Stone architecture and the development of power in the Zimbabwe tradition AD 1270 – 1830

Innocent Pikirayi*

Department of Anthropology and Archaeology, University of Pretoria, Pretoria 0038, South Africa

Within the Zimbabwe Culture, stone architecture was not a mere reflection of the existing power of élites; rather, the process of creating architecture was also one of creating élite power. Creating architecture involved manipulation of the ‘natural’ environment, the elements of which were extended or appropriated to constitute the built environment. There is a clear relationship between architecture and ‘natural’ power, which provided links with the ancestral world. Thus, the construction of monumental architecture in the Zimbabwe Culture was a process of constructing social and political power through the manipulation of ideology, including the appropriation of ‘nature’. The Great Zimbabwe and Khami architectural styles express two distinct architectural forms with two distinct conceptual relationships to nature. Great Zimbabwe (AD 1290–1550) period architecture was apparently an extension of the natural environment, while Khami (AD 1400–1800) architecture arrogated elements of nature wholly transforming them into monumental built environments. Understanding these ideological differences is critical to understanding the dynamics of ancient states on the Zimbabwe Plateau.

Keywords: Great Zimbabwe; Khami; architecture; ideology; appropriation; built environment; domination


*Email: innocent.pikirayi@up.ac.za

© 2013 Taylor & Francis
Introduction


‘In setting out to provide a thorough examination of “the growth and decline of precolonial states on the entire Zimbabwean Plateau and southern Zambezia”, Innocent Pikirayi has set himself an extremely ambitious task. On one level, the resulting work provides a comprehensive and useful introduction to the historical archaeology of the region under study. This will certainly prove to be an invaluable source for undergraduate teaching in the disciplines of history and archaeology and a useful addition to any list of prescribed books. It will also provide a useful starting point for postgraduate teaching and research. However, probably because of my own ideological situation in the grey-area between anthropology and history, as I read the work, I developed a vague sense of disappointment. In a number of areas, I wished that Prof. Pikirayi would use his rootedness in the culture of the area, together with his dual persona as historian and archaeologist, to explore the social and ideological dimensions of the social formations, structures and artefacts that he writes about in greater depth’

Kirkaldy (2002)’s critique was fair in pointing out such a limitation, which reflects the fact that my primary objective in writing *The Zimbabwe Culture* was to provide a regional overview of the development of pre-European complex societies. At the time, Huffman (1981, 1986a, 1996) had previously made a major contribution towards understanding the worldview of the Mapungubwe, Great Zimbabwe and Khami peoples, but available literature (e.g. Beach 1980; Mudenge 1988) still had not, to my mind, set forth an adequate procedure for investigating questions of ideology from historical and archaeological viewpoints. In this paper, I answer Kirkaldy’s call to explore social and ideological dimensions of the Zimbabwe tradition, guided by archaeological and related research elsewhere and motivated by increased interest in the subject of architecture and ideology (Kus and Raharijona 2000; Kimball 2002; Manning 2004; Peters 2004; Humphrey 2005; Knox 2007). In particular, I examine the role of stone architecture within the Zimbabwe tradition and clarify how social and political power was partially derived from ideological concepts of nature and enacted through the built environment via monumental architecture.

Theoretical approaches

Contemporary studies of the relationship between architecture and power emphasise the connection between past and present and the ongoing reciprocal development of architecture and power through time (Moore 1996). Maran et al. (2006) attempt to understand the architecture of societies from prehistory to the present by reading architecture as a social document and arguing that it preconditions social realities. They examine how architectural space and social agency together not only communicated, but also created systems of values, worldviews and particular social roles. Thus, the process of creating architecture actually produced social roles rather than simply reflecting them. This observation is particularly relevant to monumental architecture in the Zimbabwe tradition because many scholars have assumed a static preconceived architectural plan in which the structures were created to mirror or reflect existing social categories and roles.
Recent literature on monumental architecture has emphasised that the process of creating architecture is also a process of creating political or élite power, as well as both creating and reproducing social and political roles (Manning 2004; Maran et al. 2006; Knox 2007; Monroe 2010). This ultimately involves the manipulation of the built environment to attain, for example, spatial segregation, connectivity or aggregation (Agrest 1991). Within the Zimbabwe tradition, spatial segregation involved the separation of élite residences from commoner spaces, which implies some form of socio-political and economic exclusion. Spatial aggregation here refers to the clustering or grouping together of spaces within a settlement such as Great Zimbabwe, serving broadly similar functions. The connectivity between the various settlement areas or units is a measure of the degree of aggregation or separation.

Explanation of the term ‘ideology’ is necessary at this stage. Kathleen Knight (2006) presents a comprehensive discussion of the meaning of the term in contemporary usage. In this paper, I use Minar (1961) and Mullins (1972) whose perception of ideology resonates with an understanding of the archaeological past. They define an ideology as a set of ideas that construct the broader goals, expectations or worldview of a community. Ideologies in turn shape political and economic actions within a worldview. Every political or economic tendency entails an ideology, whether explicit or not. In particular, in the context of this paper I see one key ideology as the link between non-human, particularly ‘natural’, power and ‘human’ power as utilised and manipulated by individual agents. As I develop below, ‘natural’ power relates to the ability to connect with that cultural landscape ordinarily beyond the reach of humans, mainly through the spiritual domain of ancestors.

The Zimbabwe tradition

The Zimbabwe tradition refers to the development of ranked forms of social organisation that appeared on the Zimbabwean Plateau and adjacent regions from the early second millennium AD to the nineteenth century. It is divided into three broad periods: Mapungubwe (AD 1200–1280), Great Zimbabwe (AD 1270–1550) and Khami (AD 1400–1830). These periods coincide, respectively, with the development of related but distinct state-based societies in the middle Limpopo Valley, south-central Zimbabwe Plateau and northern and western Zimbabwe. A distinct feature of these states is the development of monumental stonewalled architecture, which attains a zenith during the Great Zimbabwe and Khami periods (Garlake 1970, 1973, 2002; Pikirayi 2001). The purpose and function of this architecture has been the subject of considerable discussion in both the archaeological and historical literature (Beach 1980, 1994; Huffman 1981, 1986a, 1996).

This study is part of a broader project on the archaeology of urbanism, focusing on the ‘Urban Mind’ (see Manyanga et al. 2010; Sinclair et al. 2010). This endeavour seeks to understand longstanding cognitive patterns and processes of urbanism and architecture in southern Africa with special emphasis on identifying continuities from the past to the present. In this paper I argue that Zimbabwe tradition architecture draws on ideological understandings of nature. Among the Karanga people who live in southern Zimbabwe today and whose ancestors built Great Zimbabwe (Beach 1980; Mudenge 1988), nature does not simply consist of the phenomena of the physical world, or the landscape of plants, animals, rivers, hills,
mountains, etc. and the geophysical and other forces that regulate these. Instead, ‘nature’ is the domain of ancestors and the source of sustenance, legitimacy and protection. The power of this ‘nature’ is manifest in various forms: death and disease, catastrophes such as floods, droughts, wild fires, wind gusts, lightning and thunder, attacks by pests, landslides, tremors and earthquakes and phenomena such as the solar eclipse, which may be interpreted as a bad omen. Karanga make culturally situated interventions to ameliorate some of these catastrophes and bad omens (Holleman 1961; Gelfand 1962).

Ethnographic and ethnohistoric sources show parallel relations between power and nature within the Zimbabwe tradition (Bullock 1950; Bourdillon 1987). For example, landscapes such as hills and mountains are associated with chiefly power. Chiefs and kings are also buried here, since such landscapes are owned by their lineages and therefore nature served as a significant basis for ideological power. Architectural manifestations of these power/nature relations can also be seen via archaeological studies of the Zimbabwe tradition settlements themselves as detailed below.

The linking of ideological concepts connecting ‘nature’ with social power is manifest in the stone-walled architecture of Great Zimbabwe, where walling extends and accentuates ‘natural’ features of the landscape. Walls define and delimit these features, thereby drawing them into the domestic or ‘built’ social realm. The act of building potentially tames this ‘nature’, but also harnesses the power inherent within it. Furthermore, the demarcation of space and its alignment with the power of nature together can directly restrict access to such sources of power or can imbue people who inhabit or act within such spaces with enhanced qualities of power.

This appropriation of nature through the construction of stone walling and the demarcation of space is unlikely to have followed a predefined standard form. Stone-walled features were built gradually at Great Zimbabwe and other sites such as Kagumbudzi and Matendere in eastern Zimbabwe, Nhunguza, Ruanga, and the Zvongombe Complex in northern Zimbabwe and Tsindi in north-central Zimbabwe. Given this gradual construction, stone walling is likely to have been spawned from existing ideological structures that linked nature and power. Practical physical engagement with this ideology may have involved the demarcation and restriction of ‘naturally’ powerful spaces and the construction of walling as a ritual act that linked the actors/walling with a source of power. We might imagine that as the power of nature was gradually manipulated and extended through the construction of smallscale walling, so the ideological power of nature was appropriated by those engaged in these practical acts. Thus, the construction of walling as an act of engagement with natural power further amplified and entrenched the social power of those same actors; either through the demarcation and restriction of ‘powerful’ spaces or through the increasing status/power of individuals physically engaged with sources of natural power. Moreover, this improvised process of engaging with an embryonic source of natural power actively shaped the form that social power took and how it was extended into the wider world through an emerging architectural lexicon of power.

I argue that at Great Zimbabwe the nature of social/élite power itself was partially shaped by the temporal act of producing architecture that itself was also a recursive act of human engagement with natural power. As the architecture developed through time it acted to further demarcate space and further entrench positions of power and
authority by restricting access to sources of power (now both social and natural) and
making manifest the divisions between those with differing degrees of social power.
Through time, the continued practical interaction with ‘natural’ power through
architecture came to extend and shape the nature of social power yet further.
Moreover, as this process progressed we can envisage that the architecture not only
acted in the enactment or creation of power but also came to express and define élite
power to non-élites, resulting in its increasing elaboration in scale and design and its
extension to an ever increasing number of sites. To elaborate this argument, I provide
some background details of the Zimbabwe tradition, focusing on the centrality of
stonewalled architecture in the interpretation of the sites. Following this, architec-
tural data from the sites of Great Zimbabwe and Khami are employed to illustrate
the development between architecture and power in each respective period.

Architectural studies of Great Zimbabwe and Khami
An archaeological and historical study of the stone-walled monuments of the
Zimbabwe tradition is also by extension a study of their architecture and how it
developed (e.g. Bent 1896; Hall and Neal 1902; Hall 1905, 1909; Randall-MacIver
1906; Schofield 1924, 1926; Caton-Thompson 1931; Summers 1955, 1961, 1971;
related stone-walled sites have treated architecture as a backdrop to typology and
dating of the structures. Studies of Great Zimbabwe and related sites by Whitty
(1957), Robinson (1959), Summers (1958), Robinson et al. (1961), Summers and
Whitty (1961) and Garlake (1970) used wall types (P, Q and R) as a basis for relative
dating and chronology, as well as for tracing the development of building sequences.
This observation has remained the cornerstone for understanding the development
of the society once based at Great Zimbabwe and its expansion to other regions on
the Zimbabwe Plateau.

This paper focuses on the neatly coursed stone-walled structures of the Zimbabwe
tradition, termed by Garlake (1970) the Zimbabwe-Khami complex after two of the
largest sites: Great Zimbabwe, in south-central Zimbabwe, and Khami, in western
Zimbabwe. According to Garlake, the main stone-walled enclosures at these sites
served a domestic purpose, screening and sheltering groups of clay-walled, thatched
houses. Garlake (1973, 2002) further demonstrated that these were the living quarters
of an élite, probably a ruling group. A characteristic feature of these sites is the
presence of single or multiple enclosures of dry stone walls, which are either
freestanding or raised as platforms. Decorated with stones set mainly in chevron or
herringbone pattern, the stone walls sheltered circular or elliptical clusters of houses,
built of solid clay. Neatly decorated pottery and other artefacts such as gold beads,
glass beads, soapstone dishes and bronze spearheads found within some of these
enclosures is consistent with their interpretation as settlements for a wealthy élite that
used its resources to finance the construction of monumental structures. Numbering
over 300, these structures are found mostly on the Zimbabwe Plateau, between the
Zambezi and Limpopo Rivers, but similar sites are also found in adjacent central
Mozambique, northern South Africa and eastern Botswana (Sinclair 1987; Huffman
2007).

Garlake (1970: 466–467) documented visible variations in the surface remains of
eighty stonewalled sites and identified their architectural styles. Combining this with
analysis of local and imported ceramics and glass beads, he examined the architectural styles for significant temporal or regional groupings and interpreted these in terms of cultural development and historical meaning. Garlake considered five analytical categories of the architectural features of stone enclosures: wall function, form, construction technique, shape of entrances and the type of decoration appearing on the walls. Based on this analysis Garlake (1970: 498–500) recognised seven ‘architecturally distinct styles’ coinciding with two broad chronological and cultural periods: the Zimbabwe (AD 1270–1550) and the Khami (AD 1400–1830).

More recent studies have focused on the relationship between the built structures and the use of spaces that they define (Huffman 1981, 1984a, 1984b, 1985, 1986a, 1986b, 1996, 1997, 2007; Muringaniza and Ruwitah 1996). Largely informed by ethnography, these studies attempt to understand the worldview of the occupants of the buildings in terms of social categories (e.g. high/low status; male/female) and values (power/weakness; public/private; sacred/profane). They then relate this worldview to structured social space as represented by the stone-walled architecture. According to Huffman, the stone structures therefore express a fixed worldview; political power is solidified by this worldview and expressed within the monumental architecture, most notably by the architectural separation of élites from commoners and the creation of distinct spaces for males and females. Wall decoration and architectural features such as slots and monoliths further symbolise the presence of the king and his wives, the ritual sister, court officials, the public and private court and the place for female initiation. Huffman’s model sees architecture as the expression of a preconceived worldview and as the projection of pre-existing élite power. The model further assumes a fixed architectural design and a homogenous universal logic leaving little room for temporal development of the structures, multiple cognitive systems, and dynamic human action. In the context of this argument the model sees élite power as being expressed architecturally in an already formed state and therefore struggles to explain how élite power was developed in the first place.

A more evolutionary view of Zimbabwe architecture emerged from Chipunza’s (1993, 1997) investigation of the development of stone walls on the Hill Complex at Great Zimbabwe using a Harris Matrix framework. He concurred with Whitty’s (1961) suggestion that the Hill Complex was not built according to any preconceived plan but had evolved over time. Furthermore, he noted that the technique of revetment walls finely executed on the Recess Enclosure of the Hill Complex was a late development at Zimbabwe and appeared at other late sites such as Khami (see also Collett et al. 1992). The walls of the Great Enclosure — the largest built structure at Great Zimbabwe — reflect a similar trend, having been built in successive stages (Summers and Whitty 1961; Summers et al. 1961). Evidence of the gradual construction of walling at Great Zimbabwe is suggestive of a changing or developing worldview and thus requires modification to Huffman’s more rigid structural model which leaves little space for architectural change through time. The present model therefore offers a more dynamic interpretation in which the elaboration of stone walling is itself the elaboration of élite power through time as a temporal social practice, related to ideological concepts of nature. I argue that such a model is cogent with the evidence for the gradual development of Zimbabwe period structures and may partially explain some of the variations and quirks of walling types and styles.
Data: the architecture of Great Zimbabwe and Khami

In order to unpack some of the arguments and theoretical positions presented above I now turn to key elements of the architecture at Great Zimbabwe and Khami. These sites represent an architectural tradition often regarded as belonging to a broader cultural complex. However, despite obvious overlaps/continuities, data also indicate that Great Zimbabwe and Khami architectural styles were ‘distinct’ (Garlake 1970) and possibly served different purposes or goals. Here, I compare and contrast the architecture at each site in an effort to reconsider how architecture and associated ideologies of power changed through time.

Great Zimbabwe

Great Zimbabwe is located some 30 km southeast of the modern town of Masvingo, in Zimbabwe. Initial settlement focused on a prominent, 100 m-high granite hill just west of the Mutirikwi River, which was augmented by the construction of drystone walling. Termed the Hill Complex, this was probably the seat of residence for the first rulers of the town (Summers et al. 1961; Huffman and Vogel 1986) before settlement spread into the valley to the south and southeast. These valley areas are also characterised by neatly constructed monumental stone walling, the most prominent of which is the Great Enclosure. Construction of the entire town took at least three centuries (Chirikure and Pikirayi 2008).

The largest enclosed spaces within the Hill Complex are the ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ enclosures. Many archaeologists regard the Hill Complex as primarily composed of these two enclosures, but the area between them has a complex cluster of boulders and several smaller enclosures (Robinson 1961; Garlake 1973). These attest to complex connections between stone walling and the natural granite boulders that dominate the hill. Evidently, the stone walls connected these boulders and extended outward to enclose spaces within which plastered clay houses were constructed (Garlake 2002). The relationships between the stone walls and natural features such as boulders are most evident when viewed in plan (Figure 1).

Chipunza (1993, 1997) has set forth a complicated sequence for episodes of construction within the Hill Complex and suggests that construction may have commenced in the walling that now defines the ‘Western’ enclosure. This was followed by the building of stone walling adjacent to the cliff facing south, resulting in a number of enclosures, including the ‘Southern’ and ‘Recess’ enclosures (Figure 2). Perhaps around the same time, some enclosures such as those known as the ‘Cleft Rock’ (Chipunza 1997: 132) and ‘Balcony’ (Garlake 1973: 26) were erected to the north side of the hill summit. The ‘Eastern’ enclosure seems, on the basis of wall sequencing, to have been constructed last, being analogous to intermediate architectural developments on the south side of the boulders occupying the hill summit (Figure 3) (for details on the wall sequence, see Chipunza 1993, 1997). Following Minar (1961) and Mullins (1972), it appears that construction of the stone walling on the hill followed some form of internal ideological logical structure guided by ideas that linked the built environment with the natural. By practically defining the spaces around the natural rock features of the hill the early inhabitants of the Hill Complex may have been able to ‘tap into’ the ‘natural power’ — the world of their...
ancestors — of the hill and also restrict access to this natural power, gradually establishing themselves as custodians of this power and therefore as an emerging élite.

The Hill Complex was settled for about two centuries (AD 1150–1360), after which political power seems to have shifted to the Great Enclosure below (Chirikure and Pikirayi 2008; Pikirayi and Chirikure 2011). The Great Enclosure is the largest single stone-built structure in southern Africa, involving the use of more than one million well-trimmed stone blocks (Summers 1961; Summers and Whitty 1961; Garlake 1973). The >5 m-tall elliptical-shaped girdle wall encloses a number of inner discrete spaces as well as parallel passages leading towards a conical tower. Three entrances lie on the north and northwest. Early investigators destroyed over a metre of cultural deposits inside, making it difficult to reconstruct the development of the building complexes that together constitute the Great Enclosure. However, there are ample suggestions to show that Great Zimbabwe royalty may have moved to this structure from the Hill (Garlake 1973; Beach et al. 1997, 1998), although Huffman (1996, 2007) is of the view that this was a ceremonial centre, used for initiation rites and ceremonies. On a number of occasions I (Chirikure and Pikirayi 2008; Pikirayi and Chirikure 2011) have argued that it is unlikely that the builders of Great Zimbabwe would have invested so extravagantly in such prestigious monumental architecture solely for purposes of initiation. Rather, the Great Enclosure is more likely to represent the peak of development at Great Zimbabwe, both as a town and as centre of a powerful and wealthy state.

Although much of the Great Enclosure and the structures adjacent to it were built in open spaces largely devoid of natural boulders, their construction appears to have employed architectural principles akin to those in the Hill Complex, with stone
walling analogous to the natural environment. The evidence for this comes from adjacent structures such as the ‘Ridge Ruin,’ as well as earlier construction within the Great Enclosure itself.

Located on a rocky outcrop northwest of the Great Enclosure, the ‘Ridge Ruin’ is one of the least mentioned structures at Great Zimbabwe (Figure 4). Caton-Thompson described finds there as part of her excavation of the ‘No. 1’ and ‘Mauch’ structures that are also adjacent to the Great Enclosure (Caton-Thompson 1931: 106–120). The ‘Ridge Ruin’ comprises an oval enclosure and a parallel passage adjacent to its northeastern side, leading to the Great Enclosure. On the oval enclosure’s southwest side, the stone walling follows a granite ridge that recurves northwards as it approaches the Great Enclosure (see plan in Caton-Thompson 1931: facing Plate II).

According to Peter Garlake (1973: Plate 14) the ‘Ridge Ruin’ has ‘low walls of ill-matched, irregularly shaped, loosely piled stones laid with little or no regard to coursing’, which fits the architectural profile of peripheral structures thought to postdate the main occupation of Great Zimbabwe. However, Caton-Thompson’s description of the finds and assessment of the stonewalled structures immediately around the Great Enclosure suggest that the ‘Ridge Ruin’ and the Great Enclosure were contemporaneous. Given the problems connected with the plunder of archaeological deposits by antiquarian investigators at the end of the nineteenth/beginning of the twentieth centuries, contemporaneity between the Great Enclosure and surrounding structures cannot, however, be asserted with absolute certainty.
Careful re-examination of the ‘Ridge Ruin’ indicates that its architecture is similar to early forms of stone walling on the Hill Complex mapped by Chipunza (1993) and its elaboration from a series of windy granite ridges conforms to the development from ‘nature’ as observed on the hill. Viewed in plan, the ‘Ridge’, ‘No. 1’ and ‘Mauch’ structures show some spatial connectivity, the layout of the latter two strongly indicative of connections with the first stone walling inside the Great Enclosure (Summers and Whitty 1961; Whitty 1961).

The girdle wall of the Great Enclosure, definitely a later construction, was a significant modification of an earlier plan. With the construction of the Great Enclosure, ideas about creation and usage of space seem to have altered. Perhaps, then, the linkage between natural power and stone walling had become so entrenched that stone walling alone was adequate to evoke the ideology of natural power. The girdle wall reflects a complete re-organisation of the internal spaces of the Great Enclosure. Thus, the spatial shift from the Hill Complex to the Great Enclosure was not only a function of time, but also a refinement and transformation of an evolving ideology governing the creation and usage of space and the worldview of Great Zimbabwe’s inhabitants.

From the middle of the fourteenth century onwards, palaces assumed exaggerated dimensions of architectural constructions, extending imaginatively beyond the realms of the ordinary. Elites used these dimensions to further negotiate, create and extend their political and economic power over their subjects. With the expansion of the
stone-building tradition to other regions of the plateau such as northern Zimbabwe during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the creation and replication of élite power was apparent over a larger area. This development suggests a subtle transformation of the earlier ideology, with élites gaining considerable access to resources that they then invested in extending their power by constructing more substantial stonewalled structures, which had, by this stage, become synonymous with both the enactment and symbolism of power. In earlier phases the act of constructing stone walling may have been simply an extension of, and physical interaction with, extra-human power that drew on an ideology that linked nature and natural places to power. As this ideology developed, stone walling may have come also to constrain, limit, and eventually determine access to certain ‘natural’ sources of power, thus defining emergent élites through their restricted access to power. In the final phases, the expansion of elaborate stonewalling to the valley and across a much broader landscape, may have symbolised an ideological shift in which the construction of stone walling was itself an act of both constructing power and projecting that power. While this developed ideology still linked stonewalling and ‘natural’ power, there may no longer have been the need for ‘natural’ places themselves to retain their original form in the construction of that power. Indeed, in the site’s latest phases, stone walling alone may have been sufficient to serve the purpose of power building, or in other situations the ‘natural’ may have become subsumed or overwhelmed by the built. This potential shift in thinking is particularly prevalent in the spatial layout of stonewalled sites in the later Khami...
period, which greatly transform (as opposed to amplifying) fairly modest topographic features through revetment walling and platform construction.

**Khami**

Following Great Zimbabwe, the second largest settlement on the Zimbabwe Plateau lies on the banks of the Khami River west of the modern town of Bulawayo (Robinson 1959). Named after this river, Khami was the capital of the Torwa state that arose in the southwestern regions of the Zimbabwe Plateau during the fifteenth century.

Khami covered an area of over 40 hectares, extending more than 1.5 km north-south and slightly more than 1 km east-west (Pikirayi 2001). Fourteen platforms represented élite housing, with a substantial complex on the northernmost hill probably the residence of the king (Robinson 1959; Huffman 1996). This complex is decorated with a check pattern with considerable elaboration and aesthetics to suggest that it was the most important part of the settlement (Figure 5). Plaster and ceramic sherds litter open areas between the platforms and attest to substantial settlement in less permanent material.

Also established in the Khami period was Danangombe, some 120 km east of the modern town of Bulawayo in south-central Zimbabwe. Danangombe has a central building complex on a granite outcrop, consisting of two large, sub-rectangular platforms separated by a passage. The western platform covers some 900 m² and has

---

**Figure 5.** Khami: the Hill Complex. Note the extensive stone revetment which shapes and contours the natural hill, working around a natural boulder rather than linking boulders together as at Great Zimbabwe. An entire ‘natural’ hill was completely transformed through this approach, to form terraces and platforms, with substantial house remains on the summit (photograph courtesy of Anders Lindahl).
a retaining wall of well-fitted stone blocks rising over 6 m in many places. The eastern platform is larger, measuring about 2800 m² in area and 3 m in height. The retaining walls are profusely decorated with check, cord, herringbone and chevron patterns suggesting that this was the most important part of the settlement. The entire settlement spreads outwards in a radius of almost 200 m. To the north and south are more stonewalled enclosures. A perimeter wall marks the southern and southeastern limits of the settlement (Muringaniza and Ruwitah 1996; Pikirayi 2001).

The site of Khami is dated by radiocarbon and written texts from the fifteenth to mid-seventeenth centuries, when it was destroyed by fire in a civil war in which the Portuguese interfered (Beach 1980). Oral traditions associate it with the Torwa political dynasty, which controlled much of southwestern Zimbabwe (Robinson 1966). After the mid-seventeenth century political power shifted to the south-central regions of the Zimbabwe Plateau and to Danangombe. According to oral traditions, Danangombe was the capital of the Rozvi, from around the middle of the seventeenth century. The Rozvi were able to command sufficient military power to expunge the Portuguese from the Zimbabwe Plateau during the 1690s. Both the Torwa and the Rozvi appear to have spoken the Kalanga dialect of Shona and they likely shared the same general worldview in terms of socio-political organisation and use of space (Mapara 2007).

Khami architecture combined the building mode inherited from the Great Zimbabwe period and the Leopard’s Kopje tradition (Garlake 1973), an Iron Age culture that had existed in and occupied much of western Zimbabwe and adjacent eastern Botswana since the late first millennium AD. This includes terraced stone platforms and elaborately decorated stone walling. In Leopard’s Kopje most stone walling is retaining rather than freestanding, providing platforms upon which clay-plastered houses were constructed. The construction of terraced platforms involved significant modifications or transformation of natural hills into living residential spaces (Figure 6). Machiridza (2012) argues that Torwa and Rozvi élite power was located in the matrix of natural, social and spiritual realms. In particular, based on a critical analysis of oral traditions, ethnohistorical accounts and archaeology, he argues that the élite manipulated material culture items, including their built environments, as an expression of their ethnicities. The ways in which the builders of Khami phase structures exploited their environments and settled within them were imbued with ideology that linked their settlement architecture with nature. Drawing on oral traditions, Khami phase buildings suggest that, although space could still be defined as a horizontal extension of the natural environment like the Great Zimbabwe phase sites (and some sites do combine the techniques of the two building canons), emphasis seems to be placed more so on the vertical relationships between humans and nature.

In particular, oral traditions associate the Rozvi with attempts to build a tower in order to pull down the moon (Posselt 1935). The traditions are also linked to stories of the Rozvi digging out mountains to build a watchtower (Mapara 2007: 111, 117). These traditions are potentially making references to the platform architectural complexes associated with the Torwa and Rozvi rulers and may have some historical validity if one considers the architecture of Khami sites since these are carved out from hills and erected vertically, towering above the surrounding landscapes. Indeed, as already noted, there is a notable shift in architectural form and its relationship to
natural topographic features in the later period. While freestanding stone walling at Zimbabwe period sites may be thought of as interacting with and perhaps amplifying ‘natural’ topographic features, so revetment walling and platform construction during the Khami period utterly transformed or overwhelmed natural features.

Figure 6. Khami: plan of the Hill Complex. The plan presents a clear view of how ‘nature’ is transformed vertically, shaping it into a complex human settlement (modified from Robinson 1959; Pikirayi 2001).
Discussion
Like many other urban contexts in which grand buildings were constructed at the behest of élites (e.g. Rome, Angkor Wat, Tikal and other Maya population centres, and Tenochtitlan), the architecture of Great Zimbabwe and Khami came to express a society and its worldview. However, I would argue that Zimbabwe period sites and possibly those of the later Khami period were not designed according to a predefined plan. Rather, the settlement layouts reflect a worldview because the construction of those same layouts was part of the process of constructing the worldview itself.

According to Huffman (1981, 1984a, 1996, 2007), the settlement layout of these sites conformed to a longstanding traditional settlement layout of southern Bantu-speaking people, whose basic social categories are arranged as a set of binary or contrasting divisions of left/right, male/female, private/public, sacred/secular, up/down, east/west and life/death. Important personages, the ruling élite, resided up the hill, while the commoners lived below. However, binary divisions seem to have limited significance to the Karanga and Kalanga, whose forebears respectively created Great Zimbabwe and Khami (see Beach et al. 1997, 1998). Nevertheless, Huffman (1996, 2007) argues that Great Zimbabwe and Khami reflect this pattern on a greater scale and that both stem from earlier variations on the pattern at sites such as Mapungubwe. With the help of ethnography, Huffman presents a spatial model that delineates traditional meeting places and residential zones and argues that these isolated the commoners from decision-making bodies and the élite from the rest of society. By so isolating the masses, he argues, the élite enhanced its role as a mediator between the living and the dead, ensuring its status as a conduit through which power flowed. While élite power could have been created in this way, this model assumes that élites enacted a pre-defined plan and therefore that stonewalled architecture is merely the material expression of élite power and relative social categories. Stone walling in this view marks boundaries between social and spatial categories, but does not act to create those categories.

This paper offers a more dynamic, if tentative, model in which stone walling as actively implicated in the development of and negotiation of power. The process hypothesised draws on an ideology linking nature (and by extension ‘natural’ places) with power. I see stone walling emerging from practical interaction with these sources of power, gradually resulting in the demarcation of powerful spaces (and associated activities) and, through the resulting restricted access to power, the gradual development of more deeply entrenched social categories and the establishment of an élite. In my view both Zimbabwe and Khami period stonewalled monumental structures were extensions of the natural environment and it is partially on the basis of this human-nature relationship that we should define the worldviews of the Zimbabwe tradition people. Over time, I argue that there is a development of this worldview, with Khami period structures demonstrating an intensified appropriation of hills and mountains terrain upon which towns were built and an increasing subjugation of ‘natural’ places with built spaces.

While Great Zimbabwe and Khami period stonewalled architectures share this basic ‘nature-human’ ideological basis, the primary differences between the two architectural canons lies in how both exaggerated the dimensions of construction. The best examples of this are the Great Enclosure at Great Zimbabwe and the Hill Complex at Khami, both complexes where designs and layout were extended.
imaginatively beyond the realm of the ordinary. This must have been important ideologically, as it appear that the ruling élites were actively manipulating architecture to entrench their power. This was not a ‘once off event’ as studies of the development of the Great Enclosure show (see Summers and Whitty 1961), but rather a complicated construction process over time. Bearing this in mind, Khami should not be seen as a direct successor of Great Zimbabwe. Instead, Khami élites may have potentially sought to distinguish themselves from their predecessors by assuming a building canon different from that used at Great Zimbabwe. Indeed, as Garlake (1970: 504) noted some time ago, ‘while the occupants of the Khami Ruins...shared a common cultural basis with their predecessors at Zimbabwe, almost every aspect of their material culture had undergone substantial modifications in the two centuries that probably separate the main building periods at the sites.’ This statement also suggests that, while the two building traditions were broadly similar, there are chronologically and culturally based differences in their architecture. As Garlake (1970: 503) put it:

‘In all recent syntheses of the...Iron Age, the Khami Ruins are comprehended in Zimbabwe period IV and considered as only a “local variation” of it. This is no longer satisfactory: the walling of Khami differs in form, function and decoration from all walling at [Great] Zimbabwe; the occupations were not contemporaneous, as radiocarbon dates, imported ceramics and glass beads all indicate; and, while the indigenous ceramics of Khami share a common basis with those of period IV at Zimbabwe, Khami Ruin pottery assemblages are readily distinguishable from all [Great] Zimbabwe assemblages’ (emphasis added).

Conclusion
The ideas presented in this paper are naturally at a preliminary stage and a number of questions remain unanswered. A useful place for future studies to begin might be to examine in much more detail the earliest phases of smallscale stone wall construction as reported at sites such as Mapela and Mapungubwe (Huffman 1996, 2007). It is vital to probe what influenced these societies to build in stone and to achieve such distinctive forms of architecture in subsequent periods. Here, I have put forward one possible model, linking power and natural places and the early enactment of that power, which might find further support in evidence of early, smallscale stone walling linking and redefining natural features such as rock outcrops. My model further emphasises change through time as the relationship between stone walling, nature and power developed. At the very least the premise that people developed ideas of natural power through stone walling and thus extended these into the spatial layout of their built social order seems likely and, I hope, interesting enough to require further study.

Acknowledgements
This paper arises from the National Research Foundation (NRF) Blue Skies Project “Collapse of Ancient Societies” (Grant Number 75878). It was first presented at the Society for American Archaeology Annual Meeting held in Memphis, Tennessee, 18-22 April 2012. I should like to thank session participants, especially Matthew Davies, for their constructive comments as well as the feedback received from peer reviewers. I also thank my late sister Sylvia for her prayers and encouragement.
Notes on contributor

Innocent Pikirayi is Professor of Archaeology in the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology, University of Pretoria. He researches the origins and development of complex societies in southern Africa since the late first millennium AD, focusing on Zimbabwe tradition. Ongoing research projects focus on the relationship between monumental architecture and ideology, and the role played by water in the formation and demise of complex societies.

References


Gelfand, M. 1962. *Shona Religion (with Special Reference to the Makorekore)*. Cape Town: Juta.


