

■ GHANA

A Preliminary Report on an Excavation at Ahwene Koko in the Wenchi Traditional Area of Ghana

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Introduction

The Akan people of Wenchi claim that their ancestors came out of a hole in the ground at Bonoso near the source of the Ayasu stream, about 14m south of the Wenchi metropolis. The *Akyeamehene* (Chief Royal Spokesman) is said to have led the way with his ancient staff. Their leader was the Queen Mother called Asase-ba-ode-nsee, which literally translated means “child of Mother Earth whose origins date to the beginning”. Traditions maintain that the ancestors of the Wenchi people had been in the earth from time immemorial until the *wankyie* or *panta*, a pig-like quadruped probably an aardvark, burrowed down and unearthed them. From this time they were named after the animal *wankyie*, now corrupted to Wankyi or Wenchi. The *aardvark* is now a totemic symbol of the Akan-speaking population of Wenchi. Another etymology of Wankyi is that it means *waan akyi* meaning “beyond brightness.” This is a reference to their abode in the hole, which was beyond the realm of light or brightness, that is to say they lived in darkness. Wenchi traditions also claim that the ancestors of the Wenchi people first settled at Bonoso before moving to Ahwene Koko, which became the capital of the state.

In 1974 the author initiated a historical-archaeological research in the Wenchi traditional area

(see Boachie-Ansah 1986a) with the collection of oral traditions on origins, settlements and chronology of the Wenchi State, as well as on food items, trade, and local industries including metal working, weaving and potting. Bonoso (N 7° 37' W 2° 05 ') and Ahwene Koko, (N 7° 29' W 2° 12') were excavated in 1975 and are claimed to be the earliest settlements of the Wenchi people (Boachie-Ansah 1976: 27-31, 1985: 41-72, 1986a, 1986b: 53-70). The aim of the research was to ascertain what contribution archaeology could make to the history of the ancient Wenchi State. An important aspect of the research was to find out when these two settlements were occupied. This was important since the oral traditions could not provide any meaningful chronological clues about the founding or occupation of the settlements. The research was also aimed at contributing to our understanding of the cultural transformations particularly resulting from trade with the outside world, as well as the socio-economic complexities that resulted in state formation in this part of northwestern Brong-Ahafo.

So far only a few trade items have been found at Ahene Koko. This paucity of finds is in contrast to the claims of the lucrative trade that took place between merchants from the north, particularly the Mande and the Wenchi area and northwest Brong-Ahafo in general (see for example, Bravman 1974: 67; Daaku 1968; Daaku and Van Dantzig 1966; Garrard 1980:132; Ozanne 1966: 18, 1971: 62; Posnansky 1973a, 1973b; Wilks 1961). This of course does not mean that intensive trade did not take place in the Wenchi area. Rather, it means more research must be done if we are to get copious data on trade and its resultant social complexities that must have played a crucial role in state formation and urbanization. As Dickson (1970: 40-42) has rightly pointed out in Ghana and in West Africa in general, the appearance of the urban phenomenon and of social complexity was not so much the result of technical innovation as the intensification of trade, particularly long distance trade. Throughout West Africa peasant farming practices have not been changed by any serious technical innovations. Surplus production freed part of the population

from primary production to develop the techniques and the arts, which constitute the elements of urban life and social complexity. On the other hand, the importance of trade to the emergence of social complexity and urbanization is to be seen in the fact that early towns flourished in areas that lived on the wealth of trade. It is the author's belief that evidence of long distance trade in the Wenchi area awaits the trowel of the archaeologist, and that long distance trade contributed to the emergence of social complexity and the emergence of the Wenchi state.

It was for the purpose of getting data on trade, and the dating of Ahwene Koko for which only a single carbon date of AD 1585 \pm 80 (N-2345) existed, that excavation was conducted there in March 2010.

Excavation

The excavation at Ahwene Koko (N 7° 30' 25.4" W 2° 12' 38.1") took place between March 9 and 20, 2010. The excavation was conducted 2km north of the present day Ahwene village after a 3m-interval grid had been laid. The single excavated unit consisted of a 2 x 6m trench that was opened on a mound approximately 1m high and 6m across. Two natural levels with cultural material were recorded. The first level consisted of a dark humus soil with rootlets and occasional laterite nodules. Measuring about 55cm at its thickest section, the first level was underlain by the second level, which consisted of a compact brown loamy soil with numerous lateritic concretions. The second level terminated at an average depth of 62cm and was underlain by a deep brown lateritic sterile sub-soil. Finds from the first level consisted of pottery, locally-manufactured smoking pipes, grindstones, cuprous objects consisting of a ring, a fragment of a container, probably a *forowa* (brass containers for storing cosmetics, lotions, medicinal powders, and valuables such as gold dust, beads and cowry shells), what appears to be the handle of a cuprous receptacle and a frag-

ment of a cuprous bracelet. Finds from the second level consisted of pottery, pieces of iron slag, a glass bead, a grindstone, a clay spindle whorl and fragments of locally-manufactured smoking pipes. Three carbon samples found at a depth of 41cm were collected in different places of the trench. Owing to the lack of funds, only two of the samples were submitted for radiocarbon age determination.

Finds

The predominant finds consisted of pottery identical to the pottery excavated in 1975. Among the pottery are well-fired sherds with a fine sandy and porous texture. Some of the sherds have a coarse fabric. When broken, the fabric reveals quartz fragments, specks of mica and lateritic concretions. The sherds erode away when rubbed with the hands. This type of pottery was found in the 1975 excavations and was named Ahwene Ware I (see Boachie-Ansah 1985: 51-56, 1986a: 135-160)

Another ware found in the excavation (and also identified in the 1975 excavations and named as Ahwene Ware II (Boachie-Ansah 1985: 56, 1986a: 172-184), has glittering specks of mica on the surface and inner fabric. Lateritic concretions and quartz fragments also occur in the fabric. The mica was not applied as a decorative material but was rather derived from the clay from which the vessels of the ware were made. Also found among the pottery are typical Begho Ware sherds which were also identified in the 1975 excavations (see Boachie-Ansah 1985: 53-56, 1986a: 160-172). Characterized by red-slipped sherds, cord rouletting and carinations, the ware was probably imported from the Begho area. Oral traditions collected from Wenchi claim that the inhabitants of Wenchi exchanged foodstuffs for pottery made by the Mo, a Gur language speaking ethnic group, who live immediately to the north of the Wenchi traditional area and in the Begho area about 80km to the northwest of the Wenchi metropolis. Archaeological and ethnographic research strongly indicates that the

Mo probably were the producers of Begho Ware (Crossland 1989).

Decorations on the pottery consist of single and multiple circumferential and curvilinear grooves on the body and neck, comb stamps arranged diagonally on body sherds, and a few cord rouletted motifs. Vessel forms are predominantly the ubiquitous jars with everted rims and globular bodies, open hemispherical bowls, and hemispherical bowls with incurved rims and carinations between the rim and body. The last vessel form is particularly characteristic of the Begho Ware from the site.

A few of the sherds are fragments of pots used as hearths. They are covered with clay laminations or layers easily distinguishable from one another. The layers of clay are the result of routine coating of hearth pots with red clay, a morning chore of Akan women. Traditionally, a complete set of hearth pots consists of three pots (usually with holes at the bases), turned upside down, and arranged in an equilateral triangle to form a tripod whose inverted bases serve to support the cooking vessel. The holes at the base serve to support the cooking vessel and allow the heat generated by the fire to escape and thus prevent the pots from exploding. Pottery used as hearths were also found in the 1975 excavations (Boachie-Ansah 1986a: 156-158).

Also found in the excavations were small, hemispherical, and neckless open bowls that were claimed to have been used for spinning cotton. Rim diameter of the bowls ranges from 4.3 to 5.0cm, and the height ranges from 2.3 to 2.5cm. Similar vessels were also found in the 1975 excavations (see Boachie-Ansah 1986a: 181-184). Other ceramic finds include an oval spindle whorl and fragments of locally manufactured smoking pipes.

The smoking pipes consist of fragments of bowls and stems. Pipe fragments were found at depths of 4, 13, 18, 24, 26, 28, 30, 36, 42, 43, and 75cm of the excavated trench. Since the overall

thickness of the levels with cultural material was about 75cm thick, the smoking pipes were evenly distributed in the levels of excavated trench. It is noteworthy that a smoking pipe was found at the very bottom of the levels with cultural material. This suggests that the site began in the era of the introduction of tobacco and cannot therefore predate the 17th century AD. Many of the pipes are fragmentary and cannot therefore be fitted in Ozanne's (1962 n.d.) typological sequence of smoking pipes for Ghana. The only two diagnostic pipes, recovered from depths of 13 and 36cm belong to Ozanne's Type 2 typologically dated to AD 1655/60 to 1690. The stems of these two pipes adjoin the base in a single angle, a feature characteristic of pipes from northern rather than southern Ghana. One of Ozanne's Type 3 pipe usually assigned a date of AD 1690 to 1724 was found on the surface, on the spot where the trench was opened.

Decoration on the broken pipe bowls consists of vertical incisions, triangular stamps, rouletted motifs in the form of rounded nodules, circumferential grooves bordering on rouletted motifs, cross-hatched incisions, circumferential incisions, and a combination of circumferential grooves and cross-hatched incisions. Some of the pipes have a fine ox-blood coloured red slip.

While the smoking pipes and their distribution in the excavated trench suggest a 17th century AD or later date, the two charcoal samples submitted for age determination recovered from a depth of 41cm, have produced earlier dates than the 17th century date inferred from the smoking pipes. The samples were submitted to the Laboratory for Dating and Isotope Research and Development, Christian-Albrechts University, Kiel, Germany. The first sample (KIA 42822), recovered 44cm from the north wall and 117cm from the east wall of the excavated trench has produced a 2-sigma date of AD 771-887. The second sample (KIA42823), retrieved 124cm from the north wall and 131cm from the east wall of the trench has produced another 2 sigma date of AD 1411-1461. Although the two carbon samples were recovered from the same level, there are dis-

crepancies of 640 years and 574 years respectively between the beginning and termination of the two dates. In addition, the dates are earlier than the 16th to 19th century date of a Venetian bead stratified 19cm below the carbon samples (see paragraph immediately below). The dates provided by the smoking pipes and the glass bead, and the discrepancy between the two carbon dates obtained from samples taken from the same level, is sufficient grounds for rejecting the carbon dates. The carbon dates do not date the context of the site and may have been derived from older wood that predates the site.

One upper grindstone of sandstone, one upper grindstone of granite, and one lower grindstone, also of granite was recovered. A striped five-layer star glass bead in ultra marine blue, turquoise and brick red colours was recovered at a depth of 60cm. It is a Venetian bead dated from the 16th to the 19th century AD (Dubin 1995: 118-119).

Lastly, a cuprous ring from Level 1, with a diameter of 2.5cm; a cast brass bracelet made by lost wax casting with an attached crotal recovered from Level 1, and similar to one exposed by erosion and collected by the author in 1975; a cuprous handle, (most likely of a small spoon for collecting gold dust) with a twisted cuprous wire on one end, and a cuprous fragment of a container, probably of a *forowa* (a container made from stamped, incised and repoussé imported sheet and used for storing, cosmetics, lotions, medicinal powders, items of adornment and valuables such as gold dust, beads and cowry shells, see Cole and Ross 1977: 64) were recovered from the excavation. *Forowa* are recent art works that were produced from around AD 1780 until approximately 1930 (Ross 1983: 54). The presence of a brass sheet (probably a fragment of a *forowa*) at Ahwene Koko clearly indicates that the site was occupied beyond the 17th century.

Discussion

It was hoped that the excavation at Ahwene Koko would provide new data and information

from that obtained from the 1975 excavation. Partly for this reason, the 2010 excavation was conducted 2km to the north of the 1975 excavation. It was felt that the chances of locating a phase of occupation different from the phase represented in the 1975 excavation would be brighter if a different area was excavated. However, similar finds as that obtained in 1975 were found in the excavation. The 2010 excavation seems to confirm what we already know from the earlier research conducted in 1975. Firstly, the pottery from the two excavations is identical especially in terms of paste characteristics and decoration, and to a great extent in terms of vessel forms. The pottery labelled in 1975 as Ahwene Ware I, Ahwene Ware II and Begho Ware have all been found in the recent excavation. The presence of Begho Ware in the latest excavation confirms the claim that Ahwene Koko participated and benefited from the commercial prosperity that ensued in the Begho area (Daaku 1968; Ozanne 1966) where Mande traders had established themselves and succeeded in tapping the commercial resources of the forest and savannah regions of Ghana to keep the trans-Saharan trade going. The cloth industry, probably introduced into the Wenchi area by the Mande as a result of trade and for which Wenchi was so popular in the 17th century and partly derived its wealth (Daaku and van Dantzig 1966), is again attested in the archaeological context by the spindle whorl and the small earthenware bowls claimed by potters to have been used for spinning cotton. In the Bono dialect spoken in the Techiman and Wenchi areas, the word for spindle whorl, *gyane* or *gyaneboo*, seems to have been derived from *dzene*, the Mande word for spindle whorl (see Crossland 1989: 78; Effah-Gyamfi 1974: 70). Wilks (1962: 154) has pointed out that there are several Mande loan words in Akan. One of such loan words is the word for spindle whorl, which together with weaving, was probably introduced into the Wenchi area by the Mande. A piece of rivetted brass found in association with fragments of locally-manufactured pipes in the writer's excavations at Ahwene Koko in 1975, is thought to be a gold-dust box made from European brass and may be evidence "of a gold trade at the site" (Garrard 1980:132). The trade in

cuprous metal and gold seems to be supported once again by the cuprous objects recovered in the 2010 excavation.

Roy Sieber believes that a surface find from Ahwene Koko in the form of a fragment of a fluted basin is a brasswork of North African manufacture (Ozanne 1965: 21, 1966: 18, 1971: 62). Ozanne (1965: 21) has commented that if this is true, then “it is the first trans-Saharan import to be found in an archaeological context”. Ozanne (1966: 18) has also commented that the fluted decoration on the brass fragment “makes a North African origin almost certain”. Garrard (1980: 139), commenting on the same brass fragment, concludes that, “there is no obvious parallel among North African metal-work”. He however admits that

“in the museum of Islamic Art in Cairo there is a brass bucket from Mosul, dated to the twelfth century, which has a similar fluted base”, and that “it seems possible... that the Ahwene Koko fragment is part of an Akan *kuduo* (prestigious cast cuprous container in which precious valuables such as gold were kept, and used on important ritual occasions as containers for food offerings to the deceased) based on such a prototype, but probably of rather more recent manufacture, a sixteenth or seventeenth century date would not be inappropriate”. (Garrard 1980:139)

North African influences were reaching Ahwene Koko, directly or indirectly. Influences from northern Ghana, through which North African influences filtered into northwestern Brong-Ahafo, can be seen in the smoking pipes from Ahwene Koko. Flat-based pipes in which the underside of the stem meets the underside of the base are characteristic of northern Ghana where smoking pipes typical of coastal Ghana and with hooks bridging the angle between the bowl and the stem are almost absent. The pipes from the Wenchi area belong to the northern type and may be an indication that smoking tobacco and smoking pipes may have been introduced from the north rather than from the coast. This of course does not mean that there was no trade between the

coast and the Wenchi area. It is likely that a single blue bead from the 1975 excavation, probably of a type called “Akua blue” by women in Wenchi, and the single bead described in this report, as well as cuprous metal including European sheet metal may have been traded from the coast.

The 2010 excavation has also thrown some light on the chronology of the excavated areas of Ahwene Koko. The piece of rivetted brass found by the author in an excavation in 1975 is believed to be a recent gold-dust box made from imported European brass sheet (Garrard 1980: 132). Garrard (1980: 132) has further observed: “on the basis of available information, most gold-dust boxes made from imported machine-made brass sheet are likely to date to the nineteenth century”. The implication of Garrard’s statement is that the rivetted brass is likely to be of 19th century date. There is, however, strong circumstantial evidence, based on the typology of smoking pipes, that the brass sheet is earlier than the 19th century.

The rivetted brass was retrieved from a level which contained pipe fragments and which have been dated by radiocarbon to AD 1585 ± 80 (N-2345), e.g., a date between AD 1505 and 1665 (based on half-life of 5730). Smoking pipes were found close to the bottom of all the excavated units - an indication that the sites were occupied shortly or during the 17th century. One Ozanne Type 2 pipe usually dated to AD 1655/60 to 90 was stratified 16cm above the carbon sample that has produced the carbon date. If it is considered that there are no indications that smoking pipes were in use in the 16th century, the carbon date largely coincides with the date assigned to the pipe type by Ozanne. The carbon date is not inconsistent with the Dutch map of 1629 (see Daaku and van Dantzig 1966), which mentions Wenchi as one of the states on the Gold Coast in the 17th century. It may therefore be regarded as reliable. The rivetted brass probably dates to the late 17th century and may not be part of a gold dust box as suggested by Garrard.

It has been argued (Boachie-Ansah 1986a: 206-207a, 1986b: 66) that in support of the oral

traditions of Wenchi that Ahwene Koko was abandoned shortly before 1715 when the *Asantehene*, Osei Tutu, sent an army of 3000 men against the settlement (see Furler n.d.: 269-270; Daaku 1968; Fynn 1971: 43). This is because Ozanne's Type 2 pipes date to between AD 1655/60 and 1690, and are the most common pipes at the site. They are found not only in excavated contexts but also on the surface of the site. Pipe types that survived into the mid-18th and 19th centuries are rare at Ahwene Koko. The only pipe type of this category at Ahwene Koko is Ozanne's Type 3, e.g., flat-based pipes whose bases and/or terminals of the stems are decorated with rounded projections at the corners. The pipe type is usually dated to AD 1690-1724 although they may be found in 19th century contexts. According to Ozanne (n.d.: 32), the pipe type is widespread in the Jenne-Timbuctu area and diffused from this area to the coast as a result of trade.

In the 1975 excavations, one Ozanne Type 3 pipe was found stratified 7cm above a Type 2 pipe. While Type 2 pipes are older than Type 3 pipes, as demonstrated at several sites in Ghana, it must be noted that Type 3 pipes came into use at the time when Type 2 pipes were still in vogue and that the replacement of Type 2 pipes by Type 3 pipes was a gradual process. It is perhaps significant that only one pipe of Ozanne's Type 3 was found at Ahwene Koko in 1975. During the reconnaissance survey undertaken by the writer in 1975, only Ozanne Type 2 pipes were found on the surface of the site. It would seem therefore that during the abandonment of Ahwene Koko, Type 2 pipes were the most popular and that Type 3, usually common on 18th century sites was gradually coming into use. It was concluded therefore that Ahwene Koko did not survive long enough to experience the popular use of Type 3 pipes common on 18th century sites, and that the site was probably abandoned in the early 18th century when its inhabitants were defeated by the Ashanti army.

The 2010 excavation has produced finds that suggest that the site was occupied after the Ashanti defeat. The Venetian bead found in the

2010 excavation is known to date from the 16th to the 19th centuries AD, and the probable fragment of a *forowa*, known to have been commonly made from AD 1780 to 1930, are indications that even if the majority of the inhabitants abandoned the site after the Ashanti defeat, a remnant population continued to live there. This is perhaps supported by the fact that a schnapps stoneware bottle from Schiedam, Holland, found on the site in 1975 was dated by the City Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent, England, to c.1850-1900 (see Boachie-Ansah 1986a: 63). So far, only a small portion of the site has been investigated and it is possible that future research would produce smoking pipes characteristic of the 18th century and beyond.

As already indicated, the 2010 excavation was conducted 2km north of the present-day Ahwene village close to where the 1975 excavations were conducted. This is an indication that the site is really big. The description of several Akan settlements (including Ahwene Koko) as having 77 or 177 streets or quarters implies that such settlements were quite large (Dickson 1970: 420). Such sites as Asantemanso and Bono Manso have been found to be quite large (Effah-Gyamfi 1974; Rattray 1923: 121-122; Shinnie and Shinnie 1995). Trade must have contributed to the growth and enlargement of the settlement. The glass beads from the 1975 and 2010 excavations, the cuprous objects, smoking pipes and the bowls used for spinning all testify to trading activities and contact with the outside world. Trade must have altered and broadened the economic base of the settlement. With the importation of cuprous metals new occupations like brass-smithing and casting would have been introduced. It was probably in the course of trade that the cloth industry, for which Wenchi was so famous in the 17th century, became established in the traditional area. Such economic activities might have contributed to the enlargement of the Wenchi capital.

Conclusion

There is a large chronological gap between

Bonosos which has produced five carbon dates of AD 680-776 (KIA 42817), AD 663-774 (KIA 42818), AD 663-774 (KIA 42819), AD 710 \pm 90 (N-2343) and AD 980 \pm 85 (2344) and Ahwene Koko which has produced an acceptable date of AD 1585 \pm 80 (N-2345) and two doubtful dates of AD 771-887 (KIA 42822) and AD 1411-1461 (KIA 42823). This suggests that there is much research still to do and that conclusions reached here must be regarded as highly tentative. When the "the missing link" is discovered in unexcavated areas of Bonoso, Ahwene Koko and perhaps in some other sites, our views on issues such as the chronology of the Wenchi state are likely to change. It is hoped that future research will discover sites that predate the 17th century AD and thereby contribute to our understanding of the period outside the scope of written history.

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