

■ CONFERENCE NEWS

Call for papers: Historical and contemporary Bourguou in the West African Context: Contribution to a policy of peaceful pluriethnic coexistence in the 21st century

Information about this conference was provided by Hounkpati B.C. Capo of the Université Nationale du Bénin.

Organized by the Université Nationale du Bénin with the collaboration of the Centre Béninois de la recherche Scientifique et Technique and the Direction du Patrimoine Culturel and the support of the Government of the Republic of Benin and the local communities in the Departments of Bourguou and Atacora.

This conference will be held at Parakou, Bénin Republic, in the 3rd week of December 1998. Final dates will be given in the second announcement (March 1998) which will include the call for papers.

Contact address: Bourguou'98 International Colloquium, c/o Secrétariat Permanent, Conseil Scientifique, Université Nationale du Bénin, B.P. 526, Cotonou, Bénin. FAX (229) 36 00 96 or 30 09 38. Telephone (229) 36 00 74, Post: 306. Telex 5010 B.

Report on the Workshop on the Archaeological Heritage of Eastern Africa: Conservation, presentation and research priorities; National Museum, Nairobi, Kenya, February 1997

*John E.G. Sutton
British Institute in Eastern Africa
P.O. Box 30710
Nairobi, Kenya*

This workshop was organized by the British Institute in Eastern Africa in coordination with the Kenya National Museums. It involved active staff of the antiquities departments and museums of Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti, as well as archaeologists in universities and research institutes in the region.

The purpose was to examine policies, practices and problems of conserving and presenting archaeological sites and their landscapes, to compare the varying experiences of the countries in the region, and to recommend opportunities for cooperation and priorities for research at a regional level, bearing in mind that site distributions and the African archaeological heritage do not normally respect modern boundaries.

The discussion, conducted round-the-table with smaller working groups for more detailed issues, concentrated on the following topics:

Archaeology, sites and the landscape, including issues of recording and gazetting of sites and antiquities and of their protection, in practice as well as law, in the modern and changing environment, and the urgency of devising effective policies and action which can command public support and government sympathy and be respected by business and developmental interests.

Archaeological sites and the public, noting issues of presentation of selected sites and the availability of suitable information (from printed guides to explanation centres), especially for the local public, as well as the importance of cooperation between fieldworkers and the local communities.

Museums and antiquities bodies - services and research facilities. The discussion noted the range of support, from storage to laboratory facilities and scientific equipment, which modern archaeological research requires, but which few museums and national antiquities services in the region can satisfy. It was strongly advocated that reciprocal arrangements and joint planning should be encouraged. Questions of cooperation with researchers and of the latter's necessary access to collections deposited in museums were examined (bearing in mind professional courtesies and scientific ethics), as well as conditions and charges for services and permits which some institutions levy. Concern was expressed about storage space and facilities for archaeological collections, and that field researchers should allow adequate time and assistance to museum staff when depositing finds.

Research strategies and Priorities, cooperation and publication. This session looked beyond the organizational and institutional aspects of archaeology to the importance of continuing and expand-

ing the momentum of research throughout the region. It was acknowledged that this needs to go hand-in-hand with training of more recruits, both as archaeologists and as technicians, and improved arrangements for such to gain essential experience by participating in projects in neighbouring countries. Concern was expressed about the dissemination of research results, whether formally published in journals or as typescript reports and occasional papers, and their availability in the libraries, museums, universities and research centres in the region.

The organizers and participants are indebted to the National Museum in Nairobi for acting as host to this workshop, and to its staff in various departments for invaluable assistance; also to the British Council in seven countries of the region for agreeing to cover the travel costs of participants. The report on the workshop, summarizing the discussions and recommendations has been circulated in the region. Copies are available on request from the British Institute in Eastern Africa, Box 30710, Nairobi, Kenya.

Report on the Second Workshop on the "Archaeobotany of North Africa", Leicester, Great Britain, 23-25 June 1997

Katharina Neumann
J.W.Goethe-Universität
Seminar für Vor- und Frühgeschichte
Archäologie und Archäobotanik Afrikas
Robert-Mayer-Str. 1
D-60054 Frankfurt, Germany

The Workgroup "Archaeobotany of North Africa" was established in 1994 with the aim to facilitate scientific discussion and exchange among scholars engaged in African archaeobotany. We felt that, besides the big conferences of the IWGP (International Workgroup for Palaeoethnobotany) held every four years, we should have a smaller group concentrating only on the special problems of the African continent. The first meeting was held in 1994 in Kraków/Poland, and the second in Leicester in 1997.

In contrast to the well-established archaeobotany of Europe, the Near East and America, research on the origins and development of prehistoric and historic plant use in Africa is still in its beginnings. The domestication history of the most important African cereals - *Sorghum bicolor* and the millets *Pennisetum americanum* and *Eleusine coracana* - is largely unknown, and data on other African domesticates, including the staple tuber and root crops from the rain forest area, are virtually absent. However, the participants of the Leicester conference, 28 scholars from nine countries, demonstrated the marked progress achieved during the last few years.

The conference was organized in four sections: 1. The transition to farming and the domestication of African wild grasses, 2. The development of agriculture south of the Sahara, 3. The mechanics of crop production and food transport in complex societies, and 4. Vegetation reconstruction and utilisation of charcoal. Geographically the contributions focused on the Sahara (Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia), the West African Sahel (Burkina Faso, Nigeria) East Africa (Ethiopia, Uganda) and Namibia. Besides the results and interpretations based on the microscopic investigation of plant remains, ethnobotanical data on modern traditional crop processing and new chemical identification methods were presented. In addition, laboratory sessions were held where people showed their material and discussed identification problems.

In order to improve exchange of information, the participants decided to establish data bases on sites and literature references. The contributions of the conference will be published in a special proceedings volume, edited by Marijke Van der Veen. The next workshop is to be held in June 2000 in Frankfurt, Germany. Considering that there is a special need for archaeobotanical research not only in North Africa, but for the whole continent, the conference will change its name to "African Archaeobotany".

The participants feel that there should be a closer cooperation with archaeologists working in Africa. New perceptions on the use of plants in the past, the development of agricultural systems, former vegetation and human impact can only be achieved with regular archaeobotanical sampling in the field and succeeding extensive laboratory work.