

GHANA

Preliminary Report on Excavations Conducted in January 2005 at Wodoku, East Legon, Accra, Ghana

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Introduction

Between 26th January and 4th February 1998, the writer conducted a rescue excavation at Wodoku (5° 38' N, 0° 11' W), the ancestral home of the Nungwa people of Accra. The site, located 1.9 km east of the village of Bawaleshi and 1.6 km north-east of the Kotoka International Airport in a suburb of Accra known as East Legon, was threatened by building activities and it was hoped that the excavations would produce data on the pottery sequence, cultural affinity of the ceramics and chronology of the settlement (Boachie-Ansah 1998:1-18, 2004:217-228).

The 1998 excavations produced pottery similar to that from 16th and 17th century sites in the Accra Plains such as Ayawaso and Ladoku. Wodoku was considered to date to the 17th century. However, a fragment of a 16th century Type II Martinkamp-type flask from northern France was recovered at a depth of 1.1 m in one of the excavated pits in an area underlain by pottery in a soil of about 64 cm thick. This, together with the close similarity between Wodoku pottery and that of Ayawaso, a site now thought to have begun around 1500 to 1520 AD (Bredwa-Mensah 1990:156-157), opens the possibility for Wodoku to date back to the 16th century or even earlier. The 1998 excavations therefore pushed back the beginnings of the site by about a century. The continual destruction of the site by building activities necessitated further excavations in January 2005 in the hope of getting more data on the chronology of the settlement.

The Excavations

Two pits, each measuring 3 m², were dug in an area between the houses along a street known as the Ambassadorial Enclave and the wall housing the navigational devices of the Kotoka International Airport. The pits were excavated after a grid with a 3 m interval was laid, and were named by their south-west corners. Arbitrary levels of 20 cm each were adopted. The first pit, J27 or Pit 1, was opened 141 m to the fence wall of the house of Mohammed Ibn Chambas, the Executive Secretary of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The second pit, G27 or Pit 2, was opened 132 m east of the fence wall and 18 m north of Pit 1.

Pit 1 went down to a depth of 80 cm at its deepest. Four arbitrary levels were excavated. The first level contained grinding stones, pieces of iron slag, fragments of daub, potsherds, animal bones and mollusk shells. The second level contained similar finds as those of the first level. In addition, it contained small fragments of locally manufactured smoking-pipes, pieces of rusted iron and what appear to be parts of a copper alloyed chain or wire. The third level produced in addition to pottery, animal bones, mollusk shells, and a broken piece of a possible iron knife. Finally the fourth arbitrary level contained pottery and pieces of iron slag.

The four arbitrary levels could be divided into three natural levels with cultural materials and a fourth sterile level. The first natural level consisted of black humus soil of about 30 cm thick. It was underlain by a dark loamy soil, which on the average measured about 20 cm thick. This level was also underlain by a dark-brown loamy soil of about 44 cm thick. Below this level was a sterile layer of light brown sand. Pit 2 had only two arbitrary levels which constituted a single natural layer consisting of a black humus soil of about 30 cm thick. The humus soil was underlain by a sterile light-brown sandy soil. Finds from the pit consist of potsherds and grinding stones.

The Finds

The bulk of the finds consisted of pottery. Two wares were identified. The first consists of well-fired sherds with reddish-brown or black fabric. The in-

ner fabric of the sherds contains hornblende, garnet, lateritic concretions and quartz fragments. Many sherds are blackened with soot from an open air fire. The majority of the sherds are not burnished, and red-slipping was unpopular. The most popular decoration consists of multiple horizontal grooves. Other decorations consist of single grooves, single and multiple incisions, rim-lip notches, triangular stamps, dot stamps, short linear stabs or vertical incisions on necks, shoulders or bases of vessels, applied plastic decoration or embossment, usually consisting of cylindrical lobes of clay on the rim or bodies of vessels, comb stamps, what appears to be thumb impressions, and squarish stamps.

In some cases, two decorative techniques were employed on the same vessels. Combined decorations include grooves and cord roulette, grooves and squarish stamps, grooves and incisions, grooves and rim-lip notches, grooves and triangular stamps, grooves and comb stamps, grooves and dot stamps, grooves and short linear stabs or incisions, incisions and comb stamps, incisions and rim-lip notches, incisions on applied plastic decoration, comb stamps and dot stamps, and sub-triangular stamps-on-applied plastic decoration. In a few cases, three different decorative motifs were applied on the same vessels. These combined decorations are grooves, dot stamps and embossment, and grooves, finger impressions and triangular stamps.

Vessels have flowing rather than angular profiles. Bowls are more popular than jars. Jar forms include vessels with everted rims which curve smoothly to join the neck and with rim diameter averaging 16 cm; vessels whose everted rims curve sharply at both exterior and interior to join the constricted neck; and vessels with almost horizontally aligned rims and with rim diameter ranging between 14 and 24 cm. Bowls consist of hemispherical vessels with everted rims whose diameter is greater than body diameter, hemispherical vessels with incurved rims, hemispherical vessels with ridges separating the rim from the body or characterized by a hunch or a protuberance at the exterior rim, open hemispherical vessels with squared or tapered rim-lips, and hemispherical vessels with horizontally aligned rims which extend beyond the limits of the interior and exterior body wall, or beyond the exterior body wall. Hollow pedestalled bases, built separately and then attached to the main vessels are common. Ring bases are also characteristic.

The second ware is micaceous and consists of a well-fired pottery with specks of mica in the inner fabric and outer surface. The fabric is reddish-brown or blackish in color and some of the sherds contain quartz fragments and lateritic concretions. Like the first ware, vessels have flowing rather than angular profiles. Multiple horizontal grooves are the predominant decoration. Other decorations are single grooves, mainly on necks, shoulders and rim lips; multiple incisions; channeling; comb stamps; short linear stabs or incisions; and a combination of grooves and rim-lip notches. The majority of the sherds are burnished and the only vessel form of the ware consists of a jar with an everted rim which curves sharply at both exterior and interior to join the constricted neck.

Other finds include grinding stones, fragments of daub, pieces of iron slag, two heavily-weathered glass cane beads, and fragments of locally-manufactured clay smoking pipes. A partially broken pipe with an elliptical base was collected from the surface. It belongs to Ozanne's Type 1a and dated by him (Ozanne n. d.) to between AD 1640 and 1655/1660 on typological grounds and association with dateable European objects.

Mollusc shells from the surface of the site and from the excavations have been identified as *Thais callifera*, *Cypraea stercoraria*, *Cardium costatum*, *Arca senilis*, *Codokia eburnean*, *Conus* sp., *Triphora* sp., *Cypraea zonata*, *Cardium ringens*, *Mistra fusca*, *Ostrea denticulate*, *Donax acutangulus*, *Gadina afra*, *Pachymelania aurita*, *Architeconia nobilis*, *Tectarius granosus* and crayfish. Many of the animal bones could not be identified to specific species. A few of the rodent and reptile bones are those of the giant African rat and tortoise respectively. Fish bones, bones of unidentifiable birds and bovids as well as bones of *Bos taurus* were also found in the excavations.

Metal objects include a cuprous coiled, ring-like object from arbitrary Level 2 of Pit 1, and parts of a possible copper-alloyed chain or wire. Also found is a circular metal shaped like the rings of a car engine. This is certainly a very recent object which may have found its way into the soil as the surface of the soil was overturned in the course of making mounds for the cultivation of crops.

Discussion

The cuprous objects and the glass beads testify to trade with Europeans. The 16th century French stoneware and the cuprous objects found in the 1998 excavations, as well as a Rhenish stoneware found by Tawiah (1988:55) and dated by the Victoria and Albert Museum to AD 1600 to 1625 all indicate that the inhabitants of Wodoku participated in trade with Europeans on the coast. The site was advantageously located for trade, as it was only a few kilometers to the sea. It was also close to lagoons such as the Kpeshie Lagoon, a possible source of the mollusc found in the excavations. The excavated shells are from species which inhabit mangrove swamps, lagoons, and estuaries, and could have been collected from any of the nearby lagoons. Meat from cattle and bovids, some of which are likely to have been hunted, rodents such as the giant African rat and reptiles and birds provided good sources of protein.

No pipe fragments were found in the lowest levels of the excavated pits, a possible indication that these levels may predate the 17th century. However, the pipe from the surface of the site and the few fragments of smoking-pipes found in level 1 of Pit 2 and level 2 of Pit 1 indicate that even if the site's inception predated the 17th century, it continued to be occupied at this time.

The pottery found in the excavations is similar to that excavated at the same site in 1998, and to pottery from other sites in the Accra Plains including Ayawaso and the upper levels of Ladoku. Many of the decorations on Wodoku pottery are also characteristic of Cherekecherete Ware from which it certainly descended. Cherekecherete Ware has been dated at Ladoku to AD 1,400 ± 75 (Anquandah 1979:16-18, 1982a:143); at Kpone West to AD 150 ± 75 and AD 690 ± 90 (Sutton 1980: 2-3, 6, 1982a: 301; Calvocoressi and David 1979:17-18); and at Tema South-West to AD 400 ± 75 (Sutton 1982b:15). The ware therefore dates back to the early first millennium AD and continues until the middle of the second millennium AD.

Ozanne (1965:7) has suggested that Cherekecherete Ware may date back beyond the first millennium date obtained for the ware at Tema south-west. He maintains that the ware may have developed during the "Transitional Period", "the period during which stone was replaced by iron in many

parts of the technology and in which the first evidence of pottery occurs" (Ozanne 1965:6). According to him, "typical Cherekecherete sherds have been found on the Transitional site of East Legon and Legon Staff Village". These sites are very close to Wodoku. Ozanne has further observed that some of the decorations on Cherekecherete pottery such as "impressed and incised designs are not easily distinguishable from some found on earlier and later wares." It is therefore possible that Cherekecherete Ware has ancestral antecedents.

There are other indications that Cherekecherete Ware is quite old. A few of the potsherds excavated by Dombrowski at Gao Lagoon, a Late Stone Age site characterized by shells of molluscs, quartz flakes and pottery and dated by radio-carbon to 3,560 ± 60 BC and 3,900 ± 80 BC (Dombrowski 1977:30-34, 1980:3, Fig.1; Sutton 1982a:300, 312) have similar decorations. Decorations include squarish stamps, comb stamps, cross-hatched incisions, short linear oblique incisions or stabs, what appear to be finger impressions, and punctates or dot stamps below ridges on body sherds. Vessel forms include open hemispherical bowls with thick rim lips and jars with short everted rims similar to some of the vessel forms of Cherekecherete Ware. It is also interesting that the mollusc shells from Gao Lagoon include those usually associated with Cherekecherete Ware in other sites in the Accra Plains. Dombrowski (1977:32) has observed that some of the pottery may have been re-deposited from elsewhere. However, she insists that the bulk of the sherds as well as the quartz flakes associated with them were safely stratified in compact shell layers (Sutton 1982a:300).

In the light of the observations above, the possibility should not be ruled out that Cherekecherete Ware has its origins in the later phase of the Late Stone Age when pottery made its first appearance in the Accra Plains, and that there is continuity in pottery tradition from about 4,000 BC to the mid-second millennium AD. If this is true, then certain pertinent observations can be made about Ga-Dangme traditions of origin.

Cherekecherete Ware has been found in almost all sites traditionally claimed to be early Dangme settlements. These include Cherekecherete, Ladoku, Kpone, Tema, Adwuku (Anquandah 1979:14-18, 1982a:116; Sutton 1982b:15); Mampong, Tetedwa, Nanne, Pianoyo and Hiowoyo (Anquandah

1982b:15). Research in settlements in the Shai Hills where the ware is suspected to have been made has revealed continuity in potting traditions from the 14th to the 19th century (Anquandah 1982b:15-16). Quarcoo and Johnson (1968:55-56) have observed that ground up gneiss from the Shai Hills is used as temper by modern Shai potters. Cherekecherete Ware sherds were also tempered with the same material which is the source of the hornblende and garnet found in many of the excavated sherds. The pottery from Wodoku is also suspected to have been made in the Shai Hills because of similar temper. The continuity in potting traditions from the 14th to the 19th century (when potters of the Shai Hills were certainly Dangme) gives credence to the belief that the makers of Cherekecherete Ware were Dangme. It is perhaps for this reason that Anquandah (1979:18) has described Cherekecherete Ware from Ladoku as "Early Dangme" pottery.

Different oral traditions claiming that the Ga-Dangme migrated from areas in the east and north-east such as Nigeria, Benin Republic and Togo are common among the Dangme. As indicated elsewhere (Boachie-Ansah 1998:15, 2000:78), some scholars are skeptical about these traditions. Boahen (1977:94) for example, believes that these traditions may be a distortion of trading connections that existed between the Accra coast and Nigeria in pre-European times. On the other hand, Kropp Dakubu (1972:88) and others maintain that while these traditions cannot be taken for literal truth, they should not be regarded as historically meaningless. Kropp Dakubu (1972) has used place names and other linguistic clues, old maps and traditions of origins to show that there may be some substance in the claim that the ancestors of some of the Ga-Dangme may have migrated from the east or north-east of present day Ghana.

What archaeology seems to indicate is that the makers of Cherekecherete Ware, presumably Dangme, have been established in the Accra Plains for several centuries. The ware, certainly a genetic antecedent and ancestral to the pottery from Wodoku, has been found in several sites close to Wodoku, including the University of Ghana Drama Studio (Anquandah 1982b:16), Achimota, Christian's Village, Ormsby Road in Accra, East Legon, the University of Ghana Staff Village (Ozanne 1965:7-19) and Gbegbe, a lagoonal site south-west of Accra (Sutton 1980:2). While Cherekecherete Ware may

have its origins in the later part of the Late Stone Age, the data on which this inference is based is inadequate, and must therefore be supported with data from other sites. Unfortunately the pottery from the Late Stone Age level at Ladoku, above which the Cherekecherete Ware sherds were stratified, has not been described in detail. They are simply described as "stamped pottery associated with quartz flakes" (Anquandah 1982b:115). Attempts to locate the pottery in the store rooms of the Department of Archaeology, University of Ghana, have also not been fruitful.

In view of Ozanne's observation that Cherekecherete Ware may date back to a period of transition from the use of stone to iron, the data from Gao Lagoon, however inadequate, must not be dismissed lightly. There is a crying need for a detailed study of Late Stone Age pottery from the Accra Plains to confirm or refute Ozanne's claims. Be that as it may, Cherekecherete Ware has been found in quite an early context at Kpone West where two dates of AD 150 ± 75 and AD 690 ± 90 have been obtained. These dates are likely to predate the Ga-Dangme traditions of eastern origin. If the makers of the ware were the biological ancestors of today's Dangme as postulated here, then they have been established in the Accra Plains for a long time, at a period likely to predate the traditions of eastern origins usually associated with the Ga-Dangme.

The traditions of eastern origin may be the stories of a few powerful people who may have met an already established population who made Cherekecherete Ware and pottery genetically related to and antecedent to it. It is likely that the traditions are those of a few migrant people or peoples who met the Ga-Dangme people already established in the Accra Plains and that they have now been adopted as the traditions of the entire Ga-Dangme people, including those whose ancestors were not migrants.

The traditions of an eastern origin have been popularized by written sources and have overshadowed other Ga-Dangme traditions which suggest that some groups are autochthonous. In 1996, Mr. L B. Crossland was informed by the chief of Old Ningo that the ancestors of Ningo were not migrants but emerged from the Djange Lagoon located between Old and New Ningo. The leader of the ancestors of Old Ningo, according to the chief, was named Djangma. This tradition must be taken seriously in

the light of the ceramic evidence discussed in this paper.

It is likely that Dangme potters made both Cherekecherete Ware and the pottery from Wodoku. The latter descended from the former. This explains why the two pottery types have many decorations and vessel forms in common. At Ladoku, the Wodoku type of pottery was directly stratified above Cherekecherete Ware. Although the descendants of the inhabitants of Wodoku, the present-day Nungua people regard themselves as Ga, the original inhabitants of Ladoku were probably Dangme. This is supported by the fact that the name Wodoku, meaning “derelict” or “abandoned Wo” is a Dangme word. Another hint that the inhabitants of Wodoku were Dangme is provided by the name of one of the leaders of Wodoku, Bokete Lawei (see Field 1940:121). The name “Lawei” is a Dangme name used for a male twin (Kropp Dakubu 1997:110). It has also been argued that “Ga originated as Dangme in the mouths of a grouping of mostly Guan-speaking populations” and that “ease of intelligibility between Ga and Dangme probably declined rather abruptly” (Kropp Dakubu 1997:100). If the inhabitants of Wodoku were Dangme, then they belonged to the same ethnic group as the inhabitants of Ladoku, and this may explain the similarity between the pottery of Wodoku and that of the upper levels at Ladoku.

Conclusion

Field (1961:2) has noted that the earliest settlements of the Ga were located in hills. The portion of Wodoku that houses the navigational devices of the Kotoka International Airport is a small hill and the highest point on the site. It is possible that the earliest phase of the settlement is located in this area now walled by the Department of Civil Aviation, and a prohibited zone to the public. It is hoped that excavations would be conducted in this area if and when permission is granted by the Department of Civil Aviation.

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