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NIAMARA AND MAGURE, TWO POSSIBLY GENDERED PLACES IN THE CHOA MOUNTAIN RANGE OF CENTRAL MOZAMBIQUE

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This paper presents a gender-based interpretation of the 15th century Niamara stone enclosure located in the Choa mountain range of Central Mozambique. Although it was recognized as a zimbabwe, the site has two components: Niamara, a male place on the hill-top and Magure, a female place in the valley.

Ce journal présente une interprétation basée sur le genre, concernant l'enclos des pierres Niamara au 15^{ème} siècle. Cet enclos se trouvait dans la chaîne des montagnes de Choa, au centre du Mozambique. Bien qu'il ait été reconnu comme zimbabwe, le site comporte deux éléments: Niamara, une place mâle située sur le sommet de la colline et Magure, une place femelle située dans la vallée.

INTRODUCTION

The possible role exercised by the most spectacular stone enclosure of Niamara located in the Choa mountain range in Central Mozambique has not yet been sufficiently ascertained (Wieschhoff 1941; Gerharz 1973, 1975; Plate 1). This stone enclosure is about 130m in length, i.e. more than twice as long as the other best studied stone enclosures of Mozambique, which are Manyikeni (Sinclair 1987) and Songo (Macamo and Duarte 1996; Macamo and Madiquida 2004; Macamo forthcoming). The Choa mountain range enters Mozambique and extends to the Inyanga falls in neighbouring Zimbabwe (Oliveira 1963: 92, 1973: 48). Mount Nhacaranga, named after the river that passes at the foot of the mountain, provided the foundation for the Niamara stone enclosure (Oliveira 1963: 93).

It has been suggested that because Niamara was located on the peak of the mountain, in association with the valley enclosure of Magure, the sites could be interpreted as gendered places (Macamo forthcoming). It was tentatively suggested that men controlled power on the hill and women practised agriculture in the valley (cf. Huffman 1996). In this paper it is shown that this assumption cannot be assumed automatically, as men might well have cooperated with women in agricultural tasks (Negrão 1998). This discussion, however, is still at an early stage.

The basic supportive material for a gender discussion was a survey undertaken in the Choa mountain range by a team from Eduardo Mondlane University in the late 1990s. As a complementary source, some ethnographic parallels were