

Chapter 2

Trends in the Development of Archaeology and Heritage Studies in Ghana

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This chapter presents a summary of the inception and growth of the discipline over the past 80 years or so:

- Its importation from Europe.
- Its adaptation to the local environment by the adoption of eclectic and multi-sourced methodology.
- The indigenization of the body of archaeological practitioners.
- The gradual and continuing transformation from an ivory-tower type academic discipline inherited from Europe to a down-to-earth relevant “applied” heritage-oriented Ghanaian discipline.

Introduction—Why Study the Past?

Among new nations of the world, such as Ghana, there is continual struggle for survival in highly competitive global setting. As such, priorities are put on the development of key areas and essentials of society—food, shelter, health, security, social welfare, communication, governance, education. Even in the sphere of education and the quest for knowledge, subject areas are mentally prioritized. Politics, economics, medicine, the natural sciences, engineering, law, information technology are accorded precedence and pride of place. On the other hand, histories and heritage studies are invariably ranked lowly in the hierarchy of disciplines.

It is no wonder, therefore, that taking all levels of public and private instructions of education into consideration, the University of Ghana, Legon, is today almost the only place where archaeology and heritage studies is seriously pursued as an academic discipline.

This chapter, among other things, seeks to take issue with the current mind-set prevalent in certain quarters of the globe and also Ghana that the twenty-first

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century A. D should be a purely forward-looking computer-cum-space age unhampered by irrelevant backward-looking historical concerns and that “the past” should be jettisoned, baby, bath-tub, water and all.

In every sphere of life, including the production and dissemination of knowledge, present and future developments are invariably founded on what existed before. As they say, today is the tomorrow of yesterday!

All over the world, there is an unwritten phenomenon known to scholars of historical demography as the “genealogical imperative.” This means that in all human societies, individuals, families, clans, ethnic groups, social classes and nations, feel obliged to memorialize and keep track of their ancestry, lineages, land and property titles, heraldic totems, notable events, heroes, achievements, knowledge systems, folklore, historic sites, monuments, etc.

In nearly all African societies, there are informal custodians of traditional histories and cultural heritage. In Ghana, various ethnic groups have proverbs that underscore the vital role of indigenous heritage as a major factor in societal development. The Akan have a saying—“*Tete ara ne nne*”

(“The present is part and parcel of, and coterminous with, the past.”) Another Akan proverb states:

Tetewo bi ka, tetewo bi kyere. Duakontonkye a no so ne neaetenegyina.

(“The past has a lot to say and much to teach us. Though an aged tree may look bent, rugged, uninspiring, yet still it provides the setting for engraftment of a new steady fruitful plant.”)

In a paper presented at the UNESCO international conference held at Accra in 2002 on the theme “Enhancing Cultural Co-operation on the African continent,” Prof J.H.K Nketia observed:

In Ghanaian traditional society, there is constant historical awareness which is reflected in material culture. In my native town of Asante Mampong, once every 40 days, Adaye is celebrated, a festival which links history to material culture heritage. Various items of state property are regarded, not as mere artefacts, but as inculcating cultural values. These are brought out from the royal court museum. They are exhibited and accounted for. Their ancestral authors are named and eulogized. Every royal is obliged in his lifetime to ensure that something new is created for posterity—some cultural object or art work. He knows that failure to do this may result in his subjects bringing charges of dethronement against him! (Anquandah 2002)

So vital to humanity worldwide is the innate responsibility of “tracking down” the past to build the present and future, that at the formal level in academia, it has given rise, over the past century, to a bewildering multiplicity of disciplines and sub-disciplines, each specializing in a particular aspect of study on the past—palaeontology, geology, prehistory, archaeology, palaeohistorical demography, oral tradition/oral history, written history, art history, historical geography, historical linguistics, economic prehistory and history; political history, social history, onomastics, epigraphy etc.

Studies on historical linguistics have shown that past ethnic groups of Ghana spoke numerous languages and dialects which evolved over the centuries and most

are extant today. For some reason, these languages were not developed into written or scripted forms even though many of their concepts were expressed in the form of artistic symbolism. It was only with the introduction of Arabic and Western-type alphabet, that Ghanaian languages began to be scripted. As a result, history information has been transmitted down the generations by indigenes, chiefly through oral traditions which are, however, often marked by distortions and myths. Also oral traditions lacked time depth and were difficult to fit into exact chronological sequence.

From the 1500s, the introduction of Western-type writing made it possible to give some permanence to the recording of information on indigenous histories and tangible and intangible heritage. However, the pioneering written documentalists, including nineteenth century Basel missionaries tended to interpret the heritage information with a Western colonial bias.

What was needed to overcome these problems related to heritage documentation was a source, method, or tool of study that would minimize information distortion and also project heritage studies upstream into the distant past.

It was with this in mind that in the late 1940s the designers of the curricula of the University College of the Gold Coast deemed it prudent to include the subject of archaeology in the first batch of academic disciplines earmarked for research and teaching as well as learning at the new College.

Archaeology came to Ghana as part of the baggage and legacy of Western acculturation and system of education. As will be seen in later sections of this chapter, it has its own limitations and drawbacks, especially as regards the extent of data preservation and also the personal bias of the archaeologist's mindset and beliefs that creep into the record in the process of interpretation of the data. However, it seemed to the pioneers of tertiary education in the then Gold Coast that here was the precise "tool" of scholarship that could be adopted for verifiable scientific documentation of heritage, especially since it exhibited capacity for long range exploration into the very distant past.

Archaeology—Its Identity and Purpose

Archaeology has to do with the study of the past, including the distant and relatively "recent" past. Its principal source of data comprises tangible material residues related in some way to human life. Archaeology entails the process of uncovering, examining, recording and analyzing the contents of an ancient site, its artefacts, technofacts, ecofacts and features. The archaeologist seeks to ascertain what light such residues can shed on vicissitudes of behaviour and experience over time and space.

In the course of time the discipline of archaeology has developed linkages to several other disciplines in the humanities and natural sciences to such an extent that the same modern scholars have wondered whether it has a distinct identity or whether it is but an amorphous hybrid of multiple academic investigative techniques and methods and intellectual approaches which knit together in some apparent cohesive manner.

Some scholars view archaeology as the backward projection in time, or “the past tense,” of history, anthropology, geography, sociology and contemporary culture. Indeed, archaeology shares with various social science subjects the common goal of developing scholarly endeavours that would facilitate understanding and enrichment of human experience, and also stimulate consciousness of the brotherhood of peoples throughout history.

Like history, archaeology has a time dimension although its chronological range goes well beyond history’s boundaries and extends to over 1 million years.

Archaeology is also viewed as being amenable to the pursuit of “human ecology,” that is concerned with discovering how humans have been interacting with, and transforming the environment, including physical, biological and cultural aspects of the environment.

Over the past century, archaeology has been known to employ concepts and models from anthropology, including the use of ethnographic analogy. Hence archaeology is regarded by some as a behavioural cultural “science.”

The question has been posed as to whether archaeology is a science. Archaeology adopts scientific attitudes and its practitioners seek to collaborate with scholars of the natural sciences to obtain assistance in dating by scientific methods and also for identification of discoveries emanating from sites. This, however, hardly warrants identifying archaeology as a natural science discipline because the replicative character of the methods and results of scientific experiments is indeed a far cry from that of archaeology.

There is no doubt at all that archaeology has a unique identity that makes it totally different from all other disciplines. This is evident from the major canons of archaeological practice:

- Archaeology employs peculiar methods and equipment for surveys and excavations for data retrieval from ancient sites.
- Archaeology entails description, analysis, dating, as well as interpretation or explanation of retrieved material data based on some forms of logic acceptable to a wide spectrum of schools of thought.
- Except in areas such as Pharaonic Egypt where archaeological remains are often elucidated by means of paintings, engravings, datings and hieroglyphic writings, in most African sites the archaeological data *per se* does not contain built-in meaning. Thus for the task of formulating valid conclusions from archaeological record, there is the need to source other data by engaging in some non-archaeological research in areas such as ethnography, ethnohistory, ethno linguistics, art studies, written history, etc.
- At nearly every stage of archaeological practice, before, during and after excavations, there is some form of theorizing. This constitutes the conceptual basis that underpins interpretation and the logical framework employed to make sense of material data that is retrieved. Modern archaeology has witnessed the emergence of many theoretical movements such as:
 - Cultural history school
 - New Archaeology/Processual school,

- Post-Processual school,
- Marxist school and
- Post-modernist school.

What is the *raison d'être* or justification for archaeological practice? Why do some people choose to take up this peculiar profession which, to others, seems to involve risks, hardships, apparent boredom, inconveniences etc.? However, archaeologists regard their profession as a fascinating and exciting “calling” and full of passion that drives them to discover more and more about past events. The questions that constantly engage their minds are: What happened in the past? When, where, why, how (or by what process)? And who were involved?

Ivor Noel Hume, eminent pioneer of the historical archaeology of early European colonial sites in North America underscored archaeology's unique place in the development of historiography and cultural heritage scholarship when he wrote:

Archaeology gives a people sense of roots. This is undisputably true. It is why in Europe, thousands of people from every walk of life spend their vacations working on their countries' archaeological sites. They do it in the United States of America too, from the White House downward, and the shades of countless of Indians must scratch their heads in wonder as they watch their trash and bones being treated with a respect that their living descendants are denied. Expeditions are sponsored by Universities. Sites are protected by Federal and State agencies. And across the land, societies of amateur archaeologists devote themselves to the study of the American Indian. (Noel-Hume 1968, p. 8)

For Archaeologists in Ghana, the discipline provides opportunity to employ unique research designing to decode from data buried in the earth the cryptic unwritten past of societies that lacked writing until the introduction of foreign alphabets.

Above all, for Ghanaian archaeologists, philosophically, the discipline signals African consciousness. Black Africa's greatest wealth and most important “export” are seen in culture, past and present. In charting the vicissitudes of prehistory and history, not so much from books and ideas imported from external sources but by direct excavation from Ghana's native virgin earth, Ghana's archaeologists seem to be saying: “We prefer to put premium on our own home-grown paradigms, independent thinking, creativity and inventiveness. This way we expect to infuse the richness of the past as a manure or fertilizer into our future lifestyle.”

Archaeology and Heritage Studies in Ghana, Yesterday and Today—A Historical Outline

The narrative of the inception and evolution of the discipline in Ghana may be viewed, as it were, through the “windows” of four arbitrary time periods as follows:

- Era of amateur explorers (1820s–1930s)
- Era of the foundations of scientific archaeology (1930s–1960s)
- Era of the expansion of the academic discipline (1970s–1980s)
- Era of Applied Developmental archaeology (1990s–2010s)

Era of amateur explorers (1820s–1930s)

Modern scholars of the discipline trace the origins of African archaeology to Europe and North America which are regarded as the “cradle” or “core” area where archaeological practice was initiated and whence it was diffused to so-called “peripheral” areas in Africa (Robertshaw 1990, p. 3). It is, however, very interesting to note the shortness of the time-gap between the initial stirring and foundation of the concept of archaeology in the “metropolitan” region and its transfer to the “peripheral” zone of the so-called “Third World,” with particular reference to Ghana.

One of the earliest recorded references to prehistoric studies in the Gold Coast (Ghana) is that of the Danish missionary called Monrad. In 1822, he unearthed ground stone axes from a prehistoric site at Osu, Accra, not far from Christiansborg Castle location. Monrad sent the axes for study and exhibition at the Copenhagen Royal Ethnographic Museum. This was very timely, as the Danish pioneers of European archaeology, namely, Christian Thomsen and J. J. Worssae, Curators at the Danish National Museum were engaged in formulating the archaeological concept of the “Three Age System.” This refers to the hypothesis that all the scattered and hitherto incoherent cultural heritage remains found worldwide could be conveniently classified by the adoption of a progressive technology-cum-chronology model designated as stone age, copper/bronze age, and iron age. Ground stone axes akin to those collected by Monrad were unearthed by the Basel missionary, Johannes Zimmermann at Odumase-Krobo and were mentioned in a publication in 1874 by Winwood Reade, a journalist of the *London Times* who visited Ghana to cover the Anglo-Ashanti war at that time.

In 1916, A. E. Kitson, Director of Gold Coast Geology Survey wrote in an article in the *Gold Coast Geological Journal* that it was evident from ethnohistories of indigenes that the stone axe was only one item of a prehistoric material culture context that included ancient pottery and cylindrical hatched stone rubbers (“Cigars”/“rasps”). Kitson called the makers of the stone axe tradition, the “Nyame Akuma People.” This “emic” term was not adopted by later professional archaeologists who preferred an “etic” term, “Kintampo Tradition” based on the name of the location where a major settlement of the tradition had been excavated. (Several sites containing remains of this tradition, which initiated prehistoric farming and village life, were later excavated by twentieth century archaeologists in all ecozones of Ghana and dated scientifically to around 2000–500 BC.)

A host of amateur documentalists of prehistoric data in Ghana followed in the trail of Monrad, Zimmermann and Reade, including antiquarians such as Burton 1883; Robert Rattray 1923; Junner 1931, Wild 1934 and Braunholtz 1936. It was, thanks to them, that samples of numerous cultural collections sourced from cuttings in road and railway construction, building works, mining and dredging and farming enterprises were deposited at the British Museum and also at the Gold Coast Geological survey centre in Cornwall Gardens, London. H. J. Braunholtz published data on these collections in the British journal, *Antiquity*, and Captain R. P. Wild, Inspector of Mines published similar articles in the local journals, *Gold Coast Rev-*

iew and *Gold Coast Teachers' Journal*, (Wild 1934/35), all of which facilitated dissemination in Europe and Ghana related to the earliest archaeological discoveries, from Ghana.

In 1936, Braunnholtz published an article in *Antiquity* that sounded almost like a “prophecy.” He wrote: “It is clear that there is here a large interesting and almost untouched field awaiting the spade of the trained archaeologist.” For, the very next year, Thurstan Shaw, a trained archaeologist from the University of Cambridge was appointed to be lecturer at Achimota College and later became curator of Ghana’s first museum of anthropology and archaeology at Achimota College Campus.

The Era of Foundations of “Scientific Archaeology (1930s–1960s)

From his pioneering work, one may, with some justification, refer to Thurstan Shaw as “the father of Ghanaian Archaeology.” He noted in his memoirs (1990) that he was guided by two principal objectives, each of which contributed to the realization of the other. Firstly, he sought to gather all available archaeological evidence and secondly, to create and increase as widely as possible an awareness of the archaeological dimension for engaging in research on Ghana’s past. He argued that the more archaeological evidence there was to present, and disseminate, the greater there was of the possibility of increasing awareness among people throughout the country and, as a result, there would be a greater inflow of information from the public related to finds and sites.

In 1940, Shaw carried out scientific excavation in the prehistoric Bosumpra rock-shelter at Kwahu Abetifi and unearthed an assemblage of microliths, ground stone axes, pottery and faunal remains of unknown age. (Later when radiocarbon dating method was invented, archaeologist Andrew Smith was able to obtain dates of 4th millennium B. C for the oldest materials at Bosumpra (Shaw 1944; Smith 1975).

In 1942, Shaw conducted another major excavation at an ancient rubbish mound at Dawu Akuapem, a site which was similarly dated by radiocarbon after the war to the fifteenth century A. D.

Shaw’s works included systematic collection, cataloguing and display of heritage materials at the Achimota Museum. In addition, he promoted archaeology through lectures at colleges and schools, publication of articles in the print media and lecture series on Accra Radio. His publications on the excavations he conducted with very limited resources are a marvel even to present-day archaeologists as they were highly detailed and of high quality and so have served as models for up-and-coming archaeologists.

He wrote in his memoirs (1990): “In the 1930s and 1940s, it was not a matter of urging the importance of archaeology in what it could contribute to a sense of *identity* in an emerging nation, and the way it assists in giving a people a sense of its roots—all that came later. Rather, it was simply a matter of demonstrating that the Archaeology was there and that it was a form of study which could throw light on the unwritten past. Once these things had been appreciated, the importance

of archaeology in the process of nation-building became much more readily self-evident” (Shaw 1990, p. 209).

The decades immediately before and after Ghana’s independence witnessed major developments as much in educational and cultural sectors as in politics and economics. Thus the period attracted to Ghana archaeologists trained in Western universities or related Antiquities Services, whose work contributed significantly to the process of laying strong “infrastructure” for archaeology in Ghana. Among these were A. W. Lawrence (1951–1956), Davies (1952–1966), Shinnie (1957–1966), Ozanne (1962–1966), R. N. York, D. Mathewson and C. Flight (1960s). All these were Researchers/Lecturers at the Department established since 1951 at Legon. Their principal objectives were to extend the frontiers of knowledge on Ghana’s past by engaging in “pure/basic” archaeological research and the dissemination of their findings through publications, museum displays, conference presentations and training and teaching of prospective, local archaeologists. Thanks to these scholars, several hundred ancient sites were surveyed and a number were selected for limited excavations. Sites investigated include the following:

Prehistoric Sites Legon Botanical Gardens, Kintampo Chukoto, Ntereso, Christian’s Village (Achimota).

Later Sites Ahinsan, Ayawaso, Buipe, Ladoku, Jakpawuase, Nyanaoase, Mampongtn.

In 1951, A. W. Lawrence, a Professor of Classical Archaeology at Cambridge University was appointed as Professor of the Archaeology Department at the University of Ghana, Legon and also as Curator and Director of Ghana’s National Museum. Lawrence used his immense fund of knowledge and experience in architectural history to document the extant European forts and castles located along Ghana’s coastline. His book entitled, *Trade Castles and Forts of West Africa* (1963) is a rich information repository derived from European archival sources as well as on-the-spot careful examination, measurement and documentation (in writing, photography and drawing of the historic buildings. From the 1990s when the subject of the international slave route became the vogue of historical scholarship, Lawrence’s book has served as a major standard reference source.

In 1952 Oliver Davies brought to Legon experience from archaeological work in Ireland and South Africa. For 14 years he traversed Ghana surveying and documenting archaeological findings in hundreds of sites. His most important contribution to Ghana’s archaeology comprises his research and publication on “Stone Age” archaeology, especially his documentations on raised beaches, river terraces and lake sediments. Data from various key sites which he investigated, for instance, Asokrochona, Hohoe, Legon Botanical Gardens, Kintampo, Limbisi, Ntereso etc., served as a point of reference for later archaeologists. His books, *Quaternary in the Coastlands of Guinea* (1964) and *West Africa Before the Europeans* (1967) are very useful in terms of subject matter, even though the style of writing makes heavy reading and some of his prehistoric terminology is outdated. Allsworth-Jones, an authority on “Stone Age” Archaeology of West Africa paid tribute to Davies when he wrote of him: “Nobody can fail to admire the tremendous energy and devotion

which Davies brought to his work. Without that there should be no great corpus Ghanaian material such as is available for study today and West African Archaeology needs such qualities if it is to get anywhere at all” (Allsworth-Jones 1981)

In 1957, a new National Museum was opened at Accra using half of the collections deposited at Legon from the Achimota College Museum of anthropology.

P. L. Shinnie became Professor of the Department of Archaeology, University of Ghana, Legon, bringing to his task immense know-how from Oxford University, Sir Mortimer Wheeler’s expeditions and many years’ rich experience of Nile Valley archaeology. His 9 years stint at Legon was marked by significant academic developments:

- A period of teaching of an archaeology course at the History Department.
- The introduction of a 2-year professional post-graduate diploma course in archaeology as a result of which a number of facilities were set up that have survived till today, namely, a library, scientific laboratory, photographic studio, and museum teaching collection.
- A major archaeological salvage scheme was mounted in 1963–1970 as part of the university’s Volta Basin multi-disciplinary research programme. The Department’s new appointees, R. N. York, D. Mathewson and Colin Flight led by O. Davies carried out significant scientific excavations at some 48 sites located in the Volta and Northern Regions of Ghana that were to be inundated by the creation of the Volta Lake through the Akosombo Dam construction. The total findings published in a booklet (Davies 1971 *Archaeology of the Flooded Volta Basin*) promoted the Department’s mission of “extending the frontiers of Archaeological knowledge” in Ghana.
- The University, in collaboration with the Ghana Government, financed a 3-year archaeological research expedition to Debeira West in Nubia as part of the UNESCO international scheme to save African heritage sites due to be inundated by the Nile floods created by the construction of the Aswan high dam. The Debeira expedition led by P. L. Shinnie not only provided archaeological training for three Ghanaian up-and-coming academics, but it also brought to Ghana 50% of the total archaeological findings as a donation from the Sudan Government. These provided a boost to the University of Ghana’s Department’s Museum artifact teaching collections and also the National Museum collections in Accra. The publication of the expedition’s result in Shinnie and Shinnie’s book (1978) certainly constituted a major contribution of the University of Ghana to world heritage scholarship.

Era of Expansion of the Academic Discipline (1970s–1980s)

Both from the standpoint of research and knowledge dissemination, the 1970s and 1980s constituted a critical phase in the development of heritage studies. Thanks to the bold initiative of Professor Merrick Posnansky in 1968/1969, the Department embarked upon a Bachelor of Arts degree programme. Henceforth, a student

could register for a course in archaeology combined with other humanities subjects. This was indeed, a major landmark in the fortunes of archaeology. Moreover, in 1971/1972, academic year, a Master's degree programme in archaeology took off at Legon and then to crown it all, in 1979/1980, the University of Ghana awarded a PhD degree in archaeology for the first time to a Ghanaian. The curriculum for the BA degree programme featured among others, courses on:

1. African prehistory
2. Archaeology of West Africa
3. General (World) Prehistory
4. Human culture and Environment
5. Practical/Field archaeology
6. Regional archaeology (Nile Valley/Indian Ocean/Southern Africa)
7. Independent Field work dissertation and
8. Historical archaeology of Africa

The post-graduate degree programme focused on:

1. The Archaeology of Ghana
2. Sub-Saharan African "Iron Age" Studies
3. Advanced Method and Theory and Practical Field Work
4. Nile Valley Archaeology and
5. MA/MPhil Thesis

In the late 1980s, the B. A. degree programme was restructured to include a number of courses that equipped and "groomed" students upon graduation to take on jobs related to heritage pursuits, teaching history in schools and museum work. The new courses included:

1. Cultural Resource Management
2. Art History of Ghana
3. Palaeohistorical Demography
4. Museum Conservation
5. Monuments Conservation

As practical field work is key component in the training of archaeologists, the establishment of B. A and MA degree programme in the 1970s and 1980s led to significant expansion and diversification of research activities of the Department of Archaeology. Lecturers and Research Fellows were obliged to mount "field schools" for students during vacation periods to provide training in field and laboratory work, and students were examined on the lessons taught.

Quite apart from the researches mounted to train students, academic staff engaged in individual research work for the advancement of scholarship. Unlike the period before the 1970s when field research was often on an *ad hoc* basis, research in the 1970s and 1980s became more systematic and purposeful, and was geared to specific objectives and research designing. It was also based on thematic patterns such as Pleistocene technology and subsistence, metallurgy, agricultural origins, ekistics and urbanism, long-distance trade patterns, art history, ethnoarchaeology, etc.

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