

OBITUARY

Peter Garlake (1934-2011), Great Zimbabwe and the politics of the past in Zimbabwe

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In early March 1984 when I was registering for my second year undergraduate programme in history at the University of Zimbabwe, I was encouraged to enrol for two courses that were offered as part of a broader study in the subject — *Material Culture and Archaeological Methods and Theory*. This was when I first encountered the person in the name of Peter Garlake, the man hired to teach these courses which were designed to meet the human resource needs of museums, art galleries and culture houses in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe was then embarking on a very successful programme of staff development to train black African archaeologists locally and abroad. This marked the beginning of archaeology as an academic discipline in Zimbabwe, and a few years later the History Department was to offer a full undergraduate degree programme in archaeology. These are just some of the contributions and impacts that Peter Garlake made to Zimbabwean and African archaeology.

Born in Cape Town on 11 January 1934, Peter Storr Garlake completed high school studies at the prestigious St George's College in Harare. He obtained an honours degree in architecture at the University of Cape Town from 1952-1957 and a postgraduate diploma in the same field at the Institute of Archaeology, University College London (UCL) in 1961. A receiver of a Nuffield Studentship, he was attached to the British Institute in Eastern Africa (BIEA) in Dar es Salaam between 1961 and 1962. There, he studied the architecture, art and archaeology of Swahili towns (Garlake 1966). His love for these subjects was to take him in 1964 to the then Rhodesia, where he was employed as Inspector of Monuments. Until 1970, he researched the archaeology and architecture of Great Zimbabwe and related stone walled monuments (*madzimbabwe* or *zimbabwe*, literally meaning houses of stones, but, in reality, these were capital centres) (Garlake 1968, 1970, 1973). He also excavated sites linked with the Portuguese *feira* (market) trade in northern Zimbabwe — Dambarare, Luanze and Maramuka — which he interpreted with the help of Portuguese written accounts (Garlake 1967).

Great Zimbabwe (Garlake 1973) provides a detailed, factual description of the archaeology and architecture of monuments at Great Zimbabwe, as well as a synthesis of the regional prehistoric and regional context in which the site developed and declined. The book also carries a history of archaeological research of the monuments, describing how early antiquarian investigators ascribed Phoenician and/or Semitic identities to the builders of Great Zimbabwe, how the site was plundered of its precious finds and stripped of its history and how Rhodesian colonists manipulated research and interpretation of the site as part of the colonial agenda to remain 'alien' against the rising tide of African nationalism (Garlake 1982a; Garlake *et al.* 1985). It remains the core academic reference text for archaeologists and conservationists working on the site as well as on associated monuments in the southern African region. Another book, *Kingdoms of Africa* (Garlake 1978), is a lavishly illustrated survey of pre-European states and civilisations to AD 1600, emphasising the role of archaeology in understanding long-term history. This book succeeds in putting Garlake's

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work in eastern, southern and western African into a global context. After 1980 Peter Garlake focused on the rock art of Zimbabwe, a disciplinary shift from the monumental archaeology he worked on in the 1960s and 1970s. However, I see this as a consequence of his earlier interests in Swahili art and subsequent interest in West African art. His studies of Zimbabwe rock art of the now-extinct San shaman-artists depict not ordinary animals, people or things, but a world transformed by spirit (Garlake 1987, 1995). Although he built on the ethnographically informed works of Professor David Lewis-Williams, he took a more heterogeneous approach, proposing numerous likely interpretations.

Garlake's research on Zimbabwe type monuments led him to attribute their authorship to ancestors of the Karanga — a conclusion that was considered unacceptable to the white settler community in Rhodesia, especially the government of Ian Smith, which had unilaterally declared independence from Britain in 1965 and was highly prejudiced against the black majority, whom it perceived to lack the technical sophistication and complexity needed to construct such structures. Ian Smith went on to hire pseudo-archaeologists who were tasked with challenging Garlake's conclusions, since they strongly undermined white settler ideology, which preferred to see Great Zimbabwe and related monuments as the works of a mysterious, alien civilisation. The works of Bruwer (1965), Gayre (1972) and Mallows (1986) must be read in this context. Their views are still entertained by some southern African scholars (Hromnik 1981), who argue for a Dravidian presence or influence in the region. The repressive Ian Smith government forced Garlake into exile in 1970 and between 1971 and 1973 he was a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Ife, Nigeria, where he researched the early art and archaeology of Ile-Ife (Garlake 1974a, 1977). In 1976 Garlake moved back to England where he assumed the position of lecturer in the Department of Anthropology at UCL. It was during his tenure at UCL that he excavated the *zimbabwe* of Manyikeni, in Mozambique, elaborating on the connections and interactions within the Zimbabwe civilisations and regions beyond (Garlake 1976).

In 1981 Garlake returned to Zimbabwe where he took a lectureship position at the University of Zimbabwe and researched the country's rock art (Garlake 1995). Apart from mainstream academic research (he received his doctorate in archaeology from the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies in 1992), he believed in the educational value of archaeology and, in collaboration with other scholars, published books that are either read by the public (Garlake 1974b, 1982b) or are still used in Zimbabwean schools today (Garlake *et al.* 1985, 1991, 2000).

Peter Garlake died on 2 December 2011. He leaves behind an academic legacy that successfully challenged Rhodesian colonial settler ideology and defined a postcolonial archaeological research programme in Zimbabwe (Garlake 1982a, 1982b). I regard him as part of a conscious and passionate transformation agenda in Zimbabwean archaeology, something neighbouring South Africa is embarrassingly failing to embrace, nearly two decades after the 1994 elections that brought an end to *apartheid*. However, to judge Peter Garlake on the basis of his achievements in Zimbabwe alone would be to deprive him of his continental contribution to the discipline, as attested by his work and publications in East Africa and Nigeria, as well as his work on art and architecture (Garlake 2002), which has been very well received globally. In my view, Peter Garlake enjoyed considerable international recognition for the high quality and impact of his recent research, all of which indicated his standing as a leading international scholar.

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