

TOPIC : DEVELOPMENT OF ZIMBABWEAN SOCIETIES

SUBTOPIC : STATE FORMATION - MAPUNGUBWE STATE

OBJECTIVES

BY THE END OF THE SUBTOPIC LEARNERS SHOULD BE ABLE TO;

- ✓ Give a brief definition of Mapungubwe.
- ✓ Identify factors leading to the rise of Mapungubwe state.
- ✓ Explain the political, social and economic activities of Mapungubwe.
- ✓ Evaluate factors leading to the collapse of the state.

Background of Mapungubwe State



Location of Mapungubwe

- Mapungubwe was an Iron Age archaeological site in the Southern part of Africa and it was a capital of southern civilisation.
- The Mapungubwe hill stands on the Transvaal side of the Limpopo at the place where Shashe River joins the Limpopo River.

- Mapungubwe means a “hill of Jackals” and it is believed that the state was established around 900 AD while other sources state that the state was established in the middle of the 11th century AD.
- Mapungubwe was a powerful state which had connection with the Chinese, Arabs and Indians merchants who were traders.

Organisation of the state

A. Economic activities

- Mapungubwe was a state which farming, mining, iron, pottery and trading occurred.

(1) Trade

- Trade played an important role in Mapungubwe society as it brought wealth in the kingdom.
- The kingdom of Mapungubwe controlled a vast of trading networks.
- They traded with the people from east Africa, Egypt, India, China, Arabia and East Asia.
- Trading trips to the coast were done at the king’s command.
- The Mapungubwe people traded with gold, copper, ivory, animal skin iron, ostrich eggs and shells.
- In external trade gold was being exchanged for beads, metals, spindles for weaving and cotton cloths.



Trading items

- Before the arrival of the aggressive Europeans Mapungubwe traded peacefully with the Indian merchants.
- Moreover the Limpopo River allowed the Mapungubwe people to transport trade goods to the East African ports along the Indian Ocean.

(2) Mining

- Mapungubwe is known by its gold deposits.
- It is believed that Mapungubwe people mined gold in Zimbabwe.
- The gold found in Mapungubwe was alluvial gold, people panned gold from the edges of Shashe and Limpopo River which runs through gold rich areas in the north.
- Mining was labourers as the quarts needed to be heated and ore crashed and separated.
- They also mined copper which they used for trading.
- Gold was important in the state because;
 - (i) It was a symbol of power.
 - (ii) It was a trading commodity.



Gold

(3) Craftwork

- It is believed that Mapungubwe attracted and trained specialist in working gold, iron, ivory and cooper.
- The Mapungubwe people made famous objects out of gold, iron and cooper such as jewellery, bowls and rhinoceros.

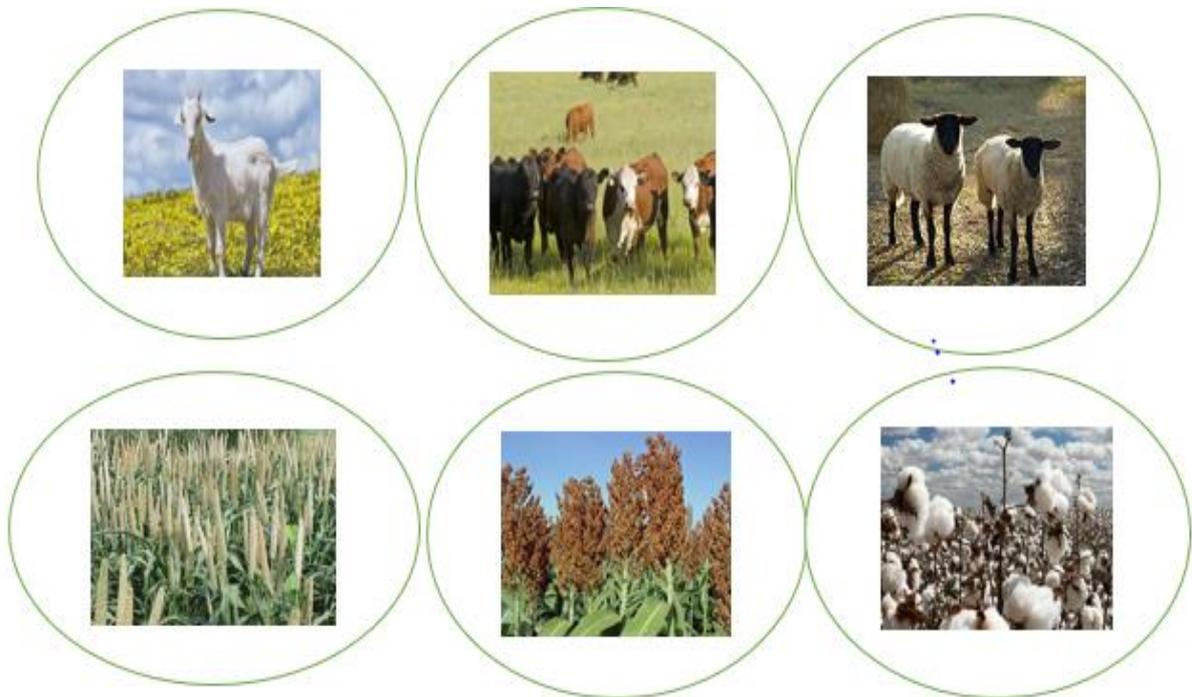


Gold rhinoceros and bowl

- They absorbed designs and innovations from foreign traders.
- In pottery Mapungubwe people made pottery for kings and it was different from the ordinary people.

(4) Agriculture

- People in Mapungubwe enjoyed health and wealth as they focused on family and farming.
- They kept domesticated animals such as goats, sheep, cattle and dogs.
- Cattle were used in ritual activities and to reward traders, miners, and those who did craft work.
- They cultivated crops such as cotton, sorghum, millet and beans
- Farming was done by women while men kept large herds cattle.
- They used long term storage jars to store their grain.

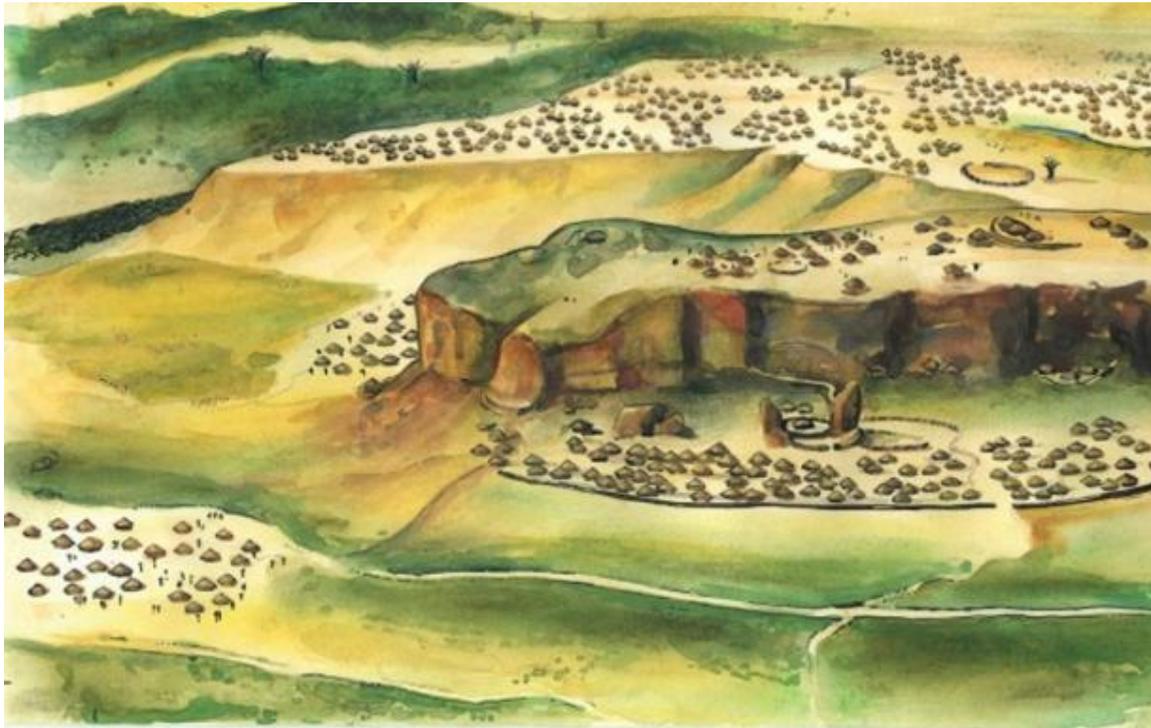


Agricultural products in Mapungubwe

(5) Hunting and gathering

- Even farm animals supplied the Mapungubwe community with meat they also engaged in hunting.
- They hunted wild animals snared and gathered fruits.

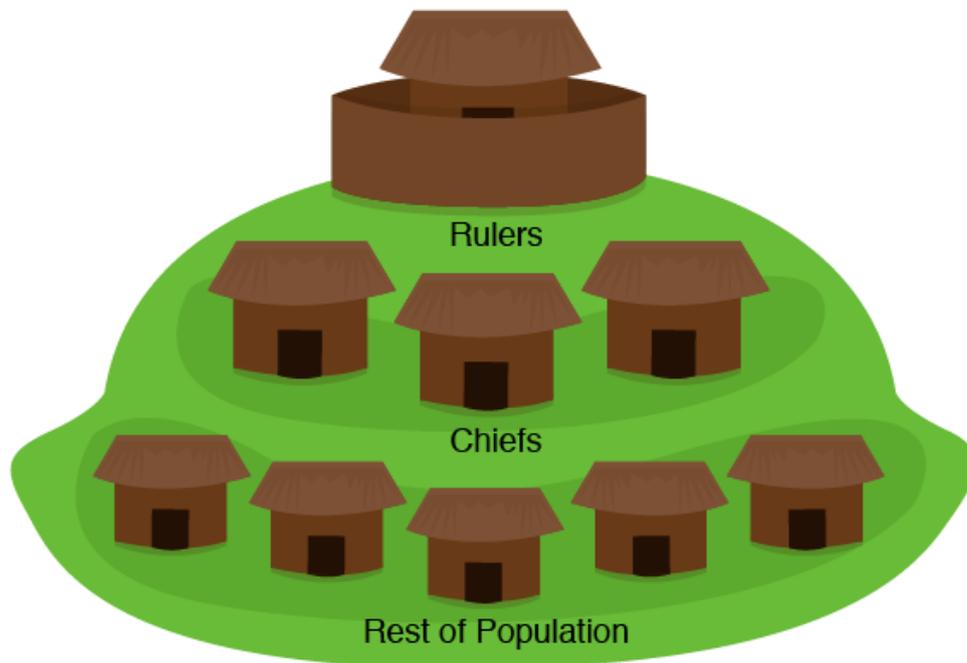
B. Social activities



Mapungubwe hill

- The wealth brought by trade influenced the hierarchical structure of Mapungubwe kingdom.
- The wealth of the society influenced the rise of social classes in Mapungubwe, the kingdom and the livelihood of people was divided into three hierarchical groups namely the rulers, chiefs and the commoners.
- The housing in Mapungubwe reflected the hierarchy of the society as shown below.

Mapungubwe Social System



Social structure of the State

- The commoners (the whole population) occupied the low lying sites of the Kingdom. The common people made their homes at the bottom of this hill and in the surrounding areas.
- In the small hill tops lived the districts such as the chiefs.
- Leaders of Mapungubwe were separated from their inhabitants and they occupied the hilltops of the kingdom. This was seen by the remains of the elite habitation found on the top of the hill.
- Royal wives lived separately from the king.
- Funeral traditions were also held differently between the poor and the rich. The rich had graveyards at the top of the hill.
- Through the archaeological evidence it has been pointed out that a garbage site located where the common people lived reveals that the food that the elite ate was quite different from the rest of society.
- The more powerful you became the higher the mountain, you lived.

C. Political organisation

- The political structure of Mapungubwe developed as individuals who controlled large herds of cattle used this source as a springboard of political power.
- The political power of Mapungubwe was determined by the social ladder, the more powerful you became the higher the mountain you lived.
- The king communicated with the ancestors on behalf of the people thus he lived on top of Mapungubwe hill so as to be close to the ancestors
- The king was a sacred leader he was in charge of the important ceremonies and rituals for example rain making.
- Rainmaking was done secretly as it was regarded as a sacred event.
- The Mapungubwe was also used as a burial place for the kings.

The sacred Mapungubwe hill



Mapungubwe hilltop

- The Mapungubwe people believed that the hilltop of the mountain was sacred.

- They believed that the hill top was the place of the spirits of the ancestors thus ordinary people were not allowed to climb on top of the mountain.
- Moreover commoners were not allowed to look directly at the hilltop.
- The hilltop was a home for the kings of Mapungubwe, they believed that the king had to stay close to the ancestors so as to communicate on behalf of his people.
- The king's royal palace was built with stone holes that kept the king hidden from his people.

Decline of Mapungubwe state

- There are debates about the demise of Mapungubwe state.
- It is believed that Mapungubwe declined due to climate changes. The droughts which affected the Limpopo valley led to the drying up of small rivers.
- The climate which was cooler and dryer reduced the grazing lands making cattle farming impossible and crops failed to grow due to these conditions.
- People died of famine thus moving to the north ward to better watered lands/pastures.
- Moreover overgrazing by cattle destroyed the pastures.
- The decline in trade might also have led to the collapse of the state. It is believed that the coastal traders moved their activities further north in Mozambique abandoning Mapungubwe.
- The gold trade was now running down the Runde and Sabi valleys to the sea ports of Sofala instead of the longer and difficult journey landing to Mapungubwe.