

Book Review

Aeneas Chigwedere. 2016. *The Great Zimbabwe State and Its Off-shoots: A.D.1000-1700*. Mutapa Publishing House. ISBN 9780797468085, 367 pages

Many theories have been penned down concerning the construction of the Great Zimbabwe monument in Zimbabwe. Different scholars and researchers give different perceptions on who built the great ruins of Zimbabwe.

The Great Zimbabwe State and Its Off-Shoots AD 1000-1700, is a historical account of Zimbabwe and its people. It is the story that traces the Great Zimbabwe State that lies in Masvingo and the tribes that constitute Zimbabwe. It is also an account that gives evidence pertaining to the construction of the historical monument, Great Zimbabwe.

Written by renowned Zimbabwean author and historian Aeneas Chigwedere, the book is an educational account that gives a detailed story of the formation of one of Africa's finest states. In the first chapters of the book, Chigwedere is quick to point out that Zimbabweans, like other Africans, 'did not fall from the sky' but came from somewhere. "Every African race appears to have originated in North-East Africa," says Chigwedere. "We can therefore assume that even our black race originated in the North-East Africa."

The book focuses on the story of three tribes that migrated to form Zimbabwe. According to Chigwedere, these tribes are the Dau Tonga Beja, Dziva Hungwe Kalanga and Nyai Soko.

Chigwedere tackles the social, political and economic aspects that made up the tribes. Economic activities included mining, hunting, agriculture and manufacturing, among other things. "Mining was a very important industry of the Mbire Nyai community as much as it was important for the lives of both the Dau Tonga and Dziva Hungwe Masters of Water," writes Chigwedere. The book clearly highlights that these tribes, with different totems, had a structured existence that followed well laid-out systems. Cultural traits of the tribes are a clear testimony that these people had their own way of socialisation and ways that guided their day-to-day lives. The Dau Tonga Beja tribe are known by practicing matriarchy (a social system dominated by mothers and mother's side, not by fathers or the father's side), tooth extraction, fitting a lip and nose ring known as pelele and katoto and consumed fish, among other things.

Distinct cultural traits of the Dziva Hungwe are, association with the sun, water, fish eagle and engaging in circumcision and clitoridectomy (female genital mutilation). The Soko distinguish themselves through associating with the moon, stones, rocks, hills, mountains and have land totems. Prior to colonialism, people living in the Great Zimbabwe State were developing on their own thus leading to the construction of the massive stone city – the Great Zimbabwe. It was built without mortar (dry walling). Their cultural traits, distinct nature and governance systems are a clear testimony to their

constructing the Great Zimbabwe State. The book proffers reasons the stone city was built and the people responsible for building it.

“Great Zimbabwe was built in stone because its founders were a segment of the Bantu Tribe of westerners who were closely associated with rocks, hills and mountains for the reason that they were ‘the masters of the land’,” says Chigwedere. The author references fellow historians to substantiate his claims on the origins of the Great Zimbabwe State.

The Great Zimbabwe State and Its Off-Shoots AD 1000-1700 also offers detailed information on totems, their meanings as well as the reasons for their use. “This means that Shava is not a totem; we know well that the totem of these people is Mhofu, Nhuka, Mhukahuru,” writes Chigwedere. “Shava was simply the house name to distinguish Mushavatu’s descendants from those of his elder brother.”

The book sets the record straight on some of the issues that have been misrepresented by white scholars. He dismisses whites, and in particular the Portuguese, for taking glory for the construction of the Great Zimbabwe. Research conducted by Chigwedere reveals that the Portuguese were totally ignorant of the formation of Great Zimbabwe State and its inhabitants. “The truth is that the Portuguese never witnessed the existence of the Mwenemutapa Empire – the Great Zimbabwe State,” he says. “They found it dead!”

The historian also highlights the existence of the science of agriculture and how it was practiced by the people of Zimbabwe. “All the Bantu communities that migrated from the north were agricultural people,” writes the author. This reveals why Zimbabweans have a deep affinity to their land. This connection has existed since time immemorial and cannot suddenly be severed.

The historical account written by Chigwedere does not only point to the importance of the Great Zimbabwe State as a historical icon, but also highlights the reasons for its collapse. “Great Zimbabwe was ravaged by a succession of civil war and this revolted Murenga, the High Spirit, who thereupon, decided to move to the west to end up at Njelele Hill in present-day Matabeleland.”

Any Zimbabwean with interests of knowing the roots and origins of different tribes in Zimbabwe, The Great Zimbabwe State and Its Off -Shoots AD 1000-1700 is an ideal book offering interesting perspectives. After all, it is said the Great Zimbabwe remains the largest single pre-historic structure in sub-Saharan Africa. The ruins cover a complex of massive stone walls built across to approximately 1,800 acres of present-day south eastern Zimbabwe.

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