



GREAT CITIES OF AFRICA

THE KINGDOM OF



GREAT ZIMBABWE

The Kingdom of Great Zimbabwe was located in south-eastern Africa in modern-day Zimbabwe and was established in 1100 AD. In the Zimbabwe region the specific group of Africans who were the architects of Great Zimbabwe were the Shona people. In the Shona languages the name Zimbabwe means ‘Great Stone Houses’ or ‘Great Revered House’. By 1100 AD the Shona peoples of southern Africa had begun to accumulate an increasing quantity of wealth from their trading activities and developed into a kingdom. It was at this time that they used skills in construction to develop the main city of Great Zimbabwe which was to serve as the capital of the kingdom and its commercial center. To the east of Great Zimbabwe is modern-day Botswana and much further north the Zambezi River is located. It is understood that the main city would eventually grow to house around 18,000 Africans making it a larger size than medieval London. The city included amongst other structures twelve central buildings and a castle. There were also 150 buildings and homes made of clay and gravel which had walls which were 18 inches thick.

The archaeologist Peter Garlake provides the following description of Great Zimbabwe:

“THE ELABORATE PLANS AND LAVISH CONSTRUCTION, NECESSITATING ABUNDANT MATERIAL AND LABOUR, ALSO EXHIBITED CONSIDERABLE TECHNICAL PROFICIENCY AND A VIRTUOSITY THAT ACHIEVED ALMOST SCULPTURAL EFFECTS”.

The clay and gravel combination used to construct the buildings is known in the region as ‘daga’. The Shona people created large pits where daga was collected and used for the construction of buildings. The general population of the kingdom lived in homesteads which were groups of homes situated close to each other and surrounded by stone walls.

Great Zimbabwe was the largest city-state in southern Africa at the time. The artefacts discovered within the ruins of Great Zimbabwe indicate international trade with China, Arabia and Persia.