

# **INTRODUCTION**

Thinking and writing  
on the past in Africa

## INTRODUCTION

**Alexandre Livingstone Smith<sup>1</sup> & Scott MacEachern<sup>2</sup>**

Is there anything to find in Africa? While the continent is generally acknowledged as the cradle of mankind, the general public is rarely aware of events following this almost mythical beginning. The African continent clearly has a past, but knowledge of this past is partial, filtered and sometimes biased. The reason for this denial of history is related to the international slave trade and the politics of colonial expansion, which certainly did not leave much room for mutual respect and enlightened exchange, but also to the fact that scientific research in colonial nations was dominated by evolutionist thought. The simplistic idea of opposing stereotypes, ‘industrial/dynamic’ and ‘traditional/unchanging’, is still strong today. Researchers most of the time find what they are looking for. History has long been a discipline devoted to only written sources, hence neglecting civilisations that are better known through other records such as archaeology. Needless to say, archaeology, like any historical discipline, is immersed within the social context in which it is practiced. Interpretation of archaeological data may therefore be affected by the interests of a researcher or of the community (s)he belongs to.

Archaeology has played an important role in political struggles across the African continent for more than a century, in very different contexts. In many countries, it has been used to build up nationalist feelings, or more generally to inculcate pride in the African past. In other cases, as at Great Zimbabwe, archaeological evidence was denied or distorted to support Eurocentric and colonialist assumptions about ancient societies. Researchers need to pay continuing attention to the social and political circumstances in which their research is undertaken and its results interpreted. The following papers should help in this respect, as they outline the history of the discipline and the state of the art from various points of view.

To start with, **John Sutton** outlines the role and the main characteristics of African archaeology. Our discipline is just one line of investigation, along with history, linguistics or anthropology, to name but a few. Looking at research designs and objectives, he distinguishes two schools: Universalists, for whom Africa is just a case study serving larger research objectives, and Africanists, whose aim is primarily the reconstruction of the African past. The needs of the latter explain how African History came to be ‘written’ or recorded by combining archaeology, anthropology, linguistics and local memories.

Focusing on the present situation, **Susan K. McIntosh** reviews the state of practice in archaeology, considering funding and priorities, theoretical and research agendas, project designs and stakeholder values. In doing so, she outlines the various key elements a researcher needs to take into account when conducting research on the African continent - or elsewhere. She makes it clear that a dialogue between all the

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parties involved in the outcome of an archaeological investigation is crucial. This means that, to comply with the tight schedule involved in grant proposals, a researcher needs to build a network with local and international parties that can be activated when a grant needs to be submitted.

**Moustapha Sall** elaborates on these questions from a West African point of view. Using Senegal as a case study, he considers the origin of archaeological research in the region and its transformation in the new independent states from the 1960s onward. He examines a series of key issues such as the cultural attribution of archaeological sites, the role of historical archaeology, heritage protection and the training of future generations of archaeologists. He emphasises the growing role of Heritage Management Studies and rescue excavations, yielding unbiased data since they are not problem oriented other than saving material traces of ancient human or hominin presence.

**Christophe Mbida Mindzie** examines this topic from a Central African perspective. Using the example of Cameroon, he explains how archaeology, considered an auxiliary to History, was developed by a combination of political decisions which promoted Cameroonian research institutions, national research programs, and collaborations with international teams. Considering the 21st century, he examines the benefits and drawbacks of preventive and rescue archaeology development.

## RECOVERING THE AFRICAN PAST: LOOKING BACK FROM THE PRESENT

John Sutton<sup>1</sup>

Archaeology, as the study of the landscape, and of every feature visible on its surface or revealed by excavation, is essential for understanding the past wherever people live or have lived. But it is not the sole method of historical enquiry. For in probing backwards from the present, the archaeological record can be correlated with anthropological insights, especially ethnographic studies and linguistics, as well as oral testimonies and written accounts, wherever available (see also Chapter 6 this volume). This methodology of historical reconstruction from multiple approaches has been pioneered in Africa where documentary sources – the traditional mainstay of historical research in Europe – exist for few regions only before the 20th century.

## I. ARCHAEOLOGY OF AND IN AFRICA

Individual archaeologists involved themselves in parts of sub-Saharan Africa before 1900 (and earlier still in Egypt). But in most countries structured and sustained research had to await the final years of colonial rule (1950s/60s) or the first decades of independence. The political upheavals of that period were accompanied by a radical demand, popular and intellectual at the same time, for explaining the background to Africa's peoples and cultures in a positive way – in contrast to the diffident view of African history typical of colonial administrations and their education departments. The establishment of universities, as well as national and regional museums and antiquities services in the mid-twentieth century, opened institutional bases for a scattering of archaeologists across the continent. These pioneers, mostly expatriate at first, had each their own specialisation by region, period and theme. There were contrasts in purpose and outlook too, which have persisted as research has expanded. Putting it simply, archaeologists active in Africa belong to two schools or 'clubs' – what might be labelled the 'universalist' and the 'Africanist' traditions. The distinctions are not clear-cut; these two broad traditions are not overtly opposed. Where they differ is in their visions and agendas.

## A. Universalists

The universalist school is concerned for archaeology as a worldwide academic discipline (one usually seen in North America as a division of anthropology). Accordingly it selects regions for fieldwork and promising sites for excavation, in Africa as elsewhere, for testing general hypotheses and for understanding human lifeways and adaptations from the earliest times to the recent past. These researchers do, of course, take proper note of local factors and signs of changes in the environment through time, these being central to their purpose of recognising the range of human cultures between the continents and within them. But at its purest – if one may characterise – this 'club' is focussed less on Africa and its history as such than on addressing universal questions of archaeological and anthropological theory, practice and interpretation. Its emphasis is on ideas worth testing *in* Africa, rather than the archaeology – and history – *of* Africa and its parts.

Such an approach applies especially to Stone Age archaeology and palaeoanthropology, that is, the study of humans from their emergence as upright tool-making animals in Africa some two million years ago (not to overlook yet older pre- and proto-humans). As is well known, much of the field research responsible for current knowledge of human evolution, not simply physical (through discoveries of fossil bones) but also behavioural (through study of their environments, living places and tool-kits), has since the mid-twentieth century concentrated on the eastern side of Africa. Olduvai in Tanzania, with its exceptional succession of fossil-bearing deposits and Early-Stone-Age tools, is but one of many important sites (**fig. 1**). As a result, the evidence that the evolution of humanity occurred in Africa is now beyond dispute. But that conclusion is only a starting point for increasingly sophisticated questions, in which the African finds, and their detailed laboratory examinations by anatomists and other scientists, assume worldwide significance. For no one 'owns' the past; human history, from its beginning to the present, belongs to everyone.

The complex issue of expansion of humanity from Africa into Eurasia (and eventually around the globe) is

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**Fig. 1.** Two million years of evolving human history revealed at Olduvai Gorge (northern Tanzania), a massive erosion gully cutting through 100 meters of successive Pleistocene layers, including volcanic ash and tuffs. Most of these deposits had formed in shallow alkaline lakes, a situation ideal for bone fossilisation. The site achieved international fame in the late 1950s through the discoveries in the lowest strata (by Louis and Mary Leakey) of fossil remains of *Australopithecines* and *Homo habilis*. (Photo © J. Sutton.)



**Fig. 2.** Rubbish dumps, a key to the history of town settlements, as at Ntusi (western Uganda), a centre of sorghum cultivation surrounded by a specialised cattle grazing zone, c1000-1400 AD. Two 5-metre dumps – known as ‘Ntusi male’ and ‘female’ – testify to an organised system of disposal of domestic refuse, notably cattle bones, charred sorghum seeds and broken pots, and illustrate the balanced agricultural and herding economy. The pasturing of the finest cattle in these rich undulating grasslands is recalled in the regional traditions of gods and heroes. (Photo © J. Sutton.)

of obvious interest to people everywhere. Moreover, it has now become clear that such ‘Out of Africa’ movements happened more than once. The first occurred hundreds of thousands of years ago, involving pre-*sapiens* humans with Early-Stone-Age traditions of manufacturing and using tools for everyday living dependent on gathering and hunting. Eventually their descendants were superseded by modern humans (*Homo sapiens*), an advanced species which also evolved within Africa and developed more versatile cultures and behaviour (including, so recent research suggests, artistic sense and skills). Offshoots of *Homo sapiens* spread into Asia less than a hundred thousand years ago – only ‘yesterday’ in overall human history – and reached more distant continents much later still.

This broad picture emerges partly from fossil found in Africa as well as in Eurasia at the same time, and their dating in laboratories (equipped for the latest isotopic measuring processes of carefully collected samples), but also from recent advances in comparative genetics (especially DNA). The details, naturally, are in flux as research continues. That involves not only teams of archaeologist and geologist fieldworkers, but equally palaeontologists and anatomists for studying the fossils and conferring with geneticists (based in museums and medical faculties around the world) as well as the dating laboratories. Thus the search for archaeological remains of early *Homo sapi-*

*ens* in Africa, that is for fossilised skeletal materials and, equally important, associated Stone Age finds and their contexts (environmental, climatic etc), is – like that for the evolution of the genus *Homo* over the preceding one, two and more million years – an international concern, relevant to public thirst for knowledge worldwide. Research in a single continent, whether in archaeology or any other science, cannot be isolated from the world at large.

### B. Africanists

The second tradition of archaeologists active in Africa – the more avowedly Africanist school – is not a formally separate ‘club’; in fact, some might deny a real distinction. Nevertheless, there is a contrast in outlook and emphasis. Whereas the first school consists of specialists at work on all types of sites (and of all ages too) which happen to be *in Africa*, the other’s concern is for the archaeology of *Africa*, with a commitment to ‘rediscover’, region by region, bit by bit, the *history* of the continent and its *existing* peoples and cultures within their environments. And these environments, it should be emphasised, are those which the same populations have helped create over time, particularly by clearing land for cultivation of various crops and grazing by their cattle and other livestock. That means concentrating on a relatively short time-scale, stretching back centuries or the last few millennia, usually with marginal concern for the Stone Age.

This impetus for researching the background to the present African populations emerged, effectively, in the 1950s/60s as the clamour for independence from colonial rule reverberated around the continent. In that situation it was only natural that popular demands extended beyond mere politics to the spheres of culture and education. In short, a new vision of Africa and its people was being called for, with priority for the writing of histories – continental, national and regional, including those of particular ethnicities and ancient kingdoms. This was the start of an intellectual revolution, seeing that before independence the notion of *pre-colonial* African history had been generally dismissed as impossible owing to the lack of ‘sources’ (meaning written documents in the established tradition of European thinking). For what had been labelled ‘History of Africa’ in colonial-era schools concentrated on foreign explorers, traders, Christian missionaries, soldiers and eventually administrators, in which African people figured secondarily, almost as an afterthought. By the same colonial mentality, instances of enlightenment, development, technical initiative, political sophistication or what was vaguely called ‘civilization’ were explained as having reached Africa by some process of diffusion from outside. That image of Africa had to change!

The reason for the former entrenched ‘Eurocentric’ bias was not a lack of research on African societies but, rather, one of vision and direction. For, from the beginning of the twentieth century many parts of the continent had proved fertile ground for anthropological recording – by colonial administrators, missionaries and, in time, trained academics. The quality of their formidable published output was variable, but the finest studies contain informative and perceptive accounts of individual African societies at that time, as well as detailed grammars of their languages. Thus these pioneering field anthropologists ensured that a vast amount of invaluable documentation has been saved for posterity. However, their perspective was generally not so much historical as ethnographic, that is, focussed on describing the ‘traditional’ culture and institutions of each so-called ‘tribe’, as if these existed in an essentially changeless present-past. Not surprisingly, for the spirit of the ‘African awakening’ of the 1950s/60s, such a static and patronising image of pre-colonial Africa and its peoples looked seriously inadequate. The need now was for a dynamic vision, one charting historical development and duly recognising indigenous African initiatives and

achievements – an endeavour which would engage an emerging generation of African scholars. As for research method, the old excuse of the sparsity of written materials could no longer be acceptable. New sources and techniques of historical enquiry needed to be identified and explored. An obvious way forward was to examine the landscape, searching for signs of former settlement and activity on the ground, in other words to turn to archaeology – especially of what came to be called the African Iron Age (see **figs. 2** and **3a & b**).

## II. AFRICAN HISTORY: COMBINING EVIDENCE FROM ARCHAEOLOGY, ANTHROPOLOGY, LANGUAGES AND LOCAL MEMORIES

This archaeological commitment, from its patchy first efforts of the mid-twentieth century in western, central and eastern Africa, thus focussed on the existing populations of Africa and how they had come into being. It endeavoured, with the help of local informants as well as available ethnographic knowledge, to probe backwards through the preceding generations, to ‘open a window’ as it were into the past and especially to grasp any available chronological clues. The perspective, therefore, was on discovering the background to the present over recent centuries or, in some cases, the last thousand years or more. If that sounds vague, it is because in the 1950s and 60s so little was documented or dated – the radiocarbon method being new and barely tested then – that the horizons of research initiatives were hazy. In fact, enthusiasm and speculation were apt to race ahead of solid research results, with the agenda being driven by general historians (their fashionable catchphrases and all) and by popular and educational demand, as much as by the few archaeologists on the ground. Sites were selected for excavation by their prominent features (for example mounds of different types or unclear purposes, walls interpreted rightly or wrongly as fortifications, and village settlements identified by broken pottery eroding out), or again places reputed to have been royal capitals, according to traditional authorities. Thus, despite rather haphazard beginnings, what was labelled ‘Iron Age’ or sometimes ‘historical archaeology’ developed across Africa; and, as a sub-discipline, it soon distinguished itself from so-called ‘prehistory’, the domain of Stone Age specialists. The emphasis on the working and use of iron – some two thousand years old in parts of sub-Saharan Africa,



**Fig. 3.** Town walls and their gates: rules of entry and exclusion, symbols of power and the pride of history.

**(a)** Surame (north-western Nigeria), a capital of the Kebbi kingdom of 16th-17th centuries surrounded by double concentric stone walls. A century after Surame's desertion, the site was rediscovered by the Fulani jihadists – 'These ruins are like nothing we have seen before' – and inspired them in building their new capital at nearby Sokoto.

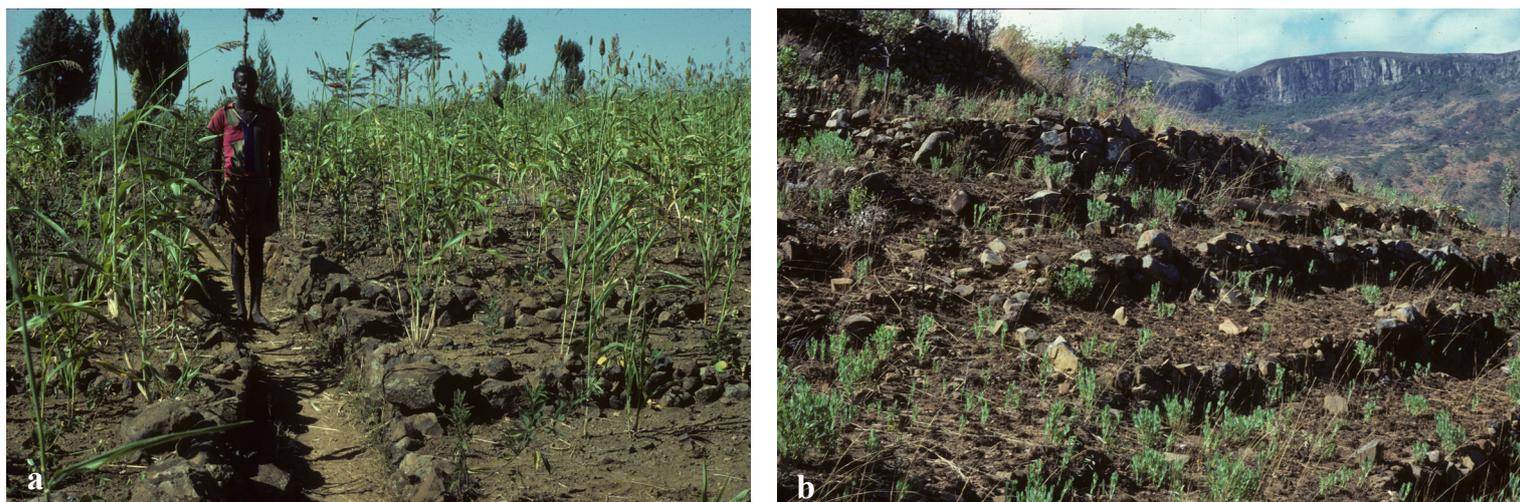
**(b)** Zaria, the capital of the former Hausa kingdom of Zazzau, conquered by the Fulani jihadists in the early 19th century and reduced to an emirate within the Sokoto empire. Like other old Hausa cities, it boasts stretches of prominent walls (typically built of sundried brick) with guarded gateways. But the heavy gates reinforced with iron strips have long gone, and the case for protection and conservation of what remains is obvious. (Photos © J. Sutton.)

as became clear with improved handling of radiocarbon testing – and equally on the development of regional agricultural (and also pastoral) economies, set the scene for more systematically designed research across the continent in the following decades.

Certain of the practitioners concentrated essentially on the archaeological sites and finds and in reporting them in specialist monographs and journals (including those published by learned societies in several African countries). Others, committed to 'outreach', tried interpreting the results more broadly and maintaining close rapport with the History schools in the new African universities, as well as in European institutions (where valuable library, archival and museum collections were attracting increased attention, spurred by the growing popularity of African Studies, especially in North America). Moreover, dialogue was encouraged with scholars in other disciplines relevant to the pre-colonial past. These comprised, in summary, oral traditions (and 'folklore') and surviving written references (in Arabic and European languages); and anthropology generally defined, but particularly ethnography (with details of social organization, economy and material culture, recorded 'tribe'

by 'tribe'), and especially comparative linguistics. This last discipline has proved enormously important not only in charting historical relationships between communities over time, but equally valuably, through attention to sound- and meaning-shifts, for documenting cultural and economic innovations (from crops and agricultural methods to technology and trade), and the order in which such developments and their expansions occurred.

While truly multi-disciplinary field projects were few at first, what mattered was the emerging principle of combining these varied approaches for reconstructing pre-colonial African history. In retrospect, some early cross-disciplinary exercises were conceived too narrowly and simplistically. For instance, excavations undertaken at shrines or claimed capitals (notably in the interlacustrine region of East Africa), in the hope of verifying legendary names and confirming the dating of specific events through recitations of oral traditions and lists of kings, would now appear rather naive. But in time Africanist archaeologists – and historians generally – have learned from social anthropologists to be less concerned about the literal accuracy of oral testimonies (and equally of written ones too), or regarding them sim-



**Fig 4.** Ethnography and Archaeology: terraced and manured sorghum fields. **(a)** existing (crossed by path for villagers and small cattle), Konso (Ethiopia); **(b)** abandoned 200-300 years ago, Nyanga (Zimbabwe). (Photos © J. Sutton.)

plistically as sources of dated ‘facts’. Instead, they have come to appreciate the deeper significance of traditional lore and the realm of so-called ‘myth’ for understanding both the present and the past of societies and their cultures. Indeed, although the human sciences in Africa are no longer monopolised by anthropologists, the latter – and their cumulative work – play an essential role in modern historians’ thinking. Archaeologists take note!

This particularly holds when drawing on ethnography, especially aspects of material culture, for interpreting archaeological findings. Some earlier attempts to compare specific settlement features and household items, as recovered by excavation, with existing ‘traditional’ examples (of house types, pottery styles, ironworking etc.) may, in retrospect, look facile and crude, being too selective while overlooking essential context. This is where a perceptive anthropologist’s eye and ear could have offered a corrective. But recognition of previous inadequacies does not mean that ethnographic analogy should be eschewed as a way towards understanding the findings from excavations (**fig. 4**).

For, implicitly at least, all archaeological interpretations, whether of whole sites or landscapes or of individual objects recovered, rely on reasoning from the present. More explicitly, tentative conclusions can often be tested by suitably designed experiments, especially if undertaken with the cooperation – intellectual as well as manual – of the local community. Essential here, for comparative purposes and regional historical reconstruction, is the indigenous terminology for each material item, process or even concept, which means that the exercise needs a linguist with local experience or at least a sensitive translator. Some of the most fruitful of such ethno-archaeological projects have extended into detailed studies of rural villages, their compounds and building methods in action, as well as their land use, year-round agricultural strategy and crops, and the associated technology. Thus, with proper handling and without undue sentimentality – which means rejecting the nostalgic vision of a ‘traditional’, unchanging Africa before foreign intervention – one may begin to discern both ‘the past in the present’ and ‘the present in the past’, and, by broadening the perspective, the place of Africa in world history.

## ARCHAEOLOGY IN AFRICA: WHO OR WHAT SETS THE AGENDA?

Susan Keech McIntosh<sup>1</sup>

For anyone wishing to undertake archaeological research in Africa, there are opportunities galore to provide pioneering insights in unstudied areas, to establish basic chronological frameworks and create reference databases, or to revisit sites excavated in prior decades and expand existing information. The ratio of practicing archaeologists to habitable land mass in Africa is staggeringly low. In some countries (e.g., Guinea Conakry, Guinea Bissau), there are no professional archaeologists in universities or government offices; at the other pole, uniquely, is South Africa, with numerous and diverse archaeological expertise and well-funded research carried out in numerous institutional contexts. Countries such as Senegal, Morocco, Egypt, Kenya, Botswana, Nigeria, and Ghana occupy positions more or less midway between these two poles.

The development of archaeology within Africa has been highly uneven, varying from country to country as a function of local colonial and post-independence experiences with professional training, institution-building, and funding. This is also the case for our knowledge of Africa's past. Certain time periods and geographical areas have been favored for study, while vast sectors of Africa remain uninvestigated. This uneven, profoundly partial landscape of knowledge can be attributed to three dominant factors (Stahl 2004):

1. The questions archaeologists choose to investigate, which are underlain by all manner of assumptions about the nature of African societies past and present;
2. How sites are valued or identified as 'significant' – a factor clearly related to the first factor;
3. Access to funding for fieldwork, analysis and publication, archaeological training, and institutional frameworks providing facilities, support, and the rationale for archaeological research.

Archaeological agendas in Africa have been, and continue to be, fashioned on the basis of implicit or explicit applications of theory and theory-laden concepts, almost all of which originated outside the continent. During the colonial period, the Enlightenment historical narrative of social and technological progress was deeply embedded in the Three-Age system that was transposed with

only partial success to Africa. The colonial, imperial enterprise was well-served by the belief that Africa was an unprogressive continent, timeless and unchanging. 'As we see them today, thus have they ever been', Hegel proposed. The primary theoretical framework deployed by the small number of archaeologists in the colonial service from the 1930s onward was culture history, a descriptive approach to identifying normative material culture groupings. Thought by some to be a value-neutral approach to the past, culture history in fact had little in its conceptual toolkit to explain culture change. Rather, it often relied on diffusion and migration to account for change, and exogenous influences were regularly invoked to account for technological innovation or monumentality – from Great Zimbabwe to the megaliths and tumuli of the western Sudan.

After independence, the focus of archaeology shifted in most countries away from universal histories/prehistories, into which Africa had figured marginally, to local and national histories. Profoundly aware of the loss of traditional histories and oral traditions that had occurred during the colonial period, Africans in many countries turned to archaeology as a primary mechanism to regain and re-establish their pasts. In these countries, a nationalistic archaeology focussed on recent periods – from the origins of food production through to the trans-Atlantic era – emerged. Part of the new agenda for archaeology was refuting the view of Africa as an unprogressive backwater. The processual paradigm of the 'New Archaeology' that developed in England and America in the late 1960s and 1970s, with its emphasis on explaining endogenous culture change, was well-suited to this new agenda, despite the shortcomings that would be critiqued by the post-processualists beginning in the 1980s. British and American researchers in several countries worked within the processual paradigm and began to train students. Throughout most of Africa, however, culture history continued as the dominant framework for both local archaeologists and foreign researchers from different countries throughout western Europe. Robertshaw (1990) provides details on the differential development of theory, practice and archaeological research agendas in different regions of Africa during the colonial and post independence pe-

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riods. A number of African countries sent students for archaeological training in the then USSR and Soviet bloc countries including Poland, but Soviet archaeology never significantly shaped archaeological agendas, as it funded very few archaeological projects in Africa.

#### I. FUNDING AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL PRIORITIES

The African archaeologists I interviewed for this chapter were clear that money drives agendas in African archaeology. Externally-funded projects account for the majority of archaeological research in many countries, and the agendas are set by European and North American researchers as they write their grant proposals.

Within individual African countries, internal agendas and priorities for archaeological research, conservation of archaeological sites, and rescue work depend on institutional contexts, professional capacity and infrastructure, all of which reflect current and historical funding levels. Heritage management, linked to tourism, is often the best developed sector, but decisions about archaeological heritage may be in the hands of government employees with management background rather than archaeological training. National legislation regarding development and cultural resource management opens another research avenue in certain countries, where CRM occupies a tiny but growing aspect of archaeology. In most countries, trained archaeologists located in universities and government entities such as Institutes of Human Sciences or Directorates of Monuments and Museums provide the primary personnel for archaeological fieldwork. Depending on the country, these archaeologists may be stymied by weak antiquities legislation or lack of enforcement, not to mention low to non-existent levels of funding for their own research and for field training for students. It is not uncommon for research and training funds for entire archaeology departments in Africa to range from several hundred to less than \$5000 per year. Under such circumstances, foreign projects may provide a very welcome opportunity for both research partnerships with local archaeologists and field training for local university students. One difficulty that can arise is the disconnect that often exists between the government directorate that issues permits for archaeological research and the relevant university archaeology faculty. Although assigned a government ‘homologue’ who earns a *per diem* for participating in the project, a foreign researcher often needs to reach out personally to colleagues in university archaeology departments in order

to locate faculty collaborators and students interested in gaining fieldwork experience. Ideally (and circumstances are often less than ideal), these contacts and conversations will be initiated as the project is being formulated rather than after the project has been funded. The chance for students to work on some of the project materials for master’s theses or student papers may also be appropriate and greatly appreciated.

#### II. THEORETICAL AGENDAS

Theory is fundamental to archaeological agendas and influences the kinds of questions we ask about the past, the observations and data that we consider relevant, and the interpretations we offer. Whether or not we acknowledge and make explicit our theoretical orientation, it undergirds all of our archaeological activities. Concerns with theory making and its articulation with the formulation of research questions, research design, data collection and analysis, and the evaluation of interpretations or hypotheses were foregrounded in the New Archaeology in the 1960s and 1970s. Subsequent decades have seen an explosion of archaeological theories, accompanied by shifts (styled as ‘turns’) in orientation and preoccupation: the 1980s brought the ‘critical turn’ (variously described as the literary, reflexive, post-modern, post-structural, or interpretive turn); linguistic, somatic, and material turns, and (most recently) the ontological turn have followed. Most of these shifts originated in disciplines other than archaeology. Indeed, some have accused archaeology of having no theory of its own, relying instead on mining other fields for new ideas and constructing bridging arguments to operationalize them for archaeological data (Yoffee & Sherratt 1993). A diversity of interpretive frameworks, each presenting a different ‘window of observation’ on the archaeological past, appeared in rapid succession from the 1970s onward: economic, ecological, behavioral, spatial, symbolic, structuralist, post-structuralist, evolutionary, Annaliste, cognitive, feminist, social, and landscape archaeologies, among others. The primary producers of this shifting theoretical landscape were and are academic archaeologists in Britain and North America, where the political economy of knowledge production favors the theoretical innovator who can build a following. The prize is status, conferred by citation counts and job offers from influential, well-funded departments where particular theories gain adherents among networks

of colleagues and graduate students. The objective of these theoretical engagements is of course an expanded, preferably transformed understanding of various pasts. Whether particular theories achieve this, or whether they are merely transitory shifts in fashion may not become apparent for some time (Trigger 1990).

The African archaeologists I interviewed are keenly aware that archaeological theory is externally derived and that foreign researchers generally set their own agendas. Their assessment is that, in general, local archaeologists in their universities don't concern themselves much with theory. In some cases, the 'Eurocentric' nature of theory is cited as a rationale for ignoring it, resulting, ironically, in minimal engagement with the development of theories more appropriate for African data. Outside of South Africa, it is primarily archaeologists with recent North American or European Ph.D.s who incorporate theoretical considerations actively and self-consciously in their teaching and research. Their concern is to encourage more explicit framing of research questions by students and more critical thinking about the kinds of data collection and analysis needed to address those questions.

### III. RESEARCH AGENDAS, PROJECT DESIGN, AND STAKEHOLDER VALUES

Whatever the theoretical orientation or research agenda of a foreign-funded project, a key element must be a research design, crafted in advance, that takes into consideration the range of stakeholders in the project and the social interests involved. For an approach to research design that integrally incorporates stakeholder interests along with the demands of an academically rigorous field archaeology, there are few guides better than Martin Carver's *Archaeological Investigation* (2009). He reminds us that 'archaeological investigation is powered by design, linking what is done with its purpose, reconciling the diverse agendas that fieldwork must satisfy, balancing its objectives, its ability to read the ground, its social context...[W]ithout a...project design, a field archaeology project must be judged at best inept, at worst unethical.'

A useful concept here is Carver's (2009) 'value-led archaeology', which evaluates the different values placed on a particular site or landscape that is the proposed tar-

get of research. Potential stakeholders range from local and descendant communities to national and even global interests, all of which need to be consulted and acknowledged alongside academic interests, ideally as part of the research design. Meaningful dialogue that is respectful of stakeholder concerns and viewpoints can open up new ways of thinking about the research and suggest valuable collaborations. It cannot eliminate conflict where various interests collide, but it can and should be an arena to demonstrate openness, sensitivity, and good faith. Wherever possible, research design and implementation should strive to create additional value for local stakeholders, including archaeologists, students, and community members, through active engagement, collaboration, and sharing of information. A project design should be a consultation document, containing 'proposed programmes designed to serve research, conservation, and other interests. Its importance lies in its acknowledgement that historic resources are about to be expended and that we seek broad consent. Its utility lies in the exercise of deciding exactly what to do and costing it. Its social purpose is to take field research out of its academic enclave and to place it at the heart of the modern community.' (Carver 2009).

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## ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN WEST AFRICA: THE CASE OF SENEGAL

Moustapha Sall<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

In West Africa, as in other countries on the continent, archaeology was introduced by European colonial administrators and doctors. The founding of the Institut français d'Afrique noire (IFAN) in August 1936 reflects this influence. Established in Dakar, this federal institute covered all of French West Africa and became a genuine focal point for research (mandatory depositing of all discovered materials). These ambitions gave rise to research campaigns, but also to academic bulletins (*Bulletins de l'IFAN* and *Notes africaines*) that publicised all such discoveries in West Africa and above all enhanced the value of sites. Enthusiasts in Senegal thus became interested in remains for a variety of reasons. Some wanted to reconstruct part of the history of the Senegal River's middle valley, others to solve the mystery of megaliths, still others to establish the origin of hundreds of shell middens on the coast.

Since this (colonial) period, research campaigns have focused on the precolonial past and fall under three chronological benchmarks. The first campaigns, by amateurs such as de Mézière, Jouenne and Joire, contributed to the discovery of sites and the identification of cultural and technological behaviours. In the 1970s and 1980s, the first professional research teams were formed by the same foreigners and joined by nationals in the context of their individual academic studies, with marked interest in Palaeolithic, Neolithic and protohistoric sites.

Even though this research contributed to the discovery of sites, the academic approach of archaeology paid little attention to societal issues. Taught to very few students, the discipline was characterised by its isolation and silence on the debates of the time (Egyptian origins and identities of Senegambian populations). This interest in links between archaeological remains and populations generated its first data in the 1970s. Ethnologists, during a long, wide-ranging campaign to survey village traditions, became pioneers of inventorying the archaeological landscape, producing the current map

of protohistoric sites (Martin & Becker 1974; **fig. 1**). However, during the second half of the 1980s, advances were made both in methodology and interpretation. In addition to a traditional approach, progressive recourse to other methods (ethnography, history) in the study of Iron Age sites helped show that these stones, waste piles of waste materials, mystical places and haunted (in popular perception) cemeteries are veritable libraries quite capable of telling the history of each site and transcending current ideological representations.

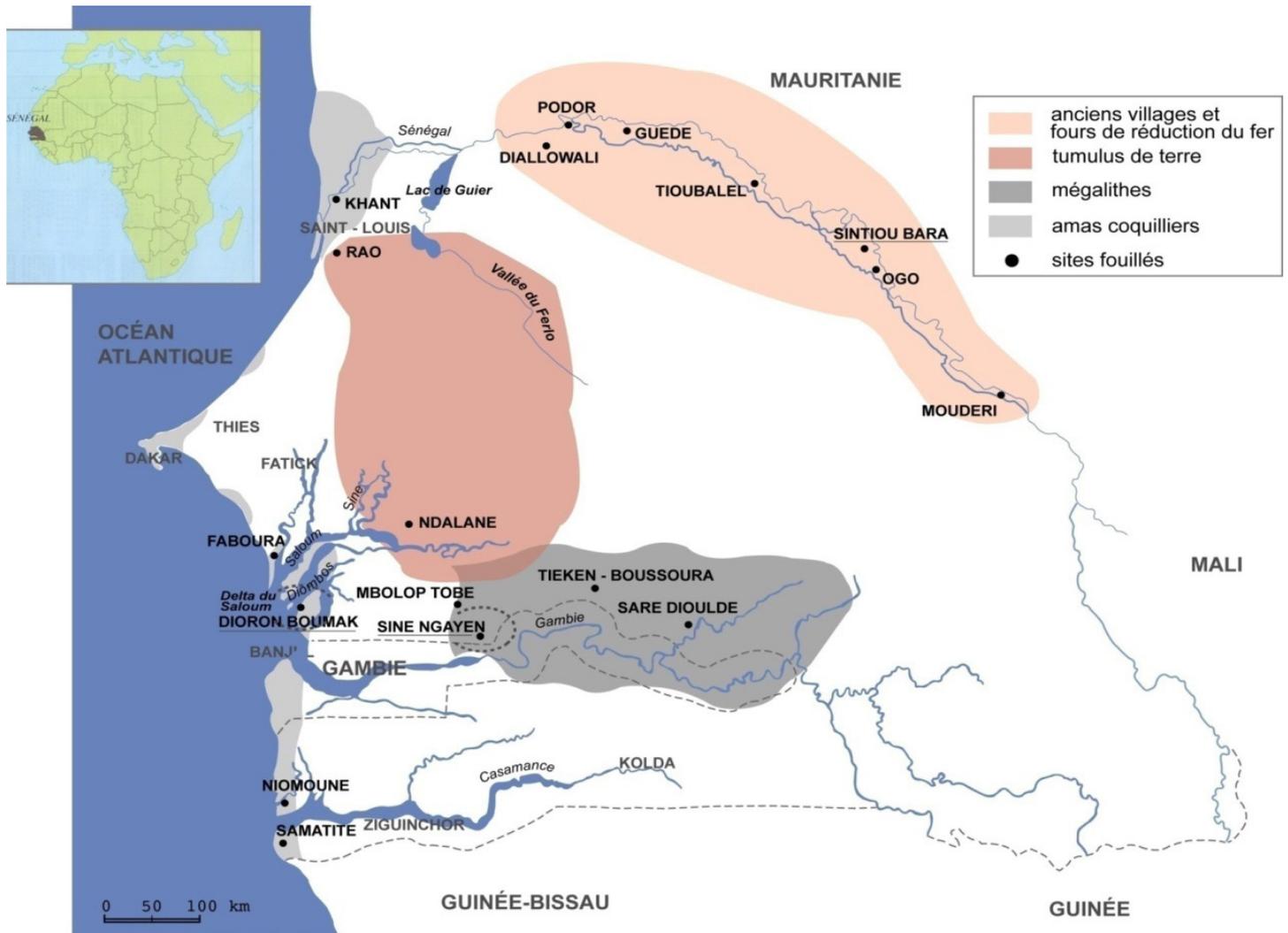
## I. PAST AND ARCHAEOLOGY: THE EXAMPLE OF SENEGAL

The settlement history of Senegal is marked by the presence of several archaeological (prehistoric, Neolithic and protohistoric) sites.

Of these cultures, we will approach those related to the Iron Age (protohistory) and that have attracted the most research. Indeed, in addition to the work of pioneers such as Bonnel, de Mézières and Monod, non-archaeologists (ethnologists) identified four categories of cultural behaviour of ancient populations. The first, covering many sites in the country's north, particularly in the Senegal River valley, is the 'ancient Sereer village zone'. The second, 'shell midden zone', is related to eating habits (gathering and cooking molluscs and disposing of their shells) and is characterised by an accumulation of disposed shells and its reuse for funerals. The third, 'tumulus zone', encompasses many sand mounds in the central-west. The fourth includes significant megalithic circles and scree circles.

Although this inventory helped prove the extent of archaeological remains, it sparked debate over the definition of an archaeological culture. An interesting reading of this archaeological landscape shows one area reserved exclusively for housing (ancient villages of the Senegal River valley), another area for eating (shell middens), and two areas for burial (tumuli and megaliths) albeit with different burial styles. Even if the approach of these non-archaeologists was subject to criticism, there is no question that professional archaeologists, though driven by differ-

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Répartition des vestiges "protohistoriques" du Sénégal

Fig. 1. Archaeological zones inventoried by ethnologists. (© M. Sall)

Legend below: distribution of 'protohistoric' remains in Senegal. Legend top right, from top to bottom: ancient villages and iron smelting furnaces, earthen tumuli, megaliths, shell middens and excavated sites.

ent interests and having profound differences of opinion, subsequently strove to conduct their research within these divisions. The characterisation of the Senegal River valley sites (McIntosh & Bocoum 2000) is a perfect example. The same is true for the megaliths and tumuli, with a separation between housing and funerary sites.

Dating this archaeological landscape helped place each site chronologically. The occupation of the middle valley of the Senegal River dates from the first millennium A.D. to modern times; the megaliths from the 4th century BC to the 16th century; the tumuli to no later than the 13th century. The central-west shell middens accumulated between the 7th and 13th centuries AD, whereas those in the south accumulated over a longer duration, from 200 BC to the present day (de Sapir 1971).

### A. Cultural attribution

As for identifying the people who created these sites, a brief overview shows that several methods were used. Ethnologists resorted to the local traditions of certain populations and to analogies between the cultural behaviours, morphology and functions of certain sites in order to attribute most of them (ancient villages of the Senegal River valley, tumuli, and shell middens of the central-west) to Sereer populations. The archaeologists mention no link between the megaliths and any cultural group (Sall 2005).

Other archaeologists took advantage of the variability of discovered materials (especially ceramics) to place certain sites in political, historical and social contexts (Thilmans & Ravisé 1980). Applying the generic



**Fig. 2.** Featured archaeological sites in the heart of Dakar (capital of Senegal). (Photos © M. Sall.)

identity ‘Sudan’ to all black populations who lived or passed through the Senegal River valley was not supported by archaeologists who attributed certain sites to the Sereer (Sall 2005).

Regarding the shell middens of the south (Casamance), the first archaeological research helped identify four phases of occupation stretching across 19 centuries. The author interpreted these phases based on analogies between past and present ceramics and hypothesised the presence of two groups. The Diola was such a group beginning in the 7th century (de Sapir 1971). However, the interpretation of the pre-eminence of the Diola presence was put into perspective by other ethnoarchaeological research, local traditions and written sources (Sall 2005).

This brief overview of the cultural study of archaeological sites, and above all of methods of interpretation, shows an evolution in the use of some tools. The duration of occupation of some sites until the modern (historical) period and the reference to cultural groups inspired new thinking.

### **B. Historical archaeology**

Unlike the approach of archaeological pioneers in Senegal, the new generation of archaeologists (five out of ten

active in the country) began a vast study of historical sites in the late 1990s.

In this context the first surveys targeted ‘deserted villages’, with particular attention to the causes of their abandonment (Diop 1985). Others targeted the slave trade, with major excavations carried out on Gorée Island (Thiaw 2010).

The same perspective is noted in the south (Casamance). Indeed, a critical review of the studies addressing the populations of Senegal shows that the long history of this region, which occupies a very important place relative to the sub-region’s anthropological issues, remained obscure. Like the Senegal River valley, this region was a melting pot of civilisations where several peoples (Baynunk, Manding, Diola, Sereer, Wolof, Balantes, Peul, Manjaques, Mancagnes, Aramé and Pépels) came to settle in order to benefit from its specific ecological conditions. Analysing this cultural dynamic was subject to archaeological, historical, anthropological, linguistic, geographical, etc., approaches whose conclusions are far from exhaustive or convergent (Sall 2005).

To better understand this dynamic, in addition to my ethnoarchaeological studies, I began archaeological research (surveys and excavations) on ancient Baynunk

villages in the area between the Gambia (Brefet & Bintang) and Guinea-Bissau. Our recent archaeological excavations (2011-12) in ancient Baynouk areas (Djibonker & Butimul) reflect a Baynouk presence in the west, between 1539 and 683 B.C. (dates not yet calibrated). These excavations are being complemented by others at the sites of Gonoum and Koubone (which the Baynouk consider their oldest sites). Surveys in 2014 mobilised 150 Department of History students, attracted by the new emphasis on the archaeology of living societies.

## II. ARCHAEOLOGY, ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONUMENTS AND THE PUBLIC

The colonial period's archaeological dynamics did not survive the successful independence movements of the 1960s. Indeed, in Senegal, even if IFAN remained a major research institute, the country's cultural policy neglected this method (archaeology) of documenting the country's cultural history. Such negligence was reflected in the lack of financial backing and above all at the legislative level in Law no. 71-12 of 25 January 1971, which established rules for historical monuments, excavations and discoveries. These rules provided inadequate protection, which had harmful consequences for archaeological sites. Many of them (to which the local populations recognise no connection whatsoever) were literally razed by public authorities and entrepreneurs. Sites in the capital (Dakar) that had been so proudly shown to visitors during the colonial period were not spared (**fig. 2**).

On the other hand, colonial historical monuments (on Gorée, in Dakar and Saint-Louis), the object of the first national and world heritage classification proposals, were well-protected. These were accorded the most importance in schools, and students often mix them in with all archaeology and/or cultural heritage.

However, in addition to the state, people are a serious threat to archaeological monuments and pose the problem of cultural attribution. Indeed, archaeologists often tend to attribute archaeological sites to ancient populations whose descendants live right nearby; but what about the latter's perception? In the Senegal River valley, Halpulaar consider the monuments in question non-Islamic, which motivates a certain indifference on their part. This lack of cultural feeling is also found in the local populations (Wolof, Peul) in the megalith zone. On the other hand, in the shell midden zone, two behaviours are noted.



**Fig. 3.** Mixed cemetery (Christian/Muslim) on a shell midden at Fadiouth. (Photo © M. Sall)

Some archaeological middens became sacred places where Sereer populations conduct libations and that they even use as cemeteries. This is the case with the Fadiouth middens where the village's current residents (whether Muslim or Christian) hold a common belief, symbolised by this monument that functions as a mixed cemetery (**fig. 3**). On the other hand, other middens, which do not have this connection, are literally plundered and the shells sold (**fig. 4**).

This attitude of the people is an exception for sacred historical sites (places of worship, memorials and others), where desecration is inconceivable and conducting any research is difficult – archaeologists are not welcome. These problems are exacerbated by Senegal's lack of qualified human resources.

## III. ARCHAEOLOGY AND TRAINING

In Senegal, perceptions of archaeologists and of archaeology are mixed. Indeed, the occupation 'archaeologist' remains peculiar. For some, archaeologists are 'desecrators of tombs', and they are often bewildered at how they can come from the university (thus the city) yet pass their time gathering insignificant objects or digging like a mason. The few (ten) Senegalese archaeologists talk often about their misadventures (being seen as insane or academically incompetent). As in many African countries, archaeological research does not benefit from financial support from public authorities because priority is given to vital sectors (health, nutrition, etc.). This lack of



**Fig. 4.** Local people plundering shell middens, and loss of a skull (right). (Photos © M. Sall.)

financing, linked to the high cost of research, still burdens the discipline. However, while early methodological orientation (prehistoric site studies with no reference to societal issues) interested few students (fewer than 15 per year), the inclusion of the connections between archaeology-heritage and development since the 2000s has attracted many more. Thus this science, originally deemed too complicated and expensive, became appealing because of its engagement with questions of development (heritage management) issues. This shift in approach attracted generations of Senegalese and African students captivated by a field innovative in its scientism (close to the natural sciences and cutting across geology, chemistry, geography, anthropology, etc.) and offering a new methodology (field work and excursions, contact with objects). Thus admissions are now in the hundreds (from 100 in 2010, the enrolment of students specialising in archaeology surpassed 300 in 2014) (**fig. 5**).

#### CONCLUSION

This short presentation shows that archaeology in Senegal, despite the post-colonial initiatives of enthusiasts and ethnologists, still has a long way to go. Indeed, even though research has contributed to a better understand-

ing and dating of certain parts of history, it has not yet gained visibility in the debate over Egyptian and Arab origins attributed to or claimed by populations who, most often, are thoroughly Islamised. Studies have shown that the current map of protohistoric sites, despite its importance as a source for archaeologists, must be reviewed in order to fix methodological problems: Are the sand mounds observed in the Senegal River valley only islets that remain unflooded? Did others, categorised as tumuli and sometimes found next to basins, have the same function as those in the valley? All this goes to show the need to account for the existence of probable links between cultural provinces, beyond their geographical space, in order to better understand connections between cultural behaviours (eating, burial, etc.) and settlement strategies (housing). Answering these questions requires extensive archaeological research campaigns that unfortunately are hindered by the triple problem of poor existing legislation, the difficulty of mobilising resources and scarce human resources. For the last aspect (training), extending archaeological research to historical or memorial sites and to their relationship to questions of development will help train new actors in cultural development.



Fig. 5. Training students on historical sites. (Photos © M. Sall.)

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## AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES ON ACADEMIC RESEARCH: THE CASE OF CAMEROON

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### INTRODUCTION

Archaeology as an academic discipline has only recently been introduced to Cameroonian universities. It evolved originally as an auxiliary to history, and it was first taught as an elective in the History Department of the University of Yaoundé – at that time the country's only university. A Department of Art and Archaeology was created as part of the university reform of 1993. In the twenty years since, teaching and research in archaeology at Cameroonian universities have generally progressed quite happily. This text will offer a brief history of archaeological research in the country from the end of the 20th century through the beginning of the 21st, and will sketch the challenges and perspectives facing teaching and research in this discipline.

### I. ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN CAMEROON AT THE END OF THE 20th CENTURY

Archaeology was first practiced in Cameroon by enthusiasts and amateurs who, for the most part, were employed by the colonial administration during the 1930s. Among them were several colonial administrators (E.M. Buisson, J. Fourneau, J. Guillou, J.B. Jauze), a physician (M.D.W. Jeffreys), and a church official (Georges Schwab). From 1936 on, however, the man considered the 'father' of Cameroonian and Chadian archaeology, Jean-Paul Lebeuf, a researcher at the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), conducted intensive ethno-archaeological research in northern Cameroon. With his wife, Annie Masson Detourbet Lebeuf, also a CNRS researcher, he inaugurated the first phase of professional archaeology in Cameroon. Their research programmes dedicated to discovering the lost Sao civilisation continued until the 1980s (Essomba 1986).

In the years following Cameroon's independence in 1960, an institutional innovation gave rise to a Cameroonian research structure, the Office national de la Recherche scientifique et technique (ONAREST, national

office for scientific and technical research), which later became the Délégation générale à la Recherche scientifique et technique (DGRST, general delegation for scientific and technical research). This was then integrated into the Ministry for Higher Education and Scientific Research (MESRES). These bodies, given the responsibility for overseeing research, developed and launched the first Cameroonian archaeological research programmes, specifically through the Centre d'Études et de Recherches anthropologiques (CREA, centre for anthropological study and research), a part of the Institut des Sciences humaines (ISH, institute of human sciences). It is for this reason that the first meeting of archaeologists from Cameroon, held in Garoua from 26 to 28 February 1979, took place under the auspices of ONAREST, and the first international conference on archaeology in Cameroon, held January 1986, was chaired by MESRES.

Cameroonian research institutions established cooperation and collaboration agreements with those of other countries or with foreign universities, which even provided financial and logistical support to some of its programmes. This allowed the CNRS team led by J.-P. Lebeuf to pursue their research in the northern part of the country, soon joined by researchers from the Office de Recherche scientifique et technique outremer (ORSTOM, office of scientific and technical research overseas), including Marliac and Gauthier. Nicolas David began carrying out digs in the Bénoué region with the support of the University of Pennsylvania in 1967 and later the 'Mandara archaeological project' with the University of Calgary in Canada. In the early 1980s, under the direction of Professor Pierre de Maret, the Mission belge de Recherches anthropologiques began working in southern Cameroon in partnership with the ISH, but later the Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB) and the University of Yaoundé signed a cooperation agreement (Essomba 1992; Delneuf *et al.* 1998).

We should note that a large number of ISH research programmes were run by university faculty members. It was in this way that archaeology became a part of the academic universe in Cameroon. In the beginning, the

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discipline was considered an auxiliary to history. The Reverend Father Mveng played a pioneering role in that regard. He is the first Cameroonian historian to have turned to archaeology, with some publications of interest. But it was his disciple, Professor J.-M. Essomba, who first taught archaeology in the University of Yaoundé Department of History in 1975. These elective courses remained very theoretical, as the institution had no archaeological research programme. Research programs run by ISH and foreign institutions such as ULB, ORSTOM, CNRS, and the University of Calgary offered opportunities for fieldwork.

In January 1993 Cameroon took another step forward with its university reform. Six new state universities were created. Academic institutions set goals to improve educational offerings both quantitatively and qualitatively. The guiding principles behind these changes included, among others, broad academic and management autonomy, professionalisation and increased educational opportunities, and expanding inter-university and international cooperation. Academically, a Faculty of Arts, Letters, and Humanities was established at the University of Yaoundé I, and with it a new Department of Art and Archaeology. It also provided teaching in the field of heritage management. The reform assigned specific tasks to university faculty, namely teaching, research, scientific advancement, and development support (Fouda Ndjodo *et al.* 2012).

## II. ARCHAEOLOGY IN CAMEROON AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 21st CENTURY: ISSUES, CHALLENGES, PERSPECTIVES

The third millennium opened on a new context in Cameroon. The ISH closed in 1991 following the political turmoil of the period; a Department of Arts and Archaeology, lacking equipment and adequate funding, opened at the University of Yaoundé I; the country was engaged in major infrastructure works which would affect cultural heritage. Archaeologists took advantage of this opportunity to get funding for fieldwork and basic facilities. It was at this time that first archaeological monitoring programmes for large projects – preventive archaeology programmes – were introduced.

The Bertoua-Garoua Boulaï (BGB), Lolodorf-Kribi-Campo, and Ngaoundéré-Toubo-ro-Bogdibo roads, the Chad-Cameroon pipeline, the Dibamba and Mpolongwé power plants, and the Mbalam mining concession were

among the first cases of applied preventive archaeology. These projects involved faculty from the University of Yaoundé I, and offered a suitable framework for carrying out their missions. Students were exposed to practical training in the field, research was made possible by the discovery of new sites and the acquisition of new materials, scientific promotion by publications, and development support by the expertise brought to these projects. We think that these are positive contributions which allow us to be optimistic about the future of archaeological research in Cameroon and Central Africa.

What today are the challenges and perspectives that face archaeological teaching and research in Cameroon? The first challenge is to consolidate structures in order to train enough personnel and ensure minimum equipment and funding for programmes. Academic training in the fields of art and archaeology originally benefited from the competition between the various programmes run by the institutions named above, which is to say the CNRS, ORSTOM – which became the IRD (Institut de Recherche pour le Développement, or Institute of Development Research), the ULB, and the ‘Mandara Archaeological Project’, Tübingen University. They gave a certain number of students the opportunity to obtain scholarships for doctoral studies. Theses in archaeology were defended by students originally educated at the University of Yaoundé – which, following the reform of 1993, became Yaoundé I – at Paris-Sorbonne University, ULB, and Laval University in Canada. We should highlight the role played by the Prehistory Section of the Royal Museum for Central Africa, which hosted all the doctoral students trained in Belgium.

The manner in which our administrations function is another obstacle to overcome. They must break down their barriers and build synergies through joint programmes and projects and their managers must be animated by a sense of the public interest. The lacklustre results a few years ago of the cultural component of the ‘Environmental and Social Capacity Building for the Energy Sector Project’ (PRECESSE) intended for preventive archaeology and financed by the World Bank, are a good example and a lost opportunity (Mbida Mindzie, forthcoming). Our training institutions will never achieve the professionalisation goals they have been set if they do not work with the sectors requiring the skills they teach and if they are not aware of the needs of the labour market. It is possible to federate research programmes and projects

between the Ministries of Higher Education, Research, Culture, Environment, Public Works, and others, based on the convergence of interests. The opening up of our public administrations is a necessary step for their performance and efficiency.

Ultimately, the future of archaeological teaching and research in Cameroon and other Central African countries should be placed in a more general heritage perspective. A chain of values must be forged, one which trains not only archaeologists and excavators, but also other professionals related to archaeology: conservators, restorers, curators, designers, museum specialists, managers, communication specialists, etc. All of these skills are still lacking but needed for enhancement of the archaeological and ethnographic heritage. Preventive archaeology should be systematised based on the various development projects planned or underway, and in accordance with national legislation. But, essentially limited to areas of major development work, this does not allow for coherent, basic research, made possible by programmed archaeology, somewhat abandoned by our institutions but still deserving of support. The state is crucial in terms of financing such programmed archaeology.

The Department of Art and Archaeology has gradually been enriched with highly trained personnel. Like every department at the University of Yaoundé I, it is part of the Bachelor-Master-Doctorate system (LMD). Students from Chad and the Central African Republic are regularly trained there. It brings its expertise, in conjunction with the University of Coimbra in Portugal, to the National Institute of Cultural Heritage (INPC), an arm of the Ministry of Culture of Angola with which a cooperation agreement was signed as part of the project to register the ancient city of Mbanza Kongo on the World Heritage List. One of the latest challenges facing this department is to consolidate its teachings through adequate facilities (laboratories, reserves, logistics, etc.), sufficient staff of sufficient quality, a multidisciplinary research team with

established programmes, a reliable network of collaboration with local and foreign institutions. Steps in this direction have been taken with programmes and universities in the United States, Europe, and Asia, all of which will allow the department to consolidate the regional and international influence to which it aspires.

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