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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE WESTERN AND EASTERN ZAMBEZI RIVER BASIN, MOZAMBIQUE

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The Zambezi River basin has been archaeologically investigated mainly towards the understanding of cultural interactions that took place from at least the 16th century AD onwards. This included the investigation of different types of sites (e.g. stone enclosures) and the analysis of local pottery assemblages and imports. The study of site formation processes was added to these efforts, aimed at interpreting human activities in relation to the environment. Previous investigations have, however, tended to concentrate on the western area of the Zambezi River basin mainly in the context of attempts to understand the extent of the influence of the Mutapa state (15th - 19th centuries AD). This has led to disjointed research information that does not represent the entire region of the Zambezi River basin. In addition, the duration of the research efforts has been rather limited and has not allowed a clear understanding of developments prior to the 15th century AD. The recent work carried out in the delta area of the Zambezi River has attempted to correct this research imbalance. The current investigations that are reported in this paper combine evidence from both the western and eastern region of the Zambezi River basin and provide data related to the Early and Later Farming Communities. Indeed, there are written accounts that before the Europeans arrived in this region, the banks of the Zambezi River were already inhabited by local Bantu communities and that they were also trading with the coast (dos Santos 1999: 180; Serra 1988). Therefore, the Mutapa state formation and trade contacts with the Indian Ocean should be seen within the context of developments among the farming communities during the early part of the second millennium AD. The current research ignores the geographical separation of the Zambezi river region into western and eastern, and includes the delta area. The archaeological evidence from Songo and Degue-Mufa sites, located in the western region is analyzed. Preliminary results of the