

■ GHANA

Obituary for Boyasi Hill: A Kintampo Site in Ashanti Region, Ghana

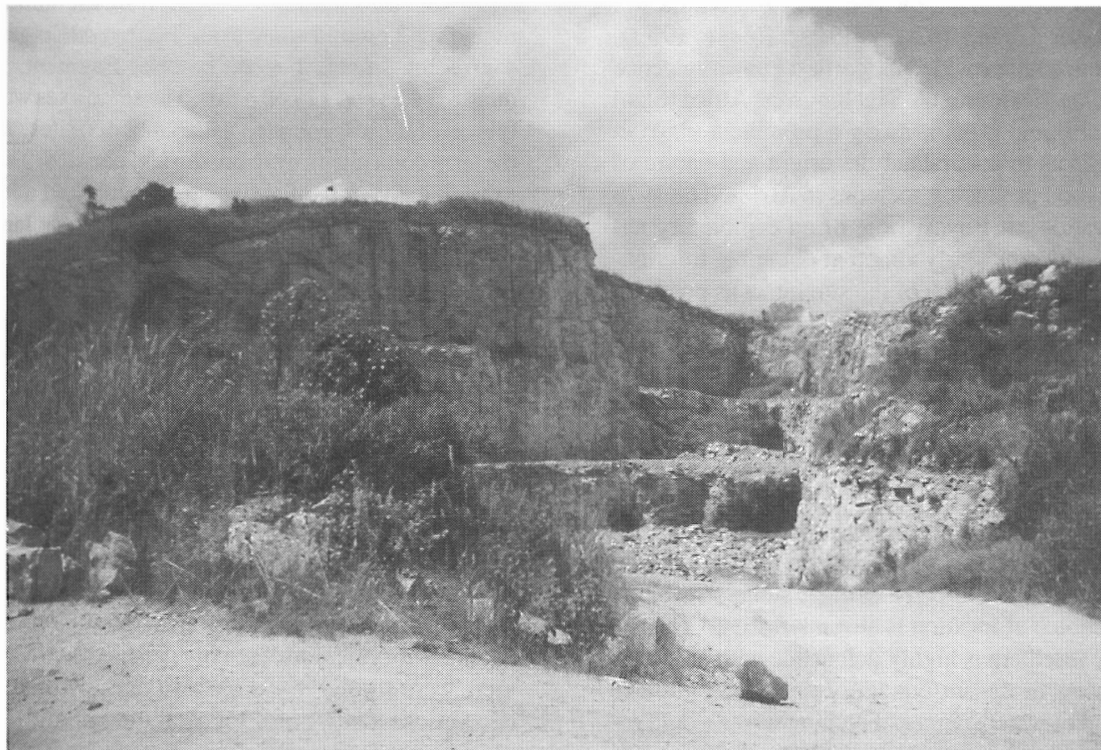
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On 20 May 1997, at the suggestion of Peter Shinnie, we undertook an excursion to Boyasi Hill, a Ceramic Late Stone Age Kintampo site (ca. 3000-3500), located on a granite inselberg just north of the city of Kumasi (1°34'9"W, 6°44'35"N near the town of Kenyasi) in central Ghana. Our intention was to have a closer look at the stone-based structures that had been reported at the site in 1976 in order to help us to understand better the architectural remains we were recovering from Kintampo contexts in Northern Ghana. When we arrived at Boyasi Hill we discovered that the inselberg upon which it is located is the focus of intensive mining

activity and that as much as half of the inselberg has already been reduced to gravel and hauled away (Figure 1). At present the site has been so severely impacted by mining activity that little remains of it other than artifacts that are entirely out of context. In a few more years, Boyasi Hill will disappear completely.

The discovery of Boyasi Hill was first reported in *Sankofa* in 1976 by Newton and Woodell (1976). Newton had discovered the site in 1969 in the course of botanical field work. The inselberg had attracted botanical interest because it is an island of savanna vegetation that is different from that of the surrounding forest. Newton and Woodell observed grinding grooves carved into the granite outcrops on the side of the hill, and the remains of dwellings near the summit. They collected grinding stones, stone arm bands, polished axes, grooved stones, worked stone flakes, pottery, "terra cotta cigars" (flattened, elliptical, scored items made of fine-grained sandstone), and a clay figurine from the surface at the summit and on the "saddle" a lower area to the south of the summit. These artifacts were identified as being associated with the

Figure 1: The Northwest Side of Boyasi Hill, Now a Gravel Quarry.



Kintampo Complex by Merrick Posnansky, then at the University of Ghana. Boyasi was an example of archaeology working in the interest of botany. This outlier of relict vegetation indicated that in the past the area was once much drier than it is now, and evidence for Kintampo peoples who at the time were thought to have preferred open savanna, seemed to indicate that the hill had had savanna vegetation for a very long time.

In that same issue of *Sankofa*, James Anquandah (1976) reported on excavations undertaken at Boyasi Hill in April 1976. Five test pits were excavated in the summit of the site. They recovered artifacts similar to those collected by Newton and Woodell, as well as beads and the remains of several stone-based structures (Anquandah 1976, 1982). Anquandah estimates the site to have been about 11.53 ha. in extent (Anquandah 1993).

At the time Boyasi Hill was excavated not much was known about the Kintampo complex, so excavations at Kintampo sites were primarily concerned with working out chronologies, and understanding the material culture and regional variations of the complex. In the past 15 years we have learned considerably more about Kintampo primarily through the reassessment of K6 Rockshelter (Stahl 1985 a,b) and the discovery of new sites in northern Ghana (Casey 1993; Kense 1992). Kintampo has provided the earliest known evidence for domesticates in sub-Saharan West Africa (Stahl 1994:76) and it is assuming a prominent place in helping us to understand the origin and nature of early food producing societies in Africa. The 1976 excavations at Boyasi were of an exploratory nature and were clearly aimed at obtaining information, but left as much of the site intact as possible. This is, of course, standard archaeological procedure to insure that in the future when new questions and new techniques become available, there will still be enough of the site left to allow researchers to investigate it in light of these new developments.

Boyasi remains an important site in our understanding of Kintampo because of the presence of figurines and clearly defined stone structures. The choice of location is also interesting. The top of the inselberg is highly defensible with an excellent view of the surrounding countryside, but it is devoid of water sources. Fetching water would re-

quire an arduous climb up a very steep hill which rises 60 metres above the surrounding land. We understand very little about the social organization of the Kintampo peoples, so it is difficult to suggest why this location was chosen, but the possibility of Kintampo peoples needing to defend themselves against enemies raises interesting questions about their relationships with contemporaneous peoples.

When we visited the site, we found the vegetation on top of the hill very much as Newton and Woodell had described it, consisting of high grasses and borassus palms. Kintampo artifacts littered the summit amid shattered fragments of granite that had been recently thrown up onto the top of the hill by explosions set in the course of mining activity. Linear and eccentric configurations of rock were also clearly evident on the surface of the hill, but these appear to have assumed their present locations in the course of scraping and drilling in order to set charges for mining. A virtually identical situation prevailed on the lower "saddle" where drilling was currently taking place. There, all topsoil and vegetation had been recently scraped off and artifacts were jumbled amid the general rubble pushed to the side.

We collected some artifacts from the summit including 2 ground stone axes, 7 terra cotta cigars, 4 grinding stones, 1 stone bracelet fragment, 20 quartz flakes and 11 potsherds. The stone axes were typical of those associated with Kintampo sites. All the terra cotta cigars were broken and abraded. They exhibited a variety of surface treatments and a few of the pieces appear to have been from very large specimens. Few of the potsherds could be specifically attributed to Kintampo. Some were slipped, incised and fabric impressed of the sort that are often found in Kintampo assemblages, but none showed the comb-stamping that is typical of Kintampo ceramics. Other potsherds were extremely thick with raised decorations that are not typical of Kintampo and are probably far more recent.

We collected a few artifacts from the "saddle". These included a ground stone axe and 2 quartz flakes which are probably attributable to the Kintampo occupation. The only potsherds we found there were similar to the massive ones with raised decorations that we also found at the summit.

Concern for the destruction and disappearance of Africa's archaeological heritage has only recently been receiving the attention it deserves. Boyasi Hill could potentially have contributed significantly to our new questions about the Kintampo Complex and agricultural origins in West Africa, but it is, perhaps, a relatively minor site and at the moment is probably of little interest to most people outside of the handful of us who study the Kintampo Complex. Its fate pales in comparison to the terrible tragedies that are currently taking place over much of Africa with the organized stealing and sale of artifacts from museums and supposedly protected sites, or the wanton destruction of uninvestigated sites in the process of construction and resource extraction. All this makes it difficult to call for the protection of a site like this when it means restricting the economic progress of which Ghana is so badly in need.

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