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KINTAMPO 1967

This is a preliminary report on the first season of research undertaken by the Department of Archaeology into the prehistory of the Kintampo area. Philip Rahtz of Birmingham University spent 5 weeks in November-December 1966 excavating a rock-shelter (K1) 6 miles north of Kintampo. I carried on with work at this and seven other sites of the same type for 13 weeks in January-April this year. Not all the shelters investigated proved of much importance, and the tentative conclusions given in this report are largely based on the evidence from three sites:-

| Site | Site Name                                          | Location               |
|------|----------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| K1   | Bwigheli<br><u>Mo</u> : 'the high rock'            | 0°<br>8°08'N<br>1°42'W |
| K6   | Onyame Bekyere<br><u>Akan</u> : 'god will provide' | 8°01'N<br>1°45'W       |
| K8   | Buobini<br><u>Mo</u> : 'the old hole'              | 8°04'N<br>1°44'W       |

It may be noted that only one rock-shelter had ever been excavated in Ghana before, the Bosumpra cave at Abetifi dug by Shaw in 1943.\*

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\* Proc. Prehist. Soc. 10 (1944), 1-67.

BUOBINI CULTURE

The earliest culture we have been able to identify so far we propose to call the Buobini culture, after the rock-shelter K8 where it is best represented. It occurs also at K1, in the lower of two cave-earths (layer 9), and at K6 Onyame Bekyere. Radiocarbon dates shortly to be published suggest that the Buobini culture came to an end at K1 about 1600 BC.

The pottery is immediately recognizable. Almost every sherd bears some decoration, with typical motifs including cord-impressed lines and rough overall stabbed ornament. Harder to analyse is the prolific small-scale flake industry - 'microlithic' in none but the vaguest sense. The only tools recognized so far are a few lunates and other backed pieces. There are no polished stone axes - two small fragments from near the surface at K8 must be regarded as suspect -, no stone rasps, no querns or rubbers.

Two burials were found: one from K8 (K8-A), the other, only partly excavated this season, from K6. Also from K8 comes most of a skull with the mandible and a few other scattered bones, probably from a disturbed burial (K8-B). The K8-A burial was that of a young man. The skeleton lay on its left side, in a flexed position, with the head to the north-east. Four beads of polished bone were found by the right wrist, two by the left, and one rather larger beneath the left upper arm. So far as we would tell, the K6 burial lay in a similar attitude, on its left side with the head to the north-east. Around the neck was a string of tiny shell beads. Both this burial and the scattered burial K8-B are thought to be of adult women. Both seem, moreover, to have undergone a similar mutilation which may well prove to be a regular feature of this culture: K6 had had seven of its

incisors extracted at an early age, K8-B all its upper incisors and canines.

### STONE AXE CULTURE

The Stone Axe culture at K6 Onyame Bekyere extends through 3 1/2 - 4 feet of finely stratified deposit, an accumulation of floors interleaved with spreads of ash and domestic rubbish. A small surface collection from K8 is also assigned to this culture; presumably it is from this occupation that the two small axe fragments noted above as suspect are derived. At K6, and apparently also at K1, the Stone Axe culture overlies Buobine levels; and it was shown at K6 to be almost certainly intrusive, not a local development.

\* The pottery is altogether different from Buobini material. Even with small samples there is no room for confusion. Heavy rolled rims and plain incurved rims with a zone of oblique comb-impressed decoration on the shoulder are especially common. Polished greenstone axe-blades, sandstone rasps,\* and a few rubbers or grinding-stones occur.

Flaked quartz, though never completely absent, is so rare that I did at one point wonder whether iron might have been in use, if only on a limited scale. On general grounds this would point to a date within the 1st millennium AD, possibly a little earlier. (Davies claims that iron was known at Ntereso before 1000 BC. He is not to be taken seriously.) But radiocarbon dates for the K1 site seem to mean the Stone Axe culture

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\* These are objects of the kind which Davies unhappily chose to call "terracotta cigars".

is very much earlier than that. The material from the upper earth (layer 8) at K1, dated roughly to 1600 -1200 BC, resists exact classification, but is at least broadly comparable with the Stone Axe culture at K6 - stone axes, a small proportion of quartz, and pottery which, in some details if not in overall aspect, can be paralleled at this latter site.

The term Stone Axe culture is, I should point out, only a temporary expedient. Not improbably this culture will prove to be the same as that, nowhere very adequately defined, which Davies called "Kintampo-neolithic". If so, the term Kintampo culture would be preferable.

#### ANCESTRAL MO

'Ancestral Mo' is for the moment a rather loosely defined term, but the pottery to which it applies is quite different from earlier material, and has certain distinctive traits of its own. Comb-impressed swags around the rim, for instance, are a characteristic feature. At K6 Ancestral Mo pottery is associated with tobacco-pipes datable probably to the latter half of the 17th century. When pottery of this style first came into use, on the other hand, is a question to which no firm answer can yet be given; though a southward movement of Grassi-speaking people into this area towards the beginning of the present millennium might be inferred from linguistic evidence.\*

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Bendor-Samuel, Wilson, Swadesh and Swadesh: "A preliminary glottochronology of Gur languages", a paper read at the 5th West African Languages Congress, Legon, 1965.

CONCLUSIONS

Our work this season was on a small scale, designed to test the archeological potential of the area in general, and of caves and rock-shelters in particular. We hoped to recover the outlines of the cultural sequence, not to fill in all the detail. Judged on these terms, the work was extremely successful. It was particularly gratifying to find organic material so well preserved - including the Buobini culture burials which are of some incidental interest as the oldest human skeletons yet known from Ghana. Some of the finds are now on exhibition in the Archaeology Department, where those interested are welcome to see for themselves.

Much of course remains unknown or uncertain which only large-scale horizontal excavation can determine. It is very important, for instance, to define more fully the character and economic status of the Stone Axe culture, and further work is planned to this end next year at the K6 site. This is an enormous rock-shelter, of which so far only a tiny fraction has been excavated. All three cultures described above occur here in stratified relations, with tobacco-pipes neatly dating the latest levels.

There are implications of wider scope as well. It is hard to avoid the conclusion: that much previous research has been sadly misconceived. Too much has been made of evidence of a kind which really does not allow any concise interpretation. The time is not ripe for synthesis. What we need first is a series of well-documented, well-dated local sequences like that we begin to piece together for the Kintampo area. And in this work caves and rock-shelters deserve to play a leading part.

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Colin Flight.