Chapter 15: Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe in Africa

# Chapter Summary [Copied from Olszewski 2019, Chapter 15]

* Food-production economies were introduced into southeastern Africa by Bantu-speaking groups during the Early Iron Age. Cattle pastoralism was one important feature of domestication economies there, along with growing millets and sorghum.
* Metallurgy during the Iron Age included iron, gold, and copper. The knowledge needed to work iron was extensive, and specialists in this craft appear to have been men. Ironworking required certain ritual practices and often was done in areas away from villages.
* In southeastern Africa, by the end of the Early Iron Age, many villages had a central cattle *kraal* with houses around it. These villages were led by chiefs, who exerted some control over trade and exchange networks, including elephant ivory.
* During the Middle Iron Age, in the Shashe–Limpopo rivers area, Zhizo groups established much larger villages. They appear to have settled here because of access to large herds of elephants and thus to ivory.
* About a hundred years later, Leopard’s Kopje groups moved into the Shashe–Limpopo region and established a capital at Bambandyanalo that was characterized by the Central Cattle Pattern. This pattern consisted of a *kraal* with the chief’s house to the west and the houses of the chief’s family surrounding the rest of the *kraal.* The *kraal* area was used to hold court to settle various disputes.
* Large quantities of imported glass beads at Leopard’s Kopje sites suggest extensive trade and exchange networks beyond the Shashe–Limpopo region.
* The next capital was nearby at Mapungubwe, which is sometimes described as the Mapungubwe state. A new settlement layout called the Zimbabwe Pattern was established. This was marked by the construction of stone-walled residences for elite rulers, who usually built their residence on a hilltop, which was associated with rainmaking rituals. The king lived in near seclusion from most people.
* The state centered at Great Zimbabwe was the successor to the Mapungubwe state. It also controlled lucrative trade and exchange in ivory, cattle, gold, and imported glass beads. Stone-walled residences for the king were constructed on the hilltop. There also was a large stone-walled construction called the Great Enclosure in the valley below. Interpretations of the function of the Great Enclosure are debated, with some researchers believing that it was a residence for the king and his wives but others arguing that it served a role in initiation ceremonies for young women and men.
* Rainmaking was a significant and important ritual activity and was conducted on relatively inaccessible hilltops. It was one of the functions taken over by elite rulers who used it to legitimize their rule. It relied on appealing to ancestors to intercede to bring rain. As the king was a rainmaker, his rule likely was partially dependent on his success.
* Reconstruction of the past lifeways of the people of the Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe states relies on several sources of information. The archaeological record is one of these, but researchers also use oral traditions of Shona speakers, who are the descendants of those earlier groups, and historical documents written by foreign visitors to the region.
* These historical documents describe similar states in southeastern Africa, but ones that came after Great Zimbabwe. Among them were the Torwa and Mutapa states. The Mutapa were encountered by the Portuguese.

# Key Terms

**Banbandyanalo**: also known as site K2, was a capital established by Leopard’s Kopje groups in the Shashe-Limpopo area of southeastern Africa. It controlled a lucrative trade in ivory, and abundant imported glass beads are found here and at other sites in the region. It was laid out using the Central Cattle Pattern. Over time there was a separation of cattle from the central kraal at Bamabdyanalo, which may relate to consolidation of power by the elite chief and ownership of more cattle herds.

**Central Cattle Pattern**: a village layout where a centrally placed kraal is surrounded by the houses of the chief and his family members. The kraal area is used for cattle and also as a court where disputes can be heard and settled.

**Chifumbaze complex**: a term used by some archaeologists to indicate the Early Iron Age Bantu-speaking groups whose migrations from central Africa spread iron metallurgy, farming, and herding ways of life to eastern and southern Africa.

**Great Zimbabwe**: the capital city of the Great Zimbabwe state in the plateau region of southeastern Africa. It controlled a vast trade and exchange network in gold, cattle, iron, ivory, and copper. Stonewalled residences for the kings are found on the rainmaking hilltop called the Acropolis, and there is a large stonewalled construction in the valley called the Great Enclosure, as well as other smaller stonewalled enclosures and many *daga* (clay) huts. Great Zimbabwe was organized using the Zimbabwe Pattern.

***Kraal***: a walled, circular enclosure to hold livestock, usually situated at the center of a settlement or village in southeastern/southern Africa.

**Leopard’s Kopje Cluster**: Bantu-speaking Iron Age groups who established a regional center first at Bambandyanalo and then at Mapungubwe, which became the political capital of a

state-level polity that exerted control over some 30,000 square kilometers (11,583 square miles) of the plateau region in southeastern Africa.

**Mapungubwe**: the capital of the Mapungubwe state in the Shashe-Limpopo area of southeastern Africa during the Middle Iron Age. It controlled the ivory trade, as well as trade and exchange in cattle and other goods. The elite ruler lived in stonewalled residences on the rainmaking hilltop, while other elites lived at the base of the hill. The Zimbabwe Pattern was first established here.

**Mutapa State**: a complex political entity to the north of Great Zimbabwe, near the Zambezi River. It may have been established by people from Great Zimbabwe, and it was the state encountered and described by the Portuguese.

**Schroda**: a Middle Iron Age large village established by Zhizo groups in the Shashe-Limpopo area of southeastern Africa. It is sometimes described as a capital for what would later become the Mapungubwe state. Zhizo groups here were invested in trading ivory from the numerous elephants in the vicinity, as well as farming and pastoralism.

**Torwa State**: was situated to the southwest of Great Zimbabwe and was a powerful political entity after the decline of Great Zimbabwe. Its capital was at Khami in what is now the modern country of Zimbabwe.

**Zhizo**: a Middle Iron Age group of Bantu-speaking peoples who built the early regionally important center (sometimes called a capital) at Schroda in the Shashe-Limpopo region of southeastern Africa.

**Zimbabwe Pattern**: also called Zimbabwe Culture, it consists of stoned walled structures built for elites with the ruler’s residence secluded on top of a relatively inaccessible hill and the rest of the royalty houses built immediately adjacent to the base of the hill. Commoners lived in *daga* (clay) huts farther away from the hill. It may also incorporate ideological ideas about status, sex, age, and private/public spaces based on modern and historical examples.