

Strongholds of Political Power, Strongholds of Resistance: Securing monumental structures on the Zimbabwe plateau and adjacent regions (1100-1900 AD)

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Online

Pre-registration
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Abstract

During the early second millennium AD, the Zimbabwe Tradition, a settlement system synonymous with state-level societies developed on the Zimbabwe plateau and adjacent regions. Characterised by monumental stone-walled structures, antiquarians and early archaeologists interpreted these as 'forts', linked to long-distance trade. Referring to early sixteenth century Great Zimbabwe, Portuguese chronicler João de Barros remarked that it "is guarded by a nobleman, who has charge of it, after the manner of a chief alcaide, and they call this officer Symbacayo" Alcaide is an Iberian term borrowed from Arabic al-qā'id, meaning commander of fort or castle. I employ the concept of 'stronghold' beyond European understandings of Medieval fortifications or castles, to denote power and understand how monumental structures served ruling elites. European concepts of defence cannot be applied to understand the construction and function of sites such as Great Zimbabwe.

With European expansion into the African interior after 1500 AD, the same region witnessed both European and local strongholds ('loopholed forts'), the latter constructed to resist Portuguese attacks. These were 'strongholds of resistance'. To survive European siege warfare, these strongholds also used European weaponry. The term 'Refuge Tradition', was an unsuccessful attempt by some archaeologists to characterise the rise of hilltop and fortified settlements from 1700 to the onset of British rule in 1890.

From 2010 to 2019, Innocent Pikirayi served as Professor in Archaeology and Chair in the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology at the University of Pretoria. He is now Deputy Dean responsible for Postgraduate Studies and Research Ethics in the Faculty of Humanities at the same university. In 2019, he was Visiting Professor in Archaeology at the Centre for Urban Network Evolutions (UrbNet) at Aarhus University in Denmark. He is also serving as Honorary Research Associate of the McDonald Institute, University of Cambridge, for three years until 30th September 2023.

Innocent Pikirayi serves as advisors to the following journals in archaeology and the broader humanities: *Azania: Archaeological in Africa* (Routledge), *African Archaeological Review* (Springer), *Antiquity: A Review of World Archaeology*, *The Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology*, and the *African Humanities Publication (AHP) Series* (Carnegie Corporation).

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