

FURTHER OBSERVATIONS ON THE CULTURE HISTORY AND SPATIAL
BEHAVIOUR OF PREHISTORIC FARMING COMMUNITIES OF THE
MID-ZAMBEZI VALLEY, NORTHERN ZIMBABWE

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INTRODUCTION

The mid-Zambezi valley in northern Zimbabwe (Fig. 8.1& 2) has been the focus of archaeological research over the last ten years or so. This research was deemed necessary in order to counter the wide spread bias seen in previous national archaeological surveys and subsequent neglect of the area because it was assumed that given its hot and dry climate and tsetse fly infestation, it was unlikely to have attracted any meaningful human occupation in the past (see for example Robinson 1965). The research has aimed at, among other things, documenting the cultural history of the area as well as investigating the spatial behaviour of the cultures under review.

Survey work between 1991 and 1993 in selected parts of the valley documented over 70 sites of different periods ranging from the Middle Stone Age to the historical period (Pwiti 1994, 1994-5, 1996a, 1996b, 1997). The focus has been however, on the Early Farming Communities (EFC) and Later Farming Communities (LFC), traditionally referred to as Early Iron Age (EIA) and Late Iron Age (LIA) respectively. The survey results showed that sites of the EFC were fairly large villages located on river/stream banks. Site Territorial Analysis suggests that the villages tended to be located in contexts where the soils had high agricultural

potential. LFC sites on the other hand were located further away from water bodies but agricultural potential of the soils remains a constant variable in site location.

Excavations at the major EFC site of Kadzi, found during the surveys, have demonstrated that settled iron-using farmers were established in the area by the middle of the first millennium AD. They grew a variety of millet, *Eleusine coracana* (Jonsson 1998) and kept sheep/goat and cattle. The animal food economy was, however, also heavily dependent on hunting, particularly buffalo (Pwiti 1996b; Plug 1997). The recovery of exotic glass beads in the upper horizons of the site stratigraphy testified to the fact that the communities had established contacts with the outside world by the 8th century AD.

Excavations were also carried out at the Zimbabwe Tradition site of Kasekete, one of the four stone walled sites located immediately below the Zambezi escarpment and associated with the famous Mutapa state. Radiocarbon dates obtained placed the occupation of the site between the 16th and 17th centuries AD. Contrary to previous thinking that this happened seasonally because of the climate of the valley (Robinson, 1965), the excavations demonstrated that the site was occupied all year round and for a considerable length of time (see Pwiti 1996b).