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A three-month fieldwork mission was undertaken in the Republic of Niger, West Africa from June to September 1999. This visit forms part of a larger doctoral research project examining the population history of the region, with a special emphasis on trade and ethnicity. The Zinder area (Damagaram, central Niger) seems particularly interesting because of its position at the northern limits of the lands suitable for cultivation, and its importance in trade with the drier regions to the north. These factors made it an important terminus of trans-Saharan trade in the nineteenth century. Zinder also seemed an attractive choice for a study of trade as its population consists predominantly of Hausa, a group reputed for its propensity for trade and commerce.

Investigations in Zinder took three distinct phases. First, interviews were conducted with local traders in order to elucidate the role and scale of trade in the past century. Second, the historical remains still visible in the town of Zinder were documented. In a third and final phase the archaeological potential of the Zinder area was assessed. It is the preliminary results of this third course of research which are presented here.

The area south-east of Zinder, near Wacha (Figure 1), was the seat of important developments in the historical period. It saw the growth of early polities by the Tsotsebaki - usually understood to be a sub-group of the Hausa - and includes the remains of the towns of Ganuwa, Babbaye, Maja, and Takai. The area also demands attention as it seems to be linked to the earliest inhabitants of Kano: oral tradition suggests that the site of Kufan Kanawa was the original location of the well-known Hausa city of Kano. That these sites are so little known is due more to the state of archaeological research in the area than to their true archaeological interest.

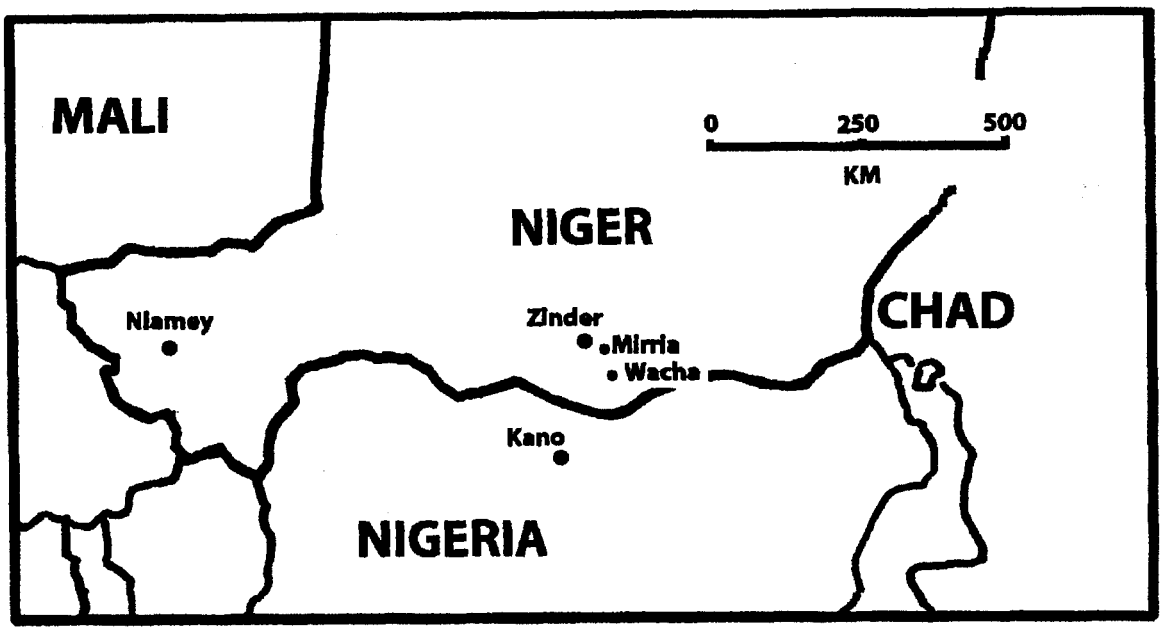
Two visits were made to Massama, at three week intervals; once with a 4 x 4 vehicle and once by motorcycle and on foot. A three-day trip into the Wacha region, using a 4 x 4 vehicle, allowed a survey of Ganuwa, Maja, Kufan Kanawa and Babbaye. The aim of this report is simply to place these sites on record and to present a brief assessment of their archaeological significance. Oral testimonies were collected at the sites of Kufan Kanawa, Massama and Babbaye and at the courts of the traditional rulers of Zinder, Mirria and Wacha. These interviews were conducted in Hausa using interpreters and were recorded, and were later checked, transcribed and more completely translated by M. All N'Diaye Ibrahim, of the University of Niamey. The three sites visited which seem most significant for a basic understanding of the culture history of the Zinder/Wacha region will be described here: Kufan Kanawa, Ganuwa, and Massama.

Prior oral and written knowledge in the area

There is a local awareness of the existence of ancient sites in the Zinder region, from sources as diverse as the regional museum, NGO (Non Governmental Organization) publications, traditional authorities in Wacha, Mirria or Zinder, and the Direction Régionale de l'Industrie, du Commerce et de l'Artisanat. These all mention places such as Kufan Kanawa and Ganuwa. However, due to lack of funds this knowledge is vague and not accompanied by visits to the sites. Much more precise and more detailed in nature is the academic research which has focused on the area, beginning with an account by Brouin, a colonial administrator, who describes the Wacha region, concentrating especially on Kufan Kanawa of which he writes - "Une enceinte de Pierre, rectangulaire, haute de plusieurs mètres et visible encore de nos jours, escaladait les collines, courait le long des crÍtes pendant des kilomètres et la protégeait sur les quatre cÙtés. Quinze portes y donnaient accès.. ." (Brouin 1938:469-470)

Between 1981 and 1983 Maître (n.d.) conducted a survey and inventory of all ancient sites in the vast zone stretching from Zinger to Lake Chad and from the border with Nigeria to the fringe of the Sahara. Maître died unexpectedly, his project incomplete, and the scope and degree of detail of the study vary from region to region. Thanks to his

Figure 1. Map showing location of study area.



study, it was possible to locate the site of Massama; but his survey does not cover the extremely important area of Wacha just to the south. Maman Saley's thesis (1982) investigated the history of the Tsotsebaki polities from oral and written sources relevant to their old capitals and to Kufan Kanawa.

Local written data on the ancient sites also exist. The traditional ruler of the Wacha area is Maman Manzo, who refers to himself as the 'serkin Tsotsebaki'[1]. The sites of Ganuwa, Babbaye, Maja and Kufan Kanawa fall under his remit, and he and the imams of Wacha hold a list of the Tsotsebaki rulers which stretches back over 1000 years[2]. This text claims that the first Tsotsebaki rulers were Arabs who came from Arabia or Egypt and settled in Ganuwa where they remained over 900 years. Skirmishes with Tuareg warriors then forced them to move successively to Babbaye, Maja, Takai and finally Wacha.

The data provided by the imams of Wacha Abdusalam Liman Haruna and Abubacar matches fairly well those collected by Maman Saley at the court in Mirria, and that published by Brouin, though some rulers' names and lengths of reigns differ. Another useful form of written data, though not specifically to do with archaeological remains, are the French colonial archives in Zinder. These date back to 1903 and contain general descriptions of the area and its inhabitants.

Kufan Kanawa

The site of Kufan Kanawa lies on the eastern side of the generically-named mountain Babban dutsi. Testimonies were collected from the chief of the closest village to Kufan Kanawa, El-Hajj Bauchi, aged 67, and from a number of villagers who accompanied him. From the ground, a wall (garu) appears to enclose a roughly circular area, though the presence of crops did not allow to look out for any corners in the structure. Local villagers described the wall as an ellipse, whereas Brouin described it as a rectangle. Later examination of aerial photographs showed that the wall appears as a roughly trapezoid enclosure, of which the long sides are each over 2000 m, and the shorter sides about 900 m and 1500 m in length.

The city wall consists of well-aligned, shaped blocks, and stands on the top of a grass-covered embankment which seems to be of human construction and brings the height of the rampart to nearly three m. The villagers reported that in former times "even from the top of a camel you could not see over the top of the wall". The villagers described the wall (garu) as having three gates and

identified the location of four old wells, now filled in by natural soil accumulation, and a fifth, about 25 m deep, in which they once found the remains of old metal implements. According to the villagers, it is the former inhabitants of Kufan Kanawa who dug these wells. Also visible are the remains of the stone houses of the *serh* and of the *cadi* (judge).

Local farmers reported that they unearth jars of cowries (which the people of Kano come and buy from them), potsherds (which they describe as "thicker [than contemporary ones], maybe used for safekeeping things", corroded iron objects, and slag. Human burials have also been found. Observations on the surface of the site revealed the presence of ferruginous rocks, but traces of human activity seemed very rare; most notably, potsherds were almost completely absent, even in the areas within the garu which were not cultivated.

Kufan Kanawa is apparently tied to the history of the people of Kano. According to the villagers and the imams of Wacha, about nine hundred years ago divination revealed to the early inhabitants of Kufan Kanawa that the time had come for them to emigrate. The leaders entrusted the control of the region to the Tsotsebaki (who were 'a different people to them'), and the whole population of Kufan Kanawa set off - leaving a trail of seedlings so that any latecomers could join them - and resettled in the town which later became Kano. Kufan Kanawa was, until then, known simply as "Kano", and "Kanawa" means "the people of Kano". The link between Kufan Kanawa and Kano is especially interesting because the history of Kano is comparatively well known, and because the antiquity of Kano is well demonstrated both by oral tradition (which places the date of foundation of Kano at A.D. 999) and by archaeological work.

The villagers close to Kufan Kanawa and the imams of Wacha agree on the fact that since the departure of the people to Kano, and the cession of the control of the region to the people of Ganuwa, Kufan Kanawa has remained abandoned. Even the hamlet that Maman Saley found on the site has now been moved, due to lack of water.

Ganuwa

The site of Ganuwa lies at the foot of the mountain dutsin Illela, which rises 200 m above the plain. Oral tradition says that this was the first capital of the Tsotsebaki, founded when control of the region was left to them by the departing people of Kufan Kanawa. Its occupation therefore stretches back to the beginning of this millennium. The rectangular enclosure of the city wall is still very visible on the south-west and north-west sides, both from the ground and on aerial photographs. The walls are also clearly visible from the top of the nearby dutsin Illela which provides a vantage point over an extensive area. The garu of Ganuwa is of a much smaller size than that of Kufan Kanawa, in the order of 600 m^2. Its south-west side appears to have consisted of a double fortification: two parallel walls, about a metre high, built of very large unshaped rocks, some nearly a metre by side, join up with the flanks of the dutsin Illela. This same mountain provides a natural rampart on the south-east side. As for the north-east side, remains of a wall are visible there, which seem to close off the rectangle, but it appears to be different from the other two walls: less wide, less high and made up of much smaller blocks. It could be the fourth side of the city wall, or it could be the wall surrounding the house of the serki, invisible at the time but mentioned by local people. Maman Saley (1982: 42) also talks of the remains of a square construction, which he identifies as an ironworking workshop.

The question of course is, if this smaller wall is not the garu, then where is it? A very large gully runs along the north-east side of the site and is likely to have destroyed important evidence, but whether it might have carried away the garu on this side is impossible to say - and difficult to believe given the great size of the garu on the south-west side. There is not a great quantity of surface material within the city wall; a few potsherds, crude, heavily eroded and non-diagnostic (a single rim), as well as ferruginous stone and slag. Careful investigation was made of the sides of another ravine which runs along the dutsin Illela and provides a ready-made archaeological section. Here, potsherds were present, becoming more and more abundant as one ascends. Bone, some very fragmentary, and occasionally mixed with potsherds, occurs. A human pelvis, the femur still articulated, and the bones of a finger or toe, were identified.

At some distance from what appears to be the main site, and higher towards the mountain, is a hill which is covered with great quantities of potsherds and numerous stone circles. Visibility here was

much better as the hill was not cultivated, probably because of its steepness. In short, though there are abundant traces of human activity at Ganuwa these seem more plentiful outside the enclosure of the city wall proper. This, of course, may well be due to the fact that the land within the wall is under cultivation, the plants of sorghum and millet being already shoulder-height at the time of the visit. Still, the lack of ceramic material is slightly surprising and recalls Kufan Kanawa.

Massama

The site of Massama lies at approximately 13°40' north and 9°17' east at the foot of the mountain dutsin Serkin Baka'a. This site, which lies within a horseshoe of hills, is about 200 by 300 metres large. It is most likely the site described by Maître (n.d.: 71-72) as ZR DKB 75 and 75A. An elder of the nearest village, Garba Tabou, a man about seventy years old, reported that in ancient times -his grandparents' time, or before - a prince of Mirria had sought refuge there, protected by the natural configuration of the site. The hills close off the site on three sides, and the fourth was protected by a wall, of which the remains are still visible. Garba Tabou reported that agricultural work uncovers cowries (in one instance, a whole jar full), metal implements, potsherds and bone, on some occasions whole skeletons. Itinerant collectors buy the cowries unearthed by the villagers - apparently in order to sell them to potters who use the shells to polish the wares. The villagers had discarded the other material uncovered and it was therefore impossible to examine it.

Observations of the surface of the site and the sides of the gullies created by water run-off revealed a very large quantity of potsherds - in one instance the complete mouth of a jar - both incised and plain; terracotta beads or spindle whorls; a stone arrowhead; non-distinct metal objects; a grinding stone; as well as numerous but very fragmentary bone material. Maître says of Massama: "La céramique y est abondante et très morcelée, le plus souvent décorée d' impressions ou d' incisions, entremêlées de plages vierges sur lesquelles viennent parfois se surimposer des motifs peints. On trouve aussi quelques éclats, et de petite objets ovoïdes percés, en poterie...(fusaïoles?). D'autre part, autour de cette butte ainsi que plus en aval, se voient de nombreux cercles et demicercles de pierres à demi enterrées" (Maître n.d.:71). There are numerous stone circles on the site, which the villagers told me were the remains of former houses. Combining the evidence of these stone structures, the presence of a wall, and the sheer amount of material culture present at Massama, we can suppose that this prince of Mirria and his followers occupied the site for some time.

Maman Saley (1982:62) speaks of a Tsotsebaki ruler called Kuya, who was expelled from his capital and forced to seek refuge near Kisambana in A.D. 1822. Kisambana being only four km. from Massama, it is possible that this episode coincides with the tradition which the Massama villagers connected with the old site. However, unlike Kufan Kanawa and Ganuwa, which are linked respectively with the Kanawa and the Tsotsebaki, Massama is not assigned to any specific group by oral tradition. Because of the great amount of surface material observed, and the fact that it is not cultivated, Massama seems a very promising site for survey and possible excavation.

Discussion

Population movements in the Zinder/Wacha area appear to have been nothing if not complex. Maman Saley (1982:112) writes that the inhabitants of Mirria came from Arabia, which concurs with the information given by the imams of Wacha. It is, however, very possible that history was rewritten by these now Muslim people to incorporate a distinguished Arab ancestry[1]. Perhaps more significant than this Arab connection, and deserving of investigation, are the alleged links between the Tsotsebaki and the well-known archaeological site of Birnin Gazargamo, which is presumed to have been an ancient capital of the Kanuri polity of Borno. The rulers' lists of Wacha and Mirria, and Maman Saley's informants (1982: 38) state that the city of Gazargamo was built by the ancestors of the present-day Tsotsebaki.

The ruins of Gazargamo have, comparatively speaking, attracted a fair amount of interest. For example Barth (1965(1857): Vol. 3: 29-30) states that "The town had nearly a regular oval shape. . . was little more than six English miles in circumference, being encompassed by a strong wall with six or seven gates... The principal buildings consist of baked bricks". There is a radiocarbon date of A.D.

1620 for a sample from a midden near the presumed palace (Willett 1971). Urvoy sees Gazargamo as the successor capital to Garoumele, an important archaeological site in Niger 200 km east of Zinder, which has remains of brick walls (Bivar and Shinnie 1962). However, the authenticity of the link between the Tsotsebaki and their neighbours at Gazargamo can be questioned. For instance, Maman Saley (1982: 41) explains the reference to a Borno influence by the influence that this empire had on the Tsotsebaki polities at the time these traditions were compiled.

As for the inhabitants of Kufan Kanawa, these are said to have been of a very different nature as the Tsotsebaki. Whereas the Tsotsebaki were Arabs, the people of Kufan Kanawa were Fulani, or rather, according to the imams of Wacha, 'hausaised' Fulani: sedentary, and Hausa-speaking. Since this perfectly describes the ruling dynasty of Kano after the early 19th century jihad, the information may be a later transposition and should be taken with caution.

This article aims to be simply descriptive. Clearly any further work will have to surpass this and attempt to suggest the when, how and who of the archaeological sites in the Wacha region. A first focus of attention will be the evolution of the natural environment in the Wacha region. Most significant here is the progressive desiccation of the Sahel in general and the Zinder-Wacha area in particular. One Zinder trader explained that one hundred years ago dense forests prevented direct travel between Lake Chad and Zinder, and court historian Moussa Adam, aged 76, told me that he remembers the time when one dared not travel to the Tuareg camps on the outskirts of Zinder because of the danger from hyenas and lions.

Population estimates are notoriously difficult to make, even in present-day Niger; but steps towards a better understanding of the Wacha sites would have to include an assessment of former population numbers. The information that we do have on this is very fragmentary; Barth (1965/1857) is usually the sole observer we can look to in this context. Not only did he refer to the Zinder region as forested, but he also describes the continuing depopulation of some areas of the east. This is also commented on fifty years later by a French military official in Zinder[4].

The fact that the sites described here were apparently large and defended by walls presupposes considerable organizational skills and manpower. This poses unexpected problems in reconstructing the culture history of an area today marked by apparently much more transient modes of living (wattle and daub housing, for instance). Barth (1965: Vol. 3: 30) commented on a similar issue at Gazargamo: "The principal buildings consist of baked bricks; and in the present capital not the smallest approach is made to this more solid mode of architecture". What these populations lived on is also unclear. The imams of Washa mentioned that the rulers of Ganuwa were not cultivators but warriors, who obtained food by bartering some of the slaves they had captured in raids.

The sites of the Wacha region need to be related to the broader context of events in the West African Sahel at the beginning of the present millennium. They could be very important in reaching a better understanding of the mechanisms behind the development and expansion of the Hausa city-states and other local polities such as the Borno-Kanem 'empire'.

The sites of the Wacha/Zinder region require urgent attention. The only site benefiting from any sort of protection is that of Massama, since the traditional ruler in Mirria prohibits cultivation on the site. However, more severe than damage by cultivation is erosion by water; rainfall causes serious damage, very apparent during this fieldwork visit which coincided with the rainy season. For instance, in the interval of two trips to Massama, separated by three weeks, whole sections of the site had been swept away.

Next year a return to the Zinder region will allow to continue and expand on ethnohistorical research by the collection of additional oral traditions and to conduct surveys on one or more of the most promising sites.

Footnotes

1. "serkin Tsotsebaki' - the Hausa word 'serki' is usually translated into English as 'king'.
2. This document is written in Arabic and the text is rewritten each time a new ruler comes to power. The imams reported that the list went back 1249 years, but the information they gave added up to 1068.

3. The notion of empire-building invaders coming from the north or east is found among many peoples in West Africa - for instance among the Yoruba, at Nupe, at Benin, and in Bomo. Maman Saley is also dubious of the veracity of the Arab link to the Tsotsebaki.
4. Letter 190, 8 May 1903 to the Col Cant Zinder. Green book marked 1903, pages 148-150 (Archives de la Préfecture, Zinder).

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