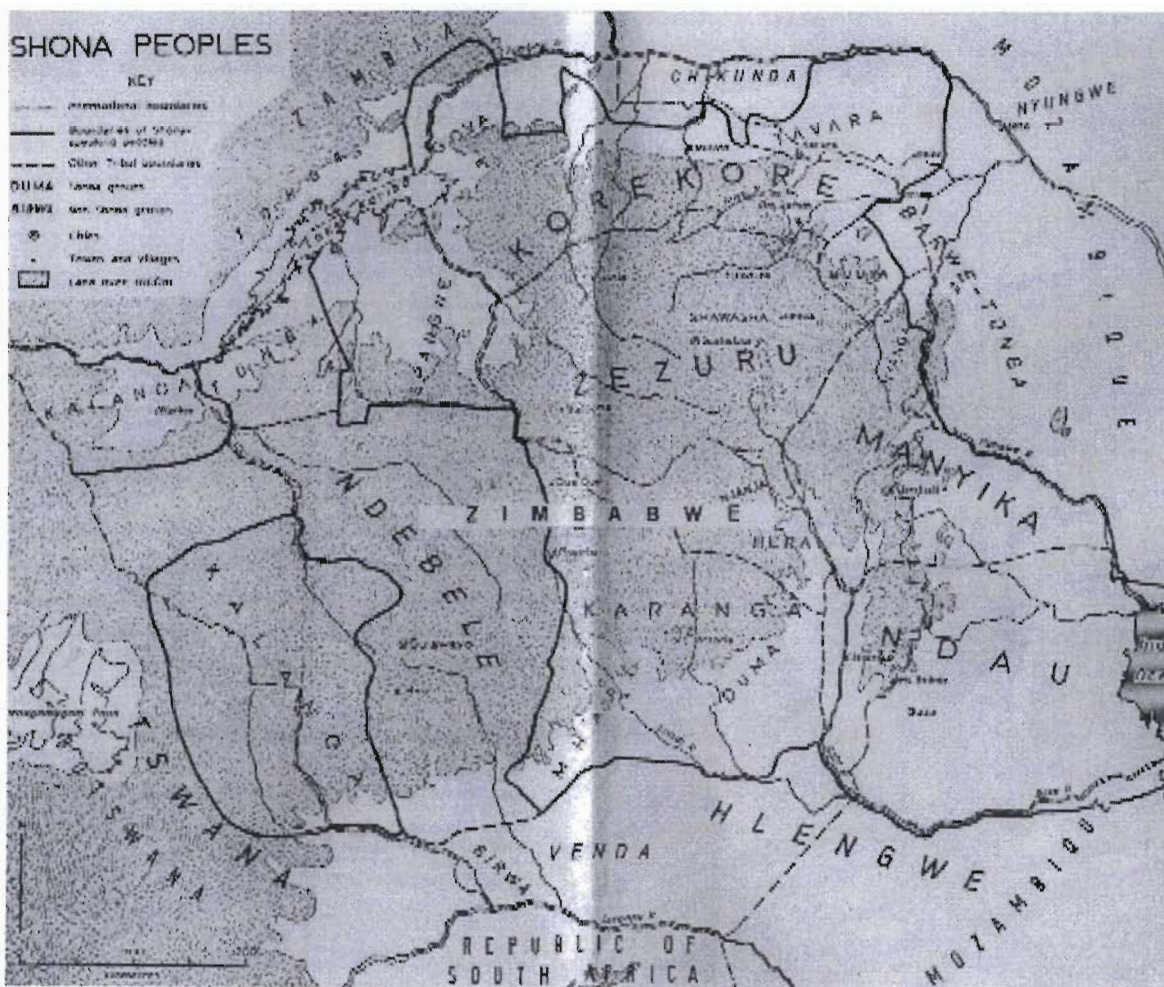


Figure 1.1; Map showing area occupied by Shona (Bourdillon 1991)

Integration of an analysis of Shona culture with an interpretation of the ruins could be seen as an informative way to understand the architecture of Great Zimbabwe and therefore to further develop this acceptance of origin.

The purpose of this study is to therefore provide a deeper understanding of Great Zimbabwe by interpreting its material culture based on a penetrative study of Karanga culture and religious wisdom and to thereby make connections between cultural consciousness and material artifact.

2 Great Zimbabwe Settlement Pattern

At the time of Great Zimbabwe's occupation, the macro-level settlement consisted of densely populated residential housing for the masses surrounding a central royal settlement constructed of stonewalling;

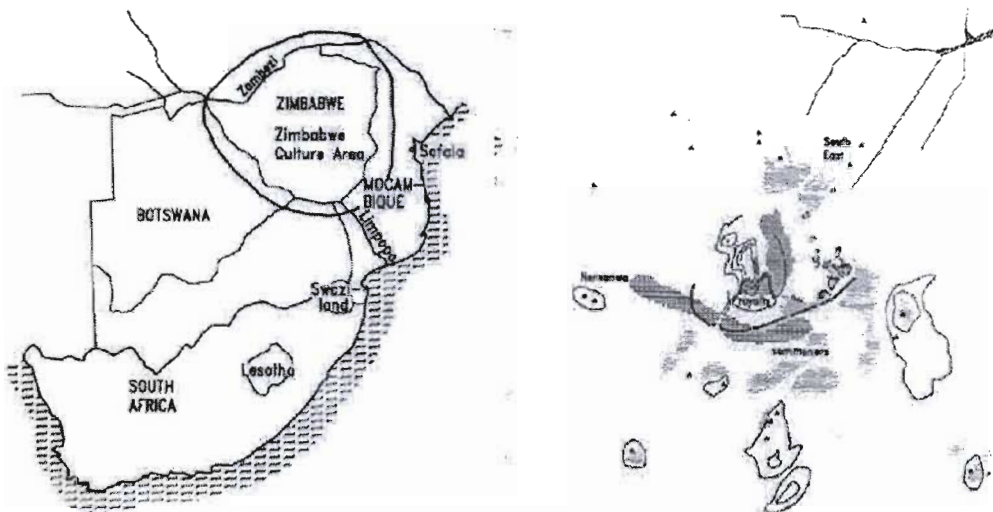


Figure 1.2: Left; Zimbabwe Culture Area. Right; Great Zimbabwe Macro Settlement (Huffman 1996:126).

T. Huffman interprets the organisational principles of this settlement pattern as rings of settlement surrounding the central royal palace, where “perimeter walls, commoners and nobles...form protective circles around the leader, shielding him from political rivals...” who lived on the outskirts of town (Huffman 1996:110f);

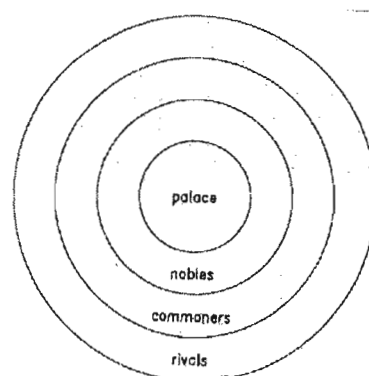


Figure 1.3: Protective circles of settlement at Great Zimbabwe (Huffman 1996:111).

This spatial arrangement, according to Huffman, reflects the principle dynamic of Zimbabwe culture; that of “class distinction justified by sacred leadership” (op. cit.).

At a micro-level, the royal settlement can be loosely divided into two main areas; the Hill Complex (once housing the *mambo* (king) and his royal entourage) and the enclosures in the valley below it (once housing the royal wives) with the Great Enclosure. (Western terminology typically refers to the *mambo* as a ‘king’, though this term is somewhat insensitive to the Shona meaning which sees the ‘king’ as a leader, or head chief of a large region of chiefs. For this reason, this study will continue to use the term *mambo* to refer to the royal leader at Great Zimbabwe).

While this royal settlement is one of the most impressive and prolifically documented archaeological sites in Africa, it is only one of the many ancient stonewalled sites in the Southern African region.¹ These Zimbabwe stone settlements are known as *madzimbahwe* (*dzimbahwe* singular), the Shona name for a chief’s residence. Most of these appear around the Zimbabwe plateau between the Limpopo and Zambezi valleys. M. Hall and P. Garlake suggest that each of these stone walled towns would have been a regional centre supporting the capital of Great Zimbabwe (Hall, M. 1987:92);

...the framework of the Zimbabwe State was a set of regional centres from which members of the nobility signified their authority over the mass of the population by lavish public architecture, symbols of status and ideological control. But both the basis and object of such political power was control over the economy - the network of transactions that linked peasant villages, madzimbahwe and the capital and, beyond this, the state itself with the wider commercial world (Hall, M. 1987:95).

This study does not discuss in any detail these other sites, since they have been previously recorded and contextualised by various documenters such as Garlake (1973), Summers (1971), M. Hall (1987), and particularly by Huffman (1996).

¹ The plans included in Figures 1.4 & 1.5 appear to provide the most recent illustrations of the Central Area at Great Zimbabwe. When approaching this material one must be aware that any level of complete accuracy of plan representation is now lost to us because of the gap between the time of Great Zimbabwe’s occupation and its documented history. All of the permeable structures have disappeared, and much of the remaining impermeable structure has been either partly destroyed or remodelled. However, there have been recent attempts to restore parts of the Great Enclosure back to its original state. For example, the western facing entranceway to the Great Enclosure has been recently remodelled to include the stone lintel closing the top of the entrance (cf.: p.9). The new stonework is lighter in colour than the existing material in order to mark remodelled work from existing. The difficult process of piecing together archaeological evidence such as hut mounds, stratified layers of occupation and material artefact with historical written records such as Portuguese accounts (in themselves often misleading due to Euro-centric pre-conceived ideas about Black culture), oral tradition and ethnographic data is exacerbated by the many excavations of the site and the disastrous earlier excavations by Hall in 1892. Until such a time when we have available more accurate representations of Great Zimbabwe as it was during its period of occupation (which would involve an enormous amount of inter-disciplinary field work, well beyond the scope of this dissertation and its resources) we must rely on the most recent representations offered by researchers in this field. For the purposes of this study, the plans provided here of the settlement, the Hill Complex and the Great Enclosure must suffice.

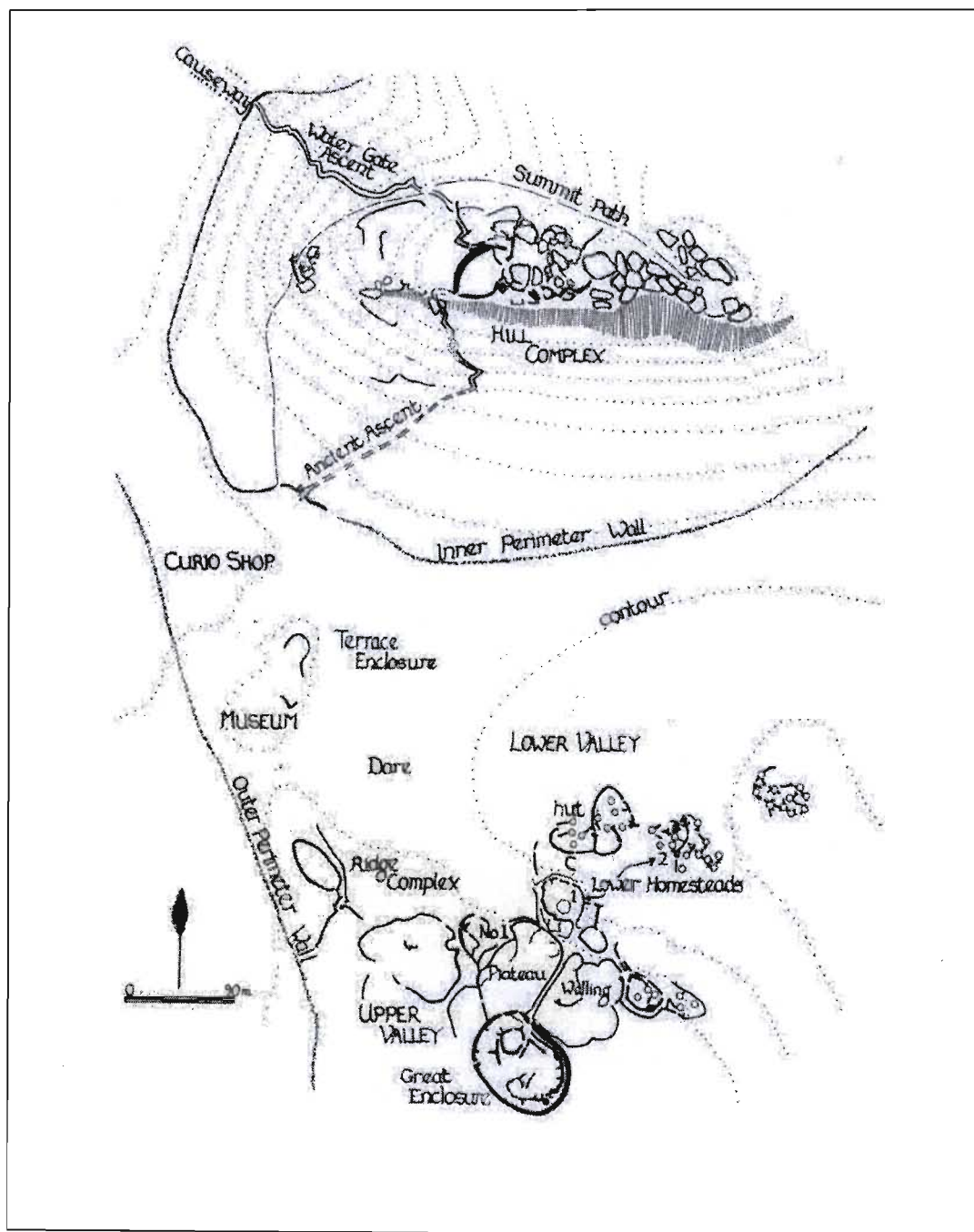


Figure 1.4: Plan of Town Centre at Great Zimbabwe (Huffman 1987:49)

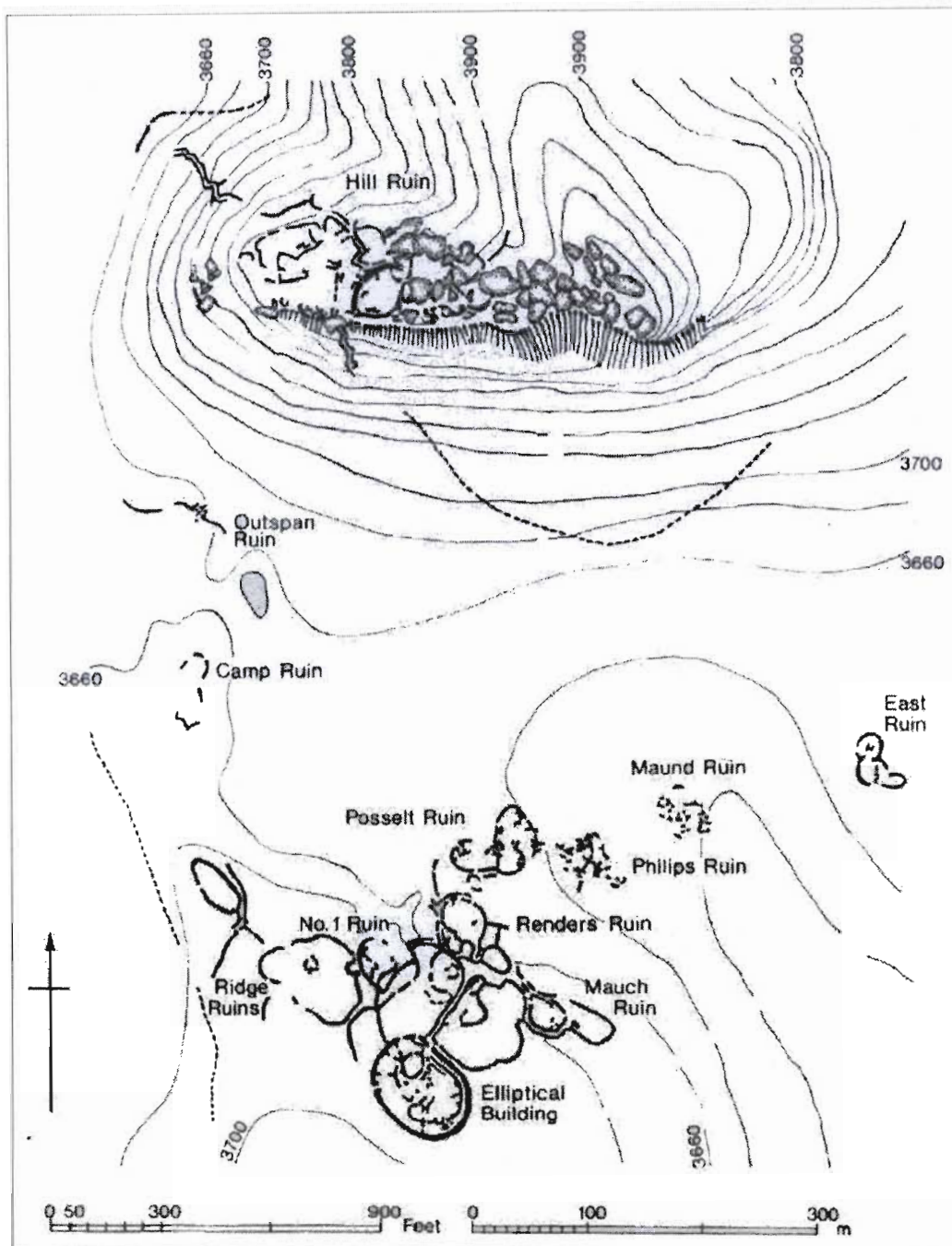


Figure 1.5: Plan of Town Centre at Great Zimbabwe (Garlake 1974:18)

Furthermore, the methodological approach taken in this study is not one of comparative analysis but rather one of 'historical particularism' where Great Zimbabwe is used as a case study for analysing connections between symbolic consciousness and material culture.

It is the author's intention that the methodological inquiry adopted in this study to develop observations could provide source for a later more diachronic and comparative analysis between Great Zimbabwe and other stone sites within the same culture area.



Western Entrance to Great Enclosure showing recent reconstruction of lintel



From Inside



From Outside

3 Great Zimbabwe Settlement Dynamics

Considering that the settlement area of Great Zimbabwe supported an estimated population of +/-18,000 people (Huffman 1996) for over 300 years, the efficient management of local resources would have required an enormously complex level of political and economic organisation;

The persistence of Great Zimbabwe as a centre of major importance through several centuries is testimony to the economic and political strength of the realm of which it was capital. Indeed, if longevity is an appropriate criterion for measurement, it could be argued that early Zimbabwe has thus far been the most successful of all the states in Southern Africa, both before and after colonial settlement. (Hall, M. 1987:102)

Moreover, during most of the time of its occupation, Great Zimbabwe's creative power exerted political and economic authority over most of Zimbabwe. The success of Great Zimbabwe as one of the most powerful kingdoms in Africa between AD1100 and +/-AD1450 (cf.: p.16) can be attributed to many systemically related factors such as an opportune geographic location, a successful combination of political and religious leadership, a growing economy, cultural dynamism and technical innovation.

The fertile plateau surrounding the settlement of Great Zimbabwe provided plentiful quantities of building material in the form of accessible granite rock for stonewalling and timber from surrounding woodlands for roof structures, palisades and for fuel. Domestic huts were generally constructed of solid daga walls, daga floors with thatched roofing and timber roof structures supported on a ring of poles outside the walls (Garlake 1974).

The alluvial soils and summer rainfalls provided a cultivable topography for domestic animals and agriculture. While an equable climate and fertile habitat set a context for the establishment of settlement, it was the opportune siting on a major gold and ivory trade-route that provided Great Zimbabwe with the economic impetus to finally establish political and cultural success (Hall, M. 1987:99);



Figure 1.6; Extent of the Zimbabwe empire at the time of Great Zimbabwe (Huffman 1987)

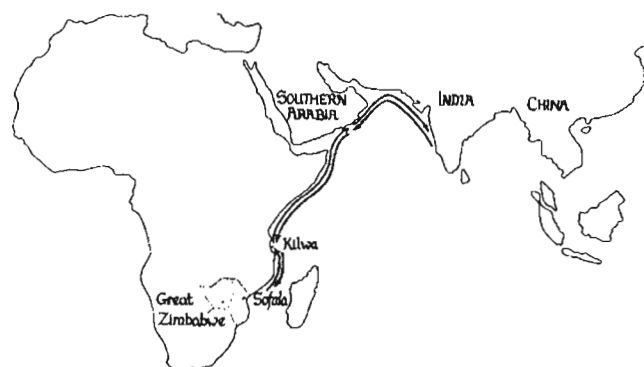


Figure 1.7; Great Zimbabwe and the Indian Ocean trade network (Huffman 1987)

According to Huffman, as the royal leader gained economic power through trade wealth, the earlier 'Central Cattle Pattern', typical of Zimbabwe settlements up to AD1000 was no longer appropriate to reflect the increased status of the *mambo* (Huffman 1996). Huffman argues that the social transformation effected by this trade wealth motivated the spatial transformation that generated the Great Zimbabwe pattern. Indeed, the settlement of Great Zimbabwe provides a valuable case-study for examining how a change in economy and political power effects change to settlement pattern and how settlement structures validate and strengthen the new social order.

Huffman outlines some of the major spatial shifts that he believes occurred to the 'Central Cattle Pattern' from the settlement of 'K2' to that of Mapungubwe, as precedent settlements to that of Great Zimbabwe (Huffman 1996:75f);

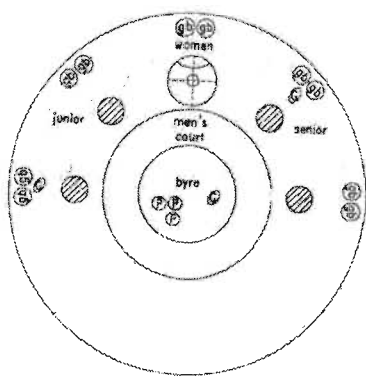


Figure 1.8; Plan of the Central Cattle Pattern (Huffman 1996:175)

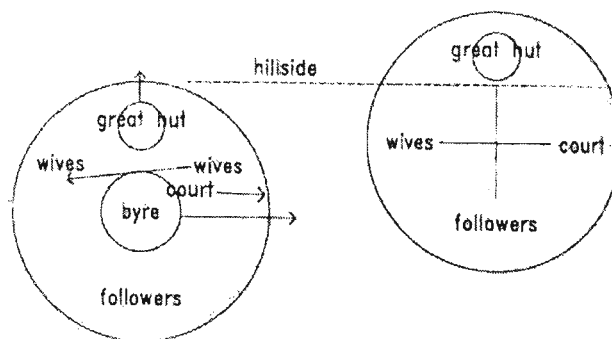


Figure 1.9; Spatial shifts to pattern from 'K2' to Mapungubwe (Huffman 1996: 185)

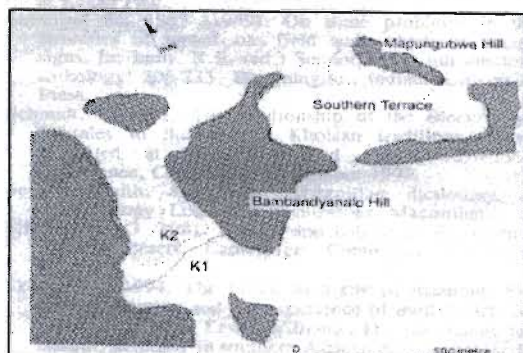
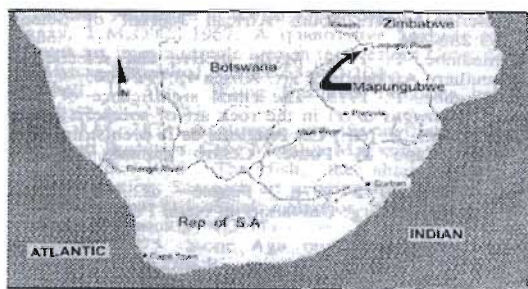


Figure 1.10: Location Map of K2 and Mapungubwe (Steyn 1997:14)

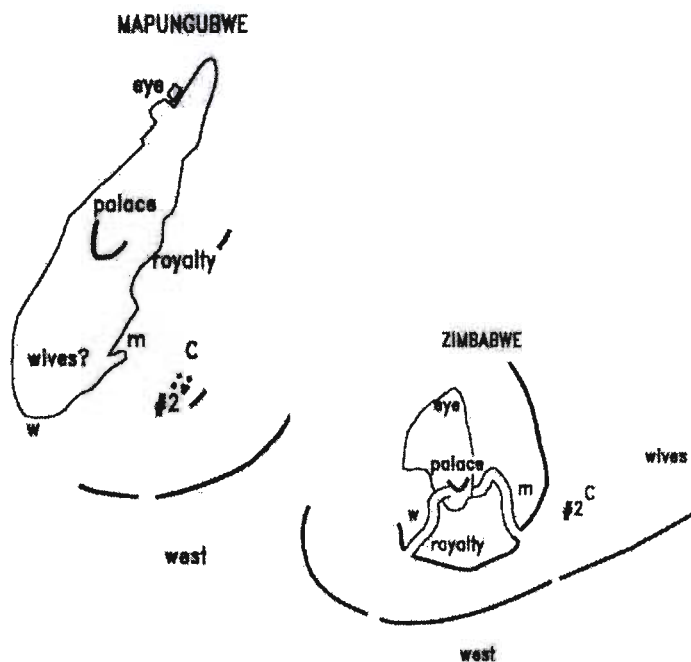


Figure 1.11: Schematic comparison of Great Zimbabwe & Mapungubwe (Huffman 1996:185)

Spatial shifts, he suggests, include the placement of the commoner's court at the bottom of the hill, moving the cattle kraal away from the centre of the settlement, placing the wives to one side opposite the court and moving the 'Great Hut' away from the commoners area to the hill (op. cit.).

According to Huffman, by elevating the *mambo's* residence at Mapungubwe hill, and later to the hill at Great Zimbabwe, royal status was validated and strengthened through the *mambo's* closer connection to the ancestors and to mountain symbolism (op. cit.).²

Huffman argues that this new 'Elite Pattern' emerged at Mapungubwe as a result of increased trade wealth and royal status (op. cit.). However, other influences may need to be factored into the reasons for such socio-spatial transformation. For example, M. Steyn documents recent archaeological investigation of the skeletal remains at K2/Mapungubwe sites which reveals that while the inhabitants appeared to be healthy there is some evidence of overcrowding, parasites and lack of sanitation (Steyn 1997:18). While the evidence is inconclusive, we cannot outrule the possibility that overcrowding or disease may have been other contributing factors in the motivation for the spatial shift of the *mambo's* residence away from the commoners firstly from K2 to Mapungubwe and later from Mapungubwe to Great Zimbabwe. Factors such as the physical environment, population and health, external influences on the economy (through increased trade networks), political and cultural change and technical achievements are all systemically related. All factors impact upon each other to such an extent that it is problematic to suggest that any one factor could have been of principal importance to socio-spatial transformation.

² Cf.: Parts 3 – 4 which discuss the significance of mountain symbolism in traditional Karanga culture.

4 Stone Technology

As one of these key factors related to Great Zimbabwe's achievements, it is pertinent to discuss the development of stone technology for it was a major factor in strengthening the *mambo's* status, since stonewalling became a symbol of the royal family.

Documenters offer various interpretations on the motivation for stonewalling of *madzimbahwe*. Garlake suggests that the stone walls were primarily a 'political statement';

The walls of Great Zimbabwe were built primarily to display the power of the state. They symbolise in permanent and obvious fashion, the achievements of the ruling class. They are therefore essentially a political statement (Garlake 1982 in Hall, M. 1987:110).

Huffman concurs with Garlake's interpretation by suggesting that stone was the symbol of the 'ruling class' (Huffman 1996), while James Denbow suggests that stone architecture became a symbol of royalty, and the development of stone walling for royal enclosures assisted in the validation of the *mambo's* power (Denbow 1997). M. Hall further suggests that the status of the stone walling set the royalty apart from the commoners;

The carefully built stone walls clearly served to set those who lived in the dzimbahwe apart from the majority of the population. (Hall, M. 1987:93)

The idiosyncratic nature of stone architecture at Great Zimbabwe is the result of an intensive developmental period of innovation and craftsmanship in masonry construction. An amorphic free-form style, seductive geometries, innovative techniques in masonry skill and the vivid presence of symbolic image all combine to create a dynamic architectural language, an architecture that responded, and now stands as legacy, to the powerful extent of Karanga cultural achievements.

This idiosyncratic style though, has influenced many Western documenters to describe Great Zimbabwe as being 'difficult to comprehend' and such perception has unfortunately resulted in approaching the study of Great Zimbabwe as if it were a 'mystery';

The architectural style developed at Great Zimbabwe is rooted deeply in Shona tradition and owes nothing to external influences in design or structure. Using very simple construction methods, the style has a powerful impact. However, to eyes trained in the vocabulary of an ordered progression of columns, mouldings, plinths, cornices and vaults, it often appears a strange and disturbing aesthetic. The scale is particularly difficult to comprehend (Garlake, P. 1994:19).

By penetrating the depth of meaning in Shona symbolic thought and religious culture, this dissertation reveals that the style of Great Zimbabwe is neither "disturbing" nor "strange", but is the expression in stone of a highly creative culture consciously and actively motivated by powerful religious and political symbolism and by the need to honour influential ancestors with stone monuments.

When comprehending the architecture of Great Zimbabwe, one must also remember that the stone walls were once connected to a compact arrangement of residential huts forming courtyards between the

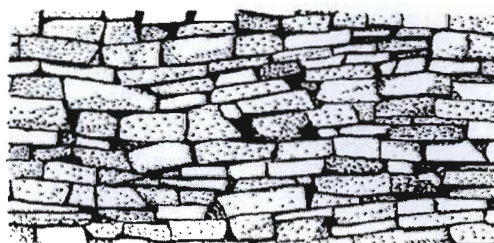
labyrinths of stone walling. The settlement pattern was one of organised networks of courtyards, huts and stone walling, a pattern incrementally developed over a period of more than 300 years. What remains of Great Zimbabwe today is merely the bare skeletal bones of the original pattern.

Furthermore, many of the more significant buildings at Great Zimbabwe's town centre such as the Great Enclosure and the Hill Complex were originally partly plastered with *daga* and therefore would have presented a more homogenous style than what exists today (Garlake 1974; 1994).³

However, the skill in masonry techniques employed at Great Zimbabwe deserves more than a cursory mention. Walls constructed of granite blocks, laid without mortar, form irregular circular enclosures. The wall types vary in height and technique. Earlier walls, often known as 'P-coursing' style, (up to +/- AD1350 (Garlake), AD1270 (Huffman)) were characterised by uncoursed, pile and wedge technique while later walls, known as 'Q-coursing' style, (after AD1350 (Garlake), AD1270 (Huffman)) developed regular coursing and dressing techniques (Garlake 1974; Huffman 1987);



Examples of P- and Q-coursing.



Class P



Class Q



Class PQ



Class R

Figure 1.12; Wall types found at Great Zimbabwe (Hall, M. 1987:107 after Whitty 1961).

³ The extent of the original *daga* plaster rendering is unclear due to much interpretation and re-interpretation of original excavations.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF EVENTS PERTAINING TO GREAT ZIMBABWE:	
PERIOD V	AD 1700 – 1900. Great Zimbabwe area reoccupied by various Shona-speaking people. AD 1498 – 1506. Portuguese take over East Coast trade. AD 1450. Great Zimbabwe abandoned, capital shifts to Khami near present-day Bulawayo and Mutapa has separate capital in northeast.
PERIOD IV	AD 1270 – 1450. Great Zimbabwe controls large empire. AD 1270. Great Zimbabwe becomes new capital.
PERIOD III	AD 1270. Mapungubwe abandoned. AD 1100 – 1270. Great Zimbabwe becomes capital of trading empire.
PERIOD II	AD 1000 – 1100. Shona speakers occupy Zimbabwe Hill. AD 950. Ancestors of modern Shona move north across Limpopo. AD 900. Gold and ivory trade established between South-east Africa and East Coast.
PERIOD I	AD 500 – 900. Subsistence farmers live in the Masvingo district. AD 500. Bantu-speaking farmers move into southern Africa.

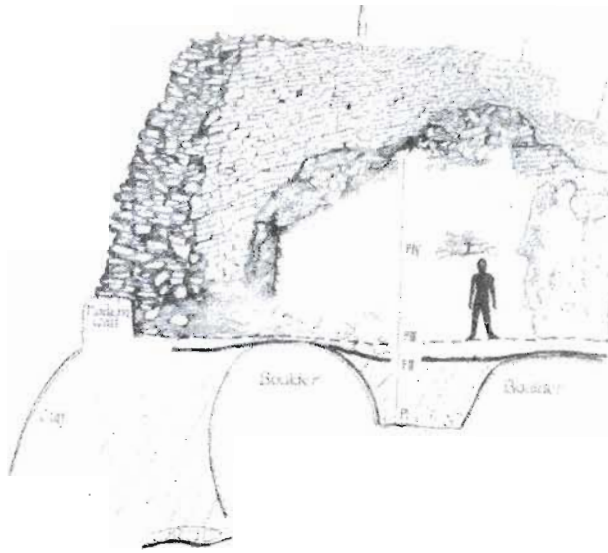
Figure 1.13: Archaeological periods and their events.

(Source: Huffman 1987:13)

Another style, known as ‘R-coursing’ (roughly fitted irregular coursing) was employed in outlying structures and occurred in some P and Q type walls;

Generally, P and Q typify important structures in the town centre, such as the Hill Ruin and Great Enclosure, while Zimbabwe builders used R-coursing in the perimeter walls and outlying structures (Huffman 1996:125)

Adjoining walls were never bonded, allowing structural flexibility under earth movement. Constructed without substantial foundations, the walls were wide enough (ranging from 1.2 - 5metres), and usually just over twice their width in height, to sufficiently spread dead-load, preventing subsidence (Garlake 1974:16). Where required, drains were constructed through the bottom of these walls (cf.: p.17). Such detail has ensured the longevity of many of the inner walls of the Great Enclosure building. Many such innovative details characterise the unique features of the later period of stone masonry development. Curved steps at the entrance to the Great Enclosure skilfully articulate the geometrically curved junction between threshold and buttress wall (cf.: p.17). Structural wall patterns, carved stone monoliths and circular towers are among other technical achievements in stone detail and these will be covered in greater depth throughout the study, since they contribute to the symbolic architectural language at Great Zimbabwe. They are therefore inherently relevant to the scope of content for this dissertation.



A section through the deposit in the Western Enclosure. This sequence of occupation proves that the stone walls were built after AD 1250, thereby eliminating the possibility of an ancient Egyptian, Phoenician, Sabeo-Arabian or pre-Muslim presence. (Huffman 1987:12)

Figure 1.14; Wall section through Western Enclosure. After AD1250 (Huffman 1987:12).

What is significant here in a formative context, is that the development of stone technology further helped to establish royal power as stonewalling and symbols in stone became the hallmark of the ruling family and refers directly to the founding royal ancestors.



Upper; Drain constructed to bottom of Inner Wall (Author)
Lower; Curved stone steps at Northeast Entry to Great Enclosure (Author)

5 The Hill Complex - Political/Religious Leadership

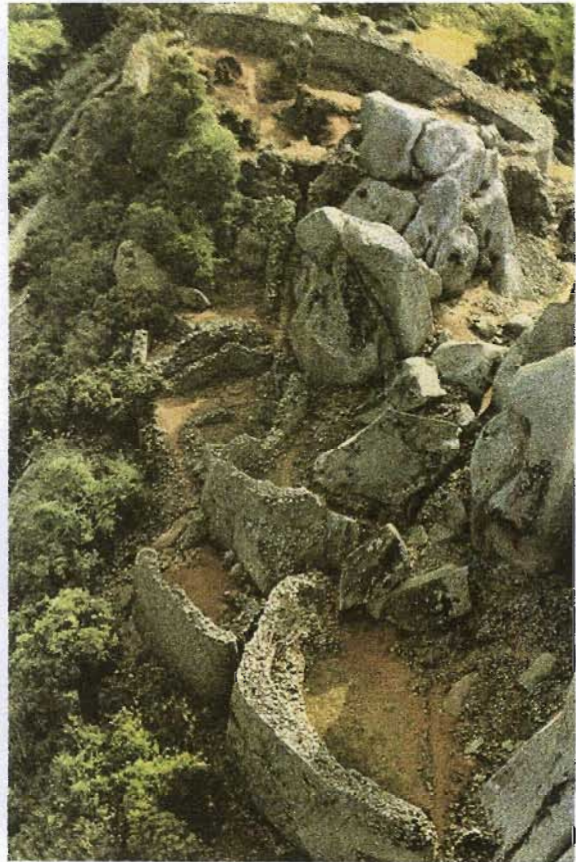
The land is intimately associated with the history of a chiefdom, with the ruling class and with ancestral spirits who lived on it (Bourdillon 1991:67).

The central area of Great Zimbabwe is dominated by a 240m high granite hill. At the time of Great Zimbabwe's occupation, the Hill Complex, sited on top of this granite hill, housed the residence of the *mambo* as well as his royal entourage and spirit mediums. The clusters of man-made stone walling and natural boulders forming walls for passages and enclosures on the Hill Complex can be loosely divided into two main areas, usually referred to as the Western Enclosure (once housing the *mambo*'s residence) and the Eastern Enclosure (once housing the Ritual Area, or 'national shrine').

The complex is entered via two narrow-walled and contorted passageways, the Ancient Ascent (often referred to as the Cliff Ascent) approached from the southwest from the valley below, and the Terrace Ascent (or Watergate Ascent) approached from the north-west. (A third ascent, known as the Modern Ascent, has been constructed post Great Zimbabwe's occupation.) The Western Enclosure (now no longer accessible from the original entrance at the top of the Ancient Ascent due to the collapsed lintel above the entranceway) is bounded by 7.5 - 9 metre high curved stone walling topped with stone monoliths and towers. This wall forms a precipitous edge to the top of the hill, contributing to the dominating aspect of the hill from the valley below (cf.: p.19).

Inside the Western Enclosure, remaining daga mounds suggest residential structures. Substantial archaeological investigations of stratified layers in this area, supported by oral tradition as well as Portuguese written records, provide evidence for this area being occupied as the official residence of the *mambo* (Garlake 1974,1994; Huffman 1987,1996). Similar investigations as well as the presence of religious stone artifacts, has revealed the generally accepted idea that the Eastern Enclosure was an area for religious activity. In traditional Zimbabwe settlements, the areas behind the *mambo*'s residence were reserved for religious function performed by spirit mediums. The atmosphere of a mysterious spiritual world is enhanced by the presence of monolithic boulders around the Eastern Enclosure, as well as the surrounding walls wedged between rock clefts with contorted narrow entrances and an underground passage (cf.: p.145). The stone platforms originally supported monoliths topped by six of the seven Zimbabwe stone birds which were found in this enclosure along with other ceremonial artifacts such as soapstone bowls (Garlake 1974; Huffman 1987).

Furthermore, archaeological investigations of the stratified layers show no evidence of any residential occupation in this enclosure (Huffman 1996). This evidence, as well as the use of historical record and oral tradition, suggests that the Eastern Enclosure was a ritual area. Huffman and Mufuka both refer to it as the 'national religious centre' for Zimbabwe (Huffman 1987; Mufuka 1983). This will be covered in greater depth later in this study, as well as a more specific discussion of the enclosures and detail of the Hill Complex.



Upper left; Western wall of Western Enclosure (Huffman 1996).
Left and Lower; Towers and monoliths encircling northwest wall of Western Enclosure (Author)
Right; Aerial view of Hill Complex (Garlake 1974:59)

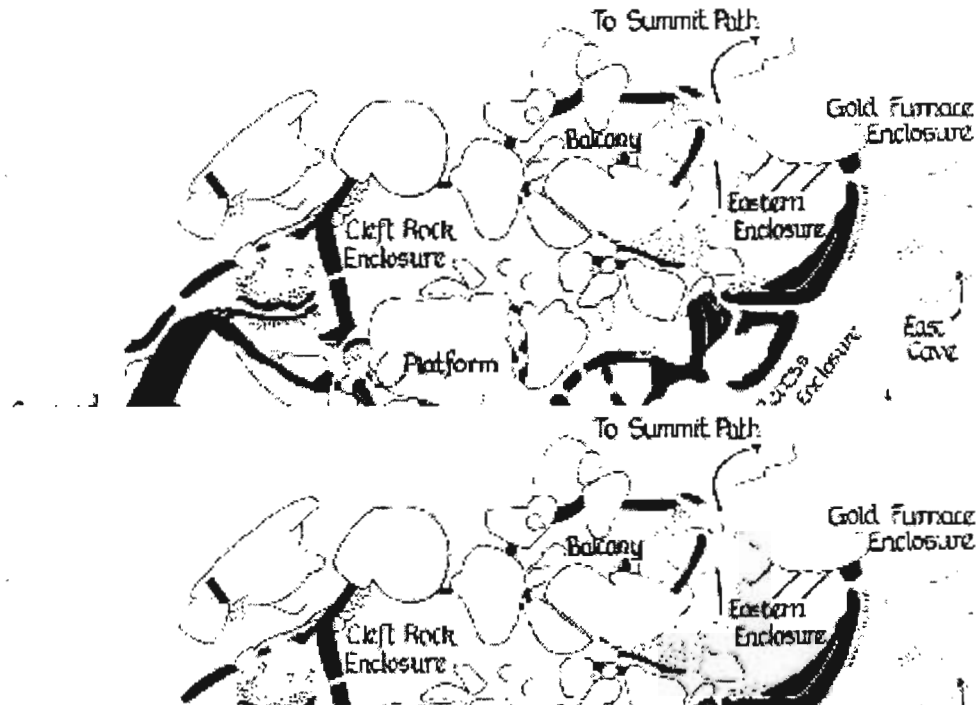
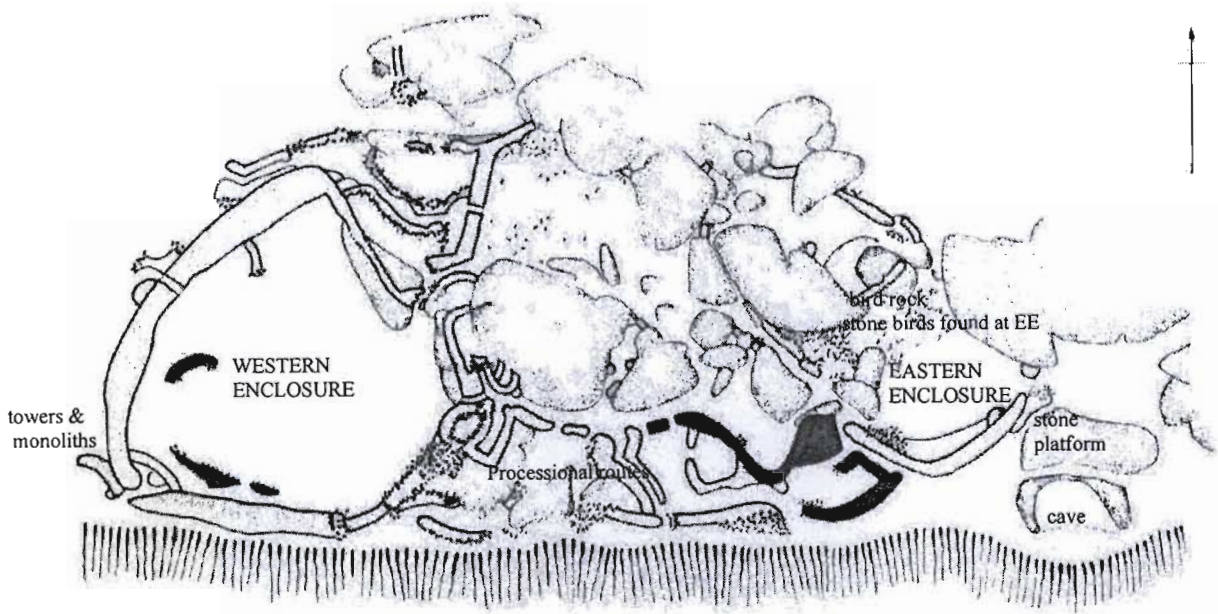


Figure 1.15; Plans of the Hill Complex (Upper; Adapted from Garlake 1974. Lower; Huffman 1987). Garlake's plans; shaded walls indicate coursed dressed walls of later period IV (class Q) while unshaded walls indicate uncoursed walls of earlier period III (class P)

What is significant here is that the dichotomous spatial relationship between the expression of ritual enclosure on one side of the Hill Complex and *mambo*'s residence on the other, and united by mountain symbolism, helped to establish the dynamic nature of political and religious leadership at Great Zimbabwe. It appears that there was a complex and very important relationship between religious and political leadership, between the spirit mediums as advisors to the *mambo* on the religious side, and the *mambo*, his soldiers and his entourage on the political side;

Research among Shona in the Zambezi valley has shown the important role the svikiro (spirit medium) plays in the political administration of society - solving succession disputes by conferring 'spiritual legitimacy' on the favoured candidate and mediating between the ancestors and their living descendants to ensure good rains and harvests (Hall, M. 1987:94).

Ken Mufuka refers to the Eastern Enclosure as the 'national shrine', an enclosure for religious ritual at a national level (including chief's of wider chieftancy) and house of the spirit mediums;

The monument is also intimately associated with the independence of Zimbabwe. The national shrine on the hill complex was the home of the spirit mediums whose main duty was to act as the conscience of the Zimbabwe confederation and to preserve the traditions of the founding fathers, Chaminuka, Chimurenga, Tovera, Soro-rezhou and others (Mufuka 1983:6).

The *mambo*'s right to rule was based on his ability to procure many wives and beget many children. His virility safeguarded his political and religious position. This dual role became the crux of the *mambo*'s responsibilities. The unity between the state and religion validated and strengthened the Zimbabwe confederation. This unity was the genius of the founding father of Great Zimbabwe, Chigwagu Rusvingo, who realised that a lasting civilisation must be founded on firm religious and moral values (Mufuka 1983). The close connection to the ancestors (founding fathers) ensured by the spirit mediums, gave the *mambo* a special and close connection to God, and it was the religious symbolism, architected in stone, that assisted in establishing this connection and to validate his divine leadership;

... we are convinced beyond any reasonable doubt that Chigwagu Rusvingo saw the inadequacy of a kingdom built entirely on an economic foundation. The genius of the succeeding Mwene-mutapas was that power was based, not entirely on force or on economic enterprise but on the more encompassing force of religion. Great Zimbabwe became a centre of divine monarchy and all legitimacy stemmed from the mysterium, tremendum et fascino of religion (Mufuka, M. 1983:7).

It was the religious architecture of the Hill Complex that supported, validated and strengthened this divine 'legitimacy'. The political and religious power of the Zimbabwe state, effected from Great Zimbabwe, inspired the achievements we see today;

Despite the obvious weaknesses of divine leadership, for four hundred years the Zimbabweans found common purpose, unified leadership, and common discipline enough

to make possible the achievements that are a source of amazement today (Mufuka, K. 1983:8).

Various documenters take conflicting positions regarding the nature of political and religious leadership at Great Zimbabwe. Garlake and Mufuka take different positions in their interpretation of the motivation for the stone walls and structures at the Hill Complex. Garlake suggests that the Hill Complex was primarily a 'political statement';

...walls of the Great Zimbabwe were built primarily to display the power of the state. They symbolise in permanent and obvious fashion, the achievements of the ruling class (Garlake, P. 1982:13).

Mufuka, however, suggests that religious aspiration was the key motivator for the stone structures;

The Shona-Karanga state was a theocracy, and the mambo derived his authority from his religious position representing the ancestors on one hand and the new generations on the other. This means that the Great Zimbabwe was both a political and religious centre, but it was its religious functions that were overwhelming. Religion was not merely a personal affair between the individual and his creator (Mufuka, K. 1983:17).

Mufuka also suggests that until religion is seen as a key motivator, the platforms, monoliths and hideouts "become incomprehensible." (Mufuka, K. 1983:17.) However, this study reveals that it was not the dominance of either political or religious leadership over the other, but the integrative nature of the dualistic relationship between the two that contributed to the success of Great Zimbabwe.

Bourdillon appears to adopt a more comprehensive approach when he considers the attributes most appropriate for a chief who is competing for leadership. He suggests that chiefly power was validated through a wide range of abilities and that these would ensure his influence in the afterlife. It was therefore the contribution of attributes of a *mambo*, both in his political and in his religious roles that ensured his success and his ability to have many qualities is required for his close association with the ancestors;

The early chiefs are associated with extraordinary power, whether it came from natural leadership, cunning, a 'knowledge' of 'medicines' or, as is most usual, a combination of these... The legendary power of early members of the chiefly families is further expressed in the belief that their spirits remain the powerful guardians of the chiefdom. They are believed to continue their role through the chiefs, their successors whom they protect and support (Bourdillon 1991:104).

The above passage further highlights the importance of ancestral honouring, (at Great Zimbabwe, architected in stone structures), in order to continue the success of the land and the community on it. Part 5 of this study explores this idea further. An expansive approach may see the motivation for stone structure inspired by a multitude of factors such as political, economic, religious, cultural and historical, yet it appears to be the success of the interactive relationship between political and spiritual leadership that would establish a *mambo's* authority. Bourdillon further highlights the essential role of the leader to mediate between the people and the ancestral spirits;

A fundamental aspect of the traditional chiefship is its association with religious and magical powers... the founding ancestors of chiefly dynasties are usually the spirits believed to control the productivity of the chiefdom; that the ruling chiefs are successors to these founding ancestors and must have their approval and protection; that the chief's political power arises from the religious power of his ancestors. From all this arises the role of the chief to mediate between his people and the spirit guardians of the chiefdom... Among the Karanga where the centralised cult of the high god, Mwari, is strong, the chief is responsible for sending delegations to the oracle of Mwari when consultation is deemed necessary, and for sending contributions to important festivals at the cult centre. The traditional chief is thus a religious as well as a political ruler (Bourdillon 1991:117).

In part 4, this dissertation observes the significance that the role of architecture played at Great Zimbabwe in reflecting this founding political ideology where reference is made to the many settlement and symbolic structures that reflect the dual function of political and religious leadership and where symbolic architecture appears to unite the dualities.

During the later period of Great Zimbabwe's occupation, religious processes gradually overtook political duty and this could have been a key factor in the demise and eventual abandonment of Great Zimbabwe (Mufuka 1983). While over-cultivation of the land and subsequent periods of drought are obvious factors, the abuse of power and neglect of the *mambo's* duties may have been seen by the *mambo's* followers as reasons for the droughts and poor harvests during the later period of occupation.

Furthermore, according to Mufuka's sources, King Mudadi, who ruled from 1420-1430, refused to marry and was therefore childless. His impotence, he suggests, allowed the spirit mediums to assume more power and religious protocol gradually overtook political function until the *mambo's* religious entourage of diviners and spirit mediums eventually became "...a centre of alternative authority to that of the king." (Mufuka 1983:45.) Mufuka suggests that Mudadi's abuse of divine leadership led to dissatisfaction amongst his followers and the community, who eventually emigrated eastwards to establish the Khami site. However, considering the systemic nature of the relationship between politics, economy and physical environment impacting on cultural dynamism and socio-spatial transformation, any one factor should not be seen as singularly instrumental to social development or demise. However, failure in state organisation would have effected substantial destructive repercussions for the sustainability of such a dynamically interactive society as Great Zimbabwe;

The functional reasons for decline will probably be found to lie in a failure in the organisation of the state, where disruption of one element in the economy would have far reaching social implications (Garlake 1994:17).

Nevertheless, whatever the causes for its gradual decline, the interactive nature of political duty and religious protocol seemed to be held in balance up until the end of the later period of Great Zimbabwe's occupation.



Views of Hill Complex: Clockwise from left; From Valley Area; Approaching from Ancient Ascent; South Compartments; Entry to inner passages from Western Enclosure; From Watergate Ascent; Boulders and walls of South Compartments; View from upper Valley Area. (Author.)

6 Political/Religious Leadership - Architectural Implications

Aspects of this study attempt to reveal the architectural implications of this socio-political foundation apparent at Great Zimbabwe. As precedent to the later discussion of such aspects, we need to understand the implications that political/religious leadership may have had on settlement dynamics.

Various documenters have conflicting views on the extent to which political/religious leadership influenced settlement pattern. Huffman suggests that the *mambo* was ‘ritually secluded’ in his palace and protected by rings of residential settlement (Huffman 1996:108f). His interpretation is influenced by his study of cognate spatial patterns of settlement shifts between ‘K2’ and Mapungubwe to Great Zimbabwe (cf.: Figs. 1.8 - 1.11).

While the elevated architecture of the Hill Complex, with its precipitous and contorted pathways certainly suggests some measure of inaccessibility and ritual seclusion, examining Shona socio-religious practice reveals that the *mambo* may not have been as rigidly inaccessible as Huffman suggests. According to David Beach, the *mambo* had many extra-mural duties that involved close contact with his subjects and participation in communal events. Such duties are discussed in his thorough historical account of Shona society (Beach 1990). Historical interpretations recorded by Beach and Bourdillon imply a communal nature of many of the *mambo*’s duties;

...the ruler was not always secluded, but went out to hunt, fight, attend ceremonies in public or even cultivate (Beach 1997 in SAAB no.166:126).

Furthermore, practices that inculcate, through ritual, the omnipresence, fertility and longevity of the ancestral leaders, by virtue of their nature, would have relied on active participation by the *mambo* and his royal-religious entourage.⁴

Huffman’s position also differs from that of James Denbow, who suggests that the assumption of a ‘ruling class’ operating at Great Zimbabwe may be misleading and that the spatialisation of the *mambo*’s broader domain may not necessarily have been so limited by a pattern of concentric settlement;

Perhaps this assumption of ‘class solidarity’ also leads him to argue that the homes of nobles and commoners were arranged around the king’s to form “protective circles around the leader, shielding him from political rivals” ((Huffman 1996) p. 110-111). Such an interpretation discounts the equally likely probability that a king’s greatest political contenders were also his closest relatives - people whom it would have been in the king’s best interests to keep close at hand so that a watch could be kept over them (Denbow 1997 in SAAB 166:128).

Denbow’s comments suggest that it may have been possible that the *mambo*’s rivals resided closer to the palace and may even have formed part of the ‘noble class’ in Huffman’s model.

⁴ Cultivative practices involving the *mambo* and rituals related to honouring the ancestors are examined in part 5 of this study where their symbolic content is discussed in its relationship to architectural symbolic structures.

However, considering the political and religious power the *mambo* possessed, elaborated by the elevated Hill Complex and ritual enclosures, Huffman's position does have validity. One would expect some measure of class distinction, generated by the concept of religious leadership, between the royals and the commoners. Perhaps the criticism offered by Denbow and Beach reveals Huffman's model to be somewhat rigid, since one would expect some degree of class interaction and spatio-cultural dynamism. Perhaps the argument is merely one of perception and might be resolved by transforming Huffman's model. Structuralist terminologies used by Huffman such as 'ruling class' could be substituted by 'ruling family' or 'royal family' (in the African sense) or 'royal leadership'. His model of concentric rings of settlement (cf.: Fig.1.3), could be transformed to indicate permeable lightweight boundaries between areas of settlement to reflect the socio-spatial interaction between 'commoners', 'nobles', 'rulers' and 'rivals';

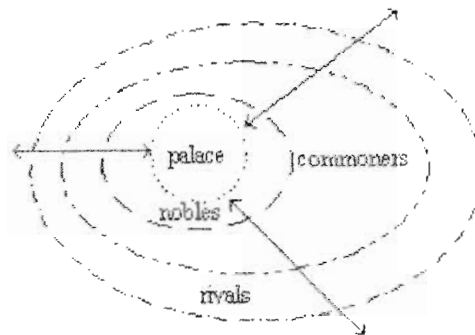


Figure 1.16; Conceptual Transformation of Huffman's Settlement Model (cf.: Fig.1.3).

Such a model may be better able to reflect the more expansive approach taken by Bourdillon, who suggests that the nature of political and religious roles of leadership is interactive and complexly interwoven;

...for them, the chiefs are not elected by anybody, but are born chiefs, with the blood of their fathers and the power of their ancestors to help them...most chiefs need some recognition from a senior spirit medium, and in the minds of their subjects they are appointed by the spirits who control the resources of the land...the traditional Shona chiefship is associated with the spiritual powers which are believed to control the chiefdom...The chief is traditionally guardian of the fundamental values of 'rupenyu' (life) and 'simba' (strength, vitality, well-being). Life comes from the chief's status and his accession rituals. Both life and strength are necessary for the prosperity of the people (Bourdillon 1991:111).⁵

The dynamic nature of political/religious leadership impacted not only on the settlement pattern but also on the settlement structures and their symbolic content. The expression of 'life' and 'strength' of the *mambo*, as well as the ancestors, is validated and established through stone symbols in the landscape of Great Zimbabwe and these will be discussed in Parts 3, 4 and 5 of the study.

⁵ The *mambo* in traditional Shona society is the head chief of many chiefdoms.

The monumental scale and prolific quantity of 3-dimensional stone symbolic structures at Great Zimbabwe gave way to a more 2-dimensional expression in the form of symbolic wall patterns at settlements occupied later than Great Zimbabwe (cf.: p.28). Researchers tend to avoid any explanation for this. Paul Lane, in his review of Huffman's documentation, highlights this avoidance;

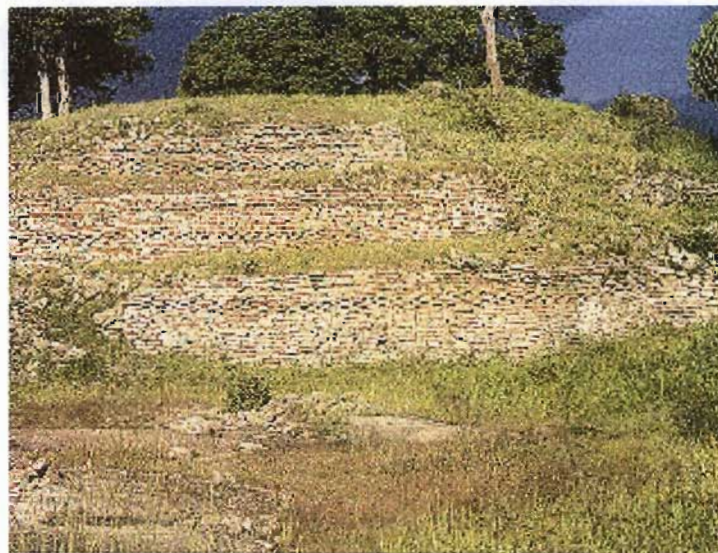
...there is no discussion of either why settlement layouts became more complex following the shift in power to Great Zimbabwe, or why, for instance, Khami period sites tend to be more elaborately decorated with stone symbols (Lane 1997 in SAAB 166:134).

The more complex nature of settlement dynamics at Great Zimbabwe compared to earlier sites could possibly be explained by factors relating to population increases. But again, this is systemically connected to aspects related to increased religious and political status and increased economic power impacting on cultural dynamics.

A society that actively engages in the practice of honouring the ancestors through religious symbolic ritual, and one that uses stone as a symbol of the ruling family, will naturally be motivated to express in permanent building material, the symbols of their ancestral leaders. The increasing power of the leader would have considerably augmented such motivation and would have possibly also impacted on the complexity of settlement pattern.

Furthermore, the stone symbolism at Khami-period sites, while being possibly more 'elaborate' in its decoration, as Lane discusses, is of a less monumental scale than the 3-dimensional symbolic expression at Great Zimbabwe. The symbolism in stone at Khami, Danangombe and Nalatele for example becomes more significantly 2-dimensional and is almost entirely limited to structural wall patterns (cf.: p.28). Their detail, though, is notably more developed and elaborately architected than any of the structural wall patterns at Great Zimbabwe. However, stone details at Great Zimbabwe such as the skilfully constructed outsized conical towers, the stone Zimbabwe birds, the numerous carved stone monoliths, the powerful architectonic expression of elevated hill, and the idiosyncratic steps were all features never to be repeated in later sites. The few details that do reappear, such as free form stonewalling and platforms fail to express the magnitude and presence they had at Great Zimbabwe.

This aspect is discussed in greater depth throughout the study. What is significant here, in a formative context, is the comparative analysis between the physical contexts of Great Zimbabwe and later period sites and how such a shift is related to social change. To extend Lane's observation, the absence of powerful 3-dimensional symbol at later-period sites could be simply explained. Neither the Khami, Danangombe or Nalatele sites have a significant elevated hill. The elevated nature of the *mambo's* residence at Great Zimbabwe is significantly more extreme than those of the later-period sites. At the Khami-period sites, the absence of extreme elevation of the *mambo's* palace could have motivated a need to re-establish the power and religious status of the *mambo* and to express this through structural wall pattern and terraced slopes, in absence of natural mountain symbolism.



Terraces in stone: Upper, Khami site (Author). Centre; Nalatele (Huffman 1996). Lower, Danangombe (Huffman 1996)

Generally, the structural wall patterns describe in stone the symbolic references to religious and political leadership and to the ancestors. In traditional Karanga society, the sacred mountain was the symbol of the *mambo* and of the ancestors and this developed through the practice of the Mwari –cult (Bourdillon 1991).⁶ The complex and elaborate structural wall patterns and the terraced slopes at Khami possibly reveal an architectural stone narrative in memory of Great Zimbabwe’s Hill Complex and the cultural development and economic sustainability the *mambo* was able to establish there via political/religious leadership. The wall patterns and terraces therefore symbolise in stone the memory of the natural mountain symbol at Great Zimbabwe.

Hill Complex – Hill Siting Motivation

There has been some debate by various researchers of Great Zimbabwe concerning the reasons for the hill siting. Theodore Bent (1909) suggested that the Hill Complex was motivated by a need to protect the residents from attack. The architecture of the Hill Complex, he explains, is defensive by nature, marked as it is by buttresses, dense and high stone walls and tortuous passageways. However, one could similarly argue that such architectural style was motivated by (or integrated with) a need for religious seclusion and to identify the *mambo* with the spiritual world of divine leadership, for religiously inspired places are, universally, known to be aloof and often adopt a character of tortuous inaccessibility in order to promote a ‘holy atmosphere’;

While Bent was correct in arguing that the Dzimbahwe was defensive, he did not appreciate fully the implications deriving from its inaccessibility. The Nyashanu tradition is very clear about the reason for choosing this unapproachable place. The religious mind associates mysterium, tremendum et fascinanz with inaccessible places. The pilgrim and the faithful must journey to some way out place to renew their faith. When they arrive there, a holy place is not the easiest place to be allowed in. The impediments, the ritual barriers to the Dzimbahwe are all deliberately placed there in order to create a proper holy atmosphere (Mufuka 1983:16).

While Mufuka argues for both a defensive and a religious motivation for the architecture, other recent researchers (Garlake 1974, 1982, 1983. Huffman 1986) have abandoned previous assumptions that the walls at Great Zimbabwe Hill Complex and the hill-palace siting were ever built for defensive purposes. Garlake rejects any defensive motivation by observing that there are no ‘ramparts’, ‘bastions’ or ‘battlements’ at Great Zimbabwe;

...despite the immediate impression that the enormous stone enclosures make on foreign tourists, no part of the walls of Great Zimbabwe was ever designed as a fortification...it is apparent that Great Zimbabwe is extremely ill-designed to withstand attack, still less siege. There are none of the ramparts, bastions, breastworks or battlements that any defender would

⁶ Parts 3 and 4 of this study discuss in depth the origin and meaning of mountain symbolism and structural wall patterns.

need for protection. Inaccessible cliff-tops are walled while accessible paths are left unprotected (Garlake 1994:13).

The above passage reveals the Euro-centric approach first taken by Bent and more recently by Garlake in attempting to compare the Hill Complex with a European model of medieval hill town fortification which overlooks the local socio-religious influences factoring in the inaccessible style of architecture. (Part 3, Chapter 8 discusses how the towers and monoliths have potent symbolic associations with Karanga political and religious leadership and that the Zimbabwe Bird figures represent totem-figures of the great ancestors).

‘Battlements’, ‘ramparts’, ‘breastworks’ and ‘bastions’, as described by Garlake, are all architectural devices generally pertinent to other styles of defensive architecture developed in different cultures in separate historical and political contexts. Making vague cross-cultural comparisons is somewhat cavalier especially when we consider that, before the occupation and settlement of Great Zimbabwe, ‘defensive’ architecture, in the Western sense, was largely unknown. Therefore, any inaccessible style of architecture, whether this includes bastions or simply an elevated hill structure, would probably have been seen to have some sort of defensive character, especially when combined with symbolic structures that have powerful religious attachment to the ancestors (through the spirit mediums) and to God (‘creator of mountains’).

The extremely elevated and tortuous Hill Complex, with its looming and precipitous Western Wall towering over the entrance path, possibly architects the concept of defense and this theme may have been more than adequate to serve the purpose of repelling any possible rebellious parties. Furthermore, we cannot discount the excessive nature of religious protocol necessitating staged religious and political proprieties between the *mambo*’s entourage and spirit mediums and any visiting party to the *mambo* which would have severely slowed down the process of entering the *mambo*’s domain (Mufuka 1983).

Mufuka suggests that archaeologists may not have appreciated the defensive style of the Hill Complex in the context of Zimbabwe socio-political history and he suggests that the siting and walling has some defensive motivation. He suggests that even the name of Masvingo, a nearby town to Great Zimbabwe, translated means ‘a protective form of walling’ (op.cit.). Huffman and Garlake’s response might be the result of a reaction against the many fictitious colonial assumptions (Bent 1885; Hall 1902) and influenced by the change in political consciousness of Zimbabwe during the late 20th century (cf: Part 1, Chapter 1).

However, it may be erroneous to assume that a successful kingdom at the centre of a major gold and ivory trade route would not require some measure of defense, though this depends upon how we interpret ‘defense’. In this context we could consider the term as it relates to the *mambo*’s position which was often under threat by rival successors and, according to Huffman, these people lived on the outskirts of the settlement (Huffman 1996).⁷

⁷ Refer to Part 1, Chapter 2, where Huffman’s settlement pattern defined by ‘protective circles’ of settlement is discussed.

Huffman also describes the defensive spatial arrangement of the *Mambo*'s soldiers encircling the Hill Complex. These soldiers occupied what he describes as “sentry boxes” and “guard’s huts” on the slopes of the hill and around the perimeter inner and outer walls (Huffman, T. 1996:126);

At the most general level, the outlying structures and perimeter walls form concentric rings that reflect a dimension of security (Huffman 1996:126).

Such an observation appears to conflict with his idea that the siting on a hill, as well as the architectural style of the Hill Complex, was not motivated by defensive requirements. The socio-spatial dimension cannot be seen a-contextually from the architectural dimension. The motivation for ritual seclusion and elevated political and religious status is not necessarily mutually exclusive to the motivation for defensive requirements. Since the forces that shape settlement and building processes are multi-faceted and systemically related, one would expect some degree of overlap between various motivating forces, thereby resulting in certain multi-functional aspects of form and space;

...house form is not simply the result of physical forces or any single causal factor, but is the consequence of a whole range of socio-cultural factors seen in their broadest terms (Rappaport 1969:47).

Perhaps a fresh interpretation needs to be more capable of approaching material culture in a way suggested by Rappaport in the above passage, than previous interpretations with their tendencies to resort to structuralist or determinist ‘answers’, where only one possibility is considered. Historically, hill settlements are marked by a defensive motivation and the architecture at Great Zimbabwe could be consequently responding to this as a ‘human’ response to political, religious and socio-cultural climates. It would appear to be inappropriate to make comparisons between cultures, since the idea of ‘defense’ varies for different cultures. We need to validate the natural ‘human’ responses to *genus-loci* not necessarily as consequences of any cross-cultural influences.

While it is evident that the motivation for placing the *mambo* on the hill was possibly partly inspired by socio-political forces such as a need for defending the palace by elevating the *mambo*'s physical position, it is possible that this motivation was equally inspired by socio-religious forces as well, such as the need to validate royal leadership via a direct and physical connection to mountain symbolism and the world of the ancestors. This in itself has a ‘protective’ aspect, since ancestors are the ‘guardians’ of the land and the mountain is the symbol of God’s strength (God as ‘builder of towers’) and of the *mambo*'s protection and provision, offering security for the people. Since God lives ‘in the mountains’ and the ancestors are the guardians of the land, this offers a dimension of security that has a ‘defensive’ character. Therefore, socio-religious (mountain symbolism) and socio-political (need for defense, protection) are by no means mutually exclusive.

7 Valley Area and the Great Enclosure - The Current Debate

The Plateau Valley below the Hill Complex at Great Zimbabwe is scattered with various sized groupings of stone enclosures and is dominated by the impressive elliptical structure of the Great Enclosure (cf.: Figs 1.4, 1.5, 1.19, 1.20).

The lesser enclosures in the valley share the same masonry techniques employed at the Hill Complex and the Great Enclosure but many of the sections have collapsed due to the intrusion of tourist paths and numerous amateur investigations. It is important to remember that the confusing clusters of rubble and collapsed stone walling that exist today would have joined daga huts to form intricate residential complexes surrounding courtyards;

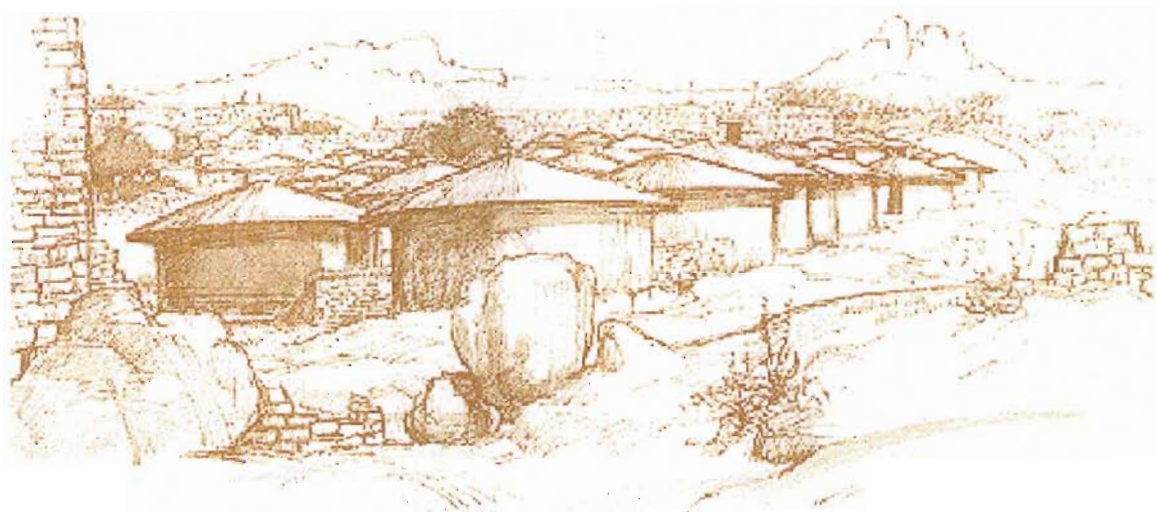


Figure 1.17; High-density settlement housing during Period IV at Great Zimbabwe - artist's impression (Huffman 1987:25).⁸

Figures 1.4 & 1.5 showing the Central Area Plan of Great Zimbabwe illustrates Huffman and Garlake's documentation of the Valley Ruins, while Garlake's more detailed graphic representation of the walls and stone enclosures in the Valley (cf.: Fig.1.19) is the most detailed and recent and therefore offers the most comprehensive amalgamation of documented ethno-archaeological material to date (cf: Footnote 1). Huffman and Garlake offer different suggestions for the function of the Valley enclosures. Huffman interprets the Lower Homesteads as huts and enclosures for the royal wives, while Garlake suggests they were the domains of the "...ruling class, the officials of the court and the relatives of the king." (Garlake

⁸ Huffman locates this context of development in 'Period IV', (1270-1450), the later period of development at Great Zimbabwe. The lack of accurate detail in depiction of the Great Enclosure in this drawing renders it difficult to locate the housing cluster depicted. However, the drawing does suit its purpose, which is to depict the compact nature of housing during the denser period of occupation at Great Zimbabwe.

1994:28). Garlake sees the royal wives and the *vahosi* (First Wife, Head Wife or Great Wife) occupying the Great Enclosure, while Huffman sees the *vahosi* occupying Lower Homestead 1 (Huffman 1996:146).

Previous documenters suggested that the Ridge Enclosure complex housed a cattle kraal, while Huffman suggests it was used as the headquarters of young soldiers (Huffman 1996). The large enclosures bisected by plateau walling leading to the Great Enclosure once contained grain bins storing produce from the *mambo*'s fields (Huffman 1996; Garlake 1994). It was the responsibility of the *mambo* to support unfortunates during times of struggle by providing food from 'tribute fields' stored in these grain bins.

The enclosure to the south-east of Lower Homestead 1 has become known as the 'royal treasury' due to the hoard of gold and ivory trade goods discovered there. This, according to Huffman, would see the *vahosi* in Lower Homestead 1, since it was the *vahosi*'s duty in traditional Shona society to guard the *mambo*'s treasury (Huffman 1996). (The Royal Treasury was found in Enclosure 12 of the Valley area, southeast of Lower Homestead area.)

Garlake, Mufuka, M. Hall and Summers however, believe that the *vahosi*'s residence was in the Great Enclosure itself (cf.: Chapters 2, 7 & 9). This appears to be the most popular version. Ethnographic evidence in this study reveals that this would have been the most likely interpretation. Garlake suggests that the Great Enclosure was also the house of the royal wives and that during the later period of Great Zimbabwe's occupation, the *mambo* moved down from the hill and occupied the Great Enclosure. However, considering the *mambo*'s fundamental attachment to mountain symbolism, the Eastern Enclosure and the ancestors propitiated there, this would be most unlikely. Later parts of this study provide more detail concerning this debate.

Between the enclosures in the valley and the Inner Perimeter Wall at the foot of the Hill Complex, the topography flattens out considerably. According to Huffman, because this area is unencumbered with stone enclosures and is situated in the centre of the royal settlement, this area would most likely be where the *dare*, the court of appeal, was located, for it aligns with traditional location for *dare* function (Huffman 1996). According to M. Hall, the size of the *dare* indicates the size of the settlement;

The significance of Great Zimbabwe as a centre of power is further indicated by the size of its dare, or central court: the large, open space, devoid of occupation debris, located between the hill and the southern part of the central town, where the leaders of the nation 'handled disputes between people in different chiefdoms, national policy and other matters of national concern' (Huffman 1986b) (Hall, M. 1987:111).

The *dare* during the occupation of Great Zimbabwe would have been the centre of a very busy community with hundreds of people coming and going each day to conduct business with the court officials and regional chiefs. The chiefs were more in touch with the community than the *mambo* was, for he had little time to spend at the *dare*. According to Huffman, the *mambo* spent most of his time at the royal court, situated in the Western Enclosure on the hill. The village councils were more democratic than the royal council and the chief's court possibly kept democracy intact. The site of the *dare* could be interpreted as a

social centre, a place that unites the laws of the *mambo* with the common man, through the council of chiefs (Mufuka, K. 1983; Beach, D. 1990).

The most significant structure in the Valley area is the Great Enclosure, situated to the south of the Hill Complex and the *dare*. This is the largest building in the settlement and has often been considered as the largest ancient stone building in Africa outside of Egypt. Substantial and elaborate outer walling houses smaller semi-enclosed areas as well as architectural features such as curved steps, stone monoliths, stone platforms, grooved walling, structural wall patterns, buttresses and conical towers. Many of the inner walls of the building were constructed at the earlier period of development in P-coursing and have been radiocarbon dated to approx. up to AD1250. The outer walls and conical towers were constructed in P/Q and Q-coursing and have been dated to approx. AD1350 in the later period of development (Huffman 1987). P/Q-coursing indicates later construction over earlier failed sections of P-coursing;

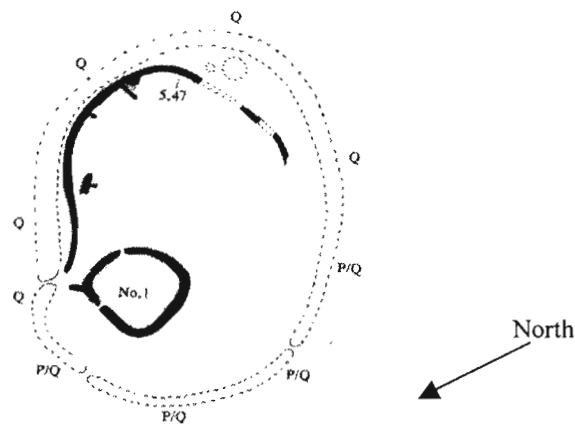


Figure 1.18; Stages of construction of the Great Enclosure (Huffman 1996:153).

There has been much debate concerning the possible function of the Great Enclosure. Diverse suggestions range from an initiation centre (*domba*) (Huffman 1987; 1996), a residence for the great wife (Garlake 1973; Mufuka 1983; Hall, M. 1996), a residence for the *mambo* in the later period of occupation (Garlake 1994) to the extraordinary suggestion of a prison to hold slaves (Mallows 1984). The building has even been described as a 'temple' by earlier documenters.

The range of suggestions and the level of uncertainty surrounding the possible function of the Great Enclosure may reveal the peripheral level at which most researchers have examined Shona culture in its relationship to the architecture of Great Zimbabwe.

While Garlake offers substantial archaeological evidence to support his hypothesis for function of stone enclosures at Great Zimbabwe, he provides little ethnographic and historical evidence to support his findings. His book 'Great Zimbabwe' (1974) is a valuable source in this field of study for it integrates in a comprehensive and detailed way, descriptions of the archaeological finds, excavations and hypotheses documented from the earliest investigations to the late twentieth century. Huffman, on the other hand, goes some way to making connections between material culture and society by providing a wide range of ethnographic material.

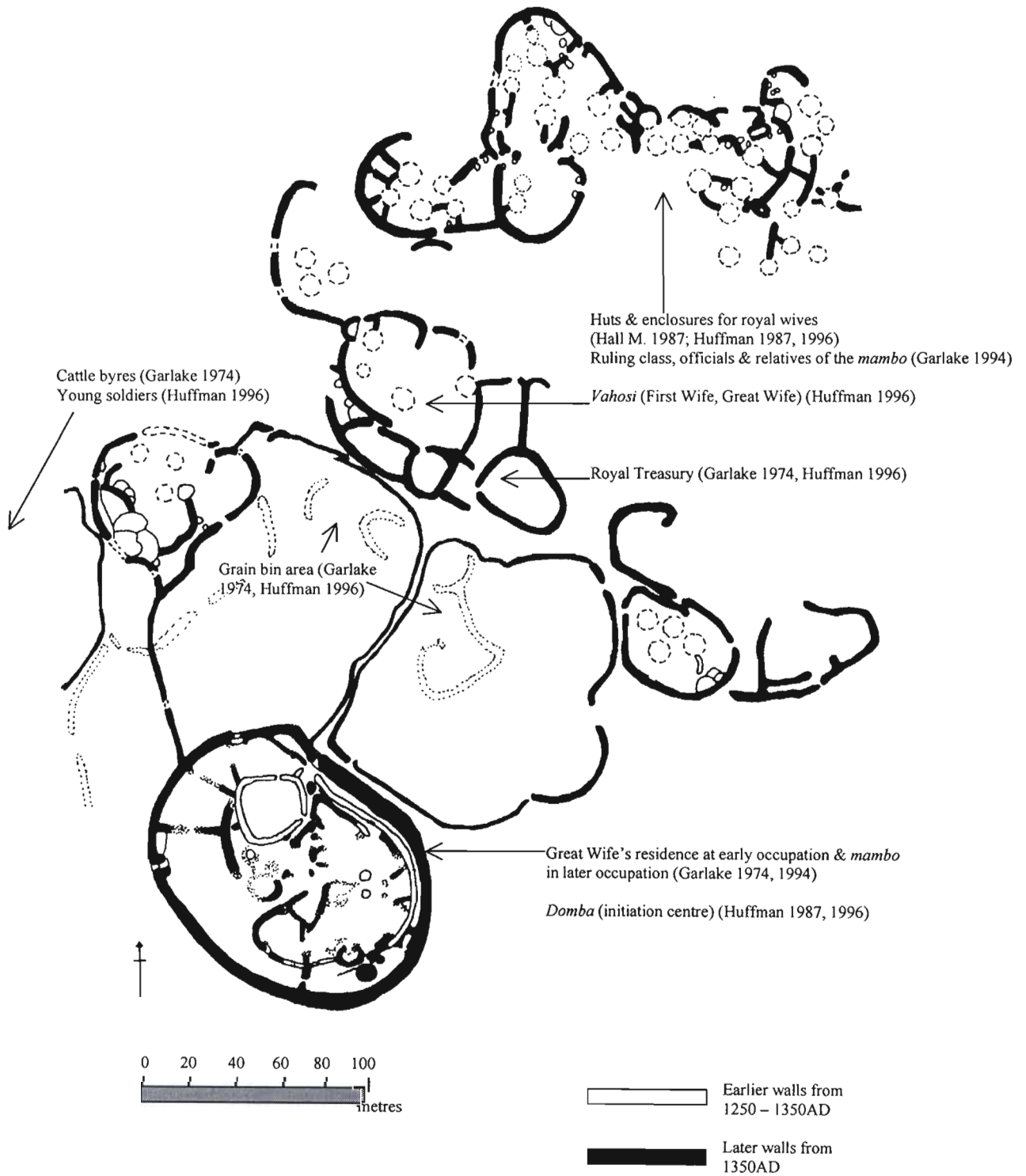


Figure 1.19; Plan of Great Enclosure and Valley Area.
 (Author – Plan adapted from Garlake 1974, 1994 & Huffman 1987)

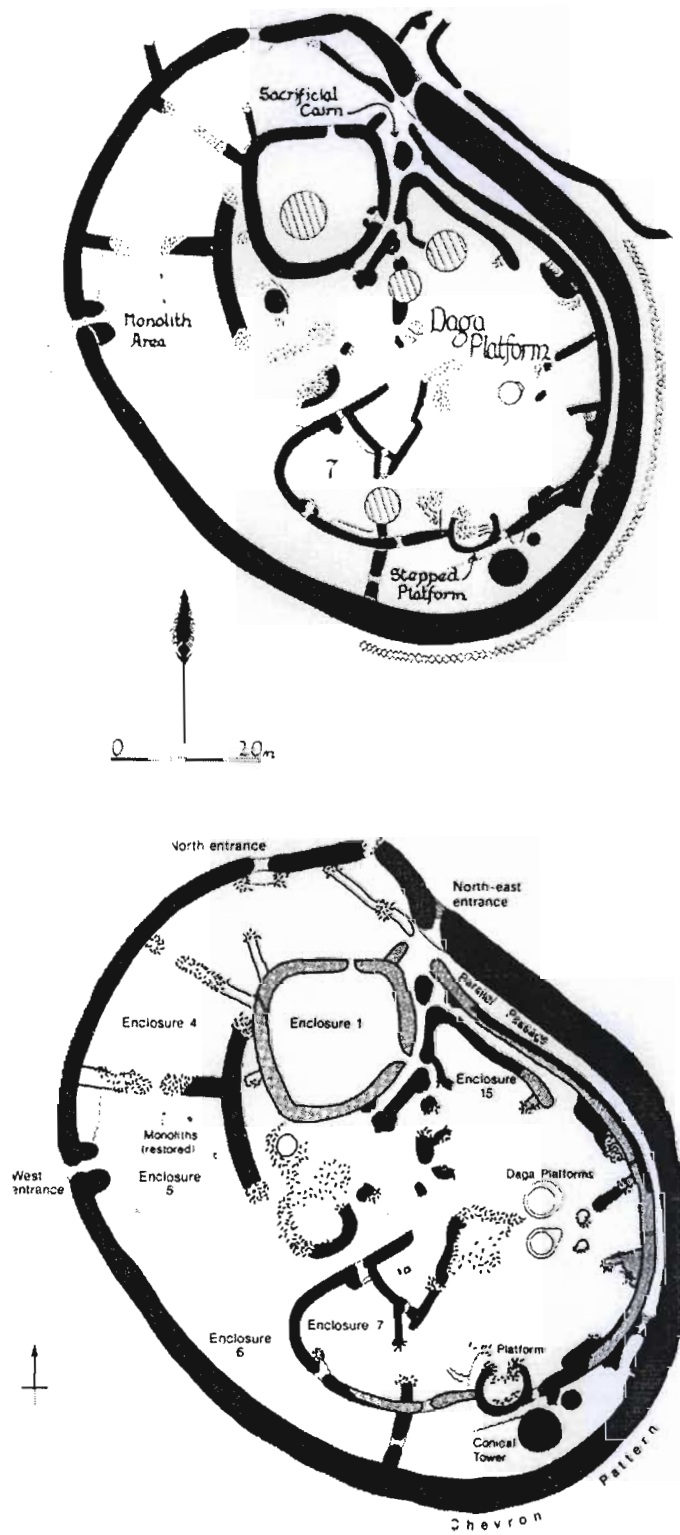


Figure 1.20; Plans of the Great Enclosure (Top; Huffman 1974:35. Bottom; Garlake 1974:28).

His documentation however, has been severely criticised by his colleagues for the use of a structuralist approach to support his hypothesis of initiation function for the Great Enclosure and for his over-reliance on Venda rather than Shona ethnography. However, Huffman clearly substantiates his position (Huffman 1997 in SAAB 166) and provides evidence to suggest that Venda sources are appropriate to his interpretation of Great Zimbabwe. The position adopted in this study of examining Karanga mythology and religious symbol and ritual is discussed in more detail in Part 2, while Part 5 discusses the possibility that the Great Enclosure functioned for ceremonial activities related to cultivative practices and honouring the ancestors, as well as housing the *vahosi* (First Wife).

The *vahosi* in traditional Karanga society was the *mambo*'s first wife, his "first real wife" and "head wife, in charge" of all of the wives of the *mambo* (Huffman 1996; Bourdillon 1991). As such, the *vahosi* (Great Wife, First Wife, head wife) would have occupied a position of authority and respect. Furthermore, the more wives acquired by the *mambo*, the more her status grew (Bourdillon 1991). As the head wife, controlling as many as up to two hundred wives, her household would have been significant in size, with many servants. It therefore seems appropriate to follow the interpretation that the Great Enclosure housed the *vahosi* (at least part of it such as the earlier areas of Enclosure 1 and southwest of Enclosure 1 (Garlake 1974)), (cf.: Part 5, Chapter 7, Fig. 5.19). This interpretation is followed by Garlake 1974, Mufuka 1983 and Hall M. 1987. An interpretation based on the mythology of the region, traditional Karanga ritual and ceremony, and an examination of the meanings of symbolic structures at the Great Enclosure, explored in Parts 3, 4 and 5 of this study, further validates this position and explains possible functions for Enclosure 15 and the Tower Enclosure. These are developed throughout the dissertation.

This interpretation is the result of the position taken in this dissertation, where Karanga ethnography, rather than Venda, is utilised. This study therefore offers a new approach. However, to provide a formative context for later discussion, the following chapter outlines Huffman's methodology.

8 Huffman's Contribution to the Current Debate

As one of the most productive researchers of Great Zimbabwe and of archaeological sites within the Zimbabwe culture area, and the most prolific documenter, Thomas Huffman's work has had a significant impact on the development of archaeological and historical understanding of Great Zimbabwe over the last twenty years. Therefore, any researcher in this field must approach the authority of Huffman's documentation with serious consideration. Unfortunately, some of the impact of Huffman's documentation has been in the form of criticism, by other researchers in this field, of his structuralist approach. Much of this criticism however, serves to reveal the argumentative, contentious and sometimes counterproductive milieu within which most archaeologists today seem to operate. While much of this criticism is offered below, it must be remembered that Huffman's documentation is useful for it provides an informative context for further research, from which this dissertation has partly arisen.

Furthermore, while some aspects of Huffman's methodology as well as some of his interpretations (*domba* based on Venda ethnography) is reconsidered in this study, many of the Shona interpretations he documents for stone symbols appear to be consistent with the findings of this study based on the Karanga mythology of the region and Karanga ritual and ceremonial practices. Many of Huffman's interpretations are significantly extended and contextualised by this study. Huffman's prolific documentation is seen as a valuable contribution to this study and will continue to have impact in this field, for it provides a foundation from which we are able to begin to approach the ancient architecture of Zimbabwe from a perspective that integrates archaeology with ethnography, oral tradition and history.

Huffman's most recent publication, "Snakes and Crocodiles" (1996) is important for many reasons as it attempts to understand the architecture of the ancient Zimbabwe culture area within a socio-cultural context. It also synthesises a wide range of ancient Zimbabwe culture area sites for comparative analysis and provides illustrations and photographs of many sites not previously recorded. Huffman utilises archaeological evidence, Portuguese recorded documents, oral tradition and Shona and Venda ethnography to construct a model of settlement pattern and cognitive structure common to Zimbabwe sites. This structuralist approach is based on a two-dimensional framework where elements identified as supposedly 'common' to all sites are used to determine spatial layout and function of settlement structures.⁹

Huffman argues for a cognitive model that supposedly underlies the spatial organisation of settlement pattern and residences of Zimbabwe sites;

...each dzimbahwe had to have five components to function: a palace, guards, court, royal wives area and place for followers...Zimbabwe people arranged these five components according to three dimensions: (1) life forces, (2) status, and (3) security (Huffman 1996:104-5).

⁹ Cf.: Part 4, Chapter 3 which discusses Huffman's methodology and findings in more detail.

Huffman overlays this model onto a number of Zimbabwe sites in order to determine arrangement of functional areas based on the binary opposites of cognitive structures;

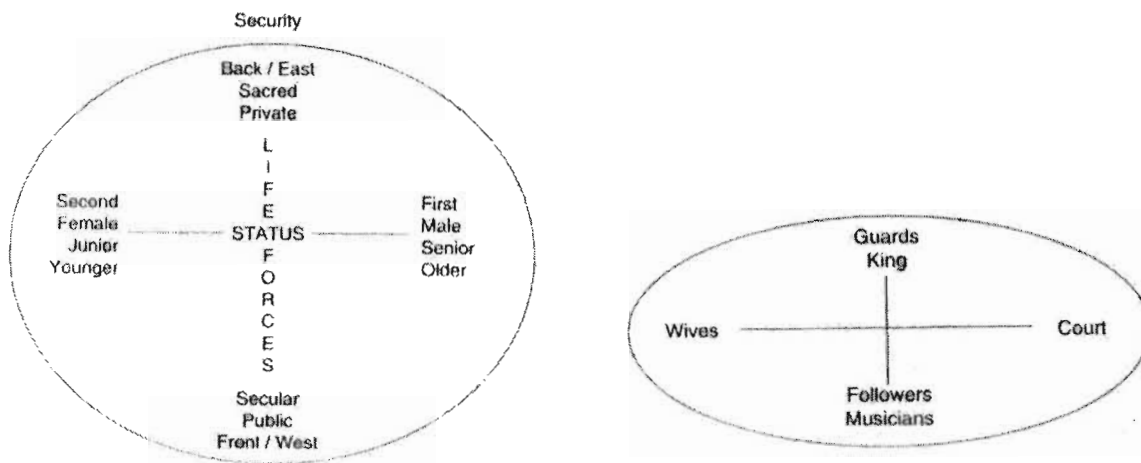


Figure 1.21: Huffman's Cognate Models¹⁰

Huffman also identifies wall designs common to sites using Shona divining dice (*Hakata*) (cf.: Fig. 3.21) to interpret their meanings and to suggest possible function of enclosures where such wall patterns occur;

Male crocodile – old and senior man, wisdom	
Female crocodile – old and senior woman, unity	
Crocodile in its pool – ritual seclusion	
Pool – ritual seclusion, female fertility, womb, protection	
Stone grain bin – male fertility	Tower
Horn – justice, defence, male duties	Monolith
Furrows in a field – female duties	Mihombwe
Snake of the Mountain – rainmaking, young and junior man, male virility	
Snake of the water – female fertility	
Zebra – young and junior woman, female fertility	

Figure 1.22: Huffman's 'Core symbols expressed in stone' (Huffman 1996:68).

¹⁰ The left diagram is Huffman's cognitive spatial model which he uses to derive spatial function for settlement structures throughout the Zimbabwe culture area. The right diagram is an example of suggested town layout pattern derived from this model (Huffman 1996:105).

The application of these core symbols has been heavily criticised by Huffman's colleagues. They believe that his model fails to recognise that spatio-symbolic values within a culture group occupying different sites and time periods may not necessarily remain the same;

There is no reason to assume, as many structuralists appear to assume that all symbols found in a particular culture cohere in a single system. (Bourdillon, M. 1997 in SAAB 166:127).

By utilising evidence in current Venda initiation practice, Huffman attempts to convince his readers of a sense of 'fit' between his cognitive grid model and the settlement patterns of a wide range of sites spanning a period of over 800 years. However, other documenters in this field suggest that the application of this model may not be able to acknowledge the transformative capacity of spatial structures operating in a dynamic socio-cultural context or the wide range of physical contexts that would have impacted on such a model. We therefore need to consider the implications of applying this model over such a broad sweep of settlement sites;

From the beginning (pp. 5-6) he argues against 'historical particularism' and narrow inductivism' in favour of stress on spatial organisation and world-views. This looks very much like a justification for a certain amount of glossing over of awkward questions about evidence and argument in favour of his own complex and rigid model (Beach 1997 in SAAB 166:126).

The archaeologist Martin Hall also criticises Huffman's structuralist approach;

As an attempt to write history, Snakes and Crocodiles succeeds only in taking history away, consigning 'the Shona' to timeless entrapment in a cognitive structure that has allowed no significant change over almost a millennium, and to the 'dark continent' which has been Europe's prejudice of Africa for generations (Hall, M. 1997 in SAAB 166: 132).

Such harsh criticism tends to undermine the cognitive and integrative nature of Huffman's approach that has so far been the only significant attempt made by archaeology to relate material culture to Shona symbolic values.

However, from the research conducted in this study it was discovered, and it is important to note, that Shona symbolism has multi-variant interpretations, and symbolic associations do not have discretely defined meanings, often interrelated to a dynamic range of interpretations based on a common theme. Furthermore, the same mythological symbol can have a variety of meanings depending upon the context of the myth or ritual. A symbol will never appear to have a discrete or simple meaning nor can it be assigned a 'true' defined value. In Part 2 of this study, this aspect of symbolic interpretation in the African context is discussed, where the term '**condensation**' is used to describe the way in which many meanings are **compressed** into one symbol and symbols themselves interrelate. Indeed, it is this interactive and dynamic aspect of Karanga symbolism that allows for a more creative and less limiting relationship between man and his symbolic world

Therefore, literally translating symbolic architectural features can be problematic, since it overlooks the multivalent meanings of the symbolism. Furthermore, while Huffman assigns gender specific meanings to many symbolic structures based on the assumption of the Shona use of binary opposites such as male and female, front and back, sacred and secular, the approach taken in this study recognises that symbolic expressions in the Karanga built environment originate from a desire to form symbiotic relationships between two opposing characteristics.

A further criticism of Huffman's approach has been offered by Blacking and Soper (Blacking: 1985; Soper: 1997) for a lack of substantial field study and over reliance on Venda rather than Shona ethnography. Many of Huffman's colleagues have criticized Huffman's use of Venda sources (SAAB 1997,166:125-143). Beach suggests that because Shona oral tradition and historical documents were not available to Huffman, he utilised Venda ethnography instead;

...certain of his assumptions or uses of evidence were untenable. These included the ability of oral tradition to retain data over many centuries, the reading of documents and the relevance of data from Venda (Beach, D. 1997 in SAAB 166:125).

Beach further criticises Huffman's interpretation and use of crocodile symbolism;

Huffman has little enough evidence to link crocodiles with Shona monarchy and some of that is dubious or irrelevant (Beach, D. 1997 SAAB 166:127).

Huffman uses present day Venda use of crocodile symbolism to interpret herringbone and check patterns as crocodile symbolism at Great Zimbabwe. However, crocodile symbolism plays a somewhat minor role in traditional Karanga mythology and ritual and appears in only two of the many myths and stories read for the material in this dissertation.¹¹

Pikirayi also highlights this problem;

Space is a cultural variable, expressed in symbols meant to convey meaning both to the observer and the user. Venda court language is impregnated with crocodile symbolism and Huffman sees Danangombe and other Khami phase sites expressed in the same way. However, this symbolism is not conspicuous among the Shona (Beach 1994:249). The Portuguese did not see it in the Mutapa State. As Huffman points out on p. 29, the association between crocodile and sacred leadership is only a general one, probably restricted to the ritual sphere. There should be no reason why wall decorations and features such as the tall vertical ridges (mihombwe) at Danangombe and other Khami phase sites should be interpreted as such. Killing a crocodile among the Tswana was considered taboo (Chirenje 1977:69). Whether crocodile symbolism is important in Tswana

¹¹ Cf.: Part Two, Chapter 3 of this study which discusses the ability of mythology to retain symbolic significance and meaning over time. While the story line and the heroes or characters may change or be adapted to suit a new audience, or the physical adaptations to society (e.g., the use of microphones and costumes), the symbolic values, beliefs and existential attitudes of the stories and myths retain their potency and intended function. Sometimes, because of the powerful conviction relayed in a myth, the story line can remain unaltered for many generations.

court language is unclear. Since Venda has a strong Sotho-Tswana element the cultural importance attached to the crocodile should be traced from there, and not from the Shona as Huffman suggests (Pikirayi, I. 1997 SAAB 166:136-137).

Pikirayi and Pwiti also criticise Huffman's assumption that Venda ethnography provides an appropriate source for interpretation of Zimbabwe stone architecture;

The theoretical discourse is straightforward, but arguing that "groups of people sharing the same world view organise their settlements according to the same principles wherever they live..." (p. 6) overlooks the contribution of the environment in shaping human lives (Pikirayi, I. 1997 SAAB 166:135)...I continue, however, to have reservations about the 'goodness of fit' between the archaeology and the ethnography, particularly his insistence on the application of Venda ethnography to what he agrees are principally ancestral Shona sites. Also of concern has been his continued perception of Great Zimbabwe as having been constructed according to a preconceived plan, a plan which is then repeated with some variations at other madzimbahwe through space and time (Pwiti, 1997 SAAB 166:137).

Soper also criticises Huffman's approach for its lack of use of Shona ethnography;

The overall picture is somewhat vitiated by problems of definition. Firstly there is no physical definition of the Zimbabwe culture though the culture area is said to be matched by the distribution of ruins similar to Great Zimbabwe...Venda ethnography - Huffman's chief source of extant information on sacred leadership and class distinction - is at one stage of remove, and the direct descent of Venda customs from the Zimbabwe culture may be questioned..."Testing" his model is largely confined to manipulating evidence in support, with potentially contrary indications being ignored and no independent analysis to provide more convincing confirmation...Since the whole institution of domba is based on Venda sources with no hint in Shona ethnography or Portuguese sources, one may question if it actually existed (Soper, R. 1997 in Zimbabwe Today:3-5).

While Soper's criticism may be somewhat harsh and reveals the contentious context within which many archaeologists still operate, it does serve to highlight the opportunity that now exists for the use of Karanga ethnography to interpret Great Zimbabwe.

Further criticism surrounds Huffman's position that the Great Enclosure operated as an initiation school, for it presupposes that initiation school structures were inculcated in the social structure at the time of Great Zimbabwe's occupation. The evidence he provides to support this is that Venda society, who supposedly derived from the Shona society, use initiation buildings. However, from the position of examining Karanga culture for this dissertation, there appears to be no evidence that initiation was ever institutionalised in Karanga society and the education of young adults, as described in all documentation of both Shona and Karanga traditional society (Gelfand: 1962, Aschwanden: 1982, Beach: 1990; Bourdillon: 1991) is a private, within-family affair and continues for several years before marriage. A young girl is taken to her future husband's family at a very young age, long before puberty, to be instructed in her future role as a

wife and mother and to set up her future household. A girl's aunt plays a very significant role in private lessons on sexual matters (Aschwanden 1982:73f; 148; 161f). Shona initiation appears to be marked not by public ceremony, but is rather contained within the family concerned. Aschwanden's thorough account of the various complicated ritual stages of the typical Karanga marriage indicates that the education of the young adult on matters pertaining to their sexual roles and to married life (initiation) takes place over several years and is a family matter (Aschwanden 1982:97-183). A young girl's instruction takes place in her own homestead and is usually instructed by her aunt or similar mother figure of her extended family. The author was unable to source any evidence of public ceremonial initiation function or structure in Karanga traditional culture. For this reason, Huffman's hypothesis is criticised by Blacking:

Since much of the ethnography is grossly misrepresented, serious doubt must be cast on the theory, which makes the remarkable claim that initiation lodges were permanent structures in ancient Zimbabwe, and so contradicts almost all that has been reported about initiation in sub-Saharan Africa... Attractive as the interpretation may be, the author's use of evidence from Venda is cavalier and often inaccurate (Blacking, J. 1985 in Man 20:543).

An important feature of initiation in Venda society is that at the end of the ceremony all ritual material, including the building, is destroyed or dismantled, because their potency would be seen as dangerous if not destroyed (Blacking 1985). Huffman claim that initiation buildings were used in ancient Zimbabwe could then be questioned since, if they were used, there would be no physical evidence of them remaining. While this does not rule out the possibility that if the Shona of ancient Zimbabwe did use initiation structures then they may have been dismantled, it does appear to make the use of Venda ethnography somewhat problematic and leaves the interpretation of the Great Enclosure (a permanent stone structure) as a building for *domba* practice to be somewhat questionable. By taking a more particularist approach than that offered by Huffman, this dissertation attempts to consider the contribution that the environment has in 'shaping human lives' by discussing how not only the socio-cultural factors, but also the landscape and *genus-loci* of Great Zimbabwe possibly influenced the architectural responses and how the architectural responses served to validate and give authority to the socio-cultural context. For example, Part 5 of the study particularly examines how the siting and increased ritual status of the Great Enclosure possibly contributed to the increase in status of the *vahosi*'s role in royal society.

However, by using a variety of sources, Huffman purposely avoids a particularist approach in favour of a broad sweep. In order to achieve this, such an approach needed to overlook cultural dynamism and environmental influences and rely on the assumption that ancient Zimbabwe stone sites were modeled on similar cognate settlement patterns. Huffman's approach, indeed any approach, must not be seen as an 'answer to the mystery', but rather as an interpretation based on the available and appropriate sources and that his broader approach is important for bringing together a wide variety of sites.

As long as an approach is taken whereby we are not attempting to 'answer' a 'mystery', but are rather seeking one that leads to further interactive research, Huffman's analysis and interpretations, despite the criticism, must still be seen as valuable and informative in this field of study. The strident criticism offered

by Huffman's colleagues does not serve to enrich this field, for most of it is limited by a reactive tendency to concentrate only on the **improbabilities** (problems) and to thereby discard any **possibilities**.

However, while understanding Huffman's model in its application to such a broad range of sites, we must not overlook the political, economic and physical context variability that must surely have motivated a wide range of adaptations to the built environment. When examining historical artifact we must consider the systemically related and pluralist influences such as political, economic, historical and physical that impacts on the settlement pattern and settlement structures within a transformative socio-cultural context.

Furthermore, if we consider the dynamic process of cultural history, we may need to reconsider the use of any hypothetical model that focuses on spatial and structural elements that supposedly **remain the same** throughout a period of more than half a millennium of African history.

9 Motivation for this Study

While this dissertation will attempt to highlight some of the difficulties resulting from the use of Huffman's 2-dimensional model, the preceding discussion forms part of the context for motivation behind this study. This dissertation uses Great Zimbabwe as a case study in order to interpret its architectural spatio-symbolic and in-situ stone symbolic structures based on an understanding of Karanga cultural symbolic values. It has therefore been necessary for this study to take a synchronic approach and an historical particularist view in order to understand cultural influences on architectural form at a contextual level for Great Zimbabwe in particular.

Despite the criticism offered by his colleagues, Huffman's documentation provides immense value to researchers in this field for it synthesizes descriptions and illustrations of a vast number of settlements spanning over 800 years of the ancient Zimbabwe culture area. Furthermore, it opens up the possibility of other areas of study within this field and assists in the attempt to approach traditional archaeology more cognitively.

While this study documents the criticism of Huffman's model, both diachronic **and** synchronic approaches are important in the interactive process of inquiry and investigation.

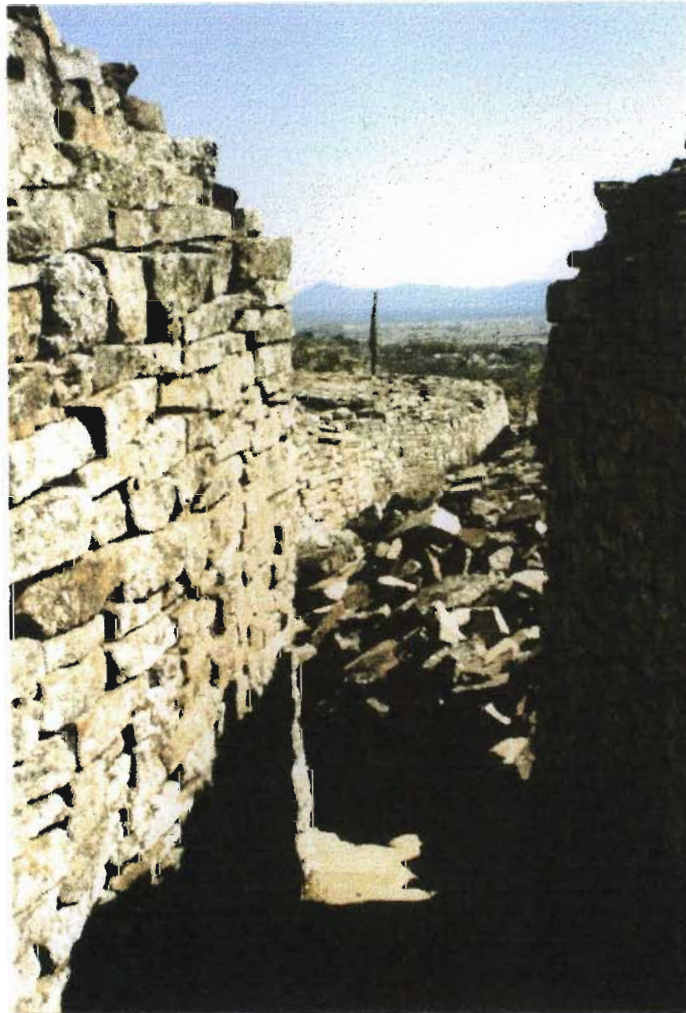
This study can only ever offer a different approach **to part of** the very complex and dynamic research material in this field of study. The research in this study was conducted out of interest in the architecture and the desire to gain insight into the well of ancient African wisdom of which Karanga religion is a part. Research was not undertaken on the premise of 'answering' the 'mystery' of Great Zimbabwe. Furthermore, inquiry into Karanga mythology was initiated from an interest in the relationship between African mythology and material culture.

A method of inquiry, which values the diversity of positions taken in this field of study, is validated by this dissertation. Therefore, any serious researcher in this field must consider Huffman's fieldwork, research and contributions as informative for further inquiry. Integrating a diversity of resource material is seen as the most valuable way to approach the history of architecture in Southern Africa today, at a time where an emergent, diverse and pluralist African society is itself experiencing social transformation as it redresses its colonial past.

We can no longer afford to embrace only one idea or belief system at the expense of all others and we must be prepared to glean information from as many sources as possible. This study should therefore be seen as an extension to the field and, at times, a modification or clarification to Huffman's interpretations.

PART TWO

SHIFTING PARADIGMS



Myth then, is the irreducible aesthetic substratum in all varieties of human cultural endeavour, from one generation to another
(Okpewho 1983:70).

A map of our past is the pathfinder to our destiny. Thus if we misread the map of our past or consult an incorrect map, we will misdirect our efforts in shaping our future
(Chinweizu 1996 in Nokuzola, M. 1997:10).

1 Introduction

To understand who a people are, we have to look at their past, the history from which they arose. The ever-returning debate about who built the Great Zimbabwe shows clearly enough how people place their status and prestige on their past, and how many judge their past according to their image of what people now are (Bourdillon 1991:3).

While any approach to history will only ever provide an interpretive perspective on the past, an unbiased and a-political approach to interpretation must at least be attempted. Considering the Western paradigm by which much of African material culture has been analysed, it is crucial that a shift in paradigm takes place, in order to provide a less biased “map of our past” and facilitate “...our efforts in shaping our future.” (Chinweizu, 1996 in Nokuzola, M. 1997:10). Western models of analysis often ignore or misinterpret African philosophies. In the early 20th and late 19th centuries, Western interpretation seldom searched for connections between African material culture and African consciousness since it did not easily believe in the existence of profound African thought and, therefore, the connections had seldom been looked for, nor less found.

Interpretations of African material culture could therefore be re-examined with an emphasis placed upon a deeper understanding of African religious consciousness informing African material culture. This dissertation attempts to achieve this by examining symbolic values inherent in Karanga religion, ritual, mythology, proverbial lore and wisdom and subsequently applying such an understanding to an interpretation of the architecture of Great Zimbabwe.

This study is concerned with symbolic structures and settlement dynamics and approaches Great Zimbabwe as a case study for interpreting form, meaning and symbolism in architecture. This interpretation is based on an understanding of the symbolism and consciousness inherent in the mythology of the region, that of the Karanga people and on an examination of Karanga customs, ritual and religion.¹

There are numerous reasons for utilising Great Zimbabwe as a case study, the most obvious being that it was the largest settlement in Southern Africa at the time of its occupation, with the most powerful and influential kingdom. Furthermore, it reflects, in its settlement dynamics, the establishment of the social order of royal power and stone symbolism that was to become the precedent for later settlement dynamics of the Zimbabwe period (cf.: Part 1, Chapter 3). The symbolic expression such as carved monoliths, outsized walls and conical towers at Great Zimbabwe also displays a more 3-dimensional, monumental and

¹ The Karanga are a sub-group of the Shona peoples of Zimbabwe. Their culture area lies loosely within the southeastern region of Zimbabwe. The term ‘Karanga’ was first used for the new group of people, who moved onto the Zimbabwe plateau, following AD1000. The name ‘Shona’ has been used only in recent times to apply to all the Shona speaking peoples of Zimbabwe (Beach 1990; Bourdillon 1991) and originates from the British colonial need to categorise and simplify terminologies for ‘tribal’ groups for a more ‘manageable’ beauracacy. (Cf.: Part 1, Chapter 1 documenting historic evidence that the Karanga were the creators and occupiers of Great Zimbabwe.)

vivid character than that of its successors. Later period sites developed a more 2-dimensional symbolic expression where structural wall patterns culminate in an almost 'Baroque' style at Nalatele (cf. Part 1, Chapter 6). The three-dimensional aspect of Great Zimbabwe's symbolic expression facilitates a tangible connection to be made between the spatio-symbolic language of Karanga mythology, ritual and proverbial lore and the spatio-symbolic language of the architecture.

This part of the study attempts to introduce the reader to the study of mythology and its potential value as a creative resource for interpreting material culture. It also discusses the reasons why an understanding of Karanga symbolic consciousness inherent in the mythology and ritual of the region is necessary in order to understand the symbolic content of ancient Zimbabwe architecture, and in particular, the architecture of Great Zimbabwe.

2 Mythology and Architectural Theory

Myth explains the why and how of the here and now. The explanation given is not only authoritative, because it is given in the form of a myth, it is true to say that a myth has authority, because it offers an explanation (Van Baaren, T.P. in Johnson, P-A. 1994:47).

This chapter specifically discusses the relevance of exploring mythology for understanding culture, history and architecture.

In discussing the relevance of examining mythology as a source for creating a theory of architecture, Johnson suggests that, since mythology has contextual 'authority', its essence and usefulness in architectural understanding can be paralleled with how theory can inform the creation of architecture.

Johnson argues that the authentic definition of a 'myth' is much more than merely "...a purely fictitious narrative..." as offered by the typical dictionary definition, and that such a limited interpretation has "...attendant derogatory connotations." (Johnson, P-A. 1974:47.)

To validate the relevance of mythology in theory, Johnson cites the following 'working definition' of myth offered by William Doty (1986). This definition also serves to explain the reasons why this dissertation examines mythology as a source of creativity for a culture's architecture and as a way to understand the creative and cultural processes informing an architectural record;

A mythological corpus consists of a usually complex network of myths that are culturally important imaginal stories, conveying by means of metaphoric and symbolic diction, graphic imagery, and emotional conviction and participation, the primal, foundational accounts of aspects of the real, experienced world and humankind's roles and relative statuses within it.

Mythologies may convey the political and moral values of a culture and provide systems of interpreting individual experience within a universal perspective, which may include the intervention of suprahuman entities as well as aspects of natural and cultural orders. Myths may be enacted or reflected in rituals, ceremonies, and dramas, and they may provide materials for secondary elaboration, the constituent mythemes having become merely images or reference points for a subsequent story, such as folktale, historical legend, novella, or prophecy (Doty, W. 1986 in Johnson, P-A. 1994:47).

The architecture created out of the mythological context could therefore be seen as a 'primal' graphic expression in metaphor, symbol and imagery embodied in the people's real experienced socio-cultural context. The architecture becomes **reference** to the mythological time, while the mythologically shaped thinking of a culture and the oral narrative suggests the architectural **intent**.

Perhaps the most recognisable example of this can be found in the pyramid form. The Egyptian pyramid, as a reference to a people's mythology, is a symbolic attempt to integrate the physical world with that of the divine, where the form expresses the cosmic mountain and the desire to reach the sacred realm above the earthly physical plane. The Mayan ziggurat and the Javanese Borobudur similarly express in stone the

mythological context of the time. We could therefore begin to consider Great Zimbabwe's stone monuments in a similar way, where **the architectural record expresses the mythological context of the time.**

Roland Barthes (1957 in Johnson, P-A. 1994) aligns the creative process of theory with that of mythology by arguing that a theory is not defined by an object (in this case, an architecture) but by **the way the object is conveyed and by the process of its creation.** Indeed, a more revealing analysis and understanding of architecture relies on examining the way in which it is conveyed, the creative process itself. This study is an attempt to examine Great Zimbabwe based on this idea, where mythology reveals the creative intentions of the architecture. Similarly, the meaning of the oral narrative is defined not by the literal story line itself (the 'object', the characters and events of the story), but by the way it is conveyed and by the symbolic imagery it expresses;

"Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters its message (emphasis added): there are formal limits to myth, there are no 'substantial' ones" (Barthes 1957:117). This is precisely the case with theory and with what Heidegger says about the created 'work': "Everything brought forth surely has this endowment of having been brought forth, if it has any endowment at all. Certainly. But in the work, createdness is expressly created into the created being, so that it stands out from it, from the being thus brought forth, in an expressly particular way (emphasis added)" (Heidegger 1936:181-182). This 'standing out', this 'expressly particular', this 'bringing forth' is not defined by the object of its message but by the way it utters, by the design-talk that mediates the work (Johnson, P-A. 1994:49).

At Great Zimbabwe, the 'design-talk' could be seen as the symbolic language, the unique and powerful syntax of symbolic forms and their arrangement referring to ancestors and the mythological time. This dissertation explores the way the Karanga 'messages' are 'uttered' through the architecture. In Heidegger's terms, it is the conveyed message, not merely the object from which it is uttered, that is of creative value.

Creativity in architecture could be seen as not merely the object itself but as the 'record' of its creative process, and, in the case of Great Zimbabwe, this 'record' could be considered to be the oral narrative. This reveals the similarity between what Johnson terms 'design-talk' and the oral narrative, in that it is not the object itself that **defines the nature** of that object, but the way the object is **'brought forth'**. Similarly, in architecture, the nature of the object is defined by the **"...attitudes that have allowed it to be."** (Johnson, P-A. 1994:50.)

The theoretical nature of this dissertation could be seen as one that considers the symbolic structures of Great Zimbabwe as vehicles for the 'bringing forth' of the mythological symbolic meaning, as expressions of the **'attitudes that have allowed' the architecture to be.**

The record of the way that architecture was created, its process, can be understood through and by the mythological time, the mythological context operating during the creative architectural process.

Mythic realms serve to inspire the creative process and therefore it appears to be convincingly appropriate to examine a historic architecture by probing the meaning, symbolism and imagery of the mythical world that actively informed the creative process.

Examining the oral narrative as source for symbolic and graphic meaning in the built environment has theoretical justification if we consider mythology, and its enactment in rituals, as more than 'fictitious narrative'. We could consider it instead as the 'primal' and principal account of a culture's **real world** perspective, consciousness, wisdom and insight as the creative message that is 'uttered' through the architectural record. Mythology is therefore an 'authoritative' account, offering an 'explanation'.

This is precisely why Karanga mythology has been sourced in this dissertation, to attempt to provide a meaningful understanding of the architecture of Great Zimbabwe by examining the creative process, the messages brought forth within the architectural record which have 'allowed the architecture to be'.

3 Mythology Explains Culture

I... highlight the aestheticist position which sees myth as a creative resource from which the larger cultural values are derivative... Whereas a not too hopeful future awaits man's technological efforts, myth and the study of it provide man with the only hope of release from the enslavement of time. Time lost would be regained in the knowledge that there are invariables in human culture that have not suffered the ravages of time and the material hardware of culture; by a synchronic analysis of culture (e.g. transformational models in myth) we find the opportunity for locating and reasserting these invariables and thus earning a convenient mobility between the past, the present, and the future (Okpewho 1983:xi, 41).

This chapter discusses the theoretical perspectives adopted by cultural researchers of mythology and ritual in order to contextualise the theoretical position taken in this study that sees myth as a valuable cultural resource for interpreting history and material culture.

Myth and Culture

Mythical tales tell of an earlier world-view, a set of ideas about how man has adapted to his environment. Myths, stories and proverbs are used to explain cultural wisdom to the people of a society and can therefore explain to an outsider, as a true source of a culture's perspective, their cultural thought and organisation. Okpewho discusses the 'second generation' of oral narrative theorists who see myth as a way of understanding cultural thought;

... the tendency was towards seeing human culture in terms of related forms as an aid to the understanding either of social organisation, or of cultural thought, or else of creative activity: this generation is represented, respectively, by functionalists, symbolists, and formalists. The difference in perspective between the two generations may be explained by the fact that, while most of the scholars in the first engaged in armchair speculation with little thought for the quality of social life, most of those in the second either did active field-work or else were influenced in their conclusions by the growing social concern in humanistic scholarship (Okpewho 1983:20-21).

Oral narrative also contributes to the maintenance of the 'structural continuity' of a culture. Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown both see the function of the oral narrative as a device to contextualise and validate social norms by the telling of socio-cultural aspects related to rites of passage such as birth, adolescence, marriage, old age and death (Okpewho 1983:21f). Many theorists value mythology as an explanation of a society's morals and behavioural attitudes and Malinowski even sees oral narrative as a vehicle for resolving societal conflicts. It therefore has the potential to inform us of the culture's morality and codes of conduct. Malinowski also sees myth as a 'charter' for 'proper conduct' to "...preserve the ways in which the society has always behaved since time immemorial" (op.cit.). W. Bascom further sees the following as the main functions of myth in society;

“...amusement; validation of culture, by giving charter to custom; education, through approbation or reprimand of behaviour; and aetiology, by answering questions about origins etc”...the tale... “explains and validates various religious beliefs and ritual practices...”

(Bascom, W. 1977 in Okpewho 1983:24).

Therefore, through an examination of a culture’s mythology, we are better able to understand the way a culture validates itself, the behavioural attitudes and approach to educational processes, the attitude to its own origin and the religious and ritual practices that inform material culture.

Myth and Multivalent Symbolism

The ground of creation is thus the middle, between all opposites...it is the mutual impact of opposites that is the motive force of creation (Maclagan 1997:17).

Earlier documenters of myth in Africa focused on the aspect of symbolic binary opposites seemingly apparent in the African myth, possibly because it was easier to interpret it this way. This is a common misconception made by the structuralist viewpoint. However, post-structuralists have seriously doubted the earlier emphasis on binary coding and later recognised the multivalence of symbolic associations in African perspectives apparent in mythology;

The allegorical quality of symbolism is further validated by scholars who have moved beyond the somewhat easy parameters of dual classification to explore the multivalency of cultural symbols. One such scholar is Victor Turner, who has identified a ‘forest of symbols’ in the ritual life of the Ndembu of Zambia. He has found that one item or symbol may carry a variety of meanings, and so uses the words ‘polysemy’ or ‘multivocality’ in this regard. He also uses the term ‘condensation’ for the situation whereby many meanings are compressed within one symbol (Okpewho 1983:29 citing Turner, V.).

This study explores in depth this aspect of Karanga symbolism, where the term ‘**condensation**’ could be appropriately applied to the symbolic associations inherent in the mythology of the region. In most situations, any given symbol appears to have a multitude of meanings contextualised by a theme.

The study further reveals that Karanga myths demonstrate a cultural desire to **overcome polarities and contradictions**, and where the “**mutual impact of opposites**” is a recurrent theme in African mythology and socio-cultural consciousness, yet one that has been overlooked by recent researchers in this field;

Myth is a story by which a culture endeavours to grapple with and to resolve some of the contradictions inherent in its view of reality or the world, and one way in which this is done is by the use of mediation or mediatory devices, e.g. a character in the story who enjoys mobility between mortal and immortal life, a medium of transfer from the natural to the supernatural world, a creature who incorporates the contending elements of nature (wildness) and culture (technology), and so on. There are no such devices in the primary activity of language (e.g. poetry or speech) (Okpewho 1983:39).

Maclagan suggests that it is the complexity of the world of creation in many creation myths which facilitates the realisation of a less contradictory attitude between opposites;

This original complexity of creation stems from an impossible unity beyond all human distinctions... "from which life and death, real and imaginary, past and future, communicable and incommunicable, height and depth; are no longer seen as contradictory" ... Production, division, reproduction etc., are all processes which have an inner and an outer reference simultaneously... Man's own creative powers can thus be seen as a version (or re-version) of the power that creates and sustains his existence (Maclagan 1997:7 citing Breton, A. 1962).

It is this desire to overcome oppositions in order to comprehend the complexity of creation that facilitates a wide and diverse range of symbolic associations inherent in creation myths. It also allows man to see himself as part of the creative process. **The multivalence of symbolic associations enrich the myth and place it above the category of story or legend; it becomes a commentary on a culture's creativity by using symbolic complexity to overcome conflict and binary simplicity.**

A theoretical reliance on the study of binary opposites overlooks the creativity inherent in African myth and could even be seen as racist for it denies the culture's development of complex thought;

In particular, the enterprise of symbolic interpretation in social anthropology rests largely on the belief that, considering the polysemy or multivalency of any one symbol in a society, there is apt to be a variety of opinions on the meaning of that symbol among the citizens of that society (Okpewho 1983:123).

It is indeed, the complexly interwoven, usually contradictory and often obtuse symbolic associations of a tale which are the creative vehicle to relay messages about society, for there is a satisfaction at finally 'getting at' the meaning which strengthens the message. It is through the often-heterogeneous process of comprehending complex symbolic imagery that promotes the memorability of the tale and its messages. It is this process that often gives the narrative a dream-like quality. Myths are, undeniably, a creative and imaginative experience.

Myth symbolism has even been compared to dream symbolism. Sigmund Freud suggested that myths express the "wish-fulfillment" of entire nations, as though they were the dreams of the young society, of the "collective consciousness" of a culture (Freud 1957: Vol.4:182). Carl Jung later compared his 'archetypes' to the symbolic images of a myth;

No less so is the psychoanalytic approach, from inside out, where myths, like dreams, are seen as being determined by unconscious fields of force which are vaster than individual consciousness: the archetypes of Jung are universal formative structures which programme the emergence of particular images into consciousness, and which also provide keys to the interpretation of myth (Maclagan 1997:12).

Myth, in this respect, mirrors the aspirations of a culture and is therefore confidently used in this study to interpret the aspirations and intentions of the inhabitants and creators of Great Zimbabwe.

Myth and Interpretation

Myth tales are kept alive not only because of their cultural relevance, but also because of their creative aspect as a culture's visual art, as performance and as stories to entertain. They do not merely impart codes of conduct or the causes for creation of nature and man. They are also successful for their expressive, entertaining, graphic, physical and oral quality via live performance. Creativity in myth, the 'acting out' of it, is a confirmation of a society's attitude between 'man and the world';

The fact that creation myths 'place' man in the universe, or act as models of processes in human, as well as cosmic, life, is reflected by the particular circumstances in which they are recounted. On the simplest level, the efficacy of a medicine may depend upon the correct recital of its... origin. In a more complex fashion, the creation account may function, as the Maori cosmogony does, as an analogue for all human inspiration: it is ceremonially recited to cure sterility, to cheer men's spirits and in connection with rituals of war, baptism and death, among others. As the etymology of the word 'myth' implies, the speaking/writing/acting-out of a creation 'myth' is more than a rehearsal; it is the occasion for a re-creation, a confirmation of the essential relations between man and the world (Maclagan 1997:10).

The creative element of myth is continually being kept alive through the dynamic process of oral narrative performance through its 're-creation', its re-enactment. The audience, too, is a significant contributor to the interest of the myth, especially in traditional African society where members of the audience will often be asked to 'become' one of the characters in the tale, or to clap, sing and dance at certain stages of the story. Myth is then a foundation for creative awareness and social skills.

Therefore, when interpreting material culture based on oral narrative, one must accommodate for the certain amount of artistic license allowed for in the telling of the tale.

However, while creativity may change a story line over time, the original lessons and meaning of symbolic associations remain in tact, sometimes with unexpected authenticity to the original version;

In some cases the narrative weave of a myth has been orally transmitted for generations with an astonishing fidelity (Maclagan 1997:11).

Okpewho even suggests that, unlike poetry, myth does not lose its intended meaning and cultural messages even when translated into another language;

First, since poetry operates on the primary level of language, we cannot translate it from one language to another without serious distortions in both style and meaning: myth, on the other hand, operates on the secondary level which transcends considerations of style and idiom. 'Whatever our ignorance of the language and the culture of the people where it originated', Levi-Strauss tells us 'a myth is still felt as a myth by any reader anywhere in the world.' The second characteristic stems from this view of myth as having larger cultural implications than language (Okpewho 1983:39 citing Levi-Strauss).

It is important for a myth to be interpreted interactively within the body of myths and stories to which it belongs. A myth must be seen in relationship to other myths, as a group of tales, since there are a variety of subtle symbolic associations that link meanings across contexts of stories. Myths “telescope” into each other and the coherence of a single myth often relies on its relationship to the body of myths from which it arises;

Myth, like poetry, pays compound interest on each re-reading...a coherent range of myths... demonstrate both the fundamental processes of creation and the way in which they telescope into one another (Maclagan 1997:12).

Because of this interweaving of meaning between tales, this dissertation has cross-referenced many myths with other stories, from the bodies of myths, within the context of Karanga oral narrative.

Myth and Ritual

Myth can also be used to explain ritual processes and ritual symbolic content. An example of this, in this study, can be found in the myth of The Tree that Touches the Sky (cf.: p.129) where the story line is actually acted out during the rain ceremony at the *mutoro*-place (ancestral rain-shrine). The symbolic meanings inherent in the myth are encountered also in the ritual.

Many theorists claim that myths explain the processes of ritual performance and thereby preserve ritual activity. There is, they say, a common symbolic truth informing both the myth and the ritual;

Malinowski has pointed out that ‘rituals, ceremonies, customs, and social organisations contain at times different references to myth, and they are regarded as the results of mythical event’. (Okpewho 1983:48 citing Malinowski.)

Many theorists claim that myth antecedes ritual, while others claim that it precedes ritual. However, many more believe that there is a homology or systemic relationship between the two. Kluckhohn equates myth with ritual because they both “ ‘...provide social solidarity, enhance the integration of the society by providing a formalized statement of its ultimate value-attitudes, afford a means of transmission of much of the culture with little loss of content – thus protecting cultural continuity and stabilizing the society’.” (Kluckhohn 1942:45-79 in Okpewho 1983:48.)

Another interpretation is provided by Claude Levi-Strauss, who suggests that ritual is a “paralanguage” because its meaning lies in “instruments and gestures” while myth is a “mentalanguage” since it makes use of discourse in order to arrive at a higher integrative complexity (Levi-Strauss 1968 in Okpewho 1983:49).

Myth and History

Myths should not be seen as a record for history, but rather as a ‘storehouse’ of symbolic images captured in imaginative stories to suggest morality and codes of conduct. They are not literally historical legends recording certain historic figures and their lives nor should they be regarded as a record of historical events. However, many historians and archaeologists would prefer to see the intention of myth as the later and therefore tend to dismiss the relevance of mythology;

...the tale is an open-ended portrait not of a particular experience but of the problem of existence (Okpewho 1983:67).

By validating this **existential** intention in the myth over and above the **experiential**, myth can be seen as a relevant source for interpreting cultural **intentions** for material artifact, since it explains existential values.

However, Okpewho believes that it depends upon the degree of the narrator's artistic license as to whether a myth will sit between the historic legend or the fable;

The creative or 'poetic' genius of the narrator is what makes the greater difference to the tale in its movement within the generic continuum (Okpewho 1983:68).

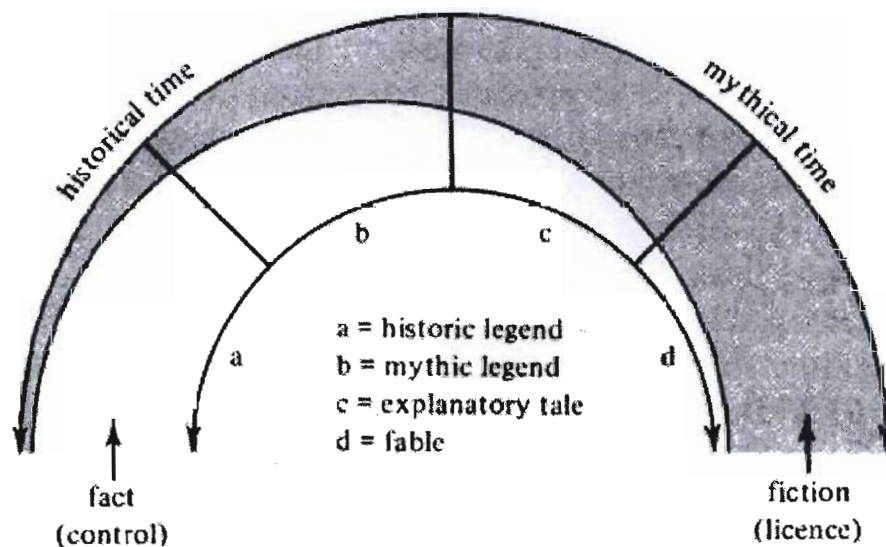


Figure 2. 1; Graphic relationship between myth and history (Okpewho 1983:68).

Myth, he adds, explains cultural ideas because of its symbolic content, more so than does a legend. A **legend records historical data, while the myth describes cultural identity and existential attitudes**. Rather than rely solely on historical 'fact', we can therefore look to mythology to explain cultural ideals and the timeless values retained in a culture's perspective;

The closer a tale gets to historical reality, the less capable it is of being an illustration or vehicle of larger, timeless, abstract ideals...If such a scheme is accepted, then clearly the more 'poetic' a tale is, the stronger is its content of intellectual play and thus its availability for exploring larger cultural or existential (as against experiential) issues (Okpewho 1983:69).

Because of its potential to explore “larger cultural or existential issues”, the myth is therefore able to adapt and proceed from one generation to another without destroying or altering the essential cultural meanings and intentions inherent in the tale;

Myth then, is the irreducible aesthetic substratum in all varieties of human cultural endeavour, from one generation to another (Okpewho 1983:70).

Even history can only ever be seen as a perspective on the past, and has a certain mythic quality to it. History, according to Levi-Strauss, can never be devoid from myth and myth too, cannot detach itself from historical context. (Levi-Strauss 1966 in Okpewho 1983:101.)

Myth relates a multitude of integrative social ideals, attitudes and values, concerning itself with a wide spectrum of social issues ranging from historical experience to issues relating to the nature of being and ‘transcendent’ experience.

Okpewho suggests that **an integrative and broad study of a culture’s myths can “...yield a very sound picture of its history.”** (Okpewho 1983:116). He cites D. McCall, who suggests that **oral narratives should be considered as historical knowledge and that myths are just as valuable as written accounts in providing “raw materials” from which “historical judgement” can be made** (McCall 1969 in Okpewho 1983:116).

In interpreting a culture’s material artifact, we must consider not merely the historical ‘fact’ but, more importantly, the **intentions and creativity** of that culture and the symbolic consciousness of society inherent in the myth. Myth gives us insight into the way a culture sees itself and therefore reveals the intentions behind the creation of architecture and material culture.

Myth and Ethnography

Although as a source of historical information, oral history has until recently been neglected. Today, thanks to the theoretical work of Professor Jan Vansina, historians are increasingly making use of oral history with some scientific competence (Kimambo, I. 1969 in Okpewho 1983:117).

Mythology has long been discounted as a source for understanding the traditions and ethnography of African culture. An alternative paradigm, however, would see a shift away from previous narrow reliance only on historic ‘fact’ or scientific sensibilities and begin to embrace the creative record of a culture’s behavioural intentions evident in oral narrative. Indeed, we may now even begin to be able to recognise a parity between mythology and science. Maclagan even equates the sensibilities inherent in modern science with those inherent in the world of a culture’s myth;

...it is significant that the word ‘myth’ stems from a root which means ‘utterance’. The clash between ‘scientific’ attitudes and the ‘regressive’ or ‘magical’ attitudes ascribed to so-called primitive cultures (with which the poetic and artistic elements of our own culture often side) is less a clash between real and illusory, efficient and inefficient, ways of dealing with the

world, than a clash between two different mythical systems, the first of which tries to repress any consciousness of its mythical dimension (Maclagan 1997:6).

It could then be said that our modern materialist world has become de-mythologised. There is a tendency in a materialistic society to devalue 'non-scientific' historic evidence and so the oral narrative has not been considered as a source for understanding cultural perspectives.

Mythology, however, informs us of the elementary ideas about a culture's perspective;

An obsession with ethnographic variables has every chance of blinding us to the universal applicability of ideas concerning human behaviour; a bondage to historical imperatives may rob us of a sensitivity to those 'elementary ideas' which inform myth 'not as clear abstractions held in the mind, but as cognized, or rather re-cognized, vital factors of the subject's own being.' (Okpewho 1983:15 citing Campbell, J. 1966).

An over-reliance solely on archaeological findings and written historic records with little consideration for the potential to integrate history with cultural perspectives has plagued theoretical discourse in studies on African material culture. For example, previous interpretations on Great Zimbabwe have mostly relied on archaeological evidence and Portuguese records. However, Portuguese accounts are misleading for they not only post-date Great Zimbabwe's period of occupation, they are also non-local and non-indigenous sources. The Portuguese traders undeniably held racist views about black culture, since their intentions were biased towards colonising the African mind. Their records may not, therefore, offer a true source of cultural indigeneity, since they are culturally removed from the source of creativity.

However, Karanga mythology is part of the local oral tradition for this field of study and is therefore seen as a valuable source for interpreting the intentions of the creators of Great Zimbabwe.

Researchers of Western history have, unquestioningly, utilised Roman, Greek and Egyptian mythology as an unequivocal historical source for the interpretation of the architecture of antiquity. Indeed, it would be inconceivable to consider an architectural analysis of the Greek temple without prior understanding of Greek mythology and its pantheonic dimension of illustrious heroes and Gods exerting their influence on genus-loci. While the styles of Hellenic and ancient Zimbabwe architecture are temporally and culturally disparate, it may be equally inconceivable to consider an architectural interpretation of Great Zimbabwe without an understanding of the mythology of the region; a region where ritual invocation of legendary ancestors necessitates symbolic associations.

The architecture manifested through Greek mythology is one of sacred proportions, while that of the Karanga of Great Zimbabwe is one of symbolic display. Why should not, in the context of Great Zimbabwe, the same respect paid to classical mythology be paid to the African oral narrative?

Conclusion

Okpewho suggests the possibility of seeing myth as "mentifact" as opposed to merely an "artifact" since myth gives us clues about the collective consciousness of a culture, and the knowledge and wisdom of the cultural mind. He describes a comprehensive definition of the mythological reality;

In the oral tradition the recourse to fantasy is essentially a flight from the constraints of time-bound, objective reality in the search for something more fulfilling or reassuring. For whether we tell a lie (as in the popular derogation of the term myth), or we put a historical ancestor in an exaggerated romantic light, or else we assign an aspect of our social morality or ecology a genesis that is not measurable by the laws of physics or conventional logic, we are simply preferring to escape the rather uncomfortable facts of objective truth in order to embrace truth of a more metaphysical design (Okpewho 1983:262-263).

Myth therefore, explains metaphysical truth over and above objective truth. The application of mythology in understanding architecture therefore facilitates a deeper and broader perspective. For this reason, one of the intentions of this thesis is to follow Okpewho's suggestion that mythology be given the full recognition as both a "creative" and a "cultural resource" (Okpewho 1983:265).

Myth, in this study, provides an 'historical judgement' from which to analyse and contextualise material artifact.

4 The Relevance of Karanga Symbolism & Mythology

The Karanga call their stories “pasichigare” which literally means “the sitting earth”, or, simply: when the earth was still at peace. This refers to a time when the people will have leisure to sit and tell each other stories - not only time, the old Karanga said, but also the peace the earth once had (Aschwanden 1989:278).

This chapter attempts to explain the relevance of Karanga mythology for interpreting the architecture of Great Zimbabwe. Emerging from Africa’s ancient well of wisdom, Karanga mythology provides an insight into the existential values and creative consciousness of the Karanga people. The most significant theme prevalent in Karanga mythology is man’s striving to reunite himself with God, through the forces of nature. The wisdom of this philosophy is akin to the basic axiom of Platonist theory that; “...wisdom is thinking *with* God and thinking *with* nature” as opposed to “...thinking *of* God and thinking *of* nature” (Hall, Manly P. 1963:11). The symbolic associations between man, nature and God from the Karanga mythological time pervade most aspects of Karanga daily life, and this provides valuable insight into socio-religious aspects of Karanga culture at the time of Great Zimbabwe’s occupation.

Karanga mythology is more than simply a collection of oral stories and legends. It is rather a Karanga interpretation of symbolic associations, as conscious mechanisms for understanding and controlling cosmological, biological and psychological phenomena of the Karanga universe. The practical use of symbols sourced from the Karanga mythological time ensures the longevity and adaptability of the Karanga socio-religious fabric. Through a fertile and multi-variant array of symbolic associations, the traditional Karanga strive to reunite God with man, through nature, where biological phenomena such as human fertility, life and death actively coincide with the cosmological forces created by God. For this reason, the traditional Karanga interpretation of their world is a **mythological and symbolic** one. The religious symbolism inherent in the Karanga mythological world is a mechanism that continuously attempts to unite the spiritual world with the physical world of the Karanga universe. We shall see that this attitude possibly influenced the settlement dynamics and architectural symbolic expression at Great Zimbabwe.

Karanga mythology is an oral narrative expression of socio-symbolic values realised through various ritual associations in every day life and embodied in the collective consciousness of the people;

...their symbolism, consciously worked out from the experience of life and death, extends into another world which we can perhaps see as a purely mythological or religious interpretation of the world. However, for the Karanga there is no such difference because the religious and the profane spheres always exist within the same reality: in the symbol. And religion is symbolism in rituals (Aschwanden 1987: 334-335).

Through the real presence of ancestors in everyday life, the past is fused with the present, the world of the dead (ancestors) with the world of the living, where reality, to the Karanga, is never simply what can only be seen with the eye. Reality is informed by symbolic connections between the physical and spiritual worlds. The Karanga’s interpretation of their mythology is less concerned with any logical sequence of

events (as usually expected by Western interpretation) than it is with the potent symbolism expressed and interpreted in the narrative.

The integrative complexity of the meaning of symbols and the interweaving of themes through narratives enriches the interpretive perspective, where the 'mutual impact of opposites' (between the physical and spiritual worlds) ensures longevity of the existential values inherent in the myth. The complexity of Karanga mythology conveys meaning beyond literal interpretation or binary simplicity and this brings forth an insight into the creative domain of the architecture of Great Zimbabwe.

Any interpretation of the ancient architecture of the Karanga people must be based on an understanding of the spatio-symbolic characteristics of their worldview. An interpretation of architectural symbol must be based on an understanding of the religious, mythological symbol.

Through an examination of Karanga symbolism, it will be demonstrated that the architecture of Great Zimbabwe and the symbolic consciousness of the Karanga people, as presented in their mythology, form a symbiotic relationship, where stories and myths appear to describe the symbolic landscape of Great Zimbabwe. The messages brought forth in the stone symbols, the spatial dynamics and the physical landscape are conveyed also in the oral narrative.

We shall also see that at the time of Great Zimbabwe's occupation, while a symbolic context inherent in mythologically shaped thinking, may have informed settlement dynamics, the power and display of architectural symbolic expression possibly facilitated the validation and strengthening of the emergent society and its foundation of political/religious leadership (cf.: Part 1 Chapters 5-6).

A change to social structure motivates change in spatial structure and symbolic expression. This expression and change in spatial structure strengthens and validates the new aspects of social structure and the values of the emergent society. Therefore, the architecture cannot be interpreted in isolation from an understanding of Karanga symbolic values.

The motivation for such an examination is less concerned with arriving at a determinist hypothesis for the possible functions of built form than it is with providing a deeper understanding of the meaning of form and symbolism of the architecture of ancient Zimbabwe.

However, the antithesis of this approach has often been applied to the interpretation of Great Zimbabwe, where ethnographic evidence has been manipulated to suit preconceived ideas about spatial function (cf.: Part 1 Chapters 7 – 8). Standing outside a culture and discussing ideas from a systematic, detached and rational framework is inappropriate, since it is insensitive to a culture's perspective. It would certainly be inappropriate to try to explain a culture's philosophy and material culture without examining what that culture's own ideas are regarding the meaning of their religious symbols.

The Karanga themselves interpret such complex and meaningful associations of symbol and imagery in their myths and rituals that it would be an oversight not to source their own interpretations. The Karanga interpretation of symbolic associations is characterised by profundity, diversity, contradiction and complexity. It is therefore problematic to approach an understanding of their worldview based on a need to form a systematic perspective based on acontextual expectations.

Therefore, wherever possible, this study approaches the understanding of the architecture of Great Zimbabwe without referring to western architectural theory or Euro-centric architectural methods of analysis and has avoided the temptation to make vague cross-cultural comparisons. For example, an obvious architectural response might be to compare the Hill Complex with the Acropolis at Athens, Greece. While such a comparison might be tempting, it leads nowhere, for it does not begin to approach the real socio-cultural and existential values informing the creative work. It could only ever be a stylistic comparison.

Analysis of symbolic concepts are centred on the functions assigned to them by the Karanga themselves and not on far-flung non-Karanga, non-Shona or non-African symbolic concepts. For this reason, this study of the architecture of Great Zimbabwe takes a synchronic approach and historical particularist view. Diachronic analysis, where Great Zimbabwe has been studied in its wider historical context, has been more than adequately covered by other researchers in this field and such analysis would add limited new insight to this area of study (cf. Part 1). Furthermore, a synchronic approach might be able to offer more to this field of study at this period in the long process of investigation of ancient Zimbabwe, considering the diachronic and structuralist approach already provided recently by Thomas Huffman. This was discussed in Part 1 of this study where Huffman's broad-sweep approach rather than an 'historical particularist' one was revealed. David Beach, in his criticism of Huffman's approach, recommends that researchers "...go much more carefully into the nature of Shona society, being ready to consider the possibility of regional variations." (Beach, D. 1997 in SAAB 166:127). In an attempt to respond to such criticism, this dissertation concentrates on the cultigens sourced particularly from Karanga society and on the specific architecture and archaeology of Great Zimbabwe. It therefore takes an historical particularist approach in attempting to interpret material culture, in order to extend the body of research that has previously been provided in this field. However, **both synchronic and diachronic** (Huffman) approaches are valuable in the process of inquiry into and examination of the complex, interactive and dynamic field of study of ancient Zimbabwe settlements.

Since Great Zimbabwe is now a monument to the past with no living community, we are unable to source present occupants to determine the intended function of the spatial enclosures. Therefore, any suggestions for spatial function can only be arrived at through a long process of archaeological, historical and ethnographic inquiry and will only ever be, at most, well informed interpretations and, at least, hypothetical suggestions. However, by understanding the socio-religious consciousness of its creators, we are better able to understand the meaning of the symbolic forms, which may **imply rather than determine** spatial function. Finally, it will be seen that the **wisdom** of the people is expressed in the symbolic stone narrative of Great Zimbabwe and this gives us insight into the life-style and consciousness of its creators and of the **dynamic relationship between architecture and culture**.

5 Decolonising the Past

The beauty and splendour achieved at Great Zimbabwe is best expressed pictorially. I can only say that, standing in silent and mysterious majesty at the foot of sheer granite cliff, the Dzimbahwe defy all those who in their arrogance thought that the Africans had no past worth remembering (Mufuka 1983: 42).

Previously documented interpretations of the form and meaning of Great Zimbabwe have usually been considered from a Western perspective and therefore can only ever provide part of the context of investigation. Purely 'modernist', or structuralist perspectives are usually characterised by technocratic tendencies towards categorisation, concentration on binary opposites and a determinist need to provide 'answers' to 'mysteries.' Conversely, the approach taken in this dissertation could be considered a 'post-modern' one, for it does not attempt to provide any fundamental 'answers' but rather suggests possibilities. The historian, David Beach, favours this approach, where he suggests that "...research should be leading to still further research, not a final answer to any question." (Beach, D. 1997 SAAB 166: 127.)

Western paradigm is usually concerned more with its own theories than it is with making tangible cognate connections between socio-religious structure and spatial structure. Without real connections, historical evidence is easily manipulated to suit preconceived ideas. In every way possible, this dissertation attempts to provide a deeper understanding of the meaning of spatio-symbolic structure at Great Zimbabwe and therefore also attempts to facilitate in the process of 'correcting' Africa's map of the past.

This study is not interested in making comparisons between the architecture of Great Zimbabwe and that of some far-flung, unrelated architecture from another culture and time-period, nor is it interested in indulging in a self-fulfilling theory in order to obtain academic eccentricity.

For this reason, it has been necessary to approach this study from a broad framework of sources, where sociological, historical, anthropological and archaeological perspectives are widely discussed. As a result, this discourse approaches architecture from an holistic conceptual framework where **architecture is seen as an informative cultural mechanism.**

In every way possible, the meaning of symbolic concepts and symbolic structures in traditional Karanga society has been examined in this study before making any suggestions related to meaning of architectural symbolic structures and spatial function. This study is a means **not** to an end but to the process of discovery. There are many examples of how our understanding of Great Zimbabwe has suffered because of the manipulation of archaeological and historical evidence to suit a preconceived idea. Hromnik's hypothesis that the builders of Great Zimbabwe were influenced by Indo-African culture is an example of such manipulation of historical evidence (Hromnik 1981). While Hromnik's hypothesis has not been considered by any serious researchers in this field, a popular acceptance of it has developed through the documentary produced for television (that most successful mechanism of public acceptance) outlining his ideas.

Hromnik uses the linguistic similarities between certain Shona words and those of traditional Indian languages to justify his idea that many of the Shona cultigens developed simultaneously with the coincidence of Indian trade on Zimbabwe trade routes. However, it must be remembered that when a society is trading with foreigners, certain words will change or be adapted or even adopted in order to allow communication between the trading parties, but this does not necessarily imply that any significant changes to culture would have taken place. Hromnik also suggests that the small stone ‘shrines’ at Great Zimbabwe provide evidence that the creators honoured the solstices and that the stone monoliths were used as markers to detect the winter and summer solstices.²

This, Hromnik suggests, supports the idea that Indian and not African cultigens influenced the creators and occupiers of Great Zimbabwe. Hromnik must surely have made an erroneous preconceived assumption of Indian origin for the ruins in order to arrive at such preposterous suggestions for function of Shona material culture.

Hromnik’s approach in his BBC documentary, ‘Behind the African Mask’ is criticised by Val Ward;

This well-produced and beautifully photographed documentary on stone ruins in southern Africa was full of factual errors. Not only did it have the date for Great Zimbabwe wrong, it also said that Africa got its cultigens from Indian when it was the other way around. The programme made out that India, and Indians alone, honoured the solstices, commemorated their dead etc. when many of the rituals are shared by people all over the world and in different religions. The worst aspect of this long documentary was that it was racist and denied African people their long past (Ward, V. 1997 in SAAB GNEWS Vol.39:3).

The presence of stone monoliths and stone ‘shrines’ can be better explained by their relationship to Karanga symbols and ritual and these are documented in the following parts of this study. Furthermore, there is no evidence in Karanga traditional society of solstice honouring. The Karanga do *not* orient their buildings based on cardinal directions, nor do they face doors to the north, as do cultures that honour the sun.³

Furthermore, it would be unlikely that a culture such as the Karanga would worship the sun or summer/winter solstices because in the sub-Saharan climate the sun is always present and there is no need to chant or sacrifice to bring back the sun after a long winter. Instead, rain is considered to be the vital source of fertility, since its presence is scarce at many times of the year. Rain, sacred pools and water, in sub-Saharan Africa are the potent life-giving elements (Parrinder, 1967; Krige 1980).

Thunder and lightening, rather than the sun, is seen as evidence of God’s presence. When a Karanga witnesses thunder in the sky overhead, he will kneel and pray and clap his hands, while chanting praise-words that signify the presence of the creator, and that God is passing and wishes to visit his people. When

² The stone ‘shrines’, (actually stone platforms) were used to honour the ancestral spirits (Bourdillon 1991) (cf.: Part 5).

³ The only evidence the author could find regarding the facing of Karanga doors is in Karanga huts, where the entrances are said to face towards the west, where God lives, towards the Matopo-mountains (Aschwanden 1987:159).

a child is frightened of lightning, the mother will comfort the child by telling it that God is making blankets from lion-skins. These, the child knows, make the same noise as the thunder claps overhead. The child is also warned that God will punish him if he quarrels, by striking him dead with a single bolt of lightning (Aschwanden 1982:58).

It is therefore lightning, thunder and rain-clouds that influence Karanga life forces, and not the presence of the sun. Therefore, by implying that the Shona honoured solstices and that this was a practice influenced by Indian religion, Hromnik uses historical evidence from non-African cultures and manipulates them to suit his own Indo-African hypothesis. Furthermore, because the hypothesis is a-contextualised, it lacks conviction and validity.

Another example of such manipulation of evidence to provide 'answers to mysteries' is Raymond Dart's suggestion that the conical towers at Great Zimbabwe were phallic emblems originating not from Bantu but from Boal and Astarte civilisations in Syria where similar phallus shaped towers were used for phalli worship (Dart, R.A.1929). This idea was probably suggested and upheld to support the notion that local people did not construct Great Zimbabwe (cf: Part 1, Chapter 1).

As discussed in Part 1, it is now widely accepted that the conical towers are oversized symbolic replicas of traditional Karanga grain bins (*dura*). We shall see that symbolism expressed in Karanga mythology strongly supports this idea. The traditional Karanga grain bins illustrated below show a construction of poles plastered with *daga*. These particular grain bins were found near Great Zimbabwe;

Grain was the common form of tribute to Karanga chiefs and the Conical Tower may be the symbolic representation of a grain bin and thus of tribute and authority (Garlake 1974:87).



Nineteenth-century Karanga grain bins (Garlake 1974:87).

While grain bin symbolism in Karanga society has multivalent references to male and female social and fertility roles, there is no evidence to suggest that phalli worship was ever a feature of traditional Karanga society.⁴

The interpretations in the following parts of this study are concerned with making real connections between the Karanga worldview and architectural form. Basing an interpretation of the material culture of Karanga society on Karanga spatio-religious phenomena is critical, since the laws and patterns which govern a society's religious structure are the same laws and patterns which motivate a society's spatial structure. To assume a culture was so willing to consciously absorb socio-religious structures (such as the practice of solstice honouring and phalli worship), so acceptingly also inherently implies that the culture's values were not already founded on profound, potent, meaningful and long-lasting religious wisdom. This study takes an antithetical approach to such assumptions by validating, from the outset, the established existence of profound conscious religious mechanisms in Karanga culture. The study therefore assumes that any influences acting upon the culture from foreign trading parties would have effected the society on a more economic or political level than on a deeply socio-cultural or religious level;

Shona history shows the rise and fall of a number of larger states, a long history of mining and a history of both internal and external trade. The Shona peoples had for the most part maintained their autonomy against various outside influences (Bourdillon 1991:14).

A gap in existing documentation exists precisely because connections between material culture and symbolic values have seldom been made. However, the more recent cognitive approach taken by T. Huffman (Huffman: 1987, 1996) goes some way to making such connections. His approach is helpful though very different to the one taken in this dissertation. Huffman approaches the analysis of material culture from a structuralist archaeological paradigm. In order to interpret function for stone enclosures of ancient Zimbabwe, Huffman literally applies presumed Shona cognitive levels to structural wall patterns and architectural features, literally translating Shona symbolism, employing it as a linguistic tool.⁵

Despite the criticism offered by his colleagues, as outlined in Part One, Chapter 8 of this dissertation, Huffman's approach does offer much potential for a deeper understanding of Zimbabwe's ancient sites, by providing connections between symbolic expressions and Shona religious structure. Any understanding of a more contextual nature needs to be based on an understanding of Karanga ethnography and in particular, on the consciousness of Great Zimbabwe's creators.

⁴ Part 3, Chapter 7 provides a detailed discussion on the Karanga origin and possible meaning of stone towers at Great Zimbabwe. Many phallic shaped soapstone figurines have been recovered from Great Zimbabwe. Part 5 of this study provides evidence that these figurines do not necessarily suggest phalli worship but were more likely used as totem-figures for propitiating ancestors during ritual related to fertility.

⁵ Refer to Part 1, Chapter 8 that outlines Huffman's contribution to this field of study and discusses his approach and methodology.

This dissertation is therefore an attempt to decolonise previous interpretations by making a thorough examination of Karanga socio-religious structure, culture, symbolism, mythology and ritual before arriving at any suggestions for spatial function.

6 African Mythology and Interpretation of Material Culture.

A deeper understanding of African religion and mythology (or at least a suggestion that this would now be appropriate), appears to be the current direction taken by some researchers of African material culture. For example, Anne Solomon is currently re-interpreting the figures of San rock paintings by analysing their possible origin in San mythology;

Mythology has long been discounted as a key to understanding San rock art...An interpretation which reconsiders the importance of San mythology in relation to rock paintings strongly suggests that figures with both animal and human features are not trancers or shamans...Rather these, and other images are better understood in relation to San myths and to beliefs about the spirits of the dead (Solomon, A. 1997 in SAAB 165:3).

Solomon also highlights the relevance of examining African mythology, since **mythology is the original source of religious belief and symbolic consciousness.**

In relation to Great Zimbabwe itself, Parrinder suggests a closer examination of local mythology is needed;

Perhaps some day a fuller African mythology will be recorded of Zimbabwe, or it may be lost forever, leaving only the artistic work as evidence of the thought of vanished African peoples (Parrinder, G. 1967:118).

Since Parrinder's time, detailed records of Karanga mythology, religion, history, ritual, symbolism, consciousness and proverbial lore has been documented (Aschwanden: 1982, 1987, 1989; Hamutyinei & Plangger:1987; Gelfand 1985; Bourdillon: 1991; Beach 1990). These sources and others are used in this dissertation to examine the architecture of Great Zimbabwe through an understanding of traditional Karanga religious consciousness. Furthermore, these sources are reliable since the observations of Karanga philosophy they provide have been taken entirely from the Karanga's own statements and interpretation without being influenced by external versions. Aschwanden's thorough and comprehensive documentation of Karanga mythology and Shona symbols of life and death (Aschwanden 1982; 1987; 1989) was primarily motivated by a need to understand the cultural background of the Karanga people he was treating while he was a doctor at the Sisters of Musiso Hospital in Zaka, Zimbabwe. This understanding assisted his previously misunderstood methods of treatment by allowing him to approach his patient's problems from a less pragmatic Western paradigm. Traditional Shona believe that Western medicine is only able to alleviate pain or, at best, only cure the present ailment but does not treat the original cause of illness which will frequently recur. Therefore, a Shona will invariably consult a traditional *n'anga* (healer, diviner) as well as a Western practitioner because the *n'anga* will be able to communicate with the spiritual world from which the 'sickness' originates (Bourdillon 1997:149).

Furthermore, since Karanga interpretations of symbols are multi-variant, they were checked by Aschwanden often more than one hundred times and were sourced from many different groups, until a commonality among the interpretations presented itself (Aschwanden 1982). Furthermore, the Karanga

themselves are often ambivalent about any 'true' or discrete meaning of their symbols, since meaning is divergent through an interactive and dynamic context of multivalent interpretation cohering within a theme. Sinclair suggests the examination of Karanga mythology to approach a more holistic understanding of Zimbabwe archaeology, history and society (Sinclair: 1987). He reveals the difficulties in interpreting symbolic expression within an archaeological context alone and that aspects relating to material culture as well as settlement dynamics may be strongly influenced by symbolic values sourced within mythology. These may have also influenced the macro-scale process of settlement distribution and expressions of leadership and power;

...the need for systematic field studies on the symbolic aspects of Shona culture is clearly apparent...it would be interesting to consider the possibility that dualistic forms of secular and religious organisation and the accompanying micro-scale forms of symbolic expression are integral parts of or responses to more general evolutionary processes of state formation (Sinclair, P. 1987:159).

As a response to Sinclair's observations, this study will reveal that the "dualistic aspects of secular and religious organisation" and "symbolic expressions" inherent in the Karanga socio-religious fabric and consciousness inform settlement structure and dynamics as well as architectural symbolic expression. The study will also examine how the transformation was a symbiotic one where 'evolutionary processes of state formation' possibly influenced the potency of symbolic expression and oral narrative development.

Furthermore, interpreting this area of study through an architectural perspective has the potential to extend the existing documentation within this field since an architectural viewpoint provides a spatio-cultural dimension to the interpretation of the physical expression of religious symbol.

Sinclair further highlights the possible linkage between symbolism, settlement pattern and material culture and identifies the unexamined area of mythology in its relationship to the understanding of settlement dynamics and expressions of symbolic power;

...one might expect such aspects of material culture as architectural style and settlement layout, organisation and decorative motifs as well as a choice of subsistence needs to be strongly influenced...larger scale expressions of symbolic values...exist in the expressions of kingship and power...Further illustrations might include the associations of the granite mountains found throughout the plateau margins with the widespread distributions of stone buildings. The mythology of the region has been little considered from this point of view (Sinclair, P. 1987:159).

This study attempts to bridge this gap identified by Sinclair and to test and extend his observation by examining values sourced in Karanga symbolism and mythology as an informative factor to our understanding of settlement dynamics and spatio-symbolic expression.

It will be seen that in Karanga mythology, the symbolic concepts relating to the Karanga universe are **manipulated at the cosmological, biological and psychological level** in an attempt to reunite man with

God through nature and that such preoccupation is possibly conveyed in the choice of site, settlement pattern and spatial arrangement of the Great Zimbabwe royal settlement.

Since African religion has in the past been interpreted within a context of colonial expectations, such connections between African mythology, symbolism and material culture are vital to any approach that attempts to decolonise previous perspectives on African material culture. An understanding of the symbolic significance of Great Zimbabwe style, technology, form and architectural features relies upon an understanding of the pantheon of symbolic concepts inherent in the Karanga interpretation of their universe.

This understanding therefore further validates architecture as a powerful cultural mechanism, where mythology and symbolism are seen as expressive devices linking the landscape and built environment with the culture of a people. The architecture of Great Zimbabwe utters forth the existential values and messages inherent in Karanga society.

PART THREE

SYMBOLIC STRUCTURES
AS EXPRESSION OF THE
MYTHOLOGY
OF THE REGION

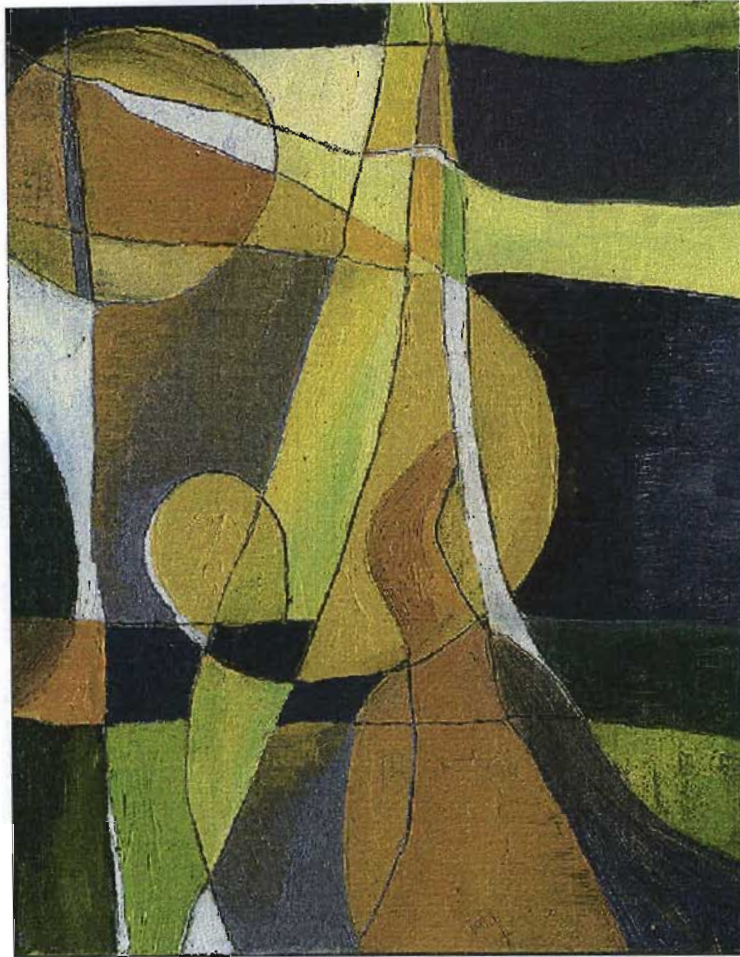


*Mubibani washongwe,
matsika ruware, rukuruva rwazadza nyika, bwe remvura.
Dziva-guru, rinopfungaira mhute kana rabvongodzwa.
Chinu chinoyerera mafuta.
Runji rusingu nguvo rwakavetera kutunga pasi.
Rwakapfuma denga namakore senguvo.
Tovera, wapakuru, mbereka.
Vanisi vemvura, makazodza nyika nefuta redenga.
Matanga kugara.*

Builder of towers

You stamped your foot on the rock, and the earth filled with dust.
You are the stone from which the mist rises when one stirs the water.
You are a vessel flowing over with oil,
Iron needle which did not sew up the skin but is there to sew up the earth.
It has sewn together the sky and the clouds, as one stitches together skins.
Tovera, you are great, you who give birth, you creator,
Rain-maker, you who have poured oil over the earth from the sky.
You are the first who has ever been there.

Karanga Praise hymn dedicated to the God of fertility.
(Aschwanden, H. 1989:206.)



(By Author, Oil on wood)

It would be inconceivable to consider an architectural analysis of the Greek temple without prior understanding of Greek mythology and its pantheonic dimension of illustrious heroes and Gods exerting their influence on *genus-loci*.

While the styles of Hellenic and ancient Zimbabwe architecture are temporally and culturally disparate, it may be equally inconceivable to consider an architectural interpretation of Great Zimbabwe without an understanding of the mythology of the region; a region where ritual invocation of legendary ancestors necessitates symbolic associations.

The architecture manifested through Greek mythology is one of sacred proportions, while that of the Karanga of Great Zimbabwe is one of symbolic display.

1 Karanga Symbolic Thinking - An Introduction

...myths are never merely tales of past events - they always contain a relevance to the present human reality (Aschwanden, H. 1989:15).

This part of the study provides an analysis of the various Karanga symbols as they appear in Karanga mythology, culture, ritual and proverbial lore. This serves as a background for the following parts of the study which integrate Karanga symbolism with the architecture of Great Zimbabwe. Before the discussion with respect to the symbols themselves and their Karanga interpretation can be comprehended, an analysis of the way in which the Karanga create, use and interpret symbolism needs to be considered.

Aschwanden's studies reveal the nature of Karanga symbolic thinking in traditional society. Karanga symbols, he suggests, are centred within conscious thought, being consciously created, and are never regarded as existing only in the sub-conscious mind (Aschwanden 1982; 1987; 1989);

"...the fact that all men form symbols is not a matter of religious belief. Our investigation has proved that the Karanga form their symbols consciously – as opposed to modern man who is a product of science and technology. The term "consciously"...presupposes a consciousness which admits of rational as well as irrational factors. Modern man has banished the irrational from his consciousness... "Primitive" people, on the other hand, form them (symbols) consciously... They experience these symbols – they do not need to think about them (Aschwanden 1982:318).

The presence of symbols is made explicitly real in every-day life. The traditional Karanga individual therefore **thinks** in terms of symbols, where every-day items, both man-made and natural, are identified with their closely connected symbolic object. The **reality** of the symbolic association issues not from the object itself but from the subconscious mind, from the human psyche. The potency attached to a symbol comes from man's own forces and not from the object symbolised. At this level, Karanga symbols could be seen as **psychological phenomena** (Aschwanden 1982; 1987; 1989). For example, a calabash, as symbol of the woman's uterus, in many situations, actually **becomes** a uterus in the mind of the Karanga, and possesses all the qualities of the human life forces of the uterus. The uterus itself, as symbol of the sacred pool, actually **becomes** a sacred pool, and the sacred pool adopts the life-giving nature of the uterus. **The symbolic object adopts the qualities and life forces of the original symbolised object;**

A symbol is something to which effects and attributes have been transferred that were originally experienced within another reality; these transposed characteristics are identified with the original ones (Aschwanden 1982: 14).

This aspect of Karanga symbolic thinking is pivotal to our understanding of their symbols and must be remembered when interpreting Karanga built environment and symbols in architecture.

The Karanga worlds of the living and of the dead (ancestors) are fused through a multi-variant array of symbolic associations, sourced from a mythological reality, and expressed through a conscious and symbolic way of thinking. This could be termed a ‘mythologically shaped thinking’ (Aschwanden 1989). It is important to understand this aspect of Karanga consciousness; **that the traditional Karanga ‘think’ in terms of symbols.** Aschwanden discusses the differences between Western “scientific” thinking and the more “symbolic” thinking of the Karanga people;

There is no bridge spanning scientific and “primitive” ways of thinking; from a certain point onward, they are mutually exclusive. (A) scientific thinker will not go beyond what is logically comprehensible, “primitive” man crosses that border consciously and deliberately - to create symbols on the other side (Aschwanden 1987: 29).

In traditional Karanga consciousness, a symbol is never only a sign, metaphor or signifier of an object or function, for it is always associated with a deeper psychological meaning. Furthermore, it is precisely because Karanga symbols are more **conscious symbols**, than merely ‘signs’, that they become meaningful and convincing. The problem of identifying Karanga symbols as signs or metaphors will be discussed in the study as it relates to the way some documenters have interpreted Shona symbols.

To the Western mind, the ability of the Karanga to perceive a symbolic object as having the same qualities, and being the same as, the object symbolised, yet recognising that they are in fact two separate objects, may appear to be dialectic and troublesome. This contradiction though, according to Aschwanden, is never problematic to the Karanga. While the Karanga knows that the uterus and the calabash are completely separate items, they also become identical through the process of symbolisation. The Karanga are very aware of this contradiction, and use it to their advantage as they shape their world. The Karanga saying that; “ **‘they are two things, and, yet again, only one’** (*zviri zvinhu zviviri, asi ndechimwe chete*)”, indicates their identification with this contradiction (Aschwanden 1982:15).

This contradiction is a central theme in Karanga interpretation of their symbols and reflects a basic axiom of their wisdom; **that there is a duality within a unity**, two things are separate yet are only one. This aspect of Karanga thinking shapes their approach to polaric entities in the Karanga universe of symbols. It is the “mutual impact of opposites” (Maclagan 1977:17) that affords a more existential identification where symbolic complexity is favoured over binary simplicity. This notion will be discussed in more depth throughout the study since it informs many aspects relating to an interpretation of the divergent and complex nature of symbolic content within the built environment, and extends previous interpretations that tend to overlook the interactive, integrative and polysemic nature of symbolic structures at Great Zimbabwe.

Furthermore, one cannot assume that for any given culture the same meaning or value is applied to material symbolism in different settlement areas. M. Bourdillon highlights this in his criticism of Huffman’s broad-sweep analysis of cultural symbolic values;

There is no reason to assume, as many structuralists appear to assume, that all symbols found in a particular culture cohere in a single system (Bourdillon, M. 1997 in SAAB 166:127).

In response to this criticism, this dissertation concentrates on symbolic structures of one settlement area, that of Great Zimbabwe and this corresponds to what could be referred to as an 'historical particularist' approach. As such, this study extends, modifies and contextualises some aspects of Huffman's meanings for stone symbols.

The Karanga language of symbol identification in traditional society is made very explicit to the individual from an early age. The Karanga child grows up identifying every-day items such as jars, baskets, plates, pots and spoons with their associated symbolic functions. The smallest and seemingly least significant objects in every-day Karanga life are identified with the most profound and often complex meanings through the action of symbol identification with cosmological and biological processes. This helps the individual to develop an imaginative, incisive, integrated, and yet never literal, understanding of the cosmological and biological practicalities of his or her immediate and spiritual worlds. It also establishes a high level of values, principles and respect of codes of conduct. Karanga symbolisation also plays a vital role in the development and longevity of the community both at a familial level and at a wider social level. The traditional Karanga world of symbols helps to establish the individual within a well-centred and focused social structure and supports the real bonds between the individual and the members of the social group. At this level, Karanga symbols also become **social phenomena** (Aschwanden 1989).

The following chapters examine the most important symbolic associations in traditional Karanga socio-religious structure to provide a background for a later understanding of the meaning of the architecture of Great Zimbabwe.

Unless otherwise indicated, the interpretations of the myths are taken directly from Aschwanden's documented material sourced from intensive field studies and interviews with traditional Karanga. We shall see that the Karanga myths and stories, documented throughout the study appear to describe in narrative the social and physical contexts and the existential values of the traditional Karanga and, therefore, of the cultural context of Great Zimbabwe during its occupation. This will help to inform our understanding of the symbolic and spatial meaning of the architecture.

2 Water and Rain as Symbols of Fertility.

Water and rain, as symbols of life-giving fertility have central importance in Karanga myths and stories. The source of all life springs from the waters in the sacred pools of the caves at Matopo-mountains, a site in the south-west of Zimbabwe near present day Bulawayo, where the Karanga believe God created man.



View of Matopos Mountains (Author)

The word 'Karanga' is a derivation of '*kunyudza*' which literally means '...those who lived immersed in the water.' The Karanga believe that their original ancestors were born from the water and many of the Karanga myths of creation refer to this event. The original source of the origin of man is said to be in the sacred pools at the Matopo-mountains;

Mwari is the God of the Karanga whose voice is heard in the caves of the Matopo-hills (a mountainous area in the south of Zimbabwe); there God speaks to the Karanga. In one of these caves, the Karanga told us, there is a small pond. In this pond there live snakes that have an important task: they are sent by God and provide (inter alia) rain and fertility.

(Aschwanden 1982: 245).

Water, as a symbol of fertility, is also used to refer to human biological liquids, such as semen, vaginal liquid and blood and particularly the amniotic fluid in the woman's uterus, the ultimate source of human biological fertility. Rain and water can also represent sexual intercourse, and sexual fluids, and the ensuing life of the embryo (Aschwanden 1982; 1987; 1989).

The following myth of creation refers to water as the source of man's fertility and of its original creation by God;

Myth: The Creation of Water

Once upon a time there was a man called Mudzanapabwe. Long ago he had come from a foreign land, carrying bow and arrows as well as a red needle. The new country in which he found

himself was hot and dry, nothing grew, and there were no animals or any other living things. Before he left home his father had said to him: "You will probably suffer, but you will find happiness eventually." However, Mudzanapabwe did not know what suffering was because, in his own country, good fortune and abundance reigned.

On his departure, his father made a promise: "Your name means that you possess great strength for achieving everything. You will be king and all will obey you."

Mudzanapabwe bore this in mind when he left home, and he wandered around until he found the new country. He then remembered his father's words and began to use his powers. Standing on a rock he stamped his foot, and at once a large dust-cloud rose to the sky. Mudzanapabwe looked up and saw huge rocks towering in the heavens like a giant cloth. At that moment he recalled his father telling him that there is life in the big rocks.

To find out what kind of life this might be, he shot an arrow into the sky which hit a rock. There was a great noise, the heavens shook, and the rocks turned black. Mudzanapabwe shot once more at the rocks but this time the red needle sewed together the large rocks and the land in which Mudzanapabwe now lived. Then it started to rain and went on raining until the whole country was flooded. Mudzanapabwe was at a loss what to do and again shot an arrow into the sky. This separated earth and heaven again. Also, the rain stopped and trees, grass and vegetables began to grow.

However, there was something which puzzled Mudzanapabwe: there were great holes where the arrows had hit the rocks, and they remained connected with the land because the red needle had stitched the rocks to the land. In those places where the needle had made a seam, rivers formed, and the holes themselves became oceans.

When Mudzanapabwe saw how beautiful his country had become through the green trees, the grass and the many fruit-trees, he began to praise his father: "You, great one, you who live in the great ponds of the heavens, you father of the needle, you do not stitch the canvas but connect land and sky, you are the great one."

By so praising his father he attained all he wanted. When the land dried out again he again stamped his foot on the rock, shot his arrows into the sky, and the rain came down again. (Aschwanden 1989:11-12).

One interpretation of this myth as told by the old Karanga is that the heavens became 'pregnant' by Mudzanapabwe's arrow, which separates the sky from the earth, symbolising the procreative aspect of God. The arrow is a symbol of male genitalia, while the rain falling from the sky symbolises the loss of amniotic fluid in childbirth, and the separation and loss of unity, of the mother and child at birth. The separation of the Earth from the Sky is seen as a symbolic birth.

There is always a close connection in Karanga mythology between the woman's biological role and God's creative power, symbolically expressed in God's creation of the earth and sky and woman's creation in her uterus. This aspect will be explored in more depth throughout the study since it relates to the Karanga relationship between God and man and informs an interpretation of settlement dynamics and relationships between the Hill Complex and the Great Enclosure.

In every-day Karanga life and in the many ceremonies of their ritual life, the Karanga use water in order to make contact with their *vadzimu* (ancestral spirits);

Water has the symbolic significance of peace, it cools and soothes. With water one craves a hearing (with the vadzimu) and, at the same time and through the symbol, asks for peace and kindness. Water expresses a wish for peaceful communication with the ancestral spirits.
(Aschwanden 1982:39).

The land that has no water is a prevalent symbol of the earth in an embryonic state as well as of the barren, sterile woman (Aschwanden 1982). The term 'there is life in the big rocks' refers to the rain clouds and the fertility of the stone of the pool at Matopo-mountains, the source of all life, where man was created by God. Water, therefore, is also a symbol of God.

The rocks in this myth symbolise the rain-clouds, while the needle symbolises lightning. Rain provides fertility for the earth and so rain and fertility are closely linked in Karanga myths (Aschwanden 1987:12-16;193-195).

3 The Sacred Pond, Pools and Rivers as the Source of Fertility

'Kupedza nyota / kuenda padziva': *To quench thirst (one) goes to a pool.*

Explanation and Application: When disputing or in doubt about anything it is always good to consult an expert...

Shona Proverb. (Hamutyinei 1987: 3).

The sacred pool found in the cave at Matopo-mountains is the source of all life and the cosmological symbol of fertility, containing life-giving water. Pools are therefore seen as the origin of God's life-giving creativity. God himself is referred to as the 'Great Pool', since all waters come from him.

The following Karanga story describes the significance of these pools;

Story: The Inheritance from the Pool (*nhaka yaiva mudziva*)

Once upon a time there was a man who had many sons but only a few daughters, so there was never sufficient bride-price for the sons. This man was not rich either. He had only a single head of cattle, the bull *gono* who bore his father's name. His only wealth consisted really only in a *njuzu* alien spirit which belonged to him.

When the man fell ill he called his sons and told them: "My sons, I shall die before you marry. I have no wealth (*fuma*) except this *gono* (bull of the ancestor). Do not kill it until I tell you. However, any one of you needing a bride-price must jump into the pool called "mouth of the underworld (*muromo wepasi*)". The sons felt unhappy, none of them could really understand what their father had meant. The father died and the sons remained unmarried because they had no wealth. The dead man had left many wives, and one of them had an only son who was also the youngest amongst all his brothers.

One day, as the brothers were discussing how to raise a bride-price for the eldest, the youngest reminded them of their dying father's words. The brothers laughed at him and said: "Whoever heard such a thing? Who would return alive?" They refused to follow their father's recommendation, for - as they said - they were not yet ready to die. But the youngest said he would try it all the same. However, his mother forbade it, for he was "the eye of her heart".

During the following night the youngest - he was called Muzvidziwa, the despised, crept to the cattle-kraal and spoke a few words to the *gono*. He then poured maize over the animal, and when he shook itself, he knew that it agreed.

The following morning he went to the river and threw himself into the pool. The brothers watched him and said they would do the same if he returned safely. They waited all day by the

pool, but Muzvidziwa did not come back. Towards sun-set they went home and told his mother. She cried for her son, put a bark-cord around her neck and did not cut her hair for many years. Time passed, but nothing happened. The elder brothers found wives - not by means of a bride-price, but for working for hire. They only laughed at their youngest brother for being so stupid as to lose his life for following a dying man's instructions - a man who no longer knew what he was saying.

Mudzvidzwa's mother went to the pool daily, she sat there on a stone and cried for her son. Then she filled the water-jar and returned home. - One day, she saw a most beautiful girl sitting on "her" stone. Before she could say anything, the girl said: "Cut your hair, put on your best dress and glass-beads, I will give you a horn with oil." The mother did not understand but did as she was told.

A few days later, as she was sitting in the shade of a tree near her hut, she suddenly saw large herds of cattle, goats and sheep in the distance, which were accompanied by many people. As they approached, she noticed a young man who was dressed in a lion-skin and wore a crown of reeds. On one side he carried a sword, on the other a bag, and in his hands he held a black horn and an animal tail. He was followed by a very beautiful girl, whom she knew at once. The girl was dressed as a virgin and surrounded by many servants.

The son called to his mother to welcome him, but she was too frightened to move.

Muzvidziwa told his mother how he had been received by *njuzu*. He had lived with them in the underworld and had there received all the wealth one could wish for. He had also brought her a daughter-in-law to comfort her. The mother wanted to know what had happened when he threw himself into the pool. And Muzvidziwa told her: "When I submerged I was a young fish that was not yet able to swim. I was pushed through a small opening into a cave that was as big as our earth. - My guardian was a large snake called *ninga* (another name for *njuzu*), and it was as large as a river. I lived in the reeds which grew on its back and ate mud. The snake had warned me never to eat maize, or I should never be able to return.

"I had to collect the various plants (*gomarara*) which grew there. Once I cut a plant off the snake's back and it hurt the snake: whereupon it told me to go back to my mother who would give me all the wealth I needed. The snake also gave me the horn with which I shall cure people. With this crown of reeds and this sword I shall reign over my brothers, and in this bag there are the medicines".

Muzvidziwa became a famous man and chief over his brothers, who had once mocked him. His mother, who had also been despised, was now treated like a queen.

(Aschwanden 1989 : 146-148).

The principal theme of the story relates how a person can become a *nyanga* (traditional doctor) by submerging into a sacred pool. The development of such a *nyanga* is compared to the growing life of a baby in a mother's womb. Rain priests and *nyangas* go to sacred pools to obtain healing abilities from the waters and some are even able to cure infertility. Those who return from such sacred places are said to possess special strengths given to them by the strength of the water creatures who dwell in the pools. (Aschwanden 1989:149f).

The pool in this story is also the entrance into the underworld and symbolises the woman's uterus, from where a person enters alone but returns with many riches. There is a realistic connection in Karanga life between a woman's uterus and a sacred pool, the uterus often being referred to as a pool from which new life is created, just as life was created by God at the sacred pool in the Matopo-mountains.

Immersing in a pool of water is seen as symbolic of sexual intercourse and the entrance into the vagina by the male phallus, since the water of the pool creates new life similarly to the water (amniotic fluid) of the uterus (op. cit.). There is a certain sense of appropriateness to this symbolic connection between a pool of water and a uterus, considering the intensely sensual and mysterious nature of water in a pool. The cave "as large as the earth" in the above story also symbolises the 'uterus of the earth' (cf.: Part 3, Chapter 6).

The small hole into which Muzvidziwa enters represents the physical entrance into the womb (cervix), while the snake in the cave represents the woman's oviducts, often referred to as the 'snake of the uterus';

The small opening signifies the real entrance into the underworld and also refers to the cervix. The cave is the uterus, the big snake (njuzu) the woman's oviduct... The close connection between the small fish and the big snake, by the reed, represents that of an embryo in the uterus and the mother (Aschwanden 1989:150).

The boy as a small fish in a pool symbolises the man's semen entering the woman's uterus. When the boy cuts the plants on the snake's back, the story relates the labour pains experienced at birth.

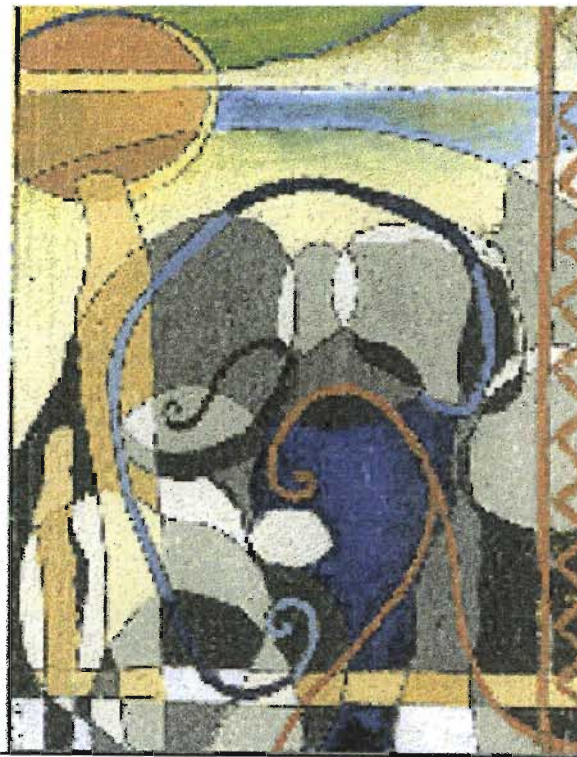
The black colour of the horn and the animal tail are both symbols of the *nyanga's* great healing abilities, since black is the symbol of rain, water and fertility thus indicating the black rain clouds (op. cit.).

This story clearly describes the relevance that pools and swampy places have in the Karanga context of symbols, for they sustain the life of the rivers, and are therefore potent and must be respected by all. There is a practical reality to this mythological symbol, since it is the rivers that sustain the life of the people, always supplying enough water for all during the dry season. Rivers, ponds and pools are seen as the origin of nature's fertility while the uterus is seen as the origin of man's fertility. In Karanga mythologically shaped thinking, the uterus becomes synonymous and is interchangeable with the sacred pools, ponds and rivers. By visiting a sacred river, a person can achieve a new beginning in life, where the water has qualities able to protect an individual or clan from any danger or problems of infertility. Water is therefore usually associated with important rites of passage since it symbolises a new beginning in life. The Karanga say that human life starts in water, in the amniotic fluid of the mother's womb and similarly rain also brings new life and fertility. Therefore, amniotic fluid and rain also become synonymous with

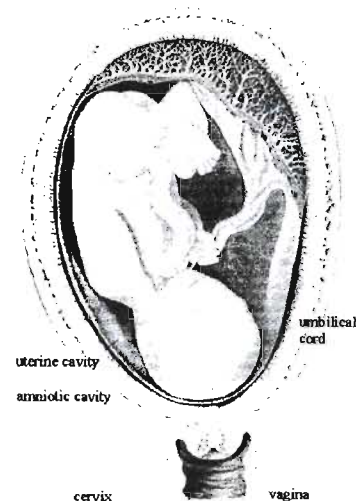
synonymous with each other. Important stages in human development are often termed “crossing the river”. The river becomes a symbol of the continuous fertility of nature provided by water and rain and in man through human biological fluids such as male emissions, female menstruation and amniotic fluids (Aschwanden 1987:53f).

The creatures that inhabit the sacred pools and rivers, and the pools and rivers themselves, are symbolic of women’s fertility and the role of women. The term ‘when a pool dries up’ represents an old woman whose uterus has stopped functioning (Aschwanden 1989:193-195).

The structure of a sacred pool with fertility bearing snakes is therefore synonymous with the anatomical structure of the uterus with fertility bearing oviducts (snakes of the uterus). By symbolically identifying man’s fertility with nature’s fertility, **biological and cosmological forces are united.**



The sacred pool of water in the cave of the mountains as symbol of the uterus. (By author, oil on wood.)



Sectional view of woman’s uterus. (Johnston, T. B. (ed.) 1987.)

Figure 3.1; Pools of water are synonymous with the uterus. The sacred pool of water symbolises the amniotic fluid in the uterus. The cave symbolises the uterus, the opening to the cave symbolises the cervix, while the fertility bearing snakes of the cave symbolise the fertility bearing oviducts (‘snakes of the uterus’).

4 The Cave in the Mountain as the 'Stone of the Pool'

'Wazarira bako / mvura ichada kunaya': *You have closed the cave while it is still raining.*

Explanation and Application: It is unwise to show ingratitude to a benefactor when you still need his help. For example, a poor man who has been helped with food and shelter should not quarrel with his benefactor before the famine is over.

Shona Proverb (Hamutyinei 1987:17).

The cave in Karanga mythology refers to the site of the sacred pool at the Matopo-mountains, the source of God's creativity. The Karanga say that God's voice can still be heard in the caves of the mountains of Matopos, and that in the old days, God's voice could also be heard at Great Zimbabwe;

A direct connection with God is today still experienced in those places where his voice is or was heard. Two places are always mentioned by the old Karanga: Zimbabwe and the Matopo-mountains (Aschwanden 1989:212). ('Zimbabwe' here refers to Great Zimbabwe.)

Caves are also referred to as the 'stone of the pool' meaning the sacred pool in the caves of the mountains. The natural cave shelter behind the Eastern Enclosure on the Hill Complex of Great Zimbabwe may have been interpreted by the people of Great Zimbabwe as this cave symbol in Karanga mythology, where the 'voice of God' was heard.



View of the natural cave at the Hill Complex (Author)

According to Huffman, because of the iron ore deposits found on the floor of this cave, researchers have often misinterpreted the function of the cave by suggesting it was used for iron making practice (Huffman, T. 1996). Since there have been no iron-making tools recovered from the cave, Huffman

interprets the thick iron ore deposit as more likely symbolising the deep dark waters of the pool in the cave at the Matopo-mountains. Huffman explains this misunderstanding;¹

Firstly, the cave contains over a metre of dark red banded ironstone. Mounds of iron slag and blowpipes associated with iron smelting, however, do not exist on the hilltop...there is no evidence whatsoever that the ironstone was used for smelting. Instead, this ironstone is the same material that was used in many Khami-period walls to form 'pool' designs. Rather than smelting then, the ironstone deposit probably signified a pool...Such a cave would have linked the mambo to Mwari, and along with the ritual enclosure emphasised the sacred nature of Zimbabwe leadership (Huffman, T. 1996:137-138).

Extending Huffman's suggestion, the meaning of the cave could be seen as sourced from mythology, where a cave is often referred to as the 'stone of the pool', as described in the story of The Inheritance from the Pool (cf.: p.80). The symbolic function of the cave may have more relevance than any physical function.

The cave at Great Zimbabwe Hill Complex is also said to have powerful acoustic properties which resonate through the valley and can be heard clearly at the Great Enclosure. This has accredited the cave with spiritual qualities (Garlake 1974:85, Huffman 1996:138). The rain-makers attached to the Hill Complex may have utilised the acoustics to connect their sacred area to the voice of God. This is the tradition of the 'oracle of God' still practised by the Karanga (the Mwari-cult) in the caves of the Matopos mountains (Bourdillon 1991). The cave at Great Zimbabwe could then have been a powerful symbolic mechanism to elevate the *mambo's* religious status via his close connection to God, through the cave and its associated symbolic value. Therefore, the mythological source of the sacred pool and sacred cave where the 'voice of God' is heard possibly extends the suggestion for the symbolic function and spiritual significance of the cave at the Hill Complex.

In Karanga mythology, the cave and the sacred pool are also symbols of the woman's uterus and the uterus of the earth, as mentioned above. This aspect, as well as the symbolic meaning of the cave at Great Zimbabwe, will be examined further in chapters 6 and 7.

¹ Iron smelters have, however, been recovered from the Western Enclosure Balcony (Garlake 1974).

5 Snakes as Symbols of Ancestors and Fertility - An Interpretation of the Chevron Pattern

In Karanga mythology, the 'stone of the pool', the pool at the cave in Matopo- mountains, is protected by snakes, as described in the story of The Inheritance from the Pool (cf.: p.80). These snakes are said to represent the ancestors guarding the fertility of the Karanga people. Snakes, water and pools are always closely connected, since the snakes were sent by God to bring rain and fertility to the earth.

Snakes also symbolise human fertility and are represented in human anatomy as the woman's oviducts (containing eggs, similar to the snake) and man's spermatic cords, since these anatomical structures sustain human fertility. Of a barren woman, it is said that 'the snake has vomited the eggs,' and of a sterile man that 'the snake has stopped functioning' (Aschwanden 1986:34). In the myth of The Creation of the Earth and of Man (cf.: p.128), the snakes that crawl across the loins of the man and the woman are interpreted as symbolising human fertility. The snake crawling across the woman refers to her oviducts while the snake crawling across the man refers to his spermatic cords, and the marks the snake leaves behind also corresponds to these anatomical structures. This myth also presents the place of fertility where the snakes live as the 'soft place in the rock', meaning the cave with the sacred pool of water (Aschwanden 1986:34).

There are three types of snakes (*nyoka*) that inhabit the waters of the caves at the Matopo-mountains, and are referred to as the 'snakes of God,' (*nyoka dzokwaMwari*) (Aschwanden 1986:230). All three snakes are concerned with the control of rain, through the ancestors. The python symbolises the snake guarding the mountain, and has unpredictable characteristics. The python is often used to symbolise the *mambo*, also 'guarding the mountain', and God, since the python is said to have the same characteristics desirable of a good *mambo* and of God, who both offer protection for the people and characterise strength and power. In the story of The Pond of the King (cf.: p.150), the python is used to refer to the characteristics of the *mambo*;

The python symbolises mildness and gentleness but, simultaneously, also power and strength. It is regarded as a very tame animal that does not immediately react to an attack. However, once roused to anger it destroys its adversary completely (Aschwanden 1989:78-79).

Such strength and control of character are qualities most desired of a successful *mambo*.

The puff-adder (*bvumi*) symbolises rain and rain clouds since it is said to have similar characteristics to that of good rain - it emerges unexpectedly, and is soft, gracious and gentle. These are also said to be the desirable characteristics of a woman and because the puff-adder is also faithful to its habitat, it becomes a symbol of the woman, as the most important bearer of the fertility. The snake, as symbol of fertility, becomes a central figure and is as real in the woman as 'snakes of the uterus' (oviducts) as it is in nature (Aschwanden 1987:230-231). The particular markings on the puff-adder also represent the shifting clouds

and ensuing rain and, since the same pattern is used on ritual items for rain-making and as a symbol of rain in African material artefacts, this is most probably the origin of the chevron pattern at Great Zimbabwe;

...the puff-adder is an important and manifold symbol-carrier. It primarily symbolises rain and fertility...its skin-markings are connected with rain: alternate patterns of light and dark chevron-shaped markings resemble a sky covered with rain-clouds. The same zigzag pattern is to be found on the drums and jars of the mutoro-ceremony. A woman's loincloth is decorated with glass-beads forming such patterns, and this represents her fertility, the tattoos on her abdomen, and the movements at sexual intercourse (Aschwanden 1989:231).



View of chevron pattern on Outer Wall of the Great Enclosure. (Garlake 1974)

The same pattern in mythology and ritual refers to the puff-adder snake, representing protection by ancestors and protection of female fertility (oviducts, 'snakes of the uterus').

Snakes normally are strongly associated with witchcraft, but they do signify different things in different contexts. Thus life is believed to begin as a snake or worm in the mother's womb

(Bourdillon 1991, after Gelfand 1964:173).

Huffman suggests however, that the chevron structural wall-pattern at ancient Zimbabwe sites is the symbol of the 'snake of the mountain' representing virility of the young and junior man (Huffman 1996:68). Huffman's source for his interpretation of the structural wall-patterns is the *hakata* divining dice used by Shona diviners (Huffman 1996:67). The *hakata* are a set of four wood or bone dice, the patterns on each die representing one of the four adult statuses. The dice are used in sequence to determine future events, usually related to fertility.



Figure 3.2; Shona divining dice, *Hakata* (Huffman 1996:67-69).

Huffman interprets the chevron pattern as a symbol of young male status, yet the pattern appears on all four dice. However, as is evident above, in Karanga mythology and ritual items, the chevron pattern represents the puff-adder as symbol of rain and **female** fertility. However, the chevron pattern also appears frequently in Africa as a symbol of the python snake (Parrinder, G. 1967). This would indicate the multi-valency of the chevron symbol and the problem with attaching to it any discrete gender specific meaning.

Aschwanden suggests that the symbol of the puff-adder (as a chevron pattern appearing on ritual items of *mutoro* (rain) ceremony), possibly represents primarily the female and in a broader sense the male, while on another level, the ancestors themselves;

The Karanga use the puff-adder to contain the conflicting set of problems of life and death, good and evil. This poisonous snake is primarily a symbol of the woman and in a wider sense also of the fertility of man, the fields and nature. On another level it even symbolises the ancestors, the real bearers of fertility...If it appears in human dwellings, and lives there (as a natural animal) everybody loves and honours it: the puff-adder is, in that case, a symbol of the ancestral spirit itself (Aschwanden 1987: 148).

This illuminates the more extensive meaning of the chevron pattern in stone on the outer wall of the Great Enclosure. It most probably represents the puff-adder dwelling in the structure and therefore comes to mean the permanent presence, symbolically constructed in stone, primarily of the woman as well as the

fertility of man and of the ancestral spirits.² The chevron pattern on its own is therefore able to represent many aspects of symbolic gender identity, since this depends on its context as it represents a wide range of meanings based on the symbolic interpretation by the Karanga of the ambivalent nature of the puff-adder snake that contains the “...conflicting problems of life and death, good and evil.” (op. cit.).

This evidence may therefore extend Huffman’s interpretation of the symbolic meaning of the chevron pattern. While the patterns of the *hakata* dice do have specific gender differences, the symbolic meanings of the patterns are flexible according to the context of the throw. It may be likely that the chevron pattern represents male fertility in certain situations and/or female fertility in others and in a wider sense, the ancestors, or it may be more likely to represent all three **at the same time**. Furthermore, mythology is the original source of Karanga religious symbolism, and the origin of religious beliefs, the cult of spirit possession and divining (use of *hakata* dice) being incorporated much later, according to Huffman himself (Huffman 1996). Mufuka also discusses the cult of spirit possession and the increased authority of spirit mediums to have developed during the later period of occupation of Great Zimbabwe, post-dating the construction of the Great Enclosure Outer Wall. The increased status of the spirit mediums, according to Mufuka, coincided with the impotence and lack of political power of the later *mambos* around AD1400-1450 (Mufuka, K. 1983).

Mythology could be seen as an appropriate source for an interpretation of Karanga symbolism. The ambiguity of Karanga symbolism is indeed a common feature in Karanga mythology and using the symbols as though they were linguistic signs overlooks the ambivalent nature of Karanga symbolism. This aspect will be considered in further depth throughout the study as it relates to our understanding of the symbolism of Great Zimbabwe. Therefore, Huffman’s interpretation for the chevron pattern can be extended by considering the way that Karanga symbolic associations telescope into each other where any symbol contains within it a condensation of meanings.

The third type of snake prevalent in Karanga mythology is the *njuzu*, a half-human and half-snake creature who inhabits sacred pools. These are described in the story of The Inheritance from the Pool (cf.: p.80). Because of their half-human characteristics, they are referred to as symbols of the unity between man and God, through nature. They are also important in the development of the *nyanga*. A novice *nyanga* will go to these sacred pools and become a *njuzu* for a time to receive healing abilities and to learn the practices of traditional medicines.

² This also corresponds to the idea that the Great Enclosure was constructed to honour the founding ancestors and to house the Great Wife (This will be discussed in further detail in Part 5, chapter 5 of this study.)

6 The Pond and Cave as Symbols of the Uterus Containing Snakes

And if there is a connection between ornaments and love that is because that jar is the symbol of the world's womb (Griaule 1965 in Tzonis, A. 1972:51).

The female uterus is an omnipotent, omnipresent symbol in Karanga consciousness. Aspects relating to female fertility, the woman's biological role, procreation and birth pervade most aspects of Karanga mythology and provide a rich and fertile source of symbolic associations.

We have seen that geographic sites such as pools and caves are interpreted in myths as symbols of the female uterus where the water of the pond represents the amniotic fluid within the uterus. The two snakes of the pond also refer to the 'two snakes of the uterus', the oviducts (cf.: *The Inheritance from the Pool*, p.80). In Part 5 of this study, an examination of *mutoro*-place (ancestral rain shrine) ritual practices reveals parity between the nature of symbolic structures and expression of form and space of the Great Enclosure with the nature of the traditional *mutoro*-place as symbolic of the uterus and where ritual is related to the theme of death as a symbolic birth.

Apart from the symbolic structures expressing the theme of fertility and honouring ancestors, the form of the Great Enclosure appears to imitate expressive qualities related to *mutoro*-place symbolism, where a high walled, protective and cave-like enclosure incorporates snake-like walls and narrow cervical-like entrances, as narrated in mythology (cf.: the story of Chamasango, p.105 and *The Witch is a Mother Too*, p.100). Such expression could be thematically compared to uterus anatomy. However, there would **not** have been any deliberate intention in the creation of the Great Enclosure to represent a uterus or foetus-like form. The structural pattern of an architectural expression as free-form and idiosyncratic as that of Great Zimbabwe facilitates numerous possible interpretations. This observation is merely intended to be a conceptual one. It implies a symbiotic relationship between the symbolic consciousness of the creators of Great Zimbabwe and the process of symbolic form making for ritual enclosures and house of the Great Woman. The similarities in symbolic content between the consciousness of the culture and the geometry are seen as inadvertently influential rather than prescriptive.³

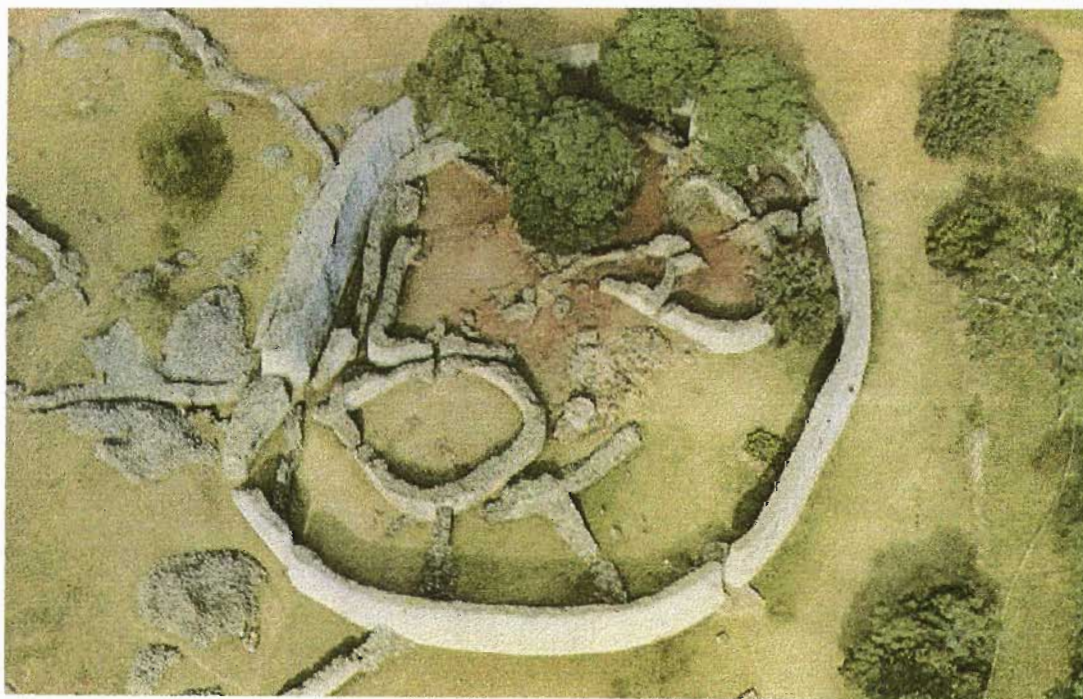
Such an observation reveals the interesting area of study concerning the extent to which cultural understanding and awareness of symbolic meaning can influence the process of form making. This

³ In Part 5 of the study, the enclosing and massive snake-like walls and cave-like ritual enclosures of the Great Enclosure is discussed in relationship to ritual function where Karanga symbols associated with ancestral honouring appear to be architected in form, space, and symbol. If the symbolic significance of the structure was inadvertently influenced by a desire to express a female enclosure housing a *mutoro*-place (symbol of the uterus), then this may imply residential function related to children and women (wives of the *mambo*) and could have consequences for extending the interpretation of the Great Enclosure as residence of the Great Wife (*vahoz*). This is also discussed in further detail in Part 5 of the study.

observation also reveals the area of the reality of the unconscious in architecture, an area somewhat overlooked within the study of architecture;

While psychologists and physicists have rediscovered and then accepted the reality of the unconscious and then with difficulty integrated the concept into their personal and professional world views, architecture lags behind...Symbolic architecture is based on principles which extend beyond formal rules, because they tap into the unconscious and mythic layers of being, and activate higher spiritual qualities (Mann 1993: 10-14).

It is the unique expression of form, suited to its function, and combination of symbols in stone that **“activate” a “higher spiritual quality”** at the Great Enclosure. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts and this can only be appreciated when we consider the dynamic layers of meaning which the Karanga identify with their symbols. **An examination of these meanings reveals the subconscious “mythic layers of being” activated through and by the experience of the building. By understanding the dynamic interpretation given by the Karanga for their symbols, a deeper level of meaning for the building, beyond formal rules, technology and geometry can be realised.**



Aerial view of The Great Enclosure (Garlake 1974).

This chapter provides a discussion of the compressed and interrelated layers of meaning the Karanga attach to the uterus and the woman and the symbolic associations that relate to the woman's role as fertility carrier.

The significance of the woman as carrier of the centre of man's fertility, through her 'pool' (uterus), and the connection between the woman's role and the role of the fertility bearing snakes is a central fundamental theme dominating many aspects of Karanga mythology and everyday life. Through this connection, the close association between human biological phenomena and God's creative power is realised. The pool and the uterus are synonymous with the same functional and symbolic content;

The spirit from the pool (njuzu-shave) is seen as a genuine alien spirit. And the woman who gives her fertility to her husband is herself an alien whose fertility is received from the ancestral spirits that are alien to the husband too. The pool and the water are peopled by partly mysterious elements like njuzu and the alien spirits. It is no different with the woman whose "pool" is supported by the activity of the ancestral spirits. Also, the "snakes of the uterus", are in their activity similarly mysterious as the snakes of the pool. However, the identity applies even further. When a man submerges in the pool and, as embryo, is shaped into something special by the water-snake, then this "exchange" between woman and nature has become total, the identity appears complete (Aschwanden 1989:152-153).

The development of life is made possible through the fertility of the woman, given by God, and the uterus becomes a symbol of this fertility.

The woman is the biological root of Karanga religion and her uterus is seen as a 'pool' through which life is created. The pregnant woman, carrying new life in her uterus with the amniotic fluid is referred to by the old Karanga as the pond in the Matopo-mountains. (Aschwanden 1986:15.)

The woman who creates life, or destroys it, by refusing her role, is the pool through which nature lives or dies (Aschwanden 1989:198).

The act of procreation and birth are recurring themes in Karanga mythology and the pool, cave and landscape are used to refer to the sacred parts of the female anatomy, since these are revered and should not be spoken of to children or in public.

The woman's procreative role is often symbolised in descriptions of the landscape. The dry earth refers to a barren woman or a girl before puberty, while mountains, caves and valleys represent female genitalia such as breasts, uterus and vagina. (The mountain can also refer to the male sexual anatomy.) The first blades of grass refer to a woman's pubic hair while rising rivers refer to a girls' first menstruation.

A uterus, an embryo, a foetus, a new born child and a miscarriage, are all referred to by the Karanga as *Mwari*, (God), since they all have a very close connection to God. Perceiving them as such allows the Karanga to sustain a more direct relationship with God through the procreative cycle of the woman (biological phenomenon).

In the following Karanga myth of creation, the earth is interpreted as a womb and the connection between the creative power of God and the procreative role of the woman is conveyed;

Myth: The Creation of Man (*Kusikwa kwomunhu*)

One day, God (*Mwari*) dwelt on those things he had created already. He regarded the sun, the moon and the stars, the sky and the clouds, and he was happy to see their beauty. He then decided to create Earth and to make it especially beautiful by living things.

So he created the Earth and shaped it like a *rusero*-basket (a shallow round basket for winnowing). From the clouds he took the water, from the sun the fire, and placed both into the belly of the Earth (*mudumbu renyika*) to make it fertile. Thus Earth obtained the power to let plants grow. *Mwari* saw how good and beautiful Earth was, and he loved it so much that he added rivers and oceans to its beauty. The seas were to provide water to the land and the rivers when they dried up. - He then sowed the seeds of trees, bushes, flowers and grass. And that is why no man can order a plant to grow without there first being earth and warmth.

The trees and the grass grew taller. God never ceased speaking of the Earth's beauty, and the sun and moon became jealous. This is the reason why the sun sometimes gets too hot: it is trying to kill the beauty of our Mother Earth (*nyika mai vedu*). And the moon, from sheer envy, chases off the clouds.

Since no-one cut the grass, *Mwari* began to consider how he could eliminate the reason for the sun's jealousy. (Short grass was to diminish the Earth's beauty). So God began to form many kinds of animals, each different from the others. As God gradually became tired and the sun began to go down, he hurriedly shaped the hippopotamus which, therefore, prefers to live in the river.

God worked very quickly when he shaped the animals. Therefore, he forgot to give horns to some, or tails to others. To one animal he even gave ears that were too big.

God created all these beings in order to beautify the Earth. Then the water started to complain, saying: "You have given everything to the land to make it happy. But we are here to give life and to protect the Earth, and you give us nothing that might give us pleasure."

Mwari took the remaining clay and formed a great variety of fish. Because there was so little clay left, fish have no legs.

All the creatures God had created were still lifeless. Therefore, Mother Earth asked: "How will the animals come to life?"

God replied: "I gave you the power to create life." But Earth said: "I can give this power only to plants and trees."

So God sent his shadow, which spread like a rain cloud over all those lifeless figures. And that was the moment when all the animals came to life. They began to jump high into the air with joy. After that, the happy Earth looked even more beautiful.

Next, *Mwari* began to consider sending someone to rule over the Earth and all who lived on it. First, he wanted to send someone from his own place of residence (*muzinda*). But in that city

there only lived creatures without body (*mweya*, spirits), and the animals would not obey such invisible creatures. So God took clay and water from the Earth's belly and shaped a figure. He told himself: "This creature must be like me, because when I go it will take my place." He made Man and gave him the power to rule, and the strength of procreation. He also gave him all that he had given to the animals.

He had barely finished when Mother Earth said: "My creator (*musiki wangu*), why did you form someone so very different from myself? Would you not like to shape someone who looks like me, giving him also the power to give life?"

Therefore, *Mwari* took what was left of the clay and formed a woman. Earth told him: "I should like her to receive everything I have too."

Mwari replied: "Look, Earth, this creature is meant to walk about, so how can I give her rivers, mountains and trees?" But since God was omniscient and did not want to disappoint his beloved Earth, he asked her: "Give me a little of everything you have, and I will give it to your friend."

Earth gave the fire and the water to *Mwari*. The fire is the love in the woman's heart, the water the amniotic fluid in her womb. The Earth gave rivers and mountains, and they became the woman's genitals and breasts. Earth also gave grass and flowers, which became the hair and beauty of the woman. It is for this reason that a woman is called the "Earth of man (*mukadzi chinyika chavarume*)". Mother Earth had given her best to make the woman beautiful. Therefore, a woman may adorn herself with Earth's gifts.

Then *Mwari* wondered how to make man beautiful also. He said: "Every mountain has grass"; he gave some to the man, and it became his beard. "Every tree has a root", God added: so man received his penis which, like all roots, always hangs down. "And in every river there are countless fish", God thought, and so the man received seeds without number. The power with which God had invested the fire and the water he also gave to the man: hence a man's love is so powerful.

When God had finished the two creatures which resembled him, he sighed and let his shadow fall across them. This is why a person has two shadows and an animal only one. Man, brought to life by God, was ordered by his creator to rule the world and give names to all creatures.

Man said to God: "You gave seeds to all plants and trees, but how shall I beget children?" God replied: "You too have this procreative power. The seeds within you have to enter the woman's uterus, just as the seeds of plants and trees go into the uterus of Earth".

Mwari then turned to Mother Earth and said: "The time will come when Man, blinded by pride, will no longer obey me. Then he must die, but he will return to your uterus. However, I will take back my breath (*femo*). for it shall live forever." This is the reason why men are buried, and why they need the bringing-home ceremony (*kugadzira*).

When God had returned to his residence, Man called together all the animals in order to give them names. But the animals would not agree to this, and said: "How can you give us names when we were created before you?" It was Earth who answered the animals: "You must obey Man, for he descends from me and from God while you descend from me alone". The animals calmed down, and all were named. - But then the water had something to grumble about: "We too would like to know where we stand: who is the greater, the animals or I?" Again, Earth answered: "You were created to protect me from my enemies, and to give life to the animals." - But here the animals raised a new objection: "We can manage without the water", they said. This was too much for Earth, who exclaimed angrily: "I will punish you. I shall cease to give grass power to grow, and I shall let the rivers dry out."

The man intervened and, turning to Earth, admonished her: "You also, Mother Earth, must obey me." But she replied proudly: "I have the power to destroy you also." - So the quarrel went on and on until, one day, Man went to see God and asked him to come down to earth to make peace. *Mwari* visited Earth, and the first place he came to was "the stone of the pond (*mabwe adziwa*, Matopos). here God said: "You Man, must use your power over all the animals, and over Earth. But remember that you stem from Earth, and that she is your mother."

Thus it came about that the animals, the land, the water, and mankind lived together in peace for a long, long time (Aschwanden 1989:26-30).

Here, the earth is literally expressed in the story as a womb, the "uterus of the earth". The seeds of plants are compared to the seeds of man (semen), 'planted' in the uterus of the woman, the earth. The story also describes the origin of man and woman and what is significant here is the symbolic connection the woman's and man's genitals have with the physical landscape. Woman was fashioned to represent Mother Earth and her uterus was intended to create life in the same way that earth creates life. Earth was created in the shape of a *rusero*-basket and so here we also see a symbolic association between Earth, woman and the basket since all three express the expansive and procreative qualities of a uterus. The story is quite explicit and requires little explanation other than to add that the expression of man 'returning' to his 'uterus' refers to birth after death, for death is seen as a symbolic birth in Karanga society. The grave is a symbol of the uterus and even, in the minds of the Karanga, **becomes** a uterus, while the body in the grave is referred to as an embryo. This aspect is discussed in more depth in Part 5, Chapter 3 of this study.

Uterus symbolism is also prevalent in every-day Karanga life, symbolised in commonly used family and household objects. For example, the animal skin used as a traditional baby's backslings is a symbolical uterus. The dangling legs of the animal skin refer to the 'snakes of the uterus', the oviducts (Aschwanden 1987:37).

The Karanga knows the anatomy of the internal female genitals; the uterus is described as a receptacle for the fruit, and it has two "snakes" at the upper end (the Fallopian tubes). The

Karanga woman uses a sling to carry the baby on her back, the sling is called mbereko (from kubereka, to give birth): it represents the womb. After birth the baby must be carried in some kind of uterus because it still needs protection (Aschwanden 1982:6-7).

A similar symbolic identification is used for the lion-skin worn by a great chief. It is called *debwe tinofuka*, meaning 'the skin with which we cover ourselves'. The skin represents the uterus, which is able to be stretched many times and is therefore extremely strong and these are the characteristics a great chief must have; strength and resilience. (Aschwanden 1982:118.)

A novice *nyanga* (traditional doctor) is referred to as an embryo in the earth's uterus, since he is 'being born' from the sacred pool and is influenced by the *njuzu* creatures who symbolise the female oviducts.

The *shambakodzi* jar is also a symbol of the uterus and is often used to describe the sexual act and the ensuing pregnancy and birth process. A stick stirring the liquid contents of a jar symbolises a penis entering the vagina of a woman, while the stirring refers to the sexual act itself. The water in the jar symbolises the new life and the amniotic fluid. The saying that 'the pot will boil' refers to a pregnant woman about to give birth.

When a child is born it is placed inside the *gambe* jar. This jar is wide and has no neck and therefore symbolises the state of the mother's uterus after childbirth. Another jar, the *chimbua*, is also a symbol of the woman, this time of her vagina since, unlike the uterus, it is small and has no neck. This jar is kept hidden in a private part of the house for, if this jar is exposed where everybody can see it, then this symbolises that the woman is exposing the most private parts of her anatomy, her vagina (Aschwanden 1982). The jars therefore actually assume the anatomical characteristics and functional properties of the uterus. The jar, a constructed, man-made artefact, is physically identified with the natural anatomy of the uterus. They are enclosing, muscular, thick walled and have cervical-like openings. This quality is also similar to most of the architecture of Great Zimbabwe, where free-form walls appear to ramble over the landscape seemingly echoing the sculptural curves of pots, jars, baskets and towers.

The jars, the uterus and the cave containing the pool with snakes are all synonymous with each other and take on each other's properties. The sacred pool and the cave, as symbols of the woman's uterus, are often compared to a jar full of water. Since God's voice is heard in the cave, he is often referred to as 'he who is in the jar' and when a child is born it is said that the child has 'come out of the jar';

This cave with its pond is compared by the Karanga to a jar filled with water. Since God's voice is heard from the inside of the cave, God is called: He, who is in the jar. "In the jar" is muhari, and by contraction the word mwari came into existence. God is the giver of life - as the woman's uterus is too. In the woman's "jar" (muhari) with its amniotic fluid (pond), the embryo lives (Aschwanden 1982: 245).

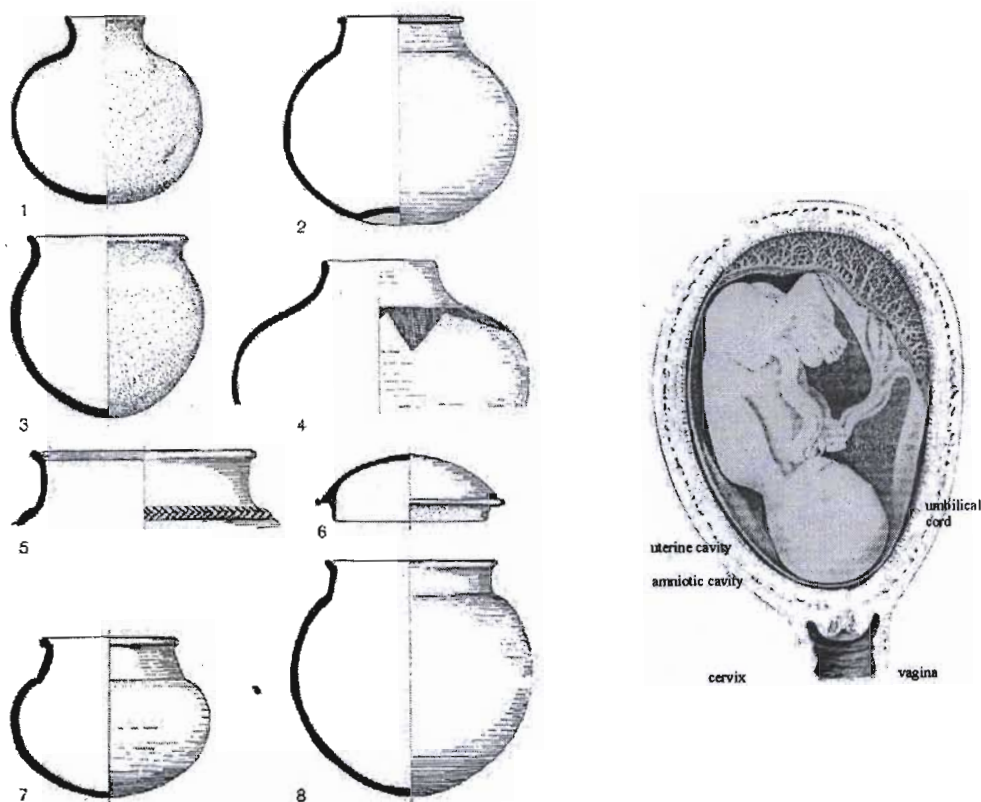


Figure 3.3; Pottery excavated at Great Zimbabwe and Sectional view of uterus. These sectional views of traditional Shona jars and the woman's uterus indicate similar expansive nature of form and symbolic content. Illustration 3 probably closely resembles the shape of a *gambe* jar. (Left; Garlake, P. 1987:107. Right; Johnston T. B. (ed) 1987).

Other everyday utensils are also symbolic of the uterus. For example, Shona serving plates (*gunere*) symbolise the wife's uterus, for the man accepts food on the plate from the woman, just as he accepts 'food' (children) from her uterus. The *gunere* also becomes a symbol of the family, for it is a set of plates (children) that have come from the union of a man and a woman (Aschwanden 1982:196-197).

Karanga baskets are also identified with the woman's uterus and this is discussed in the study relating to the field as symbol of the woman (cf.: Part 3, Chapter 9).

The Karanga also identifies cooking pots with the woman's uterus. They say that the process of firing a clay pot is similar to the fire (love) expressed between a man and a woman, resulting in childbirth. The making of a pot is also expressed as a sign of the woman's maternal role in 'making' a child. Pots are therefore seen as symbols of the uterus. A young girl is compared to an unfired pot without an opening, since she too has not been 'fired' and her opening is intact. The process of menstruation and that of pot firing are also similarly identified. A young girl must not touch an unfired pot, for the pot would then crack

and this would be seen as a sign that the girl's hymen has already been torn (cracked) (Aschwanden 1982:53-54).

Since eating is compared to the sexual act, cooking and eating from a pot symbolises the tribe itself, for it has expanded from the nourishment provided by the mother and the pot. When a man expresses his desire for a 'clean' pot, he inherently means that he wishes for a woman whose uterus has not been sullied by any other blood (another man). A pot of boiling water also symbolises a uterus where it is said that only the millet (male seed) needs to be added to provide 'food' for the family. Similarly, the phrase, 'your pot is boiling' refers to a young fertile girl (Aschwanden 1982:49,92,263).

The expansive nature of the uterus is also the source of symbolic association of the calabash.

'Chitende chinorema / ndechine mhodzi': It is the calabash containing seeds which is heavy.

Explanation and Application; It is more the inner quality than the outward appearance which determines the value of something. For example, a poor man with a constructive mind is held in greater esteem than his rich but stupid counterpart. The proverb also applies in a physical sense to a woman with children, who is always more respected than a barren woman.

Shona Proverb. (Hamutyinei 1987: 36).



Figure 3.4 Woman making pots. (Garlake 1983:16).

A new-born child is fed from the *shupa*, a type of calabash which contains special food for the baby to protect it as it was protected inside the womb. The calabash is shaped like a uterus, a rounded form with a narrow opening, the desired shape to symbolise the protection offered the baby by the uterus. The Karanga actually say that the calabash *is* the uterus. If the calabash is broken then this is synonymous with the woman's uterus also 'breaking' and if it is stolen, then it is said that she becomes sterile. Here, the substitute for the uterus, the *shupa* and the uterus itself have become one (Aschwanden 1982:12-15).



Figure 3.5; Illustrations of a jars, pots, calabash with basket and a uterus, indicating expansive nature of all such types of 'containers'. (Sources: From left; Garlake 1983; Author; Johnston T. B. (ed) 1987). The expansive nature of the uterus is the source of symbolic association with the lion-skin, the baby's backsling, baskets, jars and the calabash.

The functions of the calabash are to be extended until it can take over those of the uterus also. But the shupa is not simply a uterus substitute for the Karanga – the calabash is the uterus itself, they say "it is an actual uterus (chizvaro chaico)". When the baby is fed from the shupa then its fed as if it still lived inside the mother's womb: it is protected as it used to be in the uterus (Aschwanden 1982:13).

The uterus is also symbolically associated with death, since death in Karanga society is seen as a symbolic birth. Aschwanden relates the ceremony he witnessed marking the initiation of a new chief and ritual sister of the Korekore people in the north of Zimbabwe (cf.: Part 5, p.188).⁴ The ceremony described by Aschwanden is referred to as a symbolic birth and it is said that the pair ritually die and are reborn with new ritual status. The process is described as a real birth (Aschwanden 1987:56-59). The pair in this ceremony are immersed into a sacred pool. If they return alive they are initiated. If the crocodile of the pool kills them, then the spiritual world is indicating that the pair would have been inappropriate rulers. We can therefore appreciate how significant and prevalent uterus symbolisation is in traditional Karanga society. The following chapter discusses the Great Enclosure as a site possibly conveying the themes of procreativity and fertility prevalent in Karanga mythology.

⁴ The Korekore people are direct descendants of the Karanga and their cultigens run parallel with those of traditional Karanga society (Boudillon, M. 1991). Pikirayi indicates that Korekore ethnography is more appropriate to use in connection to Karanga material culture than Huffman's use of Venda ethnography. Pikirayi even indicates that the Korekore people provide a good source of oral tradition for this field of study in his criticism of Huffman's sources;

In applying Venda ethnography, Huffman should have considered other groups who were in contact with the Zimbabwe culture peoples in the past, such as the Korekore. Korekore ethnography is relevant to the study of the Zimbabwe culture since some of their dynasties were part of the historical Mutapa state, a northern extension and branch of the Zimbabwe tradition (Pikirayi 1993) (Pikirayi, I. 1997 in SAAB 166:135)

7 Procreation and Fertility Themes Expressed at the Great Enclosure

‘Ura mapoko / hunozvara mbavha nomuroyi’: *A womb is an (indiscriminate) container, it bears a thief and a witch.*

‘Nhumbu ibakwa rehuni / inochengeta nyoka namakouzo’: *A womb is (like) a pile of wood, it harbours snakes and rats.*

‘Nyoka yemvana / yakazvara mbavha nomuroyi’: *The uterus of a woman (who has just given birth for the first time) bore a thief and a witch.*

Explanation and Application: Good, respectable parents may have children who turn out to be bad characters.

Shona Proverb (Hamutyinei 1987: 244).

We have seen that the cave and sacred pool symbolise the uterus in Karanga traditions and that the two become synonymous with each other. The following myths and stories describe the prevalent themes of procreation and fertility conveyed through such symbolic associations. This chapter introduces the interpretation that sees the possibility that these themes are expressed in the form, spatial experience and symbolic structures of the Great Enclosure.

The following Karanga story refers to the cave as a symbol of the earth’s uterus and is used to describe conception, pregnancy and the process of birth;

Story: A Witch is a Mother Too.

In a certain wood there once lived an old woman. She had only one tooth left, and they called her the thin old woman who tears children into pieces (*Varukweguru bande*). She dwelt in a cave where there also lived a gentle snake, the puff-adder (*bvumbi*.) This snake at first knew nothing of the woman, and it produced an egg every month. But the eggs never hatched because the old woman ate them.

One day the snake went to see a doctor. He advised: “From now on eat only worms. Then chase the old woman from the cave and close up the entrance”. - The snake took this advice. However, the old one knew exactly what the doctor had said because, being able to fly, she had followed the snake. She decided to eat no more eggs because they were now mixed with worms. But she planned to wait for the children and then eat those. The puff-adder was terribly disappointed when it realised that the old crone always ate its offspring when they were three or six months old.

It again went to the doctor, and this time he advised: “Build a fence around the cave so that the old one can never again enter it.” - The puff-adder obeyed and produced its next egg after

having eaten many worms. From that egg came a young one which grew and grew until even the puff-adder became afraid of it.

One day the snake even noticed that the child had grown four legs and that it swam about happily in the pool. When one day it opened its eyes, the puff-adder was so frightened that it began chasing the young one away by trying to bite it. Then the child was afraid also, and it began to scratch the walls of the cave. It was looking for a door but, of course, the door was shut. The puff-adder's child had a very strong head which it beat against the wall until the door suddenly opened. Thus it came into the world before the snake could bite it. This is why most children are born head first and why women have to suffer pain when giving birth: a frightened child moves about the cave looking for an exit (Aschwanden 1989:106-107).

The story relates the biological process of conception, pregnancy, and childbirth. The cave is a symbol of the uterus and the door to the cave is the entrance to the uterus and the birth canal. The snake living in the cave is interpreted as the 'snakes of the uterus', the oviducts. The snake biting the child in the cave refers to the problem in childbirth if the child stays within the uterus too long. The Karanga say that the 'snakes of the uterus' will 'bite' the child (Aschwanden 1987:107).

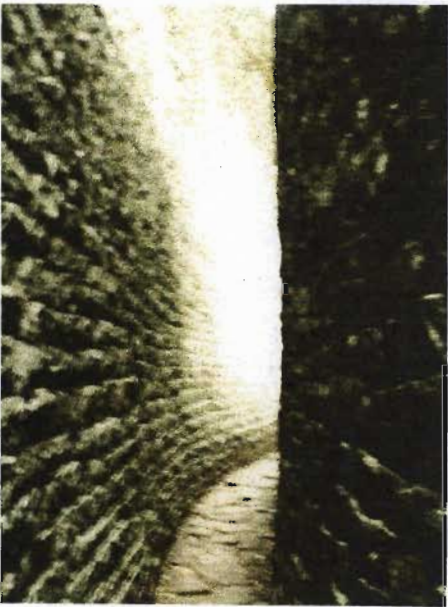
A comparison could be made between the symbolic experience of procreative-cycle narrated in this story and the architectural experience of the Great Enclosure. **The structural reality appears to be similar to the mythological and symbolical reality.** The experience of intense constriction as one enters the Great Enclosure between the snake-like walls of the Parallel Passage, (similar to the 'snakes of the uterus') and of release as one approaches the Tower Enclosure is similar to the birth process itself, as described in the above myth as intense constriction and release through the cave opening. This experience would appear to be appropriate for the ritual process of enacting death as a symbolic birth at the *mutoro*-place. This aspect is discussed further in Part 5 of the study, where the *mutoro*-place (ancestral rain shrine) traditionally **becomes** the uterus of the earth through ritual and ancestral invocation.

The association made between the stone walls, the 'snakes of the uterus', and the procreative cycle may have a more than conceptual identification. The Karanga believe that the 'snakes of the uterus', the oviducts, actually form the body of the child in the womb (Aschwanden 1982:242). They therefore have a very real role in the **construction** of the human body. The Outer and Inner Walls of the Great Enclosure similarly **form the structure** of the building.

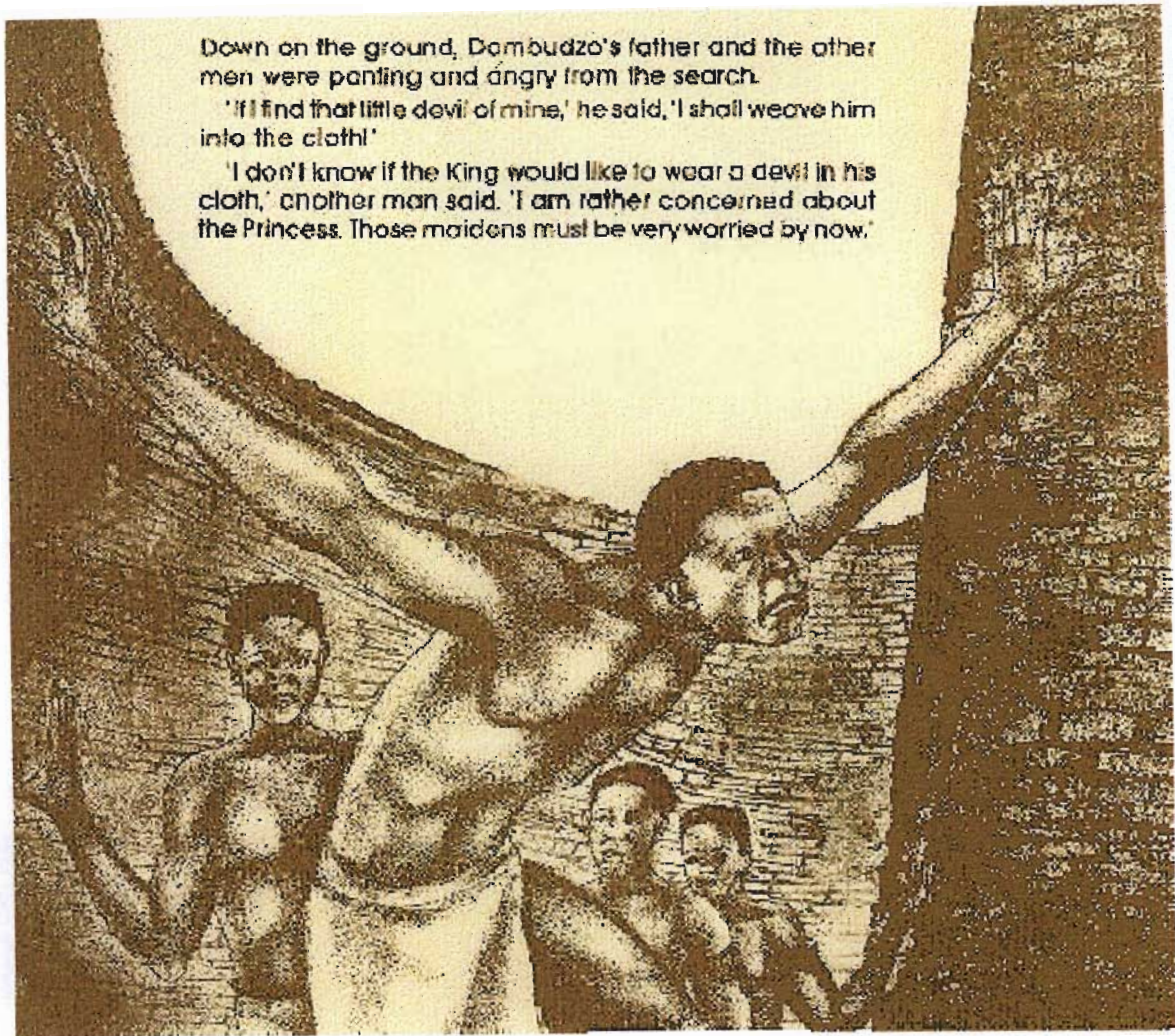
The unborn child and the embryo have very important status in Karanga life. From conception, the embryo is identified with human totem-names and characteristics. The embryo is never a passive being, for it symbolises within the pregnant fertile woman the union between man and woman and the now realised status the woman has in the community as sustainer of the common culture through the longevity of the family name. The unborn child then, influences attitudes in the outside world on a very significant social level. By giving birth, the woman contributes to the continuance of the clan and so childbirth and pregnancy are seen as sacred and the process of human life is raised above the profane level, since the



Experience of Plateau Passage approach to northeast entrance at the Great Enclosure (Author)



Snake-like walls and experience of constriction and release through Parallel Passage to the entrance to the Tower Enclosure (Author)



Artist's impression of walls to Parallel Passage (Asare 1987)

woman has contributed something most precious which God himself has taken part (Aschwanden 1982:242f). As a house for the great woman (*vahosi*), the snake-like protective walls of the Great Enclosure may have comparative significance to this mythological theme.

The term *Mwari* (God) is itself a derivation of words used to describe the mother, the egg, and the uterus;

The Karanga mention three words which have contributed towards the formation of the expression mai, (mother). Mai is the same as zai, which means egg. But mai is also hari, the jar, by which the uterus is meant. The uterus gives to the Karanga what is most precious, something that comes from the Creator himself, and God is called muhari (contracted into mwari)...To express the all-embracing concept of the mother in its fullest significance, the Karanga have taken the m- from mwari, the a- from hari, and the i- from zai, to form the word mai. (Aschwanden 1982: 297).

If interpreted as a house for the great woman (*vahosi*), the building becomes a significant structure in the settlement of Great Zimbabwe on a spiritual and symbolic level. It could be seen to be reflecting the woman's close connection with God, through her life-giving role and therefore of the close connection between man and God through nature. This idea is developed further throughout the study.⁵

Karanga myths and stories reveal a conscious connection in Karanga symbolic thought between the structures of cave-like enclosures and openings and that of uterus anatomy and its cervical openings. An example of this is revealed in the following story where the cave again becomes a symbol of the woman's uterus;

Story: Chamasango

In a village there once lived many boys who went hunting mice every day. One of them, Chamasango, always caught more than the others.

One day, the boys went off early in the morning to check their traps. Chamasango found a mouse with a long nose (*mudende*), which is regarded as a bad omen. The other boys laughed at Chamasango. However, he did not kill the mouse but put it into his bag. At home he showed it to his mother who cried out with fright and told him he would die. To avert this misfortune, he had to go to a strange, far-away country where no-one knew him.

So he took his bag with the mouse in it and left home. He walked many days and then came to a cave. Hungry and thirsty, he tried to penetrate into the cave, but he became very tired. Suddenly a door opened and he found himself right inside the cave. The door closed behind him. - It was very

⁵The existing entrance to the Great Enclosure from the Plateau Passage is inconsistent with the original entrance at the time of Great Zimbabwe's occupation. Originally, the entrance way was linteled and has been incorrectly reconstructed earlier in the 20th century as a gap in the Outer Perimeter Wall (Hall, M. 1987:109). This would indicate that the original intention for this opening was to create a more constricted entrance to the building than the existing construction indicates. It therefore seems appropriate to follow the suggestion that the entrance is thematically similar to a cave-like or cervix-like opening.

dark inside the cave, and he felt miserable. There were many animals who had got into the cave in the same way but could not get out again.

Chamasango began to look around and noticed that the cave was as large as the earth. - An old woman reigned in the cave, and she was ruler over all the creatures in the cave. She possessed a horn (*gona*) filled with wax from a honeycomb. With this wax she was able to produce light in the cave by magic; when she returned the wax to the horn it became dark again.

The animals longed for the sun. One day, Chamasango asked the Bateleur eagle (*Chapungu*): "How do we get out of the cave?". The eagle replied: "Though I know the way I see no possibility of stealing the horn from the old woman". The mouse heard what was said. It stuck its head out of the bag and said: "Chamasango you saved my life, and now I want to help you too. I will go into the hut and steal the horn. When I come out you must come and save me quickly".

The eagle replied: "I shall be ready and lift the mouse up into the air. You, Chamasango, run to the door, I will fly out with the mouse".

Meanwhile Chamasango had fallen in love with a beautiful girl whom he wanted to show to his mother. But so far he had had no chance of escaping from the cave.

One day the mouse disappeared into the old woman's hut and pulled the horn outside. The eagle was ready to save the mouse. The people started to pursue the mouse, when the eagle appeared and flew off with it. At the cave's entrance the eagle dropped the horn. Chamasango picked it up and touched the entrance with it. The door opened and they all returned to earth together with the other creatures who had lived in the cave. As soon as everybody was outside Chamasango once more touched the entrance and the door closed again. The old woman remained inside (Aschwanden 1989:111-112).

The story tells of the process of creation from conception through to birth. Chamasango trying to 'penetrate' the cave obviously refers to the phallus and semen penetrating the uterus. The animals and people escaping through the entrance of the cave refers to the birth process, and they symbolise the child, the placenta, the blood, the amniotic fluid and the ovular membranes. The witch's horn, normally a symbol of male fertility, here refers to both the sexual act which opens the entrance to the cave as well as the internal female sexual organs (op.cit.);

The horn with the bees' wax is important here: both refer to the internal female sexual organs. For bee-hives, the Karanga use cylindrical bark-tubes, hung in trees. As the honey-bees enter and leave by a small opening at the end of the tube, so the seeds reach the woman's uterus (Aschwanden 1989:114).

Hence, the horn with the bees' wax becomes a symbol of the uterus, and is part of the larger cave, the earth's' uterus.

The Karanga refer to the cave as the 'earth's belly' as a symbol of both the female uterus and the earth's womb (*dumbu renyika*). The cave 'as large as the earth' refers to the fertility of all of God's biological

creation and of the earth's womb. Chamasango is a symbol of the male semen entering the uterus in the act of procreation while the old woman of the cave, the Karanga refer to as the 'snake of the uterus', the oviducts.

A comparison could be made between the cave-like form of the Great Enclosure and the Karanga symbolism inherent in this story. The cave-like structure and the thick, protective, muscular walls may be inspired by a desire to enclose and protect the contents within, similar to the symbolic reference to the earth's uterus in the story. In the Karanga worldview, the uterus is an all-embracing symbol of unity realised through the fertility of the snakes.

The enveloping, protective form of the Great Enclosure appears to express a similar desire for unity, where snake-like walls 'guard' the contents within, just as the snakes guard the waters of the sacred pool. At the Great Enclosure the walls (mythological 'snakes of the uterus') are conceptually 'guarding' the *mambo's* 'sacred pool' (his first wife), the *vahosi*, who 'lives inside the cave' (symbol of the uterus). The narrow entranceways and constricted passages of the Great Enclosure also appear to correspond to the "door to the cave as large as the earth" in the story.

Furthermore, the horn in the story becomes part of the cave, as part of universal fertility. The many monoliths within the Great Enclosure, as symbols of the horns (*gono*), representing the protection provided by the great ancestors, could refer to this aspect of the horn within the cave; (cf: Part 3, Chapter 8 for origin and meaning of monoliths and horns). These monoliths (*gono*, horns) appear inside the West Entry and encircle the top of the Outer Wall around the Tower Enclosure. They were also found lying on the stone platform beside the large Conical Tower (Garlake 1974).

The story of Chamasango appears to narrate similar experiences of form, space and symbolic structure as those that exist at Great Zimbabwe. The siting of the Great Enclosure, as a house for the *vahosi*, within the royal settlement is also significant, since it is sited at the top of the wife's residential area and could therefore be a symbol of the woman's role as provider of fertility and of descendants for the *mambo*.⁶

The style of the Great Enclosure could be seen as a structural reality analogous to the mythological reality. Conversely, the story may have been inspired by the architecture of Great Zimbabwe. Both contexts appear to be validating the female biological role in society.

This aspect will be discussed throughout the study where further examination of Karanga mythology, symbolism and ritual appears to extend this observation.

⁶ Archaeological evidence, oral tradition and historical records indicate that the valley plateau was the most likely area for the residential quarters of the *mambo's* wives (cf: Part1)

8 Monoliths, Birds and Towers as Symbols of Protection, Provision and Male Fertility

Monoliths and *Gono* (Horns)

The horn of the bull in Karanga mythology is a prevalent symbol usually referring to male fertility and protection. In particular, it is used as a phallic symbol to represent the fertility of the tribe. The origin of the symbol is the bull (*gono*) protecting the herd with his horns. The horn of a bull has phallic significance and refers to the founder of the tribe, the origin of the tribe's fertility (Aschwanden 1982:119). The stud bull has significant importance in traditional Karanga society, for it begets the cattle for which women can be acquired. The bull's horns then become important symbols of the clan's fertility and ancestral spirit (Aschwanden 1987:335). There is also a connection between the bull and the child, for the most important people in one's life is one's children and the *gono* and the child both become symbols of the ancestor.

The horn often appears inside a cave, as in the story of Chamasango (cf: p.105) or used to penetrate a jar (vagina, uterus) as symbol of the procreative act and of male fertility. The phrase "to stir the jar" refers to the sexual act where the penis enters the vagina, where the jar symbolises the uterus (cf: Part 3, Chapter 7, & p.97f). A similar phallic symbol, a wooden stick, is used in every-day life. The walking stick of the great ancestor is used to refer to the centre of the family's fertility and a wooden stick used for firewood is said to refer to the male genitalia. When a stick stirs a jar of water, this symbolises the sexual act itself. In the story of The Pond of the King (cf: p.150), the horn is an ancestor's symbol and the emptying of the horn into the king's pond refers to the discharge of semen into the woman's vagina.

This mythological symbol is structurally expressed at Great Zimbabwe as stone monoliths representing the spears of the *mambo*'s army protecting his people similarly to the way a bull protects his herd with his horns. The presence of so many of these stone monoliths at Great Zimbabwe can possibly be explained when we consider that in the past, cattle were considerably rare, and so the descendants would use a horn to embody their ancestors (Aschwanden 1987:336). The stone monoliths, as symbolic horns of the *gono*, possibly then came to represent the ancestors.

The Great Enclosure also houses stone monoliths inside the enclosure that possibly also refer to male protection and fertility (*gono*) and, from mythology, to the horn as penis penetrating the uterus. In the story of A Witch is a Mother Too (cf: p.100), the horn appears inside the cave, referring to the male genitalia penetrating the uterus. Considering the cave-like structure and narrow entrances to the Great Enclosure, the stone monoliths may be conveying the same theme presented in the story of A Witch is a Mother Too, where the male genitalia penetrates the structure, referring to the ensuing life and fertility within the womb and to the *mambo* providing descendants through the uteri of his many wives.



Monoliths inside western entrance to Great Enclosure (Author)

Huffman attributes the position of the monoliths “on only one side” of the Great Enclosure as indicative of male entrance and a male side of the building. However, they also appear at the Tower Enclosure on top of the Outer Wall as well as lying on the stone platform beside the large Conical Tower (Garlake 1974). They were also found lying on a *daga* mound in the *Daga* Platform Area (op. cit.). Their presence in this context is then possibly indicative of the theme of male fertility creating the new life in the uterus, as symbolised inside the cave and evident in Karanga myths and stories.

Garlake believes there is evidence to show that the remaining stone monoliths at Great Zimbabwe represent only a fraction of the original number and that they were used as totems to represent a particular ancestor of a family, each post being carved to represent the characteristics of the family’s great ancestor (Garlake 1974).

As discussed above, the horn also refers to the founding father of the tribe and this aspect is realised in the Karanga use of the ‘giving of *gono*’ (horn, bull). A bull is given as ‘bride-price’, as tribute to a woman’s family by her husband’s family in payment for her fertility which they have ‘lost’ through marriage;

This is achieved by giving gono - which today always takes the form of a bull. In the old days, gono used to be a simple gift: a phallic symbol such as (originally) a horn (gona). Gono and gona derive from the same word. Years ago, the Karanga told us, cattle were scarce - usually only to be found in the possession of chiefs: the horn served as a substitute. The Karanga elders also refer to the animal’s ability (kugona) of defending itself (as well as attacking) with its horns...Gono itself is of utmost importance in the Karanga’s life...The old Karanga say: “We cannot leave the mudzimu (ancestor) alone, we must join him to something.” The horn, as a phallic fertility sign of the tribe, is an ideal object for this purpose (Aschwanden 1982:145-146).

Since, ‘in the old days’ the *gono* was a phallic symbol horn, as substitute for the bull as symbol of the ancestor, then the presence of so many monoliths, as symbols of the horn, both inside and around the top of the outer wall of the Great Enclosure, most probably refers to the fertility of the founding fathers (great *vadzimu*) of the royal settlement of Great Zimbabwe. Later parts of this study discusses the possibility that the conical towers were also built primarily to honour the greatness of the founding fathers of the

Zimbabwe state. Considering the importance of the *gono* as symbol of the fertility of the ancestors, there is a real possibility that the stone monoliths at the Great Enclosure and Hill Complex were constructed primarily to honour the fertility of the great founding fathers.

Zimbabwe Birds

Totems have important ritual significance in Karanga life and possibly their meaning would have had more potency during pre-colonial Zimbabwe. The stone birds found at the Hill Complex are also most probably totem figures of the founding ancestors (cf. p. 111).

Huffman interprets the stone birds as representing the first leaders of Great Zimbabwe. He suggests that the reason they do not appear elsewhere in later Zimbabwe period sites is because there was no longer a need to demonstrate sacred leadership once it had been firmly established (Huffman 1996). However, the reason they do not exist elsewhere could also be because they are site specific and contextualised by Great Zimbabwe. Since they represent the animal-totem of the first great ancestors they are therefore specific to the sacred leadership of Great Zimbabwe and not to subsequent settlements.

Martin Halls explanation of the stone birds is perhaps the most comprehensive;

The symbolism and probable function of the Zimbabwe birds can be understood in terms of Shona beliefs. Birds, and particularly eagles, were seen as messengers to and from ancestral spirits and between men and God. Propitiation of the ancestors was important to ensure well-being, and the role of the ancestral spirit depended on the importance of the earthly person in whom the spirit had once resided. Consequently, the ancestral spirits of past kings were of vital importance in major issues affecting the nation - rain and the well-being of the state in general. It is thus probable that the carved birds from Great Zimbabwe were metaphors for the spirits of departed kings (Hall, M. 1987:112).

The six stone birds found in the Eastern Enclosure were therefore probably used as symbol figures of the founding ancestors in ceremonies related to national propitiation at the national shrine. The seventh bird was discovered in the Western Enclosure and Hall suggests that it was used for personal ceremony by the *mambo* while the eighth bird, found in the valley was most probably part of woman's ceremonial function (Hall, M. 1987:112 after Huffman, T. 1985b).

These interpretations can be extended by examining the meaning of the Bateleur eagle in Karanga mythology where it is often used to symbolise lightning in the sky. In the story of Chamasango, the Bateleur eagle is always used to refer to the ancestors, and here the story explains their role of protecting the uterus, since it provides them with descendants (Aschwanden 1987:112-115). This could partly explain the meaning of the Zimbabwe birds found around the Eastern Enclosure. The Zimbabwe birds may represent qualities of the Bateleur eagle. In the mythological context, the eagle is protecting the uterus. The Eastern Enclosure could therefore be mythologically interpreted as a sacred pool in the caves of the mountains, protected by the eagle. The painting illustrated in Figure 3.1 attempts to conceptualize this theme, where the eagles, symbolised by the Zimbabwe Bird sculptures protect the uterus (sacred pool in

cave). Walton suggests the Zimbabwe Birds actually represent 'lightning-birds' (Walton, J. 1959). The presence of lightning birds in many Bantu cultures further supports this possibility. Walton believes that the stone bird monoliths found at the Hill Complex at Great Zimbabwe represent these 'lightning-birds' and are therefore protecting the residence of the *mambo*. The presence of lightning in the sky is said to be caused by the bird itself (Aschwanden 1987:159).

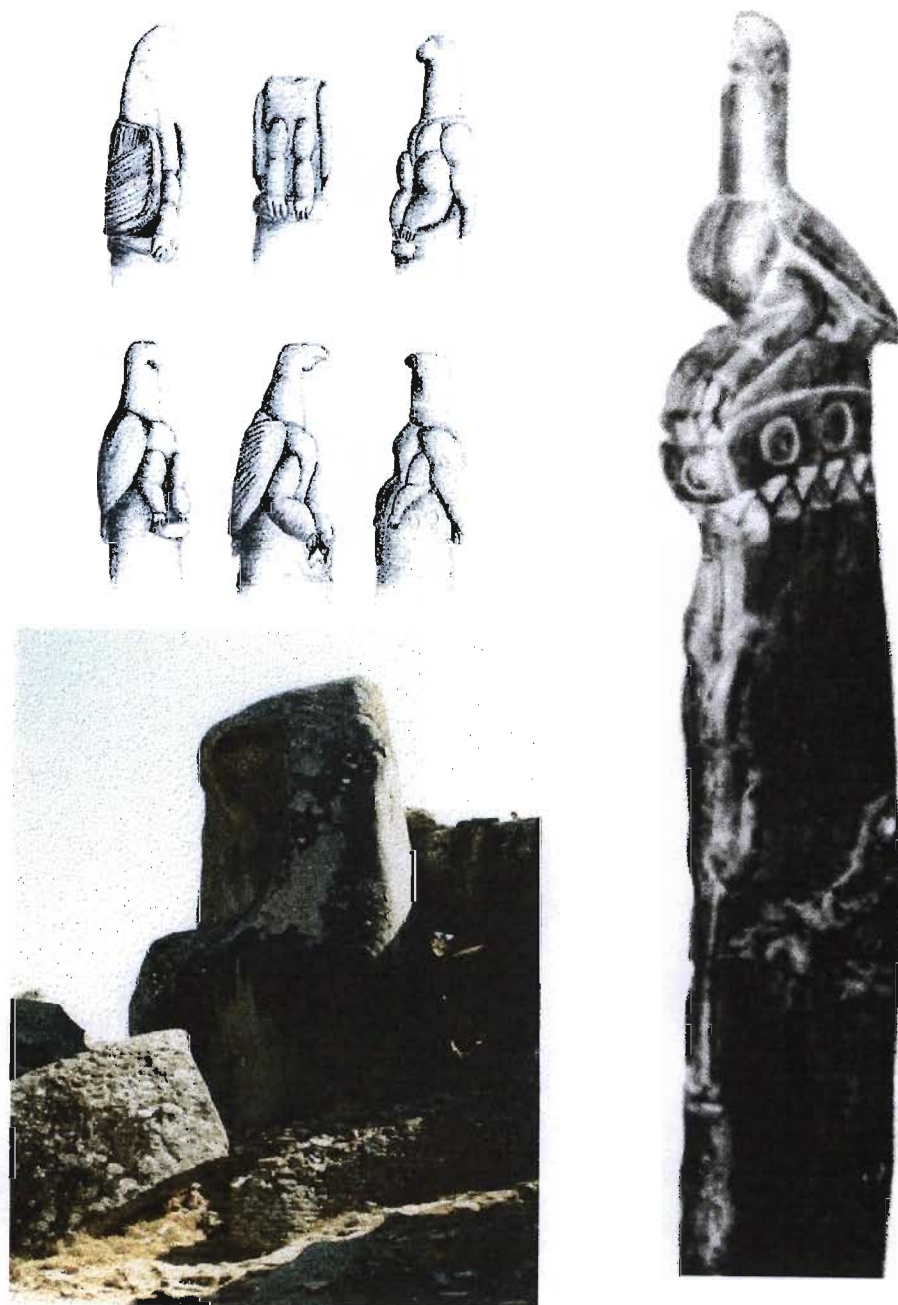
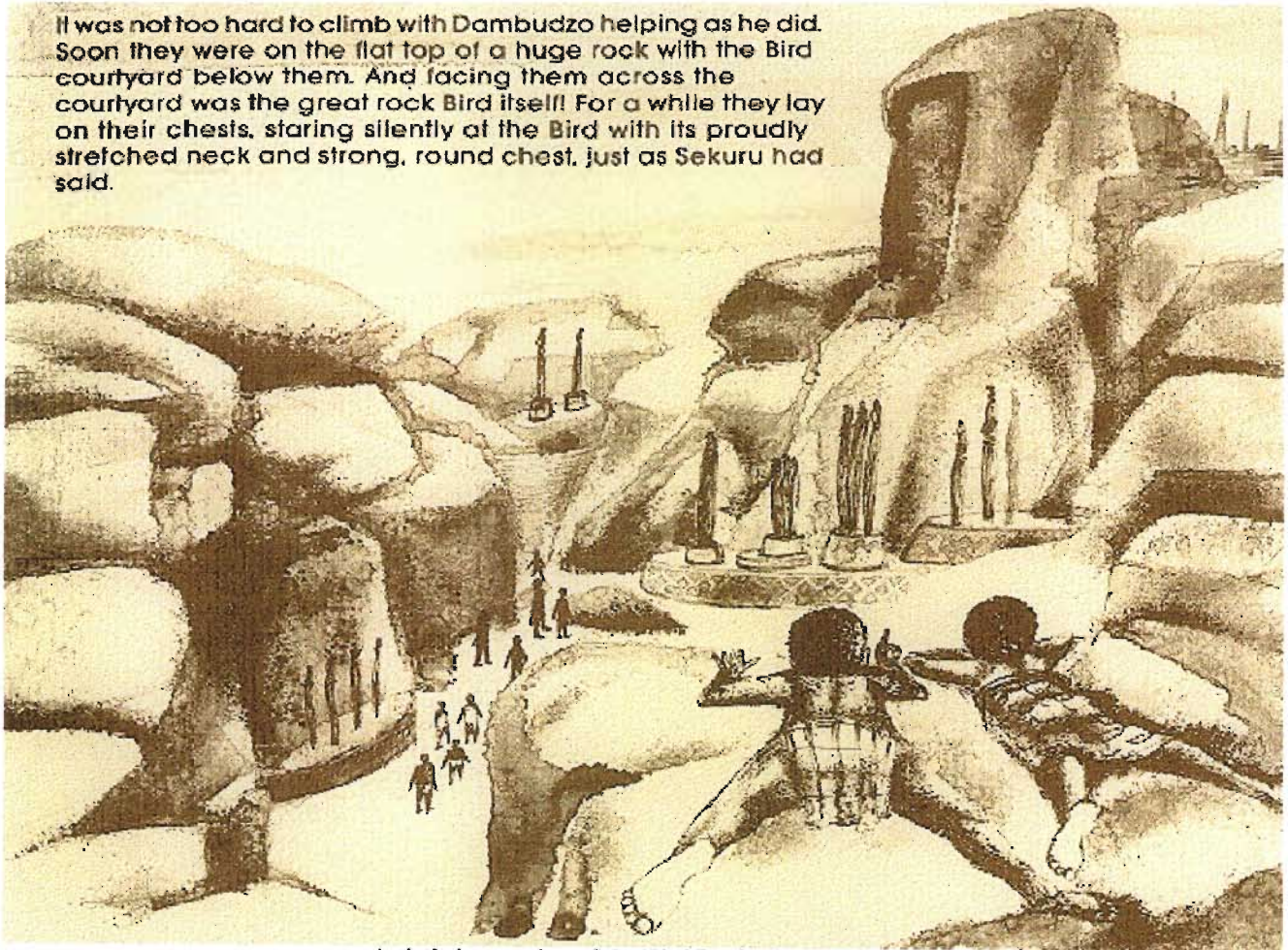


Figure 3.6; Zimbabwe Birds. Upper left; Six stone bird sculptures found at Eastern Enclosure. (Garlake 1994). Left; (Huffman 1987:17) Lower; Natural stone Bird Rock (Author).

It was not too hard to climb with Dambudzo helping as he did. Soon they were on the flat top of a huge rock with the Bird courtyard below them. And facing them across the courtyard was the great rock Bird itself!! For a while they lay on their chests, staring silently at the Bird with its proudly stretched neck and strong, round chest, just as Sekuru had said.



Artist's impression of the Bird Rock (Asare 1984)

Walton's interpretation can be extended though when we consider the probability suggested by Garlake and supported by Hall that the stone birds represent the totem-animal of the founding fathers of Great Zimbabwe. The idea that the birds also represent the lightning-birds (Bateleur Eagle in mythology) is very probable, since Karanga totem-animals have a mythological origin, and the lightning-birds are probably seen as the root of the meaning for the great ancestor's totem-animal. Mythology then, supports many interpretations.

The 'Bird-rock' at the back of the Eastern Enclosure could have inspired the tradition of crafting stone birds at Great Zimbabwe and provides another reason why the birds were not found elsewhere, since their siting would be specific to the natural feature of the Bird Rock at the Eastern Enclosure.

The presence of the 'Bird-rock', crafted by nature, and its strong similarity to the Karanga mythical eagle (Bateleur Eagle, lightning bird) may have validated the establishment of sacred genus-loci and inspired the founding father's totem animal. The Bird Rock itself may have inspired the tradition of carving stone birds and the Hill Complex may have been the origin for bird totem-figures for great ancestors, thereby validating further the spiritual aspect of the Eastern Enclosure.

Stone Towers

At the Western Enclosure of the Hill Complex, the stone monoliths appear alongside stone towers (cf.: pp.19, 72). Huffman interprets these stone towers as symbolic grain bins that refer to the *mambo's* role of providing seed for his people's fields (Huffman: 1987,1996). The traditional grain bin (*dura*) has associated complex practices of exchange and tribute connected to household co-ordination of food (Gelfand, M. 1985). In traditional Shona society, the members of the chieftancy, in tribute, paid grain to the *mambo* for the *mambo's* provision of land for the people and for the *mambo's* ability to protect his people with his army. Garlake's interpretation suggests that while the stone monoliths represent individual ancestral chiefs, the stone towers refer to the tribute provided by these subsidiary rulers;

It is possible that the towers, platforms, bastions and 'altars', like the monoliths that most of them once supported, were themselves emblems. This applies particularly to the Conical Tower, clearly the most significant and visually powerful structure in the Ruins. Rozwi traditions tell that the small towers capping the outer wall of the Nalatele Ruin represented different subsidiary chieftancies and that chiefs would stand under their respective towers when presenting tribute of grain to the Paramount ruler who lived at Nalatele. In form, many towers, particularly the Conical Tower, resemble grain bins and it could be that they symbolise such containers and, by extension, the recipients of the tribute and the office of the ruler itself. Thus, where monoliths represent individual holders of chieftancy, towers may represent a more abstract and generalised concept of the sources of the titles or power of these individuals (Garlake, P. 1974:122).

This interpretation sees a combined symbolism referring to the provision (towers) provided by the subsidiary leaders in tribute for the *mambo's* protection (monoliths) and, as Garlake suggests, they

therefore represent the rulers themselves. An all-embracing interpretation would then see the towers as symbolic of provision and the monoliths as symbolic of protection by the ancestors and the *mambo*.

Grain bin and tower symbolism is a prevalent theme in Karanga mythology, symbolism and ritual and the conical towers and towers on the outer wall of the Western Enclosure at Great Zimbabwe are the most prominent features within the settlement. For this reason, these interpretations are extended further throughout the study. The following chapters integrate their mythological interpretation since grain bin and tower symbolism is extensive and meanings telescope and compress into meanings for other symbolic structures related to fertility of the ancestors.

9 Women, Fields and Fertility –an Interpretation of the *Mihombwe* and Conical Towers

The Role of Women in Karanga Society

The role of women in traditional Karanga society ensured her a much higher status than her European counterpart. She dominated all cultivating activities while the men were more concerned with pastoral activities (Bourdillon, M. 1991). She could also take a political role in society by occupying various crucial positions in government and ritual leadership such as the Great Wife (*vahosi*) or ritual sister or she could become a spirit medium (op.cit.). In light of this, and considering the woman's very important role as bearer of fertility for the tribe, it would appear that the term 'patriarchal', used to describe aspects of Shona society, might be misleading.

As we have seen, the woman's role and responsibility in traditional Karanga society is symbolised on a daily basis through everyday items such as cooking utensils, plates, pots, jars and baskets. This, it would appear, helps to validate her position in, and contribution to the family and society. In mythology, the woman's social and sexual roles (tending to the fields and begetting children) are also symbolised in the landscape through symbolic association connected to the woman's anatomy in the valley, mountains, caves and fields.

A further reason why uterus symbolism is so important in Karanga traditional society is that it is seen to be the 'place' where the family 'originates', the centre of fertility. When a mother dies, her spirit demands to be particularly recognised and honoured, as she was the one who gave life and created descendants for the family. Her influence as a centre of fertility carries on after death (Bourdillon 1991:32). The relatives through the family line of the woman are said to be " 'coming ultimately from the same womb' " (Bourdillon 1991:33).

By creating symbolic associations between the uterus and God's creation and with everyday items, the Karanga are able to honour the fertility role of women and great ancestral mother spirits.

Women and Fields uniting Biological and Cosmological Forces

The symbolic connections between a woman and a field are made explicit in every-day Karanga life through the symbolic associations identified in the tools used for tending a field. The *rusero* basket, used for winnowing and sifting symbolises sexual intercourse since the action involved in sifting soil is similar to the action of sexual intercourse. The *shandiro* basket has a similar identification. It is used to sow seeds onto a field and therefore is a symbol of sexual intercourse when a man 'sows' his 'seeds' onto the woman's uterus. The *dengu* basket is a large basket used to contain all the smaller baskets. It is therefore used to symbolise the *ambuya* (grandmother) for she is also large and has been sown by many seeds, (has had many children). This basket is also a symbol of the *ambuya* as a container of the whole tribe, for it contains all the baskets inside. The connection between the large and expansive nature of the *ambuya*'s uterus and the large baskets containing smaller baskets is very apparent (Aschwanden 1982:194-195).

Since ploughing and harvesting the fields is traditionally a woman's role in Karanga society, the field is interpreted as a symbol of female responsibility, or as a symbol of the woman herself and of the woman's genitalia or uterus. The connection between the uterus and the field originates in the tradition that both provide fertility and new life;

A girl can be called Mavhu, derived from ivhu (earth), and a girl's uterus is like a field...like the earth. By this, the old Karanga again wish to emphasise the significance of the earth as source of fertility and life, which always includes the efficacy of the ancestral spirits too (Aschwanden 1987:253).

The Karanga identify the uterus as a 'field' onto which many 'seeds' (male semen) will be sown. For this reason, the Karanga believe that the male seed is decisive and the child takes the totem-names of the father and not the mother. The uterus provides the place for the child to grow, but the semen provides the blood. The Karanga compare this to a farmer and his field; the field does not 'own' the crop growing from the seed, the farmer himself 'owns' the product, for he alone provided the seed. The field and the uterus are both seen as 'receivers' of the seed (Aschwanden 1982:6). The saying 'to plough a field' means to bear children and 'to rob a strange field' means to commit adultery (Aschwanden 1982:116). A pregnant wife is referred to as a 'greening field' where the field represents the woman's uterus (Aschwanden 1982:117). The seed of the field refers to the male seed (semen) planted in the field (uterus) of the woman.

The life-cycle of the woman's uterus is also symbolically connected to the life-cycle of nature where a young girl should start to menstruate for the first time only during the fertile rainy season. At this time, crops are 'opening up' and the fields are green and 'ripe'. Accordingly, this is seen as the most propitious time of the year for the girl's uterus to 'open up', since both processes are followed by fertility. Conversely, if a girl menstruates for the first time during the dry season, she is thought to be in danger of sterility, since a dry field is symbolic of a sterile woman. The uterus **becomes** a field and is **affected** by the seasons much in the same way as the field itself (Aschwanden 1982:82-83). However, it is not the forces within nature that are 'causing' the woman's menstruation. Symbolic connections are rarely causal. Instead, it is the forces that are **similar** in both processes of human and natural fertility that 'cause' the symbolisation. The life forces of the field and of the uterus imitate each other and become one. The uterus is not influenced by the field. Rather, the life forces of human fertility transmit outwards (op. cit.).

The following Karanga story relates these themes;

Story: The Eradication of Evil

There once lived a man and his wife in a certain wood. In the middle of this wood, they cultivated a field, in which a cave was hidden. It was very dark in the cave. No-one had ever entered it so far, and so nobody knew what was hidden in it.

In this cave, however, there lived an old woman who had but one tooth left and was called the thin old woman who tears children into pieces (*Varukweguru bande*). This woman was able to change

her whereabouts in a moment, and because she ate small children she was chased away everywhere.

One day the husband and wife sowed the field. The seeds began to sprout. But the old woman came out of the cave: she broke the stalks, and they all died. The owner of the field came out to do the weeding. He was horrified at seeing all the dead plants. Worried about his field, he wondered whether to sell it and buy another one.

But his wife advised him to see the hare instead and ask it where the evil had come from. He took her advice and went to see the hare. "What is the source of the evil?", he asked. The hare replied: "An old woman with only one tooth lives in the cave, and she is the source of the evil." "What must I do?" the man wanted to know. "This old woman has done evil to many people", replied the hare, "and I will, therefore, punish her forever, and with her also the baboons who have stolen my ground-nuts."

At that time the rocks and trees were still able to talk and move about. The hare brewed beer and invited the people, animals, stones and trees to the party. The baboons were given much beer so as to make them drunk. The hare then brought out a special medicine, and he cursed the stones so that they would bear no more children, and he ordered the trees to stop moving about. He then fetched the old woman from the cave and placed her under a big heavy stone. At this command the dogs were let loose. They at once chased the baboons and started to bite them. But the baboons climbed onto the trees and stones, to ride off on them. But neither trees nor stones obeyed their commands. So they had to realise that the hare had killed their mother. They fled. - Since then one can observe baboons turning over stone after stone: They are still searching for their mother who is buried under one of them. And since then also, no stone has moved about or given birth.

When the party was over, the man returned home. He sowed again, and this time there were no difficulties. He cropped and filled his grain bin with seeds (Aschwanden 1989:108-109).

The field here symbolises the man's wife while the wood is a symbol of his mother. The husband and wife sowing their field obviously refers to the act of procreation and the old woman who "breaks the shoots" refers to a problematic pregnancy resulting in a miscarriage;

The wilting of the plants means that the witch's spirit has "bitten" (killed) the child in the uterus and that therefore, the uterus miscarries (the whole field dies) (Aschwanden 1989:110).

The cave, being dark and mysterious and appearing in the middle of a field, represents the wife's conscience. Therefore, on a deep and phenomenological level, the cave is associated with the female psyche. The man returning to weed the field refers to his need to feed the child within the uterus with his semen.

This discussion sets the scene for our understanding of architectural symbolisation and how the Karanga themselves identify and use practical symbols. What is important here is the recognition that the

cosmological processes of nature and the biological role of women are very closely connected on a practical level.

***Mihombwe* as 'Furrows of the Field'**

While the male symbol of the horn is structurally expressed as stone monoliths at Great Zimbabwe, the furrows of a field, according to Huffman, are similarly expressed as architectural features called *mihombwe*, and are used as a metaphor for women and refer to the 'furrows of the field' (Huffman 1996:73). *Mihombwe* are described by Huffman as the vertical structural breaks in the stonework of a doorway, pillar, wall or bastion and appear at Great Zimbabwe around the wives' area and in the Great Enclosure (cf.: p.119). Garlake interprets these vertical grooves as symbolic only when they are used to support a monolith or when they are sited in "unusual" locations. He suggests that, where they appear at entrances, they were used as doorjambs and had no symbolic meaning (Garlake 1974). Huffman, however, sees the grooves as symbolic in all cases (Huffman 1986, 1996).

Since the field as a symbol of female responsibility and female genitalia is a strong recurring theme throughout Karanga mythology and everyday symbolic associations, it would appear that Huffman's interpretation of *mihombwe* may have some relevance. Extending this interpretation, the origin for the *mihombwe* symbolic structures may be sourced from mythology where fields symbolise the woman. They can also be found in the natural environment of Great Zimbabwe, where, particularly on the hill, large granite boulders have split down the centre, forming a *mihombwe* type pattern in the rock. It could be possible that the *mihombwe* structural breaks in the wall constructions at Great Zimbabwe were inspired by the naturally formed 'furrow' shaped splits in these boulders as well as from the mythological symbolic context of furrows of the field relating to the woman's biological and social roles. This influence of landscape features is similar to the way in which the Zimbabwe bird carvings may have been inspired by the 'Bird-rock' at the Eastern Enclosure (cf. pp.111, 112). The natural rock formations also strongly resemble female genitalia reminiscent of the sexually thematic landscapes (fields, furrows and valleys) symbolising female genitalia. This theme is prevalent in Karanga mythology. More evidence to support these ideas are provided in Part 5 of this study where the Great Enclosure is examined in terms of its possible relationship to cultivative ritual practices and ceremonies related to fertility of the fields, where the *mihombwe*, as 'furrows' of the field may refer to these rituals.

Huffman believes that, since the *mihombwe* in the Great Enclosure are concentrated around the entrance to the Parallel Passage and Tower Enclosure then this area represents the female entrance, and female side of the building. This presumed pattern of gender differentiated entrances aligns with his hypothesis of an initiation centre, since Venda initiation structures supposedly are characterised by male and female entrances (cf.:Part 1) (Huffman 1996:148). Furthermore, Huffman suggests that the opposite entry, constructed with symbolic towers on the interior of the wall buttresses (cf.: p.10) denote a 'male entrance', to align with his idea of *domba* (initiation) function.



Structural grooves in stone (*mihombwe*) representing the 'furrows of the field' (Author)
Upper, In the Valley Area. Lower, In the Great Enclosure and Parallel Passage
Upper Left; Monolith inserted into *mihombwe* indicates male and female paired symbolism.

However, in the interpretation based on mythology for this study, the stone towers are symbolic of grain bins, representing, within the same structure, both male and female characteristics (symbol of the womb storing seeds) of protection and fertility as well as the longevity of the ancestors. Such an interpretation (cf.: below) does not support an intention for strictly male entrance.

The prolific use of *mihombwe* around the entrance to the Parallel Passage may have a practical explanation, for this area accommodates many walls on which to construct *mihombwe* patterns, while the opposite entrance is devoid of such stone walling. It may therefore be more appropriate to assume that the *mihombwe* could identify an **entrance to a domain symbolic of female fertility** (especially if we consider an interpretation of the Great Enclosure as a house for the Great Wife), rather than specifically marking female entry. This theme could be compared to the way in which the towers are paired with monoliths at the Western Enclosure wall, indicating residence of the *mambo* (cf.: p.113).

Conical Towers

We can also use mythology to interpret a more extensive meaning for the conical towers at the Great Enclosure. In the story of The Eradication of Evil (cf.: 116), the field, as a symbol of the wife and of the uterus, is connected to the seeds of the field (the male semen) and this seems to unite male and female aspects, a common theme in Karanga mythology. This symbolism is possibly expressed at Great Zimbabwe in the Great Enclosure. Siting Shona ethnography, Huffman and Garlake interpret the conical towers at the Tower Enclosure as symbols of Karanga style grain bins used to store grain and crops of the fields and as symbols of tribute and authority. (Garlake, P. 1973; Huffman, T. 1996) (cf.: pp.66, 113).

Sourcing Karanga mythology, this interpretation could be extended. Aschwanden explains that the grain bin is a symbol of both male and female fertility (Aschwanden 1987:241). The conical towers, as symbolic grain bins, could symbolise the male seed providing crops for the people, as expressed in the story of The Eradication of Evil, where the man was able to 'fill his grain bin with seeds' (children). Since nature's fertility and woman's fertility are closely connected in the Karanga universe, the conical towers could then represent both the *mambo's* role of providing seeds for the people's fields as well as seed (semen) to provide crops (children) for his wives.

There is evidence to support this idea in Karanga tradition. When a man dies, his personal possessions such as his bow and arrows, his walking stick and his axe are placed inside the grain bin of a young pre-pubescent girl, until the bringing-home ceremony. The grain bin is a symbol of her virginal (clean) state and this has a 'protective' nature. While the dead man's artefacts represent his status and male responsibilities, the placement of them inside the woman's grain bin becomes a symbolic sexual act, and death is symbolised as sexual intercourse. Through ritual, the *mambo's* possessions are safeguarded within the grain bin, inside the symbolic womb, and this early stage of death is associated with the early stage of pregnancy. The dead man's possessions, protected within the grain bin, become symbolically associated with the embryo inside the womb (Aschwanden 1987:239f). The grain bin then, is symbolically associated with the female in this particular situation, and it might be appropriate to suggest that the conical towers at

Great Zimbabwe, as symbolic grain bins, refer to both male and female fertility and not just to male status as suggested by Huffman. They therefore represent the unity between the dualities of male and female.

The large Conical Tower would then become a significant symbol in the royal settlement, since the longevity of the *mambo*'s ancestry can only be provided by his children, through his wives. The large Conical Tower therefore provides a marker within the settlement of his family's longevity. This aspect is discussed further in Parts 4 and 5 in relationship to the centre of fertility at the *mutoro*-place (rain-shrine) ceremony.

Since in Karanga mythology, the field refers to the woman and the seeds of the field refer to the male semen, then the conical towers symbolise on a **cosmological** level the provision of crops for the people's fields and on a **biological** level, the provision of children for the royal family.

On a **cosmological** level, the conical tower could also refer to the might and strength of God, since he is often referred to as the "builder of towers." (Aschwanden 1989:206). God's creative power is then realised as being closely connected to human procreativity;

Builder of towers.

You stamped your foot on the rock, and the earth filled with dust.

You are the stone from which the mist rises when one stirs the water.

You are a vessel flowing over with oil,

Iron needle which did not sew up the skin but is there to sew up the earth.

It has sewn together the sky and the clouds, as one stitches together skins.

Tovera, you are great, you who give birth, you creator,

Rain-maker, you who have poured oil over the earth from the sky.

You are the first who has ever been there.

Karanga Praise Hymn dedicated to the God of fertility (Aschwanden 1989:206).

The ancestors of Great Zimbabwe, as builders of towers (conical towers at the Great Enclosure and stone towers at the *mambo*'s residence) are associated with God, (*Tovera*), as the ultimate "builder of towers". The conical towers are therefore a symbol of the power and strength of the founding fathers and of the creativity of God. **The conical towers therefore express the multivocality of Karanga symbolism for they bring together in one structure the significance of the ancestors, God, (cosmological), fertility, and the social and biological roles of men and women.**

10 Blood and Fertility as Symbols of the Person (*Munhu*)

Blood and fertility are the two most important symbols in the Karanga universe, and both represent the human (*munhu*). They are also the most prevalent symbols in Karanga mythology since, through fertility, the blood of the ancestors is continued and the union of blood and fertility, symbolised in the child, represents the union between sacred and profane, between God and man and between man and woman. The uterus, as the 'container' of the child and of the male 'seed' (semen) is therefore seen as carrier and provider of this unity. Symbols of blood and fertility are used to protect the individual, the clan, the community, and the physical environment against the danger of real infertility (Aschwanden 1987:59f). Blood is seen as the 'bond' which ensures the continuity between the living and the ancestral spirits. Because blood connects the individual directly with the dead, it is regarded as sacred and as such raises individual human life above the profane level. Blood symbolises the ancestral spirits, the *vadzimu*, and is considered to actually be the ancestral spirits. The Karanga will talk about his blood being his ancestors, and of the totem-names that carry this blood between the ancestors and the living. The expression; "Blood is fertility, life, my tribe, my children, even my *vadzimu* (ancestors) are in my blood", refers to this theme (Aschwanden 1982:53).

Fertility itself is the most important aspect of Karanga physical and spiritual worlds for, through evidence of fertility, an individual is able to achieve immortality (Aschwanden 1989:60).

The connection between blood and fertility is also presented by the embryo, for it is seen as containing the seeds (semen, fertility) of the father as well as the blood of the parents and the two are seen as inseparable. This is why the old Karanga say that 'life starts with blood' meaning that an embryo starts first with the blood (semen) of the father and blood (*mafundu*) of the mother. Consequently, the embryo in Karanga traditional society is considered sacred and close to God because the embryo is the unity between blood and fertility, or between man and God (Aschwanden 1982:22-23);

One only becomes an individual if one's own ego is absorbed entirely in the community and if one performs the duties imposed upon the individual by blood (ancestors) and fertility. A newborn child has all the characteristics of a human being: it has a body and a God-given soul. But it will not have an ego until it has begotten children and thus has ensured that its name has been perpetuated (Aschwanden 1982: 301).

Without children, the Karanga individual is not able to become a *mudzimu* (ancestral spirit) after death. His fertility becomes a symbol of his ego. The child, as symbol of the fertility and longevity of the tribe, also becomes a symbol of his ego, and the most important connection between man and his ancestors. Children are therefore revered and protected in traditional Karanga society.

The source of blood is the heart and this is connected with the uterus, for just as the heart is seen as the source of man's blood, the uterus is seen as the source of man's fertility.

As a site for the renewal of man to take place, the uterus symbolises man's direct connection to his family's ancestors and to his own *vadzimu*. Conceptually, the experience in the space, form and structure of the

Great Enclosure may be compared to this aspect of Karanga life. The symbolic content of the Great Enclosure appears to refer to this symbolic identity between blood and fertility and the ancestral world. The processional entry into the Great Enclosure may even be seen as similar to the entrance into the spiritual world (Tower Enclosure), as though entering the centre of fertility;

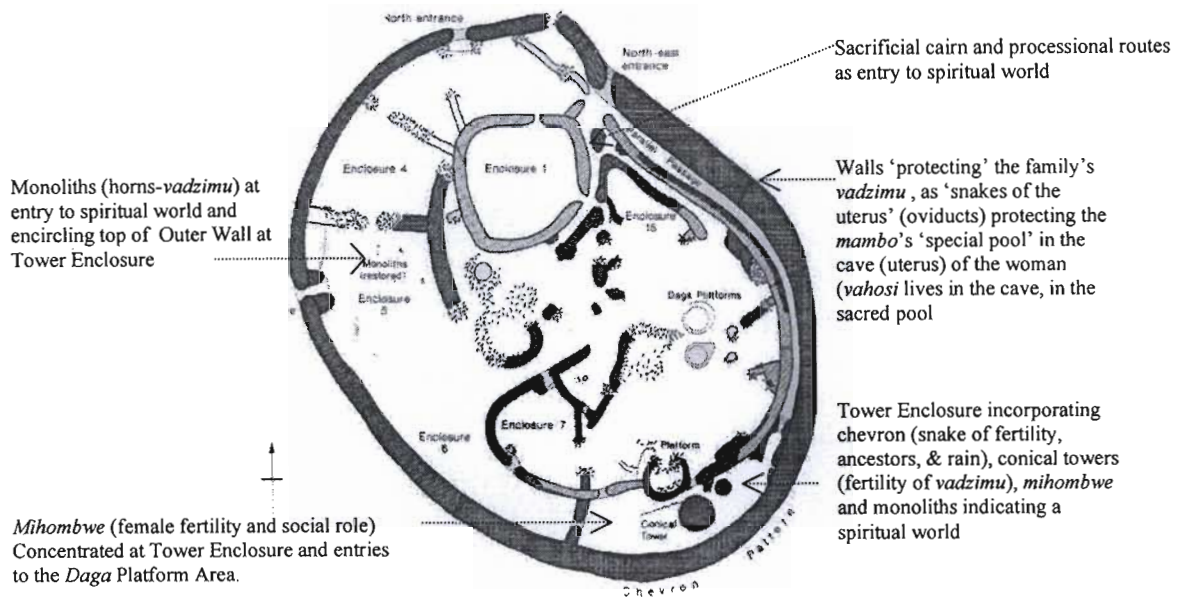


Figure 3.7; Protective walls and symbolic content of the Great Enclosure possibly similar to the theme of “protecting” the child as symbol of the ancestors (*vadzimu*) and entrance to the spiritual world.

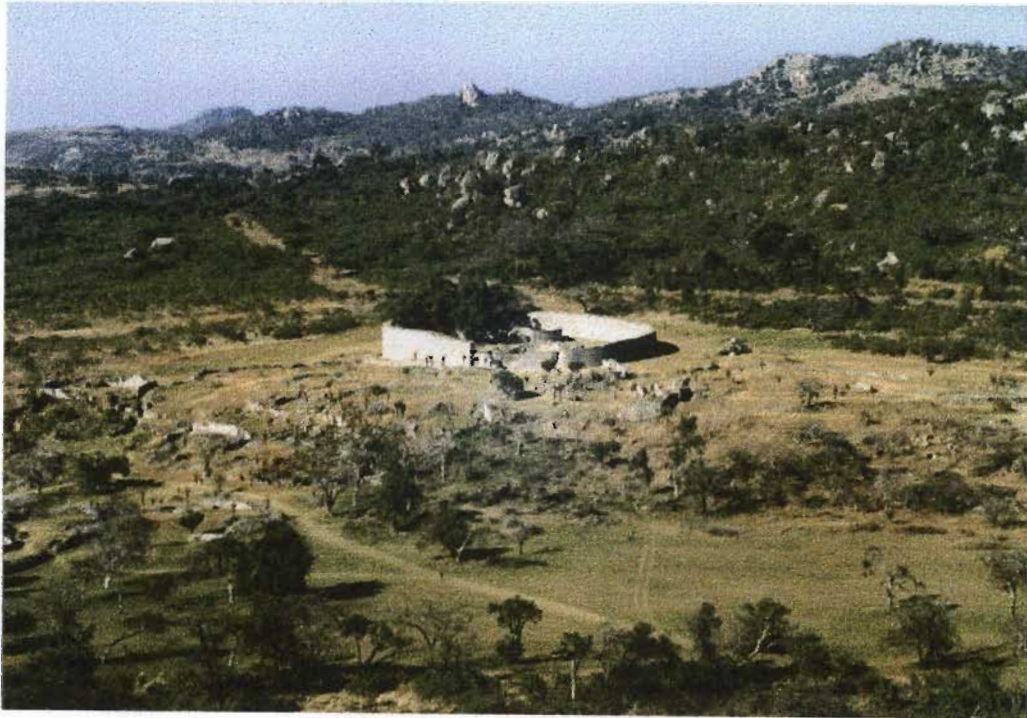
The study will continue to return to this idea, and more substantial examinations develop this observation when the study considers the Great Enclosure as a possible site for cultivative ceremonial practices and as a *mutoro*-place (rain shrine) and therefore as a thematic centre for fertility, or ‘uterus of the earth’.

The importance of both blood and fertility is also manifested in traditional Karanga sacrifices where special reference to the fertility and longevity of the ancestors is inculcated in traditional ceremonies of blood sacrifice and supplication. Blood and fertility are united through symbolic association and ritual activity at the centre of fertility - the *mutoro*-place. This aspect is discussed in depth in Part 5.

This part of the study has examined the important symbols and their meanings in traditional Karanga life and has provided interpretations of the stone symbolic structures at Great Zimbabwe based on these. The study will continue to extend and interrelate the meanings of these stone symbols as more themes from mythology and ritual are explored. Part 4 provides a comparative analysis between the symbolic associations presented here and the settlement dynamics of the Great Zimbabwe symbolic landscape.

PART FOUR

SETTLEMENT DYNAMICS
AS EXPRESSION OF THE
MYTHOLOGY
OF THE REGION



*It appears that there is a certain point in the mind
where from life and death,
reality and imaginary, past and future,
the communicable and the incommunicable
cease to be perceived in a contradictory way
(Breton, A. in Tschumi, B. 1997: 71).*



(Author, oil on wood, adapted from works by Trevor Pye, NZ artist)

*While psychologists and physicists have rediscovered and then accepted the reality of the unconscious, and then with difficulty integrated the concept into their personal and professional world views, architecture lags behind...
Symbolic architecture is based on principles which extend beyond formal rules, because they tap into the unconscious and mythic layers of being, and activate higher spiritual qualities...
It is essential to define the meaning of the word 'sacred' as applied to architecture.
Sacred Architecture can mean many different things.
'Sacred Architecture' is usually defined as a building or monument which has a religious function or uses the vocabulary of forms consistent with religious practice.
The architecture I consider sacred is that which has a common root in the life of the soul and spiritual vision, rather than merely in forms which qualify as being religious.
I am therefore more concerned with symbolism and meaning in architecture than with its aesthetics...
The spiritual is the active, dynamic aspect of the psyche, which is independent of forms, and yet is an essence which seeks expression in and through the world, always invested in forms. Those forms into which spiritual energy flow reflect a sense of the divine, and a science of such forms has developed throughout history, a science based on symbolism...
(Mann, A.T. 1993:10-14.)*

1 Introduction

This part of the study discusses the expressive symbolic aspects of settlement dynamics at Great Zimbabwe. Symbolic values sourced from Karanga mythology examined in Part 3 are applied to an understanding of the “larger scale expressions of symbolic values” of the royal settlement (Sinclair P. 1987:159). The following observations made by Sinclair are explored, where discussion centres on the dualistic nature of political and religious leadership, united through mountain symbolism, as well as the Karanga relationships between God, man and nature and the influence this consciousness may have had on settlement pattern;

...the need for systematic field studies on the symbolic aspects of Shona culture is clearly apparent...it would be interesting to consider the possibility that dualistic forms of secular and religious organisation and the accompanying micro-scale forms of symbolic expression are integral parts of or responses to more general evolutionary processes of state formation...one might expect such aspects of material culture as architectural style and settlement layout, organisation and decorative motifs as well as a choice of subsistence needs to be strongly influenced...larger scale expressions of symbolic values...exist in the expressions of kingship and power...Further illustrations might include the associations of the granite mountains found throughout the plateau margins with the widespread distributions of stone buildings. The mythology of the region has been little considered from this point of view (Sinclair, P. 1987:159).

The study outlines how the process of political and religious leadership formation and the tradition of honouring the ancestors created the need to represent the authority and omnipotence of the great royal ancestors with symbolic structures in stone. These symbolic structures further validated the existence and longevity of political / religious leadership, where the power of the architecture assisted the formation of the *mambo*'s power and its associated macro-scale symbolic expressions.

Mythology is used to source the meaning of “larger scale symbolic expressions” in Karanga consciousness and this assists an understanding of the symbolic meaning of the landscape of Great Zimbabwe. The study is therefore intended to follow Sinclair's suggestion that the mythology of the region be considered as a source for understanding symbolic expressions of settlement pattern.

The smaller scale aspects of symbolic structure such as the 3-dimensional symbols in stone and the structural wall patterns, as introduced in Part 3, further correspond to the mythological context. This part of the study reveals that a contextualised and lively language of symbol identification corresponds to a powerfully compelling landscape and the mythology of the region. It will also be revealed that the landscape and architecture of Great Zimbabwe express in stone what mythology narrates in words, where symbolic language becomes the expressive device integrating mythology with architecture.

2 Karanga Religious Consciousness

‘Mwari ari kure kudenga kumusoro-soro, asi ari pedo nesu’

God is far away in the sky, but he is with us too

(Aschwanden 1989:210).

This chapter examines the nature of the Karanga God (Mwari), the Karanga interpretation of their universe and the relationship between the Karanga people and their God. An attempt will be made to analyse Great Zimbabwe settlement dynamics based on this understanding and upon the understanding of Karanga symbolism as outlined in Part 3 of this study.

The basic tenet of traditional Karanga religion is that God exists both in the sky and on earth simultaneously. There is therefore an aspect of God that is **distant** and an aspect of God that is **close**. The notion that God’s presence is experienced in all things on earth and yet, having divine power, he is also elusive and far away, implies that a separation between God and God’s creation, (nature, man) does not exist and that God’s divine creation and man’s biological creativity are closely connected in traditional Karanga consciousness. Aschwanden refers to this notion;

The divine creation of the world is, in the Karanga’s symbolical representations, so closely connected with human biological phenomena that any dichotomy between sacred and profane appears out of place (Aschwanden 1989:13).

This part of the study explores how this consciousness reflects the *mambo*’s ambiguous position of being both a divine and secular ruler at the same time.

Strict dichotomies between sacred and profane phenomena in the Karanga universe are seen as problematic since opposing elements represent the separation of God from man. The story of the original separation of God from the earth, caused by man’s sin and alienation from God, is related in the Karanga myths of creation. This alienation of man from God caused the separation of the earth and the sky and led to the death of man. The traditional Karanga strive to overcome this alienation through symbolic associations. This consciousness reflects the way that the rulers of Great Zimbabwe were able to overcome the ambiguous nature of sacred and profane leadership through symbolic associations, many of which are architected in stone such as the snake patterns, monoliths, *mihombwe*, towers and birds.¹

Leaders were also able to overcome the separation of God from man through connection to the ancestors (guardian spirits, owners of the land) as intercessory beings between God and man.

Many of the Karanga myths and stories, particularly the creation myths, narrate this desire for unity between man and God. The following creation myth explains the original separation of God from the earth and from man;

¹ Many of these structures have dichotomous symbolic values associated in the same symbol, or dual qualities are conveyed by pairing two symbolic structures together. These have been outlined in Part 3.

Myth: The Creation of the Earth and of Man

One day, God (Mwari) put Musikavanhu into a deep sleep then let him drop from the sky. While he fell Musikavanhu awoke and, in the distance, saw a white stone also dropping from the sky with great speed.

God ordered Musikavanhu to point a finger at this stone. Musikavanhu obeyed, and the stone stopped. Musikavanhu began to fly towards the stone, and the closer he got to it the bigger the stone became, and finally he could no longer see where it finished on either side. Musikavanhu fell softly onto the stone, and the first place his feet touched softened and emitted water. Touching the stone, Musikavanhu heard God's voice coming from it. This place became the stone of the pool (mabwe adziva, today called Matopos), a place venerated and regarded as sacred by the Karanga.

Musikavanhu was bored and began to wander about. When night fell he sat down near the stone from which God had spoken, and slept. He had a dream: he saw the birds in the air, and many animals on the Earth who were jumping from stone to stone. - When Musikavanhu awoke he was very surprised to see that all he had just dreamt had become reality.

God told Musikavanhu what he was allowed to eat, and what food was forbidden. He was free to eat vegetables, and fruit from the trees, but not to kill and eat animals. The animals were not allowed to eat each other either.

One day, while Musikavanhu slept, a snake crept over his loins and left its marks. When he woke up he was overcome by a strange feeling, he had trouble breathing and his penis moved like a snake. A voice told him: "Go to the pool, and the pain will pass". On his way there he saw a beautiful girl sitting on a stone near the pool. She looked like him but she could neither speak nor move.

Again Musikavanhu heard the voice, and it said: "Touch her with your hand". He did, and the girl came to life, and a snake moved across her loins too. She was overcome by the same emotions as Musikavanhu. And this is why a man has a strange feeling when he touches a woman's body.

Again the voice spoke and told Musikavanhu to be kind to his wife, and to all the animals too. He was also to set aside one day a month for the honour of God.

When Musikavanhu had completed the tasks set by God he had to return to heaven. Before he went he told his children to observe God's laws, or God would punish them.

People lived in peace for a long, long time. They were happy and there was no war. However, one day Musikavanhu's children got drunk and became proud. They told the animals and the other people: "God is dead and one of us will be God". - God's voice warned them, but because of their pride, they could no longer hear it. God then became angry and cursed the Earth. Thus the sea's water became salty, the land let thorns grow and

dried up. During the rainy season the rivers swept away many people, and crocodiles appeared in the waters. The sun became hot, and the animals began to eat one another and attack men. And men started killing each other.

(Aschwanden 1989:31-32.)

This myth describes the creative power of God, the procreativity of man, (symbolised in the pond corresponding to the woman's uterus) and of man's sins causing his death and the alienation of God from the earth (op.cit.). Because of man's "pride", he could no longer hear "God's voice" and so God retaliated by causing the earth to dry up and causing man's death. Through nature, man is able to witness God's presence. The following myth also relates this recurring theme and presents the life-giving relationship between man and God, through nature;

Myth: The Tree that Touches the Sky

When God had completed the world he embellished it. He loved his work so much that he said: "I want a tree to grow out of the earth, which will provide shade for us and will never die".

God let the tree grow, and it grew so tall that its branches reached up to the sky. In the top of the tree there lived a snake which helped the tree bear fruit. This snake used to live inside a large rock in a sacred mountain.

Whenever God visited his people he came down to Earth by way of this tree. And whenever men wanted something from God they climbed up the tree.

Before the onset of the rainy season, men offered rain sacrifices at the foot of the tree. But then they ceased to obey God's laws. The Earth became dry and let thorns grow. Because there was no rain, the snake returned to its rock in the sacred mountain. The tree died, the worm had got into it. (Aschwanden 1989:34-35.)

The tree, in this myth, becomes a symbol of the physically close relationship man once had with God, the tree becoming the vehicle for contacting God. The snakes symbolise the fertility of nature and man, given by God. (cf.: Part 3, Chapter 5; Snakes as Symbols of Ancestors and Fertility.)

Although God is distant, the Karanga experience his presence in his creation, in man and in nature. Man and nature are therefore seen as genuine symbols of God. Consequently, a strong division between God and God's creation does not exist;

The essence of the person of God...is clothed in a contradiction, for the Karanga say: "God has no body, that is the reason why we do not see him - but God has a body because he speaks, hears, sees and loves". By clinging to the contradiction, I imagine, the Karanga intend to point out that God can overcome all opposites because, as they say, with God nothing is impossible (Aschwanden 1989: 211 & 214).

Since God is distant (in the Sky), and close (on Earth), simultaneously, the sacred and the profane are very closely connected and often indistinguishable - any contradiction between the sacred and the profane can only be comprehended at a higher level by, or through, God. This may reflect a higher level of consciousness in traditional Karanga thinking;

It appears that there is a certain point in the mind wherefrom life and death, reality and imaginary, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable cease to be perceived in a contradictory way (Breton, A. in Tschumi, B. 1997: 71).

This “certain point in the mind” is attainable in Karanga consciousness, through dynamic and active spatio-symbolic associations. Consequently, the nature of God is convoluted and complex and this sustains his potent mysticism and power.

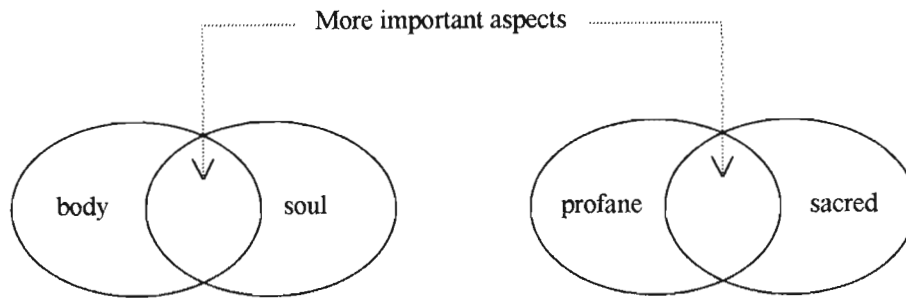
The important aspect here is that the traditional Karanga, through ritual and symbolism, strive to reunite God with man in order to overcome the original separation as presented in their myths of creation. Because of this, there does not exist in Karanga symbols, a distinct separation between opposing symbolic structures. The edges between the sacred and the profane in Karanga mythology and material culture are purposely blurred. The sacred and the profane are interwoven, as part of the same fabric, for strict separation between such phenomena would present the problem of the separation of God from the earth and from man.;

The Karanga firmly believe that God really did live on Earth for a time...However, God is on Earth symbolically too, and this leads to the sacred and the profane (an entirely Western distinction) being closely connected. This is clearly contained in the expression: “God’s breath is the symbol of man’s seeds”. This connection is expressed very distinctly in the myth of the tree that reached up to the sky (Aschwanden 1989:42).

Human biological phenomena, such as fertility, procreation, life and death, pregnancy and childbirth are closely connected with God’s creativity and the sacred places of the Karanga cosmological world such as the stone of the pool at the cave in the Matopo-mountains.

This aspect of Karanga thinking is presented in their understanding of the body (profane) and the soul (sacred). The two entities form a greater reality in their union than they do separately. A strong division between God and his creation therefore does not exist, and the fact that **there is an aspect of God that is near and an aspect of God that is distant is the basic tenet of all Karanga mythology, symbolism and ritual.**

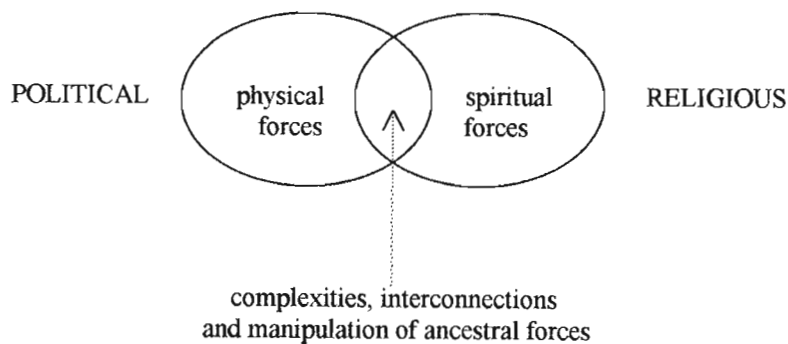
In a similar way, the two concepts of body and soul are fused into one entity in order to avoid a complete separation. While there is an understanding that the body and the soul are separate entities, a complete separation does not exist. While the traditional Karanga may at times realise the separate natures of a profane and sacred world, they do not perceive their religious world as though it contained two discretely separate areas. The sacred and the profane worlds merge to create a complete universe (Aschwanden 1982:56).



... one might say that there is a duality in the unity. We asked the Karanga: "Why two?" From their answers we saw that there were two aspects which seemed important to them. Man is created...by two beings: God creates (or gives) the soul, the parent begets the body. The Karanga say that God wanted man to participate in his work, and they use the statement... "We help each other with the help of the creator". The second interpretation reflects a mixture of mythological and biological ideas. God intended man to have body and soul so that people could see each other... The united whole of body and soul is greater and more valuable to the Karanga than each part as such. On the basis of this idea, an idea supported by the evidence of their myths, the Karanga imagine God as a being that also has a body (Aschwanden 1982: 315-316).

It is through the process of symbolisation, identifying profane biological phenomena with sacred creativity, that the otherwise dualistic nature of the body and the soul is resolved. We have seen this idea expressed in the Karanga interpretation of the uterus as symbol of the 'sacred pool' in the cave of the mountains, where human (biological) fertility is raised to a sacred level through association with God's creativity of the cave and mountain. The dualities of God and man's creation are united through symbolic association.

This idea is also reflected in the relationship between the dualistic roles of the *mambo*. Divine leadership cannot be separated from secular roles of the state. Secular leadership cannot exist on its own, just as male and female, sacred and profane and body and soul cannot exist independently. Furthermore, it is the power associated with the early rulers that enabled them to manipulate ancestral forces in favour of a balance between sacred and profane roles;



The legendary power of early members of the chiefly families is further expressed in the belief that their spirits remain the powerful guardians of the chiefdom. They are believed to continue their rule through the chiefs, their successors whom they protect and support... The early chiefs are associated with extraordinary power, whether it came from natural leadership, cunning, a 'knowledge' of 'medicines' or, as is most usual, a combination of these (Bourdillon 1991:104).

This part of the study examines this consciousness as an origin for the possible expression of a duality within a unity in the settlement dynamics of Great Zimbabwe where opposing phenomena are spatially united by symbolic structures.

The important integrative nature of the relationship between sacred and profane values and the manipulation of interconnections between spiritual and physical forces in Karanga consciousness should not be overlooked. Part 1 of this study documented criticism offered by Huffman's colleagues of his interpretive grid and the application of it as a 'master plan' model over various Zimbabwe stone settlements. The two dimensional application of this model enabled Huffman to interpret cognitive structures such as sacred and profane, front and back, left and right as being always diametrically opposed. Such a model tends to overlook the connections and integrative forces between the physical and the spiritual worlds (a typically African cultigen) and between opposing structures in favour of the typically structuralist concern with dualistic phenomena (cf.: Part 1 Chapter 8; Part 2 p.53; Part 3 Chapter 5). James Denbow criticises this approach;

Huffman's handling of the relationship between spiritual and worldly power is, however, sometimes naive and results in misleading interpretations. He completely misses the point, for instance, when he argues (p. 43) that rain-making amongst the Shona was cosmologically different from other societies because, for them, it was "caused by powerful ancestors, not powerful medicines"...The distinction is not...between spiritually endowed 'sacred kings', on the one hand, and 'profane' ones on the other. Both must be able to manipulate ancestral forces to their benefit while at the same time neutralising the leveling effects of jealousy and witchcraft. Such interconnections between physical and spiritual forces are overlooked. (Denbow, J. 1997 in SAAB 166:128).

An analysis of Karanga material culture based on making distinctions between spatio-religious dichotomies such as sacred and profane, left and right, up and down, male and female, is therefore limited, since it is the realignment of and union between such presumed opposing cosmological and biological phenomena that influences the potency of the phenomena themselves. While opposites do exist, it is the connection between them that is important. This aspect of Karanga consciousness is clearly expressed in the following Karanga phrases regarding the essence and nature of the Karanga God;

'The body and soul are separate yet only one.'

'God (Mwari) is water, he is wind and earth, he is everything, and there is no division: God is in all things, and God is far, far away.' (Aschwanden 1989: 20).

The Karanga religious world is in fact very different from the Western religious world where the sacred and the profane are purposely separated. Religion is a daily occurrence in Karanga life as in most of traditional Africa and is realised through complex religio-symbolic associations with everyday commonplace objects and activated through rituals.² This concept allows the Karanga to identify on a personal and practical level with his God and his ancestors. The close connection between the God of everyday life and God the creator means that the notion that man is part of God becomes an everyday experience.

The concept that God is in all things yet far away presents an ambiguity that indicates the dialectic nature of Karanga ideology;

The complexity of the Karanga God-image...results from, among other things, the contradictoriness inherent in Karanga ideology, if considered from an analytical point of view. This contradictoriness is not, however, based on a logical inconsequence but reflects basic Karanga thinking: their dialectic thinking, which comprehends the contradictoriness in its opposition in order to overcome it at a higher level...Thus the Karanga speak of a God who is distant and close simultaneously (Aschwanden 1989: 210).

This notion of 'comprehending a contradictoriness in its opposition' is a key aspect to the interpretation of Karanga mythology, for the understanding of a symbol is made possible by the comprehension of its relationship to its seemingly contradictory object. This appears to be the basic spatialisation of Karanga consciousness; that the relationship within the opposition allows a comprehension or resolution of the contradiction. This relationship provides a higher level of symbolic reality through a "mutual impact of opposites" (Maclagan 1977:17). For example, the grain bin is symbolic of male genitalia and male fertility (providing seeds (semen) for the crops (children) of the fields (wives) for the people) as well as of the female uterus (cf.: Part 3, Chapter 9).

Within the one symbol there is therefore a unity between contradictory aspects. The architecture narrates in stone this basic tenet of Karanga wisdom, of combining and therefore comprehending the contradiction.

This consciousness is apparent in the architecture of the Hill Complex where the dialectic nature of natural boulders and man-made walls come together in a unified integrated style (cf.: p.145). The architecture could therefore be seen as a language narrating this consciousness.

An ambiguous and convoluted architecture also connects the Western Enclosure (*mambo* - secular) and the Eastern Enclosure (spirit mediums – spiritual). This architecture may reflect not only the interactive relationship between sacred and secular leadership but also the idea of comprehending the contradiction between secular, physical forces and sacred, religious forces, through the relationship between the two aspects of leadership. We shall see that the landscape also expresses this idea as well as the relationship between man, God and nature.

² Refer to Part 3, Chapters 7 & 9, which discusses the symbolic values associated with everyday items such as the calabash, jars, cooking pots, spoons, plates, and baskets.

3 Karanga Interpretation of Dualities

‘Imbwa mbiri hadzitorerwi nyama’: *Meat cannot be taken away from two dogs.*

‘Kuwanda huuya / kwakatorambwa nomuroyi’: *To be many is good: but it is disliked by a witch.*

Explanation and Application: *You will enjoy a good measure of security if you have a wide range of friends and relatives. They are the best life insurance.*

‘Kuturika denga remba / kubatirana’: *To put the roof onto the walls of a hut needs joining hands.*

Explanation and Application: *Many tasks are just impossible to fulfil unless people unite in a common effort.*

Shona Proverbs. (Hamutyinei 1987: 323-324.)

Dualities Unified Through Symbolic Association

Western interpretation has overlooked the aspect of unity between opposing phenomena in Karanga religion, since the Karanga concept of God and an understanding of Karanga consciousness, (and therefore the consciousness of the creators of Great Zimbabwe), has not been previously considered. Close connections between opposites are vital in the Karanga universe in order to sustain man’s direct relationship with God, and to overcome the original separation of God from the earth. An understanding of this aspect of Karanga consciousness provides the possibility for a new perspective on our understanding of Great Zimbabwe.

The ground of creation is thus the middle, between all opposites...it is the mutual impact of opposites that is the motive force of creation (Maclagan 1997:17).

This dissertation has previously briefly discussed the problems resulting from translating Karanga symbols as signs, and from directly assigning gender distinctions and polarities to structural wall patterns (cf.: Part 3, Chapter 5). While there are clearly male and female characteristics in many architectural symbols at Great Zimbabwe, opposing gender characteristics are often either combined in one symbol, (for example in the conical towers), or are placed alongside each other within the same enclosure or area (*mihombwe* with monoliths or towers with monoliths). We have seen that the conical towers at the Great Enclosure incorporate both male and female symbolic attributes and, in a broader interpretation, they symbolise the ancestors themselves (cf.: Part 3, Chapter 9). Another example is presented by the stone monoliths and chevron pattern situated on the top of the outer wall at the Great Enclosure (cf.: p.87). The monoliths represent male characteristics of protection and male fertility and appear to form a **combined symbolic theme** with the chevron pattern underneath, representing the puff-adder, symbol of the fertility of women and of the protection of the ancestors. The monoliths inserted into the *mihombwe* at the entrance to the Tower Enclosure also express male and female symbolism **within the same structure**.

It would appear that the combined presentation of male and female symbolism provides a theme of unity, a theme expressed throughout Karanga mythology, since it is only through the union between a man and a woman, symbolised by the child, that ancestral longevity is achieved. A similar situation is presented in the story of Chamasango where the horn, usually a symbol of male genitalia, becomes a symbol of female internal genitalia (cf.: p.106).

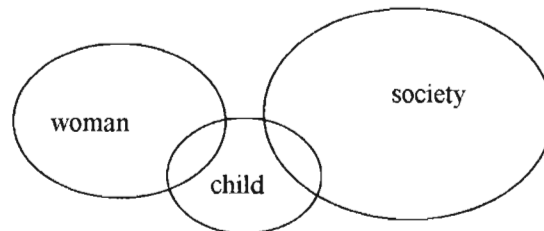
Often, the emphasis of gender characteristics of a symbolic association will be manifested according to the context, rendering problematic any assumption about gender exclusivity. This is an important aspect in our understanding of the symbolic content of Great Zimbabwe. The various combined male and female attributes associated with stone symbols within a unifying structure at the Great Enclosure could be influenced by the desire for a reference to the union between man and woman, a central theme in Karanga symbolic thinking.

We have seen that the child, in Karanga life, is a very important symbol of the union between a husband and wife for, without a child, their bond is socially unrecognised. A woman in Karanga society is not accepted as part of the husband's family until she produces a child, nor is she socially recognised;

...breeness on the part of the wife, or her early death before she has given birth to many children, is regarded as failure by her family to fulfil their side of the contract... On the birth of children to the lineage, she acquires standing within it, which grows when her children marry and produce grandchildren for her... her social standing depends on her being an influential person within her own lineage and the ancestor of a growing group of descendants (Bourdillon 1991: 47f).

The child is then a symbol of her security within the community. The Karanga say: " 'child and mother are of course two persons, but they are one.' " (Aschwanden 1982:271.) The child symbolises then not only the union between man and woman but also between woman and society.

The architecture of the Great Enclosure, sited on the edge of the wives residential area, who represent the *mambo's fuma*, (*mambo's* wealth, children) may be compared to this union the child establishes between the woman and society;



This arrangement may itself be reflected spatially in the settlement pattern of central Great Zimbabwe in terms of the siting of the Great Enclosure, the *dare* (social court) and the wife's area;

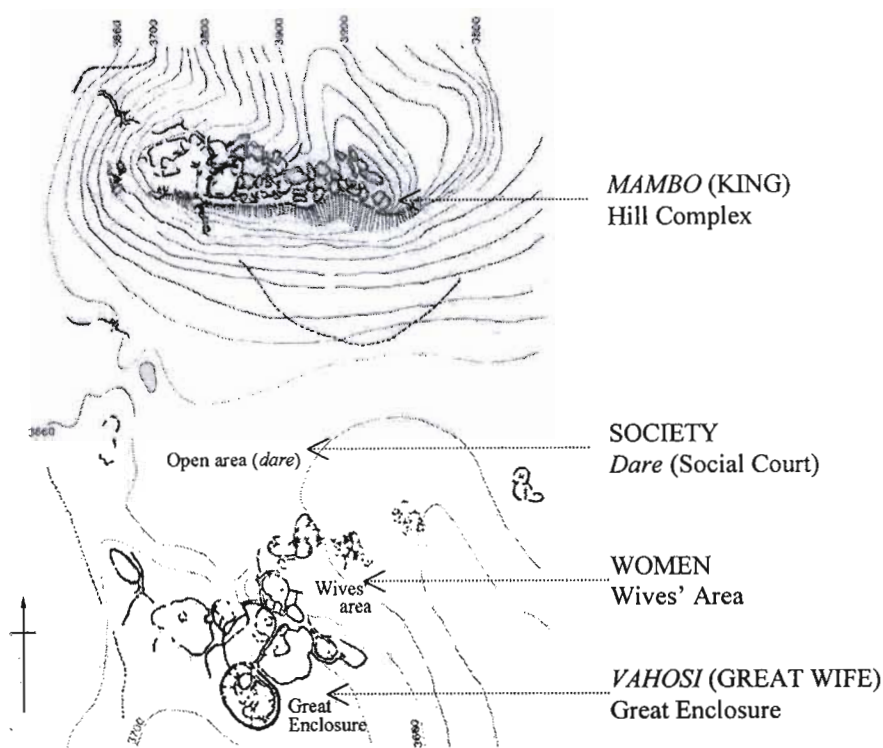


Figure 4.1; Plan of Central Great Zimbabwe and the possible symbolic siting of the *dare* (social court) between the Hill Complex and the Great Enclosure (Adapted from Garlake 1974:18).

A similar union can be seen in the interpretation of the conical towers. The field as a symbol of the woman and the field's seeds as a symbol of man unite, through an association with nature, the man and the woman. A pregnant woman must not open pots or grain bins around her house, for this would symbolise a premature birth, where the opening of the grain bin or the pot represents the opening of her uterus (Aschwanden 1982:284). While a grain bin is a symbol of the male scrotum containing seeds providing for the woman's fields, it also becomes a symbol of the field, the woman's uterus itself, and the ensuing growth and fertility issuing from the union between the man and woman.

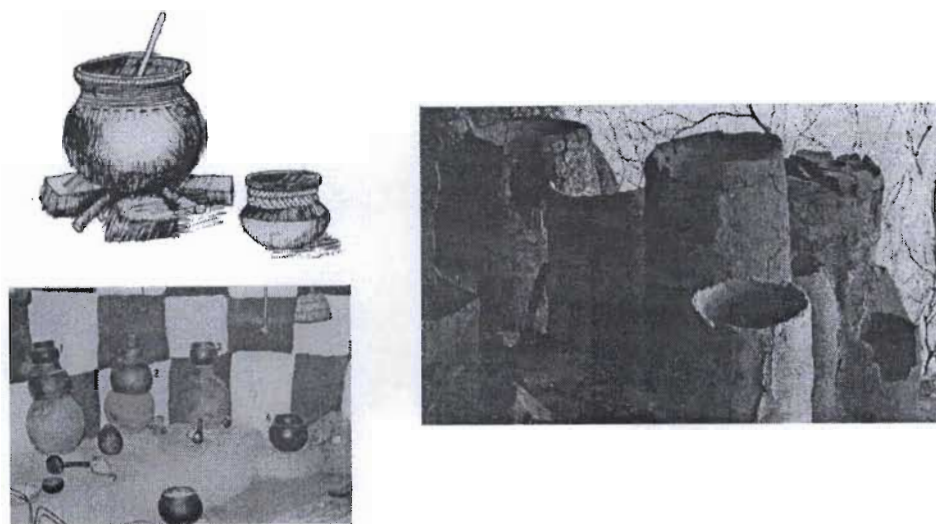
While the conical tower (as symbolic grain bin) at one level symbolises male genitalia, it also symbolises the female uterus.

The conical towers then, as symbolic grain bins, present a union between gender symbols and combines both male and female aspects of symbolisation. Furthermore, there are two conical towers, one outsized tower and one much smaller and more squat tower. Together, they seemingly represent a combined theme. Huffman suggests that they refer to male and female status respectively and were tools in the teaching of initiates at *domba* (initiation school) instruction.

Sourcing Karanga mythology and symbolic consciousness, Huffman's interpretation can be extended by seeing the combined theme of stone towers as representative of the unity between male and female fertility and male and female social and religious roles. This would align with the symbolic associations prevalent

in Karanga mythology and symbolism and the combined theme of male and female gender within one symbol, as discussed in Part 3.

In an all-embracing interpretation, the conical towers can be seen as ‘containers’ (uterus) of the male seed.



And if there is a connection between love and ornament, that is because that jar is the symbol of the world's womb (Griaule 1965 in Tzonis 1972: 51).

Figure 4.2; Examples of Karanga ‘containers’ uniting male and female symbolic associations. (Upper left; Garlake 1983. Lower; Bourdillon 1991. Right; Garlake 1974.)

This same idea is expressed in the symbolism of a cooking pot, which becomes the uterus containing fertility. The stick stirring the pot is the male phallus penetrating the uterus. The bench of the family altar is also a male symbol and this is combined with the jars as symbol of the woman. In Part 5, the study returns to this idea and discusses the possibility that the towers were constructed to honour the male and female and/or greater and lesser founding ancestors of Great Zimbabwe.

The Karanga also believe that while the parents create the body, God creates the soul and these two entities are separate, yet only one. It is this assistance from God, in the creation of human life that raises the procreative act to a sacred level. Since nature is a symbol also of God's creation, then the symbolisation of the grain bin containing seeds for the field also raises the symbolic association above the profane level.

Since it is the unity between opposites such as man and woman, and man and God, which plays the more significant role in Karanga mythology and symbolism, then it is possible that Great Zimbabwe stone symbols and spatial relationships could be interpreted based on this theme.

Criticism of Structuralist Approach

The method by which Great Zimbabwe has been analysed has often been based on defining distinct opposites between sacred and profane and between male and female areas by attributing such areas with back and front, and right and left respectively.

	FEMALE	MALE		FEMALE	MALE
LIFE FORCES	////// (crocodiles)	~~~~~ (snakes)	LIFE FORCES	Stepped platform	Stone towers
STATUS	<<< (snakes)	■■■■■ (mountain)	STATUS	<i>Mihombwe</i>	Ivory tusks and vertical ridges
SECURITY	———— (pool)	mountain	SECURITY	Charms	Monoliths

Figure 4.3; “Gender divisions of the three dimensions.” (Huffman 1997:114-115.)³

Huffman has adapted and extended Adam Kuper’s original symbolic model of the Great Enclosure to derive a cognate spatial pattern for all of the *dzimbahwe* (stone settlements of the Zimbabwe culture area) he documented. Combining this model with the meanings of core symbols (cf.: Figs.1.21, 1.22) he derives the following patterns to determine spatial function for stone enclosures of the Zimbabwe Period;

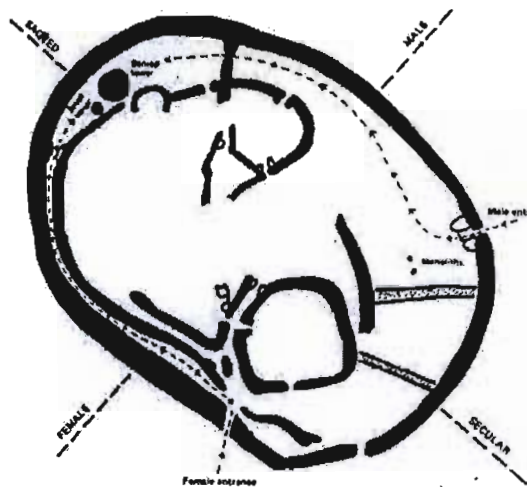


Figure 4.4; A Kuper’s symbolic model for the Great Enclosure (Hall, M. 1987:114)

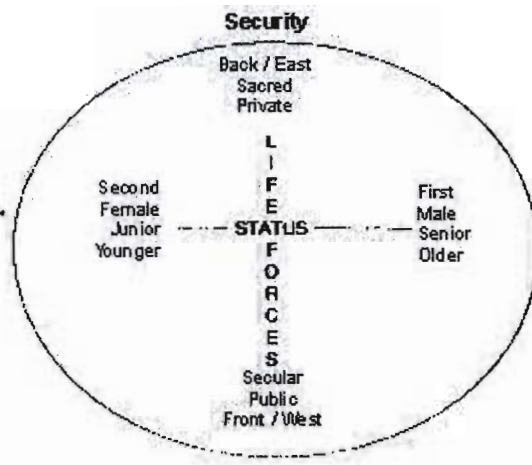


Figure 4.5; Huffman’s cognitive spatial model adapted from A. Kuper (Huffman 1996:105)

By relating these cognate spatial meanings to the symbols in stone at Great Zimbabwe (Fig. 4.3), Huffman identifies a ‘spatial reversal’ of expected status symbols, indicating *domba* function for the Great Enclosure, since spatial reversal is a common characteristic of initiation structures and the ‘multivalence’ of symbols in this context indicates spatial reversal;

These status symbols represent a spatial reversal in that they are located at the back rather than the sides, and a symbol reversal in that the towers signified status rather than fertility. Two other features suggest that these symbols were also multivalent. Old photographs show

mihombwe in all the entrances to the tower area at the back...In addition, a pile of dark stones stacked against a wall inside this area suggests that the two towers stood inside a pool. Thus the towers not only represented status but also ritual seclusion and sacred leadership. The chevron meanwhile not only represented the young man status but also the snake that guarded the sacred pool (Huffman 1997:150).

Huffman illustrates this symbol and space reversal in the following diagram;

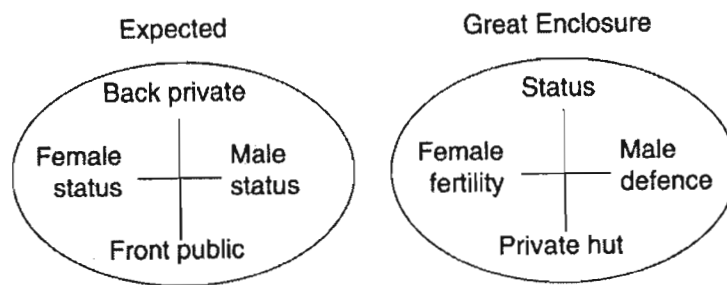


Figure 4.6; Huffman's 'reversal' of cognate spatial structures from the 'expected' model. (Huffman 1997:153).

As we have seen, Karanga interpretation of their symbols is multivalent and complex and the Karanga compress many symbolic associations of a common theme into one symbol such as in the chevron pattern and the conical towers. Huffman's alternate meanings of symbols in unexpected locations may not necessarily establish initiatory function, but rather indicate the Karanga multivalence and complexity of stone symbols in relation to context.

We have seen that the Karanga grain bins (stone towers) symbolise both male and female aspects (provision of seed and uterus) and are not strictly 'male' as Huffman suggests. Therefore, to align them with a 'male' side of the building could be too definitive and may overlook the multivalence of Karanga symbolic identification.

Furthermore, a 'reversal' does not appear to be evident when we consider the enclosed and private nature of the Tower Enclosure (as would be expected at the 'back' in Huffman's model) as well as its obvious ritual aspect (sacred) (also 'expected') defined by the ceremonial items recovered from the vicinity (cf.: Part 5, Chapter 2), the concentrated expression of stone symbols (conical towers, *mihombwe*, snake patterns, monoliths) and the processional entrance route. The sacred aspect of the Tower Enclosure seems to 'fit' Huffman's model for 'expected' cognate structure at spatial 'back' and is not 'unexpected' as Huffman suggests, at least on the sacred/secular axis. Understanding and applying the model becomes complex and convoluted and possibly its original intention to define spatial areas is rendered ineffectual. Huffman manipulates the adaptable nature of Karanga symbolic associations to provide evidence for *domba* function, where what he refers to as "normally fertility" symbols become "status" symbols at the

³ Note that Huffman's diagram has a misprint where '(crocodiles)' and '(snakes)' should be reversed.

Great Enclosure and that this reversal indicates initiation (*domba*) function. However, as we have seen in the interpretation for this study, conical towers, monoliths and the chevron pattern are all strongly associated with fertility and would therefore 'fit' the expected, rather than 'unexpected' siting in Huffman's model. His structuralist approach denies the multiplicity of symbol meanings inherent both in-situ and within the context, since it assigns meaning to specificity, i.e. 'reversal'.

Huffman utilises a two-dimensional model based on binary spatial opposites and this fits his idea of initiation centre function for the Great Enclosure. Huffman's argument presupposes that there was a preconceived spatial arrangement for the Great Enclosure based on reversal of presumed cognate spatial structures. To presume that there was any spatial reversal to the cognitive structure does not take into account the ad-hoc process of construction of the Great Enclosure, nor the idiosyncratic style of architecture. The Great Enclosure was not modeled on a master plan. Rather, it grew incrementally. Using a two-dimensional model may be problematic since it is acontextual and tends to presuppose spatio-cognitive associations of the culture concerned.

Any sacred and profane areas at the Great Enclosure were possibly less structurally determined or preconceived as cognate opposites. Rather, it might be more likely, considering the incremental process of its construction, that any sacred or profane areas would be the result of functional necessity in terms of siting, land available, and the requirements for processional routes, ceremonial areas and residential quarters such as the huts of the Great Wife ⁴

Huffman's evidence for the existence of these binary opposite cognitive structures in Shona spatial organisation is based on Venda initiation ceremony and the axial orientations of the Central Cattle Plan (cf.: Fig. 1.8) to suggest an inheritance of axial orientation for Shona spatio-cognate structure. However, the Central Cattle Plan is in many generational stages of remove from the architecture of Great Zimbabwe and there had already been many shifts to the basic pattern before Great Zimbabwe's development (cf.: Part 1, Chapter 2).

Furthermore, analysing material culture based on defining left and right or back and front siting of artifact is always problematic, since the meaning depends entirely upon where one is standing in the scheme of things (either approaching the entrance or viewing the ground plan), and presupposes that the creators identified spatial opposites with certain religious or gender categories. The author could find no evidence in Karanga mythology or ethnography to suggest this. Furthermore, Karanga religion is not based on sun worshipping where one would expect axial cognate patterns. Rather, the pantheon of ancestors and the practice of supplicating and honouring them, is more concerned with rain-making and providing fertility for the land and the people (cf: Part 2, Chapter 5). Furthermore, Huffman's model does not fit precisely with many of the Zimbabwe settlements he documented. Huffman uses the two-dimensional spatial model illustrated below and superimposes structural wall designs to determine a recurring pattern of spatial relationships between the occupants of royal Zimbabwe palaces in order to arrive at function for stone enclosures and to find a commonality over the sites to fit the structuralist model;

⁴ Cf.: Part 1 outlining the interpretation for Enclosure 1 as the enclosure housing the huts of the Great Wife.

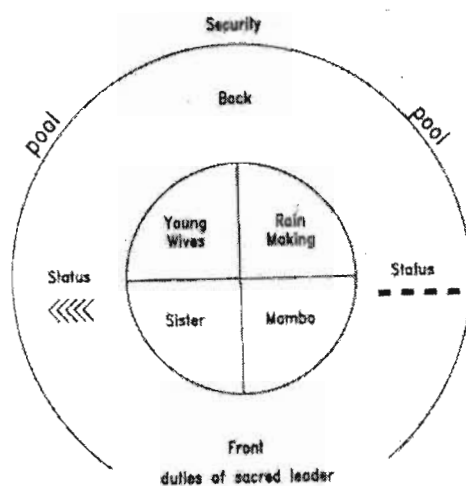


Figure 4.7; Huffman's 'model' palace plan showing the "...meaning of wall designs according to location." (Huffman, T. 1996:115.)

However, while there are some aspects common to many sites such as the rainmaking area placed behind the *mambo's* court, the spatial locations of the royal sister, mambo and young wives areas differ at nearly every palace he documents (Huffman, T. 1996:165-174). A pattern does not in fact exist, rendering the model ineffectual. It does not take into account that the planning of the various components within the settlements was marked by idiosyncratic, ad-hoc behaviour, and not determined by an overall master plan. Paul Lane suggests that even Huffman himself is ambivalent about the consistency of the cognitive model pattern;

In his analysis of other dzimbahwe, however, he notes that the rational order between the four key areas (mambo's, ritual sister's, royal mother's, and young wives') within the palace was not fixed (pp. 162-164). Thus, for instance, at some sites the ritual sister's residence is to the left of the mambo's, while at others it is to the right. The reasons for this are not fully elaborated, however (Lane, P. 1997 in SAAB 166:134).

The binary opposites of the spatial pattern appears to be inconsistent over too many sites. The prescriptive tendency towards categorisation of spatial function according to a rigid model of binary opposites yet applied to such a broad range of *mazimbahwe* settlements seems to be the major concern of Huffman's colleagues. James Denbow also criticises Huffman's approach;

The major problem as I see it, however, is an over-reliance on a structural model, derived from decontextualised ethnographies, that is simply projected onto site plans as an explanation without further recourse to archaeological data. If done at a general enough level, it is possible to make almost anything fit (Denbow, J. 1997 in SAAB 166:129).

Martin Hall also criticises the limitation of employing such a structuralist approach with its tendency towards a concern with binary opposites;

The trends in the historiography of Huffman's own work seem to be a determination to maintain the principles of classic structuralism, despite the welter of criticism of such an approach both in archaeology and in social and historical studies in general... People living in the elite areas of these towns must have spent a lot of time ensuring that they were doing the right thing in the right enclosure at the right time... Thus the Zimbabwe Pattern can be expressed - and is indeed represented - as a diagrammatic map of the Shona mind. Secular and sacred, private and public, front and back and east and west are opposed along the dimension of life forces. First and second, male and female, senior and junior, and older and younger give their paired expression to the intersecting dimension of status. Wives and court, guards and musicians, and king and followers intersect again on the dimension of security. Although this 'cognitive structure' is developed in explanation of the past, the effect is eerily futuristic, conjuring up the image of passing through bone and tissue to a virtual reality inside the cranium, where a three-dimensional geometric form rotates like an image on a computer screen (Hall, M. 1997 in SAAB 166:130).

Shona spatial characteristics would not be deterministic if we consider both the transformative capability of space and time in a dynamic socio-cultural context, the idiosyncratic free-form style of the architecture and the topographical diversity between settlements.

Hall's most revealing criticism is his objection to applying a rigid model of binary opposites to the Great Enclosure, the style of which is so idiosyncratic and free-form that any structuralist application becomes problematic;

*The weight of previous reasoning provides a momentum for understanding the Great Enclosure at Great Zimbabwe, always the weakest and most contentious aspect of Huffman's interpretation of the site. His problem is that the architecture and symbolism of the Great Enclosure is complex, and does not fall into neat, paired oppositions, even with their extension into three intersecting dimensions. But, as the reader by now knows only too well, there must be a **domba** at Great Zimbabwe, and the Great Enclosure is the only viable candidate. The problem of the detail can be dealt with by reverting again to the argument of reversals in the face of liminality. Thus the location of symbols of status (the large and small stone towers, zebra designs and crocodile patterns), which should be on the side of the Great Enclosure because of the determining effect of the Zimbabwe Pattern cognitive structure, are "misplaced" at the back as an act of "spatial reversal", indicating "multivalence". Case proved (Hall, M. 1997 in SAAB 166:132).*

However, as we have seen, and as shall be discussed throughout this study, many symbolic associations Huffman attributes to stone symbols (derived from Venda and Shona oral tradition and Shona *hakata dice*), appear to be consistent with the Karanga interpretations for symbolic meanings sourced from mythology

and ritual. It is though, the actual **application** of these symbols using a structuralist model that appears to be problematic and the above criticism casts some doubt on Huffman's use of the cognitive structure model.

The most contentious aspect of his model appears to be the use of it to interpret *domba* function for the Great Enclosure. There appears to be no evidence of initiation buildings for initiation ceremony in either Shona or Karanga ethnography. Pikirayi discusses this in his criticism of Huffman's use of Venda ethnography to justify his assumption of *domba* function;

Domba, an essential institution in Venda life, has never existed in Shona society. If it had, the Portuguese records would have mentioned it. Huffman admits domba did not exist among the Shona during historical period times, and attributes its disappearance to Portuguese wars and the mfecane. Initiation into adulthood among the Shona does not require such formal classes as boys and girls are gradually educated into adulthood. Thus the identification of the Great Enclosure at Great Zimbabwe and other sites such as Chiwawa, Zvongombe (N), etc. with the domba is probably incorrect (Pikirayi, I. 1997 in SAAB 166:137).

Furthermore, the Great Enclosure would have stood vacant and useless for most of the time during the occupation of Great Zimbabwe, if it functioned as a *domba* structure, since initiation typically occurs in Venda society only on a biennial basis. The complex and monumental scale of the building and its stone symbols that stand as testament to the enormous amount of energy expended on its construction does not appear to align with the more marginal and infrequent energies spent on *domba*;

The argument has also been questioned on the grounds that the investment put into the construction of the Great Enclosure is inconsistent with the importance of initiation rites and even the modern or historical Venda did not invest to that extent in domba. Snakes and Crocodiles does not appear to have a clear answer for this (Pwiti, G. 1997 in SAAB 166:138).

The Hill Complex and the Great Enclosure Uniting Dualities

While the spatial and functional relationships in the Great Enclosure may indicate public and private, secular and sacred areas, clear divisions do not seem to exist. The organic nature of the enclosures, developed incrementally, is characterised by blurred and indecisive boundaries and there are few distinct walls or doorways marking separate zones.

Reference was made at the beginning of this part of the study to the problematic nature of defining dualities in Karanga consciousness, since such definition implies separation of sacred and profane phenomena. It is the unity between perceived dualistic phenomena that is of most importance in the Karanga universe. In respect to this, the encompassing, enveloping geometry of the Outer Wall of the Great Enclosure as well as the combination of male and female symbols (within the building as well as combined within the same symbols), could be seen as a desire to unite 'sacred' and 'profane' activity, unifying aspects of male and female and therefore as a symbol of man's biological connection to God, through fertility;

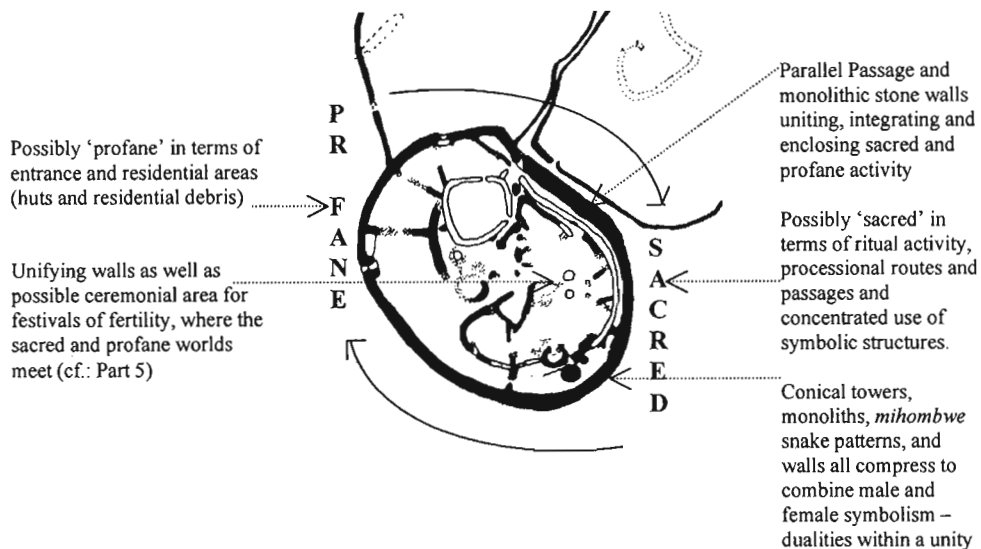
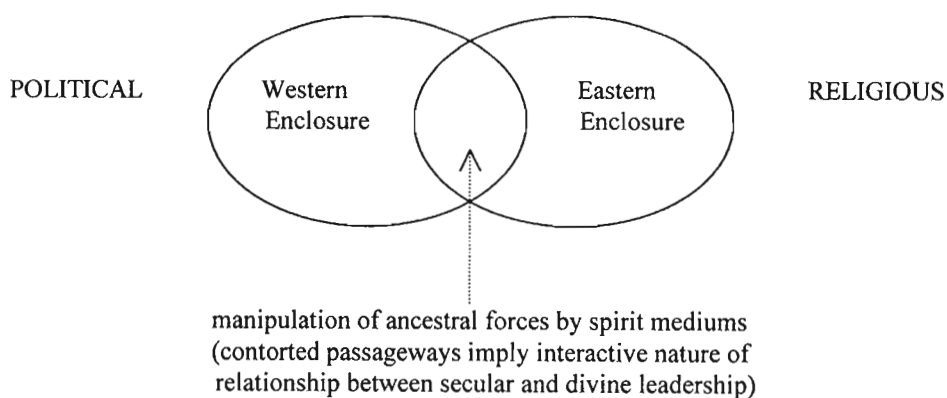


Figure 4.8; Conceptual interpretation of Great Enclosure as an architecture unifying sacred and profane aspects and seen as an expression of Karanga consciousness – a duality in a unity.

Further evidence at the Hill Complex may also suggest that the architecture of Great Zimbabwe reflects the desire to blur the edges between sacred and profane activity. While the Hill Complex at Great Zimbabwe presents definite sacred and secular areas (the national shrine and the *mambo's* residential areas respectively), the passages between these two areas are convoluted and contorted indicating the blurred boundaries between such divisions, and the interactive nature of the relationship between the sacred and the profane and between religious and political leadership.

The creators clearly took advantage of the elevated mysterious nature of the natural environment where man made stone wall constructions ramble over and between large natural granite boulders, uniting man-made structure with naturally created forms (man and God).



But one day the man told himself: "I am tired of watching by day and by night. There is a proverb which says: the piece of wood does not survive a second bush-fire (*dande haripunyuki rutsva ruviri*)". He therefore dug a deep hole in the bottom of a valley between two mountains. The baboons were able to reach the field only via this valley. He then lay down by the pit and pretended to be dead.

As usual, the baboons came to try their luck once more. They first sent a spy, who saw the man lying there. The baboon touched him, but the man did not stir.

The spy returned immediately to the others and called them all together. They all went to see and convinced themselves that the man was really dead. They said: "Let us take the man away and bury him".

They dug a grave and carried the man to his place of burial. They then sang: "The millet-farmer has died, *hii*, what has killed him, *hii*. He died from grief about his field, *hii*. With what can we thank him. Let us bury him."

When they reached the grave they were still singing. One of the baboons advised caution and said: "It would probably be better to go to the field first and eat the millet. We can bury the man later. His children might come and chase us off". The others agreed and started on their way immediately. To reach the field they had to jump over a rock at the entry to the valley. But behind that the big hole was hidden. As they were hurrying towards the field, thinking "the millet-farmer is dead", one after the other fell into the big hole behind the rock. There they all died.

The millet-farmer rose and thanked his ancestors and heaven (*nyadenga*) because they had helped him kill the baboons.

(Aschwanden 1989: 68-69.)

In this story, the man sowing his field refers to the sexual act he performs with his wife, the field symbolising both his wife and his wife's uterus. However, what is more significant here is the way in which the landscape is narrated, where a valley is used to symbolise the woman's vagina between two mountains which represent male genitalia;

The description of the landscape in this story serves especially to present all the internal and external female sexual organs. The two mountains enclose a valley in front of which there lies a rock. This rock symbolises the external female genitals: the vagina is represented by the valley and the pit (Aschwanden 1989: 69).

The settlement layout at Great Zimbabwe, of a valley between mountains (Hill Complex), the Valley Area and the mountains behind the Great Enclosure, may be interpreted based on this theme represented in many Karanga myths and stories (cf. *The Eradication of Evil*, p.117, 153). The settlement may be describing the mythological reality or, conversely, the symbolically expressive landscape of a valley and mountains may have inspired an imaginative narrative response. A dynamic architecture which contextualises symbols

within a powerfully impressive landscape corresponds to the language of the mythology of the region. The symbolic language in stone narrates the mythological language. Indeed, a symbiotic process may have occurred where a symbolism and settlement dynamic and choice of *genus-loci* was inspired by mythology and the mythology of the region developed from the response to the powerful landscape, symbolic structures and settlement.

The suggestion presented that Great Zimbabwe and the Hill Complex express the theme of a valley between two mountains can be extended by examining the respective symbolic references between the Hill Complex and the Great Enclosure to gender status and gender roles.

The Gendered Landscape

Examining the following Karanga story reveals a connection between mythology and the Great Zimbabwe landscape, where the landscape of a valley and mountains is given specific gender qualities;

Story: The Pond of the King

Once upon a time there were a people who lived in the mountains, far away from other tribes. Because of this isolation there was hardly any communication between the mountain people and the other tribes.

In these mountains, there lived many different animals. But there were no elephants. These were ruled by a king and had to give him elephant-teeth every five years. Therefore, the chief sent his men down into the plains where they could hunt elephants.

One day the chief died, and his nephew distributed the inheritance among his children. Some received cattle, others women or land. Only one of the sons received a horn (*gona*), a bow and arrows. This made the boy sad for he had not received any wealth. Disappointed, he took the horn and the weapons and went away.

He crossed the mountains and arrived in the plain below. Hungry, thirsty and tired, he lay down, placed the horn under his head and went to sleep. In a dream, his father appeared to him, saying: "Take your horn and empty some of its contents into the king's pond (*chidziva chamambo*), in which he washes himself. Then run away as fast as you can. The fish will then begin to grow, and when it leaves the water Earth will direct it wherever you will be."

When the chief's son awoke he was amazed at the dream and wondered what the king's pond and the fish could mean.

He took up his arms and started walking. When he came to a plain he saw a group of elephants in the distance. He immediately applied some of the medicine from the horn to an arrow and let it fly at an elephant-bull. - When the animal had sunk to the ground, the youth began to detach the skin from the teeth. Suddenly he was attacked and tied up. This was done by people who lived in the area. They asked him where he was coming from and where he was going, but he said nothing. Therefore, they took him to their king. Alone with the youth, the ruler

asked him: "What kind of horn is this?" The young man replied: "I inherited it from my father. I can hunt and kill animals with it." Then the king said: "You have a choice: you either give me the horn, and become my slave, or die." The youth decided to stay alive.

The king was happy. He took the horn and put it into his house. He told his youngest wife to look after the slave and give him what he needed. The youth was taken to her houses and there he lived for a long, long time, working for her. The two became friends and one day he remembered his dream. So he took the king's wife, who was the king's sister also, and soon afterwards she became pregnant.

As soon as the king heard the news he sent people to kill the slave. Meanwhile the woman had stolen the horn from the king and returned it to the slave. The slave fled before they could kill him.

When he got back to his own people he told them his adventures. They were much afraid and called a traditional doctor, who had to perform a cleansing ceremony in order to protect all members of the clan from the alien blood with which the youth had come into contact and which might bring disaster onto their own blood. Also, they made sacrifices to their ancestors and asked them for protection against the evil that might befall them because of the alien blood.

In the meantime, the king realised that the slave had got away. He went to consult his horn as to where the slave was. The horn had always helped him to fulfil his wishes. But now the horn had disappeared too. He called for his great doctors to cleanse the water that had been sullied by an alien horn. They were also to find out where the slave had fled. In addition, the king demanded that they kill every fish in the water.

After brewing beer, the doctors killed a bull. They washed the youngest wife of the king in its blood and sprinkled her house with it. The king also cleansed his fruit in the red juice, and all his people were sprinkled with the bull's blood also.

When the woman gave birth, the people were amazed to see that the fish they had expected was in fact a python. Therefore, they merely cleansed the water. What astonished the people especially was that the fish was able to live even on land. It grew and became larger, stronger and more intelligent than all the other fish they had obtained from the king's pond. - One day, it ran away from home, it had become too strong for the king's people.

The people asked the king what the fish was all about. The king and his counselors again consulted the doctors. The doctors suggested that, in future, only the king should swim in a strange pond on special occasions, but only after certain rituals for his protection had been performed and sacrifices had been made. However, gradually all the people began to swim in strange pools. Some pools, however, remained reserved for the king when it was a question of special rituals. (Aschwanden 1989: 73-75.)

Here, the “strange pool” refers to the alien wife (outside clan, the taking of a wife who is not from one’s own ancestral lineage) and the king’s “field” symbolises his special pool (many wives).

Clearly, the prevalent theme in this story is the presentation of the problem of incest and of the time when the ‘mountain-people’ bred by incest alone (not in ‘strange pools’). The king’s pool refers to the source of incestuous fertility. The lesson of the story relates the problem of idiocy among incestuous families.

What is significant to this study is the rich array of symbols presented in the story, including the horn, the pool and water, the python, the fish and the mountain and valley theme. It is this later idea which is of most interest here for it represents the significance of a sexually symbolic landscape.⁶

This story presents a common theme in Karanga mythology where the landscape of God’s creation is used to present the sexual relationship between a man and a woman. Crossing between two mountains (“crossing mountains, arriving in a plain below”) refers to the male genital organs while a valley or a plain symbolises the woman and the female genitalia;

The description of the landscape serves to present the sexual relationship between the sexes. The mountains the son crossed are interpreted as symbols of the male genital organs. But the passage across the mountains is given yet another meaning: the youth crossed the borders of his blood (breaking out of the incest circle) and so reached an alien clan...The plain is interpreted in the same way as the valley: it symbolises the woman and her genitalia (Aschwanden 1989: 76).

The mountain in the sexual landscape is given even further significance here, in its symbolic connection to the penis;

In a figurative sense, the man’s penis is meant which also lives in “the plain”, i.e. in the “valley” between the woman’s thighs (Aschwanden 1989: 76).

Settlement Dynamics Expressing a ‘State of Equilibrium Between Two Extremes’

The symbolic content and settlement dynamics of Great Zimbabwe can possibly be **interpreted in the same way** to the way in which the Karanga **interpret** the symbolic content of a gendered landscape in their oral narratives.

As we have seen, in the socio-cultural context there is a common theme of establishing a unity between male and female identities. The separate roles and responsibilities of men and women in Karanga society are made explicit at many levels, ensuring that the concept of the child as symbol of the unity between man and woman is maintained.

While the man in Karanga society is the economic decision maker, the woman’s status is maintained through her decisive and creative role as bearer of fertility and the source of creation;

Many truly creative aspects of Karanga life are attributed to the role of the woman, and this applies to cultural (including religious) matters. Even the Karanga’s concept of God, and all

⁶ Refer to Part 3, Chapters 3, 6 & 8 for reference to the symbolic associations of the sacred pool, the snake and horn as symbols presented in this story.

that implies, shows this female influence. The Karanga consciously accords to the woman, in her role as mother and giver of life, that dignity and entitlement to respect which raises her to the status of the true source of Karanga culture. That the Karanga are aware of this is illustrated clearly in their myths and the way they interpret them...The label "patriarchal system", therefore, is an extremely superficial term and fails to take into account the real situation. For this system, in its most essential cultural and religious structures, is - because of the creative superiority of the woman - matriarchally oriented to a far higher degree. A surprisingly stable state of equilibrium between two extremes has been attained here (Aschwanden 1982: 277).

This "state of equilibrium between two extremes" is presented in a figurative landscape in the story of The Pond of the King, as well as in the story of Sin and Punishment, The Eradication of Evil and The Inheritance from the Pool. This could be compared to the expression of settlement dynamics at Great Zimbabwe. Conceptually, the Hill Complex becomes an all-embracing symbol of masculine gender, since its genus-loci of symbolic mountain refers to male genitalia, ('living in the plain'), the power and strength of God as 'builder of towers' (mountains), and the protection provided by the *mambo's* elevated political and religious status.

The Great Enclosure becomes an all-embracing symbol of female gender through its siting and function. It could be seen as the 'pool' of the woman, (of the Great Wife, as symbol of the *mambo's* special 'pool'), but also because its siting in the valley (position at edge of wives area, ('field'), 'in the valley') can be compared to the mythological valley and to associated female social and biological responsibilities.

However, as is typical of Karanga symbolism, male and female associations are never discrete or polarized but are usually combined through a common theme. We have seen that the mountain in Karanga mythology can also be interpreted as symbolic of female breasts (not only of male genitalia), and there are distinct references to male symbolism at the Great Enclosure in the monoliths and towers. Nevertheless, **masculine gender content appears to be the dominating symbolic aspect of the Hill Complex, in a broader sense, while female gender symbolic content seems to dominate the Great Enclosure;**

Hill Complex



Male – *mambo* (dominating aspect)
From mythology;
Mountain symbolism
God as 'builder of towers' (mountains)
God's creative power in nature
Protection by the *mambo*
Male genitalia in landscape
Female breasts in landscape

Valley and Great Enclosure



Female – *vahoz*i (dominating aspect)
From mythology;
Cave-like symbolism and form
Wives' area siting
Wives as 'field' for *mambo* to 'sow'
'Sacred pool' (uterus) of Great Wife and wives in valley
Male aspects in monoliths and towers

Great Zimbabwe may then be seen, in its symbolic landscape, as expressing an 'equilibrium between two extremes', and the landscape narrates the mythology of the region.

Great Enclosure as a Rock / Cave in Valley Between Two Mountains

There are further parallels between the siting and structure of the Great Enclosure and the symbolic consciousness in the above stories. In the story of Sin and Punishment, the rock is interpreted by the Karanga as a symbol of the external female genitalia, while the valley represents the vagina. An interpretation based on the mythological reality would see the Great Enclosure as a 'rock' in front of a valley between two mountains. (There are mountains on the southern side of the Great Enclosure).

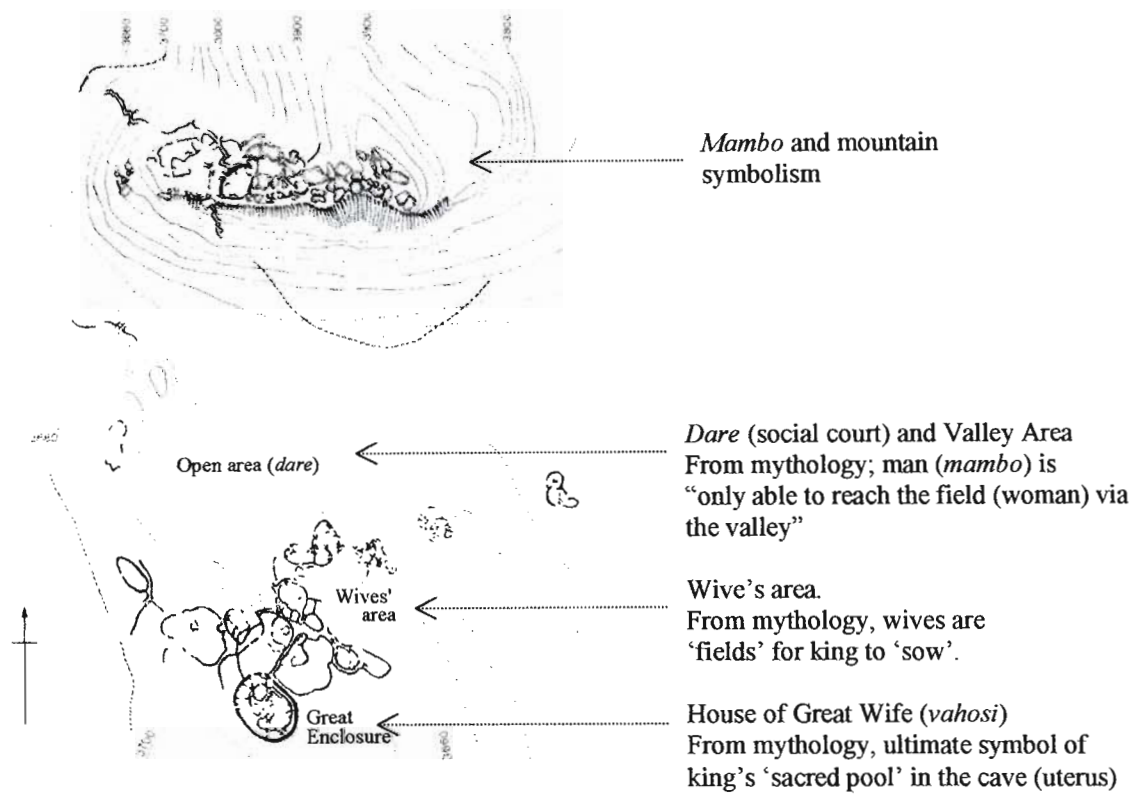
The story may also be describing the Karanga attitude of the symbolic relationship expressed between the Hill Complex and the Great Enclosure where the man was "...only able to reach the field (woman) via the valley" (cf.: Fig. 4.9).

In the story of The Eradication of Evil, a cave is "hidden" in a field which was "cultivated". The field refers to the man's wife while the cave to the wife's conscience. An "old woman" lived inside this cave and "nobody knew what was hidden in it".

The Great Enclosure is expressive and visual on the outside yet hidden and mysterious on the inside, similar to the cave-like qualities described in the story. There are also similarities between the building as a house for the Great Wife and the cave which houses the old woman. The cave is associated with the 'female psyche' and man "feeds" his child within the uterus with his semen and fills the "granary with seeds".

The conical towers, as symbolic grain bins, refer to this theme where the *mambo* 'fills' his granary (uterus, male provision, seeds etc.) and provides crops (children) for his people from his 'special pool' (uterus) (cf.: Fig. 4.9).

The narrow, elongated and snake-like Plateau Passage and narrow entrances to the Great Enclosure may be influenced by the need to provide a constricted entrance within the Great Enclosure and to the wive's area. Interpreted as a mythological landscape, this appears to reflect the theme of a man only being able to reach the 'field' (wives) through the valley (from the Hill Complex to the Wives' area);



Hill Complex



Mountain symbolism

Valley



Dare (social court)
From mythology; a valley between two mountains (as breasts and male genitalia)
Valley Area uniting two extremes of Hill Complex & Great Enclosure

Great Enclosure



From mythology; a rock (symbol of external female genitalia) in front of a valley (vagina)
Cave is also wife's 'conscience' (old woman lives hidden in cave) and cave as uterus, 'sacred pool'

Figure 4.9: Interpretation of Great Zimbabwe as Expression of Gendered Landscape. Landscape has possible parity with mythological symbolic theme of a valley between two mountains. (Plan adapted from Garlake 1974; Left photo; Author. Middle and Right photos; Garlake 1974).

Uterus as House of the Woman

The above interpretation can be extended by considering the traditional symbolic relationship between a woman's uterus and a Karanga house, where the uterus is seen as a house and the vagina as a passage with a door. Before birth, a woman's birth canal is prepared as though it were a door to an opening. The 'preparation of the passage' is termed *kuita masuo*, a derivation of the word *musuo* meaning a door, an entry or an opening. However, during pregnancy, the woman's birth canal, as a door to her 'house', her uterus, must stay 'closed'. The preparation of the passage is of great importance to the Karanga (Ashwanden 1982:250f).

This same theme is possibly inadvertently conveyed in the spatial experience of the Great Enclosure. As the house of the Great Wife, the idea of a passage and door to the house (uterus) is a theme presented by the Plateau Passage leading to the Wive's area (field) and the narrow entrance to the Great Enclosure, where the 'door to the hut' must stay 'closed'. (The original northeast entranceway was linteled and had a door) (cf.: p.105, footnote 5).

Another interesting aspect relating to the anatomical structures of childbirth is the importance of the umbilical cord. While a new-born child still has the umbilical cord attached, the father is barred from entrance to his hut, for the cord is a symbol of the close connection between mother and child and while it is still attached, the child does not belong to the father's tribe. From the time of conception to the time of the dropping of the umbilical cord, the child completely belongs to the woman (Ashwanden 1982:275).

The parent's hut also has symbolic connections to the female procreative anatomy. The grass of the roof above the entrance to the hut refers to the woman's genitalia or to the pubic hair in front of her vagina. The door itself is seen as a vagina while the hut is symbol of her uterus (Aschwanden 1982: 275f);

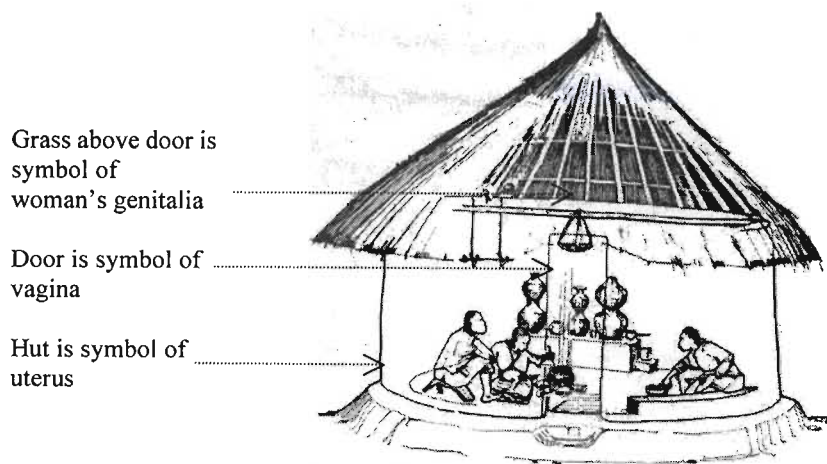


Figure 4.10; Symbolism of Typical Shona House as Uterus (Sketch from Du Toit:1981.)

There are then many symbolic connections between female anatomy and the family house and the similarity between these connections and the architecture of the Great Enclosure may be further realised

when we consider the Shona word for the Great Enclosure, the *Imba Huru*, meaning 'Great House' or *Mimbahuru*, meaning 'House of the Great Woman' (where *imba* translates to mean uterus or woman).

In the story of A Witch is a Mother Too (cf: p.100) the cave was a symbol of the uterus while the door to the cave symbolised the entrance to the uterus and the birth canal. The structure of the Plateau Passage and entry to the Great Enclosure are similar to this description as though entering a cave-like structure from the birth canal or vagina (cf: Fig. 4.9).

However, this observation does not suggest that there was ever any conscious intention to physically imitate these birth structures in the Great Enclosure. What is of interest here is that **the architectural structure and the symbols in stone expressed within it, reflect a similar theme to the Karanga interpretation of anatomical birth structures and their symbolic associations used both in the traditional hut of the woman and in the anatomical landscape of mythology.** Perhaps on a mythological level, the spatialisation and form making of settlement structure to suit its functions, has subconscious layers of symbolic associations.

The close siting to the wives area, the Plateau Passage connecting the Great Enclosure to the wives area, and the cave-like shape of the enclosure are thematically similar to the structures that unite the woman with the child. There appears to be a common theme of unity between the woman (wife's area and the house of the Great Wife) and the child (woman as symbol of man's fertility through childbirth) in both Karanga symbolic consciousness and in the architecture itself. The various interpretations of vagina, birth canal, and umbilical cord are also not necessarily mutually exclusive.

While the above observations might be considered to be presumptuous ideas, they raise an important aspect of this study; it must be remembered that Karanga interpretation of symbolism is always multi-valent. Karanga symbols can acquire many different meanings, depending upon interpretation and context, though the meanings are always thematically closely connected.

Understanding this aspect of Karanga consciousness and mythologically shaped thinking, and considering the symbolic associations attached to the snake (oviducts, snake of the uterus, ancestor's fertility, rain and God's fertility) possibly allows the snake-like walls of the Plateau and Parallel Passages to be seen as thematically similar to the female sexual genitalia and/or reproductive organs, the biological association of God's fertility and creation. **It would seem that the structures thematically imitate anatomical structures because the functions of the enclosure relates to the theme of the fertility of the women.**

Since literal translation of symbols presented in Karanga myths and stories, as interpreted by the Karanga themselves, is always avoided, so literal translation of architectural symbolic structure and architectural form must also be avoided. **Similarly, the connection made here between the architectural form and the anatomical form is not intended to be a literal comparison.** Instead, what is implied, is that the building's **architectural style and features** (hollow, thick-walled, amorphic, free-form structure with snake-like walls and cervical-like entrances and cave-like interior) **may be interpreted in a similar way (mythologically shaped thinking) to the Karanga symbolic interpretations of similar structures in mythology.** This does not imply that it was a conscious decision to plan the Great Enclosure to resemble a

uterus form, (it was not based on a master plan). Instead, the structure developed over time, probably based on an overall thematic vision expressive of a cave-like enclosure with strong, snake-like walls, a sub-conscious response possibly related to the Karanga mythological and symbolical realities, expressing the functional requirements of the building. In Part 5, the study examines further reasons for such a motivation when it discusses the Tower Enclosure as a *mutoro*-place that is traditionally a symbol of the earth's uterus. It also discusses the prevalent Karanga theme death as a symbolic birth which is activated through ritual at the *mutoro*-place.

What is of most interest here is the theme of the gendered landscape, where fertility of the woman is expressed through cave and uterus anatomy as presented in mythology such as in the stories of Sin and Punishment, The Witch is a Mother Too, The Eradication of Evil and The Pond of the King. These themes are also presented in the symbolic structures, spatialisation, form and siting of the Great Enclosure.

Conical Towers as Reference to Mountain Symbolism and the Hill

A further reference to the gendered landscape at Great Zimbabwe can be seen in the dynamic relationship between symbolic associations of towers and monoliths.

The significance of the mountain as a symbol of God's creation, is presented frequently in Karanga myths and stories and has been discussed previously (cf.: p.84). We have also seen that the story of Sin and Punishment (cf.: p.148) presents the symbolic association in Karanga consciousness of a landscape with a valley between mountains. The story of The Pond of the King (cf.: p.150) also presents the importance of this theme where the landscape of God's creation is used to present the sexual relationship between a man and a woman. Crossing between two mountains refers to the male genital organs while a valley or a plain symbolises the woman and the female genitalia.

Considering the importance of mountain symbolism in Karanga mythology and Karanga religious consciousness, mountain symbolism possibly influenced the choice of site at Great Zimbabwe of the *mambo*'s residence on the actual mountain. The theme presented in mythology of the symbolic mountain may also be conveyed in the conical towers at the Great Enclosure. The conical towers may be direct references to the mountain itself since, in Karanga mythology God is often referred to as the 'builder of towers', where towers become a symbol of the mountains. The praise hymn for the God of Fertility (cf.: p.72) and the myth of The Creation of Water (cf.: p.77), both refer to this aspect of God, where God is the constructor of mountains, seen as towers;

God is praised as the creator of the mountains (towers). He is so powerful that, when he stamps his foot on the rocks (claps of thunder?) the earth darkens in the dust raised, which symbolises the formation of rain clouds. The stone means the Matopos mountains (stone of the pool) (Aschwanden 1989:207).

Consequently, the large Conical Tower at the Great Enclosure, could be compared to the mythological symbol of the 'tower as a mountain', and of God's, as well as the *mambo*'s, power;

Hill Complex



Mountain symbolism

Valley and Great Enclosure



From mythology; crossing between two mountains refers to sexual relationship between man & woman

Conical Towers at Tower Enclosure



From mythology; towers as symbols of mountains. Tower architects the mountain (God as 'builder of towers' and creator of mountains). Reference to power of ancestors, God, and the *mambo*.

The large Conical Tower then further unites the landscape of Great Zimbabwe when seen together with the symbolic meaning of the mountain. The Conical Tower, as reference to the mountain, links the structure of the Great Enclosure with that of the Hill Complex sited on the mountain. This interpretation interacts dynamically with the previously discussed symbolic associations of the tower as a grain bin storing seed (male semen) for the people's fields (the uterus of the woman) (cf.: Part 3, Chapter 9). **These concepts are interrelated, for God's power is symbolised by man's fertility.** Considering the multi-valent interpretations the Karanga have for their symbols, such an interpretation would be appropriate. The significance of the siting of the Conical Tower and its reference to the hill and the *mambo's* power will be discussed in more depth in Part 5 where it relates to ritual function at the *mutoro*-place (honouring of ancestors, fertility and rainmaking).

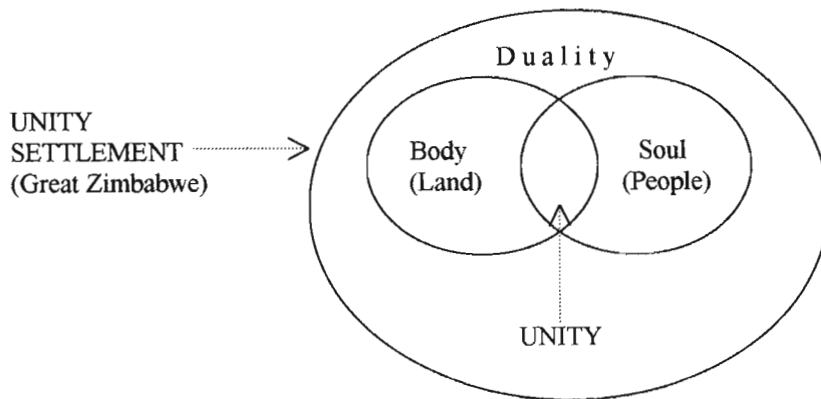
The Symbolic Landscape as a Duality Within a Unity

The recurrence of the mountain in Karanga symbolism serves to remind the people of the place where God last lived (Aschwanden 1989:44). Great ancestors are buried in a cave in the mountains, and mountains are especially sacred and potent places symbolising God's creative power, fertility, and the ancestor's guardian nature (cf.: Part 3, Chapter 4). In the myth of The Creation of Man (cf.: p.93) the reference to mountains is used to symbolically connect man with God's creation;

Mountains have female (breasts) as well as male (phallic) significance. The significance of the root (symbol of the penis) anchored in the earth (symbol of the woman) can also be understood easily (Aschwanden 1989: 30).

A landscape is presented here as a symbol of man's procreativity and the boundaries between man's creative potential (biological fertility) and God's creativity (the landscape on a cosmological level) are

blurred. The procreative aspects of biological fertility and the creative aspects of cosmological phenomena are thereby dualities united by the valley (nature). This dynamic, expressed as a symbolic landscape, is a prevalent theme in Karanga mythology and can also be seen in the way the Karanga believe that a human body and its soul represent a settlement, where the land itself symbolises the body where the people (the soul of the body) live (Aschwanden 1987:229);



Great Zimbabwe settlement dynamics could be interpreted in this way, where the Hill Complex and the Great Enclosure are dualities within the unity, of a settlement.

We have seen that the settlement dynamics of Great Zimbabwe expresses the theme of a valley between two mountains, where the landscape is seen as uniting gender characteristics. This may be a response by the creators to a mythologically realised landscape. The mythological and symbolic landscape, so perceived, therefore may have given further validation for sacred genus-loci, mountain symbolism, ancestral connections and royal occupation.

5 Great Zimbabwe as Expression of the Karanga Religious Hierarchy

This chapter explores further the possibility that the Hill Complex and the Great Enclosure express, through their respective siting and relationship to each other, the Karanga relationship between man, God and nature, the Karanga religious hierarchy.

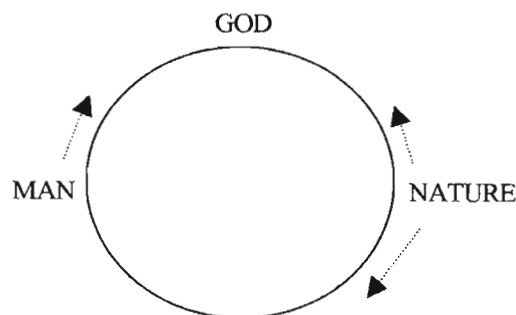
The Karanga Religious Hierarchy

Aschwanden refers to the Karanga symbolism of the close God as similar to the universal concept of the “fixed” God, fixed in symbols and rituals (Aschwanden 1989:217). But the nature of Karanga religious symbol is more extensive than the use of a-contextual icons in ritual ceremony. Karanga religious symbols become enriched through everyday usage and their origin in mythological reality and the Karanga concept of God therefore becomes a close God through commonplace application of religious symbol (e.g., jars, pots, calabash as symbols of the uterus and the uterus as symbol of God’s creativity in the woman).

We have seen that the Karanga understanding of the relationship between man and God is presented in a comprehensive structural hierarchy where nature is a symbol of man and man is a symbol of God (cf.: Part 3, Chapter 2). Aschwanden explains that, to the Karanga, nature is the ultimate symbol of man, while man is the ultimate symbol of God, and this concept forms a structured hierarchy in the Karanga universe;

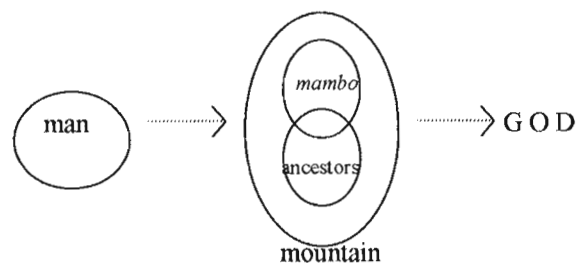
God’s relationship and closeness with the world is embedded in a cosmological and hierarchically structured whole. God is the creator of everything, and his place is at the top of the hierarchy. Subordinate to him is his deputy, man, who is probably God’s most important symbol. Nature, in its turn, is subordinate to man and is symbol of him. However, the circle is closed for nature too is seen as God’s symbol. God is thus immanent in his whole creation. - It is this immanence of God’s which keeps him tied so closely to his creation in Karanga thinking (Aschwanden 1989: 217-218).

The hierarchy forms a closed circle, however, since nature is also a symbol of God’s creation;



Man as Symbol of God – Hill Complex

A connection can be made between the socio-cultural reality and the mythological reality informing an interpretation of the settlement dynamics of Great Zimbabwe. God, as creator of all things is at the top of the hierarchy. Since man is God's most important symbol and the *mambo* holds the highest status in the Karanga social and political hierarchy, the *mambo* is interpreted by the Karanga as the pre-eminent exemplar of man, and therefore of man as a symbol of God. **The *mambo* and the mountain are also closely associated with each other and the mountain and the great leader are ultimate symbols of God and therefore also of man** (Aschwanden 1987:251f, 1989:200f).;



The *mambo*'s residence, the Western Enclosure on the mountain, could then be seen as the physical representation of this concept of man as a symbol of God.

The Hill Complex could then be interpreted as a direct symbol of the close God. The *mambo* (king) is regarded by the traditional Karanga as the ultimate symbol of God's human characteristics, since it is the *mambo*'s divine responsibility to provide for his people. At Great Zimbabwe, the *mambo* was assisted in this role by his special and close connection to God, through the ancestors and spirit mediums (cf. Part 1, Chapter 5; The Hill Complex – Political / Religious Leadership).

The mountain also symbolises a great leader, chief or head of a family and the Karanga will often go to a great mountain in order to seek the protection provided by great ancestors. The Karanga refer to the chief or *mambo* and the father of a family as a mountain. When a chief, *mambo* or head of a family dies, the Karanga say “‘The mountain has fallen (*gono rakawa*).’” (Aschwanden 1987:219). This symbolisation closely connects the protection provided by the great leader, in association with the spirit mediums, with the protection provided by God himself and of his creative power as evidenced in his creation of the mountain;

According to the Karanga's ideas, mountains are not merely a symbol of God's existence, they especially point to his power. A mountain, they say, is something firm and immovable which has always been there and will last forever, and the same is true of God. Also, the mountains have often protected men, so they also point to God's help and protection. Nearly every symbol is interpreted on different levels. Thus the Karanga see, in the first place, a relationship between the mountain and man... the Shona distinguish between male and female mountains. This is today confirmed by the Karanga. In mountains, or hills, there are often caves – which the Karanga see as symbols of the uterus. But since a mountain is something

immovable and its caves often gave protection, it is also a symbol of the man who is expected to be constant and to protect his family always (Aschwanden 1989: 251-252).

The Hill Complex then, as residence of the *mambo* (man's symbol of God), sited on a mountain (God's creativity) becomes the ultimate symbol in stone of man's connection to God through sacred *genus-loci*.

Nature as Symbol of Man – Great Enclosure

We have seen that within the Karanga hierarchy, nature (subordinate to man), is a symbol of man, and yet is also a symbol of God and God's creation. By identifying nature as a symbol of man, the Karanga does not need to feel isolated from God's creativity since God's creative power is potently evident in the land, water and sky. The immediate environment becomes controllable, reflecting man's own existence, and something that is comprehensible.

The Karanga identify nature with human characteristics, as we have seen in their mythology, and the forces within man are said to directly influence the forces of nature;

To the Karanga, nature is symbol of the person, i.e. events in nature are identified with human characteristics. Man as source of the symbols is thus the centre of all powers, and nature is influenced by him accordingly. The identification which occurs with every symbolical reference creates a sphere of influence where change always affects the one as well as the other. The form and direction is then determined by nature's hierarchical order (Aschwanden 1987:248).

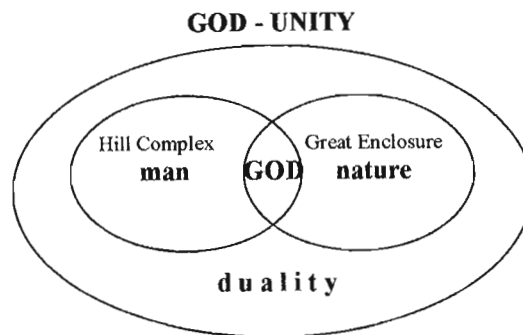
The Great Enclosure, as the house of the Great Woman, housing stone symbols reflecting the theme of biological fertility and sited on the edge of the Wives' Area (in the 'valley', 'field'), could then be presenting the theme of nature as a symbol of man and that the biological role of nature (through women) connects man with God. An all-embracing interpretation of the Great Enclosure in a mythological landscape would see it as a symbol of the close God. The woman's creative role, associated with the uterus, and manifested through cave and pool imagery and in the unborn child, are seen as potent symbols of the close God;

A mother is to her children what God is to men (Aschwanden 1989: 204).

The structure, function and form of the building may then be seen as relating to God's direct connection to man, through nature's biological fertility, expressed in the woman.

Great Zimbabwe – God, Man and Nature

The settlement dynamics of Great Zimbabwe possibly expresses the character of the hierarchical relationship between God, man and nature of the Karanga universe;



From a mythological interpretation, Great Zimbabwe could then express nature as a symbol of man and man as a symbol of God and, once again, the common theme of a unity between dualities is achieved in the symbolic relationship between the Great Enclosure and the Hill Complex.

The Great Enclosure and the Hill Complex are dualistic in terms of settlement dynamics, style, function, construction, genus-loci and form but they are connected through their respective symbolic association with the closeness of God. A duality within a unity is therefore achieved.

Great Zimbabwe Uniting Cosmological and Biological Phenomena

We have seen that in Karanga consciousness, the manipulation of physical and spiritual, biological and cosmological forces are ensured in order to overcome the separation of God from the earth. This theme is expressed at Great Zimbabwe, where the *mambo* and the hill unite man with God on a **cosmological level** through elevated ritual status and connection to the source of God's power at a sacred mountain. It is also seen in the connection to God's creation in the cave and to the ritual enclosure (Eastern Enclosure) and to his connection to ancestors through spirit mediums.

The Great Enclosure may be seen to be uniting man with God on a **biological level** through themes of procreativity, its siting close to the wife's area (king's 'field' to 'sow'), as a house for the Great Wife (head wife in charge of king's 'special pool') and in the symbolic structures representing human fertility (conical towers, snake (chevron) pattern and *mihombwe*). Once again, we can see that the valley area with the *dare* (social court) may be expressing, in a mythological interpretation, the unity of these two dualities (mountain Hill Complex and Great Enclosure) on a macro level, similar to the way the valley in mythology unites two mountains.⁷

The *dare* at Great Zimbabwe is sited in a valley and a valley is often referred to in Karanga mythology as uniting mountains and man and God (cf: the Story of Sin and Punishment). The siting of the *dare* in a unifying landscape is therefore appropriate to its function as a social court and symbol of man (society).

The Great Enclosure describes nature as a symbol of man (human biological fertility) and the Hill Complex, the residence of the *mambo*, describes man as a symbol of God (the mountain and *mambo* as God's creation).

⁷ Cf: Part 1, Chapter 7 that discusses the function of a *dare* as a social centre, a place where the council of chiefs unites the people with the laws of the *mambo*.

The Karanga theme where nature as a symbol of God closes the circle is expressed here, where nature, as symbol of man (as fertility and procreation themes expressed in the Great Enclosure), but also of God's creation, closes the circle;

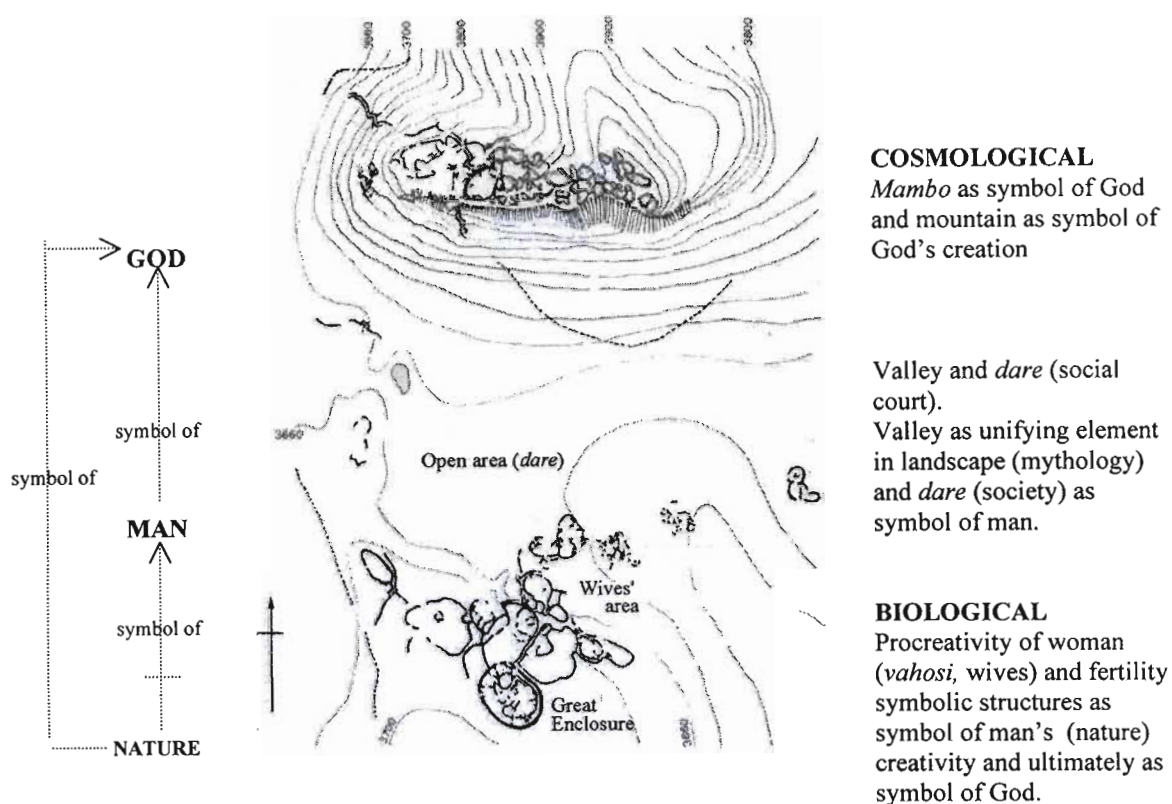


Figure 4.11; Mythological interpretation of settlement as symbolic landscape. Landscape possibly reflects Karanga religious hierarchy of nature, man and God.

Great Zimbabwe and God's Three 'Places' – Water, Cave and Mountain

These observations can be further extended by discussing the relationship between symbolic structures of the Hill Complex and the Great Enclosure in their expression of God's proximity. God's 'closeness' can be realised through symbolic associations with what Karanga refer to as "God's three places"; water, cave and mountain sites.

In the Karanga universe, there are three locations that symbolise God's proximity. One of these 'places' the traditional Karanga refer to is in the sacred mountains;

Mountains are not only symbol of God's existence, they also demonstrate his might.

Mountains are immovable and eternal - like God (Aschwanden 1989: 218).

The second location that symbolises the closeness of God is sacred pools containing water;

Water...is the God-given fertility of the earth - one even says, "God is water": God is a creative being, one who gives birth and life. The water, regarded as life's source and origin, is thus symbolised by its creator (Aschwanden 1989: 218)

The caves in the mountains are the third location that symbolises the proximity of God. As we have seen, the special significance of cave symbolism is its reference to the 'uterus of the earth', and is also seen as the symbol of the woman's uterus (Aschwanden 1989:218).⁹

God's 'places' are therefore to be found particularly in the woman;

God's "places" are...to be found also in the woman and her biological role. In the uterus, an act of creation, at which God is present, occurs at fertilisation (cf: the myth of The Tree that Touches the Sky). It is the pregnant woman especially who refers to the cave with the pool ("amniotic fluid"). This brings us to God's most important "place": from the cave in the Matopo-mountains God's voice can be heard - God himself is present (Aschwanden 1989: 218-219 first brackets my inclusion).

The uterus, as a symbol of the **cave** in the **Matopo-mountains**, containing **water** (amniotic fluid) and physical source of God's proximity, is therefore an important, all-embracing symbol of all of God's 'places'.

The Great Enclosure, interpreted from the mythological reality, could be seen as the 'uterus of the earth', a building whose symbolic structures (fertility) and genus-loci (close to wive's area, house of Great Woman) refer to the all-embracing symbol of God's 'places'.

God's Proximity Uniting the Hill Complex and the Great Enclosure

The mythological landscape therefore unites the dualistic sites of the Hill Complex and the Great Enclosure through God's creativity and proximity, the greater reality of the duality. The genus-loci and construction of these two sites are dualistic by nature. The architecture of the Hill Complex is free form and idiosyncratic, where man-made structures of stone wall coursing imitate the natural rock and boulder outcrops. It is a style that responds to the natural cave-like enclosures. As we have seen, the stone walls of the Hill Complex serve to compliment the natural caves and hidden, mysterious natural enclosures of the site, imitating the ephemeral character of the spiritual world. The Great Enclosure, however, is a man-made structure, visual, dynamic, expressive and exposed.

Architecturally, the dualistic sites compliment each other. The Hill Complex, sited on a **mountain**, with natural **cave** enclosures, can be interpreted as one of God's 'places'. We have seen that, on a **cosmological level**, the Hill Complex connects man with God through God's ultimate symbol for man, the *mambo*, and through the natural symbols of God's creation, the cave and the mountain. We have also seen that, on a **biological level**, the Great Enclosure connects man with God through a **man-made structure** housing

⁹ Refer to Part 3, Chapters 2, 3 and 4 for a detailed description of the meaning and significance of the symbols of mountain, water and cave.

symbolic **themes of fertility** as a symbol of **man's biological fertility** (siting at edge of wife's area and as house of Great Wife).

The dualistic structures of Great Zimbabwe therefore further express the hierarchy of the Karanga universe;

Hill Complex



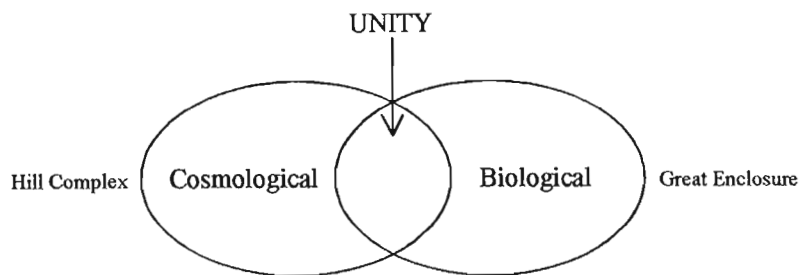
COSMOLOGICAL
Mountain siting with natural cave enclosures as expression of 'God's places'. Integrating natural and man-made environment.

Valley and Great Enclosure



BIOLOGICAL
Genus loci (wife's area, house of Great Wife), procreativity of woman, symbols of fertility, *mambo's* 'sacred pool' (uterus) and 'uterus of the earth' all as expression of 'God's places'. Man-made, visual, exposed structure. Valley as symbol of the woman and woman's vagina as unifying element in symbolic landscape

Great Enclosure



Interpreting the settlement dynamics as a symbolic landscape which expresses the sites of 'God's places'.
The landscape further expresses the mythological reality of a duality within a unity.

The natural and man-made forms express thematic 'places' of God and reconnect God with man through their respective symbolic structures. Both present the origin of fertility given by God; the Hill Complex siting of mountain and cave (**cosmological**) and the Great Enclosure as thematic man-made cave-like, form, and as the house of the Great Wife and housing symbols of fertility (**biological**). **By approaching God through structure, God becomes a close God once again.** God becomes "fixed" and real in both sites.

Architecture and Mythology – Connecting the Land and the People to the ‘Close God’

Therefore, as Sinclair suggests, “aspects of material culture as architectural style and settlement layout, organisation and decorative motifs” are “strongly influenced” and “large scale expressions of symbolic values exist in the expressions of kingship and power.” (Sinclair 1987:159). The ‘large scale expressions of symbolic values’ are realised in the *mambo*’s relationship to God through mediums, ancestors and through mountain symbolism (Hill Complex) and in man’s cosmological relationship to God through the *mambo*. Man’s biological relationship to God is expressed through symbolism at the Great Enclosure (cave-like form, towers, *mihombwe*, monoliths and snake patterns) and through the woman’s biological relationship to God via the uterus. The dualistic structures of Hill Complex (*mambo* and God) and the Great Enclosure (man and nature) are united spatially by the valley *dare* (social court) and symbolically through their respective symbolic structures relating to God’s power. The “mythology of the region” (as has been suggested by Sinclair as a direction for interpreting Zimbabwe stone enclosures) (Sinclair 1987:159), is therefore “considered” as an expression of the process of settlement organisation.

Great Zimbabwe presents a mythological reality expressed through *genus-loci*, symbolic structures, spatial dynamics and form, suggesting the motivations of its creators to express in stone their connection to (and longevity and power of) their illustrious ancestors. It displays not only the cultural and technical achievements of its creators, but also the **wisdom** of its people, by expressing the powerful relationship the land and people have with the ‘close God’.

6 Great Enclosure and Valley Area as Symbols of the *Mambo's Fuma* (Wealth)

An examination of the traditional concept of wealth (*fuma*) in Karanga society has significance to our understanding of Great Zimbabwe and extends the previous interpretations of the symbolic significance of the siting of structures at Great Zimbabwe.

***Fuma* and the Role of Women**

The term *fuma* (wealth), in Shona society is used to refer to many aspects related to a man's wealth, the most significant being its attachment to women and their role in providing children (a man's source of 'real' wealth). The following Karanga story relates this special significance;

Story: The Youth with the Bag

Once upon a time there was a youth who went on his travels. In his wanderings, he became short of food and drink and said: "There is nothing I can do." Then he saw a bird, took his stick, threw it and hit the bird, which died. He took his knife, plucked the bird and made a fire. After he had eaten he had enormous strength. He came to a court and was asked: "Where do you come from?" He replied: "I come from my father". They took him in, and he helped them with all their work. They gave him a girl, a very great virgin.

One day he took his fishing rod and went to the river to fish, all on his own. At sun-set he caught a bag in which there was food - bread and porridge. When he sang, all kinds of food came out of the bag.

Another time he went fishing and caught two sticks. But he found that the bag had been taken by his wife's father. He said: "Father, give me my bag." The father refused firmly. The young man then sang his song: the sticks became angry and smashed huts, pots, chickens and cattle. The sticks killed everything that was in the court. The father-in-law immediately returned the bag to the young man (Aschwanden 1989: 150-151).

The bird in this story refers to an alien spirit (*shave*) through which the boy is able to gain his powers from the bag from the river. The bag represents his wealth (*fuma*). The symbolic significance of the bag in this story is similar to that given to jars, baskets, calabash and the uterus. They are all containers holding wealth (*fuma*) in the form of 'seeds' (cf: Part 3, Chapters 7 & 9). By singing, the boy is able to contact this alien spirit. The two sticks from the river symbolise his two children. The sticks (children) helping him recover his stolen wealth refers to the special wealth (*fuma*) a man receives only through his children. What is significant here is that this wealth is obtained only through the river. Water refers to the source of creativity, the source of God's (and the ancestors) fertility (cosmological) and to the fertility in the woman

in the amniotic fluid (sacred pool) of the uterus (biological). The woman's wealth (*fuma*) lies in her two 'snakes of the uterus' (oviducts) and those who receive riches, (children), from her 'pool' (uterus) must pay for them, the origin of the concept of 'bride-price' (Aschwanden 1989: 152f);

The story connects, in typical fashion, the acquisition of wealth (fuma, bride price) with a special reference to the river, the pool and its creatures (njuzu and shave spirits). They are the symbols of the woman: after all, the only real wealth in a man's life is what his wife gives him from her "pool" - the children (Aschwanden 1989: 152).

The snakes of the water are symbols of the woman and seen as real wealth for it is only through the fertility of the snakes that a man is able to beget children. In a mythological as well as a socio-cultural reality, the wife's area is the symbol of the *mambo's* wealth, his *fuma*, and the Great Enclosure, as the house of the Great Wife could be seen as the ultimate symbol of his wealth. The Wives' Area and the Great Enclosure together become the symbol of his 'special pool' from which he obtains 'real' wealth.

To appreciate this concept, one needs to understand the significance a man's children have in his life;

A dead man becomes an ancestral spirit only through the children begotten by him. It is his children and grandchildren who give back to him the status of person (munhu) (Aschwanden 1989: 212).

Since the wives ensure the *mambo's* status and since fertility alone, by providing children, guarantees a status of person (*munhu*) in the afterlife, then the Great Enclosure (as symbol of *mambo's* 'special pool', head wife of many wives) becomes a possible conspicuous symbol of the *mambo's* royal status, his right to rule and his longevity, since a woman's fertility is 'decisive and overruling';

They praise God as the origin of fertility by using the words: "mbuya, mbereka, dziva-guru, chitubu, chisingapwi (grandmother, one who gives birth, great pool, spring that never dries up)". The woman's fertility is seen as decisive and overruling - it is the basis of the "female" symbolism of God and the fertility of nature (Aschwanden 1989: 205).

The uterus is seen by the Karanga as the special place where God appears in the woman's body, in the amniotic fluid as symbol of the 'pool', for it is where **the renewal of man** takes place (Aschwanden 1989:217). The Great Enclosure then, on a **mythologically experienced** level, and on a socio-cultural level, thematically refers to the special 'place', the uterus, the house of the *mambo's* Great Wife, where 'the renewal of man' occurs. In its structure and genus-loci, the building demonstrates the Karanga worldview and therefore the wisdom of its creators.¹²

A newborn child in Karanga society is afforded all the protection, both physical and spiritual, the family are able to give. After the child is born, a cord of woven bark, (*mutimwi*) is tied around its waist. This is said to protect and 'settle' the inner genitalia and protect the child from harm. The *mutimwi* also corresponds to the

¹² The idea that the Great Enclosure and the king's area refer to the king's *fuma* and 'special pool' is a symbolic one, since the king only had sexual relationships with his young wives. The Great Wife, however, obtained status and social standing through the king's wives and the many children obtained from his 'special pool'. She was the head of all the wives, responsible for them, and so is seen as the ultimate symbol of the king's real wealth.

two 'snakes of the uterus' and to the spermatic cords. The *mutimwi* is regarded as the child's first wealth, *fuma*, and is said to safeguard its fertility, symbolically 'tying' the new-born to the family, a symbol of connection to its lineage. This bond lasts its whole life until death and represents its true wealth (Aschwanden 1982:34).

The concept of **safeguarding** the child's fertility is possibly expressed in the enveloping protecting stone walls safeguarding the 'precious' contents (the Great Wife in terms of *mambo*'s 'special pool') of the Great Enclosure.

As we have seen, the Karanga refer to the Great Enclosure as the *Imba Huru*, meaning 'Great House'. It is only through the influence of Western documentation that it has become known as the Great Enclosure, which is an unspecific term. This has probably been intentional, since documenters are understandably skeptical about assigning a name that implies specific function.¹³

The Karanga term for the Great Enclosure, *Imba Huru*, implies a perception that the building is directly referring to the royal family and their lineage, since the child, the family, the house, and the community are all called *imba*. In particular, the child is called *imba*, (house), because the family, the house and the village exist only through the child, for the child is the exclusive symbol and the only true wealth of the family's and the community's life. As a 'Great House' (*Imba Huru*) the Great Enclosure possibly refers to the 'great' wealth, the many children, of the *mambo*'s clan, begotten by his many wives, and symbolised, ultimately, through the Great Wife, and therefore acts as a symbol in stone of his true wealth, his *fuma*

Great Zimbabwe – The Mambo and Fuma

This concept of wealth has significance to our understanding of Great Zimbabwe; the *mambo*'s elevated political and religious status is achieved through ancestral patriarchal lineage, the longevity of which is dependent upon the acquisition of many wives and therefore many children. His children are therefore his real wealth, his *fuma*. In the story of The Pond of the King, the horn (*gono* containing *fuma*), symbolising the ancestor, is emptied into the 'king's pond', representing the discharge of semen into the woman's vagina and the wealth of his 'special pool'. The *mambo*'s royal status is achieved and established **through** his wives, i.e. through the *mambo*'s 'pool'. The *mambo*'s fertility, his ability to beget children for his clan, is the central aspect of his leadership and provides evidence for his right to rule.

The *mambo*'s *fuma* became an important symbol of his entitled position and the continuation of his wealth (wives and children) was crucial to his longevity. Such a responsibility to beget and provide (as well as to provide for the sick and the poor) often impoverished the *mambo* and many men refused the role for fear of such impoverishment. According to Mufuka, it was a characteristic of Zimbabwean divine leadership that while the *mambo* 'owned' everything, he also owned nothing. Although the *mambo*'s subjects worked his fields and cultivated and harvested his crops, the *mambo* did not enslave his subjects and he provided for the whole community in needy times (Mufuka, K. 1983).

¹³ Earlier documentation describes the building as a 'temple' (Bent 1892; Hall, R.N & Neal 1904) while Garlake refers to it as the 'Elliptical Building' (Garlake 1974).

This ambiguity in the nature of divine leadership parallels the Karanga way of thinking, where, while God is in everything, he is also 'far, far away'; the *mambo* owned everything, yet owned nothing. While the *mambo* became materially wealthy through trade with merchants, he was expected to provide for the whole community when needed. However, it was important that the *mambo*'s *fuma* (wealth of wives and children) be kept intact for there were still always many men vying for succession to the *mambo*'s position. Therefore, the *mambo*'s children and his wives, as symbols of the *mambo*'s *fuma* were all-important and pervasive in the establishment of his right to rule and the number of wives he was able to acquire and the number of children he was able to beget strengthened this establishment.

The *mambo*'s virility establishing his right to rule is further expressed in the two symbols of blood and fertility (cf: Part 3, Chapter 10). These symbols have their greatest significance in royal leadership, for the leader's fertility and bloodline alone ensures the longevity of the tribe and the community itself. The *mambo* is the tribe's 'father' and his health and fertility affects the health and fertility of the whole tribe. It was always in the *mambo*'s best interests to strengthen his spiritual and political position as ruler, for there were always numerous successors at any given time vying for the *mambo*'s position. If a *mambo* is weak and aging, it is said that the community itself will equally become weak and defenseless. In such a situation, the *mambo* would often be put to death (Aschwanden 1987: 222f). An ailing *mambo* would also try to safeguard his power with the help of his traditional doctor who would give him special medicines in a horn to supposedly secure his fertility and longevity. The responsibility for the *mambo*'s life would often be placed in the hands of the ancestors. The *mambo* and his doctor would set a stone trap in a cave on a mountain and pray to the ancestors. If the trap fell, this would mean the death of the *mambo*, for it is God who would ultimately decide on the "fall of the slab of stone," the fall of the *mambo* (Aschwanden 1987:224f). The stone trap becomes a symbol of the ailing *mambo*'s fate controlled by God and the ancestors. This tradition also serves to illustrate the spiritual significance of the *mambo*'s position and his right to rule based on his longevity and fertility. It would follow then, that a successful *mambo* would be honoured by his tribe in life as well as in death.

***Fuma* Uniting Dualities**

As we have seen, the Hill Complex is the symbol of the *mambo*'s elevated political and religious status, via connection to mountain symbolism, the ancestors and God. Similarly, we have also seen that the Great Enclosure has a symbolic connection to the *mambo*'s 'special pool'. In its siting on the edge of the royal wives area, the Great Enclosure then becomes a thematic symbol of the *mambo*'s real wealth, of his *fuma*; i.e. the children he begets from his 'special pool', from his many wives. The Hill Complex becomes the pre-eminent symbol of male protection **provided by the *mambo*** and the Great Enclosure and Wives' Area are the symbol of the *mambo*'s *fuma* through woman's fertility, **providing for the *mambo***. Through this symbiotic relationship, the concept of a duality within a unity is once again expressed;

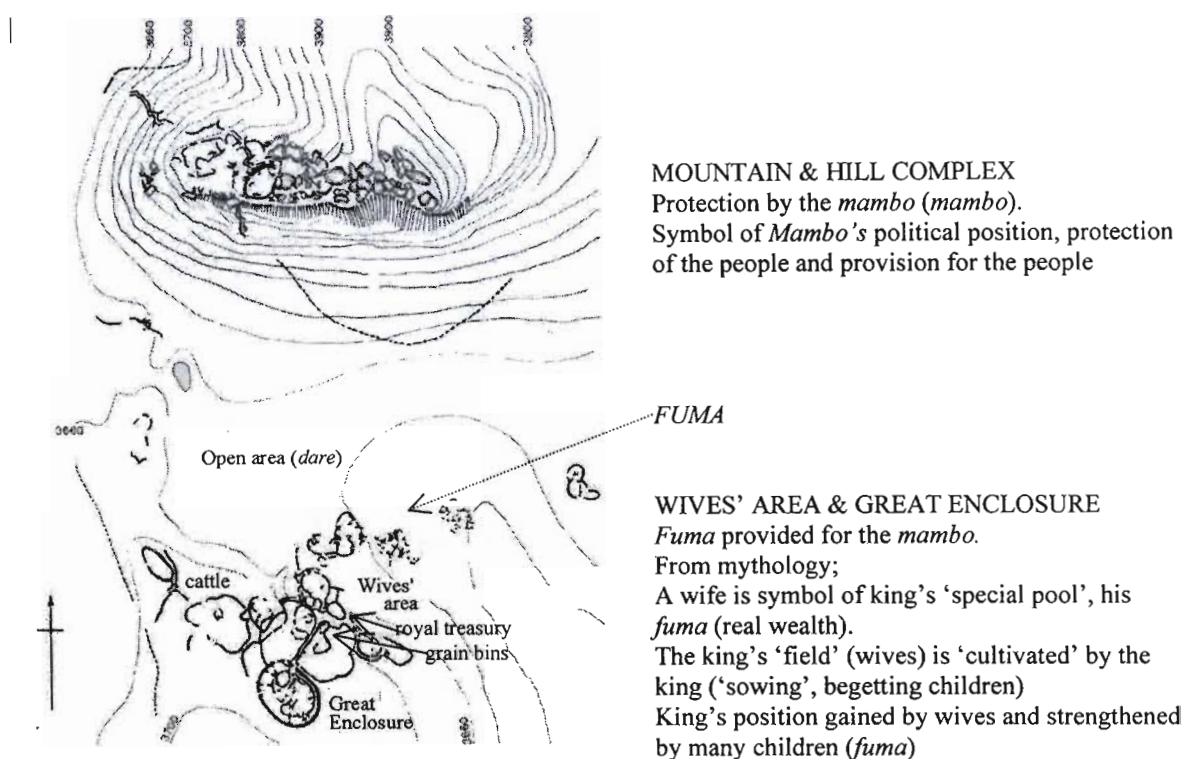
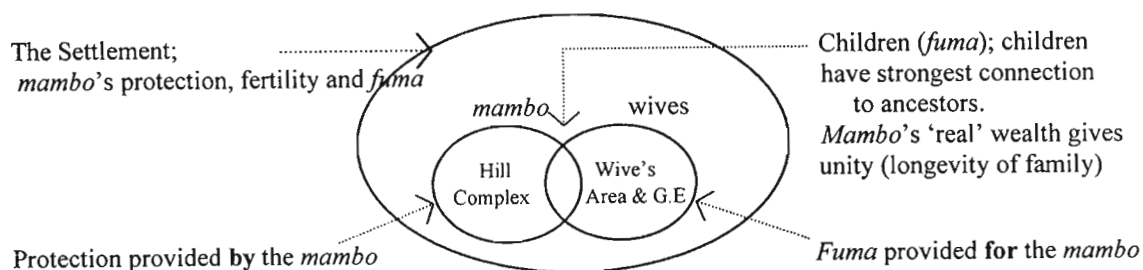
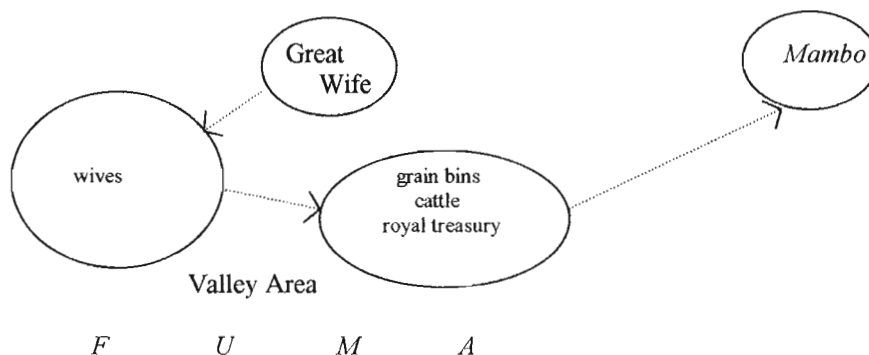


Figure 4.12; Great Enclosure and Wive's Area as Symbols of *Mambo's Fuma* (Wealth).

(Plan adapted from Hall, M. 1987.)

The observation of the concept of *fuma* expressed in the landscape can be extended when we consider that other forms of the *mambo's fuma* are also collected in the valley area below the Great Enclosure. These include the royal treasury (economic wealth), grain bins (grain as tribute to the *mambo*) and the cattle byres. (cf.: Part 1, Chapter 7). Cattle and women are symbols of a man's (in the royal settlement, the *mambo's*) *fuma* ('real' wealth). In mythology, the embryo / uterus is a symbol of his 'special pool' from which *fuma* is obtained. The Great Enclosure (house of the Great Wife), the enclosures housing the wive's area, the cattle pens, the grain bins and the royal treasury are then areas within the settlement of Great

Zimbabwe that directly refer to the *mambo's fuma*, his wealth. *Fuma* therefore unites the sites of the Great Enclosure and the Hill Complex via the Valley Area;



Part 5 of this study explores this idea further where ethnographic evidence is provided to support consequences for function of the interpretations of this part of the study, where ritual symbolism related to ancestral honouring and supplication and sacrifice, strongly associated with *fuma*, the child, the uterus (as *mutoro*-place) and death as a symbolic birth suggest ritual function.

7 Summary

Aschwanden refers to Karanga mythology as a "...practical reality dressed as myth," (Aschwanden 1989: 135) where **biological reality is so interwoven with mythology that it is no longer a profane phenomenon** or 'practical reality'. Mythology, in Karanga consciousness, he says, is not "...theological speculation," but a "daily occurrence" (op cit.);

Between belief in the reality of a related myth and its "real" experience, there is – certainly for an outsider – the fundamental difference of theory and practice. However... reality and myth can become one in everyday Karanga life where mythologically shaped thinking, and the belief connected with it, form the experienced reality (Aschwanden 1989: 154).

This part of the study has explored how Great Zimbabwe settlement dynamics possibly expresses this mythologically shaped thinking of Karanga consciousness.

Karanga mythology is an imaginative, creative and powerful mechanism for ensuring longevity of a family and longevity of the social structure. It is based on a deep and profound understanding of biological and cosmological phenomena such as human anatomical structure, and the very real processes of life, birth, death and procreation. (Any duality between the mythical and the real is seen as a separation of God from the earth and of God from man.) **The union between the biological and the cosmological create a higher, more symbolical, reality.** This part of the study has explored this idea in its expression of the symbolic landscape of Great Zimbabwe, where the **biological and cosmological** phenomena are united through God's proximity.

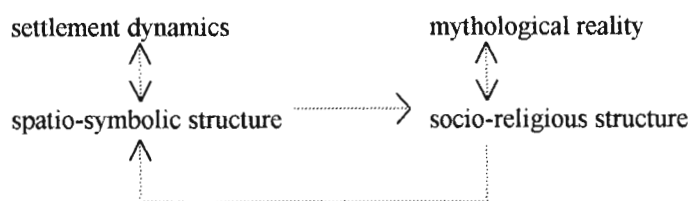
The symbolic content and settlement dynamics of Great Zimbabwe can therefore be compared to the **mythological reality** which is related to the socio-cultural context.

Therefore, to interpret Great Zimbabwe based on the symbolic associations and consciousness expressed in Karanga mythology and realised in the socio-cultural context, is appropriate, since we could assume that the mythologically shaped thinking of the creators would have motivated a desire to present and establish, through space and permanent building material, a real connection between man and God and to express the power and longevity of their *mambo* and founding ancestors. **The survival of the settlement and the community would have depended upon such expression, expansion and extension of the mythological reality through the physical world, manifested by architecture.**

While settlement dynamics are influenced by systemically related factors such as historical, social, political, economic and physical (cf: Part 1, Chapter 3), there is also the possibility that an interpretation of the spatialisation of the settlement dynamics at Great Zimbabwe may be informed by the symbolic consciousness expressed in the mythology of the region. It could be possible that the relationship of the settlement dynamics of Great Zimbabwe to its *genus-loci* recognises and expresses a mythological aspect presented by the landscape. Conversely, many of the myths and stories themselves **may have been extended, inspired or informed** by the compelling landscape, settlement and dynamic symbolic stone structures of Great Zimbabwe.

The mythology of a culture records the original source of their religious beliefs and rituals.¹² Karanga mythology would therefore be a significantly appropriate source to use to begin to understand the consciousness and intentions of the creators of Great Zimbabwe.

Nevertheless, since the period of occupation of Great Zimbabwe coincided with an intense period of technical and cultural development, one would expect the mythology of the region to have similarly expanded at that time. The question as to whether the present-day collection of Karanga myths and stories were **inspired by** Great Zimbabwe or whether the settlement dynamics were **informed by** a mythologically shaped thinking is not significant, since both situations overlap: **socio-religious structure informs spatio-symbolic structure and spatio-symbolic structure validates and strengthens socio-religious structure;**



At Great Zimbabwe, there appears to be evidence for the development of a symbiotic process and systemically related relationship between mythology and architecture.

While the Hill Complex and the Great Enclosure display dualistic characteristics in their siting, architectural style, and function, they are united by their respective symbolic and mythological connection to God, through nature. As two parts of the same mythologically realised phenomena, they each have their own identity through their association with each other. The *mambo*'s right to rule exists **only through his association** with his many wives and their **provision** of his children. The fertility provided by the women is made possible **only through the protection** provided by the *mambo*. The two forms compliment each other and present a united whole, the ultimate reference to the symbolic union between man and woman and between man and God inherent in Karanga religious and practical wisdom.

On a theoretical level, the settlement of Great Zimbabwe presents the wisdom of the Karanga people through its associations with the **biological and cosmological** symbolism inherent in Karanga mythology and expressed in architectural symbol and settlement dynamics. Therefore, the mythology of the region has been considered from the point of view of settlement dynamics and symbolic structures and this has assisted an understanding of the symbolic meaning of the landscape of central Great Zimbabwe.

In Part 5, ritual practice associated with *mutoro*-place, the concept of death as a symbolic birth and communal sacrifice festivals related to fertility are examined.

¹² Refer to Part 2, which explains the theoretical context in cultural anthropology that validates mythology as a source of cultural, ritual and religious beliefs.

Symbolic and mythological associations related to these practices inform an interpretation of the Great Enclosure and this further extends the observations and ideas that have been presented in this part of the study.

Part 5 of this study suggests that the spatialisation of this mythological reality ensures that the ancestral spirits (the ‘guardians’ and ‘real owners’ of the land), are architected within the landscape for enduring the bond between the living and the dead, between man and God, and to ensure ancestral safeguarding of land and fertility.

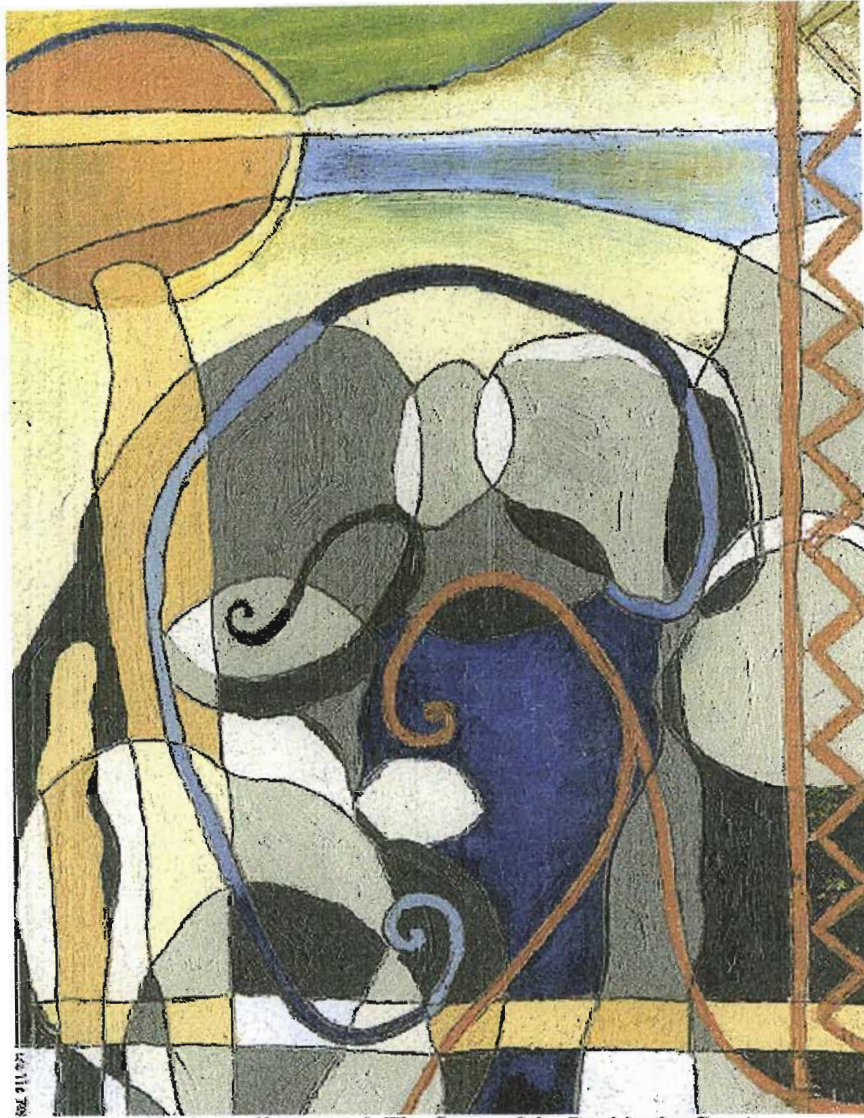
PART FIVE

ANCESTORS
RAINMAKING &
HONOURING
IN STONE



*...ancestral spirits are believed to be dominant in controlling a person's life,
and his own personal spirit could be said to be embryonic, maturing as the person matures,
until it is pushed out of the body at death
(Bourdillon 1991: 219-220).*

*In the ancestral shrine (it contains a symbolical figure of the ancestor), and even more in the
"mutoro"-place, the full significance of the most important Karanga symbols emerges
extraordinarily clearly. At the mutoro-place, a muchakata-tree grows
in the soil saturated with the king's "blood".
The tree itself is an important carrier of the tribe's fertility – which also ensures its survival...
In one all-embracing interpretation the mutoro-place becomes the symbol of the uterus. The fertility
given by the snake living in the tree...symbolises the fertility of the stone of God...
This raises the fertility to a mythological-religious level, the biological
and religious factors remaining connected.
A tribe "lives" only through the woman's uterus...
(Aschwanden 1989:270, 243).*



(Author, oil on wood. The Stone of the Pool in the Cave)

*The fertility of the woman and of nature derives its origin
from a hollow filled with water.*

*By that the Karanga mean the uterus of a woman
as well as the cave in the Matopos hills where God's voice is heard,
and in which there is also said to be a small pond.*

*The true bearers of this fertility are the snakes of the uterus
(the oviducts), and those of the Matopos cave which God sends as
conveyors of the rain and in order to sustain nature's fertility.*

*The term for what is newly or not yet born, is Mwari ,
explained by the Karanga as a contraction
of the word Muhari ("to be in the jar")*

(Aschwanden 1987:248)



(Source: Garlake 1974)

Myth: The Tree that Touches the Sky

When God had completed the world he embellished it. He loved his work so much that he said: 'I want a tree to grow out of the earth, which will provide shade for us and will never die'.

God let the tree grow, and it grew so tall that its branches reached up to the sky. In the top of the tree there lived a snake which helped the tree bear fruit. This snake used to live inside a large rock in a sacred mountain.

Whenever God visited his people he came down to Earth by way of this tree. And whenever men wanted something from God they climbed up the tree.

Before the onset of the rainy season, men offered rain sacrifices at the foot of the tree. But then they ceased to obey God's laws. The Earth became dry and let thorns grow. Because there was no rain, the snake returned to its rock in the sacred mountain. The tree died, the worm had got into it.

(Aschwanden 1989:34-35)

1 Introduction

This part of the study explores the idea that the Tower Enclosure and Parallel Passage at the Great Enclosure are symbolically and spatially expressive of ritual space and may have been used for ritual practices associated with the world of the dead (ancestral guardian spirits) and that the Great Enclosure may have accommodated ceremonies related to cultivative fertility festivals that are typically centred on the *mutoro-place*.

The current discourse documented by archaeologists in this field of study provides much archaeological and ethnographic evidence to support the idea that the Hill Complex was the residence for the *mambo*, his royal entourage and the ritual rain-makers and spirit mediums. Most researchers, to the author's knowledge, concur on this functional interpretation (cf: Part 1). However, as has been discussed in Part 1 of this study, interpretations concerning the meaning and function of the Great Enclosure are largely irresolute. This study has previously suggested that the reason for such irresolution may be due to the lack of an in-depth study of how Karanga religious beliefs and practices have informed the architecture of Great Zimbabwe. This is also compounded by tourist invasion and early amateur investigations of the site. Garlake even refers to the "reckless clearance work" of 1902-3 as "a disaster" (Garlake, P. 1994: 57).

Because the current debate centres on the Great Enclosure, this part of the study focuses mainly on this building in order to contribute information to this area. The interpretations for the Great Enclosure offered here are later incorporated with the observations made in Part 4 for the Hill Complex and the macro settlement.

Part 4 examined the possibility that the symbolic structures, form and siting of the Great Enclosure express mythological themes of the female role in society. As a house for the *vahosi*, it also symbolises a special 'place' where God's proximity is experienced through uterus symbolism. We have also seen that such symbolisation refers to the mythological site of the cave and pool in the mountain where **the renewal of man** takes place. The architectural style and scale of the Great Enclosure, the cave-like quality of the Tower Enclosure, as well as the building's many references in stone symbol to fertility and the ancestors (cf.: Parts 3 and 4) certainly suggest that it served some ritual function. The experience of constriction and release through the massive and monolithic walls of the Parallel Passage suggests single-file ceremonial procession, while the scale, grandeur and symbolic structures implies a possible religious or ceremonial status.

This part of the study examines the possibility that the Great Enclosure was constructed firstly to house the Great Wife (*vahosi*) and later also to honour the ancestors, the founding fathers of Great Zimbabwe, and was used as such at many various ceremonies associated with fertility. The symbolic associations used by the Karanga to honour their ancestors and propitiate fertility are architecturally expressed in various ways at the Great Enclosure (stone towers, snake-patterns, stone platforms, *mihombwe* and monoliths) and this is discussed throughout this part of the study.

Evidence concerning the nature of ancestral honouring (where the *mutoro*-place is the symbol of the uterus) supports the idea that the Great Enclosure symbolises the theme of the 'uterus of the earth' and the theme of the cave in the mountain, as was suggested in Part 4 of this study. It also suggests that, as a place to honour the fertility of the ancestors, and through *mutoro*-place ritual, the Great Enclosure can be interpreted as a 'centre of fertility' in the settlement.

Many researchers have offered various ideas regarding the possible ritual function of the Great Enclosure and these have been documented in Part 1 of this dissertation. The purpose of this study is not to undermine or 'disprove' current ideas, nor is it to offer an 'answer' to the 'mystery'. Instead, the purpose of this study is to offer **possibilities** based on an understanding of the consciousness of its creators and to **make connections** between the symbolism of the architecture and the symbolic associations of the people's spiritual beliefs, attitudes, religious activity and mythologically shaped thinking.

This part of the study examines the possibility that the Great Enclosure served as a building for ritual function related to ceremonial sowing, harvesting, thanksgiving and rainmaking festivals, rituals related to fertility, sacrifice and supplication associated with ancestral honouring and as a possible *mutoro*-place (ancestral rain-shrine). Aspects relating to human reproduction, life, birth and death are symbolised through ritual, space and artifact in these ceremonies and at the *mutoro*-place, where the procreation cycle of the woman and the life-cycle of nature are raised to a sacred level. This possibility is presented here because the symbolic content of these rituals strongly imitate the symbolic content of the architecture of the Great Enclosure, as well as its spatial experience and its form.

Chapter 2 discusses the archaeological finds from the Great Enclosure in order to provide a background for this part of the study, while the following chapters introduce the Karanga interpretation of death, and the significance of the *mutoro*-place and the ancestral shrine. They also discuss the symbols and their significance surrounding the rituals of death, burial and honouring of the ancestors.

By way of introduction, the ancestral grave in traditional Karanga society is the burial place of the great ancestors (usually located in the mountains) while the *mutoro*-place is the site where one prays to the great ancestors for rain. When an ancestral shrine becomes a rain shrine, it is then also referred to as a *mutoro*-place. However, a *mutoro*-place is often far-flung from the site of the ancestral grave as well, and then becomes a site where one goes to pray for rain and fertility and to honour the great ancestors. In such a situation, the 'blood-soaked soil' from the ancestor's mummifying body is ritually carried in a *hosi*-jar to another site. This new site becomes a *mutoro*-place (rain-shrine) where descendants may go to pray to the guardian spirits for rain, fertility and prosperity.

The study examines the similarities the structures of these ritual sites have to the symbolic and spatial content of sites at Great Zimbabwe.

2 Finds from the Great Enclosure

This chapter provides a brief overview of the finds recovered from the Great Enclosure in order to provide a formative context for the following chapters that examine the possible ritual function of the building (cf.:Part 5, Chapter 7, Fig. 5.19).

Various documenters have interpreted the finds from the Great Enclosure to support their own theories while others have been very careful not to be suggestive, since the complex process of connecting material finds with culture is always open to interpretation. This is exacerbated at Great Zimbabwe when we consider its history of settlement abandonment, later invasion and resettlement, merchant raiders, amateur investigators, poor reconstructions, and the more recent problem of tourist invasion.

Some of the finds recovered from the Great Enclosure suggest residential function. Garlake mentions earlier excavations by Summers of what he referred to as “household rubbish”, in a shallow and extensive pit “underlying the earliest surviving walls” of the Great Enclosure (Enclosure 1 and Inner Perimeter Walls) (Garlake, P. 1974:104). These finds consisted of “substantial quantities of cultural material” and pottery of a scale larger than any found in deposits of the same periods at the Hill Complex, as well as many fragments of imported glass beads (op. cit.). The lower levels of these excavations were dated by Robinson to the transitional period between Periods III and IV (AD 1100 – 1270 and AD1270 – 1450), while Summers sees the lower levels as Period III and the upper levels as Period IV. Charcoal from the pit was also dated to 1380 +/- 90. (op. cit.). However, Garlake attributes the “homogeneity” of sherds from the upper and lower levels to be indicative of a continual development of culture through these periods of occupation;

All this looks as if it represents a gradual, internal evolutionary process within a single tradition, subjected to no outside influence, rather than a series of abrupt or basic cultural changes. (Garlake 1974:106).

Archaeologists also suggest that there was extensive iron-working at Great Zimbabwe with finds consistent with other Iron Age contexts and that it occurred throughout the occupation period of the settlement (Garlake 1974:113). Slag was found in the midden underlying the Great Enclosure and iron ore still covers the floor of the cave at the Eastern Enclosure, while furnaces were discovered by R. N. Hall at the upper levels of the Western Enclosure and in the Renders Ruin (Lower Homesteads) (Garlake 1974:113).

R. N. Hall and W. G. Neal also discovered many iron-making tools in the Great Enclosure (Enclosure ‘7’, Huffman and Enclosure ‘6’, Garlake) (cf.: Fig. 5.19) but there was no evidence of smelting furnaces or substantial debris to suggest iron-making practices in the building. Huffman suggests that this evidence supports his idea for *domba* function;

*A few metal-working items...were found in enclosure 7...and Hall (1905:223, 236, 256) thought the workshops of metal craftsmen were located here. In recent *domba* however, the longest and most involved drama revolves around a mock metal-working episode, using such items as crucibles, tongs, blow pipes, anvils and hammers (Blacking 1969:166-67) - the same*

kind of artifacts found by Hall. Furthermore, actual smelting furnaces and metal forges were not found, and real workshops would have produced far more debris. The domba interpretation is therefore more adequate (Huffman 1996:149).

However, the presence of metal-working utensils far-flung from any furnace may simply suggest these items were not used where they were discovered or they could have been placed there either in storage or for any number of reasons. As we have seen, Huffman's connection between present day Venda *domba* and Great Zimbabwe is tenuous.

Garlake seems to concur with Huffman that the iron-making tools found near the tower area may have a more than practical function because they were found in areas adjoining ritual activity;

This was an area that Hall wrote of as also containing copper ore and slag. It may be more than coincidence that these 'industrial' areas immediately adjoin either the Eastern Enclosure on the Hill or the precincts of the Conical Tower in the Elliptical Building, the two areas that seem, from other evidence, to have been centres of ritual (Garlake 1974:116).

He also documents the presence of gold-making equipment found in the same area;

Almost all the metal working tools that Hall (R.N.) found were in Enclosure 6 (Huffman's Enclosure 7) on the floor of a hut that probably stood near the entrance to the precincts of the Conical Tower: three gold crucibles, six pottery scorifiers and a pair of tongs. A drawplate and two shallow cross-shaped moulds, crudely carved from soapstone, that he also records from this Enclosure may well have lain with them. Enclosure 10 nearby contained six or eight smooth river pebbles that had been used to burnish gold...In the low cave beyond the Eastern Enclosure on the Hill that still contains lumps of iron ore, Bent found a cross-shaped soapstone mould and nearby he recovered crucibles, burnishers for gold and the residue of gold-bearing quartz (Garlake 1974:116 brackets my inclusion).¹

It appears then that these iron and gold-making tools, far-flung from any furnace, may have served some ritual purpose, or were stored here for some reason.

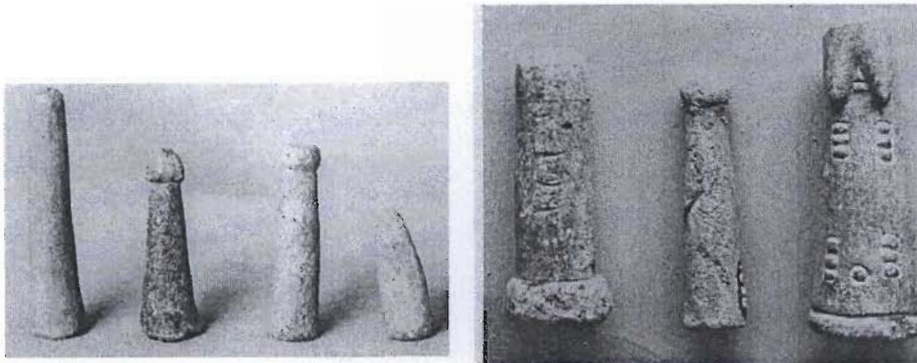
The stone cairn at the northeast entry to the Great Enclosure was also discovered to have a ritual purpose, possibly for sacrifice, as it was originally found covered with cattle bones and charcoal thought to be the remains of numerous sacrifices. (Hall:1905) Summers later found fragments of a soapstone bowl that were decorated with markings indicating a ritual function (Garlake 1974:)

Many small carved soapstone figurines have been recovered from the Great Enclosure, in the vicinity of the Conical Tower and they possibly suggest ceremonial or ritual activity;

...this development is best represented at Great Zimbabwe by small cylinders carved from soapstone and formally described as 'phalli'. Some of these are easily identifiable as human torsoes and have breasts and navels clearly depicted on them while some also bear incised marks that seem to represent skin scarifications. Hall speaks of 'at least one hundred' 'phalli' having been recovered at Great Zimbabwe. Over sixty of them were found around Bent's

¹ There is a discrepancy between Garlake's Enclosure 6 and Huffman's Enclosure 7.

'altar' in the Eastern Enclosure. The others were restricted to areas near the Conical Tower, near the bird in the Philips Ruin, in the Number 1 Ruin and in the Western Enclosure on the Hill (Garlake 1974:123).



Soapstone figurines found at Great Zimbabwe (Garlake 1974).

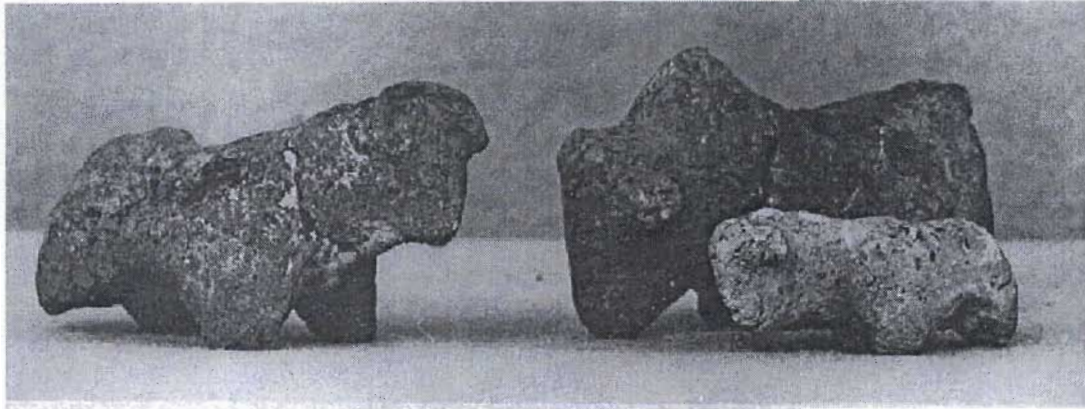
Garlake suggests that interpretation of these figurines “becomes extremely hazardous”, since he believes nothing like them have ever been recorded in Shona ethnography, though he does align them with “symbols of a cult” who could have been associated with the “ideology or rituals belonging to the bird carvings”. (Garlake 1974:123).

In later documentation, Garlake describes the carvings in more detail but still offers little interpretation on their meaning;

A great many small soapstone carvings were found in early diggings round the dakha-faced platforms that held upright pillars. They were clearly associated with the carved pillars and must have a related significance. Many are stylised torsos of women, showing breasts, umbilicus and scarifications. Some are so stylised they look like a conventional chess-piece. Others are simple cones and some resemble human finger bones...Some with a rounded head are labeled “phallic”. Highly stylised headless figurines of pottery were made by many Early Iron Age groups in Zimbabwe. They have no place in traditional Shona religion as we know it today. Some practices have clearly changed or fallen into disuse over the centuries (Garlake 1994:58).

Huffman describes in more detail the figurines that were recovered in and around the *daga* mound in the central enclosure (Daga Platform Area (cf.: Fig. 5.19)) between the conical towers and the entrance to the Parallel Passage.

...fragments of monoliths, and an unusual assortment of figurines were found scattered in the general vicinity (Hall 1905:267). Among other things, this collection included clay cattle figurines, stylised male and female soapstone figurines (one a pregnant woman), deeply grooved soapstone cylinders resembling metal bangles, and two carved soapstone beams (Huffman 1996:148).



Clay cattle figurines (Garlake 1974)

While Huffman interprets such items as suggesting *domba* function (Huffman, T. 1996:148), where clay cattle and male and female figurines were used as teaching tools in Venda initiation practices, this part of the study will reveal that such fertility figurines are used specifically in Karanga religious practice associated with ancestral honouring and cultivative rituals and are placed at the *mutoro*-place. While many such figurines were discovered inside the Great Enclosure, they were also discovered in the Eastern and Western Enclosures, in the Phillips Ruin and in the No. 1 Ruin (Garlake 1974). Therefore, since the figures were found elsewhere, they may not indicate *domba* function for the Great Enclosure. We shall see that such figures, placed at the ancestral shrine and at the *mutoro*-place (to honour the ancestors) may have also been used at the Eastern Enclosure national shrine.

The figure representing a 'pregnant woman' may have an association with female fertility related to *mutoro*-place ritual or may represent a great ancestress, or at least have some connection to fertility rituals. Relating finds such as these to cultural practice is a complex task. However, as we shall see, many of these above-mentioned utensils and ritual items coincide in form, function and decoration with traditional Karanga ritual practice.

3 Death, Burial and Ancestral Shrines

... the Shona believe in life as a spirit after death, during which a dead person can continue to bear influence on the community he has left. Immediately after death the spirit is feared as unpredictable and dangerous and a fear of their superior power covers all dealings with the spirits. Nevertheless, sometime after death the deceased is settled back at home in the community, and from this time on is regarded as a friendly spirit guardian to the family that survives him. The presence of these spirit guardians and their power over the lives of their descendants are so real to the traditional Shona that in many respects they remain part of the community, spirit elders whose influence remains very alive (Bourdillon 1997: 227).

This chapter provides a background for this part of the study which centres on the idea that Great Zimbabwe expresses the theme of a landscape which honours the ancestors through the expression of stone symbolic structures. In order to understand the significance of the practice of honouring the ancestors (*vadzimu*, spirit guardians), it is necessary to understand the Karanga interpretation of death and the importance of the traditional ritual sites related to the world of the dead such as the burial sites, the ancestral shrine and the *mutoro*-place. The descriptions of traditional graves and ancestral shrines are intended to provide a formative analysis for the spatialisation and symbolism attached to burial and rainmaking shrines and the ritual processes of death in traditional Karanga society. What is important here is that the symbolic expressive qualities and spatial dynamics of these traditional structures and rituals describe the Karanga themes of death as a symbolic birth and of the unity of blood and fertility and these themes appear to be expressed both spatially and symbolically in the architecture of the Great Enclosure.

Death as a Symbolic Birth

The burial of the dead in Karanga society is considered to be a 'returning' of the body 'to the earth', where death is seen as a symbolical birth, since the body re-unites with the earth, when it is 'placed in the earth's uterus' and the ancestor is received into the earth's uterus as an embryo (Aschwanden 1989:127f);

*Reunion with the Earth takes place when the deceased is placed into the "Earth's uterus."
The return of "God's breath" (soul) happens at the bringing-home ceremony (kugadziva) - a "symbolical birth" (op. cit.).*

The early stages of death are symbolised as a sexual act where **the renewal of man** takes place and the dead man's possessions are placed inside a grain bin. These ritual items represent his status and responsibilities and are 'safeguarded' inside the wife's grain bin, symbolic of the uterus.

...death also begins with (symbolical) sexual intercourse. Death is not the end but the start of a new life. When someone dies, the Karanga pour ashes into a mortar and pound them with a pestle, calling on all those relatives who live far away...As the ashes are blown away by the wind, so this message is meant to be carried to the dead man's relatives. Pounding a mortar

is symbolical sexual intercourse, and here it refers to the newly begun life of the deceased (Aschwanden 1982:207).

Burial and birth are very closely related and, through ritual and symbolism, they become synonymous with each other. In Karanga society new life is seen as a consequence of death, since the body began its life in an embryonic position and must leave the world in the same way. (Aschwanden 1989; 1987.)

The concept that death is regarded as a symbolical birth in traditional Karanga society is made explicit in the ceremony performed at the initiation of a new chief and his ritual sister. Aschwanden relates an initiation of a new chief and sister of the Korekore people of north-east Zimbabwe. (Aschwanden 1989:183-184.)² To examine whether the candidates were worthy of chieftainship, they undergo various ritual tests. The pair are taken to a sacred pool in the mountains and thrown into the water. If the crocodile of the pool does not attack them, then this signifies that they are worthy of leadership. During this test, the tribal medium becomes possessed by the principal ancestral spirit who enacts the process of giving birth. If the candidates emerge alive from the pool, a signal would inform the spirit medium who stays at the medium's house in the village. This signifies a successful 'birth,' whereupon a festival of singing and dancing would begin. The successful initiation of a new chief and his ritual sister is therefore regarded as the end of a successful birth (Aschwanden 1989:183-184).

What is significant here is not the event itself but the symbolism of the event. The pair walking to the mountains symbolises their 'death', while their return, from the sacred pool, symbolises their birth;

Their return is celebrated as a resurrection and presented symbolically in a birth - a birth from the pool...When chiefs are born the people with all their political and religious leaders are assembled, all are part of the event. But the ancestors who guide men's fate are present too. Also included in this circle is nature, in its most creative form (pool and water). It provides the "uterus", and it can - guided by the ancestors - give life or death to the examinees (Aschwanden 1989:185).

The process of initiation of the new leader and his ritual sister enacts the concept of the **renewal of man** taking place in the **sacred pool as uterus**.³

This ritual also demonstrates again the blurred edges between the sacred (mythology) and the profane (reality), where **mythology becomes a real experience** by the people;

This reality here becomes a mythological event which comprises all aspects and combines them in a comprehensive show by uniting the biological factors of man and nature with the supernatural realities of life and death, growth and decay, this world and the next (op. cit.).

This notion that real experiences are mythologically realised supports the motivation for studying built environment based on the mythological consciousness of the people, since ritual activity is informed by and through mythologically shaped thinking.

² Cf.: p.99, footnote 4, where the appropriate use of Korekore ethnography for this field of study is discussed.

³ Cf: Parts 3 & 4 where this theme has been discussed in depth.

What is of most significance here is that the initiation of the new leaders, and the symbolic associations of the Karanga concept of death, reveals the 'uterus of the earth' to be a central and pre-eminent symbolic feature in Shona symbols of life and death and in ritual activities surrounding the world of the dead.

Karanga Burial and the Significance of the Grave

The position that the body is placed into the grave and the artifacts that are buried with the body are two important aspects of burial ritual in traditional Karanga society (Aschwanden 1987:257f). The various objects interred with the body of a man include a jug of beer placed near the head and his wooden headrest placed under his head. His walking stick and clothing are situated alongside his body and the *gunere* set of plates is placed into the grave. These items ensure the man's fertility in the afterlife. A woman's most important jars, cooking spoons and ladles are placed inside her grave to also symbolise her continued fertility. The *mambo's* artifacts represent his status and responsibility. They are ritually potent. Traditionally, they are safeguarded in the wife's grain bin, in the symbolic womb, during the mummification process.

In traditional Karanga society a dead body is placed in an embryonic position within a grave, where the body symbolises the embryo and the grave symbolises the womb. This coincides with the idea that death is seen as a symbolic birth in traditional Karanga society and that the grave and ancestral shrines are seen as symbols of the uterus where the ancestor's body 'returns to the uterus of the earth'. The dead were traditionally buried with many pots and jars (also symbols of the uterus) surrounding the body;

Every grave symbolises the uterus. Even today, when people are buried almost exclusively in the European fashion, this symbolical meaning is maintained. When digging a grave, a space large enough to take the body is excavated at the bottom at right angles to one side of the main chamber. This side chamber is then sealed off with stones. With regard to the bend in the grave, the Karanga explain that man enters the world in a bent attitude, in keeping with the shape of the birth-canal. Later he leaves the earth in the same way, one puts him back into the uterus (literally they say "into the second uterus") from which he will rise as an ancestral spirit. (Aschwanden 1982:252).

It is also especially important in Karanga society to 'hide' the body of the deceased and the embryonic state of the body is therefore 'hidden' in the grave. For chiefs and *mambos* it is important to bury the deceased in hidden caves in the mountains. The grave, jars and pots, as symbols of the uterus, specifically relate to this notion of 'hiding' the corpse within a protected enclosure or container and that there is something of religious significance (fertility) hidden and contained within a protective enclosure. This raises the act of procreation, life and death to a sacred level;

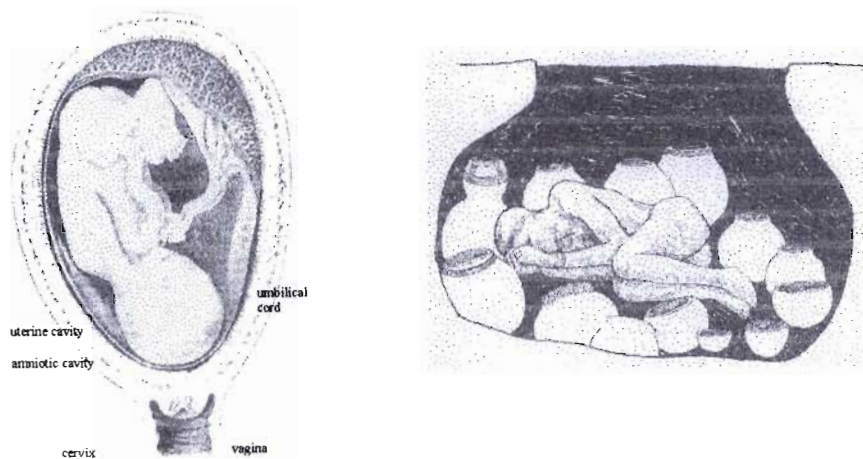


Figure 5.1; Death as a symbolic birth. Conceptual similarities between the traditional Karanga grave, pots and the human uterus. Such embryonic forms are seen as ‘containers’ of fertility. (Source: Left; Johnston T. B. (ed) 1987. Right; Garlake 1983:23.)

To bury is kwiga (to hide), and kurasha (to throw away). One wants to hide the body, the Karanga say, so as to keep it out of reach of witches, who are always in search of human flesh; and one wants to throw away the evil which death has brought and which is still connected with the body...the close connection with witchcraft and evil which the deceased has had to endure makes the body a dreaded object – that alone, in the Karanga view, is a cogent reason for hiding it. The deceased is “hidden” in a grave, but the choice of location varies from case to case. Symbolical connections play an important role here (Aschwanden 1987:247).

The symbolisation of grave as uterus is also apparent in the construction of the traditional grave, not only in the shape but also in the entrance to it. The entry to the grave symbolises the difficult exit from the uterus at birth. When the deceased is buried in a grave in a cave, entrance walls are constructed that correspond to the closing up of the uterus with a ‘door’ at birth. (This corresponds to the Karanga symbolisation of the house as a uterus and the uterus as a house) (cf.: Part 4, Chapter 4 & Fig. 4.10);

The Karanga give the same explanation for closing up the grave in the mountains. There one often finds 2 walls, one at the entrance and a second one just in front of the cave proper. This is to symbolise the difficult (because bent) exit from the uterus (Aschwanden 1987:252).

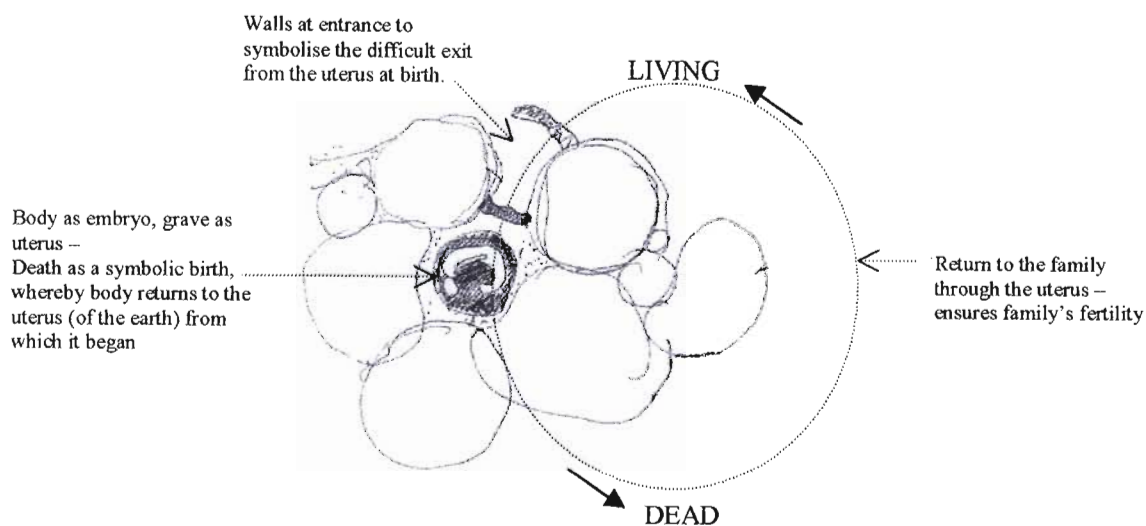


Figure 5.2; Traditional body and grave as symbols of the embryo in the 'uterus of the earth'. (Author)

We have also seen this symbolisation made explicit in Karanga mythology where, in the stories of Chamasango (cf.: p.105) and A Witch is a Mother Too (cf.: p.100), the entrance to the cave (symbol of the uterus) symbolises the difficult exit from the cervix at birth. Therefore, symbolic associations in mythology narrate the symbolic, spatial and thematic aspects of death rituals.

Aschwanden explains that it was important for the dead to be both "hidden" in the grave and to be buried close to where they lived (Aschwanden 1987:247);

... the deceased is, in principle, buried near to where he lived. Though he is dead, the Karanga say, he still belongs to his family, who want to see the grave and point it out to the children, saying: "Your grandfather is buried there." (Aschwanden 1987:250).

There are many areas at the Hill Complex between the Eastern and Western Enclosures that are cave-like and contorted and walled between boulders that would appear to fit this description of the traditional grave construction. It may then be appropriate to consider the possibility that the dead *mambos* were buried somewhere at the Hill Complex since, while it was important for *mambos* to be hidden in caves in the mountains, they also need to be buried 'near to where they lived'.

Siting Karanga oral tradition, Mufuka follows this interpretation and suggests that the Eastern Enclosure housed the graves of the dead *mambos* of Great Zimbabwe and that the bird sculptures were "graveyard signposts" of the dead kings, who were "... constantly consulted as if they were alive" (Mufuka 1983:50).

We have seen that the stone birds most probably refer to the totem-animals of the founding fathers (cf.: p.110f). Mufuka also suggests this association, where the *Hungwe* bird, the fish eagle, was fashioned with human characteristics at the beginning of the Zimbabwean empire. He explains the origin of the first carved *Hungwe* bird;

This was the first Zimbabwe bird, circa 1150A.D. It was placed in the ritual enclosure where all the future kings were to be buried as a watch-dog at the grave of Rusvingo and the state itself. Its removal from the hill was wrought with grave consequences (Mufuka 1983:50).

The *Hungwe-Dziva* ancestral spirits were associated with a bird. The eagle, he explains, was their totem of sacred leadership.

Considering that death is seen as a symbolic birth and that the body is seen as an embryo placed within a uterus-grave, the possible position of the graves between the Eastern and Western Enclosures might reflect the desire for the expression of unity between the world of the dead (Eastern Enclosure as national shrine) and the world of the living (Western Enclosure and residence of the *mambo*).

In this interpretation, the stone birds become the visual markers of the graves of Great Zimbabwe's leaders, signifying the physical location of the men who founded and subsequently led a great and powerful state.

While royal graves (relating to the period of occupation of Great Zimbabwe) have not been discovered at the Hill Complex or, indeed, anywhere within the royal settlement, Bent "unwittingly opened" several graves at the Hill Complex, one of which had been "made in a narrow passage in the ancient walls of the fortress". The grave was one year old when it was discovered by Bent (Bent 1897 (1969:79)). This would indicate a tradition of graves hidden at the Hill Complex by the later Karanga occupants, postdating the decline of the kingdom in the 15th century. However, in the absence of archaeological evidence of royal graves at the time of Great Zimbabwe's occupation, Mufuka's suggestion that the birds are 'signposts' for royal graves is unproven.

Furthermore, the burial of *mambos* at the Eastern Enclosure might be seen as inappropriate religious practice. Aschwanden suggests that, while the *mambo* must be buried "close to where he lived", he also mentions that it is most important that the dead are "strictly separated from the living" in order to avoid contamination of evil influences (Aschwanden 1987:264). If this tradition was emphasised at Great Zimbabwe, then the possibility that the great *mambos* were ever interred at the Eastern Enclosure would be doubtful, since the Eastern Enclosure is closely connected with the *mambo*'s residential quarters, the residence of the spirit mediums and the *mambo*'s royal entourage - the mountain at Great Zimbabwe was a residential complex as well as a ritual site.

Considering this evidence, it might be more likely that the great *mambos* were mummified and buried in a far-flung mountainous area. However, if we follow Aschwanden's documentation that the *mambo*'s graves needed to be located 'close to the living' then there is some ambiguity. Considering the spiritual nature of the Eastern Enclosure and its *genus-loci* on a symbolic mountain with sacred cave, the suggestion that great *mambos* were interred here could be equally likely.

At this stage of research in this field of study, the field discoveries and examination of oral traditions so far do not provide enough information (and what we do have appears to be ambiguous) about site locale for the burial of Karanga *mambos* to determine where ancestral burial sites at Great Zimbabwe were sited. Gilbert Pwiti observes this in his criticism of Huffman's analysis;

To date, the only Zimbabwe culture burials known are the recent discoveries at Tulamela. We thus do not yet have enough knowledge of the burial practices of this period and culture (Pwiti, G. 1997 in SAAB 166:138).

What appears to be important here though is the symbolic and spatial attributes of the structures supporting the world of the ancestors, the world of the dead. **The thick, massive and protective cave-like walls and processional routes of the Great Enclosure may reflect a desire to express a world associated with the dead or with rituals related to the ancestors, to enhance the concept of an embryonic protective spatialisation inherent in the Karanga concept of death as a symbolic birth.** This does not suggest burial site for the Great Enclosure since it would be seen traditionally as an inappropriate site for burial. However, it suggests a site which expresses the themes presented in the practice of honouring the ancestors.

The Death of a *Mambo* and the Bringing Home Ceremony

Rituals surrounding the death, mummification and burial of a *mambo* are significant in traditional Karanga society, not merely because of the importance of the *mambo*, but also because his fertility must remain intact throughout the process;

After a ruler dies, his fertility remains of great importance and this finds expression in the important religious procedures of the Karanga (Aschwanden 1987:266).

The *mambo*'s body, because it is particularly vulnerable to pray from witches due to the *mambo*'s power, is kept hidden. His death can only be known after the funeral. This is why mummification of *mambos* is important, for the "blood" of the family lineage (literally the blood-soaked soil collected in a jar) needs to 'stay' with the family. During mummification, it is especially important to safeguard the body;

... the walls (of the grave) were kept free from cracks to prevent the spirit from escaping, pots were placed under the corpse to collect the body fluids, and any maggots falling from the body were carefully collected to be buried with the corpse since they may contain the spirit of the dead chief (Bourdillon 1991:201).

Between the time of death and the ritual bringing-home ceremony (*kugadzira*), a dead body is said to be in an embryonic state, where the body is protected, until it is 'brought home'. The body at this time is said to be in a liminal state. The bringing-home ceremony corresponds to the symbolical birth aspect of death rituals (Aschwanden 1987:245f). During the single file processional walk to the grave, the mourners stop at various intervals and this is said to symbolise the labour pains of birth. The body is lowered to the ground three times during the walk, symbolising the three stages of a normal birth and accentuating the Karanga desire for the body to return to the uterus of the earth in the same way in which it arrived, since death is the beginning of a new life for the ancestor (Aschwanden 1987:256). At the bringing-home ceremony following the death of a *mambo*, the congregation of people begin to dance and shout joyously to indicate the transition of the ancestor to the *hosi*-jar. This is followed by a "great feast which lasts all night" (Aschwanden 1987:331).

The ceremony "...corresponds to a symbolical wedding" where roles are reversed and the dead *mambo* is treated as a bride;

The hosi (first wife) brews the beer for the bringing-home of the king. The jar, with its beer, is to bring the king home and is, therefore, regarded as the most important beer-jar... The first wife is so important at the bringing-home of the king because the ceremony corresponds to a symbolical wedding. The interesting part is that the roles are reversed: the deceased is regarded as a bride and treated accordingly. The king is said to enter the house, and the new life, like a bride (Aschwanden 1987:330).

The jar symbolises the *mambo*'s wife's uterus and safe return to his family through the uterus (death as a symbolic birth) and ensures the fertility of his family in his afterlife (Aschwanden 1987:331).⁴ The bringing-home ceremony reunites, through various ritual procedures, the whole family, both living and dead, and celebrates the "new-born ancestral spirit." (Aschwanden 1987:334).

Another important aspect related to the death of a leader is that great chiefs and *mambos* are usually buried standing up in order to ensure the great leader's "exalted status" while at the same time giving them "...an overview of their land, which they must guard" (Aschwanden 1987:257).

The Mutoro-Place and Ancestral Shrine

The place where a *mambo* or great chief is mummified is seen as the starting point for an ancestral shrine. The site for the ancestral shrine varies according to where the blood (ancestral lineage) from the mummified body is placed.

An ancestral shrine can be a stockade in front of a cave or, as a *mutoro*-place, at the foot of a mountain. Aschwanden explains that the siting of the shrine is regarded as sacred and thus is always located away from the village in lieu of contamination, and it must not be disturbed other than for ceremonial purposes (Aschwanden 1989:239). However, he is ambiguous about this tradition, since he also explains that the ancestral shrine must be "close to the living" (Aschwanden 1987). We can only assume that it was important for the ancestral shrine to be located away from residential areas yet still have accessibility and visibility for the community.

Aschwanden describes several situations in which the ancestral shrine can come into existence. The blood from the mummifying body is left to soak into the soil under the body, and an ancestral shrine placed over top of it. This will then be the site where one goes to pray and make sacrifices;

...this place, where the "blood" of the ancestor is, takes on a very special religious significance. This "blood" of the deceased, the Karanga say, is where one prays and makes sacrifices to the most important ancestor (Aschwanden 1987:267).

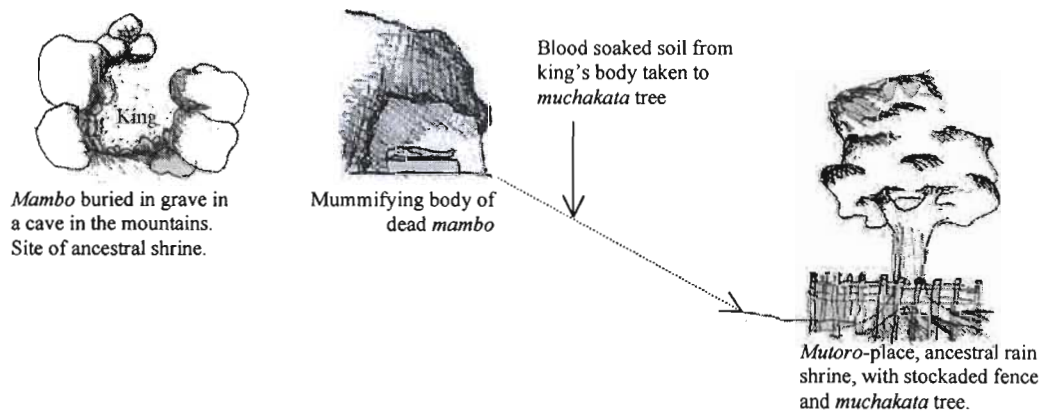
⁴ Cf: Part 3, Chapter 6 which discusses the significance of the jar's symbolic association with the uterus.

If a *muchakata* tree is planted in this blood-soaked soil, then a *mutoro*-place (rain shrine) also comes into existence. The ancestral shrine has become a rain shrine. There, one will go to pray to the great ancestor for rain and fertility (for crops and children). (Aschwanden 1989:239.)

In the case of a dead *mambo*, and therefore at the royal settlement of Great Zimbabwe, the blood-soaked soil from the mummifying body can also be taken to a site with a fully-grown *muchakata* tree, usually at the foot of the mountain where the body is buried (or a tree is planted for this purpose);

If the body is being mummified in a cave, the soil that has soaked up the “blood” is collected and taken to the place where the shrine will be erected. For a king, a muchakata tree is planted in that soil, there is then a mutoro-place (the place where one prays for rain, i.e. fertility). The symbols of blood and fertility are united in these places of ceremony and thereby attain a particular religious structure. (Aschwanden 1987:267).⁵

This site would then become a *mutoro*-place, since it is consecrated with the ancestor’s blood as well as fertility, symbolised by the tree. The *mutoro*-place in this case is symbolically (rather than physically) connected to the grave of the ancestor. A shrine is then built and people will go there to pray for rain and fertility. Similarly, the blood from the mummifying body can be taken in a jar (*hosi*-jar, symbol of the uterus) to the *muchakata* tree site;

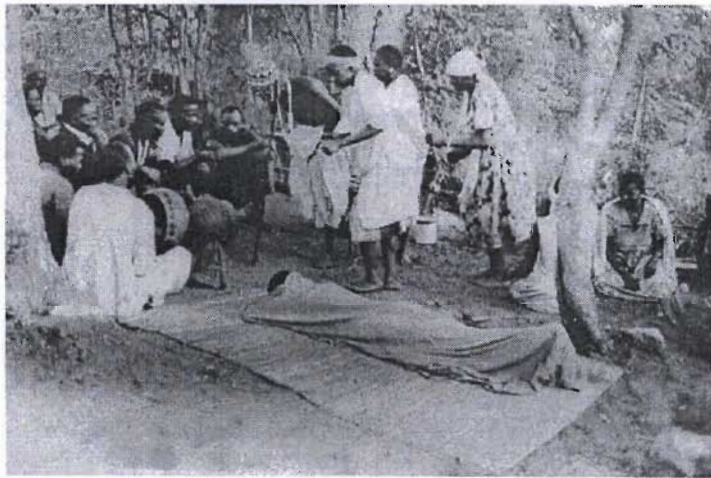


The word “mutoro” is derived from “kutara”, to lift a heavy load off the head or heart. It is the duty of the king or chief to put before God in the Mutopos the troubles the people bring to the Mutoro-place (Aschwanden 1989:239).

Figure 5.3; The creation of an Ancestral Shrine and a *Mutoro*-place. The presence of a *muchakata* tree allows for a *mutoro*-place (rain shrine) to come into existence.

⁵ Cf: Part 3, Chapter 10, Blood and Fertility as Symbols of the Person (*munhu*).

Aschwanden explains further why it was important to mummify dead *mambos* and great chiefs. The fertility of a great ruler is of considerable importance after his death and this is ensured during various religious rituals surrounding his death and burial (Aschwanden 1987:263). Mummification particularly honours the deceased by showing him particular respect since the process of collecting bodily liquid exuding from the drying out body ensures that the blood of the great ruler will stay with the people. In order for the *mambo's* fertility to continue to protect the community, it was important that his blood at the *mutoro*-place stays with the people and is accessible for all. The *mutoro*-place has further significant religious importance in the lives of the descendants and the community because it contains the blood of the *mambo* (ancestral lineage) and the *muchakata* tree (fertility) and so blood and fertility are united at the *mutoro*-place;



Contemporary Shona ancestral shrine and its related ritual activity (Bourdillon 1991).

In the ancestral shrine (it contains a symbolical figure of the ancestor), and even more in the "mutoro"-place, the full significance of the most important Karanga symbols emerges extraordinarily clearly. At the mutoro-place, a muchakata-tree grows in the soil saturated with the king's "blood". The tree itself is an important carrier of the tribe's fertility – which also ensures its survival (Aschwanden 1987:270).

Since it was important for the *mutoro*-place of a great *mambo* to be accessible to the community in order to maintain his fertility in the afterlife, there is a possibility in the case of Great Zimbabwe that the *mutoro*-place of a great *mambo* or founding ancestor was located at the Great Enclosure. The following chapters explore this possibility where the Tower Enclosure at the Great Enclosure is considered as a possible traditional *mutoro*-place translated in stone (symbol of royalty) as a place to particularly honour and pray to the royal *vadzimu*, the guardian spirits of Great Zimbabwe. Chapter 4 outlines the sacrifice festivals related to sowing, harvesting and rainmaking that centre on the *mutoro*-place while Chapter 5 discusses the particular structures within the Great Enclosure that support this observation.

The Family Altar ('Place of the Jars')

There is a strong connection in traditional Karanga society between jars, as symbol of the uterus and the grave. The dead are buried with their jars and the blood of the *mambo* is taken in a *hosi*-jar to the site of the *mutoro*-place. Jars or "small clay pots consecrated to the spirits" are also placed at the *mutoro*-place as gifts to the ancestors in return for rain and fertility from the ancestors (Bourdillon 1991:260f).

The origin for the placing of jars as gifts to the ancestors can be found at the traditional family altar (the 'place of the jars') in the woman's kitchen where the jars are placed on a bench;

The altar of a family is the place of the jars in a woman's kitchen. This is a raised place which symbolises the sublimity and dignity of the ancestors. It is also to the Karanga a symbol of the grave of the ancestral spirit that is said to reside there. There, one prays to the ancestral spirit, and no living person may sit down in that place. The deceased may be present at this altar in various ways. His presence can be very real because in the past dead men were actually buried there... Grave is guva, and the altar is called rukuva or huva. These words derive from kukuva, to collect. The grave collects the remains of the deceased, the altar (collects) the jars (Aschwanden 1987:250).

The Karanga say that the jar on the altar is a symbol of the woman and a collection of jars represent the whole tribe and therefore the unity of the family, and stand on the altar so that all may honour the members of the ancestral clan. It is said that the mother's ancestors, being of alien blood, stand on the side of the jars on lower ledges. Therefore, in one place, the alien blood and fertility are combined with the blood and fertility of one's own tribe in the place of the family altar and the problem of marrying into alien blood is restored.

Aschwanden further explains the significance of the family altar as a symbol uniting male (bench) and female (jars) characteristics;

This bench is the place of honour in the house, it is the family-altar. Its raised position symbolises the sublimity and dignity of the ancestral spirits. Since the ancestors are higher than anyone else, they are honoured at the highest place in the house (Aschwanden 1982:203).

The bench also symbolises the husband who is allowed to have many wives, since there is one place, the platform, yet there are many jars, the wives. Chapter 5 discusses the possible use of the stone platforms at the Tower Enclosure as a traditional family altar for the royal family and as a platform for placing of gifts (jars and *gono* (horn)) for the ancestors at the *mutoro*-place.

4 Communal Sacrifice Festivals and the Great Enclosure

Introduction

This chapter provides descriptions of communal sacrifice festivals related to cultivation and rainmaking and explores the possibility that the Tower Enclosure, operating as a *mutoro*-place, was used for the ritual proceedings of these ceremonies since they centre on the traditional *mutoro*-place (rain shrine). It also suggests that aspects such as spatial dynamics, siting, and symbolic structures relating to fertility at the Great Enclosure further supports the structure as a site for these ceremonies.

Bourdillon and Gelfand document the nature of these events in traditional Shona society with particular reference to the northern and central tribes of Shona society such as the Korekore people. These rituals have "...local variations, but fit into a common theme" (Bourdillon 1991:263). Ashwanden documents typical Shona rituals (1982) in *Symbols of Life and Symbols of Death* (1987) and, more specifically, the Karanga ritual traditions in *Karanga Mythology* (1989) which, he believes, differ from the northern Shona in their relationship to the Mwari-cult (Ashwanden:1989:224). The variations between tribes arise from regional differences peculiar to local contextual needs, the specifics of the various cults and to changes over time through migration.

The problem with the use of oral tradition for interpreting history is that informants recite only what is of interest to them, and many traditions will survive only as long as the people retain an interest in them. However, while the ritual procedures may change over time, the symbolic aspects of the rituals are important in providing an understanding of a culture's perspective. Shona oral tradition is invaluable for providing a "Shona point of view" (Bourdillon 1991:4) and therefore elucidates our understanding of the consciousness of the people even though it may be limited in its potential to reveal historical fact. Furthermore, the common aspects of the ceremonies are the symbolic associations and themes that are narrated in mythology. These symbolic aspects are of interest in this study, rather than the ritual procedures, since symbolism and theme retain meaning over time. This assists in further understanding the symbolic values and creative intentions of the stone symbols and symbolic landscape of Great Zimbabwe.

By way of background for this part of the study, this chapter provides a description of communal sacrifice festivals related to fertility of the fields and rainmaking and these centre around the *mutoro*-place. (The *mutoro*-place (rain shrine) is described in detail in Chapter 3 of this part of the study and is interpreted in more detail in Chapter 5.) In traditional Karanga society, there are three annual sacrifice-festivals for God and the ancestors that signify important stages of harvesting and sowing. Their prime purpose is to pray for rain for the crops and to express gratitude to God and the ancestors for the fertility of the fields (Ashwanden 1989:224f). The three great communal sacrifice festivals the Karanga speak of are The Rain Ceremony (*Mutoro* or *Mukwerere* ceremony), The Festival of the First Fruits and The Harvest Thanksgiving Festival (op. cit.). Other ceremonies such as the Ceremony Before Sowing and the *Mahumbwe* Festival are also connected to these main events. These ceremonies related to propitiating ancestors for good crops and rain are ritually important and very significant in the life of the traditional

Karanga and are held at certain times of the year coinciding with the life cycle of the fields such as harvesting and sowing and the advent of the rainy season.

During the ritual events pertaining to these ceremonies, the Karanga use symbolic associations that relate the life cycle of nature with the procreation cycle of the woman and this raises fertility to a sacred event. Therefore, as a house for the *vahosi*, the Great Enclosure becomes symbolically and functionally appropriate since these ceremonies are related to fertility of nature (rain and crops) and of man (woman's uterus).

Eastern Enclosure and Great Enclosure – Ritual Connections

Mufuka and Huffman suggest that the Eastern Enclosure was a 'national shrine' and a site for ceremonial activity on a national scale. Considering the elevated importance of the enclosure, the ceremonial artifact recovered there and its *genus loci* associated with mountain symbolism and sacred cave (cf: Part I, Chapter 5) this suggestion seems plausible;

On the national level the Great Zimbabweans received representatives from all the tribes to the celebration of thanksgiving in the season of the first fruits. If the harvests were good, this was held in April (Kubvumbi) and was a purely joyous occasion. In this case, the king and the national spirit mediums of Tovele, Chaminuka and Murenga Soro-rezhou would take charge. It was in honour of this spirit medium that the conical tower in the Great House was constructed...The ritual enclosure (named Eastern Enclosure on the hill complex) was also a national shrine, not a private shrine of the king...the Shona-Karanga religion was not a private affair of the individual and ...in fact many public actions of the political authorities were guided by religious principles and...there were many occasions for religious ceremonies (Mufuka 1983:18).

However, the inaccessible nature of the Hill Complex, the ritually secluded atmosphere of the Eastern Enclosure and its much smaller size in comparison to the Great Enclosure may rule out the possibility of large-scale communal ceremony. This may imply that the religious ceremony attached to the Eastern Enclosure would have been limited to religion on a national level such as national events concerning royalty, spirit mediums and regional chiefs as representatives of chieftancies. The ancillary residential enclosures surrounding the Eastern Enclosure would appear to rule out any possibility of large scale communal sacrifice, supplication and ceremonial festivities of the nature described below. The scale and siting of the Great Enclosure would suggest it to be an accessible building large enough to house the myriad exuberant communal ceremonies marking various ritual occasions, particular to the immediate settlement;

Music, intoxicating drink and roasted meat were part of the pleasures enjoyed by the hangers-on the Great Zimbabwe...There were many opportunities for merry-making, the new year and the lighting of the new fires was one occasion for dancing, the festival of the first fruits when the moon died in the month of April was another, the succession ceremony of the king and

sometimes biras (beer party in honour of the ancestors) were held to break the monotony of life (Mufuka 1983:25).

The residential quarters of the spirit mediums and rainmakers enclosing the edges of the Eastern Enclosure are austere and grim. Mufuka even possibly exaggerates the “celibate” life-style of these inhabitants and suggests that they lived like “monks” and “nuns” who were “...devoid of all human and social intercourse cooped up in their little perches on the hill.” (Mufuka 1983:28.)

We shall see that the symbolic nature of the stone symbols related to fertility and women at the Great Enclosure further support the building’s use in connection with the communal sacrifice ceremonies. Furthermore, in the interpretation for this study, it also houses the *mutoro*-place which is an important religious structure at the centre of these ceremonies.

The Nature of the Ceremonies

Spirit Mediums and Rain-Priests

Spirit mediums are profoundly important at these ceremonies since, through them, the people are able to find out the reasons for poor harvests or lack of rain or how to continue prosperity when harvests and rain are plentiful;

Senior men from the neighbourhood or domain approach the medium of the guardian spirit to find out the reason for the trouble and what can be done to avert it. They may go to the homestead of the medium with a large party to the accompaniment of singing and dancing in honour of the spirit... The spirit, through its possessed medium, may announce the cause of the trouble. It might simply say that the people have been forgetting their ancestors and should honour the guardian spirits of the country with millet beer. It may name some offence as the cause of the trouble, particularly a violation of any tradition that is particularly associated with the greater tribal spirits... (Bourdillon 1991:262).

When crops are poor, people will approach the spirit medium to inquire about the trouble. The medium and the chief will thereby organise an appropriate ritual and ceremony to contact the spirits.

Rain-priests are also an important part of these ceremonies. A rain-priest (*nyusa*) is chosen by God and acts as mediator between God and man, where God speaks through the rain-priest. While the spirit medium is the medium of the ancestors, the rain-priest is the ‘medium of God’ (*svikiro renhume yaMwari*).

Rain-priests and spirit mediums can be either men or women but only those persons of high standing in society may be chosen;

Only men and women of irreproachable reputation and exemplary conduct are chosen as rain-priests. Their life is often full of self-sacrifice and stress (Aschwanden 1989:233f).

A rain-priest will be called upon in a dream by a ‘spirit of God’ to go to the ‘stone of the pool’ to receive an alien spirit. Thereafter, the chosen one will go to the Matopo mountains and hear the voice of God in the cave, asking if he or she wants to become a rain-priest. At a following dance and festival with the priests of the rain-shrine (*mutoro*-place), the appointee will become an official rain-priest. This rain-priest will then

act as a mediator between God and man by relaying messages to the people about what kind of seed to sow and what the next rain period will be like. (op. cit.).

The rain-priest wears a decorated loin clothe covered in coloured glass beads in a zig-zag (chevron) pattern. This pattern represents the rain clouds and the puff-adder snake of the *mutoro*-place (op. cit.).

There are also spirits of dead rain-priests (*jukwa-shave*) which “establish a direct connection between God and *nyusa*”. These, like the rain-priests are either male or female (op. cit.).

It might be possible that in the case of Great Zimbabwe, the *vahosi* became a famous rain-priest or ancestral medium and that her fame may even be seen to be expressed by the chevron pattern, as symbol of the queen’s (*vahosi*’s) snake (cf.: p.236f).

Communal Sacrifices and the Stone Cairn at the Great Enclosure

Sacrifice is also an important part of these ceremonies for blood is seen as a way of propitiating and supplicating the ancestors in return for rains and fertility.

Sacrifice, in traditional Karanga society, is seen as the most important way to influence God. Sacrifices were made regularly to ensure fertility and also when sterility was a problem or when the fields were barren. Therefore, fertility was the key aspect of sacrifice and supplication (Aschwanden 1989:221);

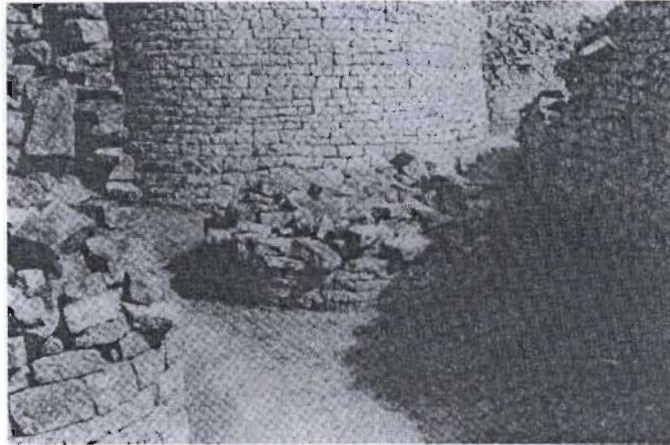
Between God and man there are possibilities of mutual influence...Direct gifts are seen as sacrifices. At the ‘matakapoua’ festival (Festival of First Fruits) meaning “we are fortunate or well off”...a black bull was sent to Matopo-mountains...we wanted to find out why the Karanga make more sacrifices to the ancestors than to God. They told us that God is too great and too good to worry about human trivialities. That was done by the ancestors and, therefore, they needed more sacrifices. Besides, God – in contrast to the ancestors – asks less often for sacrifices (Aschwanden 1989:221f).

In the past, a black ox, symbol of God’s fertility, was said to have been sacrificed during these ceremonies while today sheep and goats are used as offerings to the great spirits (Bourdillon 1991:263).

The black colour of the ox symbolises the black pool in the cave of the mountains. Many Karanga myths and stories narrate the importance of sacrifice to appease ancestors and overcome danger. For example, in the story of The Pond of the King (cf.: p.150), a traditional doctor prepares a “cleansing ceremony” in order to “protect all members of the clan from the alien blood...which might bring disaster onto their own blood”. They also made sacrifices to the ancestors, asking them for protection from the evil associated with alien blood (Aschwanden 1989:75). Blood is seen as an important way to overcome danger and satisfy ancestral spirits.

At the Rain Ceremonies (below), the sacrifice is even more important than the blessing of the seed (Ceremony Before Sowing), since it helps secure rain (Aschwanden 1989:225). Sacrifice was made before the rainy season at the *mutoro*-place, where the black ox as symbol of *fumo* (wealth) was sacrificed for the ancestors to inculcate good rains and harvests.

The stone cairn strategically located inside the northeast entrance to the Great Enclosure may have been used for these sacrifices.



Stone cairn inside northeast entrance to Great Enclosure. (Huffman 1987:38.)

Numerous cattle-bones and sacrificial debris have been discovered on the Stone Cairn and so it is more than likely that it was used as a sacrificial cairn. Garlake suggests however, that these cattle bones and the evidence of beer making and consumption would merely imply a traditional diet of beer and beef (Garlake 1982).

Mufuka, though, suggests that cattle bones and beer can be explained in terms of ritual purposes;

The proper interpretation is that spirit mediums, wisemen and councilors who must have dominated the city, demanded tender beef and beer partly for their victuals, because of their advanced age but more likely for ritual purposes. The idea of eating tender beef (mhuru, i.e. young cattle) or unsalted beef by itself suggests ritual purposes. The Karanga-Shona do not eat young cattle in the normal course of events. Their diets also consisted of starches...and finger-millet, all of which are African grains (Mufuka 1983:18).

The location of cattle bones at the Stone Cairn would therefore appear to indicate ritual activity.

Huffman also interprets the cattle bones in this way, since fragments of a ritual soapstone bowl were also found here;

The low stone cairn near the 'woman's' entrance is my third example. It was originally found covered in cattle bones and charcoal (Hall 1905:270), the debris of numerous sacrifices. Later, Summers found pieces of a soapstone bowl (decorated with a bull and crocodile) with hand-cut marks on the inside (Huffman 1996:152).

Huffman suggests that the sacrificial cairn can therefore be explained in terms of *domba* (initiation school) function;

The most likely ancestors to be honoured with a sacrifice in this way were ritual sisters, since they, as Great Aunts, were responsible for teaching marriageable girls proper moral

behaviour... (during domba instruction)... these spirits were thanked for their past success and invoked for their continuing influence (Huffman 1996:152) (brackets author's inclusion).

The ritual ancestors would have been likely to be honoured with sacrifice if the enclosure was for *domba* practice, yet the sacrificial evidence at the Stone Cairn does not necessarily **explain** *domba* function. There were numerous other sacrificial occasions in traditional Karanga society that could have utilised the stone cairn. As we shall see, it would be just as likely for other ancestors to be honoured in significant ways, especially the great ancestors of Zimbabwe – the great *vadzimu* (as founding fathers of the great state) as well as the great ancestral rain-priests during rain ceremonies and ceremonies related to fertility of the fields. In the case of Great Zimbabwe, it was the founding ancestors, the guardian spirits of the land that would have needed particular honouring and supplication through sacrifice, since they were the first leaders of the royal family and founders of the great state and it was essential for their fertility after death to remain with the community (Bourdillon 1991). In traditional Karanga society, these human and animal sacrifices were an important part of many different ceremonial and ritual occasions, such as at the three great fertility festivals as outlined below. Another example might be at the death of a great chief or *mambo*, and on the day following his burial where a goat or bull is sacrificed in a special ceremony (Aschwanden 1987:265). The old Karanga say that in the old days (possibly referring to the days of Great Zimbabwe) virgins were sacrificed as the most precious gift to God, as a way of sacrificing human fertility for God. In return for this human sacrifice, the people would expect wealth to come from God;

In return, the Karanga expect from God wealth in the shape of children (fuma yavanhu), of cattle (fuma yezvipfuo) and of land (fuma yevhu, meaning a good harvest) (Aschwanden 1989:221).

Great Zimbabwe and Matopo-mountains were important places (where the 'voice of God' is heard) where sacrifices (as direct gifts to God) were performed;

A direct connection with God is today still experienced in those places where his voice is or was heard. Two places are always mentioned by the old Karanga: Zimbabwe and the Matopo-mountains... Direct gifts to those places where God's voice is or was heard (Zimbabwe and the stone of the pool) are to be seen as sacrifices, but also as gratitude. Every tribe was obliged, through its chief, to send a gift once a year (Aschwanden 1989:212 & 221).⁶

The evidence of the Stone Cairn as well as the ceremonial nature of the architecture of the Parallel Passage and the scale of the Great Enclosure might suggest that the building was a site for such sacrifices as mentioned above. There is certainly an implication that Great Zimbabwe was a site for *national* sacrifices, its site being as important for such ritual as the mountains at Matopos. Sacrifices at a national level, as direct gifts to God, may have occurred at the Eastern Enclosure while sacrifices related to fertility of the fields and rainmaking at the *mutoro*-place may have had a particular significance at the Great Enclosure.

⁶ 'Zimbabwe' literally means 'house of stone' or a stone settlement. Aschwanden is referring here to Great Zimbabwe itself or, more generally to stone settlements relating to mountain symbolism.

Sacrifices that occur at the ceremonies related to harvesting, thanksgiving and rainmaking have particular significance to an interpretation of the Great Enclosure since, as we shall see, the building expresses spatially, functionally and symbolically the common themes expressed at these ceremonies.

The Festive Aspects of the Ceremonies

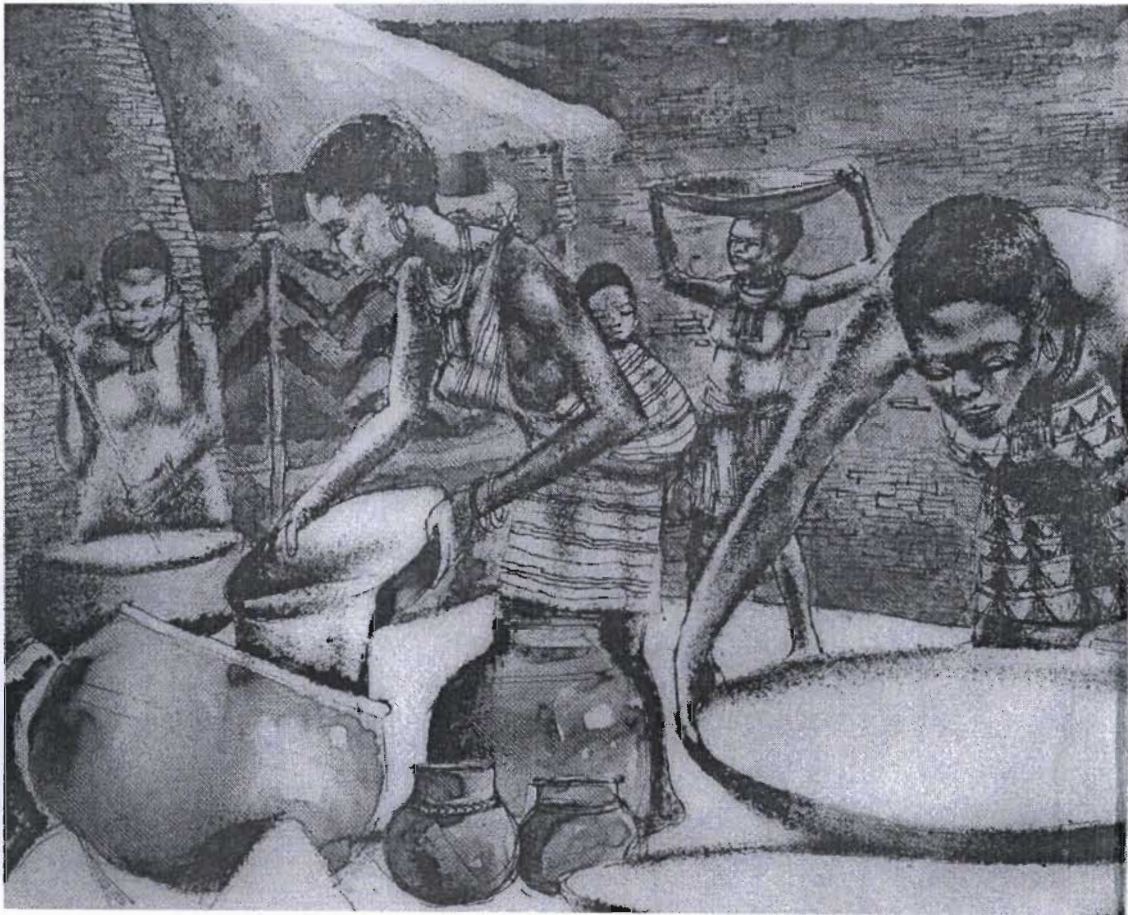
Women played an important role in organising and participating in the festive practices accompanying these ceremonies which included dancing, singing, music (*mbira* and drums), beer making and feasting (Gelfand 1962, Bourdillon 1991:260f). The *vahosi* herself was in charge of the beer brewing for the ritual and the festive aspects of the ceremonies. Ceremonies related to sowing and harvesting are in particular accompanied by feasts to show thanks to the ancestors for the bounty of the fields (Aschwanden 1982:219). Many of these ceremonies were grand-scale events, involving many people and requiring much organisation. The whole chiefdom is required to attend in order to honour the spirits of the land (Bourdillon 1991:262f.) Bourdillon describes the feasts that occur following the ritual procedures of the rain ceremonies and the festivals related to the cultivative ceremonies of sowing, harvesting and thanksgiving. During the festivals, the “local community (all households are represented) gathers...to sing and dance in honour of the spirit” (Bourdillon 1991:260f). Following ritual proceedings, the beer from the ritual is distributed to the people who thereby “...proceed with the business of drinking, singing and dancing, which may last well into the following night provided there is adequate grain from the previous harvest for plenty of millet beer” (op. cit.);

As in family rituals, the whole kinship group gathers for the good of the community, so in these ceremonies the larger community, whether it be a small neighbourhood associated with a particular spirit or the whole chiefdom, must co-operate to obtain from the local spirit guardians what is necessary for the good of all...All in the domain should attend (or at least be represented) in honour of the spirits. So territorial spirit guardians help to bring and keep local communities together (Bourdillon 1991:262-263).

The Harvest Thanksgiving festival is a “particularly large festival” and is a “chance for a very festive occasion” (op. cit.).

In the case of Great Zimbabwe, it might be possible that the archaeological finds of a ceremonial nature (phalli and figurines) (cf.: Part 5, Chapter 2) and the platform enclosure (at the entry to the Tower Enclosure from Daga Platform Area (cf.: Fig. 5.19)) suggests the ceremonial use of this area, where the platform may have been used as a stage for the ceremonial music or singing. The superior quality of the *daga* mounds as well as the bastions, monoliths and *mihombwe* found in this area also suggest a ceremonial aspect. However, since the “whole of the chiefdom” (op. cit.) was required to attend, then one would expect some of the festive aspects of the ceremonies to have taken place outside in a larger area, considering the large chiefdom of Great Zimbabwe. While there is not enough understood of the ritual practices of the Karanga at the time of Great Zimbabwe, the central areas of the Great Enclosure may have been used for

feasts and performance in direct relationship to the royal family in order to particularly honour the territorial guardian spirits of the royal family, the *vadzimu* of the founding fathers of Great Zimbabwe. Alternatively, as an area alongside the *vahosi's* residence, (she was in charge of the beer brewing) this area may have been used for the women to prepare the beer and feasts for these ceremonies. The *daga* hut mounds may suggest huts for this activity.



Artist's impression of the Great Enclosure appears to be based on the idea that the building was strongly associated with women and women's roles in society. This illustration shows women preparing beer for ritual purposes. (Asare 1984)

Ceremony Before Sowing

While not one of the three great sacrifice festivals, this ceremony is important for it serves to “bless the seed” (Aschwanden 1989:224f). The main purpose for this ceremony is to ensure strength of the people’s crops (symbol of children) by transferring to them the strength of the chief’s crop. Seeds and semen are closely connected in Karanga tradition and this ceremony ensures that the *mambo*’s fertility (seed as semen) is mixed with that of the peoples’ fields (op. cit.).

In this ceremony, the chief collects a sample of all the people’s seeds from their fields and offers a handful to the tribe’s medium. The medium offers this to the sky while praying to the ancestors and to God. He then asks for rain and that the fields will not be plagued with insects and he then sprinkles the seeds with water. The people return with a handful of the blessed seeds and mix it with their own. The seed the people receive from the chief symbolises the blood the children receive from their father, the chief being referred to as the ‘father’ of the people, who are his ‘children’. The seed also symbolises the father’s semen, providing fertility to his family;

...as the strength of the father's semen is transmitted to that of the son, so the field seed of the chief has an inherent strength which is transferred to all the (field-) seeds of his children (i.e. the people of his tribe). -The father sustains his children's fertility and, similarly, the chief is responsible for the fertility of the fields (Aschwanden 1989:225).

There can then be a good crop, since the *mambo* has “given his children seeds” (Aschwanden 1982:218). We have seen similar symbolic connections between the fertility of the fields and the *mambo*’s fertility via children in many myths and stories. In *The Pond of the King* and *The Inheritance from the Pool*, the *mambo*’s seeds (semen) is ‘sowed’ onto the field (woman) symbolically referring to the relationship between human fertility (children) and nature’s fertility (crops).

There is a symbolic connection in the Ceremony Before Sowing in the chief’s combined role of providing seeds for his people’s fields and providing semen to sustain his children’s fertility;

...in the same way as the fertility of the father or of the ancestors gives to the semen of the sons the strength to beget new life, so the seeds from the chief's granary possess a special power which is communicated on the seeds of his children. As a father sustains the fertility of his descendants, so a chief safeguards the fertility of the fields through the help of the ancestors (Aschwanden 1982:218).

The placing of the seeds (semen) in the granary (uterus) signifies the importance of unity between male and female because without this, the seeds would be “weak” (Aschwanden 1982:219).

Conical Towers and the Ceremony Before Sowing

In Part 4, the same theme was discussed in relationship to the symbolic interpretation of the Conical Tower at the Great Enclosure (cf.: p.155f). The concept that the large Conical Tower as a symbolic grain bin was discussed and that this symbolised both the *mambo*’s chiefly duty of providing seeds for his people’s fields as well as his royal duty of providing semen, (seed, fertility), for the longevity of his family, through his

many wives. It is then possible to expect that the Conical Towers were important architectural features related to the Ceremony Before Sowing since its symbolic content mirrors the symbolic content of this ceremony, i.e. the *mambo* providing seed (semen), blessed by the great ancestors, to his people for the strengthening of their crops (children).

The Rain Ceremony (*Mutoro* Ceremony)

This is the first of what the Karanga refer to as the three great sacrifice festivals for God (*Mwari*).

This ceremony occurs at the *mutoro*-place and is announced as soon as the first rains fall or is used to propitiate rain in a drought. It is also called *mukwerere* which refers to the “expected rain” (Aschwanden 1989:250f).

Aschwanden describes the medium at the rain ceremony as a woman who wears black robes which refers to the rain clouds. She takes some of the millet that the people have brought to her and then ascends a mountain where she starts to brew the beer;

The millet (man's semen) is put in water (vaginal liquid). Then the seed is kept in the safekeeping of the mountain (God and the ancestors) (Aschwanden 1989:251).

Thereafter, the seed and liquid are in the hands of the drought “for better or for worse”, in order to beseech God and the ancestors not to let the people perish (op. cit.).

The ensuing rain (amniotic fluid), which “fertilises” the seed (male semen) begins the onset of the making of beer for the *mutoro* ritual (*doro romukwerere*) which will “...come out of the seeds of the field and the water of the sky” (op. cit.)

An early beer jar (*masvusvu*) is then taken to the *mutoro*-place in gratitude to the ancestors. The beer is taken to the *mutoro*-place and the ceremony of supplication begins upon the arrival of the chief and the medium of the great ancestor, the ‘master of ceremonies’ (op. cit.).

The first jar of beer is offered by the chief to the ancestors, and then handed to the medium. She pours beer on the ground (for the ancestors) and into the two wooden dishes (for the ancestral animals), praying: “You Gumboremvura (name of the famous rain-priest and also ancestor of the medium), why are you frowning (expression of anger)? Where shall we go and protect ourselves? And you, God of the stone of the pool, what have we done that you let us wither? The wild animals and the fruits of the field die from the sun, our eyes are red with always looking up at the sky. If we did not perform well (the role in life everybody must play) we are sorry and ready to atone. Do let the sky become furious with clouds. You, God, green monkey, birth-giver, you are great, God, you who think before giving (God always considers what is good or bad for man). Send us big showers (Aschwanden 1989:251-252).

Thereafter it is the time for the rain-priest who goes to the bush and returns carrying a puff-adder, playing and dancing with it. The dancing rain-priest, with the snake coiled up one arm, then points towards the direction of the imminent rain. The rain-priest then climbs the *muchakata* tree with the snake, whereupon he lets the puff-adder go in the top of the tree. It then starts to rain (op. cit.).

The Chevron Pattern as Symbol of the Puff-Adder, (the Queen's Snake) at the Rain Ceremony

The importance of the puff-adder, who produces rain is stressed at the rain ceremony and is symbolised on the zig-zag patterns on the skins of the drums, the beer jars and on the rainmakers loin cloth. The puff-adder establishes a union between the rain-priest and the *jukwa shave*. It is said that the dead rain-priest's spirit (*jukwa shave*) appears in the puff-adder and so the animal is sent by God to provide rain;

Natural and supernatural symbols are combined so that rain can be produced by the strongest possible co-operation (Aschwanden 1989:253)

The puff-adder is the important symbol of the woman and in this ceremony it "represents the queen herself", for the puff-adder is "the chief wife of the king" (Aschwanden 1989:245).

In the interpretation for this study, the Great Enclosure houses both the *mutoro*-place and the residence for the *vahosi* (queen, first wife). It may be possible that, at the time of Great Zimbabwe's occupation, a *vahosi* became a famous rain-priest or ancestral medium and the chevron pattern on the Outer Wall, as symbol of the puff-adder (queen) becomes the symbol of her place as well as of the ritual rainmaking at the *mutoro*-place. This idea is explored further in the following chapter which discusses the role of the puff-adder in the Myth of the Tree that Touches the Sky at the *mutoro*-place, where woman's biological fertility and nature's fertility are fused through ritual, architecture and stone symbol.

The Festival of the First Fruits

This second great ceremony, described as a 'royal ceremony' by Mufuka (1983:51), marks the arrival of the first crops around February and March.

During the celebrations, everybody takes a small amount of produce (fruits) from their fields to the *mutoro*-place, and assemble there and each person must give thanks to the ancestors and to God (Aschwanden 1989:221f). The tribal medium then pours beer onto the soil of the *mutoro*-place and prays in gratitude to the ancestors and God for the bounty of their fields. Following this is a "great folk-festival" where the gifts at the *mutoro*-place are "distributed among the poor and the children" (Aschwanden 1989:226).

Using oral tradition as evidence,⁷ Mufuka suggests that the Conical Tower was built in honour of *Soro-rezhou*, representing "uncompromising valour" (Mufuka 1983:52) and that the Conical Tower symbolised bounty of harvests as an oversized symbolic replica of the traditional Karanga grain bin, functioning in honour of the great ancestors of the Zimbabwe 'confederation'. Thus it was used at the Festival of the First Fruits and at rain ceremonies.

⁷ Mufuka's sources are "...numerous interviews with chiefs and elders". Because oral tradition is his extant source of evidence, his "Dzimbahwe" (1983) book is considered to be contentious. Garlake considers it to be unreliable since it "...rejects all archaeological and historical research as 'intellectual imperialism' ... and has no basis in any archaeological, historical or traditional reality." (Garlake 1994:63.) However, on the other hand, one could criticise Garlake for his rejection of oral tradition and his imperialist position which will not accommodate unwritten or non-scientific sources. It would appear that a combination of archaeology, history and oral tradition as sources would be a more appropriate approach.

The Trees at the Tower Enclosure and the Festival of the First Fruits

The symbolic connection the Karanga give to the tree, (cf.: p.221f) as bearer of fruit and provider of protection with the ancestor as bearer of fertility imitates the context of the Festival of the First Fruits, where man prays to the great ancestors to thank God for the bounty of their fruits (crops). The presence of the trees at the Tower Enclosure possibly relate symbolically to the theme of the Festival of the First Fruits. This would make the Tower Enclosure an appropriate site for the ritual procedures of this festival as well as site for *mutoro*-place.

Conical Towers and the Festival of the First Fruits

Considering the mythology of the region, which sees God as the ‘builder of towers’ and grain bins as symbols of containers for the *mambo*’s seed (‘children’) and ancestral longevity (as previously discussed in Part 3 and 4), Mufuka’s interpretation might appear to have some validity;

The spirit of Murenga Soro-rezhou was enshrined in the conical tower (rutara - granary) and stood as a symbol of good harvests and prosperity and the blessings of nature. Though not a rain-medium (mutoro) it was given special respect during the festival of first fruits and that of the harvest, which also marked the end of the year...Prayers were offered at great Zimbabwe for rich harvests, thanksgiving at the time of the first fruits and during the precipitation of rain (munhurukwa) in September and October. It was during the times of troubles, from 1460 - 1500 AD that the spirit of Murenga deserted Great Zimbabwe and settled in Matonjeni i.e. Matopos. (Nyashanu Tradition. Chief Mukodzongi). (Mufuka 1983:6f).⁸

It appears that Mufuka’s interpretation aligns significantly with that provided in this study by mythology where the grain bin symbolises the bounty of the fields (“good harvests, prosperity and the blessings of nature”) provided by the seed of the man (cf.: Parts 3 and 4). Therefore, in these ceremonies related to sowing, harvesting and thanksgiving, the conical towers have important symbolic significance.

While Mufuka presumes that such activities occurred at the Eastern Enclosure, he does not explain the coincidence of his association of the Conical Tower with ritual function related to harvesting and thanksgiving with his idea that the Great Enclosure was a residence for the *vahosi* (‘Great Wife’).

He also does not clarify his suggestion that the Eastern Enclosure was the national shrine where such ritual practices occurred. The location of such an important symbol associated with founding fathers (potently evoked at these ceremonies through rain-priests and mediums at the *mutoro*-place) in such a far-flung place (Great Enclosure) from the presumed site for such activity (Eastern Enclosure) is difficult to

⁸ Mufuka’s dates for the abandonment (“times of troubles” of AD1460-1500) of Great Zimbabwe do not coincide with Huffman’s dates of approx. 1450 (Huffman 1987:13) and 1420-1430 (Huffman 1996). But this inconsistency merely reflects a period of overlap, where abandonment was a gradual process due to a wide range of influential and systemically related factors such as a large population with dwindling natural resources, overgrazing of cattle and political pressures (Bourdillon 1991:9). Bourdillon suggests that “Great Zimbabwe had ceased to be a centre for trade with the coast by the middle of the fifteenth century” (op. cit.).

comprehend. Furthermore, why such an important symbol related to honouring ancestors and cultivative ritual practice is associated with the *vahosi*'s residence is not clarified. Considering the close association between the *vahosi* as the bearer of fertility for the family and the nature of the fertility festivals, the coincidence of a house for the *vahosi* as well as a building to house the fertility festivals becomes feasible since the concept of fertility is common to both.

Considering the related symbolism, the grand scale and commanding presence of the Conical Tower and its relationship to fertility of the fields and of the ancestors, the Great Enclosure would appear to be a suitable building to house the ceremonies related to The Festival of the First Fruits, as well as a house for the *vahosi*. The *vahosi* is the ultimate symbol of female social responsibilities such as tending to crops and children, for she is the head wife in charge of all the *mambo*'s wives. She is also the symbol of the 'field' (wives, woman) for the *mambo* to 'sow' as well as the ultimate symbol, as head wife, of female procreativity and fertility, as the *mambo*'s 'special pool' (cf.: Part 4). The *vahosi* is also an important figurehead in many of the festivals for the ceremonies related to fertility of the fields, for she would have been in charge of organising the woman's duties and ritual beer-making. She may even have been a rain-priest or ancestral medium and the chevron pattern represents the puff-adder which is the queen's snake (cf.: p.236f).

Therefore, with the Tower Enclosure as the site for the *mutoro*-place, then the Great Enclosure provides a site appropriate for the ritual procedures and festival celebrations that accompany this festival, for it houses symbolic as well as functional requirements.

The Mahumbwe Festival (part of the Festival of the First Fruits)

Children, as symbols of fertility (mythological reality and ritual) are also an important part of the Festival of the First Fruits. At the *Mahumbwe*-Festival, which occurs immediately after the Festival of the First Fruits, children are required to sacrifice something for God. At this festival, children who have reached puberty enact the world of the grown-ups and by giving 'gifts' to God, they are told that, if they 'behave well', they will receive from God all the things for their feast (Aschwanden 1982:58). The word *Mahumbwe* derives from *kuwumba*, meaning to build a house, and reflects the nature of the ceremony which is regarded as a 'trial-marriage', where the boys build huts and the girls make pots and collect firewood and food from the fields.

The pretend marriages associated with the *Mahombwe* festival would occur every year following the harvest and although no longer performed, they were once a valuable stage in the child's adult education (Aschwanden 1982:94). This ceremony appears to differ from the Venda initiation ceremonies documented by Huffman and used as evidence for his initiation school hypothesis. These Karanga 'child-marriages' are not enacted inside a special building and mark only part of a long and protracted stage of adult education (cf.: p.43f)

This study has previously discussed the importance a child has in Karanga society, where children are seen as symbols of man's close connection to God. The child is seen as the symbol of fertility, of the union

between man and woman, of the close connection between man and God and of the longevity of the ancestral tribe and ultimately of the *vadzimu* (ancestral spirits). We have seen in Part 3 that the Great Enclosure seems to relate to this same tradition via protective walls, narrow entrances and processional passages and uniting male and female symbolism in symbolic structures (towers, monoliths, *mihombwe*, chevron snake pattern). The symbolic theme of the Great Enclosure seems to be appropriately matched to the function of the Festival of the First Fruits and for the sacrifice made by the children at the *Mahumbwe* festival, where children are honoured as symbols of fertility. The structure and symbolic content of the Great Enclosure strongly reflect this aspect of Karanga life, where the high monolithic muscular stone walls appear to protect the internal spaces and thereby could, in a mythological interpretation, symbolise the guarding of the child's fertility.

Sacrifice at the *Mahumbwe* festival also indicates the Great Enclosure as a site for this event.

On the sacrifice of a bull, the child becomes a "true symbol of the *mudzimu*", (great ancestral spirit). (Aschwanden 1982:27.) The sacrificial cairn at the entrance to the Parallel Passage may suggest a site for the sacrifice of the bull when a child becomes a symbol of the *mudzimu*. The structure would then support the ritual of a child becoming a symbol of an ancestral spirit, through sacrifice made at the beginning of the ritual process and at the entry to the building.

The close connection a child has to the ancestral world is protected by the strong, muscular and adaptable walls of the mother's womb, similarly to the notion of protection the stone walls afford the site of the Great Enclosure. The walls may be thematically conveying the procreative nature of the *vahosi* as head wife and protector of fertility. It is said that throughout the child's life, his *vadzimu* are his constant protectors. The walls may then support this idea of protection and this seems to be required in the ritual process of the *Mahumbwe* festival.;

The earlier the child gets to know them (ancestral spirits) the better. Even a new-born child is sometimes known by his ancestral praise-names. The meaning of these names is explained to the child when it is old enough to understand. In this way the child grows naturally into the world of his vadzimu. By using the names of deceased relatives, one wishes at the same time to honour the dead, for they live on in the child (Aschwanden 1982:59).

The ritual honouring of the dead is associated with the child and the embryo as symbols of fertility, inside the womb ('sacred pool'). The Great Enclosure, interpreted on a mythological level as the cave, 'sacred pool', *mambo*'s 'special pool' and *fuma* (cf.: Parts 3 and 4), would be an appropriate site for honouring the ancestors as well as a site for ritual aspects related to the *Mahumbwe* festival where the child becomes a *mudzimu*, and possibly used more in connection to the children of the *mambo* (the building symbolises the fertility of royalty) since they were direct descendants of the great ancestors of the Zimbabwe period, and so should be honoured with stone, a symbol of the ruling family and great ancestors.

Mihombwe symbols and the Mahumbwe Festival

Mahumbwe is closely connected to the word *mihombwe*, meaning ‘furrows of a field’. Part 3, Chapter 9 of this study discussed how mythology supports and extends Huffman’s documentation of the meaning of *mihombwe* in Shona society. The vertical grooves in the coursing at entrances and pillars are referred to as *mihombwe*, symbolising the furrows of the field and the role of women in Karanga society.⁹

For Huffman, this symbol provides evidence to support the idea of *domba* function, where *mihombwe* supposedly represent female entrances to the Great Enclosure during initiation ceremony. However, since the fertility of the fields is the ceremonial context for all of the ceremonies related to fertility, then the presence of *mihombwe*, as symbols of the ‘furrows of the fields’, inside the Great Enclosure might have more significance. The *mihombwe* may then relate to the *Mahumbwe* festival. Most of the *mihombwe* are situated around the Parallel Passage entrance area, at the entrances to enclosures around and inside the Tower Enclosure, and around the entrances to Enclosure 1 (*vahosi*’s residence). This suggests that the Great Enclosure may have been ritually part of this festival.

The strong references in Karanga mythology made to fields and the woman’s role in society symbolically associated to these fields strongly supports this connection.



Conical Towers with *mihombwe* to the left

⁹ Huffman attributes *mihombwe* structures to a purely symbolic function (Huffman 1996). His reasoning for this is that the Shona-Venda used swivel doors, so the structural grooves could not be doorjambs. Garlake, however, believes that many of the grooves were doorjambs, though some were symbolic when used to support monoliths, or where they are placed in areas where a doorway would be improbable. (Garlake 1994:34). Either of these interpretations would still see the Tower Enclosure as supporting ritual function where, if the *mihombwe* were, in some situations, doorjambs, they would have served to separate ritual areas. If, however, they were symbolic in all situations, not just where, as female symbols, they support the

It could be possible then, that the presence of the *mihombwe* (whether as female symbol supporting male monoliths only or as stand alone structural symbol) (cf. Footnote 9) within the Great Enclosure refers to the context of the Festival of the First Fruits and the connected *Mahumbwe*-festival, where the bounty of the fields is celebrated by thanking God and the ancestors.

Conical Towers and *Mihombwe* at the *Mahumbwe* Festival

At the *Mahumbwe* festival, children are given millet from the fields, which they drop into a large collecting basket. They are told that the millet is a sacrifice given to the ancestor for brewing beer for his feast (Aschwanden 1982:60). The Conical Tower as symbolic grain bin and the *mihombwe* both directly refer to the fertility of the fields, which, as we have seen, is also directly related to human fertility. Furthermore, the fact that human fertility and nature's fertility are combined within the two symbols of *mihombwe* (women's biological role and social role of tending crops and children) and conical towers (provision of seeds for fields and semen for tribal longevity) are both explicitly expressed within the one building is very significant to the ritual context of this ceremony. These expressed symbols may also suggest the possibility that the building was associated with women and supports the hypothesis that the Great Enclosure housed the *vahosi* since symbolism associated with the fertility festivals directly relate to the fields (*mihombwe* symbol) and therefore to the role of the woman in society.

Consequently, the symbolic content of the Great Enclosure indicates that it would have been a most appropriate site for the ritual activity surrounding these ceremonies.

Harvest Thanksgiving Festival

This third festival, called *mapa* or *mutoro* is celebrated when the crops have been harvested, and is again performed at the *mutoro*-place (Aschwanden 1989:227). The festival begins with a procession to the shrine. The ritual procedure of the Harvest Thanksgiving Festival is interesting here, in its possible relationship to the context of the Great Enclosure;

At the head of the procession walks the nephew or sister's son (the non-consanguine relative), leading a black sheep. He is followed by the medium and her assistants, only in third place walks the chief and his retinue, who carry his arms. The procession is brought to a close by two women (sisters or aunts of the chief). They carry the ceremonial beer and three plates...Since on that day the medium is symbol of the great ancestors, she is higher in status than the chief. When the procession reaches the ancestral shrine, the men clap their hands respectfully and the women kneel and ululate. The nephew is first to address the ancestors: "Grandfather", he says, "we have come to show our gratitude to you". While all together sing the praise-song of the great ancestor, the medium is suddenly possessed by his spirit and

male monoliths or stand alone, then this would coincide with the symbolic associations attached to the *Mahumbwe* ceremony.

starts to give instructions how to proceed. The chief is present only as a "child" (mwana) (Aschwanden 1989:227).

The ritual beer at this ceremony symbolises the ancestral fertility, offered at the shrine. The millet seeds that the beer is made from represent the ancestral seeds (semen, fertility). The beer itself represents ancestral blood and so the two symbols of the human (*munhu*) of blood and fertility are closely connected at this ritual (op. cit.).

The brewing of the beer may only be performed by older women who no longer have an active sex-life, for only they are ritually "clean" (op. cit., Aschwanden 1982:225). Bourdillon also describes this festival as being particularly large and festive (cf.: p.205) and the areas between Enclosure 1 and the Tower Enclosure may have been used by the *vahosi* and the wives for the preparation of feasts and the brewing of beer for this ceremony.

Since the chief is present only as a "child", and the medium is higher in status than the *mambo* in her role on that day, then the female gender and fertility symbolic content of the Great Enclosure (towers, *mihombwe*, house for *vahosi* (*mambo*'s 'special pool')), its siting on the edge of the wives area and the platforms for the placing of jars as gifts to the ancestors, may indicate site appropriateness for this ceremony. Furthermore, if the medium at this ceremony was the *vahosi* at Great Zimbabwe, then the site would be even more appropriate.

Parallel Passage at Sacrifice Festivals

It might also be possible that the route through the Parallel Passage was used for the single-file procession at this ceremony. (Single file procession is associated with the ritual proceedings at most Karanga ceremonies documented by Aschwanden.)

The termination of the route at the conical towers in the Tower Enclosure may also be significant, especially considering that the passage gradually widens from a single file width to a wider opening, like a mouth, at the entrance to the Tower Enclosure. **The grand scale and curved high walls of the Great Enclosure may also have been partly motivated by a need to elevate the space to a ritual level according to its status commensurate with the fertility of the *vadzimu* of the royal family.**

Conical Towers at the Harvest Thanksgiving Festival

The grand scale and symbolic significance of the Conical Tower may further suggest ritual function related to this ceremony. The Conical Tower as symbolic grain bin, symbolises the fertility provided by the *mambo* (crops and children) and the strength and power of God as 'builder of towers'. The mediums at this festival are asking the ancestors to give thanks to God and so the ancestors are, as usual in Karanga ritual, used as intercessory beings between man and God.

The ritual (status) positions of the medium and chiefly entourage taking part in the proceedings also indicates the Tower Enclosure as a suitable space for this ceremony;

For the actual ceremony, everybody gathers around, or near to, the ancestral shrine. The medium sits on the highest place in the shrine, and one elder addresses her by saying: "We are your children, and we are here in order to sacrifice this beer to you (he pours some of it on the ground.) And this is the meat (one of the plates is handed to the medium), and here is the tobacco (tobacco is poured on the ground). Drink and eat and take snuff with X,Y,Z (names of deceased). Give our thanks to God also for he has taken care of us. If we have sinned, let us know, we are prepared to atone (to "repair".)"...The special significance of this festival consists in thanking God and, especially, the ancestors for the fertility they give and sustain (Aschwanden 1989:227-228 & 229).

It is therefore possible that the conical towers served a symbolic role at these festivals as symbol-figures of the ancestors (cf.: Part 5, Chapter 5).

Stone Platforms at the Harvest Thanksgiving Festival

The ritual proceedings of this ceremony as related above may further support the idea that the Tower Enclosure operated as a family altar ('place of jars') (cf.: Part 5, Chapters 3 & 5) for the whole family of *mambos* buried in the mountains.

The low stone platforms inside the entrance to the Tower Enclosure could have been used for placing gifts for the ancestors, as a 'place for jars' (family altar) or for the medium (she sits on the 'highest place in the shrine') to sit as the ceremony is performed.

The circular area surrounding the conical towers in the Tower Enclosure would be a most appropriate space for the ritual activity of clapping, ululating and kneeling performed by the royal entourage, around the symbolic towers in the centre of the space (cf.: Fig. 5.7).

Summary

We have seen that there are many interactive and dynamic symbolic associations relating to fertility such as crops, fields, children, man's seed, women's uterus and procreativity, God's creativity and power, attached to the conical towers. This strongly suggests that the large and small conical towers may represent the bounty provided by the great ancestors (fertility, rain, crops, children), and could even be interpreted as symbols of the great ancestors themselves. Because of this, they have possible important ritual significance at the three great sacrifice festivals (thanking the ancestors for the fertility and bounty of the fields). In the case of Great Zimbabwe, the conical towers, in an all-embracing interpretation refer to the bounty, provision and prosperity of the founding ancestors, since the royal settlement was the centre of a large and powerful kingdom. It is then plausible that the original great ancestors were honoured with such significant stone monuments, and the site of this honouring would be explained in terms of the *mutoro*-place of the founding fathers. We have also seen the possibility that the Parallel Passage may have been used for the single-file processional nature of the rituals and the stone cairn for the important sacrifices that were part of

these events and that the stone platforms were possibly used for the placing of jars and *gono* as gifts to the ancestors at the Rain Ceremony and at the Harvest Thanksgiving Festival.

The chevron pattern is explained as the queen's (*vahosi*'s) snake (puff adder) at rain ceremonies and the *mihombwe* refer to the fertility of the fields and children as *mudzimu* at the *Mahumbwe* Festival. The areas between the Tower Enclosure and Enclosure 1 may have been used for beer brewing and feast preparation by the women and/or a ceremonial site for the singing, dancing, feast and music accompanying these ceremonies. The symbolic nature of these ceremonies further support the building accommodating the *mutoro*-place and the *vahosi*, where nature's life cycle and the woman's role as fertility bearer and tending to crops are symbolically connected. It may even be possible that the *vahosi* was a rain-priest or ancestral medium at these rituals.

These ideas are explored in more detail in the following chapter which examines the idea that the architecture and symbolic content of the Tower Enclosure strongly suggest its use as a *mutoro*-place expressed in stone to honour the royal ancestors, the founding guardian spirits of Great Zimbabwe.

5 Tower Enclosure as *Mutoro*-Place

Introduction

This chapter explores the possibility that, in the case of Great Zimbabwe, the body of a great *mambo* was mummified in a cave and his blood soaked soil then taken to the site of the Great Enclosure and that the towers were erected in honour of the founding fathers of the state. The Tower Enclosure then would have become a *mutoro*-place, a 'religious structure' and site for honouring and praying for fertility at ceremonial occasions such as the cultivative sacrifice festivals as outlined in Chapter 4. This chapter discusses how the stone symbols such as the conical towers, the monoliths, and the snake patterns in stone symbolically refer to the themes and symbolic associations of the *mutoro*-place. It also discusses the structural and spatial attributes of the building such as the passages and walls that indicate a thematic translation in stone of the spatial experience and enclosure of the traditional *mutoro*-place. This interpretation also sees the possible use of the stone platforms at the Tower Enclosure as structures for the placing of jars as gifts to the ancestors at the *mutoro*-place and family altar.

If the Great Enclosure was the site of the *mutoro*-place for Great Zimbabwe's founding ancestors, the siting away from the 'village' (at the edge of the royal settlement) and at the edge of the wives' area would suit the requirements for *mutoro*-place siting (cf.: p.195f). Since it was important for the *mambo*'s blood and fertility to remain with the people in his afterlife and that his *mutoro*-place must be accessible, then the Great Enclosure would be an appropriate site to house the *mutoro*-place of a great *mambo*. Furthermore, the high and massive stone architecture of the Outer Perimeter Wall and the high, narrow processional route afforded by the Parallel Passage would provide sufficient seclusion for such a sacred site. The building is accessible and visible yet is secluded from residential areas by high walls and entrances.

An examination of the symbolic associations of the traditional *mutoro*-place reveals the possibility of a spatial relationship between the *vahosi* and the Tower Enclosure where the *mutoro*-place is traditionally a symbol of the uterus and centre of fertility. This has a symbolic connection to the *vahosi* since she is the head wife, in charge of all the *mambo*'s wives, responsible for protecting their welfare and their fertility. She therefore symbolises the centre of the royal family's fertility. Considering the *vahosi*, as head wife and the ultimate symbol of female procreativity and fertility, it may be feasible to consider her attachment and spatial relationship to the ritual areas of the Great Enclosure in a similar way to the relationship the *mambo* has with the national shrine at the Eastern Enclosure at the Hill Complex.

Conical Towers as Symbol Figures at the *Mutoro*-Place

Ishe kukara / nokuwandira: *A chief grows with the number of his subjects.*

Ishe / vanhu: *The chief(dom) is (made by) people.*

Explanation and Application: People in authority, especially chiefs, very well know that their strength and influence depend on the number of their followers. The proverb is mostly used in a political context... Shona Proverb (Hamutyinei 1987:41.)

Aschwanden describes the tradition of placing clay or wooden totem-animals at the ancestral shrine and at the *mutoro*-place. These man-made totem animals are symbols of the Karanga's *mudzimu* (ancestor);

The old Karanga explained the meaning of these symbols as follows: "When the vadzimu come to see if their descendants are well they will see the jar or the clay animal. This will make them happy for it shows that we humans love them...". On important feast-days (in honour of the vadzimu) the totem-animal used to be placed on a lion-skin. "This we do so that the mudzimu can see what is going on and the people can see their mutupo. This is very important for the children also, one can then tell them about their mutupo." This custom, the old Karanga told us, used to be widespread in the old days... even today in many ceremonies a jar, or a clay animal, is used as symbol of a mudzimu (Aschwanden 1982:131-132).

The "clay totem-animal" symbolising the ancestor in this context might explain the function of the many clay cattle figurines found around the daga platforms, by R. N. Hall in 1905 (cf: Part 5, Chapter 2). The clay totem-animal Aschwanden refers to is a symbol of the Karanga's famous *mudzimu* (ancestor) and is always placed at the site of the ancestral shrine. The clay-cattle figurines have been discovered in many parts of Great Zimbabwe yet were not discovered at the site of the Tower Enclosure. This can be explained when we consider that the cattle figures were a tradition of the early period of settlement (they were only found in areas dating to the earlier constructions) and the tradition was later replaced by human and phallic shaped soapstone figurines (Garlake 1974:123, 150). The Tower Enclosure is dated to the later period of settlement and therefore the presence of clay cattle figurines would be unexpected in this area.

A clay jar with symbolic 'breasts' is also placed at ancestral shrines to symbolise the great ancestress.

Aschwanden also refers to human shaped clay "symbol figures" which stand at the ancestral shrine and "more impressively still" at the *mutoro*-place which actually represent the ancestor (Aschwanden 1989:242). This tradition may also explain the presence of the many soapstone figurines found in the Tower Enclosure (cf:Part 5, Chapter 2), explaining the site as a *mutoro*-place. The stylised male and female figures, one depicting a pregnant woman, may have been placed at the Tower Enclosure (as *mutoro*-place) as representations of *vadzimu* (ancestors), symbolising their fertility. The conical towers themselves may be interpreted as over-sized 'symbol-figures' of the founding ancestors. The large Conical Tower certainly imitates the form and shape of these soapstone figures and they may refer to this tradition of placing symbol figures at the *mutoro*-place. At the Tower Enclosure, the figures become outsized stone cylinders (grain bins) to refer to the significance of the royal *vadzimu*.

If the Great Enclosure housed the *mutoro*-place of the founding fathers, it would have been particularly important to honour the illustrious founding fathers of Great Zimbabwe with stone, the symbol of the ruling family. In the same way that they were honoured traditionally through symbol figures, here the conical towers become symbol figures of the great ancestors on a grand scale, commensurate with the authority and power of the early *vadzimu*, and the bounty they continue to provide for the kingdom. They were very important dignified guardian spirits and honouring them would have ensured the longevity of rain and fertility for the royal family and therefore, for the whole community.

It is more than likely that, considering the context of Great Zimbabwe, ancestral sites would have had significantly potent meaning for the people, since they would have been the *mutoro*-place and ancestral shrines of very powerful *mambos* and founders of the Zimbabwe state. One might expect that the architecture to honour the guardian spirits of such pre-eminent ancestors might also need to communicate their greatness in order to honour their elevated incomparable status. Furthermore, it would be to the ancestors, as founders of the family, that the people would turn to, to ask for God's help;

The word mutoro is derived from kutara, to lift a heavy load off the head or heart. It is the duty of the king or chief to put before God in the Mutopos the trouble the people bring to the mutoro-place (Aschwanden 1989:239).

Architecturally, the powerful presence of the outsized large Conical Tower at the Great Enclosure appears to suit the purpose of honouring the most important leaders in Zimbabwe's history.

The position in which *mambos* and great chiefs are buried following mummification also suggests the possibility that the Tower Enclosure was used as a site to honour a great *mambo*. Unlike usual burial positions, a *mambo* is interred standing up. This, according to Aschwanden, is to "...stress their exalted status," while giving them an "overview of their land, which they must guard." (Aschwanden 1987:257). If the conical towers, as symbol figures, were monuments to honour the founding fathers who would have been buried (in a grave in the mountains) standing up, then this tradition finds expression in the vertical form of the towers. They would then also symbolise the upright position in which the *mambo* is buried and by which he is able to 'overview' his land when visiting the site.

The exalted male status associated with the symbolic meaning of the Conical Tower, as well as its outsized scale, might suggest that it would be an appropriate structure to refer to an exalted *mambo* of Great Zimbabwe. The outsized scale of the conical tower, imitating the girth of the great *mambo* and his exalted status in life would have then been firmly established, in stone, and honoured in his death.

Furthermore, a great *mambo* becomes even more powerful as an ancestor, and can be more influential in death than in life. The architecture of the large Conical Tower, powerfully influential as a stone monument to Great Zimbabwe, encapsulates this idea and represents the dignified characteristics and powerful influence of the deceased *mambo*, where his spirit resides and is honoured at the *mutoro*-place.

Another interpretation might follow from the tradition where a man and a woman are buried in alternate positions, where the woman is put onto her right side and the man on his left. This differentiation is said to reflect their different positions in life and the division in status must be upheld at death (Aschwanden 1987:257).

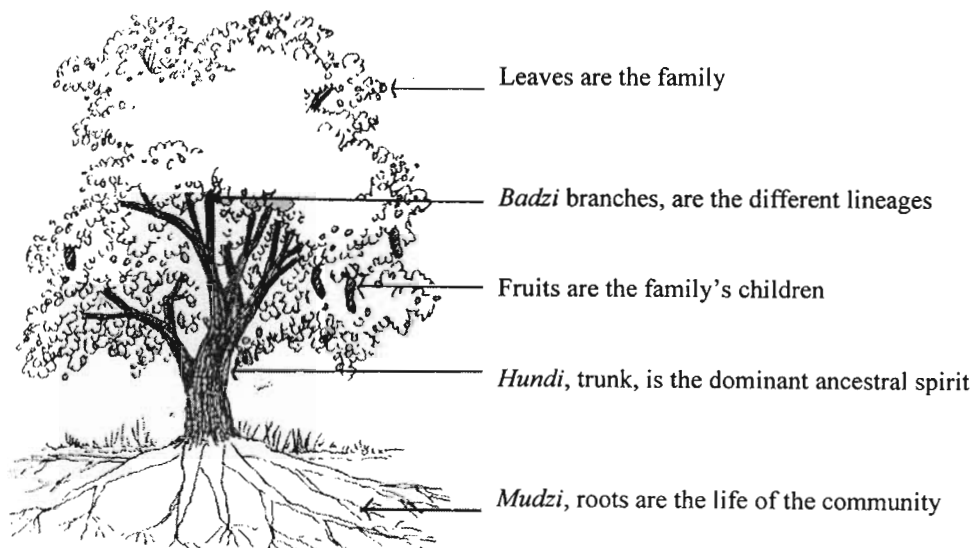
This tradition may go some way to explaining the different sizes of the two conical towers. They may be referring to the positions in which the ancestor and ancestress are buried in the caves of the mountains. The large tower may reflect the elevated ritual and political status of the *mambo* over his ritual sister or first wife symbolised by the smaller conical tower. The towers would then become symbols of the ancestors, as 'signposts' or visiting sites of the spirits of the founding fathers.

The tradition that sees the *mambo*'s artifacts safeguarded in the wife's grain bin during the mummification process (cf.: p.190), might also have significance in the symbolic expression of the large Conical Tower. His artifacts are ritually potent and represent his status and responsibility. They are therefore stored for safe keeping in the symbolic womb. The conical towers then, as symbolic grain bins (symbol of the woman's womb) could be referring to this tradition and are therefore also protecting the *mambo*'s fertility in the afterlife.

At rituals related to cultivative sacrifice (cf.: Part 5, Chapter 4) at the *mutoro*-place, the conical towers become symbolically significant. Their reference to grain bin symbolism relates to the *mambo*'s seed (semen) stored in the wife's grain bin (uterus, 'container of seed'). The symbolic associations of the conical towers also interrelate significantly with other symbols in stone at the Tower Enclosure, where meanings of symbols are compressed into the common theme of fertility of the fields, women and the ancestors. These aspects are discussed throughout this chapter.

***Muchakata* Trees at *Mutoro*-Place and the Trees at the Tower Enclosure**

The description of the *muchakata* trees at the traditional *mutoro*-place (cf.: p.196f) may explain the significance of the trees at the Tower Enclosure, representing the strength of the founding ancestors. In traditional Karanga society and at *mutoro* ceremonies, the tree represents the tribe or family;



A tree branches out in the same way a family does (Aschwanden 1982:110).

Figure 5.4; Symbolism associated with the tree in traditional Karanga society.
(Sketch; MacLennan 1986:25. Text; Aschwanden 1987:348.)

They refer to the similarity between the development of a tree and that of a family...They also mention the derivation of two other words connected with the life of the community, namely mudzi (the root of a tree) and rudzi (the tribe). The Karanga asks a stranger from which "tree-trunk" (hunde) or "tree-branch" (bazi) he descends, and in important ceremonies trees very often represent the tribe. They also have religious significance in the Karanga's life (Aschwanden 1982:110).

The trunk of the tree represents the dominant ancestral spirit while the branches refer to the different lineages. The leaves represent the family while the tree's fruits symbolise the family's children (Aschwanden 1987:348). The trees at the Tower Enclosure may therefore represent the people of the tribe descending from the royal ancestors honoured at that place.

The presence of the trees at the Tower Enclosure in terms of *mutoro*-place function has significance when we examine their context as bearers of fertility at the *mutoro*-place. The *muchakata*-tree is the preferred tree for the *mutoro*-place since, being an evergreen, its shade protects the ancestors all year (op. cit.).

The trees at the Tower Enclosure appear to be similar to the *muchakata* tree pictured in Fig. 5.5, bearing similar fruits and having a similar structure.¹⁰

The fruits of the *muchakata* tree are also revered as they provide nourishment in hard times and are therefore regarded as a sign of fertility. The tree also provides shade and protection, the characteristics most desired of a great ancestor as well as a *mambo*;

As the tree, in times of distress, safeguards the people's survival, so the mambo is to sustain his people's lives. They say: "The mambo gives us food when we need it", or: "the mambo gives his people life". These qualities of the tree, i.e. to give protection (shade); to always bear life and be exceptionally fruitful - all these are peculiarities one expects the ancestor to transfer to his own. - Muchakata contains the term "chakata" which means "much". "Much" refers to its numerous fruits. Figuratively, the tree is thus meant to represent the great increase of the dead man's clan also (Aschwanden 1989:242)

¹⁰ Although the age of the two trees is unknown, they may be the original trees from the later period of occupation. They appear in all of the earliest photographs of the Great Enclosure before Bent's first excavations of the ruins in 1892 (Garlake 1974: plates 54, 56 & 57). Furthermore, Hall's excavations revealed that the trees at the Great Enclosure were the first trees that were ever planted there;

Thus it is clear that there were no abrupt general or widespread changes in stratigraphy and, more specifically, that there was no period when the ruins were unoccupied for "the present trees seem to be the first that ever grew within the (Elliptical Building). In the soil removed from the ancient floors there were no signs of any older generation of trees having existed" (Garlake 1974:74 after Hall 1909).

The evidence is inconclusive, since the existing trees are growing from the lowest stratigraphic layers, now exposed after original excavations of the floors.

muhacha umkhuna

Parinari curatellaefolia

GENERAL

An evergreen tall fruit tree with a heavy dense dark-green crown in the shape of a mushroom. The fruit is very well known. The leaf veins on the underside of the leaf are very distinctive.

FLOWERS

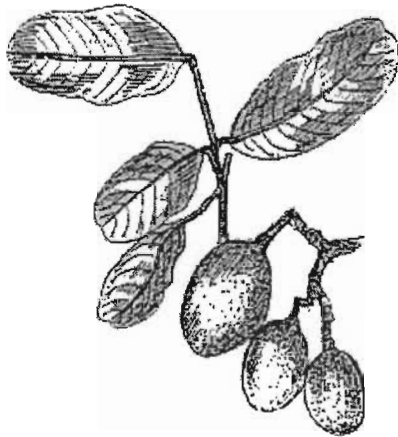
The scented flowers can be white, pink or green, and appear in masses from July to late October.

FRUIT

Is round and oblong, like a plum. Dull red-brown or yellow brown, with a roughish skin containing an edible sweet pulp and one edible seed enclosed in a hard stone. They take a long time to mature, ripening in August to November.

USES

The wood can be used to make canoes and mortars. The fruit is eaten by livestock and wild animals. The fruit can be made into a porridge, or into a syrup. The fruit is rich in Vitamin C and can also be made into a soft drink or kachasu. If the leaves of the tree are boiled with the beer this will prevent a "hang over".
The seed has a high oil content.



...Muhakata-tree (*cork-tree*, *parinari curatellaefolia*) planted in blood-soaked soil – a *muturo-place* comes into existence (Aschwanden 1989:239).

Figure 5.5; Zimbabwe *Muhakata*-tree (*muhacha umkhuna* - *parinari curatellaefolia*) (MacLennan 1986:10).

It is at the *mutoro*-place that the two most important symbols of the person in the Karanga universe, those of blood and fertility (cf. Part 3, Chapter 10) acquire their most potent expression. This makes the *mutoro*-place a centre of fertility and an important religious structure in the lives of the traditional Karanga. The *muchakata*-tree, as symbol of the ancestor's fertility **grows directly from** the blood-soaked soil of the *mutoro*-place, and therefore, at the *mutoro*-place, the most direct connection between the two symbols of the person (blood and fertility) is able to be realised (Aschwanden 1989:242).

In the *mutoro*-place, the symbolic associations of blood and fertility are intimately connected, raising their symbolic meaning to a higher level through their proximity with each other. Their symbolic associations are compressed into a religious structure at the *mutoro*-place, and this expression allows a more unified, controllable and balanced world to be realised.

Traditional Enclosure of *Mutoro*-Place Expressed in Stone at the Great Enclosure

Aschwanden describes the stockade fence that surrounds the traditional *mutoro*-place. This enclosing structure could be compared to the nature of the walls of the Great Enclosure, seen as a translation in stone of the traditional stockade fence;

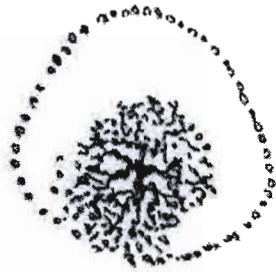
If a shrine comes into being where the great ancestor is buried, (i.e. a shrine can also come into being as a mutoro-place far-flung from the burial site) the place is surrounded by a stockade of trunks of murwiti-trees...A small opening is left for people wanting to come and offer prayers and sacrifices. The wood of this tree resists attacks by ants, and that kind of toughness one also desires for the people who were once led by the king or chief...The actual mutoro- or rain shrine is most frequently described as a stockade built of white posts, as tall as a man and surrounding a muchakata-tree. The fence represents also the "small house of the chief": the tree-top is regarded as the roof of the shrine. The roof of a house always symbolises the man. Therefore, for a famous ancestress or an important medium, a shrine without a roof is built (Aschwanden 1989:240).¹¹

In order to achieve elevated symbolic and ritual status coincidental to the status of the founding fathers, the massive stone walls enclosing the site of the Great Enclosure may replace the more usual trunks of the *murwiti* -tree. The walls may then be referring to the traditional stockade of white posts.

Stone, as a permanent and durable building material and as symbol of the ruling family and great ancestors, could also be seen to be referring to 'the kind of toughness' one expects from the ruling fathers of the tribe. The traditional fence also symbolises the protective nature of the king holding together the clan, where the posts protect the fertility of the *muchakata* tree;

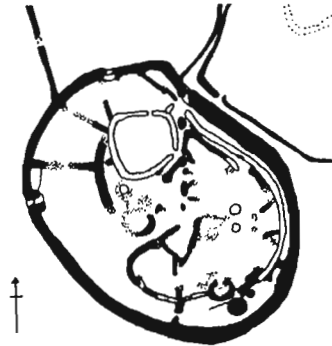
The posts forming a fence around the fertility-symbolising tree represent the white bones of the mambo which remained - like a defensive wall - as protection for his children. Whatever drops off the tree is caught by the fence: it is as if the clan is held together by the embrace of the mambo, the Karanga explain (Aschwanden 1989:243).

¹¹ Cf. Part 5, Chapter 3 which explains the traditional site locations of the *mutoro*-place.

Traditional *mutoro*-place
(ancestral rain shrine)

Muchakata tree as centre of fertility of tribe and stockade fence as 'small house of the chief'.

Great Enclosure



Traditional stockade fence translated to stone walls to symbolise *mutoro*-place of royal ancestors, the *vadzimu* of the great founding fathers of Great Zimbabwe

Figure 5.6; Comparison between the Great Enclosure Outer Wall and the traditional *mutoro*-place stockade fence and spatial enclosure.

(Left: Author, Right: Adapted from Garlake 1974, 1994, Huffman 1987.)

The Outer Wall of the Great Enclosure then protects the fertility of the royal family and symbolises the protective embrace of the *mambo*. One would expect that since Great Zimbabwe was such a large and powerful kingdom that the illustrious ancestors would be more significantly realised at a *mutoro*-place in the royal settlement than expected elsewhere.

The protective nature of the walls, their massive scale and well crafted stone-coursing become a most appropriate architectural gesture for the characteristics of strength, fertility, protection and longevity provided by the founding fathers. The building becomes an infinite and omnipotent sculpture in stone as testimony not only to the technical and cultural achievements of the people but also to the legacy of the great founders of a powerful and prosperous kingdom.

Stone Platforms at Tower Enclosure as 'Place of Jars'

The low stone platforms flanking the entrance to the Tower Enclosure from the Parallel Passage may have been used for the traditional placing jars as gifts for the ancestors at *mutoro*-place ceremony (cf.: p.197 & Fig. 5.7). These platforms could also be seen in this context as similar to the traditional family altar in the wife's kitchen ('place of jars'). The tradition, translated in stone, offers a place for which the descendants may go to place sacrifices and gifts to their great ancestors at the royal ancestor's family altar (placed in the house of the *vahosi*, the Great Woman). The platforms symbolise the unity and dignity of the guardian spirits, the illustrious founding fathers of the royal family. The ancestral spirit is said to 'reside' at the place of the jars (symbol of the grave).

The jars as gifts at the *mutoro*-place contain ritual beer (for the ancestors) which is made from millet seed and water. The fermentation process symbolises the fertility of nature and this corresponds to the traditional

association of the place of jars as a female symbol and the *mutoro*-place as a symbol of the uterus (cf.: p.229);

The fermentation process symbolises the creation and life of man. First, the millet (man's semen) is put in water (vaginal liquid). Then the seed is placed in the safekeeping of the mountain (God and the ancestors). They are thus handed over to the drought for better or for worse. This is to point out the people's great distress, and God and the ancestors are being implored not to let the people perish. But the heavens are merciful. They will "fertilise" the people's seed with their blessing (Aschwanden 1989:251).

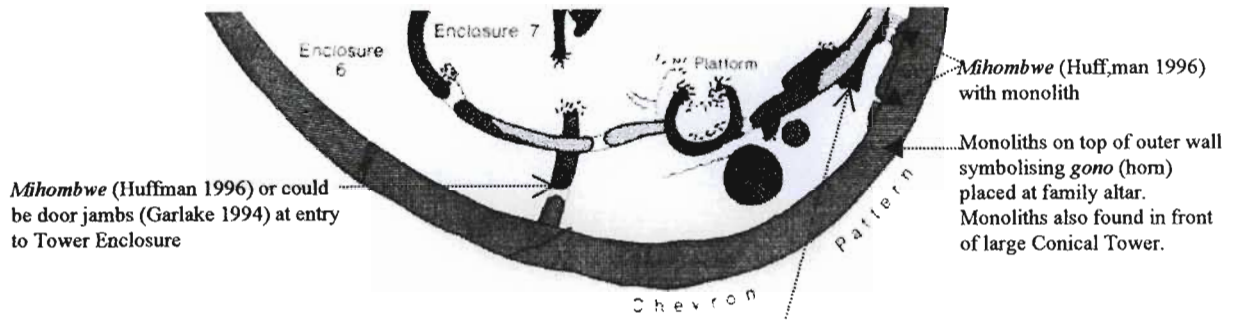
The raised platforms constructed in stone both at the Eastern Enclosure and at the Tower Enclosure would then signify the royal family's 'place of the jars'. There are also many *daga* platforms scattered in the walled enclosures of the Valley Area. These may indicate the remains of traditional raised platforms for the altar of the ancestors ('place of jars') in the residential huts of the wives, since these are traditionally placed in the woman's kitchen.

The traditional 'place of jars' is said to 'collect' the jars in the same way that the grave 'collects' the remains of the ancestor. The Tower Enclosure would then become a place to 'collect' the jars similarly to the way the graves 'collect' the remains of the *mambo*.

The conical towers may also have a significant connection to this theme, for they are symbols of grain bins, 'containers' of seeds, 'collecting' fertility in the same way that the family altar 'collects' the jars. In a similar way to the raised platform, the symbolic grain bins also symbolise the "sublimity and dignity of the ancestors". The conical towers, as symbol figures of the ancestors, are seen as resting places for the ancestors (guardian spirits) to overview their kingdom and this may have a paired relationship to the 'place of the jars' as a place for the ancestral spirit to 'reside'.

For such an illustrious *mambo*, his remains would have been mummified and buried in a cave-grave in a mountain (possibly at the Hill Complex or nearby mountain) (cf.: p.189f). If we were to consider the possibility that the Tower Enclosure platforms were a family altar and the Tower Enclosure a *mutoro*-place, then the blood of the *mambo* would have been collected in a *hosi*-jar and placed at the site, which would then have special ritual significance. Furthermore, the conical towers, as symbolic grain bins relate to fertility of the fields, good crops and prosperity and this relates to the theme presented by the raised platforms that collect the jars for offerings to the ancestors as gifts for rain, fertility, good crops, prosperity and family longevity.

The beer, produced from the seeds of the field (millet) and from the rain of the sky (liquid), symbolises fertilisation (fermentation) of the seed of the fields. **The fertilisation of nature is the key aspect of the supplication process performed at the *mutoro* ceremony and is inherent (as human fertility) in the symbolisation of the *mutoro*-place as uterus. Furthermore, through ritual, the *mutoro* ceremony presents the procreativity of man and God as a "sacred event" (Aschwanden 1989:256).**



Stone platforms possibly for placing of jars at family altar, ('Place of Jars' in Great Wife's house).
 Jars represent woman, bench represents man, while the collection of jars makes the altar a female symbol

Tower Enclosure

Hill Complex

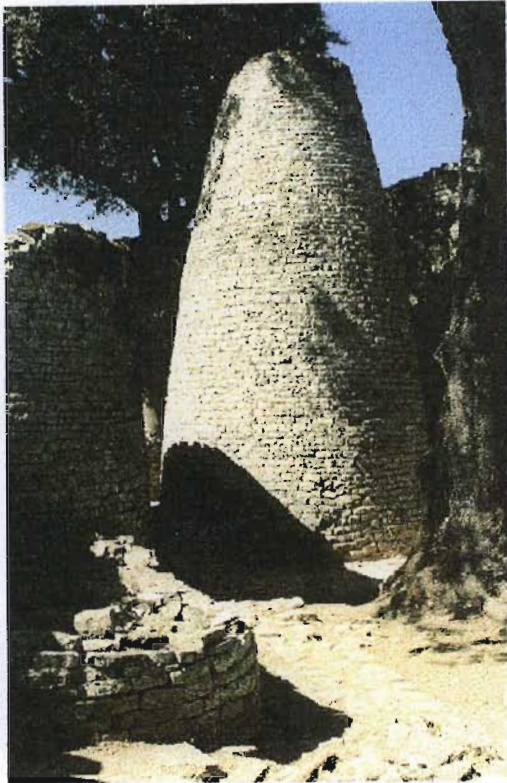


Grave in cave of mountains (possibly at Hill Complex or elsewhere in mountains).
 Ancestral shrine – 'collection' of remains of deceased.

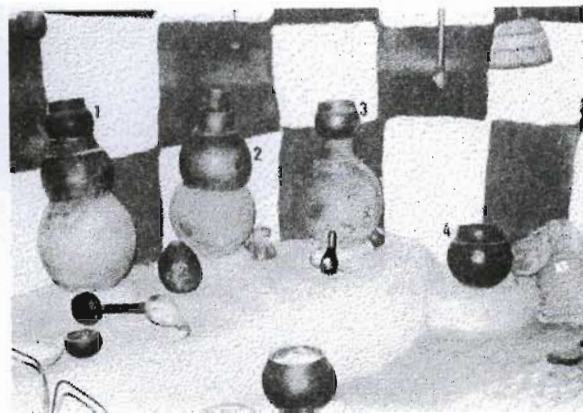


Stone platforms-
 Possible family altar ('Place of Jars') as symbol of ancestral grave, where ancestral spirit 'resides' on platform.
 Family altar – 'collection' of jars as gifts for the deceased.

Figure 5.7; Tower Enclosure as Family Altar.
 (Source: Plan; Adapted from Garlake 1974. Photos; Author)



Conical Towers as symbol of the great ancestors (sublimity and dignity of ancestors) and of grain bins as 'collector' of fertility (seeds) in the womb. (Author)



The 'Place of the Jars' (Aschwanden 1982). Family altar as 'collector' of jars.

Gono at Family Altar and Monoliths at Tower Enclosure

Another important symbolic association with the family altar is the placing of *gono* (horn) at the platform. This symbolises the ancestral spirit of the patriarchal lineage. While the platform itself symbolises the woman (receptive, collecting) the *gono* symbolises the man (protective, guarding);

The ancestral spirit can also be represented on the altar in an important symbolical sign, i.e. in the so-called gona, a horn with which the ancestor is connected (also called gono). Thus the altar becomes – in a comprehensive sense – the bearer of the most important symbols of the Karanga (blood and fertility). Apart from the ancestor who resides on the earthen bench, or underneath it in the grave there are all the jars which symbolise the fertility of an alien clan. The jars make the altar a female symbol (a grave is a symbolical uterus) from which, however – as the Karanga emphasise – the gono (ancestor of one's own clan) cannot be separated because the one cannot be without the other. It is said that one cannot become an ancestral spirit without the (alien) woman, and she is represented symbolically on the altar – as is her role. In the past it sometimes happened that a woman too was buried at the place of

the jars if she has expressed a wish not to leave her family (Aschwanden 1989:250-251).¹²

This description of the *gono* at the place of the jars could explain the stone monoliths (symbols of the horn, male protection, fertility) (cf.: Part 3, Chapter 8) at the top of the Outer Wall around the Tower Enclosure and inside the Western Entrance (cf.: Fig. 5.7). There was also a monolith discovered slotted into the *mihombwe* at the entrance to the Tower Enclosure (Garlake 1974) (male and female unity). A large collection of monoliths were also found by R. N. Hall in the "...area in front of the large Conical Tower, on the large stepped platform beside it and on the wall behind it" (Garlake 1974:121). These monoliths could therefore represent the tradition of the giving of *gono* (horn) to the ancestors at the family altar, expressed as stone monoliths for the royal ancestors.

The stone monoliths, as symbolic horns, encircling the top of the Outer Wall around the Tower Enclosure appear to be thematically connected to the chevron pattern and are located on top of the wall **only** around the Tower Enclosure, (as is the chevron pattern), possibly in direct connection to the site of *mutoro* ceremony. *Gono* is also placed as gifts to the ancestors at the *mutoro* ceremony and at the bringing-home ceremony. The ancestor thereby receives a "living symbol" of the clan's fertility (Aschwanden 1987:337).

***Mutoro*-Place as Symbol of the Uterus**

Mutoro unorema / wasvika: *The load becomes heaviest when you are reaching (the goal).*

Nhumbu inorema / yasvika: *A womb is heaviest near (the time of) delivery.*

Nhava (homwe, tswana) inorema / yasvika: *A woven bag (small bag, basket) is heaviest when reaching (the destination).*

Explanation and Application: *Often a task seems to be more difficult when it is just about to be accomplished. As one of the variants indicates, a pregnant mother will feel the most gripping pains shortly before delivery.*

Shona Proverb. (Hamutyinei 1987:76.)

The most important aspect regarding the symbolisation of the *mutoro*-place is that in traditional Karanga society the *mutoro*-place is referred to as the symbol of the uterus. This further extends the interpretation of the Tower Enclosure as a *mutoro*-place;

In one all-embracing interpretation the mutoro-place becomes the symbol of the uterus
(Aschwanden 1989:243).

The impetus for symbolising the *mutoro*-place as uterus is reasonably evident, since it is the centre of the family's fertility, containing and uniting the two most important symbols of blood and fertility.

¹² This describes the traditional family altar where, in the past, it also contained the grave if there were no nearby mountains for burial. At Great Zimbabwe, this would have been unlikely, since there were numerous mountains around the site. The Tower Enclosure, in this possibility, would have been a family altar for the spirit of the ancestors to visit.

The blood from the *mambo*'s body, placed at the *mutoro*-place and the fertility of the *muchakata* tree are united and this raises the procreation of man to a sacred level. This theme is activated at *mutoro* ceremony (cf.: p.207f) and narrated in the myth of The Tree that Touches the Sky;

Myth: The Tree that Touches the Sky

When God had completed the world he embellished it. He loved his work so much that he said: 'I want a tree to grow out of the earth, which will provide shade for us and will never die'.

God let the tree grow, and it grew so tall that its branches reached up to the sky. In the top of the tree there lived a snake which helped the tree bear fruit. This snake used to live inside a large rock in a sacred mountain.

Whenever God visited his people he came down to Earth by way of this tree. And whenever men wanted something from God they climbed up the tree.

Before the onset of the rainy season, men offered rain sacrifices at the foot of the tree. But then they ceased to obey God's laws. The Earth became dry and let thorns grow. Because there was no rain, the snake returned to its rock in the sacred mountain. The tree died, the worm had got into it.

(Aschwanden 1989:34-35)

In this myth, the trees, growing from the uterus (*mutoro*-place, fertility) and the blood-soaked soil (blood), reach up to the sky and the ensuing rain symbolises the amniotic fluid of the woman's uterus. With God's intervention, nature is fertilised through the woman's uterus;

A tribe "lives" only through the woman's uterus but, ultimately, a human being comes into existence only when God intervenes, i.e. when "the tree's branches touch the sky". Nature too is brought to life only by God's help - symbolised in the snake of the tree (Aschwanden 1989:243).

We have seen that secular (world of the living) and religious (world of the dead) phenomena are typically fused in Karanga mythologically shaped thinking (cf.: p.127f). At the *mutoro*-place, the symbolisation of the site as 'uterus' and the symbolisation of the tree as fertility of the ancestors and connection to God through the ancestors, combines the two seemingly opposing phenomena (biological and cosmological) in **one 'place'**. The whole *mutoro* event becomes a mythologically experienced reality.

This theme mirrors that which sees the Great Enclosure, in a mythological interpretation, and as house for the Great Wife ('special pool' for the *mambo*) as the uterus from which the *mambo* attains children, his *fuma* (cf.: p.169f). **As a *mutoro*-place, the Tower Enclosure within the building also becomes a symbol of the uterus and the symbolic associations within the one structure are condensed and compressed into the architectural, ritual and mythological experience.**

Considering the way in which Karanga use symbolic associations (for example, the calabash becomes the uterus) (cf.: p.74f), **the interactive repetitive themes of the house, the woman and the *mutoro*-place as symbols of the uterus**, then the building may have been perceived on a symbolic level as a uterus. Like the

construction of a jar (also symbol of the uterus), **the building could be seen as a natural response to the inherent symbolism attached to its functional purposes**; for example, the jar begins to look like a uterus. Here, the building, in form, symbolic content and style, begins to resemble a cave-like, ('sacred pool'), protective, high-walled, uterus-type form in stone. **Form and function, through this 'fit to purpose', are fused in the process of space and form making.**

***Mutoro*-Place and Tower Enclosure as Centres of Fertility**

The Tower Enclosure, housing the *mutoro*-place, symbol of the uterus and containing the blood and fertility of great ancestors could be seen as a centre of fertility in the landscape of Great Zimbabwe. The Great Enclosure itself can also be seen as a centre of fertility when we consider the general symbolism of the house in traditional Karanga society.

We have previously seen that the Shona people refer to the Great Enclosure as *Imba Huru* which literally means 'Great House' or *Mumbahuru*, meaning 'house of Great Woman' (cf.: p.156f). The term *imba* also means 'family', as well as 'child', and has a very close linguistic connection to the word *mimba*, meaning 'pregnancy' or 'uterus' (Aschwanden 1982, 1987:21). This term refers to the 'Great Woman' it houses, and to the children from the woman's uterus (*mambo*'s wives, *vahosi* is 'head' of all wives) as well as to royal fertility. The building's name would then be seen as referring to the centre of royal fertility.

More importantly, the traditional Shona house (as with the *mutoro*-place) is the symbol of the uterus, as the centre of the family's fertility (Aschwanden 1989) (cf.: Part 4, Chapter 4). Therefore, the Great Enclosure, (*Imba Huru* or *Mumbahuru*), while mythologically interpreted as symbol of the *mambo*'s 'special pool' (uterus, cave), on the edge of the valley (female symbolism) and wife's area (*fuma*) and housing fertility symbolism (cf.: Part 4), also refers to the house as uterus in its Karanga name of *Imba Huru* or *Mumbahuru*. It also refers to the Karanga tradition of the house as uterus.

A similar connection can be found in the Karanga interpretation of the uterus as symbol of the house. The uterus is referred to as a 'house' (*imba*) at the birth of a child, when the snakes are the guardians of the house;

The "snakes of the uterus"...one day press for the expulsion of the child. When, towards the end of the pregnancy, the baby opens its eyes, it looks into the eyes of the snake, and the snake says to it: "Leave my house now, you are big enough. Go, go, I do not want you anymore."

Then, the Karanga say, labour starts (Aschwanden 1982:262).

It is said that the 'snakes of the uterus' (oviducts) send a guide to show the child the way out of the 'house'. The 'snake of the uterus' sends the amniotic membranes and the amniotic fluid first to guide the child. In this way, the ancestors "...open the door to the child" (Aschwanden 1982:264). The uterus is literally seen as the 'house' of the mother and the first-born child conceptually 'opens the door' to the mother's 'house'

and the Karanga say that the uterus has “opened the door to the child” (Aschwanden 1987:156). This is also a common theme in Karanga mythology.¹³

The Great Enclosure then, could be conceptually seen as a ‘house as uterus’ of the Great Woman (*vahosi*). The walls at the Great Enclosure, particularly to the Parallel Passage, as conceptual ‘snakes of the uterus’, seem to be ‘guarding’ the house, the *Imba Huru*. If the Great Enclosure, with *mutoro*-place, is seen as a centre of fertility, then the walls (like the traditional *mutoro*-place stockade fence) (cf.: p.194f), are ‘protecting’ the centre of fertility, similarly to the way the ‘snakes of the uterus’ ‘protect’ the child within the uterus. The child, as symbol of the *mudzimu* (honoured and propitiated at the *mutoro*-place), is protected at the *mutoro*-place by the stone walls of the Great Enclosure.

Other aspects related to the Karanga symbolism of the house (*imba*) are relevant here. Aschwanden illustrates the symbolisation of the members of the family with the structure of the house (the word *mimba* refers to the occupant as well as the symbolism);

There is a proverb which says: “The house is the trunk which lives on (imba rudzi runoenda mberi)”. Another one says: “The house means children (imba vana).” The posts of a house are held together by three horizontal strands of bark and branches, and these symbolise father, mother and children. As these three horizontal links are necessary to prevent the collapse of the house, so all three are regarded as equally important in the eyes of the Karanga - which applies to the family too (Aschwanden 1989:240-241).

The powerful enveloping outer walls of the Great Enclosure may possibly correspond to this theme where stone structure ‘holds together’ the unity of the royal family, similarly to the way the ‘horizontal links’ of the house hold together the members of the family, and symbolise their unity. Recreating past and present traditions, the normal ‘hut’ becomes architected in stone to symbolise the protective role of the royal family and the royal *vadzimu*.

The traditional structure and material of the hut is adapted through time and space to be architected in stone for illustrious ancestors, whose family will never ‘collapse’ since they are represented with permanent stone walling.

The gender symbolism attached to the Karanga interpretation of the house is also interesting in terms of this theme, where the house symbolises the ‘person who lives in it’;

The wall of a house as a whole symbolises the mother because she gives warmth (love) to the children. The roof is the husband, it is up to him to protect his family against heat, cold and rain. - A childless marriage is described as follows: “The roof leaks” or “the wall is broken”. - When we asked why huts are always built round, the Karanga replied by asking whether we had ever seen a human being with corners? An old Karanga added: “You cannot build a house merely so that something is being built. When you build a house, then it is always for a

¹³ Cf: The story of A Witch is a Mother Too which also expresses this connection, where the boy forces his way out of a door (cervix) to the cave (uterus, house). A similar theme is narrated in the story of Chamasango.

human being to live in.” So a house symbolises the person that lives in it, hence the expression “the house is the person (imba munhu)” (Aschwanden 1989:241).

The Great Enclosure would therefore symbolise the ‘person living in it’, the *vahosi*, Great Woman (the house is the *vahosi*), through genus-loci, uterus theme and symbolic structures, similarly to the way in which the Hill Complex symbolises, through connection to mountain symbolism, the person who lives in it, the *mambo*, as God’s ultimate symbol of man.

The mother, (the Great Woman, Great Wife, *vahosi*), who is herself the ‘container’ of the family’s fertility (in charge of all the *mambo*’s wives), through her uterus, is symbolically expressed as the ‘walls’ of the *imba* (family house).

The above explanation might also suggest that the *Imba Huru*, as a Great House was constructed to symbolise the great ‘persons’, the founding members, who once lived at Great Zimbabwe. The building is therefore a monolithic statement in stone narrating the achievements and grandeur of the original leaders of the Karanga-Zimbabwe kingdom. The term *Imba Huru* (‘Great House’) suggests a house of origin for the fertility of the whole of the royal family, and therefore the leaders of the great chieftancy (kingdom).

This idea supports the suggestion that the Great Enclosure functioned not only as the house of the Great Wife (*vahosi*) but also as a ‘Great House’ to house the *mutoro*-place of the great ancestors, since they were the founders of the royal *imba* (family). They were therefore the centre of the royal family’s fertility (the uterus), and centre of the economic (*fuma*) and cultural longevity of the whole community. **An all-inclusive interpretation would see the Great Enclosure as symbolising the centre of the tribe’s fertility, its uterus.**

Further evidence to support this can be found in the Karanga connection between the child and the deceased. Considering that the architecture of the Great Enclosure contains many symbolic structures associated with fertility, as well as the possibility that the Tower Enclosure operated as a *mutoro*-place to honour the great ancestors, then **the building appears to combine in its form and structure the two extreme stages of human life; that of the unborn child (centre of life, from the uterus) and that of the deceased.** It is important in most African societies for this dualism to be fused, and in Karanga society the symbolic association of the grave as uterus and of death as a symbolic birth attempts to achieve this fusion:

The child is the centre of life in Karanga ideology. Thus, when it becomes the symbol of the deceased, a man attains true significance beyond death: the child - centre of life - becomes the most powerful conqueror of death through this symbolisation. By fusing extremes, the African tries to overcome the dualism of death (Aschwanden 1987:324).

Perhaps the style and functions of the Great Enclosure express a need to symbolise in stone this very important notion of reuniting death with the ‘child’ (children from the wives, *vahosi* as head wife of the *mambo*’s many wives) and to symbolise death as a symbolic birth through *mutoro*-place. The building then not only becomes a symbol of the ‘Great Woman’ (uterus) and of life but also of the deceased. The central area, possibly used for ceremonial activity (cf. Part 5, Chapter 4), links the worlds together. At the centre, there is a fusion of life and death through the activation of live performance (music, dance, singing, story-

telling etc.) at the cultivative sacrifice festivals (cf.: Part 5, Chapter 4), for the ancestors (dead) by the people (living). With the *mutoro*-place as symbol of the uterus, the building further unites the two extremes of life and death through death as a symbolic birth and a unity between dualities is achieved.

This can be compared to the duality and the fusion of the world of the living and the world of the dead expressed at the Hill Complex (*mambo*'s residential area and Eastern Enclosure) When we substitute Huffman and Kruper's terminologies of "sacred" and "profane" with 'the world of the dead' and 'the world of the living', we begin to approach a more sensitive definition for spatialisation rather than the definitive cognate opposites (cf.: Part 4, Chapter 3).

The idea that the Great Enclosure can be interpreted as a symbol of the centre of fertility for the royal family can be extended when we consider the symbolic association of the centre of the traditional Karanga family hut as symbol of the centre of the family's fertility.

The centre of the house in Karanga society is symbolically and tangibly connected to the family's founding ancestors. Before a house is constructed, the ancestor's walking stick, symbolising the ancestor's fertility, is placed at the centre of the site for the house. The ancestor is then informed of the plan to build a house. The centre of the house becomes the spot where the ancestor's stick stands and this special place, as the centre of the family's fertility, becomes the orientation for the whole family, and from where it will 'grow'. The house, like the ancestral shrine, therefore becomes also a symbol of the longevity of the tribe. This family centre is also called *imba* (Aschwanden 1989:241f).

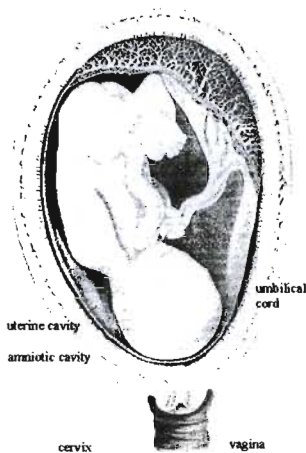
The Great Enclosure, as a 'Great House' (*Imba Huru*), may similarly be interpreted as a symbol of the longevity of the royal family supporting the community of Great Zimbabwe. The Conical Tower could be seen as a monolithic symbol in stone of the founding ancestor's walking stick, as the centre of the Karanga people's fertility, and centre of the house. The Great Enclosure, as *Imba Huru*, itself symbolises in stone the significance of the 'Great House' for the ancestors. **It becomes a 'house' in stone that refers to the centre of the settlement, the centre of the community's fertility.** This coincides with the Karanga interpretation of God as the penultimate centre at the *Matopo*-mountains.

The *mutoro*-place also symbolises a house, where the 'roof' becomes the tree. The tree surrounded by the fence at a *mutoro*-place has a special significance here. Aschwanden describes the tree as representing the " 'white shadow of the person' (*mweya*)," and that where a great ancestor is interred, the "shadow" of the whole tribe then protects them, providing a place to visit in difficult times (Aschwanden 1989:241 & 243).

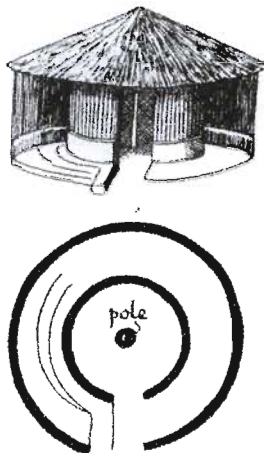
The trees at the Tower Enclosure could have then come to symbolise the *mweya*, the 'white shadow' of the ancestors. The same tradition is expressed in the Karanga interpretation of the myth of The Tree that Touches the Sky where the mythological tree becomes a symbol of the ancestors and therefore the direct connection man once had with God (cf.: p.221f).

Since great ancestors are used in an intercessory role between man and God, it would appear then that the tree as a symbol of the ancestor's white shadow or soul (*mweya*) is directly connected to the mythological tree that touches the sky as an intercessory structure between man and God - mythology becomes a **real experience** through ritual. Furthermore, the longevity of the family's tribe is only guaranteed by the

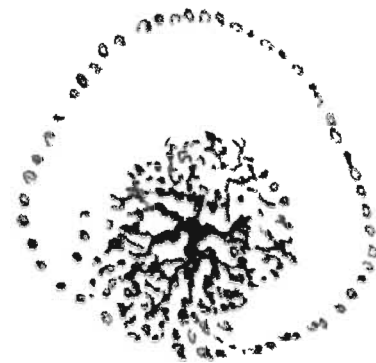
fertility of the descendants, sustained by the ancestors, and symbolised by the tree and by the *imba*, the centre of the family. The siting of the trees within the enclosure could have been motivated by this mythological tradition and realised through ritual at the *mutoro*-place. The Great Enclosure, containing the residence of the *vahosi* and housing the *mutoro*-place (as well as its reference to, and similarity with, traditional centres of fertility), becomes the centre of fertility for the royal settlement;



Uterus as centre of family's fertility
Embryo and child are symbols of the Family's great ancestors, the *vadzimu*
Entering the womb is like 'entering the centre of fertility'.



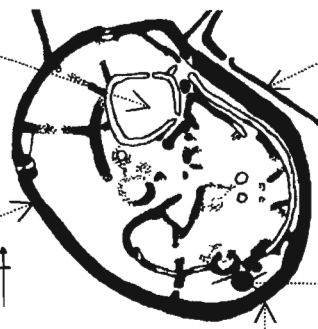
Centre of family hut, where ancestor's walking stick is placed, becomes centre of family's fertility



Tree at *Mutoro*-place (rain shrine) as centre of ancestral fertility

Great Wife (*vahosi*) is symbol of 'container' (uterus) and centre of royal family's fertility

Walls symbolise protection of the uterus ('snakes of the uterus'), guarding the child as *vadzimu*. Walls symbolise mother, father and children – unity of family



The house "is the person", the *vahosi*. *Imba Huru* – Great House is symbol of the uterus and "the house means children".

Mutoro-place is symbol of the uterus – centre of ancestral fertility. Ancestors are founders of royal *imba* (family).



The conical towers (symbol figures of great ancestors, centre of ancestral fertility) and the trees (symbol of tribe's fertility) at the Tower Enclosure as *mutoro*-place, centre of royal

Chevron pattern as puff-adder snake at *mutoro* ceremony. Puff-adder is queen's (*vahosi*'s) snake, protecting women's fertility. The snake closely connects the woman with rain when it climbs the top of the tree and causes rain (amniotic fluid). Snakes and women sustain fertility. Monoliths, paired with chevron, symbolise male protection.

Figure 5.8; Traditional centres of fertility and the Great Enclosure .

(Upper Left, Johnston T. B. (ed.) 1987. Upper Middle; Walton 1956. Upper Right and Lower; Author.)

Mythical Snakes and Snake Patterns in Stone

The chevron pattern at the top of the Outer Wall of the Great Enclosure, encircling the Tower Enclosure can also be explained in terms of the *mutoro*-place. We have seen that the chevron is a pattern used in traditional Karanga society to refer to the puff-adder snake and to the fertility of the woman and of the ancestors (cf.: Part 3, Chapter 5). The puff-adder's presence is eminent at the *mutoro* ceremony, where it coils itself around the arm of the rain-priest, who climbs up the tree and releases it in the highest branches. Soon after, it is said to rain (cf.: p.208 & 209). At this ceremony, the puff-adder is the queen's snake, as well as the 'snake of the uterus' (*mutoro*-place is symbol of the uterus) The rain produced by the snake is symbol of the amniotic fluid of the woman. This ceremony is narrated in the myth of The Tree that Touches the Sky (cf.: p.230). The snake in this myth and at the *mutoro* ceremony, living in the top of the tree, symbolises the fertility given by God and it is said that a similar snake **must live in the tree of the *mutoro*-place in order to symbolise the fertility sustained by the ancestors** (Aschwanden 1989:243).

*The fertility given by the snake living in the tree symbolises the fertility of the stone of God...
The *mutoro*-place's characteristic is its soil, soaked by the mambo's "blood" on which a muchakata-tree grows in whose branches there lives a snake. In fact, there are two snakes*
(Aschwanden 1989:243-244).

The puff-adder is also present as a zigzag (chevron) pattern on the drums and beer jars of the ceremony and on the rain-priest's loin-cloth (Aschwanden 1989:252). The function of the snake here is to guarantee fertility of the fields by influencing rain.

The chevron pattern, as a symbol in stone of this fertility bearing snake that encircles the top of the Outer Wall at the Great Enclosure probably directly refers to the symbolic mythological snake at the top of the tree at the *mutoro*-place and sourced in the myth of The Tree that Touches the Sky.

One of the snakes of the *mutoro*-place is said to arise from the body of the queen as a "mystical animal" as it does in the Tree that Touches the Sky (Aschwanden 1989:244). The chevron pattern, symbol of the fertility bearing snake of the pool and snake of the uterus, rising from her grave and released into the top of the tree, is then permanently 'living' on the top of the wall (conceptually 'in the tree').

The animal from the queen's body is the puff-adder...The gentle, mild puff-adder, which always remains faithful to its habitat, once more symbolises the good qualities of the woman. A queen was especially tied to her place of residence, and in her husband's absence she even reigned over her family. - The Karanga also again refer to the puff-adder's function as rain-snake. The woman and the rain are closely connected symbolically through the reptile, for it "produces" not only the rain of the sky (nature's fertility) but also the amniotic fluid in the woman's womb (i.e. as an ancestral animal sustaining the fertility). As mystical animal of the ancestress the puff-adder, therefore, protects the fertility of women as well as fields (see the myth of The Tree that Touches the Sky)...the puff-adder is the chief wife of the king
(Aschwanden 1989:244-245).

As symbol of the puff-adder, the chevron is also expressing the theme that sees the queen (*vahosi*) particularly tied to her residence – it symbolises her house and her snake.

The chevron pattern at the Great Enclosure also establishes the *vahosi*'s (queen's) attachment to the puff-adder snake, as the "mystical snake" that rises from the dead queen's body, climbing the tree and causing rain. The building therefore expresses the important connection between the physical presence of the queen (*vahosi*) at her residence and the presence of her snake at the *mutoro*-place.

The nature of the woman as bearer of fertility and the nature of the snake as producer of rain are permanently united through the expression of the chevron pattern as stone symbol.

The chevron pattern is also symbolic of the puff-adder "protecting the fertility of the women" (*mambo*'s many wives in wives area – 'field' of the king) and "protecting the fertility of the fields" (woman's duty of tending to fields). The dead queen "gives" her fertility to her female descendants and sustains it through the snakes. The rain-snake serves both the woman and nature, and the *mutoro*-place connects man with nature through female fertility (op. cit.). This is also symbolically related to the cultivative sacrifice festivals held at the *mutoro*-place (cf.: Part 5, Chapter 4) which centre on the theme of supplicating ancestors for rain and good harvests from the fields.

The architecture can then be seen to be narrating the mythological reality where the fertility bearing snake (chevron) rises from the *vahosi*'s body and permanently resides (pattern in stone) at the top of the wall, literally at the top of the tree's branches, protecting the fertility of the Great Woman, the *vahosi*, who resides at the Great Enclosure, tied to her place of residence. The myth of The Tree that Touches the Sky is therefore narrated in stone.

The enveloping snake-like walls of the Parallel Passage and snake-patterns may then be describing in stone the symbolic fertility role of women and performed by the puff-adder of the *mutoro*-place and as 'snakes of the uterus' (oviducts) within the woman.

Gender Significance of Towers and Snake Patterns

The symbolisation of the two snakes of the *mutoro*-place is significant because it might explain the presence of the two conical towers combined with the two snake patterns (dentelle and chevron) at the Tower Enclosure in terms of possible symbolic gender references to the ancestor and ancestress or a concept of pairing the patterns to the towers.

The positions of the structural wall patterns on the Inner and Outer Walls of the Parallel Passage appear only around the Tower Enclosure and are not repeated at any other part of the Great Enclosure.

The presence of these structural wall patterns and the conical towers at the Great Enclosure are therefore probably best explained in terms of ancestral honouring in the following contexts: the *real* presence of the *mythical* snake at the *mutoro*-place and realised at the *mutoro*-place ceremonies (sourced in the myth of The Tree that Touches the Sky); as important bearer of fertility for the Karanga people at the sowing, harvesting and rainmaking festivals (cf.: Part 5, Chapter 4), and as symbols in stone of the two 'snakes of the uterus', the oviducts of the woman and as symbols in stone of the fertility of the royal family enclosing

and 'protecting' the fertility of the *vahosi* and the sacred aspects of the *mutoro*-place. The chevron pattern then, similarly to the conical towers, has a wide range of interrelated symbolic associations which are typically compressed, where meanings telescope into each other and are expressed within a single stone structure.

The single dentelle pattern on the Inner Wall (only a small fragment of this pattern remains) and the alternate courses of darker flat stone underneath it are both shorter in length than the chevron pattern and placed closest to the small Conical Tower, at the inner entrance to the Tower Enclosure (cf.: Fig. 5.9). Similarly, the chevron pattern communicates its close proximity with the large Conical Tower. These two snake patterns, paired with the large and small conical towers, may refer to the two snakes living at the *mutoro*-place. The dentelle and dark band stripes could be referring to the imminent rain caused when the snake climbs the highest branches, where the black stripes refer to the dark rain clouds. This symbolism could be similar to that of the black robe worn by the rain-priest at *mutoro*-ceremony, which refers to the imminent rain (cf.: p.202).

Another interpretation might see the single dentelle pattern with the dark bands underneath on the Inner Wall, paired with the small Conical Tower, representing the presence of the great ancestress and that the chevron pattern with monoliths directly above on the Outer Wall, paired with the large Conical Tower with its dentelle pattern, represent the great ancestor's presence. This would coincide with the status positions of the king and queen.

However, as we have seen, the chevron pattern, as puff-adder, is the queen's snake and the original source of the ever-present chevron pattern in Karanga cultural artifact relating to rainmaking and *mutoro* function. As a 'mystical snake', it rises from the queen's body, and is symbol of both the woman's characteristics (mild, gentle) and her oviducts. This would then suggest that the chevron pattern at the Great Enclosure refers to the mambo's first wife or a famous ancestress. Paired with the large Conical Tower, it represents a great ancestress, while the tower may refer to a great founding ancestor.

What is most significant here is that the puff-adder, as symbol of the fertility of the ancestors, has been literally described in stone at the Tower Enclosure, possibly in order to ensure its omnipresent function as important bearer of the family's fertility and as permanent snake of the tree at the *mutoro*-place sourced from The Tree that Touches the Sky and in the *mutoro* ceremonies as symbol of imminent rain at *mutoro*-ritual. It also refers to the queen and her residence.

Again, the permanence and longevity of the building material ensures an eternal statement about the illustrious fertility of the founding fathers. The gesture in stone, a permanent building material, befits the purpose of the symbol which is to **ensure that the fertility bearing snake will permanently reside at the *Imba Huru*.**

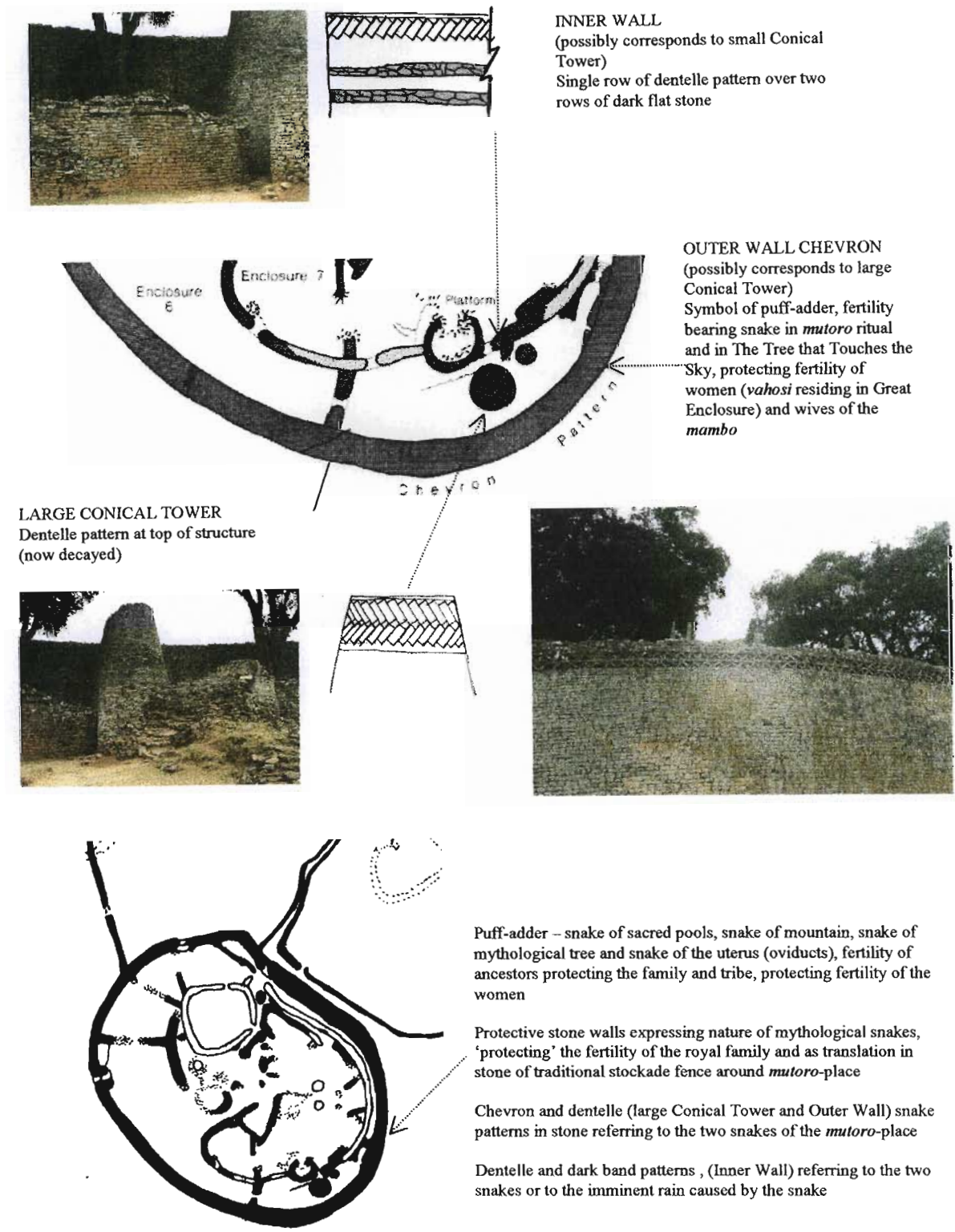


Figure 5.9; Structural wall patterns expressing snake symbolism in relation to conical towers.
(Plan; Author (adapted from Garlake: 1974, 1994 & Huffman: 1996). Photos: Author.)

Length and Position of Chevron Pattern Explained

The chevron pattern only appears at that part of the Outer Wall that encircles the Tower Enclosure. It therefore corresponds in plan to the areas most likely to have been used in the processional ritual of the ceremonies related to *mutoro*, such as the Parallel Passage and the Tower Enclosure. The consciously abrupt beginning and end of the chevron pattern has often puzzled researchers who regarded it's discontinuity as somewhat of a 'mystery' and questioned why the pattern did not continue around the entire circumference of the Outer Wall. The construction of the Parallel Passage and why the Outer Wall does not join the Inner Wall, has similarly bemused documenters. Garlake suggests that the chevron pattern and Parallel Passage can be simply explained by considering the 'advanced' level of craftsmanship in the later construction of the Outer Wall, compared to the earlier style of the Inner Wall, which motivated the builders, as if by oversight, to not join the Outer with the Inner Wall as originally intended;

This duplication of the walls is a unique and functionally inexplicable feature of the Ruins. It seems illogical to have constructed the enormous Outer Wall just to form a passage as narrow as this. It adds great grandeur to the outside of the building but little in the way of additional shelter or protection to that given by the old wall. One possible explanation for this set of circumstances is to suppose that the building of the Outer Wall started at its north-western end where the greatest additional area is enclosed and where craftsmanship shows little improvement on that of the first walls. As work on the wall proceeded, skills improved, methods were refined, architectural ambitions increased and more labour was employed in supplying stone, so that, when the enclosure of the new areas was complete and the time had come to join the old outer wall as originally planned, the appetite for ostentation and skills of the builders had so increased that the old wall was too small and 'old fashioned' to satisfy any longer (Garlake 1974:29).

The above passage denies that there was any strong motivation (pragmatic, religious or otherwise) for the local builder's intentions and that the form-making process of the Outer Wall was haphazard and accidental. Garlake appears to only consider construction methods, overlooking possible religious or socio-cultural intentions.

Examining the shape of the Outer Wall reveals that the builders possibly had no intention of ever joining it with the Inner Wall, for its circumference originates from a much wider radius than that of the earlier wall. Furthermore, the Parallel Passage is possibly too explicit to be accidental.

Garlake implies that there was no significance to the functional meaning of the Parallel Passage and the structural wall pattern on the Outer Wall and that the chevron's main purpose was decorative. Perhaps such a judgement is clouded by a need to explain artifact in terms of its pragmatic quality alone.

Huffman's explanation suggests that the seemingly abrupt 'incompletion' of the chevron pattern can be explained in terms of *domba* function: that the pattern symbolises male status connected to teaching initiates about the role of the male in adult society and relates directly to the Tower Enclosure (Huffman 1996). However, it seems inexplicable that a teaching 'tool' would be constructed on the exterior of the

wall, i.e. on the outside of the enclosure, **a-contextual** to the teaching activity within the enclosure where it no longer becomes plausible as a teaching ‘tool’.

When the chevron pattern is explained in terms of *mutoro*-place function, and all the symbolisation connected to this, (the communal sacrifice ceremonies that relate to sowing, harvesting, thanksgiving and rainmaking and the symbolisation in stone of the strength, fertility and longevity of the fertility bearing snake symbolising the ancestors, as well as the presence of the trees, platforms and towers), the discontinuity and external location of the chevron pattern is no longer a ‘mystery’. The snake pattern, crafted in stone, provides a visual, omnipotent and pervading presence on the exterior of the Outer Wall and therefore visible to all, as a symbol in the landscape, that the *mutoro*-place is sited there and, as symbol of the fertility bearing puff-adder (the ‘queen’s snake’), that the queen (*vahosi*) also resides there. The great fertility of the founding fathers of the Karanga culture, symbolised in stone, is visually available not only to the occupants of the settlement of Great Zimbabwe but for **all of the Karanga people**. The discontinuity is simply explained - the pattern is a symbol of the fertility bearing snake at the top of the tree, particular to the Conical Tower and Tower Enclosure, and to the context and function of the site of the *mutoro*-place. (The chevron pattern stops at the Outer Wall intersection with the wall between Enclosure 6 at the Tower Enclosure i.e. at the beginning and at the end of the place where the *mutoro* ceremony most likely occurred.) The single dentelle and dark band designs can be similarly explained as snake patterns closely associated with the smaller tower. The presence of the Parallel Passage can be explained as a processional route to the *mutoro*-place during *mutoro* ceremony (cf.: p.208f). The discontinuity of pattern as well as the parallel walls are no more a ‘mystery’ than they are an ‘oversight’.

Chevron and Monoliths Paired on Outer Wall

Furthermore, if we consider the pairing of the chevron with the monoliths (also only encircling the Outer Wall area directly related to the Tower Enclosure and Parallel Passage), then the pattern expresses not only the presence of the *mutoro*-place within, but also the ancestor’s protection (monoliths as horns, *gono*, symbol of male protection). Therefore, the monoliths (male) paired with the chevron (female) symbolise again the unity of male and female symbols. This combination also occurs as monoliths (male) inserted into the *mihombwe* (female) at the entry to the Tower Enclosure. Furthermore, this could also be seen as similar to the way that the towers and monoliths are paired on the top of the Outer Wall encircling the Western Enclosure at the Hill Complex. There are common architectural and symbolic themes expressed at the Hill Complex and the Great Enclosure, and the gender significance of both buildings are expressed through stone symbol.

Hosi-Jar, Chevron and the Great Enclosure

The chevron pattern as puff-adder on the Outer Wall of the Great Enclosure becomes a ‘signpost’ on the building, indicating rainmaking activity at the *mutoro*-place as well as the residence of the *vahosi* (the puff-

adder is her snake). Paired with the monoliths, it also expresses the protection provided by the ancestors and the *gono* given as gifts to the ancestors at *mutoro* ceremony (cf.: Figs. 5.9 & 5.12).

The building itself, with the encircling pattern of chevron as rainmaking symbol, could be compared architecturally to the *hosi*-jars used at *mutoro* ceremony and rainmaking. Both structures are thick walled 'containers' of fertility, decorated with the chevron pattern. The functions, decoration, form, structure and style of the jar and the building are appropriately similar (cf.: Fig. 5.12).

***Vahosi* and *Mutoro*-Place Expressing the Mythological Reality**

Since Karanga symbolism is always multi-faceted, the chevron pattern not only refers to the fertility bearing puff-adder snake of the *mutoro*-place tree, but also, as we have seen, to the 'snakes of the uterus', the oviducts, as symbol of the fertility of the ancestors. This would seem appropriate, since an 'all-embracing' interpretation of the *mutoro*-place sees the site as a symbolic uterus. There are parallel symbolic associations and roles between the *mutoro*-place as uterus containing snakes and the *vahosi* as head wife, symbol of female fertility and in charge of the *mambo*'s 'special pool' (uterus), his many wives. The roles and relationships are compressed and interconnected through mythology and ritual. The symbols of nature and the woman are fused, as is typical of traditional Karanga mythologically shaped thinking.

In the myth of The Tree that Touches the Sky and in the *mutoro*-place, this theme is made most evident. The *muchakata*-tree in itself serves the same fertility function as the uterus. The fruits born by the tree are the same as the children born by the woman, through her uterus, aided by the snakes of both places.

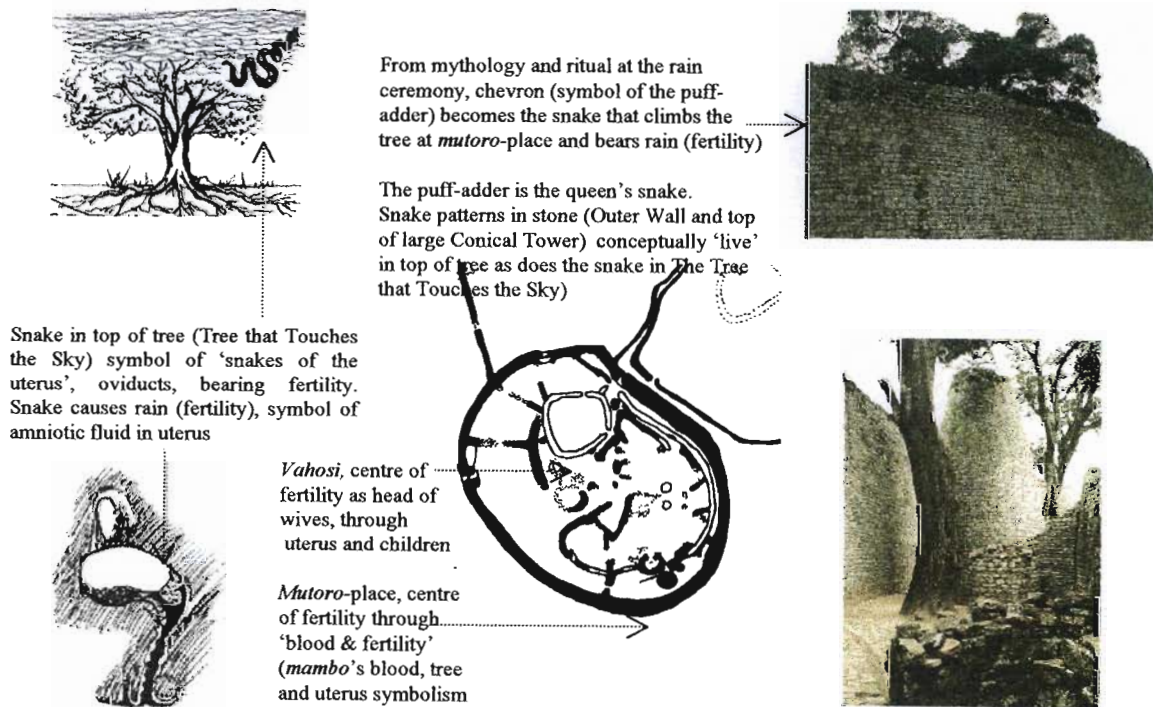


Figure 5.10; Mythology, Ritual and *Mutoro*-Place expressed at the Great Enclosure (Author).

The rain which falls when the snake reaches the top of the tree, helps the fruits to develop in the same way that the amniotic fluid of the uterus helps the embryo to develop (Aschwanden 1989:247).

The fertility bearing snake at the top of the tree (sourced from the myth of The Tree that Touches the Sky and *mutoro* ceremony), influencing rain and the snakes of the oviducts influencing fertility, are expressed in stone at the Tower Enclosure. *Mutoro*-place and *vahosi* are both seen as centres of fertility. **The *vahosi* and the *mutoro*-place are therefore very explicitly connected through symbolism and ritual.**

The *biological* (uterus symbolism and amniotic fluid as symbol of rain) and the *cosmological* (tree, snake and rain) phenomena have united and the ‘borderline’ between the world of the dead (sacred, cosmological) and the world of the living (profane, biological) has been crossed. Furthermore, God’s presence is felt in both events, via the fertility bearing snakes;

The rain that falls when the snake reaches the tree-top does not merely mean the water which revitalises nature but also - reversing the process of crossing the borderline - the amniotic fluid in the woman’s uterus in which a new life is starting to grow. And - we recall the tree-myth where the branches touch the heavens. - God himself takes part in this event for only at “contact” with the sky does the “fertilisation” by God occur. His presence is given in the rain-bringing snake, but he is also there when he gives the shadow to the new life in the woman’s “snakes” (Aschwanden 1989:247).

The idea of rainmaking and woman’s fertility is further expressed in the sacrifices at the *mutoro*-place. Sacrifices are made there before the beginning of the rainy season and symbolises man giving up one of God’s creatures in return for God’s provision of rain for the fertility of the fields. The sacrificial cairn at the entrance to the Parallel Passage most probably was used for these sacrificial killings (cf.: p.202f).

The ritual proceedings of the *mutoro* ceremony symbolises the close connection between the role of woman and of nature and provides further evidence for the Great Enclosure housing both the *vahosi* and the *mutoro*-place, as well as the communal sacrifice festivals related to fertility. The uterus, amniotic fluid and oviducts, the tree and the snakes, are integrated through symbols and ritual processes and the architecture becomes a mythological event, expressing the ancestors, rainmaking and honouring in stone.

Tower Enclosure and *Mutoro*-Place as Structures of the Woman

*...the entire *mutoro*-place becomes a uterus which - with the rain-snake that appears there and symbolises God’s fertility - presents the whole procreation-cycle as a sacred event (Aschwanden 1989:256).*

The Tower Enclosure, as *mutoro*-place, symbol of the uterus, with symbolic structures referring to the mythological reality, presents “...the whole procreation-cycle as a sacred event.” (op. cit.).

We could also explore the uterus-like form of the Great Enclosure in this context by considering to what extent the symbolism associated with the intended function can inadvertently determine form expressive of that function (i.e. Outer Wall forming a ‘uterus’ shape). The need to express a high-walled enclosure (for

sacred activity, fertility festivals, protecting woman's fertility and for the house of the Great Wife), with the material available, became a womb-like, cavernous form.

Similarly, the need to create processional routes through the building and from the valley, became an external expression of the passage of a womb or the entry to a cave as related in mythology. This expresses the mythologically shaped thinking of the Karanga.

The function of the uterus in nature (providing children, fertility), is comparable to the function of the *mutoro*-place (providing rain, fertility, as uterus). The fertility function of the tree growing out of the 'uterus', is also comparable to this theme, for it bears fruits which are symbols of the children.

The ritual event of procession (at *mutoro* ceremony) attached to death as a symbolic birth (constriction and release) is similar to the birth process itself and the Parallel Passage provides this experience (cf.: p.103).

The spatio-symbolic experience of the architecture expresses a 'fit to purpose', for it acts as a place to propitiate good crops and rain and to experience the "procreation-cycle as a sacred event". The structure of the Tower Enclosure also imitates the anatomical structure of the uterus. The form, structure and spatial experience all express the nature of the uterus, describing in stone the biological role of the woman.

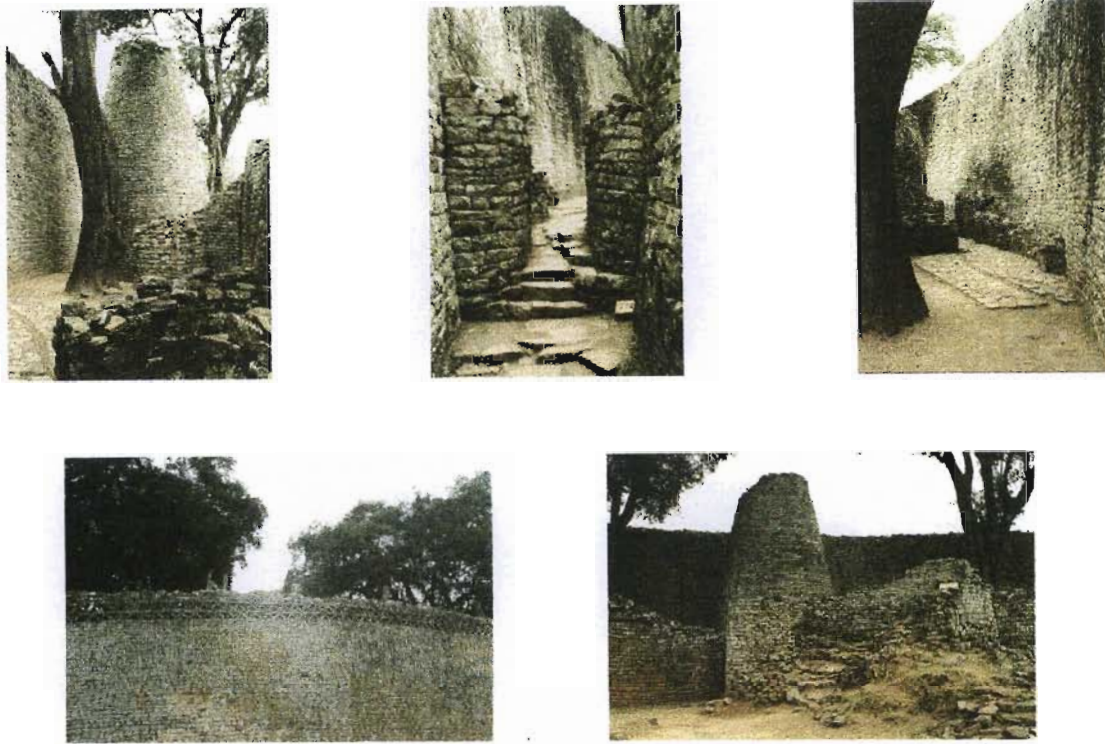
The *mutoro* event, through ritual activity (honouring ancestors, sacrifice, praying for rain and fertility, rainmaking, placing of jars (uterus) and *gono* (horn) as gifts to ancestors), **activates the architecture of stone symbol. The architecture and the mythological reality are activated and united through ritual.**

... Whenever God visited his people he came down to Earth by way of this tree. And whenever men wanted something from God they climbed up the tree. Before the onset of the rainy season, men offered rain sacrifices at the foot of the tree. But then they ceased to obey God's laws. The Earth became dry and let thorns grow. Because there was no rain, the snake returned to its rock in the sacred mountain. The tree died, the worm had got into it (Myth of The Tree that Touches the Sky. Aschwanden 1989:34-35).

The snake patterns, the presence of the trees, the stone platforms for jars, the monoliths (horn, *gono*), and the towers are all explicable in terms of *mutoro*, for they are sculptural stone expressions at the Tower Enclosure of the mythological reality where the procreation cycle issuing from the uterus is raised to a sacred level through the *mutoro*-place.

They are also explicit in terms of the fertility festivals centering on the *mutoro*-place. **An all-embracing interpretation sees the Great Enclosure as a powerful symbol in stone of the centre of fertility for the royal settlement, a 'uterus of the earth', carved, constructed and decorated in stone** (cf.: Fig. 5.11).

While the stone towers are the expressions on a grand scale of the symbol-figures of the great ancestors of Zimbabwe, the stone platforms serve a practical purpose in *mutoro* ritual. The enclosing protective walls, the *mutoro*-place as 'uterus of the earth', the building as house of the *vahosi* (centre of fertility, uterus) and the stone symbols of the Great Enclosure, all imitate the ritual structure and symbolic significance of the *mutoro* ceremony and *mutoro*-place as a place to experience the procreation cycle as a sacred event.



Conical Towers; Karanga grain bin, tribute to the *mambo*, God as 'builder of towers', grain bin as 'womb' storing 'seeds' (semen) from the male, man 'owns' the field (woman, uterus), bounty provided by great ancestors. Good harvests, blessings and bounty of nature, prosperity of ancestors.

Mihombwe; women tending to crops ('children') and tending to the fields('furrows of the field') and 'field' as symbol of woman and *mambo*'s wives.

Trees; centre of ancestral fertility at *mutoro*-place.

Walls; replacing 'white bones of the ancestor' of traditional *mutoro*-place, ancestral spirits uniting the family
Walls also symbolise protection provided by the mother of the family as well as the protection provided by the *mambo* and, as 'snakes of the uterus', protecting the woman's fertility.

Chevron; Puff-adder as queen's (*vahosi*'s) snake, rain-bearing snake of fertility, snakes of the uterus (oviducts), protecting female fertility, ancestral longevity and fertility.

Platforms; 'Place of jars' at *mutoro*-place, sublimity, dignity of ancestors, jars (uterus, symbol of woman) as gifts to ancestors. Family altar as symbol of the woman and as centre of family's fertility.

Monoliths; giving of *gono* (horn) as gift to ancestors at *mutoro*-place, longevity, fertility of ancestors, symbol of male protection

Figure 5.11; Symbolic Stone Structures at the Tower Enclosure Indicating *Mutoro*-Place.
Interrelated symbols are compressed into a religious structure. (Author)

The architecture expresses then the “...biological act of procreation...raised to a sacred level”;

The mutoro-place symbolises, in its structure and significance, the human reproductive anatomy and its biological significance, i.e. the fertility. Before, the mutoro-place was seen as the woman’s uterus. And the fruit of this uterus...is the tree. This is joined by a further interpretation by the Karanga: the puff-adder visiting the mutoro-place is a fertility symbol sent by God. The biological act of procreation is thus - raised to a sacred level - presented comprehensively (Aschwanden 1989:255).

Mythological symbols have become a real experience through architecture, since the uterus, the tree and the snake, as narrated in the myth and ritually realised at the *mutoro*-place are powerfully and evocatively realised in stone.

Architecture personifies the symbolic, mythological and ritual experience. **The usual and traditional symbolic association the *mutoro*-place has with the uterus has now become a structural reality in stone**, making the symbolism, and the connection to the ancestors, more magnificently impressive, more tangible and therefore, more available. Architecture becomes an active facilitator for man’s closer connection, through structure, to God. **By approaching God through a structure, he becomes a close God once again.**

We return to the idea that the Great Enclosure is an expression in stone of man’s close connection to God through nature. Through the active symbolisation of the procreative-cycle (biological phenomena of man and nature) during the ritual process of *mutoro* ceremony and in the symbolic associations of the *mutoro*-place site at the Tower Enclosure, man is reconnected with God through nature. Therefore, the basic tenet of Karanga religion, that God is “in all things, yet he is far away”, that he is a close God on earth as well as a distant God in the sky, the desire to reconnect man with God, has been realised. The equilibrium of the Karanga universe has occurred.

It is the uterus though, through symbolic association at the site of the *mutoro*-place, which has allowed this phenomenological event to occur;

Even though the ancestors co-operate extensively in the passing on and sustaining of the fertility, at the mutoro-place the decisive role of the woman, as regards the fertility, is stressed...When the snake appears in its topmost branches and causes the rain, it is as if the “snakes” of the uterus “produce” the amniotic fluid and realise the woman’s fertility. Thus man and nature have become one...The distant and unapproachable God thus becomes the near God again, who becomes reality not only in the rock of the Matopos but also in the woman’s body and in the snakes of the mutoro-place. Out of that, an equilibrium arises from which man can take and which makes possible his particular cultural achievements (Aschwanden 1989 : 256-258).

Through architectural expression of form, space and symbolic structures, through *mutoro* event, and through the function of housing the great woman, **the “...decisive role of the woman, as regards the**

fertility”, is realised. The Great Enclosure therefore symbolises within the landscape the powerful role of the fertility of the woman.

Stone Symbols Uniting the Ancestors with the Land

In traditional Karanga society, guardian spirits were the real owners of the land, whereby “...the land forms a close and enduring bond between the living and the dead” (Bourdillon 1991:76). It would therefore be important, in the case of Great Zimbabwe, to express in stone (symbol of the royal family), a landscape that describes the close bond the land forms between the world of the living community and that of the dead (ancestors). The Tower Enclosure contains all the relevant symbolic structures associated with honouring the ancestors through blood and fertility at the *mutoro*-place (conical towers, processional passages and protective walls, monoliths and platforms, *muchakata* trees and the chevron pattern as puff-adder).

The Great Enclosure becomes a permanent centre of fertility expressed in stone for the royal settlement. The architecture therefore participates in a symbolic landscape facilitating the bond between the owners of the land (*vadzimu*) and the people.

The Hill Complex and the Great Enclosure are also further connected through the stone symbols in the symbolic landscape. The relationship between the queen’s presence and the sacred site of the *mutoro*-place is similar to the relationship between the *mambo*’s residence and the sacred site of the Eastern Enclosure.

Hosi-jars at *mutoro* ritual for gifts to ancestors to propitiate rain and fertility

Chevron as symbol of puff-adder snake always connected to rainmaking on ritual items of *mutoro* ritual and as symbol of fertility bearing ancestors. Chevron becomes a ‘signpost’ for *mutoro*-place site.

Great Enclosure building is similar in form and ornamentation to the *hosi* jar at rainmaking ritual of *mutoro*, as a hollow thick-walled ‘container’ with chevron symbol of puff-adder – form expresses fit to purpose
Symbol of *vahosi*’s residence. Female version of Hill Complex

Hill Complex mountain symbolism represents elevated symbol of *mambo*’s residence



Figure 5.12; Symbolic structures of *mutoro* ritual and Tower Enclosure architect ‘signposts’ for *mutoro*-place. The Great Enclosure expresses a female version of the Hill Complex.

The ancestral 'guardian spirits', propitiated and supplicated through ritual at the *mutoro*-place, become centres in the landscape and assertively realised in stone at Great Zimbabwe, in the Tower Enclosure, in honour of their extreme dignity and power as the founding fathers of the successful state. The *mutoro*-place at Great Zimbabwe would have become an ancestral centre of the whole of the royal family, as a **spatial centre of fertility**.

The Tower Enclosure as *mutoro*-place ensures the "mystical links" with chiefly ancestors. The site where ancestral blood and fertility is honoured (*mutoro*-place) 'fixes' a "...spiritual link between the owners and the land." (Bourdillon 1991:82.) **At Great Zimbabwe, this "spiritual link" is significantly expressed through stone symbols at the Tower Enclosure and the Tower Enclosure becomes an important religious structure, a symbol in stone of the centre of royal fertility.**

6 Honouring Ancestors and the Mythological Landscape

Introduction

This chapter discusses the symbolic connections between the Tower Enclosure at the Great Enclosure and the Eastern Enclosure at the Hill Complex. Their respective siting in a symbolic landscape expresses the relationship between biological and cosmological phenomena in Karanga consciousness and mythologically shaped thinking. This chapter also discusses the way that spatio-symbolic structures allow the honouring of the ancestors to be firmly established in the landscape and therefore intends to integrate themes and ideas discussed in Parts 3 and 4 of the study with those discussed in Part 5.

Although the architectural style, functions and siting of the Hill Complex and the Great Enclosure are relatively disparate, there are similarities on other symbolic levels that unite the themes of the two sites.

Tower Enclosure as a 'Decorated Cave' in a Mountain

We have seen in a mythological interpretation of the landscape that the man-made form of the Great Enclosure appears to imitate the theme of a cave or a mountain, similar to that presented by the natural landscape of the Hill Complex (cf.: Part 4, Chapters 3 - 5)

This idea can be extended when we consider the traditional Karanga meaning of the 'place of jars' (family altar) in the family house.

We have seen that the traditional family altar for the ancestors houses a low stone platform for jars as gifts to the ancestral spirits and that the architecture of the Tower Enclosure houses a possible replica of this altar (cf.: pp.197, 225f). The Tower Enclosure, seen as housing the family altar of the royal family, symbolises the dignity of the ancestors and provides a place for which the descendants may go to make sacrifices to their *vadzimu*.

The family altar in traditional Karanga society is referred to a symbolic cave which is 'contained' within the house which is referred to as a symbolic mountain. The Tower Enclosure, housing the family altar, could then be interpreted as a cave also 'contained' within a house (Great Enclosure) as symbolic mountain. This idea can be extended when we also consider the Tower Enclosure as *mutoro*-place symbolising the uterus, which is the prevalent symbol of the 'sacred pool' in the cave of the mountains.

The place of the jars is also a symbol of the ancestor's grave. The name of this family altar is called *rukva* or *hva* which is derived from the Karanga name for grave, *guva*. These names are all also derived from *kukva* which means 'to assemble'. It is said that in the grave, the ancestor's remains are 'assembled', similarly to the way the jars are assembled on the altar. The long and narrow shape of the low bench is also similar to the shape of the grave. The spirits of the dead are said to reside in both places, and in both places, the spirits are honoured and special sacrifices are made. The **house**, containing the altar, symbolised the **hill**, while the place of the jars, the **altar**, symbolised the **cave** (Aschwanden 1982:203f).

The Tower Enclosure, with the stone platforms as the 'place of jars' in the building that houses the *vahosi*'s residence could symbolise the cave, while the building itself (the house) could symbolise the hill. The

building would then be symbolically associated with the Hill Complex through the traditional theme of cave within a mountain associated with the family altar in the house. While the structure is modified to become a stone enclosure for royalty, the symbolism appears to be narrated at the Tower Enclosure. The Tower Enclosure could be compared to a cave with narrow openings, as narrated in the stories of A Witch is a Mother Too and Chamasango. The spatial experience of the Plateau Passage imitates the long narrow and mysterious passages of cave and mountain architecture (cf.: p.103).

We have also seen that the landscape of Great Zimbabwe describes the mythologically realised theme of a valley between two mountains, where the architecture of the Great Enclosure possibly expresses a symbolic mountain (cf.: Part 4, Chapters 4 - 6).

In the case of Great Zimbabwe, the Great Enclosure (as house and as uterus) could refer to the hill (mountain). The same tradition would see the Tower Enclosure, the *mutoro*-place, with the low platform for jars, referring to the cave within the mountain (cf.: Fig. 5.13).

The structure of the Great Enclosure is also architecturally comparable to the mountain at Great Zimbabwe, where the precipitous sides of the hill become the high, massive, tapered stone walls of the Great Enclosure. The spatial dynamic may also be similar. The nature of the walled Plateau Passage entrance is similar to the walled ancient ascent and the ovoid plan mirrors the naturally ovoid form of the hill. The Tower Enclosure could be seen as a 'decorated cave', as an enclosed, secluded, high-walled space at the termination of a winding narrow passage and decorated with symbolic structures and stone patterns. Furthermore, there is a similar relationship between the residential areas (*mambo*'s court and *vahosi*'s residence) and the sacred areas (*mutoro*-place and national shrine) of the two sites.

We have seen that the grave itself, within the cave, is also seen as a symbolic uterus and the body must be kept bent to imitate the position of the body in the uterus;

...man enters the world in a bent attitude, in keeping with the shape of the birth-canal. Later he leaves the earth in the same way, one puts him back into the uterus (literally they say "into the second uterus") from which he will rise as an ancestral spirit (Aschwanden 1987:252).

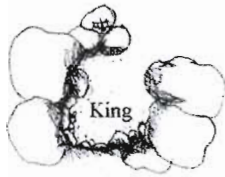
The cave at the Hill Complex could similarly be thematically represented in the Tower Enclosure (the *mutoro*-place) in its association with the symbolic cave (grave as uterus) of the place of the jars and family altar. Furthermore, the *mutoro*-place, as symbol of the uterus, also refers to the cave since the cave is symbol of the uterus. The uterus, the cave and the grave become synonymous with each other and, through a spatio-symbolic language, together realise the theme of fertility of man and nature in the 'sacred pool' of the mountain (Mwari-cult). Meanings of symbols are typically compressed into each other via a common theme.

Stone Symbols as Expression of Man's Relationship with God

The *mambo* (king) and the *vahosi* (Queen, Great Wife, First Wife) are united through symbolism by their association with God's creativity. In the woman, God's creativity is realised through procreation and in the man, God's creativity is realised through the mountain.



Zimbabwe Birds as totem figures of founding ancestors. 'Signposts' for national shrine (ritual enclosure). Honouring in the landscape spatially connects the birds as symbol figures with the conical towers of Great Enclosure (also symbol figures)



Graves in caves of mountains (grave as symbolic uterus). Mountains and the dead have a close relationship with God (Mwari).



Towers and monoliths are symbols of male fertility and protection provided by the *mambo*. Towers and monoliths refer to house of *mambo*



Mountain architecture – natural caves and rock shelters, 'sacred pools'. Man-made walls integrate with natural environment

COSMOLOGICAL:

Natural mountain – *mambo*
Mountain symbolism, man, God

In a symbolic landscape, symbol figures in stone (birds and towers) become markers of ancestral protection, authority, fertility, provision and bounty. They are further united via the 'valley between mountains' theme

Entry to Tower Enclosure from Parallel Passage – thematically, entry to a 'decorated cave', the *mutoro*-place. Great Enclosure symbolising the mountain (hill) and 'place of jars' (stone platforms) symbolising the cave in the mountain (from tradition). *Mutoro*-place is symbol of uterus, uterus is symbol of cave.

Chevron pattern as puff-adder snake refers to house of the *vahosi* and *mutoro*-place (symbol of the uterus with snakes) is 'signpost' for *mutoro*-place

Great Enclosure as 'cave' in valley (cf.: Part 4). Valley unites both structures –valley between two mountains (mythology) unites male and female. Valley, (from mythology), *dare* and *fuma* unite the landscape



BIOLOGICAL

Thematic mountain – *vahosi*
Mutoro-place, woman, 'sacred pool', uterus

Ownership of the land by the spirits is bound up with the relationship between the spirits and the living community. The land forms a close and enduring bond between the living and the dead.
(Bourdillon 1991:76.)

Figure 5.13; Honouring ancestors, and the mythological landscape. The Great Enclosure thematically expressing the architecture and symbolic themes of the Hill Complex as cave within a mountain. (Lower Left; Garland 1974. Others; Author.)

The Hill Complex expresses an architecture for the *mambo* through sacred genus-loci of rocks, caves, natural shelters and mountain (*Mwari* - God). The Great Enclosure expresses an architecture for the *vahosi* through *mutoro*-place as uterus ('sacred pool' of the woman), human fertility and through the Tower Enclosure as a 'decorated cave' sculpture (towers, chevron, monoliths, *mihombwe*, platforms for jars).

The valley, containing the social court, the *dare* and *fuma* (wives, grain bins, royal treasury and cattle), unites these two structures within the mythologically realised landscape (cf: Part 4, Chapter 6).

The way in which the Karanga symbolically associate the grave and the cave in the mountain with the female uterus allows the Karanga to affiliate man's procreativity and fertility with God's power and creativity since God created the mountains and the caves. Since the mountain is immovable, it is associated with God's power but also with the male responsibility to protect his family. The cave, like the uterus, also offers protection. The uterus 'protects' the child as symbol of the family's *mudzimu*, and protects the life of the embryo. It also 'contains' the snake of the 'sacred pool' in the mountain and the 'snakes of the uterus'.

The symbolic meanings of these natural structures are further united via their interrelated gender associations. The mountain is given a phallic association, which symbolically connects man with God, since God's creativity has enabled man to beget life. Man's fertility provides security and strength for his family, just as the mountain provides protection and demonstrates God's power. The mountain is also associated with the woman, for she too has received God's power as provider of a constant source of love and dedication for her family. Mountains in mythology also symbolise female breasts in the landscape. The mountain is thus associated with both male and female symbolism as well as with God's power and protection (Aschwanden 1987:252).

If the Tower Enclosure and Great Enclosure are interpreted as mythological symbols in stone of the cave within a mountain respectively, then this provides further evidence that the site of the Great Enclosure becomes a place for honouring the great ancestors, since they are intercessory beings between man and God.

The architecture of the Great Enclosure **appears to imitate the symbolism of the traditional uterus, cave, grave and mountain.** While not a burial site, this idea relates the building to a site for honouring the dead, as a *mutoro*-place, since its form and symbolic structures imitate the mountain, cave, grave and uterus imagery associated with the Karanga interpretation of sacred site for the dead.

Stone Symbols Express a Duality in a Unity

The *mutoro*-place realises the "...change of status from being one of the living community to being a family spirit" (Bourdillon 1991:199) and the ritual structures that support this event are narrated in stone symbol. The architecture then, facilitates the creation of a unity between the world of the living and the world of the dead, between the living community on one side and the ancestral spirits on the other, thus unifying the ambiguous nature of the relationship between life and death.

The idiosyncratic architecture of the Great Enclosure is no longer a 'mystery'. It reflects a motivation to describe in stone the essential nature of the *mutoro*-place in its man-made reference to the **cave of the**

mountain and in its biological reference to the **uterus**. It also refers to the house for the *vahosi* through the same symbolic associations. The architecture expresses a desire for a duality in a unity;

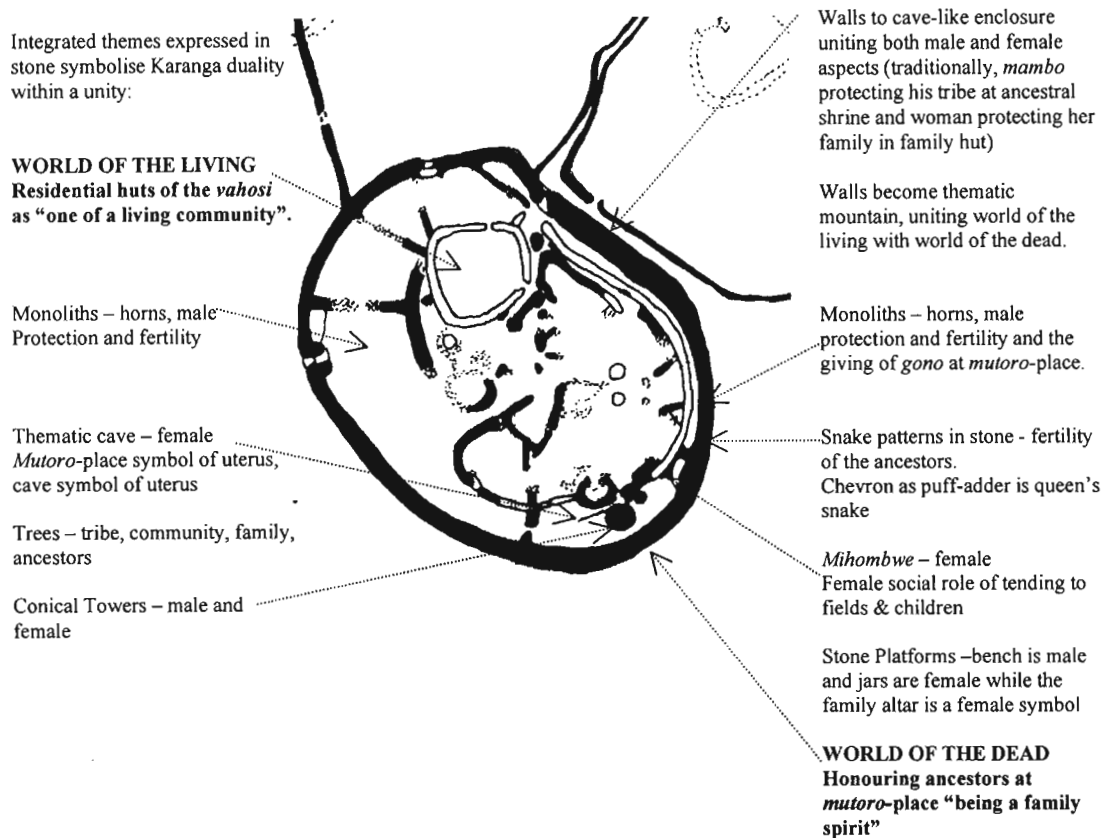


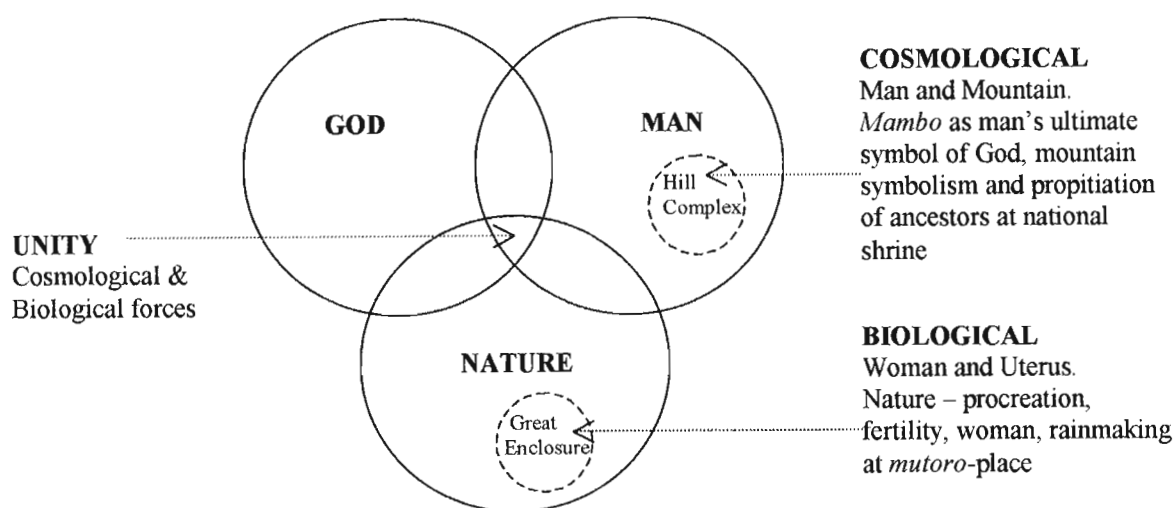
Figure 5.14; Dual symbolic associations reflecting a duality within a unity at the Great Enclosure.
(Plan adapted from Garlake:1974, 1994 & Huffman 1987.)

Stone Symbols Express Roles of the *Mambo* and the *Vahosi*

The Great Enclosure therefore symbolises within the landscape and settlement, the decisive role of fertility of the woman and of nature, through uterus symbolism. This could be compared to the Hill Complex, sited on a symbolic mountain (God's creativity), expressing the decisive role of the *mambo* as protector and provider. The Great Enclosure may have therefore facilitated the establishment, validation and increased status of the role of the woman in society in a similar way to the establishment and validation of power and authority afforded the *mambo* through mountain symbolism and close connection to the ancestors and God at the Hill Complex. In traditional Karanga society, procreativity gave the woman her independence, for it was through the provision of children for her husband that she acquired status and her own house (Bourdillon 1991:46f). Therefore, the Great Enclosure could be seen to represent the independence of the woman through procreativity, i.e. her decisive

role. (This aspect is discussed further in the following chapter in relationship to the possible connections between Great Zimbabwe and Queen Mujaji's settlement in Lovedu.)

Approaching God through the structure of the Great Enclosure, and at the Tower Enclosure as *mutoro*-place, the Karanga hierarchy of God, man and nature becomes a closed circle, and this is a fundamental theme desired by man in the Karanga myths of creation and in traditional ritual. The architecture allows man to bridge the gap between himself and God, through nature;



The relationships between the Karanga hierarchy of God, man and nature, between the world of the living and the dead, and the symbolism inherent in Karanga ritual and mythology, are expressed within a symbolic landscape through ritual, settlement dynamics, spatialisation and symbolic structures.

Summary

The following graphics (Figures 5.15 – 5.18) illustrate the ideas discussed in this chapter and summarise the interpretations of Great Zimbabwe settlement dynamics and spatio-symbolic structures sourced from the mythology of the region. This graphic comparative analysis reveals that the Hill Complex and the Great Enclosure express a duality within the landscape, unified through their respective relationship to God via cosmological and biological forces. Furthermore, both sites describe spatially their respective relationships between the world of the living and the world of the dead. These spatial dualities are united through mountain symbolism at the Hill Complex and uterus symbolism at the Great Enclosure.

The Hill Complex further expresses, through function and spatio-symbolic structures, the power and authority of the *mambo* and of the founding ancestors as well as the success of the state. The Great Enclosure, in a similar fashion, expresses through function and spatio-symbolic structures, the fertility of the royal family and of the royal ancestors. The Great Enclosure particularly expresses the decisive role of women through a spatial and symbolic experience of the procreation cycle raised to a sacred event.

The Hill Complex, through mountain symbolism, represents a cosmological relationship between man and God, while the Great Enclosure, through uterus symbolism, represents a biological relationship between man and God. The valley area, housing *fuma* (wives, grain bins, royal treasury and cattle) and the *dare* (social court) unites the two sites through a mythologically realised landscape of a valley between two mountains.

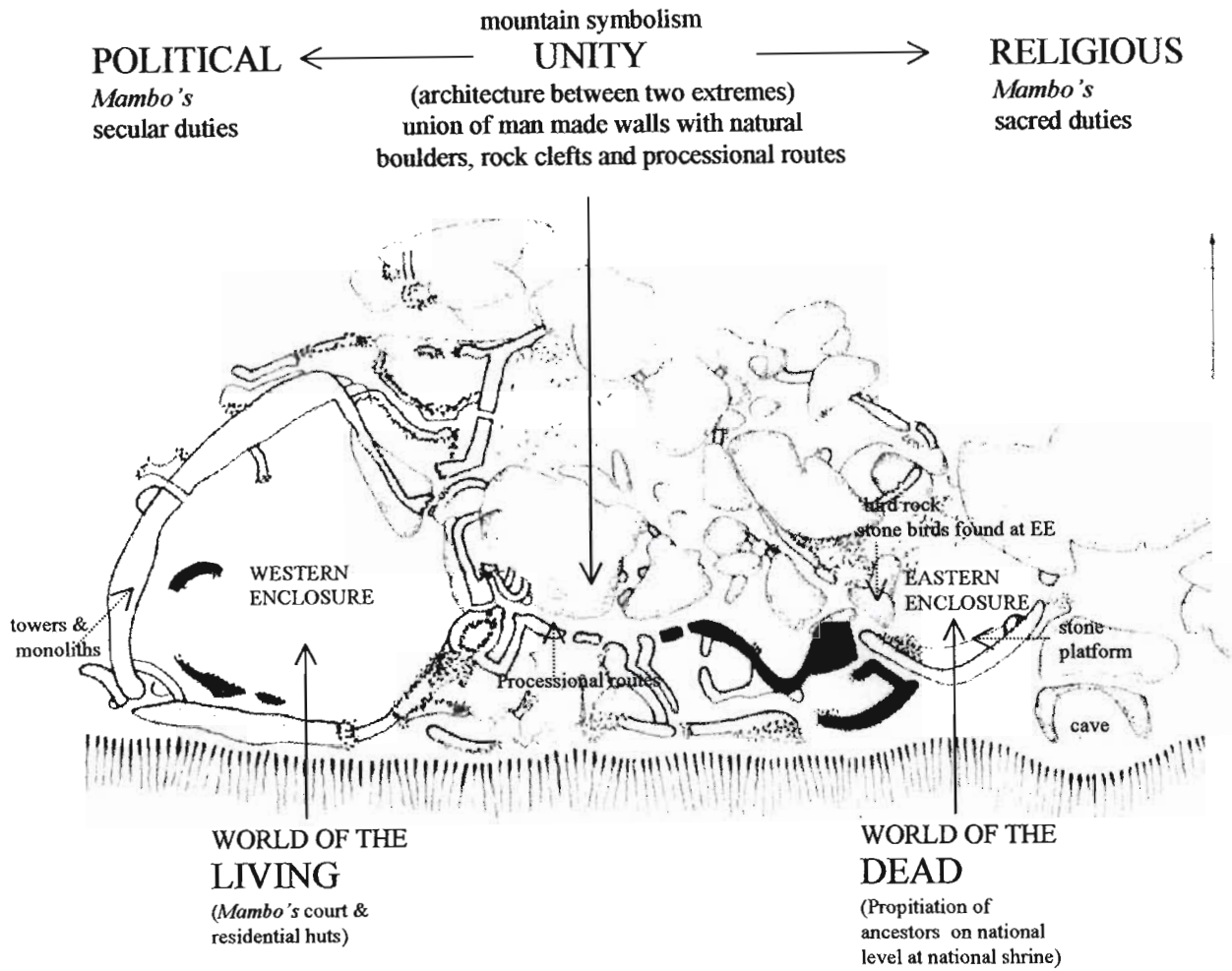
An architectural language of stone symbol powerfully honours the influence of the Karanga ancestors, the founding fathers of Great Zimbabwe, the guardian spirits and 'real owners' of the land.

Through a contextual language of symbolic display, Karanga mythology narrates in words what Great Zimbabwe describes in stone.

Symbolism is the expressive device activating the wisdom of the people within the dynamic landscape of Great Zimbabwe.

This original complexity of creation stems from an impossible unity beyond all human distinctions... 'from which life and death, real and imaginary, past and future, communicable and incommunicable, height and depth; are no longer seen as contradictory'... Production, division, reproduction etc., are all processes which have an inner and an outer reference simultaneously... Man's own creative powers can thus be seen as a version (or re-version) of the power that creates and sustains his existence (Maclagan 1997:7 citing Breton, A. 1962).

Fig. 5.15



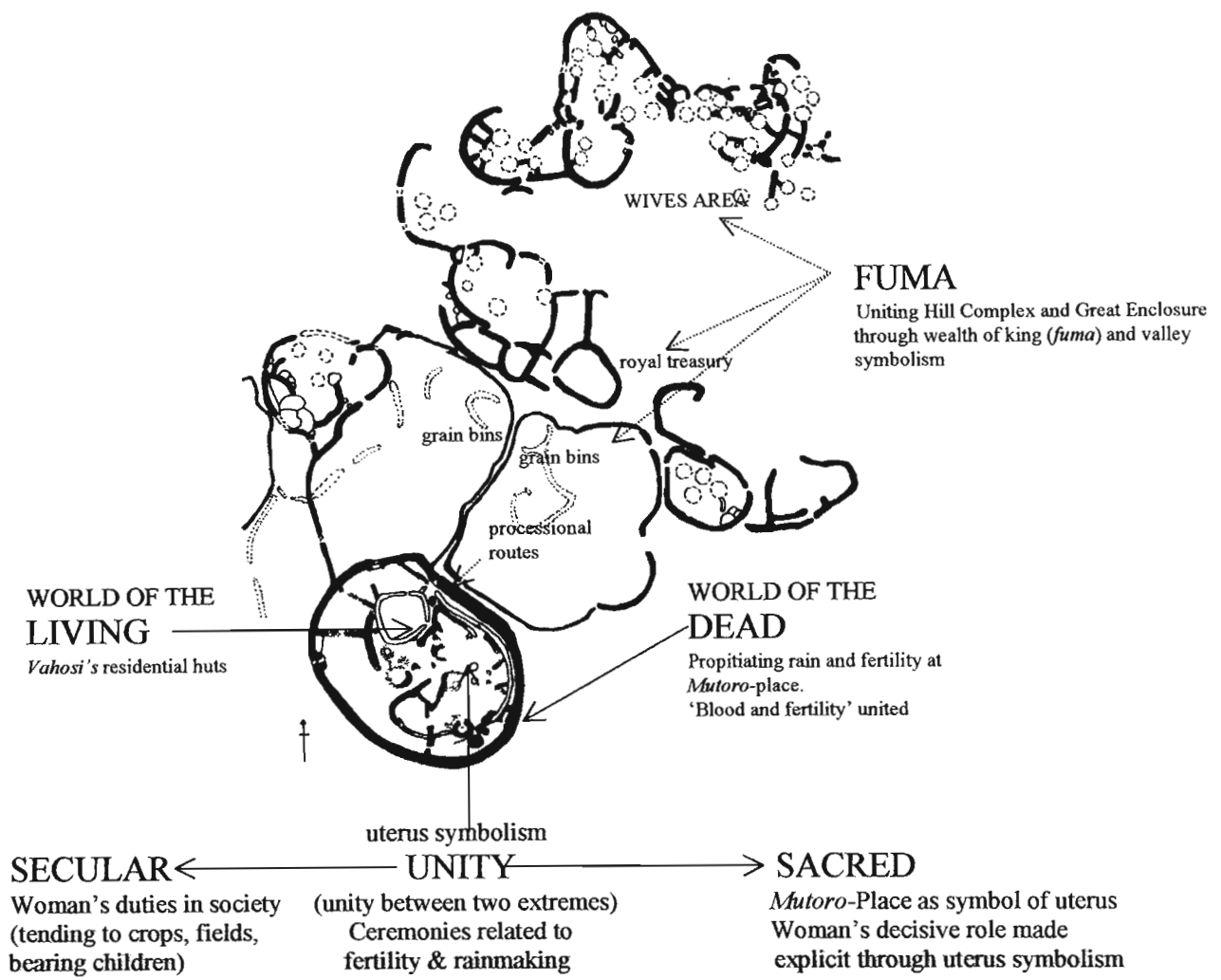
COSMOLOGICAL (Mountain Symbolism)

HILL COMPLEX
(*Mambo* Male)
PROTECTION AND PROVISION
ARCHITECTURE AND SPACE EXPRESS THE SUCCESS OF THE STATE
Man connected to God through nature (Cosmological)

Fig. 5.16



BIOLOGICAL
(Uterus Symbolism)



GREAT ENCLOSURE
(*Vahosi* Female)
PROCREATION & FERTILITY
ARCHITECTURE AND SPACE EXPRESS FERTILITY OF ROYAL FAMILY
Man connected to God through nature (Biological)

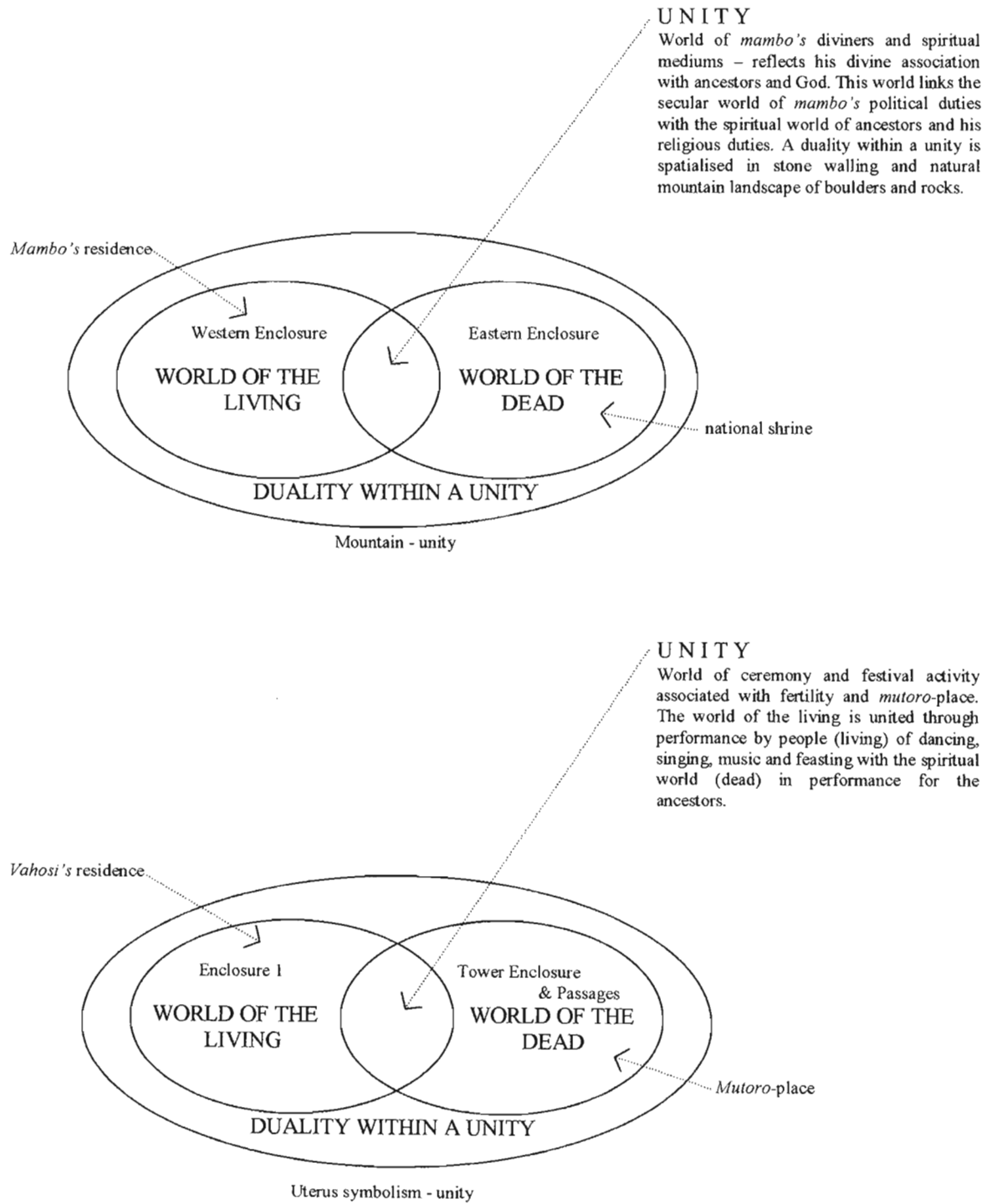


Figure 5.17; Hill Complex and Great Enclosure reflecting the Karanga theme of dualities within a unity.

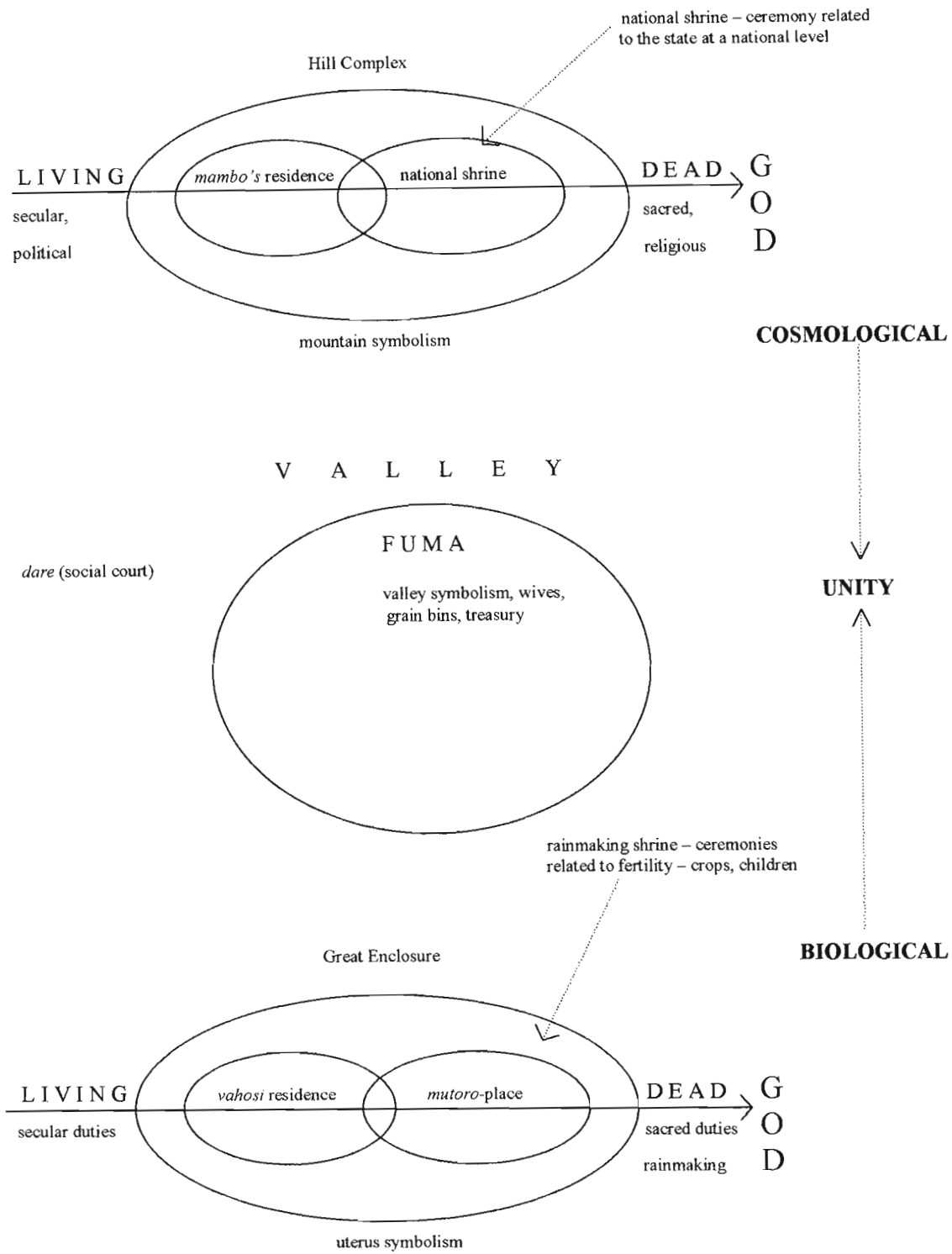


Figure 5.18; Dare and Valley with mambo's 'fuma' uniting mambo (Hill Complex architecture) with women (Great Enclosure and wives' area) and uniting biological with cosmological phenomena. This reflects the Karanga religious hierarchy between God, man and nature.

7 The Earlier Structure of the Great Enclosure Explained

This study has provided evidence to support the idea that the Great Enclosure provided a venue for honouring the ancestors at a *mutoro*-place and for the ceremonial proceedings of the cultivative sacrifice festivals. This chapter intends to propose the use of the building during its earlier occupation, before the Outer Wall and towers were constructed. The possibility that a building which **developed incrementally** over a period of more than 200 years was utilised for various functions at different stages is very feasible. There is little reason to doubt the possibility that *mutoro*-place function could operate alongside other activities such as residential, when we consider the private and enclosed nature of the Tower Enclosure. Furthermore, the *vahosi* was in charge of the wives in organising the festivities, such as feast preparation and beer milling and brewing, was possibly associated with rainmaking (if she became a rain-priest or medium) and has a symbolic connection to the *mutoro*-place through uterus symbolism. Therefore, the possibility of the establishment of a *mutoro*-place at the same site as her residential quarters is probable.

The iron-making and gold-making tools found in Enclosure 7 (Garlake Enclosure 6) (cf: Part 5, Chapter 2) might suggest some possibilities for other activities on the site, since they were not found connected to any iron smelter. This may suggest ritual activity related to iron-making itself at some stage during the 200 year occupation of the building.

The first stage of development (constructed between AD1240-1350) includes the internal walled enclosure of Enclosure 1, and most of the Inner Wall to the Parallel Passage (cf.: Fig. 5.19). This suggests that these original structures supported residential courts associated with royalty (stone walling). Residential debris was recovered from the Great Enclosure under the earliest walls of Enclosure 1 and Enclosure 15. These were found during the earliest investigations (cf: Part 5, Chapter 2). This suggests residential settlement. Garlake (1974, 1994) suggests that Enclosure 1 and most of the area around Enclosure 1 and between the entries were residential courts and huts (Garlake 1994:27).¹⁴ The *vahosi*'s household would have required many huts and would have been fairly large (cf.: p.37).

In the later occupation, the Daga Platform Area (cf.: Fig. 5.19) probably became a ceremonial area due to the presence of later platforms, monoliths and ceremonial items such as clay cattle and human soapstone figurines found around the *daga* platforms in this enclosure (cf.: Part 5, Chapter 2). This ceremonial area possibly operated on the same site as the *vahosi*'s residential area. The presence of the clay cattle figurines (thought to be used only in the earlier occupation (cf.: p.184f)) may indicate that this area was used for ceremonial or sacred function during the earlier period. However, they may have simply been placed there at a later stage.

This would indicate that the earlier structure of the Great Enclosure accommodated residential huts and possibly some ceremonial functions, while at a later stage, the site accommodated more sacred and

¹⁴ Cf: Part 1, Chapter 7 where Garlake's proposal that the *mambo* moved down to the Great Enclosure during the later occupation is discussed and where it is proposed that, because of the *mambo*'s essential attachment to mountain symbolism and the spirit mediums, this would have been unlikely.

ceremonial areas between the Inner Wall and Enclosure 1. This area was covered with uniform *daga* flooring at an earlier stage and at a later stage “short lengths of radial walls and bastioned entrances” forming “small courtyards amongst *daga* huts” were added (Garlake 1974:27). Furthermore, Garlake mentions a *daga* platform in this area originally found “...covered with fallen stone pillars which originally stood upright” (Garlake 1994:35). This would also indicate ceremonial or sacred activity. The stylised human figures were also found here, which he attributes to a “ritual aspect” (“altar or shrine”) and that since the platform has lasted for over 500 years it signifies its “quality of workmanship” (Garlake 1974:27f). This may suggest a ritual and/or ceremonial aspect to this area and the platform may have been a hut or shrine related to fertility (human figures) festivals or as a stage for performance (cf: Fig. 5.19). The Stepped Platform, with circular stone walling encroaching onto the Tower Enclosure, may have similarly been used as a stage for such activity.

The notion of honouring the founding leaders with stone towers and high stone walls to enclose the site may have been a later realisation, coinciding with the later more intense period of technical and cultural achievement. This may reflect a later need to establish more significantly the honouring of the illustrious founders (earlier leaders, great *vadzimu*) since it was such a successful kingdom. The early leaders, as the ‘real owners’ and guardian spirits of the land, would be seen to have a powerful influence on the settlement’s prosperity. There is also a possibility that the original *mutoro*-place for the great ancestors was a typical rain-shrine, with stockade fence and tree but at a later date became symbolised in stone as a monument to the original founders and the obvious success of the kingdom.

Another possibility might see the *mutoro*-place at the Great Enclosure developing as a consequence of the *vahosi* dying before the *mambo*, her body being placed ‘close to where she lived’. Aschwanden describes this tradition. The *mutoro*-place, may even have been constructed as a legacy to her legendary rainmaking abilities during her life;

After the death of the king’s wife (hosi) also, a virgin was killed and buried close to the royal grave. A muchakata tree was planted on the queen’s grave. If she died before her husband it was even possible that her grave became a mutoro-place (Aschwanden 1989:244).

As the community grew in strength and number, the towers could have been erected at the *mutoro*-place site as ancestral symbol-figures, as the strength of the founding ancestors were being seen to be influencing the success and prosperity of the community and the ‘fertility’ of the royal family. The notion of honouring the forefathers of the community through stone monument, may have been a practice added much later in the period of Great Zimbabwe’s occupation, at the height of its success. **The motivation for, and the emphasis of, honouring ancestors in stone at the Tower Enclosure possibly coincided with the increased success of the society.** The areas outside of the Tower Enclosure (between the Inner Wall and Enclosure 1) may have been used for the great communal feasts and ceremonies held after the *mutoro* ritual and for the similar feasts that are part of the communal sacrifice festivals related to sowing, harvesting, thanksgiving and rainmaking held throughout the year (cf: Part 5, Chapter 4). Bourdillon describes in detail the ceremonies related to honouring the family spirits such as milling and brewing beer, feast preparation

and dancing in honour of the ancestors (Bourdillon 1991:227f). These spaces were certainly large enough to house the large-scale festivities of singing, dancing music and feasts as outlined in Chapter 4 of this study.

This study has examined the possibility of these suggested uses for the Great Enclosure and this might reveal interesting insight for the development of our understanding of Great Zimbabwe and of the lifestyle and culture of the traditional Karanga people.

Any serious attempt at further research should now rely on a systemic multi-disciplinary approach, rather than the independent studies previously conducted.

There is a wealth of information documented about the ruins. Much of the original investigative work has been interpreted and reinterpreted, rendering any new work problematic and this is exacerbated by the colonial assumptions of earlier investigators. Most of the recent work now relies on making connections between Great Zimbabwe and newly discovered sites in other areas of Southern Africa. This can itself be problematic, for it necessitates the need to make connections between cultures that developed under different economic, physical and historical dynamics.

All of this is exacerbated by the complex and convoluted nature of Great Zimbabwe's recorded history and the numerous 'interpretations' of documented evidence where interpretive values impact on our understanding of Great Zimbabwe and are continually 'changing the past'.

More importantly, extensive and systematic field research into traditional Karanga culture is now imperative in order to make further connections. First hand, multi-disciplinary investigations are now required, where collaborative research from historians, archaeologists, anthropologists and architects is integrated with an examination of all of the recorded history of Great Zimbabwe and related to the architecture and archaeology of the site.

New insight into this field may arise from the investigations currently being conducted at Great Zimbabwe by the Zimbabwe Monuments Parks Board, where researchers are documenting more substantial graphics than have been thus far recorded, using information technology. This should prove to be a very useful contribution to this field in the near future.

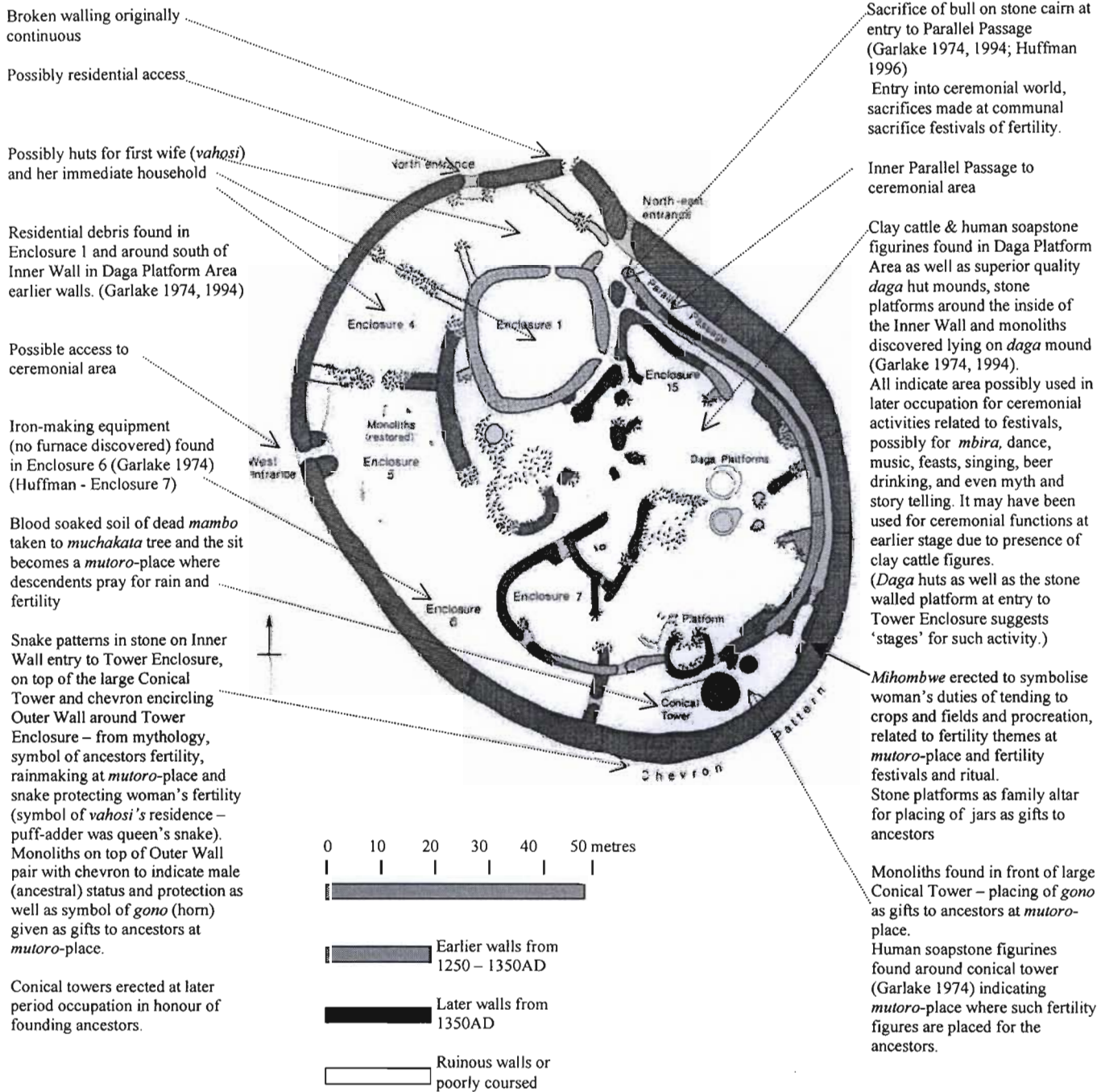


Figure 5.19; Proposed Residential, Ceremonial and Ritual Functions for the Earlier and Later Stages of the Great Enclosure. Based on archaeological and ethnographic evidence discussed in this study. (Plan adapted from Garlake 1974)

8 Further Possibilities

This chapter explores the possibility that the Great Enclosure at Great Zimbabwe was the architectural and genus-loci origin for increasing woman's status in Karanga society, established through her attachment to rainmaking and uterus theme at *mutoro*-place. This process could be compared to that whereby the *mambo's* political, economic and religious position was strengthened through mountain symbolism and symbolic structures associated with the ancestors at the Hill Complex. The establishment of the *vahosi* at the Great Enclosure and her symbolic attachment to fertility and uterus symbolism at the *mutoro*-place may have facilitated the increased status of the woman in society. This may have initiated the later establishment of the *vahosi* as the ruler, replacing the traditional *mambo*, at Queen Mujaji's settlement in Lovedu in the Northern Transvaal of South Africa. Queen Mujaji's right to rule is based on her legendary rainmaking abilities (she comes from a long line of female rainmakers as legendary ancestresses), which may also have been initiated during the later occupation period of Great Zimbabwe, facilitated by the symbolic and powerful presence and function of the architecture of the Great Enclosure.

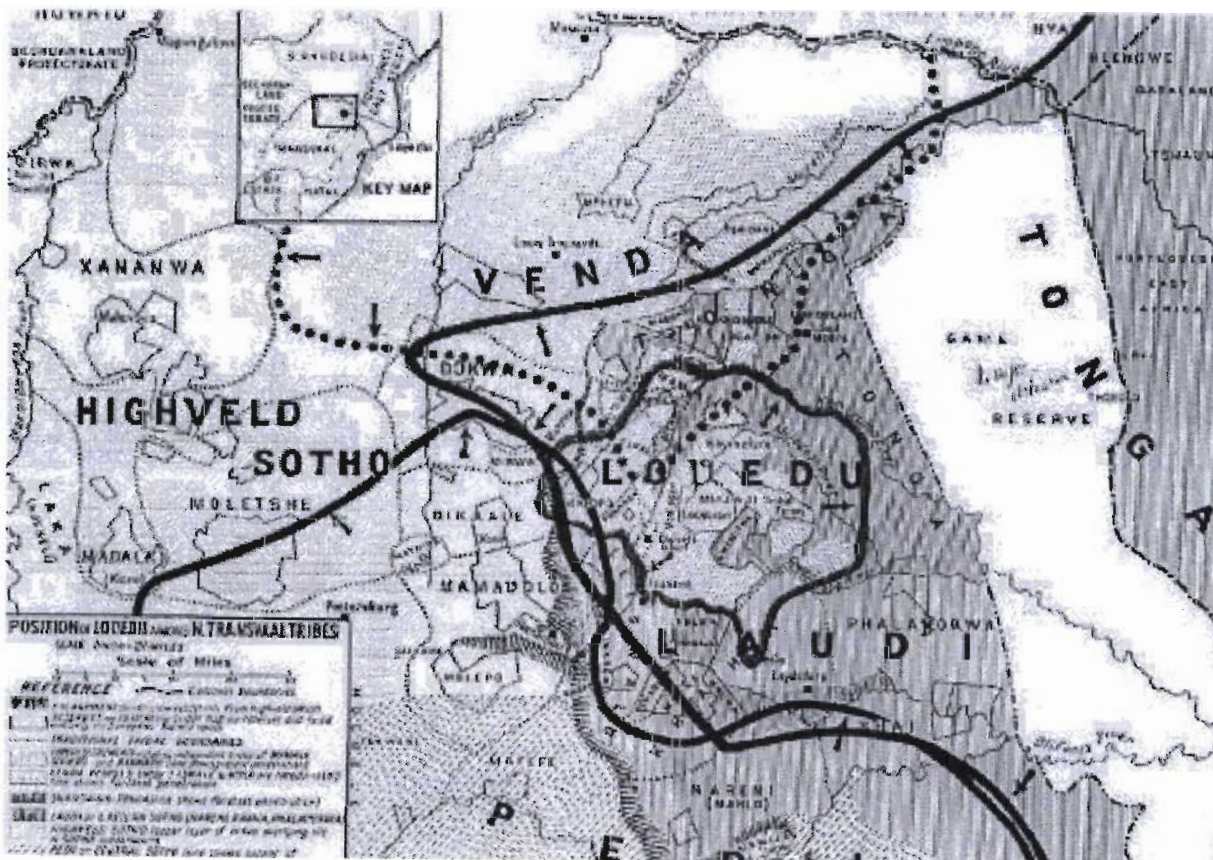


Figure 5.20; Map of Lovedu area in Northern Transvaal. (Krige & Krige 1943.)

The people of Queen Mujaji's royal settlement in Lovedu claim to have descended from Karanga royalty at Great Zimbabwe, their legends describing their ancestors as being original descendents of Great Zimbabwe (Krige & Krige 1943). Queen Mujaji is renowned for her legendary rainmaking abilities and these have been passed down to her through many decades, reported to have been first established at Great Zimbabwe. She also controls a large royal household and has many wives and they play a similar role in their relationship to her as *fuma* in the tradition of her male Karanga ancestors. The Lovedu also have similar socio-religious symbolic associations with mountain symbolism as the Karanga at Great Zimbabwe. The original stone settlement (now abandoned) was established on a prominent hill overlooking an expansive landscape, similar to that of Great Zimbabwe. It is possible that, because of the legendary connection to Great Zimbabwe, Queen Mujaji's ancestors migrated south from Great Zimbabwe and settled in Lovedu territory, retaining and developing the rainmaking qualities first established through rainmaking associations with *mutoro* activity at the Tower Enclosure rain shrine (*mutoro*-place) at the Great Enclosure. In traditional Karanga society, a woman gains independence and status through her procreative role. Children and grandchildren give her increased privileges and the Great Enclosure could be seen as an important statement of her status as the head of female royal fertility (in charge of the wives of the *mambo*). Considering the powerful fertility and rainmaking symbolism architected in the form, function, spatial and symbolic structures at the Great Enclosure, as well as its sacred and residential functions, the possibility that the building first established the elevated status of the *vahosi* in society which later allowed her to become the ruler at Lovedu, has potential for further research and documentation. Queen Mujaji's settlement was last fully documented by the Kriges in 1943 and archaeologists are now starting to re-examine some of the original stone settlement located on an elevated escarpment close to the present day Queen Mujaji's settlement. Investigating this original settlement could establish an historical link with stone settlements of Southern Africa and thereby extend this field of research in the future. It also has potential for contributing to women's studies in Southern Africa.

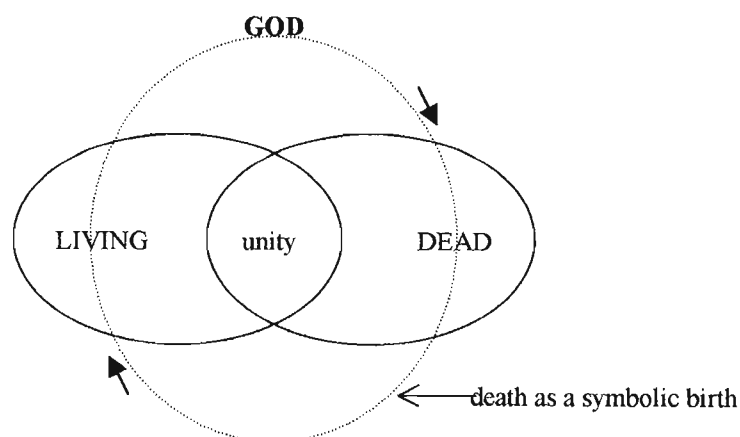
9 Summary

...one might expect such aspects of material culture as architectural style and settlement layout, organisation and decorative motifs as well as a choice of subsistence needs to be strongly influenced...larger scale expressions of symbolic values...exist in the expressions of kingship and power...Further illustrations might include the associations of the granite mountains found throughout the plateau margins with the widespread distributions of stone buildings. The mythology of the region has been little considered from this point of view (Sinclair 1987:159).

The World of the Living and the World of the Dead

The Karanga relationship between spatial dimensions of the world of the living (community) and the world of the dead (ancestors) appears to be reflected spatially within the sites of the Hill Complex and the Great Enclosure (dualities within a unity) (cf. Figs. 5.15 – 5.18). The two structures themselves can be seen as dualities in a landscape, united by valley symbolism, the *mambo's fuma* (wealth in form of wives, grain bins, cattle and royal treasury) and the *dare* (social court).

This relationship is evident in Karanga religion and symbolic associations (Part 3) and in the fundamental concepts presented in the mythology of the region, where it is expressed as two mountains united by a valley. It is also presented in the Karanga theme of the union between the two extremes of life and death. The most significant example of this theme is the way the Karanga see death as a symbolic birth, where the dead are placed in an embryonic position to reflect the idea of returning to the 'uterus of the earth' from which they came;



The Karanga approach to death as a symbolic birth ensures this fusion between the sacred and the profane, the dead and the living. This is the main theme of Karanga mythology and ritual activity associated with honouring the ancestors (propitiation and sacrifice connect world of living with world of dead) and is

expressed within the socio-symbolic and spatial structures and within the spatio-symbolic landscape of Great Zimbabwe (cf.: Figs. 5.15 – 5.18).

The Great Enclosure and Ritual Function

In terms of ritual and ceremonial aspects, the communal sacrifice festivals of the Ceremony Before Sowing, the Rain (*Mutoro*) Ceremony, the Festival of the First Fruits, the *Mahumbwe* Festival and the Harvest Thanksgiving Festival (all related to rainmaking, fertility of the fields and woman's duties of tending to crops) may have a strong connection to the Great Enclosure. The building is sited in an area (in the valley, mythology – the woman) most likely to have been associated with the royal wives (Lower Homesteads and the Great Enclosure itself – ethno-archaeological evidence). This associates the building with fertility of the woman and of the fields (her social role).

Fields and valleys are strongly associated with female sexual and social roles in Karanga mythology. Tending to crops and harvesting was a woman's duty in Iron-age Shona society (historical evidence, Aschwanden, Beach, Bourdillon, Gelfand.). The symbolic structures at the Great Enclosure are all centred around aspects related to fertility of the fields, of women and of procreativity in nature. The building also expresses the *vahosi*'s decisive role as head wife in charge of all the *mambo*'s wives who are seen as his 'special pool' (uterus) from which he acquires children. The chevron pattern as symbol of the puff-adder snake also refers to her role of protecting the fertility of the women.

Therefore, the site location of the Great Enclosure (genus-loci supported by mythology, ritual and socio-cultural context as well as the royal spatial dimension of the *mambo*'s relationship to his wives) may be appropriate to house all ceremonies thematically related to the woman's roles of procreator and tending to fields (fertility festivals and *mutoro*). The building is also of a large scale to accommodate the feasts, music, singing, dancing and beer making of these ceremonies.

Aspects related to propitiating great ancestors for fertility of crops, rain and procreation are key themes in these ceremonies (oral tradition – Aschwanden, Mufuka and historical – Beach, Bourdillon, Gelfand). These ceremonies focus around a central nucleus, a spatial centre, the *mutoro*-place (rain shrine), for it is at the *mutoro*-place that "...the decisive role of women, as regards the fertility is stressed" and the all-embracing interpretation of the *mutoro*-place is that it "becomes a uterus" (Aschwanden 1989:256).

Uterus symbolism, a common theme related to the *vahosi* as head wife, the wives and the *mutoro*-place, is seen as symbolically uniting the spatial dynamics of the site similarly to the way in which mountain symbolism unites the *mambo* with the ancestors and God at the Hill Complex.

The Great Enclosure and Uterus Theme

This fertility theme may have been inadvertently manifested on a symbolic level in the form and space making of the Great Enclosure. The compelling close similarity to an embryonic, womb-like form, while not directly supporting evidence for *mutoro*-place, may be an interesting facet of this extraordinary building and would depend upon to what extent the symbolism associated with the intended function would inadvertently influence form. The thick, massive and protective cave-like walls and processional routes of

the Great Enclosure may reflect a desire to express a world associated with the dead (*mutoro*-place) and with rituals related to the ancestors, to enhance the concept of an embryonic protective spatialisation inherent in the Karanga concept of death as a symbolic birth.

The expansive, protective and thick-walled form has an extraordinary 'fit to purpose' where form results from the spatial and the symbolic requirements of the building. The Outer Wall, seemingly approaching the form of a uterus, may have been influenced by the need to create a high, thick-walled enclosure that was private and hidden from more secular activity of the valley. A womb-like, cavernous enclosure was the result, complete with extended umbilicus passages and narrow cervical-like entries for processional activity. The religio-symbolic world of the *mutoro*-place and the ceremonies associated with cultivative practices (harvesting and fertility of the 'fields' – wives) and the *mutoro*-place as uterus are directly related to female fertility and social roles and the building houses the ultimate symbol of the protector of female fertility, the *vahosi* (Great Wife). The form of the building appears to coincide with the functional and spatio-symbolic structure of the ceremonial and ritual activity associated with the *mutoro*-place and communal sacrifice festivals. As a residence for the *vahosi* (Enclosure 1), the building also expresses her social responsibility (head of the wives who bear children for the *mambo* and organising activities for the ceremonies). She is also, through her uterus, and through the chevron pattern as her snake, symbolically, spatially and ritually connected to the *mutoro*-place, where an all-embracing interpretation by the Karanga for the *mutoro*-place is a symbol of the 'uterus of the earth'. She may even have become an important and famous rain-priest or ancestral medium at the *mutoro*-place. This would further connect her as a figure-head with the spatial area related to rainmaking at the world of the dead (*mutoro*-place).

The *vahosi* and the *mutoro*-place are therefore intricately connected and the space, form, symbolism and structure of the Great Enclosure explicitly express this dynamic connection.

The building could even be compared to a *hosi*-jar, used at *mutoro* ceremonies. (The *hosi*-jar was the *vahosi*'s jar at *mutoro* ceremonies (Aschwanden 1989)). Both structures are thick-walled, sculptural 'containers' of fertility. The jar is a symbol of the uterus and the building 'contains' the *mutoro*-place, also symbol of the uterus. They are both 'decorated' on the upper wall with the chevron pattern, indicating rainmaking as symbol of the puff-adder snake. **The building begins to imitate a jar as well as a uterus since its symbolic purpose is to 'contain' fertility. In both structures, a 'fit to purpose' results from the spatio-symbolic and functional requirements of space, form and decoration.**

Archaeological Evidence

Archaeological finds from the Great Enclosure also appear to support the function of ritual activity and fertility festivals associated with the *mutoro*-place:

Sacrificial Cairn; at northeast entry – cattle bones used in sacrifice were found here. Traditionally, the sacrifice of a bull was a large part of the beginning of these ceremonies in order to supplicate the ancestors in return for good rains and crops.

Soapstone Figurines; found at *daga* platform between Tower Enclosure and Enclosure 1 and particularly around the conical towers. Human shaped fertility symbol-figures are traditionally (and still

today), placed at the site of the *mutoro*-place at *mutoro* ceremony as totem-figures of the great ancestors. The fertility theme is also closely connected to all fertility festivals.

Monoliths; were also found on *daga* platforms in The Daga Platform Area (cf.: Fig. 5.19) (ceremonial nature) and particularly in front of the large Conical Tower. This would indicate their use as symbols of the *gono* (horn) which is traditionally given as gifts to the ancestors to pray for rain and fertility placed at the *mutoro*-place.

Clay Cattle Figurines; found on *daga* platforms between Tower Enclosure and Enclosure 1. These were used in fertility ceremonies as totem figures of the ancestors and placed at the *mutoro*-place and ancestral shrine. They were an earlier cultigen, later replaced by the torso figurines and so were not found in the later area of the Tower Enclosure. They are, however, used today at ancestral shrines.

Residential Debris; found in and around Enclosure 1. This enclosure was constructed during the earlier occupation period and suggests residential court of the *vahosi*. This area indicates a concentrated activity of residential huts and courts (*daga* platforms and residential household rubbish in a midden under Enclosure 1 and the area southeast of Enclosure 1). This strongly suggests living quarters for royal occupants (stonewalling) and residential debris suggest residence for the *vahosi*. Considering the importance of the *vahosi*, her residence may have been located in and around Enclosure 1 and would have been a significantly large household. The importance of the architecture as a 'nucleus' with walls that have lasted would also support Enclosure 1 as her residence. Considering that most *mambos* had up to 200 wives, this area (the Great Enclosure is approx. 135m long and 100m wide) would not have been able to support all the wives' households as Garlake suggests (Garlake 1974, 1994). The *mambo*'s wives would therefore have been more likely located in the valley, possibly in the Lower Homestead area, (still close to the *vahosi*) as suggested by Huffman. Furthermore, these wives were of lesser status than the *vahosi* and it would have been more appropriate in terms of status for them to be located in less elaborate structures. The valley enclosures also contain some *mihombwe*, monoliths and *daga* platforms indicating, along with the stonewalling, residences for the royalty. The *mihombwe* and *daga* platforms particularly indicate female residences, since *mihombwe* is symbolic of female duties and the *daga* platforms indicate the tradition of the 'place of jars' (family altar) placed in the woman's kitchen.

Mythological and Ritual Evidence

Karanga symbolic associations sourced from the mythology and ritual practices of the region strongly support the idea that the Tower Enclosure operated as a *mutoro*-place:

Structural Snake Patterns in Stone; The chevron pattern around the Outer Wall of the Tower Enclosure describes in stone the legendary fertility and rain-bearing snake - the puff-adder. It is the queen's (*vahosi*'s) snake at *mutoro* ceremony, representing the woman and the *mambo*'s first wife. It also represents the ancestors and the snake protecting the fertility of the women. It encircles the Tower Enclosure, representing the fertility bearing snake that appears at the top of the tree in the myth of The Tree that Touches the Sky and at the *mutoro* ceremony. The snake is seen to influence God through the ancestors

who act as intercessory beings to provide rain and fertility via the ancestral mediums and the rain-priests at *mutoro* events. They also protect the fertility of the woman and therefore indicate her residence and her role as procreator.

Muchakata-Trees; the snake appears at the top of the tree (in stone as chevron pattern at the top of the Outer Wall) in the myth of The Tree that Touches the Sky and the tree also symbolises fertility, the fruits representing children and the procreativity of the family and the ancestors. The tree grows in the blood-soaked soil (from the *mambo*'s body) placed at the *mutoro*-place. The *mutoro*-place therefore brings together blood and fertility, the two most important symbols of Karanga life. The importance of the tree is realised at *mutoro* events where the rain, propitiated by the snake, is associated with the amniotic fluid in the uterus. Man is therefore connected to God through nature via the ancestors by associating human procreativity of the uterus with God's creativity in the tree and the snake. The two trees at the Tower Enclosure appear to be *muchakata* trees.

Architectural Evidence

The architecture of the Great Enclosure also suggests compatibility with *mutoro*-place function. Apart from the chevron pattern as symbol of the fertility bearing snake and the two trees possibly planted in the blood-soaked soil from the mummified body of the ancestor, the following features of the Tower Enclosure indicate *mutoro* function:

Conical Towers; as symbolic grain bins (oral tradition and ethnography) were the stone symbol-figures of the founding ancestors in honour of them, and to ensure their on-going influence in fertility of the crops and children as well as the prosperity of the kingdom. They also refer to the bounty, authority and prosperity of the great ancestors and to the fertility and prosperity of good harvests. Karanga grain bin symbolism is also associated with the woman's uterus as a 'container' of seeds (male semen). The combined fertility symbolism of male and female and of the ancestors may align these towers with the fertility and honouring of the ancestors at *mutoro* events and thematically related to fertility festivals surrounding sowing, harvesting, thanksgiving and rainmaking. The towers also pair the symbols of blood (ancestral lineage, male) with fertility (semen, crops, children) within the one symbol and blood and fertility fusion is essential at the *mutoro*-place. This is also realised through the tree (fertility) and the 'blood soaked soil' (blood).

Stone Platforms; at the north-east entrance to the Tower Enclosure suggests platforms for jars at the traditional family altar. This would be used at the *mutoro*-place for the placing of jars (symbol of the uterus) as gifts for the ancestors to propitiate rain and fertility (jars, like the *mutoro*-place, are also symbols of the uterus). The altar is a symbol of the woman and appears in the woman's hut as the 'place of jars' or family altar. Here, this same feature is reproduced in stone for the royal ancestors as stone was the symbol of the royal family. They also appear in the woman's house (house of the *vahosi*). The family altar is also a symbol of the cave (symbol of the uterus) within the mountain (house). The Tower Enclosure could then be

interpreted as a cave within a mountain, where the Great Enclosure imitates the natural form of the mountain at Great Zimbabwe. This theme is also presented in mythology.

Monoliths; representing *gono* (horns) as symbol of the ancestor's fertility and protection, are also sited within the western entrance to the Great Enclosure, possibly indicating entry into the ceremonial area. Monoliths on top of the Outer Wall encircling the extent of the Tower Enclosure, are seemingly paired with the chevron pattern underneath. They therefore represent the tradition of the giving of *gono* at the *mutoro*-place, as symbols of the ancestor's protection.

Mihombwe; These are structural grooves in stone pillars representing the woman's role in society of tending to crops and children. They appear particularly in the Great Enclosure and around the entries to the Tower Enclosure. They are therefore related to the themes presented at the *mutoro*-place (decisive role of woman as fertility bearer is expressed in *mutoro*-place as uterus) and at the communal sacrifice festivals of sowing, harvesting, thanksgiving and rainmaking (tending to crops of the fields).

Parallel and Plateau Passages; these suggest lineal processional routes necessary at ceremonial activities associated with *mutoro*. They also express the same qualities of the 'snake of the uterus' (oviducts), 'guarding' and protecting the uterus (*mutoro*-place and the *vahosi*) and the cave-like qualities of the caves in mythology that symbolise the uterus and God's creativity. These all interrelate to the fertility concept of the enclosure.

Stepped Platform Area; This area encroaches into the Tower Enclosure and may also have been used as a stage for ceremonial activity associated with the fertility festivals and *mutoro*-place. In the interpretation for this study, the platform may have been used as a stage for singing, dancing, story and myth telling, or for musicians, all activities related to feasts and ceremonies of the communal fertility festivals. The superior quality of the *daga* mounds north of the platform also indicates a similar function. The bastions, *mihombwe*, and monoliths found in this area, as well as the monoliths at the western entrance, also indicates ceremonial activity.

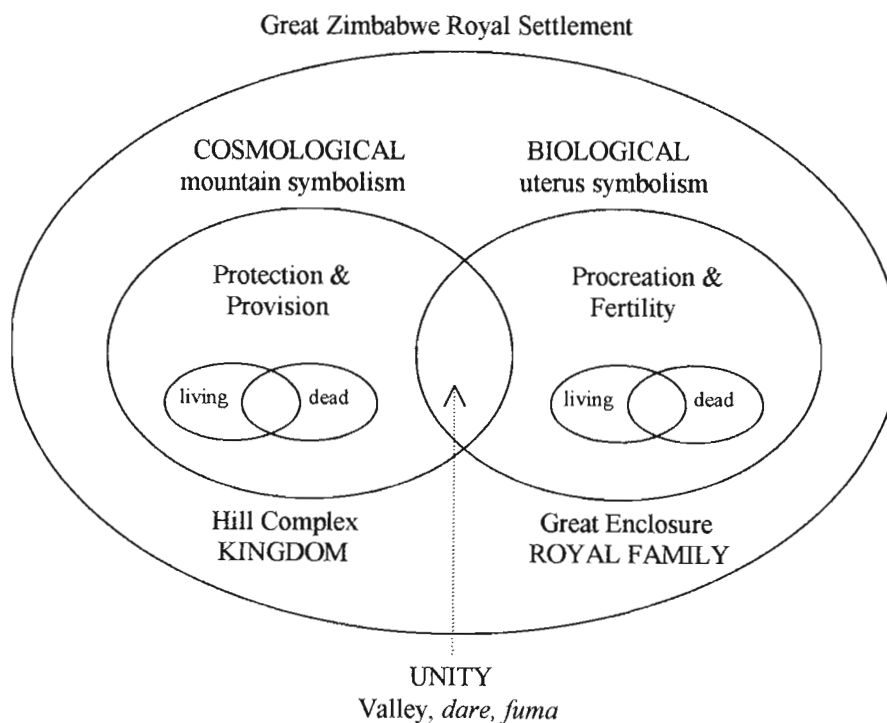
Spatial Dynamics

If we consider that the Enclosure 1 area accommodated residential activity and the Tower Enclosure accommodated ritual activity, then the spatial arrangement between residential and sacred areas form a duality united by uterus symbolism (*vahosi* and *mutoro*-place) and by the ceremonial area where the world of the living (community) dance, sing and play music in honour of the world of the dead (ancestors). This spatial dynamic would follow that of the Hill Complex where the world of the living (*mambo*'s residential court) and the world of the dead (Eastern Enclosure national shrine) form a duality united by mountain symbolism (cf.: Fig. 5.15 - 5.18). Procreation and fertility is the theme expressed at the Great Enclosure, while provision and protection is expressed at the Hill Complex. Considering the mythological association of the valley (symbol of female fertility and procreativity) as a unifying landscape between two mountains (human genitalia), then the social court (*dare*) in the Valley Area may be seen to unify the mountain Hill Complex (male) with the Great Enclosure (female). This is a common theme in Karanga myths and stories

– the desire to unite male and female roles and characteristics through valley symbolism. Other valley occupations also serve to unite the dualities of Hill Complex and Great Enclosure. The grain bin area (grain bin is also symbolic of female uterus containing seeds, semen), the wives' homesteads (wives as symbols of *mambo's* 'real' wealth, the children he begets ensuring his longevity and prosperity), the cattle enclosures (bride price) and the Royal Treasury (housing trade goods, economic) all represent forms of *fuma* (*mambo's* wealth) in Karanga society and are all located in the Valley Area. These are all then, potent symbols spatialised in the landscape of Great Zimbabwe, of the *mambo's* status and the royal family's longevity, fertility and prosperity (cf: Fig. 5.17). They serve to unite the Hill Complex and the Great Enclosure and the themes of protection (Hill Complex) and procreation (Great Enclosure).

The settlement expresses at a macro-level the unity between the prosperity of the state (Hill Complex) and the fertility of the royal family (Great Enclosure) and these were seen to be the two most important aspects for a successful kingdom.

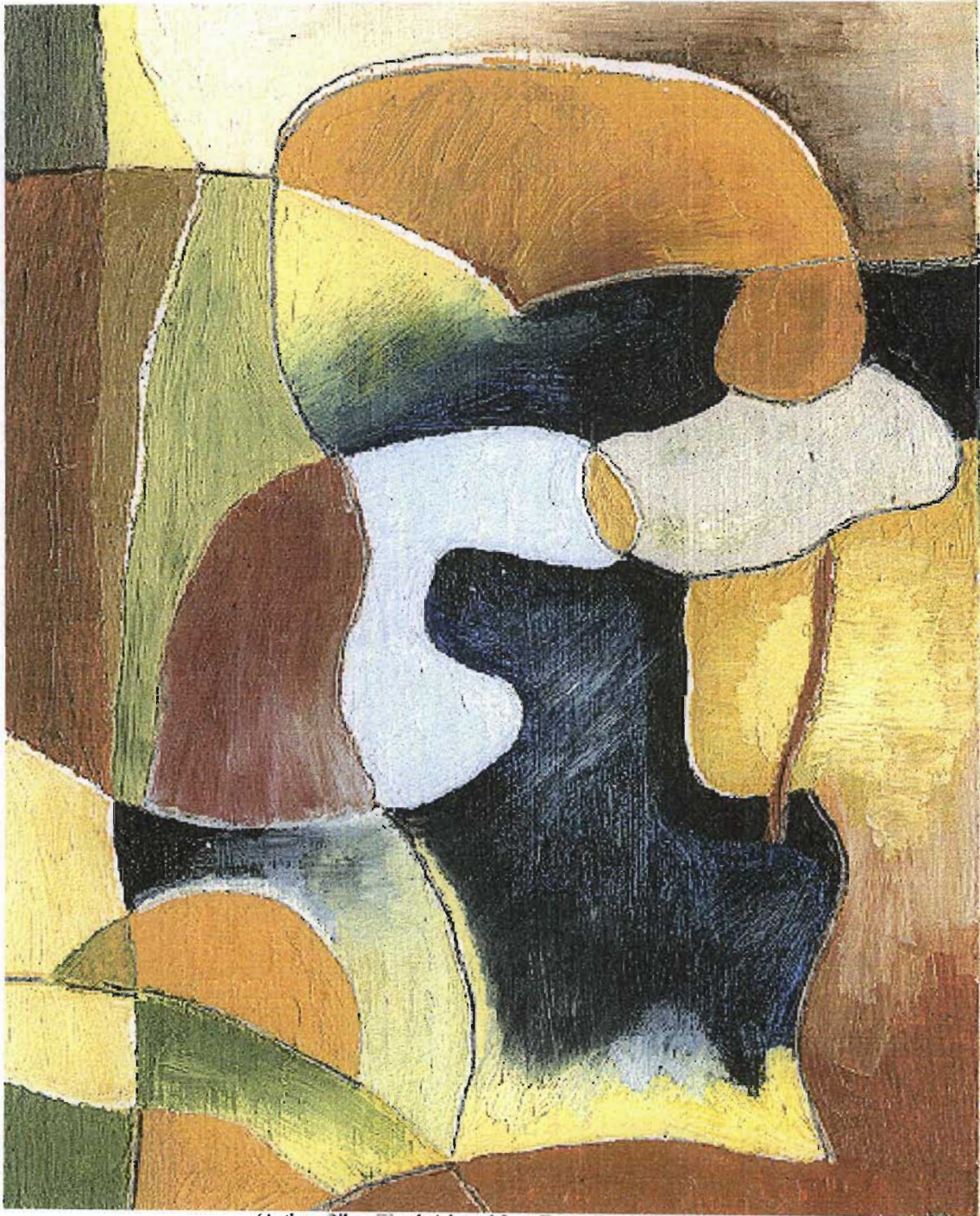
Considering the spatial relationship between the *mambo* at the mountain (cosmological symbol of God's power) and the *vahosi* and *mutoro*-place at the Great Enclosure (biological symbol of god's creativity in the woman) then the settlement also reflects the Karanga religious hierarchy between man, God and nature. Man and God are united through nature (biological and cosmological) in both places;



This connection to God on both **biological** and **cosmological** levels allows God to become a close God once again, a theme prevalently expressed in Karanga creation myths and ritual activities, and often the main theme or lesson in the myth or story. This theme also "...reflects basic Karanga thinking; their

dialectic thinking, which comprehends the contradictoriness in its opposition in order to overcome it at a higher level” (Aschwanden 1989:210). The idea that God is distant has been overcome at a higher level through spatio-symbolic relationships. The Karanga God, who is distant and close simultaneously, is manifested through an idiosyncratic and powerful graphic syntax of landscape, spatialisation and symbolic structures. **Karanga mythologically shaped thinking is therefore expressed in the symbolic and mythologically realised landscape.**

Mythology therefore conveys the Karanga attitudes that have allowed the architecture to ‘be’. The mythic realm inspires the creative process. The messages conveyed through mythology, the Karanga attitudes to society, family and religion, their existential values and their relationship to God and the ancestors, have been brought forth, graphically uttered through an architectural syntax and language. A mythic realm is conveyed through a symbolic landscape and stone structures honouring the ancestral guardian spirits who continue to influence and inspire the creative intentions of the Karanga people.



(Author, Oil on Wood. Adapted from Trevor Pye, NZ artist)

*Between God and men
there are possibilities of mutual influence*
(Aschwanden 1989:221)

Conclusion

I... highlight the aestheticist position which sees myth as a creative resource from which the larger cultural values are derivative... Whereas a not too hopeful future awaits man's technological efforts, myth and the study of it provide man with the only hope of release from the enslavement of time. Time lost would be regained in the knowledge that there are invariables in human culture that have not suffered the ravages of time and the material hardware of culture; by a synchronic analysis of culture (e.g. transformational models in myth) we find the opportunity for locating and reasserting these invariables and thus earning a convenient mobility between the past, the present, and the future (Okpewho 1983:xi, 41).

By examining Karanga mythology and ritual, the study was able to offer many interrelated interpretations for the meanings of symbolic structures and settlement dynamics of the architecture of Central Great Zimbabwe. Symbolic expression within the oral narratives and ritual processes documented were compared to the architectural narrative of Great Zimbabwe. Mythology was seen to be a valuable source of creativity for understanding the culture's architecture and as a way to comprehend the creative and cultural processes informing an architectural record.

By pursuing Sinclair's suggestion (cf.: pp.ii, 70f) that the mythology of the region be considered as a source to examine the meaning of the relationship between mountain symbolism and settlement dynamics, the study was able to suggest a 'duality within a unity' (prevalent in Karanga religious values) reflected in the spatial dynamics of the Hill Complex, the Great Enclosure and in the spatial landscape between the two structures.

In the Karanga universe of symbols, any distinct separation between opposing phenomena (binary opposites) is always problematic. It was discovered that a symbolic complexity operates over and above any binary simplicity. Individual phenomena such as sacred and profane, life and death or male and female do not exist as discrete entities. Opposing elements or aspects are always united at a higher level through symbolic associations and ritual activity, for it is the relationship between the two that gives identity to the individual elements themselves. It was discovered that the Karanga desire to unite opposing phenomena in order to comprehend the contradiction at a higher level is found in the spatial relationship between the *mambo's* (king's) residence (Western Enclosure) and the national shrine (Eastern Enclosure). The study examined the interactive and inseparable nature of political and religious leadership and how this attitude influenced settlement pattern and symbolic structures at Great Zimbabwe. The architecture, itself incorporating stone symbols with symbolic landscape, reflected the dual responsibilities of the *mambo*, that of secular and sacred duties, the relationship between the two, between the world of the living and the world of the dead, and the mountain symbolism which unifies the two extremes. This ultimately represents the provision and protection by the *mambo*, the mountain, the ancestors and God, and therefore, the prosperity of the kingdom and the state.

This relationship was also seen reflected in the Great Enclosure where the dual aspects of residence for the *vahosi* (first wife) (Enclosure 1) and the *mutoro*-place at the Tower Enclosure are dualities united by the building itself. This expresses the procreativity and fertility of the woman (*vahosi* and royal wives) through the uterus, where God's creativity is experienced and therefore, it ultimately represents the fertility of the royal family.

Sourcing the symbolic structures in Karanga mythology and ritual, the study was further able to suggest a possibility for ritual function for the Great Enclosure. The symbolic associations inherent in mythology and the rituals surrounding *mutoro* ceremonies are architected in symbolic and spatial structures at the Tower Enclosure. The spatio-symbolic aspects of rituals and ceremonies connected with fertility festivals and *mutoro* is expressed in the Parallel Passage, Tower Enclosure and the areas between the Tower Enclosure and Enclosure 1. The *Daga* Platform Area strongly suggests functions such as singing, dancing, music and feasting related to these communal sacrifice festivals. Archaeological evidence also supported these possibilities.

The study further proposes that the duties attached to the woman's role in society, explicit at these ceremonies and ritual and expressed in the symbolic structures at the Great Enclosure, may have facilitated the elevation of the woman in society as a great ancestress or rain-priest to become a legendary rainmaker at the later settlement of Lovedu. In a similar way, the mountain symbolism and symbolic structures at the Hill Complex validated, expressed and strengthened the *mambo's* position within the kingdom. The architecture facilitated the process of state formation and the validation of the *mambo's* power and its associated macro-scale symbolic expressions.

The settlement pattern also appeared to reflect the common theme in Karanga mythology and ritual of a valley (*dare*, social court and functions associated with the *mambo's fuma* (wealth) such as wives, royal treasury, grain bins and cattle) between two mountains and of the Valley Area as a unifying landscape that unites the polarities of male (Hill Complex) and female (Great Enclosure) structures. The symbolically articulate landscape of a valley between mountains inspired an innovative narrative response in stone. At the same time, an active and contextual language of symbol identification in stone corresponds to a spirited and compelling landscape and to the mythology of the region.

The study proposes that the symbolism expressed in myths and the Karanga attitude to God, man and nature, are literally narrated in the architecture, landscape and settlement pattern of Great Zimbabwe. The Hill Complex functions, spatial relationships and mountain symbolism expresses man's close **cosmological** connection to God, through the *mambo's* relationship to the ancestors and through mountain and cave symbolism. The Great Enclosure, as the residence of the *vahosi*, as a *mutoro*-place (rain shrine), (symbol of uterus, fertility of ancestors) and accommodating the ritual and ceremony surrounding the fertility festivals, expresses man's close **biological** connection to God through the woman as the *mambo's* 'special pool', (uterus), and symbols of fertility. The expression of, and relationship between, **biological** and **cosmological** symbolism inherent in Karanga mythology is presented in architectural symbolism and settlement dynamics.

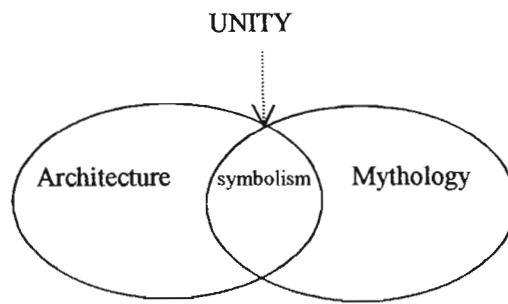
The interactive, dynamic and complex nature of Karanga symbolic associations, where interrelated symbolic meanings are compressed into a common theme, was also considered in the many interpretations for the stone symbols at Great Zimbabwe. Through a unique and powerful syntax of symbolic forms, the architecture of Great Zimbabwe appears to express in stone, the wisdom of the Karanga people.

Therefore, the main objective of the thesis has been met, since the mythology of the region has been considered in the study from the point of view of settlement dynamics and symbolic structures. This has assisted our understanding of the symbolic meaning of the landscape of Great Zimbabwe in terms of the symbolic reality inherent in the mythology of the region.

The architectural articulation in stone of the relationship between the world of the living, propitiating ancestors, and the world of the dead, and the relationship between the Great Enclosure (symbol of fertility of royal family) and the Hill Complex (symbol of the success of the state), helped to establish the longevity of Great Zimbabwe as the centre of a successful kingdom. It expressed in a profound, permanent and obvious fashion, the fundamental themes of Karanga religion, narrated in the mythology of the region and activated through ritual and ceremony. The architecture and its powerful display of symbolic structures and spatial relationships therefore assisted in establishing the longevity of the Karanga society. Architecture is therefore seen as a powerful and informative cultural mechanism.

The study proposes that, while settlement dynamics are informed by many systemically related factors such as the physical topography, the history of the region, the socio-cultural forces and the economic and political dynamics, there is a possibility that the settlement dynamics, symbolic and spatial structures at Great Zimbabwe were also inspired by the mythology of the region. The study suggests that the relationship of the settlement dynamics of Great Zimbabwe to its *genus-loci* recognises a mythological narrative presented in the landscape. Many of the tales themselves may well have been inspired by the compelling symbolic landscape and its stone structures. The study proposes that this mutual influence was a systemically related one. The collection of myths may have further evolved during the intense period of cultural and economic development during Great Zimbabwe's occupation. (Many of the myths appear to describe the valley and mountain theme of Great Zimbabwe.) The **socio-religious** structure, informed by the symbolic consciousness and the mythology of the region, influenced the **spatio-religious** structure. In a systemic process, the spatio-religious structure reciprocates by validating the socio-religious structure, the mythological and symbolical reality. It is therefore proposed that there is a symbiotic and systemic relationship between the socio-religious reality and the architecture of the settlement.

By sourcing symbolic aspects of Karanga culture the mythology of the region has been considered in its relationship to the landscape of Great Zimbabwe and to the Karanga interpretation of symbols. The study proposes that the wisdom narrated in the mythology of the region is activated through the stone architecture of Great Zimbabwe. Symbolism is the expressive device common to the architectural and the mythological narrative activating and uniting architecture with mythology;



Indeed, the architecture of Great Zimbabwe expresses the well of ancient wisdom of the African context from which it was created. By integrating the symbolic language of mythology with that of architecture we are able to experience historical precedent in Southern Africa on a less superficial and more existential level, where we can begin to approach the perception of the metaphysical creative spirit underpinning the physical aspects of the architecture.



*Between belief in the reality of a related myth
and its "real" experience, there is –certainly for an outsider –
the fundamental difference of theory and practice. However...reality and myth can become
one in everyday Karanga life where mythologically shaped thinking,
and the belief connected with it,
form the experienced reality
(Aschwanden 1989:154).*

Epilogue

If this study has revealed that mythology and ritual are able to provide creative and valuable sources of information for understanding material culture, then one of its primary objectives has been realised. We have seen that by examining spatio-symbolic structures sourced from cultural mythology and ritual practice, we are able to identify more explicitly a contextual meaning for cultural artifact and that the architecture in symbol and landscape expresses the well of ancient wisdom of traditional Karanga society. An examination of traditional Karanga oral narratives and the symbolic consciousness of the people revealed through these narratives, has facilitated a fresh interpretation of the symbolic content and settlement dynamics of the stone architecture of central Great Zimbabwe.

By recognising the possibility that the symbolic consciousness (sourced from the mythology of the region) may be employed to interpret the meaning of settlement dynamics and symbolic structures, the study was able to identify a unified contextual meaning for the seemingly dualistic natures of the Great Enclosure and the Hill Complex and these appear to align with the socio-cultural and political structures.

By examining socio-symbolic structures of traditional Karanga ritual practices, sourced from a mythological reality as well as from oral tradition and historical documentation, the study was able to interpret possible ceremonial and ritual function for the Great Enclosure.

The suggestion that the Tower Enclosure was the site of a *mutoro*-place and that the Great Enclosure was used for ceremonies related to honouring the ancestors, sacrifice festivals and a residential court for the *vahosi*, is not motivated by a need to arrive at some determinist hypothesis for spatial function. It is instead motivated by a less limited perspective that **suggests possibilities**. As an architectural study, such interpretations result from a motivation to explore connections between mythology, ritual and architecture and to gain further insight into the role architecture plays in creating, establishing and validating the social structures that support life. Therefore, the principal objective of this dissertation has been to provide a more contextual understanding of the form, meaning and symbolism of Great Zimbabwe, by taking an historical particularist approach based on an understanding of the consciousness of its creators. The concern has been with socio-symbolic and spatio-symbolic structures and such an objective will always necessitate a suggestion towards spatial function since form implies function.

This is the reason why the architectural discussion in this dissertation has concentrated on making real connections between the religious, symbolic and ideological beliefs of the Karanga people themselves and the symbolic content of the architecture they created. The landscape of Great Zimbabwe provides a contextually lively architecture of symbolic display expressing the creative narrative of the mythology of the region and the wisdom of the creators.

It is only through understanding the consciousness of the creators of Great Zimbabwe that we can begin to understand the essential **meaning** of the symbols in stone. The motivation is twofold though for, through this understanding, we are better able to conceive the way of life of the people of the Karanga culture

during the occupation of Great Zimbabwe. Such understanding can further be seen to validate the creativity and wisdom of the people of traditional Karanga society.

It is somewhat disappointing to realise that most of the young Karanga people today, self absorbed as they are in a modernist, technocratic and materialist reality, mostly devoid of traditional symbolism, are adventitiously unaware of the meanings and interpretations of the traditional world of mythology and symbolism.¹ Because the young Karanga spend most of their time in school education, that most successful instrument of Westernisation, they have less time to interact with their traditional world, and still less time to sit and listen to the *pasichigare* (stories) of their elders, for much of their free time is consumed with working for school fees! Today, the few people left who have proficient knowledge of the Karanga well of ancient wisdom, are the old Karanga of traditional society (Aschwanden 1989). This realisation has also been a key factor in the motivation for this dissertation; to learn, at least as much as an outsider can, and then to document, the rich and fertile symbolic world of the Karanga people as presented in the ancient architecture of their stone inheritance and expressed in their mythology and ritual practices.

Indeed, there is much our modern material world can learn from the symbolically rich and creative culture of the traditional Karanga as expressed in the genius of their ancient stone architecture. The self-indulgent and materialistic culture of our modern world is so consumed with ownership on an egocentric level that it has lost sight of the real purpose and meaning of life; **that of interhuman relationships, the individual's connection to the family, the community and the socio-religious structures that support life.** It could be said that our modern culture has, to our detriment, become 'demythologised';

A few "key-word" references must suffice: the profanation of religion (it runs parallel with the analytically demythologising theology); the alienation of modern man from the fundamental aspects of life (birth, death, disease, misfortune, etc.); flight into materialism at the expense of interhuman relationships, a flight which bears necrophile characteristics...So the pride of man, who seemingly only thinks analytically and acts "rationally", has perished in a deficiency (or deficit) which narrows the consciousness (Aschwanden 1987:373).

Modern society in the new millenium is finding itself entering an emergent paradigm, one where a more eco-systemic relationship between humanity and the earth, between the individual and society, is paramount to our very survival on this planet we have spent such a lot of time and effort inadvertently destroying. Traditional Karanga society reveals an extensive source of ancient African wisdom which provides a rich precedent for appropriate sustainable social values pertinent to the paradigmatic shift our modern world is experiencing.

Modern society needs to develop a new attitude, where a **balance between the physical and spiritual worlds** is desired. Karanga mythological wisdom, where a desire for a unity between physical and spiritual forces is continually being activated through ritual and symbol, mirrors the desires of today where, for the first time known to man, science and spirituality are beginning to coincide. Physical and spiritual forces are

¹ This is a personal observation gleaned from the many discussions with Zimbabwean students in South Africa and the young people in and around Great Zimbabwe.

being regarded less as discrete polaric divisions in the universe and more as mutually influential phenomena. Scientists are beginning to prove the existence of spiritual laws operating in the universe, that the universe is energy, and that, while as people we are different and separate, as souls we are one. This mirrors the Karanga wisdom of a body and soul being 'separate yet only one'. Similarly, we hope for a time when religion will begin to validate a broader understanding of spiritual values and be less concerned with physical ritual practices for their own sake and begin to approach a connection to a higher consciousness. Connections may then be made between the personality and the soul, between the physical and the spiritual, by activating higher and deeper levels of consciousness (Capra 1997; Zukov 1998).

As part of Africa's well of ancient wisdom, the profound and expressive world of Karanga mythology and ritual, with its lively and imaginative use of symbolism, creative and tactile relationship between the physical and spiritual worlds and sensitive, observant approach to the environment and landscape, could certainly be a vehicle for enriching our understanding of what is the *real* essence of being human.

I therefore dedicate the work of this study to the people of Zimbabwe. To take a lesson from the old Karanga themselves; it is right to put back into life what one has taken from it.

Maunga marema / kudya muti waagere: (Hairy) caterpillars are stupid, they feed on the tree on which they live.

Explanation and Application: It is a sign of stupidity or thoughtlessness to destroy something that could be of great service to you tomorrow, or on which your very life depends. This proverb may be used to dissuade boys from cutting a tree in order to get at its fruits which they cannot reach from the ground Shona Proverb. (Hamutyinei 1987:24.)

*We confront a past which discovers, in deep piety
as well as sudden revelation,
the secret and riddle of begetting and fertility in nature,
and has adopted them according to the formative ability
of the mythological time, -
an ability which is hard to grasp for us the impious children
of the times of materialism...
We write and read little books in our little houses –
where others view the great outdoors, the earth
with its flora and fauna,
and the heavens and, overawed,
have created “understanding” out of the universe.
(Frobenius 1930 : 242)*



The Beginning...

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