

GHANA

Interim Report on Archaeological Investigations Conducted at Kpone West, Greater Accra Region, Ghana

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Introduction

This paper presents results of historical archaeology investigations conducted at Kpone West, an ancient deserted Dangme settlement located in the Kpone Katamanso District of the Greater Accra Region. Kpone West is sandwiched between the Sunon-Asogli Power Limited and Tema New Town (Figure 1). The site has special archaeological significance due to its proximity to three other sites. The first, Sega, lies approximately 546 metres west of Kpone West and was the ancestral home of the people of Kpone before their relocation to the current settlement. The other two are Gao Lagoon and Laloi East, both Late Stone Age sites. The former lies 1270 metres north of Kpone West, while the latter is 5270 metres east of it.

The decision to undertake archaeological research at Kpone West was called for by newspaper reports that the Sunon Asogli Power Limited was going to be expanded to generate additional electric power. This would entail spacial expansion and undoubtedly destroy surface and embedded material remains in the small area unaffected by the initial construction work. The study had two objectives: 1) to recover material remains buried in areas currently unaffected by construction works, and most likely to be destroyed in the event of the project expansion; and 2) to reconstruct past cultural lifeways of the people who settled the site using the recovered material remains.

Kpone West and its neighborhoods are inhabited by the Dangme ethnic group. They constituted one of seven ethno linguistic populations occupying the Gold Coast (now Ghana) to have encountered and extensively interacted commercially with Europeans during the Atlantic contact period. The stone foundations of a Dutch trade post and its two derelict and rundown canons constitute some important vestiges of these early encounters. Early European records referred to Dangme country as “*Ladingcour*” and the people as “*Adampi*” and “*Dampe*” (Marees 1602, Barbot 1732, Meredith 1812, Bosman 1705). According to Barbot (1732: 185), the principal villages of the *Ladingcour* Kingdom were “Ningo the Lesser, Tema, Cincho, Brambro, Pompena or Ponny (Ponnie), Great Ningo, Lay, Allempy and Occa”.

Historical sources assert that Dangmeland was an important commercial entrepot for European charter companies like the *Dutch East India Company*, *The Guinea Company* and *The Royal Africa Company*. According to the resident Dutch *Factor* at Elmina Castle, Director-General Jan Van Sevenhuyen (quoted in van Dantzig 1978:70), this was because “in times of war, when the western pathways towards Accra were closed by the Upper king; those at Ponnie remained opened allowing for the easy passage” of essentials like guns and gunpowder needed by the warring factions in the interior. Slaves, ivory and gold from the hinterland to the coast were also channeled en route to Europe and the Americas via Dangmeland.

A brief review of archaeological investigations in the vicinity of Kpone West

Archaeological investigations by Joane Dombrowski and James Anquandah constitute the two most important projects to have been undertaken in the research area. Dombrowski excavated two shell middens and retrieved potsherds, few Late Stone Age micro-lithic tools and large quantities of shells belonging to various molluscs’ species. Dombrowski (1977a: 31) noted in her preliminary report that Gao Lagoon and its surroundings were occupied during the Late Stone Age by a pottery-using community who also exploited marine and freshwater resources for their subsistence. The research included two radiocarbon dates of 4180.± 140 B. P. and 1260±90 B. P. for the site (Dombrowski 1977b: 30).

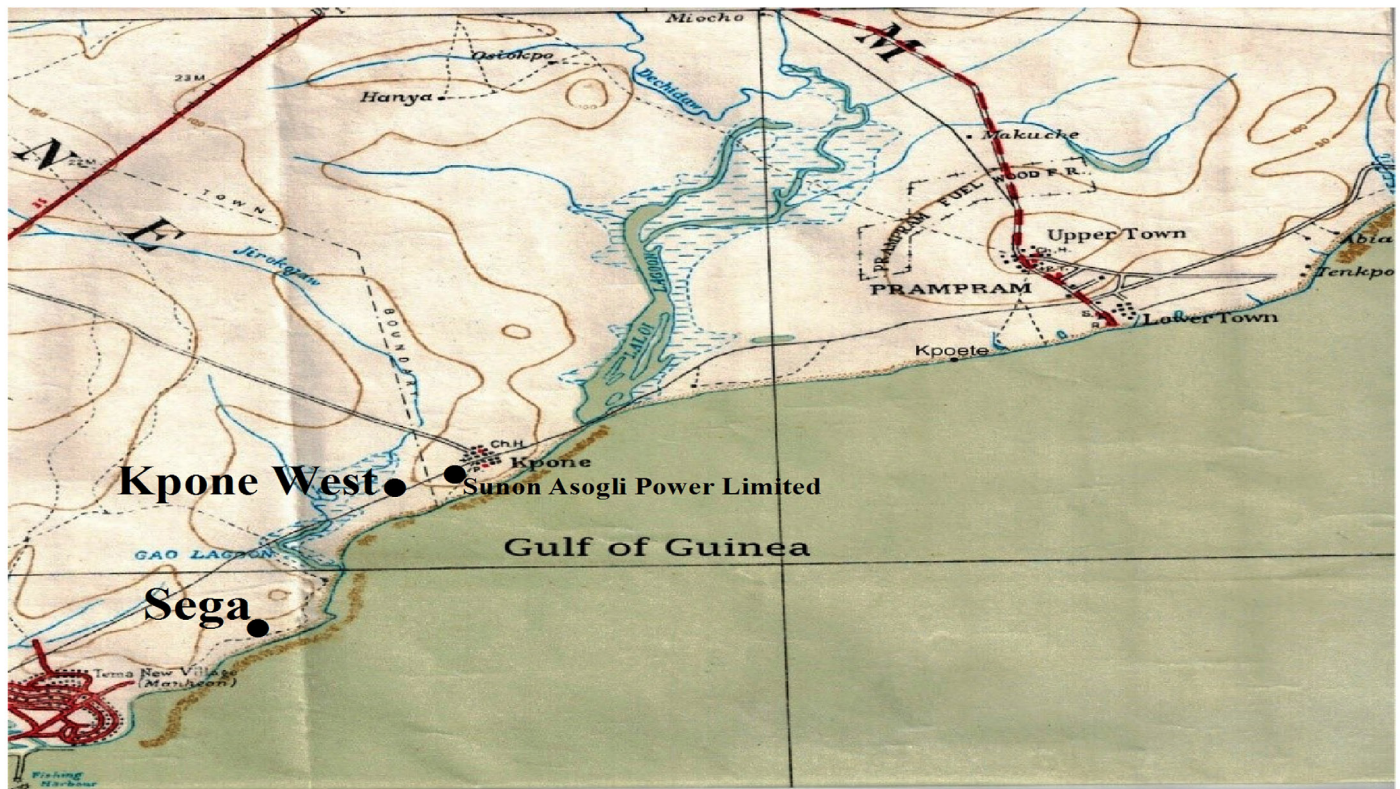


Figure 1: Map showing areas mentioned in the text.

James Anquandah’s archaeological research of Dangmeland can be described as the most important and comprehensive study of the area. The geographical focus of his research were some ancient Dangme hill-top settlements like Ladoku, Adwuku, Cherekecherete and Hioweve. Anquandah (1982: 115) asserted based on his data that parts of Dangmeland were inhabited “during the first four millennia B.C. by Late Stone Age hunter-gatherers who were also given to fishing for fresh water molluscs.” Some cultural materials associated with these prehistoric populations included cigar-shaped palettes and stamped ornamented pottery (Anquandah 1979: 26). At Cherekecherete Hill, he also found several stone enclosures. Based on their placements and arrangements along the hill-side, Anquandah postulated that the settlers practiced agricultural terracing (Anquandah 1985: 18-20). Other less comprehensive archaeological investigations to have been conducted in this research area include those by Oliver Davis at Sega (1967) and my own at Sega (Biveridge 1985).

The surface survey at Kpone West

The first phase of the archaeological investigation involved three walking surface surveys of the open and unoccupied area west of the Sunon Asogli Power Limited which was unaffected by the initial construction work. It is bordered on the south by the sea, and on the east and north by the power plant. According to 71 year old Nii Abladu Otetse (pers. Com. 24 May, 2016), a fisherman who has been plying his trade along the Kpone coastline since he was 16, and one of several respondents I interviewed, a substantial portion of Kpone West had been lost to the sea and attributed it to sand wining by sand contractors along the beach. To ensure the entire area to be surveyed was comprehensively covered, it was demarcated into four geographical zones which were designated Zone 1 - 4. Each zone roughly corresponded to north, south, east and west respectively, and the total area covered was 637.6 m² (approximately 2.4 ha). They revealed that large portions of what was left of this ancient settlement had either been built upon or disturbed by farmers cropping the area. For example, a residential apartment block for the Chinese staff of the Sunon Asogli Power Limited occupied much of the eastern part of the site while a modern sewage



Figure 2: Locally made pottery from Kpone West.

treatment plant had also been built on the beachfront. Despite disturbances, the survey revealed several low lying mounds overgrown with weeds. The layer of top soil, up to 10 centimeters below ground surface, was loose and characterized by gully erosion in many places. Marine erosion had also washed away large sections of the beachfront unaffected by the first construction work, exposing hundreds of locally manufactured potsherds and molluscs' remains embedded in the steep coastal profile. These sherds were clearly visible to persons standing on the shoreline.

Material remains recovered during the surface survey comprised 7 palm kernel shells, 1 glass bead, 2 fragments of imported alcoholic beverage bottles and 6 sherds of local manufacture. The glass bead, a barrel-shaped polychrome appeared to be Venetian in origin while the base fragment of one of the alcoholic beverage bottle had a push-up base. Francis (1994: 64) has noted that "the earliest European beads to flood the newly discovered worlds were Venetian drawn beads. In the 1500's and 1600's hardly any other sort of glass beads were found along the American Atlantic Coast or in West Africa". Chronologically, this places the glass bead, and by association some of the other finds of European origin found during the surface survey, to the Atlantic contact era.

The archaeological excavation

The second phase of the archaeological investigation began with the opening of one test pit (1 x 1 metre), located 12.5 metres north of the sewage plant. The reason for opening a test pit was to shed light on probable material remains to be encountered and to note inherent

excavation profiles of the units. This was followed by excavation of two units (1.5 x 1.5 metres) whose locations were determined opportunistically. Unit 1 lay on a low lying mound and was located 2.5 metres west of the east wall of the residential apartment block housing Chinese engineers of the power plant. Unit 2 was located 6.7 metres northwest of the sewage plant. The sterile levels for both units was 110 centimeters below ground surface, while an arbitrary level of 20 centimeters were used to control vertical provenience. Material remains retrieved from the two units comprised metal objects - 22, local pottery - 179, molluscs - 124, bones - 68, imported ceramics (mostly whitewares and Pearl wares) - 20, botanical remains (palm kernel) - 282, glass beads - 60, smoking pipes - 70 and fragments of alcoholic beverage bottles - 97.

The stratigraphy levels from where they were found, quantum, and percentage values are shown below in Tables 1 and 2.

Discussion

The recovery of imported European trade goods such as glass beads, ceramics, smoking pipes, alcoholic beverage bottles, and metal tools is clear testimony that commercial exchanges occurred between the ancient settlers of Kpone West and European traders during the Atlantic contact era. Highly perishable items like tobacco, molasses, textiles, used clothing and cotton sails may have constituted other items imported from Europe. According to Feinberg (1989: 50) and DeCorse (2001: 148 - 149), these items constituted integral trade goods exchanged during the period. Salt, animal skins, slaves and *kori* beads may have been exchanged for the above referred European trade goods (Daaku 1970: 34, Bosman 1705: 304). Barbot (1732: 186) confirmed the vibrant nature of the trade in slaves when he noted that "French, English and Portuguese ships plied most along this coast, to purchase slaves and provisions -- in my time, a good male slave might be bought here from fifty-five to sixty pounds of *cauris* or shells and sometimes they advance to seventy". It appears from historical sources that wars in the interior between Akwamu, Asante and Akyem indirectly went a long way to boost Euro-Dangme trade in the research area because according to Barbot (1732: 186), "when the *Aquamboes* are at war with the *Achim* Blacks, these people have a considerable number of good slaves to dispose of, for whilst those two inland nations make

Strata levels	Material remains										
	Metal objects	Imported smoking pipe	Glass beads	Mollusc shells	Quern	Locally made vessels	Bottle fragments	Palm kernel shells	Bones	Iron slag	Imported ceramics
1	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	2	-	-	-
2	1	-	-	4	-	-	1	7	-	-	-
3	-	-	-	1	1	2	-	12	4	-	-
4	-	6	-	6	-	4	-	4	2	-	1
5	-	2	2	2	-	14	5	9	2	7	-
6	2	6	1	-	-	13	9	5	1	5	1
7	-	11	-	4	-	9	7	2	-	11	3
8	1	17	4	2	-	11	2	1	1	13	1
9	-	9	-	1	-	2	-	-	-	3	-
10	-	7	-	-	-	2	1	1	3	3	1
11	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Total	4	58	7	22	1	58	25	42	13	43	7
% values	1.77%	1.33%	3.1%	9.7%	0.4%	25.7%	11.1%	18.6%	5.7%	19.1%	3.1%

Table 1: Table showing material remains retrieved from Unit 1, their quantum, and stratigraphy levels from where they were found.

Strata levels	Material remains									
	Metal objects	Iron slag	Imported smoking pipe	Glass bead	Mollusc shells	Locally manufactured vessels	Bottles fragments	Palm kernel shells	Bones	Imported ceramics
1	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	1	-
2	-	-	1	1	2	2	-	26	4	-
3	2	-	-	5	4	9	3	71	3	-
4	-	-1	4	4	16	17	4	44	1	-
5	2	-	2	2	27	27	11	23	2	2
6	8	6	1	7	11	23	9	11	13	1
7	1	4	1	19	9	18	9	9	9	1
8	4	2	-	11	21	9	23	23	7	7
9	1	-	2	3	4	9	11	13	11	2
10	-	1	1	1	2	5	2	9	2	-
11	-	1	-	-	3	2	-	11	2	-
Total	18	15	12	53	102	121	72	240	55	13
% values	2.5%	2%	1.7%	7.5%	14.5%	17.2%	10.2%	34.4%	7.8%	1.8%

Table 2: Table showing material remains retrieved from Unit 2, their quantum, and stratigraphy levels from where they were found.



Figure 3: Some imported glass beads from Kpone West.

war, most of the prisoners are convey'd to *Lay* and *Acra* and sold to the Europeans, who resort thither”.

Archaeological evidence (Biveridge 2010, Biveridge 2016) and several early European sources also confirmed the existence of vibrant intra-regional trade systems between Dangmeland and hinterland states. Describing local trade at Ningo and Lay, Barbot (1732: 186), asserted: “The Blacks of this village and the country about it, drive a trade of cattle, which they fatten in their pasture grounds, and either the Gold Coast Blacks come for it or they carry it along the said coast and to *Acra*, where they make thirty crowns of a bullock”. He noted also that “the inhabitants of Ningo and Lay have a good trade at Spice, a large inland town”.

The large count of imported alcoholic beverages (97), glass beads (60) and kaolin smoking pipes (70) suggest these items may have constituted important trade items at Kpone West. Imported ceramics (20) and metal objects (22) however registered low counts compared to very large recoveries of these artifacts from ancient coastal settlements like Prampram and Ningo which lie close to Kpone West and whose populations also interacted commercially with Europeans (Biveridge 2016:135-137).

Preference for local equivalents may have constituted one possible reason for the low counts at Kpone West.

The recovery of iron slag is indication that the settlers of Kpone West smelted and forged iron tools. It was difficult to scientifically ascertain which of the 22 metal objects retrieved from the excavations were imported or locally derived because of extensive abrasion, corrosion and absence of company attrition logos / trademarks. Identification was further exacerbated by the fact that the bulk measured less than 3 cm². Only 9 pieces were identified and comprised the following: iron brackets – 2, brad nails - 1, “T” head nails – 1, remnant of a door hinge – 1, remnants of hoes – 2, bottom of a basin – 1 and remnants of blades / cutting tools – 2.

A total of 179 potsherds of local manufacture was recovered at Kpone West. The bulk totaling 129 comprised body sherds with an average size of less than 4 cm². They appeared to be bowls exemplified by their sharp inward curvatures. All appeared well-fired, attested by their strong, hardy and well-preserved appearances. Their soot-blackened lower bodies and bases suggest they were likely used as cooking devices. The rest without soot blackened bodies may have served as storage and serving

containers. Close inspection of the body fabrics with a magnifying glass revealed large quantities of grog used as temper (Figure 2). All three major traditional surface treatment types associated with locally manufactured vessels namely, slipping (coating with red hematite) - 12, smudging (smoke glazing) – 40, and surface smoothing – 127, were represented in the assemblage. According to Anquandah (1982: 118-119), these surface treatment types are distinctive attributes of ancient Dangme potters.

Mineralogical analysis of 15 sherds randomly selected from both surface and excavation context indicated that quartz and garnet constituted the principal mineral constituents of the Kpone West vessels. Minute quantities of mica and hornblende were also detected in 9 of the sherds. Quartz and garnet incidentally constitute two of the principal mineral constituents of rocks associated with geological formations in the research area (Kessie 1985: 33-35).

The bulk of bones recovered measured less than 4 cm², and were designated undiagnostic because they did not have any established reference marks to facilitate identification. The following constituted the only parts identified: *humeri* (1), *tibia* (3), *femur* (1) and *fibula* (1), all belonging to *bovids* (sheep and goat), while one specimen each of tooth and *phalange* was identified as belonging to giant rat (*Cricetomys gambianus*). Giant rat is undomesticated and suggests that hunting / trapping probably constituted major economic pastimes of the settlers in the past

Even though no *Pisces* remains were found during the excavations, several early European sources intimate that fishing and molluscs collection constituted important vocations of the people. John Barbot (1732:185) reiterated the economic significance of the former when he asserted that: “*Cincho* (Sega) is five leagues east of *Acra*, a place resorted to from the beginning of the last century tho’ now the inhabitants apply themselves to fishing, to supply the market at Spice, which is a large town up the inland, for which they pay no duty to the king”. *Turretilla annulata* and *Arca senelis* dominated the molluscs’ assemblage accounting for 98% of the total. A total of 282 unbroken but friable palm kernel shells (*Elaeis guineensis*) all with their nuts intact constituted the only botanical remain recovered.

Conclusion

That the lowest occupation levels of the two units excavated did not contain items of European origin is clearly indicative that the settlement predated the arrival of Europeans to the area. Why the site was abandoned however was not evident and additional excavations will have to be conducted in the near future to answer this and other pertinent questions relating to the site.

The archaeological and historical evidence clearly indicated that the occupants of Kpone West had extensive commercial relations with Europeans and inland polities during the Atlantic contact period. Regular wars between hinterland states and the insecurities it generated appeared to have facilitated and enhanced trade and the commercial viability of Dangmeland in general. The settlers also subsisted on animal husbandry, fishing, pastoralism, crop farming, molluscs’ exploitation, hunting and trapping alongside trade. The above conclusions should be considered tentative until more capacious and expansive excavations supported with radio carbon dates have been derived for the site.

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