View from the Village: Changing Settlement Patterns in Sisalaland, Northern Ghana

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Introduction

It has become a commonplace to observe, as Labelle Prussin[1] has done, that in West Africa (and Africa generally), a residence "is no more than the physical projection in space of the social organization of the family which inhabits it." The form, size, and configuration of compounds in rural and some urban settings tend to be elastic, as their builders respond to changes in the social and kin relations of the lineage group. Deaths, marriages (in and out) and the coming into adulthood of lineage members mean that there is a constant need for the expansion and reconfiguration of living space, leading Gabrilopolous et al.[2] to conclude, with reference to the Tallensi of northern Ghana, that "[t]he compound is a material manifestation of a family's fortunes." The use of non-permanent building materials, such as mud bricks or wattle and daub, in conjunction with often torrential rains during the rainy season, also means that, on a practical level, there is a constant need to refurbish and rebuild the rooms of a compound as they fall into disrepair.

Although it is the changing physical form of lineage compounds that have received the lion's share of ethnographic, ethnoarchaeological, and geographical attention,[3] it is equally true that the changing form of villages is reflective of the larger social, economic,

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[1] Labelle Prussin, "An Introduction to Indigenous African Architecture," *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 33 (1974), 171.

[2] Nicholas Gabrilopoulos, Charles Mather, and Caesar Apentiik, "Lineage Organisation of the Tallensi Compound: The Social Logic of Domestic Space in Northern Ghana," *Africa* 72, 2 (2002), 225.

[3] See E. Kofi Agorsah, "Archaeological Considerations of Social Dynamics and Spatial Pattern Development of Traditional Settlements," in Augustin Holl and Thomas Levy, eds., *Spatial Boundaries and Social Dynamics: Case Studies from Food-Producing Societies* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: International Monographs in Prehistory, 1993), 7–24; Susan Blier, *The Anatomy of Architecture: Ontology and Metaphor in Batammaliba Architectural Expression* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Jean-Paul Bourdier and Trinh Minh-ha, *African Spaces: Designs for Living in Upper Volta* (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1985); Nicholas David, "The Fulani Compound and the Archaeologist," *World Archaeology* 3, 2 (1971), 111–31; Susan Drucker-Brown, "House and Hierarchy: Politics and Domestic Space in Northern Ghana," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 7 (2001), 673; Gabrilopolous et al., "Lineage Organisation," 221–44; C. Folorunso, "Socio-Cultural and Economic Meanings of Settlement Configurations in Africa: Some West African Examples," *West African Journal of Archaeology* 25 (1), 170–81; Merrick Posnansky, "Processes of Change—A Longitudinal Ethno-Archaeological Study of a Ghanaian Village," *African Archaeological Review* 21, 1 (2004), 44; Labelle Prussin, *Architecture in Northern Ghana: A Study of Forms and Functions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); Adam Smith and Nicholas David, "The Production of Space and the House of Xidi Sukur," *Current Anthropology* 36, 3 (1995), 441–71.

political, and environmental conditions that the residents must cope with.[4] In decentralized societies in particular—where villages are often composed of various, often unrelated, patriclans and lineages with differing migration histories—village membership is not fixed, and lineages may migrate to or away from villages as circumstances dictate. While these movements may be caused by economic factors, they are mostly the result of strained (and other) political relations between and within different sections of the village. The spatial relationships expressed in this mobility should thus be seen as a reflection of sociopolitical relations between groups of people within the village community.[5] Thus, villages tend to be mobile, far from stable, and very adaptable sociopolitical entities, and this is physically manifested in the changing form, configuration of, and relationship between lineage compounds on the landscape.[6] Changes in this physical manifestation thus have the ability to inform us about how people responded to changes in their larger sociopolitical and ecological environment. Villages in West Africa, particularly those of decentralized societies, are vulnerable to fission,[7] and can thus be seen as arenas of conflict between interest groups that can radically alter the physical layout and formation of the village. These changes are reflected archaeologically in the settlement organization of past settlements.

Increasingly ethnographers and ethnoarchaeologists are using long-term, diachronic village studies to gain insight into how villages in West Africa have been affected by the social, economic, and political processes of the twentieth century and before. In Ghana, Brokenshaw[8] observed village life in Larteh over a period of three years, while Mendonsa[9] returned to the Tumu area in the 1990s in order to track the changes that had occurred there since his initial fieldwork in the 1970s and 1980s.[10] In neighboring Togo, Piot[11] examined long-term changes in a Kabre community over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth

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[4] E. Kofi Agorsah, *An Ethnoarchaeological Analysis of Human Functional Dynamics in the Volta Basin of Ghana: Before and After the Akosombo Dam* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003); Mahir Şaul, and Patrick Royer, *West African Challenge to Empire: Culture and History in the Volta-Bani Anti-Colonial War* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001), 31.

[5] Agorsah, "Archaeological Considerations," 7–24.

[6] Prussin, "Indigenous African Architecture," 191.

[7] Eugene Mendonsa, "Economic, Residential and Ritual Fission of Sisala Domestic Groups, Ghana," *Africa* 49, 4 (1979), 388–407; Şaul and Royer, *West African Challenge*, 31; Peter Worsley, "The Kinship System of the Tallensi: A Revaluation," *Journal of the Royal Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 86 (1956), 37–75.

[8] David Brokenshaw, *Social Change at Larteh, Ghana* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966).

[9] Eugene Mendonsa, *Continuity and Change in a West African Society: Globalization's Impact on the Sisala of Ghana* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2001).

[10] Eugene Mendonsa, "Traditional and Imposed Systems Among the Sisala of Northern Ghana," *Savanna* 14, 2 (1975), 103–15; "Economic, Residential and Ritual Fission," 388–407; *The Politics of Divination: A Processual View of Reactions to Illness and Deviance among the Sisala of Northern Ghana* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

[11] Charles Piot, *Remotely Global: Village Modernity in West Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

centuries. Ethnoarchaeologists have also embraced long-term village studies as a way of isolating patterns and processes of change that are not readily discernable from single seasons of fieldwork. A case in point is Posnansky's[12] work carried out between 1970 and 1998 in the village of Hani in Ghana. Here, bi-yearly studies documented the changing forms of village settlement organization, population growth, fluctuations in subsistence and farming patterns, and coping strategies during times of economic hardship and political upheaval. The aspects of village life that do not change, such as house-forms, were also recorded.

While traditional archaeological sites and techniques cannot usually offer up the fine-grained chronological changes produced by such ethnoarchaeological studies, they can inform us about periods and aspects of life for which there are no direct informants and thus extend the study of how villages change even farther back in time.[13] In the case of Hani, excavations of trash heaps dating to the 1920s and 1930s revealed a greater reliance on domestic animals for meat and patent medicines than was expected from oral and documentary evidence.[14] Agorsah's work in the Volta Basin looked at both change and continuity in house forms over time,[15] while Stahl[16] has traced changes in consumption patterns back through the fourteenth century in her study of daily life in the Banda region, Ghana. Elsewhere in West Africa, particularly in areas such as Nigeria, regional archaeological settlement studies have provided long-term perspectives on shifts in settlement over the last half millennium. Many of these have focused on delineating the large-scale, interregional relationships that developed between polities such as the Oyo Empire and their periphery,[17] while studies of contemporary settlements have been used to inform the interpretation of archaeological sites.[18] Space is also recognized as an important

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[12] Posnansky, "Processes of Change," 31–48.

[13] Susan Gillespie, "Beyond Kinship: An Introduction," in Rosemary Joyce and Susan Gillespie, eds., *Beyond Kinship: Social and Material Reproduction in House Societies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 14.

[14] Posnansky, "Processes of Change," 33.

[15] Agorsah, "Archaeological Considerations."

[16] Ann Stahl, *Making History in Banda: Anthropological Visions of Africa's Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[17] Akinwumi Ogundiran, "Four Millennia of Culture History in Nigeria (ca. 2000 B.C.—A.D. 1900): Archaeological Perspectives," *Journal of World Prehistory* 19, 2 (2005), 133–60; Aribidesi Usman, "A View from the Periphery: Northern Yoruba Village during the Old Oyo Empire, Nigeria," *Journal of Field Archaeology* 27, 1 (2000), 43–61; "On the Frontier of Empire: Understanding the Enclosed Walls in Northern Yoruba, Nigeria," *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 23, 1 (2004), 119–32.

[18] For example, E. Kofi Agorsah, "Archaeological Implications of Traditional House Construction among the Nchumuru of Northern Ghana," *Current Anthropology* 26 (1985), 103–15; David, "The Fulani Compound"; Samuel Ogundele, "Ethnoarchaeology of Domestic Space and Spatial Behaviour among the Tiv and Ungwai of Central Nigeria," *African Archaeological Review* 22, 1 (2005), 25–54.

factor in the legitimation and negotiation of power relations by both ethnographers and ethnoarchaeologists.[19]

While large scale, survey-based area studies document regional variation and change in settlement pattern, a smaller-scale consideration of individual communities and how they changed over time can also be useful. Such a diachronic approach, working with sites that are linked by the movement of people, can inform on how communities responded to changing sociopolitical and economic circumstances over a number of centuries. Ann Stahl's[20] work in Banda has demonstrated the degree to which archaeological remains attest to these changing circumstances. In this paper, I will use the settlement history of one community to highlight the way in which the fate of villages in rural West Africa represent, within their individual histories, the pressures and opportunities that have characterized the West African region over the last 200 years. Charles Piot[21] has argued that by studying the whole (i.e., the regional level), we can transform our understanding of the parts (i.e., the local). I argue that the reverse is also true. By examining the complexity of the parts—the nuances of village history—we can reach a deeper, more complete understanding of the whole. Archaeology, in conjunction with historical and ethnographic material, facilitates this approach as it allows us to track village formation and disaggregation over time and space, beyond the temporal limits of other sources.[22]

Settlements with short occupation spans provide insight into the immediate external (and internal) political and economic factors germane to that point in time. I posit this in direct contrast to Fletcher[23] who argues, in reference to Konkomba villages in northern Ghana, that "if a settlement with a short history can be found, the influence of external political and economic factors can also be minimized." He contrasts this with settlements that were more than 100 years old and thus reflective of the slave raiding that occurred in northern Ghana in the previous century. This view implies that the physical form of villages with short histories is solely reflective of the internal socio-dynamics of the community in question. Yet such communities are surely affected by the changing regional and global dynamics of the time period during which they are occupied. It is only with reference to both these regional dynamics and internal social organization that we can

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[19] Neil Norman and Ken Kelly, "Landscape Politics: The Serpent Ditch and the Rainbow in West Africa," *American Anthropologist* 106, 1 (2004), 98–110; Deborah Pellow, "The Power of Space in the Evolution of an Accra *Zongo*," *Ethnohistory* 38, 4 (1991), 414–50; Smith and David, "The House of Xidi Sukur," 441–71.

[20] Ann Stahl, "Change and Continuity in the Banda Area, Ghana: The Direct Historical Approach," *Journal of Field Archaeology* 21 (1994), 181–203; "The Archaeology of Global Encounters Viewed from Banda, Ghana," *African Archaeological Review* 16 (1999), 5–81; Stahl, *Making History*.

[21] Charles Piot, "Wealth Production, Ritual Consumption, and Center/Periphery Relations in a West African Regional System," *American Ethnologist* 19, 1 (1992), 34.

[22] See Stahl, *Making History*.

[23] Rowland Fletcher, "Settlement Studies (Micro and Semi-Micro)," in David L. Clarke, ed., *Spatial Archaeology* (New York: Academic Press, 1977), 68.

understand how and why individual communities transformed over a period of time. In the following pages I will discuss how changes in the settlement pattern of villages in northern Ghana are reflected in the archaeological and documentary record, and how the different manifestations of one particular village, Dolbizan in the Sisala East District, Upper West Region, Ghana, reflect the larger sociopolitical and economic forces at work in the region over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

I hope that this will also serve as a commentary on the need to critically interrogate source materials and to develop a dialogical, contextual, comparative approach among the ethnographic, documentary, oral historical, and archaeological source bases.[24] While it is tempting to use colonial era observations from the first half of the twentieth century as reliable indicators of what was happening in the nineteenth century, this tends to elide the many and deep-ranging changes that took place during the colonial era. Conditions in the nineteenth century, when raids were a common feature of daily life, are often used to explain why Sisala settlements are nucleated while those of many of the neighboring groups are not. Arguably, this explanation is only applicable to villages such as Gwollu, a walled town north of Tumu, that has been occupied for over one hundred years and thus still reflects the measures taken in those days. But even these settlements, once the threat had been removed, began to change in configuration. Gwollu's wall now exists only in a series of eroded segments, and the town has expanded beyond its boundaries. The conditions that pertained in the colonial era should thus be borne in mind and continuities between present and past ethnographic observations, and the more distant past, must be demonstrated rather than assumed.[25]

Regional Context

Northern Ghana, like many other parts of West Africa, is populated by a wide diversity of ethnolinguistic and cultural groups. The convenient academic delineation of specific "ethnic" groups simplifies what is a highly complex situation on the ground.[26] Rather than

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[24] See Ann Stahl, "Concepts of Time and Approaches to Analogical Reasoning in Historical Perspective," *American Antiquity* 58, (1993), 235–60; and Stahl, *Making History*, Chapter 2.

[25] As has been pointed out by numerous scholars, including Maria dos Dores dos Cruz, "Macupulane Revisited: Ceramic Production Fifty Years after Margot Dias," *Conimbriga* 45 (2006), 351–69; and Stahl, "Concepts of Time," 235–60.

[26] See, for example, Fortes, *Dynamics of Clanship*; Jack Goody, *The Social Organisation of the LoWiili* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967); Grindal, "An Ethnographic Classification," 409–24; Sean Hawkins, *Writing and Colonialism in Northern Ghana: The Encounter Between the LoDagaa and "the World on Paper"* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002); Manoukian, *Tribes of the Northern Territories*; Rattray, *Tribes*; Tait, *The Konkomba*. Also see Carola Lentz, *Ethnicity and the Making of History in Northern Ghana* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006); Lentz, "Colonial Constructions"; Richard Kuba and Carola Lentz, "Arrows and Earth Shrines: Towards a History of Dagara Expansion in Southern Burkina Faso," *Journal of African History* 43 (2002), 377–406. Scholars such as Lentz have made an immeasurable contribution in not only highlighting the extent to which ethnicity is created and transformed, but also how, and in what ways, different groups interact on the landscape. Also see Philip Burnham, *The Politics of Cultural Difference in Northern Cameroon* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996); Scott MacEachern, "Du Kunde: Processes of Montagnard Ethnogenesis in the Northern

discrete groups bounded by distinct social and cultural differences, the Wala, Dagaaba, Sisala, Kassena, Builsa, and Frafra, etc., are gross amalgamations of smaller groups that blend one into the other in terms of language, architecture, religion, and material culture, and who might or might not identify with the label attached to them. Their political organization is characterized by its decentralization; generally, no political unit higher than the village was recognized in precolonial times.[27]

Most villages in this region of Ghana are composed of composite groups that are joined together by a shared history of migration in which small family groups, usually embodied in the lineage, advanced into the area and established settlements.[28] This process is still ongoing as some groups, for example the Dagara, continue to expand.[29] This "disjunctive migration" is by no means unique to this area and is elegantly delineated for Africa as a whole by Igor Kopytoff in his 1987 essay: *The Internal African Frontier*.[30] Such migration also had consequences for how the form of villages changed over time. Villages would expand as they integrated new migrant clans or sections into their settlements and declined in size when intravillage conflicts forced the removal of one or more of those sections. Alternatively, outside forces such as warfare or intervillage disputes could also lead to increasing cohesiveness among the different sections of the village[31] and a heightened sense of village allegiance.[32] It is not unusual that one section or clan would be more politically powerful than the others, either through the right of first arrival or conquest.[33]

Mandara Mountains of Cameroon" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Calgary, 1990).

[27] See, Mendonsa, *Continuity and Change*; Grindal, "An Ethnographic Classification"; Kuba and Lentz, "Arrows and Earth Shrines"; Lentz, "Colonial Constructions."

[28] Hawkins, *Writing and Colonialism*, 53.

[29] Carola Lentz, "A Dagara Rebellion against Dagomba Rule? Contested Stories of Origin in North-Western Ghana," *Journal of African History* 35 (1994), 406. Ethnic ascription is fairly flexible, as migrant families tend to take on the dominant ethnic identity, and sometimes the language, of whatever community they are living in. As a result there may be patrilineages that would have categorized themselves as Sisala, Builsa, or Awuna, over the course of three or four generations. See: Jack Goody, "Fields of Social Control among the LoDagaba," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 87, 1 (1957), 80; Jeff Holden, "Zabarimas and the "Grunshis" in Northern Ghana, 1860–1900" (unpublished manuscript [1979/1980]), 8; Lentz, *Ethnicity*; Rattray, *Tribes*, 465).

[30] Igor Kopytoff, "The Internal African Frontier: The Making of African Political Culture," in Igor Kopytoff, ed., *The African Frontier: The Reproduction of Traditional African Societies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 3–84; also see Jan Ovesen, *Ethnic Identification in the Voltaic Region: Problems of the Perception of "Tribe" and "Tribal Society,"* Working Papers in African Studies 13 (Uppsala: African Studies Programme, 1985), 9.

[31] Şaul and Royer, *West African Challenge*, 34.

[32] Bruce Grindal, *Growing Up in Two Worlds: Education and Transition Among the Sisala of Northern Ghana* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), 7.

[33] Edward Tengan, *The Land as Being and Cosmos: The Institution of the Earth Cult Among the Sisala of Northwestern Ghana* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 15; John Tosh, "Colonial Chiefs in a Stateless

The willingness or ability of lineage sections in northwestern Ghana to migrate at will was curbed during the nineteenth century, a period characterized by widespread insecurity. Communities in the region typically had a decentralized political organization and were routinely subjected to intermittent raids by agents of centralized polities, such as the Dagomba, Gonja, and Mossi. The area was thus a source of captives who could be sold for profit in the slave markets of West Africa.[34] The situation worsened in the latter half of the century with the permanent settlement of a group of Zaberma raiders in the region,[35] but not all insecurity was caused by the raiding activities of outsiders. The inhabitants of the targeted villages sometimes forged alliances with slave raiders as a means of altering the local political balance in their favor and often engaged in raiding on their own behalf.[36] The situation was so bad that some of the colonial officials described the societies in the region as "living in continuous warfare among themselves and against invaders."[37] This situation, which also pertained in other areas of West Africa, led to many wide-ranging changes in settlement patterns and sociopolitical organization throughout the subregion.[38]

Society: A Case Study from Northern Uganda," *Journal of African History* 14, 3 (1973), 473–90. Also see Benjamin Kunbour, "Multiple Layers of Land Rights and 'Multiple Owners': The Case of Land Disputes in the Upper West Region of Ghana," in Franz Kröger and Barbara Meier, eds., *Ghana's North: Research on Culture, Religion, and Politics of Societies in Transition* (Frankfurt am main: Peter Lang, 2003), 101–128, for a discussion of the overlapping nature of land claims and different notions of ownership.

[34] Benedict Der, *The Slave Trade in Northern Ghana* (Ghana, Woeli Publishing Services, 1987); Marion Johnson, "The Slaves of Salaga," *Journal of African History* 27, 2 (1986), 341–62.

[35] Stanislaw Pilaszewicz, *The Zabarma Conquest of North-West Ghana and Upper Volta: A Hausa Narrative. "Histories of Samory and Babatu and Others," by Mallam Abu* (Warsaw, Polish Scientific Publishers, 1992).

[36] Jack Goody, *Technology, Tradition, and the State in Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971); Natalie Swanepoel, "Too Much Power is Not Good: War and Trade in Nineteenth Century Sisalaland, Northern Ghana" (Ph.D. thesis, Syracuse University, 2004); Natalie Swanepoel, "Socio-Political Change on a Slave-Raiding Frontier: War, Trade and 'Big Men' in Nineteenth Century Sisalaland, Northern Ghana," *Journal of Conflict Archaeology* 1 (2006), 264–93.

[37] Kuba and Lentz, "Arrows and Earthshrines," 381.

[38] See, for example, Philip Burnham, "Raiders and Traders in Adamwa: Slavery as a Regional System," in James Watson, ed., *Asian and African Systems of Slavery* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1980), 43–72; Philip De Barros, "The Effect of the Slave Trade on the Bassar Ironworking Society, Togo," in Christopher DeCorse, ed., *West Africa during the Atlantic Slave Trade: Archaeological Perspectives* (London: Leicester University Press, 2001), 132–74; Michael Gleave, "The Changing Frontiers of Settlement in the Uplands of Northern Nigeria," *The Nigerian Geographical Journal* 8, 2 (1965), 127–40; Holl, "500 Years in the Cameroons: Making Sense of the Archaeological Record," in DeCorse, ed., *West Africa*, 316–368; Alan Howard, "Nodes, Networks, Landscapes, and Regions: Reading the Social History of Tropical Africa," in Alan Howard and Richard Shain, eds., *The Spatial Factor in African History: The Relationship of the Social, Material and Perceptual* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 21–140; Ken Kelly, "Indigenous Responses to Colonial Encounters on the West Africa Coast: Hueda and Dahomey from the Seventeenth through Nineteenth Century," in Claire Lyons and John Papadopoulos, eds., *The Archaeology of Colonialism* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2002), 196–20; David Kiyaga-Mulindwa, "Social and Demographic Changes in the Birim Valley, Southern Ghana, c. 1450 to c. 1800," *Journal of African History* 23, 1 (1982),

Villages moved to more easily fortified positions on the landscape, such as hilltops or lakes, built defensive walls around their settlements, constructed tree stockades, planted thorn bush hedges, or adopted numerous other defensive strategies.[39]

Slave raiding in northern Ghana came to an end at the close of the nineteenth century when the area was effectively occupied by the British military towards the end of 1897.[40] This early stage of colonization was largely concerned with "pacifying" the region by defeating the warlords and freebooters (such as the Zaberma) responsible for slaving and other conflict, as well as quelling any local resistance.[41] In 1902 the area was formally colonized and "the Northern Territories" designated as a protectorate, achieving its independence along with the rest of Ghana in 1957.[42]

The region was differentially populated: areas such as the Tumu District had a low population density with minimal traffic by precolonial trade caravans, while to the West and East around the centers of Wa and Bolgatanga, respectively, population density was much higher and, subsequently, the resistance to British colonization greater.[43] Due to its general economic unproductivity and the lack of official willingness to develop the region, northern Ghana remained a backwater and is often referred to as the "Cinderella of the Gold Coast."[44] This meant that the impact of colonialism in the north was, in many

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63–82; Susan McIntosh, "Tools for Understanding Transformation and Continuity in Senegambian Society. With a contribution by Ibrahima Thiaw," in DeCorse, ed., *West Africa*, 29–87.

[39] See, for example, Thierno Bah, "Slave-Raiding and Defensive Systems South of Lake Chad from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century," in Sylviane Diouf, ed., *Fighting the Slave Trade: West African Strategies* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003), 15–30; Christopher DeCorse, "Fortified Towns of the Koinadagu Plateau: Ethnoarchaeological Research in Northeastern Sierra Leone" (MA thesis, UCLA, 1983); Adama Guéye, "The Impact of the Slave Trade on the Cayor and Baol: Mutations in Habitat and Land Occupancy," in Diouf, ed., *Fighting the Slave Trade*, 50–61; Martin Klein, "Defensive Strategies: Wasulu, Masina, and the Slave Trade," in Diouf, ed., *Fighting the Slave Trade*, 62–80; Chapurukha Kusimba, "Archaeology of Slavery in East Africa," *African Archaeological Review* 21, 2 (2004), 59–88; Scott MacEachern, "Selling the Iron for Their Shackles: Wandala-*Montagnard* Interactions in Northern Cameroon," *Journal of African History* 34 (1993), 247–70; Elisée Soumonni, "Lacustrine Villages in South Benin as Refuges from the Slave Trade," in Diouf, ed., *Fighting the Slave Trade*, 3–14; Swanepoel, "Sociopolitical Change," 264–93.

[40] Raymond Bening, "The Administrative Areas of Northern Ghana, 1898–1951," *Bulletin d'IFAN* 45, ser. B, 3–4 (1983), 325–56. This military occupation was preceded by forays into the interior by government agents such as George Ekem Ferguson. See George Ekem Ferguson, *The Papers of George Ekem: A Fanti Official of the Government of the Gold Coast, 1890–1897*, ed. by K. Arhin (Cambridge: African Studies Centre, 1974), whose task it was to initiate "treaties of trade and friendship" or "trade and protection" with chiefs in the area.

[41] Holger Weiss, "Crop Failures, Food Shortages and Colonial Famine Relief Policies in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast," *Ghana Studies* 6 (2003), 5–58.

[42] Raymond Bening, "Internal Colonial Boundary Problems of the Gold Coast, 1874–1906," *Journal of African Studies* 8, 1 (1981), 2–15.

[43] Bening, "The Administrative Areas," 339–40.

[44] Kwamina Dickson, "Background to the Problem of Economic Development in Northern Ghana,"

respects, relatively understated.[45] The colonial administrative center in the Sisala area, Tumu Station, was even closed down for a brief period between 1909 and 1912 due to its peaceable nature (its functions being transferred to the Lawra post), and then again in 1920.[46]

From the 1920s onward, the colonial administration in the Northern Territories became more intrusive as officials clamped down on the residential mobility of inhabitants. This was to allow for greater control of "labour, resources, recruitment for the military and poll-tax collection."[47] Equally, the *pax colonia* was strictly enforced. Villages suspected of raiding or other challenges to British domination were often subjected to punitive raids by the colonial authorities, a common feature from the beginning of colonial rule at the end of the nineteenth century.[48]

Settlement Pattern and Organization in Northern Ghana

Even within the context of the modern-day nation state, the village is still the most important community and political unit for most peoples in northern Ghana and the Volta region. Within the village, the lineage takes precedence as the corporate unit of production, distribution and consumption[49] and it is widely accepted that the social structure of the lineage is reflected in the physical growth of and changes to the lineage compound and settlement.[50]

Annals of the Association of American Geographers 58, (1968), 686–96.

[45] Raymond Bening, "Administration and Development in Northern Ghana 1898–1931," *Ghana Social Science Journal* 4, 2 (1977), 58–76; David Davis, "'Then the White Man Came with His Whitish Ideas …': The British and the Evolution of Traditional Government in Mampurugu," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 20, 4 (1987), 627–46.

[46] The station was only re-opened because its closing led to rumors and panic that the area was to be given over to the French, who occupied Leo just over the international border. See Bening, "The Administrative Areas," 340; Grindal, *Growing up*, 6.

[47] Kuba and Lentz, "Arrows and Earth-Shrines," 404.

[48] Roger Thomas, "Forced Labour in British West Africa: The Case of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, 1906–1927," *Journal of African History* 14, 1 (1973), 79–103; A.E.G. Watherston, "The Northern Territories of the Gold Coast," *Journal of the African Society* 7 (1908), 344–73.

[49] Bourdier and Minh-ha, *African Spaces*, 17; Mendonsa, "Economic, Residential and Ritual Fusion."

[50] Jean-Paul Bourdier and Trinh Minh-ha, *Drawn from African Dwellings* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 89; Drucker-Brown, "House and Hierarchy," 669; Gabrilopolous et al., "Lineage Organisation"; Goody, *Social Organisation*, 45–46; John Hunter, "The Social Roots of Dispersed Settlement in Northern Ghana," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 57, 2 (1967), 338–49; Alex Tengan, "Dagara 'Bagr': Ritualising Myth of Social Foundation," *Africa* 69, 4 (1999), 603. This close relationship between the compound and the family that occupies it is not unique to northern Ghana. See David, "The Fulani Compound"; and Patricia Davidson, "The Social Use of Domestic Space in a Mpondo Homestead," *South African Archaeological Bulletin* 43, 100–108. Equally, the decline of the family compound and the increased occurrence of individual dwelling units are seen as reflecting the decline of the extended family "as the groups have found themselves increasingly deprived of the conventional structures that regulate their society." See Bourdier and Minh-ha, *Drawn from African Dwellings*, 100).

Generally, settlements in northern Ghana are characterized by two distinct patterns—nucleated and dispersed.[51] The term "dispersed" designates those villages composed of lineage compounds that are scattered across the landscape, separated by a kilometer or more, each surrounded by their farms.[52] Nucleated settlements tend to have the lineage compounds situated closer together. They may have compound gardens but the bulk of the farms are situated some distance away in the bush.

Ethnic identities (and the concomitant social, political, and religious ideologies) are seen as being expressed in material form through settlement pattern, organization, and compound structure.[53] For example, Drucker-Brown describes the "external aspect of a house" as asserting "a political identity."[54] Thus, the Tallensi and LoWiili are characterized by dispersed settlement, and the Mamprusi by a nucleated settlement pattern; the Sisala are specifically characterized as living in "compact, nucleated villages."[55]

The Sisala Village: Form and Organization

Overwhelmingly, Sisala architecture is described as possessing the following characteristics: oblong rooms; flat roofs; and compounds so close together that the yards or corridors leave the visitor with an impression of a village street.[56] The nucleation of such settlements is often given as a defining characteristic of the Sisala vis-à-vis other groups in the region:

> the compact nature of the Sisala villages and its replication in the patriclan house is a distinguishing feature of the Sisala settlements by comparison to those of their neighboring Dagaaba. It is not surprising that the Dagaaba gave them the name *langme*, literally, "the people who stay together or unite."[57]

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[51] See George Benneh, "Land Tenure and Farming Systems in a Sissala Village in Northern Ghana," *Bulletin d'IFAN* 35, 2 (1973), 361–79; T. E. Hilton, "The Settlement Pattern of the Tumu District of Northern Ghana," *Bulletin d' IFAN* 30 (1968), 868–83 Prussin, *Architecture*.

[52] These compounds were so dispersed that colonial officers sometimes referred to them as "countrysides" instead of towns or villages. See Roger Thomas, "The 1916 Bongo Riots and Their Background: Aspects of Colonial Administration and African Response in Eastern Upper Ghana," *Journal of African History* 24 (1983), 57–75.

[53] This is not something that is unique to the Anglophone work produced in Ghana. French anthropologists too link characteristics such as a decentralized political system to particular ethnolinguistic groups and directly to settlement organization. Thus, dispersed villages in southern Burkina Faso were viewed as "properly" segmentary, while those in the north, which displayed more complex forms, were interpreted as not. See Mahir Şaul, "The War Houses of the Watara in West Africa," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 31, 3 (1998), 537–70.

[54] Drucker-Brown, "House and Hierarchy," 671.

[55] Ibid., 672; Goody *Social Organisation*, 91; Grindal "An Ethnographic Classification."

[56] Bourdier and Minh-ha, *African Spaces*, 114; Hilton, "The Settlement Pattern of the Tumu District"; Hunter, "The Social Roots"; Prussin, *Architecture in Northern Ghana*; Rattray, *Tribes*, 490.

[57] Tengan, *Land as Being and Cosmos*, 21.

Some variations in settlement organization are noted:

> To the south the compounds, in their day tiny, autonomous republics, were planted out of shooting range of one another, and the tradition persists. In the north, ravaged by Babatu, they are closer together as the need for defense overrode mutual distrust.[58]

Mendonsa[59] suggests that the above-mentioned difference between compact, nucleated villages and the more dispersed version is a result of the interaction of the twin forces of trade and war. He posits that those villages situated close to trade routes, and thus more likely to be targeted by freebooters and raiders, would have had a greater need to fortify their town. In contrast, villages deep in the bush (and therefore less obvious targets) maintained a dispersed pattern and were more likely to flee at the approach of raiders.[60] This issue is currently the subject of further archaeological investigation.

In the 1970s, Grindal[61] noted that an alternative house type did exist and suggested that it had diffused from southern Ghana and may be associated with younger inhabitants who had traveled more:

> Whereas the flat mud-roofed houses tend to comprise the older and more traditional compounds, the gabled thatch-roofed houses are usually located apart from the compounds, constituting independent living units.

Nucleated settlements, however, are definitely regarded as the norm for the Sisala: "*Breaking away* from the tight, nucleated pattern of settlement … these compounds are erected on the slopes of a wide depression and dispersed in a radius of 450 meters," write Bourdier and Minh-ha[62] (emphasis mine) in their description of the Sisala village of Outoulou in Burkina Faso.

In explaining this particular form of settlement pattern and compound style, ethnographers, historians, and geographers usually attribute them to factors such as the history of slave raiding and the prevalent agricultural system.[63] Slave raiding in particular is noted as being the defining factor, also giving rise to what some describe as a higher than average village allegiance.[64] Yet, as will be seen in the discussion of the case study of

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[58] Hilton, *Settlement Pattern*, 870.

[59] Mendonsa, *Continutiy and Change*, 41–44.

[60] Such fortification, particularly the building of walls around such villages may also be related to the presence of *sipalaara* or "big men" who took charge of organizing such defense. See Ibid.; and Swanepoel, "Socio-Political Change."

[61] Grindal, "An Ethnographic Classification," 417.

[62] Bourdier and Minh-ha, *African Spaces*, 114.

[63] K.B. Dickson, "Nucleation and Dispersal of Rural Settlements in Ghana," *Ghana Social Science Journal* 1, 1(1971), 116–31; Grindal, "An Ethnographic Classification," 418; Hunter, "Social Roots," 339; Prussin, *Architecture in Northern Ghana*; Paul Webber, "Agrarian Change in Kusasi, North-East Ghana," *Africa* 66, 3 (1996), 437–57.

[64] Grindal, *Growing Up*, 7; but see Prussin, *Architecture in Northern Ghana*, 67, who argues that defensive needs alone could not explain the continuing nucleation of Sisala systems, but that it "may emerge

Dolbizan in the following pages, Grindal's alternative house form is probably a regional variation with some chronological depth, and the overall form of the Sisala village is prone to change over time depending on the specific circumstances prevalent at the time. Below, I present the results collected during two stints of archaeological fieldwork from April and May 2001, and January to May 2002. This data was collected as part of a larger project that examines the impact of slave raiding on the sociopolitical and economic organization of decentralized communities. Particularly, I was interested in establishing whether or not the presence of a "big man," by the name of Dolbizan, was made manifest in the material record at the hilltop site of Yalingbong, either through changes in spatial organization or other material indicators of wealth and status.[65] As a result, especial attention was paid to the way in which the spatial configuration of the different village sections in relation to one another changed over time. During my fieldwork I lived in the modern-day village of Dolbizan, home to Yalingbong's descendant community. This exposure to village politics gave me insight into how the current relationships between different sections of the village are reflected in its physical layout. I was also able to map the individual section compounds in the village and observe the seasonal round of building construction and repair.

Case Study: Dolbizan

The village of Dolbizan is today situated about 60 kilometers south of the district capital of Tumu (see Figure 1). Sisalaland (today composed of two districts—Sisala East and Sisala West) is bounded geographically by the Kulpawn River to the west and south, and by the Sissili River to the east. In the north, the Sisala linguistic area extends into the southern portion of Burkina Faso. The Ghanaian/Burkinabe border, officially delimited in 1900, cuts through the Isalaang (Sisala) linguistic region and many people still have kin on the other side. [66]

At the time of fieldwork in 2001–2002 the village of Dolbizan was organized into seven different sections (see Figure 2) separated from one another by varying distances depending on the social closeness of the lineages and patriclans concerned.[67] These sections are composed of either a single lineage compound or a group of such compounds and related buildings. The composition of the patriclan and minor lineage segments are clearly represented in the architectural structure of the village and the spatial arrangement of the village as described above. This relationship is expressed linguistically in that the

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from consideration of the exigencies of defense in conjunction with the dictates of land-use pattern."

[65] See Swanepoel, "Socio-Political Change," for a discussion of these issues.

[66] Raymond Bening, "The Definition of the International Boundaries of Northern Ghana 1888–1904," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 14, 2 (1973), 229–61.

[67] All the sections acknowledge a common ancestry, explaining that their separation stems from the hiving off of sublineages as the population grew. This is no doubt an over-simplification as information, collected by Rattray in the 1920s, points to multiple clan migrations into and out of the village (see Rattray, *Tribes*, 467).
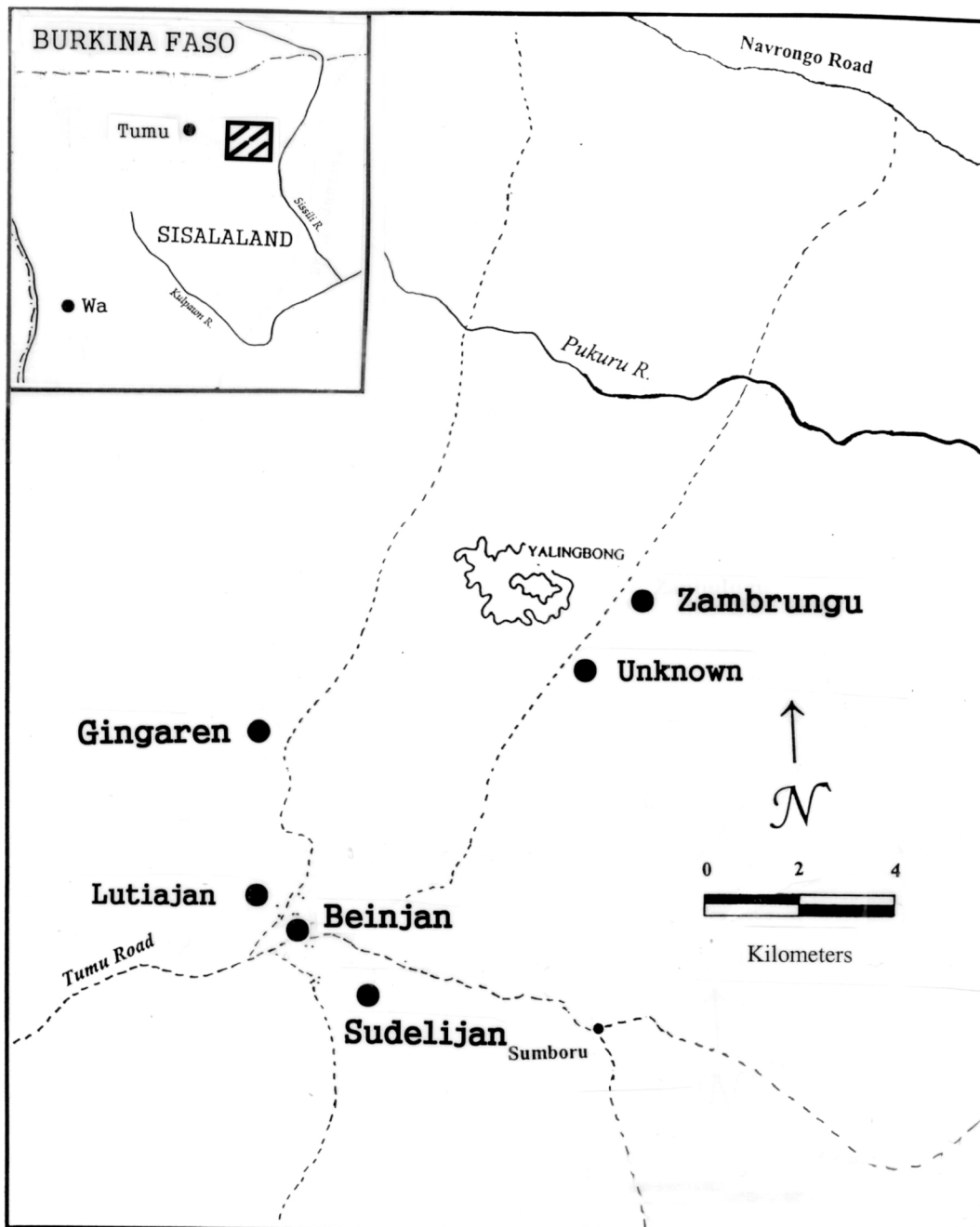
Figure 1.   Location of sites mentioned in the text and approximate representation of Dolbizan, ca. 1930.

term for a subsection of a clan or kin group—*jan*—appears as a suffix in section names within villages.[68] Section autonomy is reflected spatially in the layout of the village and the social and political relationships between sections are embodied in the physical distance between them. The section compounds of lineages that are socially close tend to be situated close to one another.

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[68] Mendonsa, *Politics of Divination*, 52.
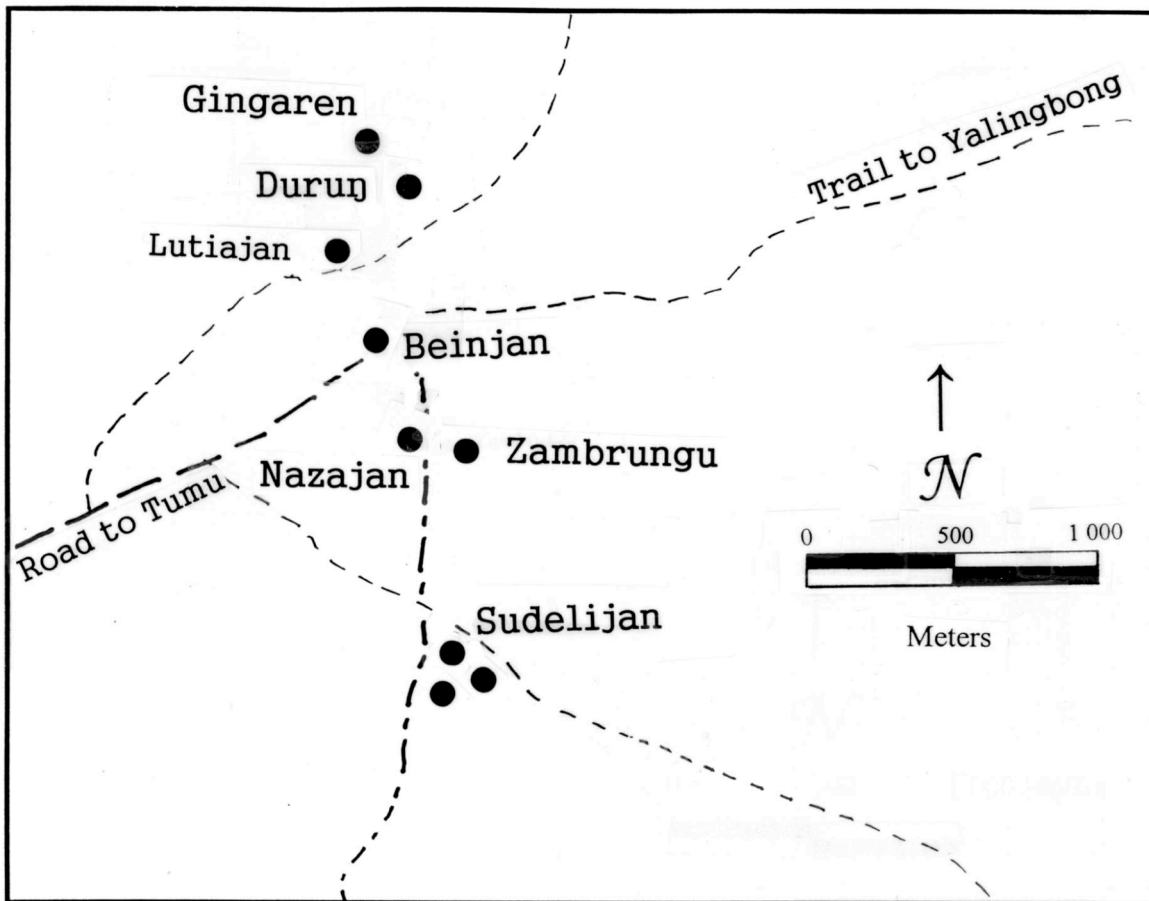
Figure 2. Sections in Dolbizan, ca. 2002.

The lineage compounds are formed by any number of rooms that are generally, but not always, joined together by a wall that is believed to keep the members of the lineage safe from contact with danger during the night.[69] As such, all rooms open onto the interior of the enclosed courtyard and not onto the open space surrounding the compound. The majority of the rooms are rectangular in shape. As more and more people acquire the means, new room structures are roofed with corrugated metal sheets. Older rooms, or those abandoned and used for penning animals, retain thatch roofing as does the occasional round room in the architectural setting. Flat, mud roofs are not a common feature in this village although they periodically occur as corner features of the compound, usually associated with the kitchen area. I observed only two such architectural features in the entire village.[70] The form of these compounds is very malleable. When a room collapses, the ruin will be demolished and the remains of the mud-brick will form the mortar for the new room to be built in its place.

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[69] Ibid., 53. Also see Prussin, "Indigenous African Architecture."

[70] Such roofs are far more diagnostic of the western part of Sisalaland.

There are few status differences apparent in the architecture of the village. Village chiefs in this area often have two-storey dwellings[71] but this is not the case in Dolbizan. The form that compounds take may, however, reflect other differences in worldview. Figure 3 is a map of the Zambrungu section, home to one of the most staunchly traditional elders. This traditionalism is reflected in the layout of the compound—all the rooms joined together and all lineage members gathered together within a single compound. Beinjan, the chief's section (depicted in Figure 4) differs in several important respects. It sprawls over a much greater area and the wall that usually encloses these compounds is missing. This may be a function of the fact that many of the inhabitants of this section are Muslim and thus do not subscribe to traditional beliefs. In addition, the most northerly part of this section has two outlying dwellings. These belong to young men in the section who have either travelled outside of the village or who have their own source of income. Other buildings in the village include a school and smaller compounds inhabited by people who do not belong to a village lineage or who are there on outside business, such as the cotton company representative. There is no trace of the colonial rest house except for a ring of cottonwood trees that mark the shade area that once existed around that building.

While the village is not organized on a grid system as is common in other areas of Ghana, such as Banda,[72] the current arrangement of the village should still be understood as a modern feature. It displays none of the features (such as extreme nucleation, a village wall, or a defensive setting) that were common in Sisalaland during the nineteenth century when slave raiding was at its height.[73] Colonial village planning may also have had an impact. An overwhelming concern of the colonial administration for example was the prevention of disease and the spread of infection, to which end they encouraged villagers to change the layout of their settlements (see below).

Dolbizan: Nineteenth Century

The modern day spatial configuration of the village can be contrasted with its appearance in the nineteenth century at the height of insecurity. At this time Dolbizan was known by the name "Kpan"[74] and was situated on a rocky hilltop known as Yalingbong—"the war rock." Located approximately 10 kilometers from the modern day village of Dolbizan, Yalingbong was probably originally settled in the early to mid-nineteenth century as small groups migrated into the area escaping war and unrest in the south. The original settlements concentrated primarily along the northern edge of the site, which has a steep drop to the plain and was easily defensible. Over time, as the population grew, there was an increase in the number of settlements in rocky terrain, especially in the smaller, less accessible and possibly less desirable places. The site was partially abandoned at the end of the 1800s after its inhabitants suffered a massive defeat, and was totally abandoned in the

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[71] Mendonsa, *Continuity and Change*, 63.

[72] See Stahl, *Making History*, 62. As Stahl has shown, village planning during the colonial era may have had a large impact on the settlement organization of villages in the region, as colonial officers sought to reach the development goals that they had been set.

[73] Swanepoel, "Socio-Political Change," 272–75.

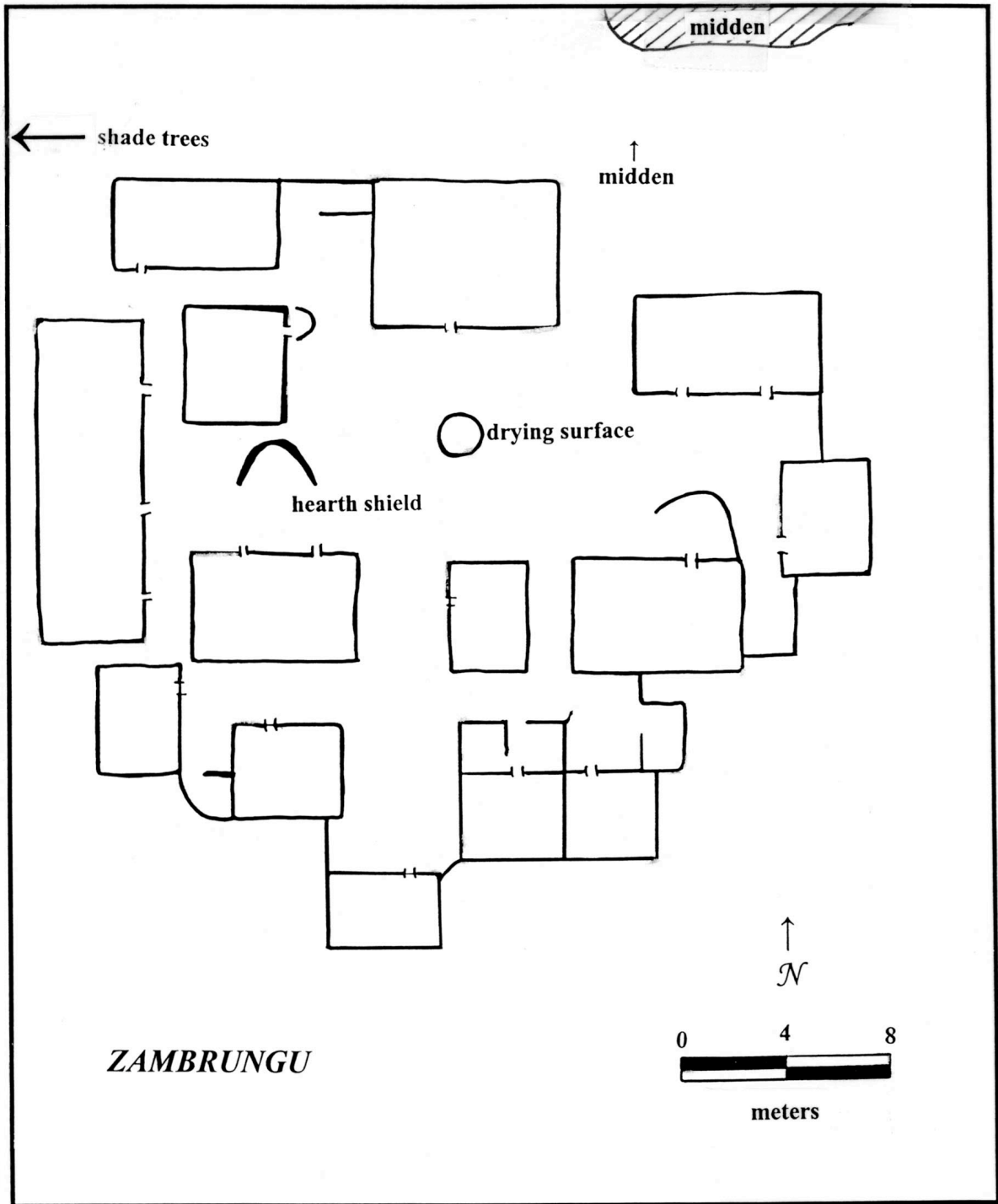[74] This is still used as an alternative name for the village today.

Figure 3. Zambrungu section, Dolbizan, ca. 2002.

BEINJAN

shade trees/
meeting area

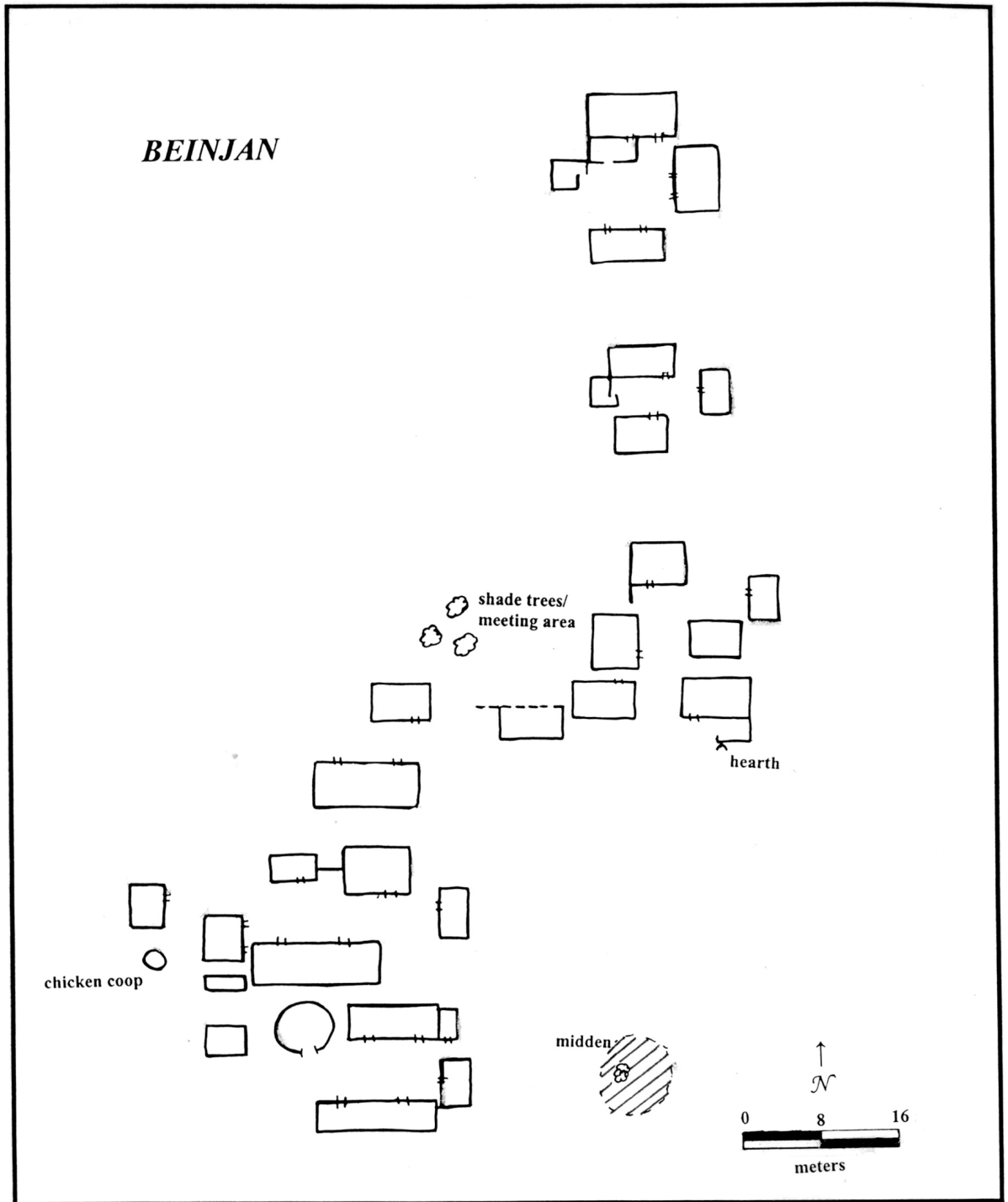hearth

chicken coop

midden

N

0   8   16

meters

Figure 4. Beinjan Section, Dolbizan, ca. 2002.

early years of the twentieth century. A survey of the site was conducted in April and May 2001.[75] A total of twenty-four residential loci (including the remains of compounds) were discovered within the confines of Yalingbong itself and ten nineteenth century compound sites were selected for further investigation. These site loci were mapped, and a test excavation and surface collection was carried out at each in the January to May 2002 field season.

Spatially, the community was organized into groups of compounds that were situated in fairly flat, open spaces among large boulder outcrops (see Figure. 5). The compounds were composed of fairly small rooms and were scattered throughout the rocks as opposed to the more nucleated architecture found at some other hilltop settlements in the vicinity.[76] My interpretation, supported by oral traditions, is that these clusters of compounds within each loci are analogous to the sections or wards we find in the village today. The architecture of these compounds can be partially reconstructed, as there are a number of extant walls at the site as well as exposed foundations. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, it was not possible to excavate any compounds.[77] In addition to the survey data, there is a written description provided by Assistant Inspector H.J.C. Leland who passed through the village of Dolbizan on his route survey in 1898:

> Dolbizan situated on the top of a very rocky hill, consists of circular huts with grass conical-shaped roofs which are scattered in blocks amongst granite boulders....[78]

It is somewhat curious that Leland should describe the huts as "circular," since the architectural remains certainly do not bear out this observation. It is possible that he passed through an area that happened to have circular outbuildings (as are sometimes seen in the area today) or that he mistook the small oblong rooms with rounded corners that *are* present for circular huts. He also notes that the houses were thatched—that is, they were not flat-roofed, mud structures. This indicates that the architectural forms described by Grindal[79] as new innovations are actually part of a long-term regional variation. This difference between flat-roofed and thatched housing may be representative of either the linguistic, dialectical difference between western and eastern Sisalaland, or alternatively, may reflect differing environmental resources. Flat roofed structures require a lot of wood, as they use thick timbers to support the weight of the packed clay roofs. In traditionally flat-roofed towns such as Gwollu there is now a trend towards the use of thatched and

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[75] During the survey an area was designated as a separate locus (landscape element) if it represented a discrete area of occupation or other use. At Yalingbong, the loci are invariably bounded by the topography, natural walls formed by huge boulders.

[76] Colonial officers at the beginning of the twentieth century noted some extremely large compounds on these hilltop sites. The village of Kulum, for example, where one compound (of seven) had over 150 rooms joined together. See General Staff, *Route Book of the Gold Coast Colony, Ashanti, and the Northern Territories, Vol. 2* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1906), 349. The site of Wutoma, near the modern day village of Lilexi, is also characterized by compact settlement (personal observation).

[77] The test excavations concentrated on the midden areas.

[78] In General Staff, *Route Book*, 167.

[79] Grindal, "An Ethnographic Classification."

corrugated metal for roofing, as flat mud roofs require both a lot of labor and strong timbers to serve as roof supports. Timber is increasingly scarce and thus this style is falling out of favor with some Gwollu residents. Some residents might also associate the use of metal with an expression of material success.[80]

As is to be expected, the size and shape of the rooms in the nineteenth century were decidedly different from those found in the village today. They are generally smaller and have rounded corners in comparison to the large, rectangular rooms with right-angled corners. This is no doubt a reflection of differences in building technique. Whereas the modern-day houses are built with pre-formed mud-bricks, the walls of the Yalingbong compounds were built using the puddled-mud technique, which involves the "super-imposing of hand-shaped adobe layers."[81] Other architectural features are also markedly different. The modern-day houses are each equipped with doors tall enough to allow a person easy passage, and windows are common features. At least two of the extant walls at the site, however, preserved evidence of extremely low, circular doorways.[82] According to oral traditions, when the site was attacked, or if you did not trust your neighbor, you would go inside these buildings and block the doorways with flat stones. This was a common defensive feature in other areas of West Africa that experienced raiding.[83]

Dolbizan: 1900–1950

Understandably, in light of the way in which villages form and disperse (discussed above) the different wards situated at Yalingbong did not relocate en masse after their defeat by the Zaberma. Rather, the sections migrated; some merely a kilometer or so from the original site, others into different locations altogether. Only a handful of the estimated twenty-four sections remained to constitute the Dolbizan of the colonial period, which, according to a 1907 report, was composed of no more than ten sections.[84] Though these ten sections recognizably constituted the village of Dolbizan, they do not seem to have been nucleated at one location. Many of the scant physical descriptions in the early colonial records in fact describe the village as dispersed. In 1914, for example, a colonial officer noted that "Dolbizan is a village of scattered compounds, one of them being six miles away from the Rest House here."[85] The 1912 Tumu District Record Book describes

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[80] G.B. Bukari, pers. comm.; also see Bordier and Minh-ha, *Designs for Living*, Chapter 6; Drucker-Brown, "House and Hierarchy," 671; Labelle Prussin, "Sudanese Architecture and the Manding," *African Arts* 3, 4 (1970), 12–19, 64–67; "Indigenous African Architecture," 191.

[81] See Bourdier and Minh-ha, *African Spaces*, 123.

[82] While groups in the northeast use this strategy to prevent flooding during the rainy season, the compounds at Yalingbong seem to lack the characteristic "dam wall" on the inside of the low doorway that prevents the water from flooding the floor of the room.

[83] Bah, "Slave-Raiding and Defensive Systems," 15–30.

[84] Captain Poole, Official Diary for the Tumu District, 17 May 1907, ADM 62/5/3, Ghana Regional Archives, Tamale [hereafter G.R.A., T.].

[85] C. Armitage, Tour of Inspection by the Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories, 28 May–19 July 1914, ADM 56/1/124, G.R.A., T.
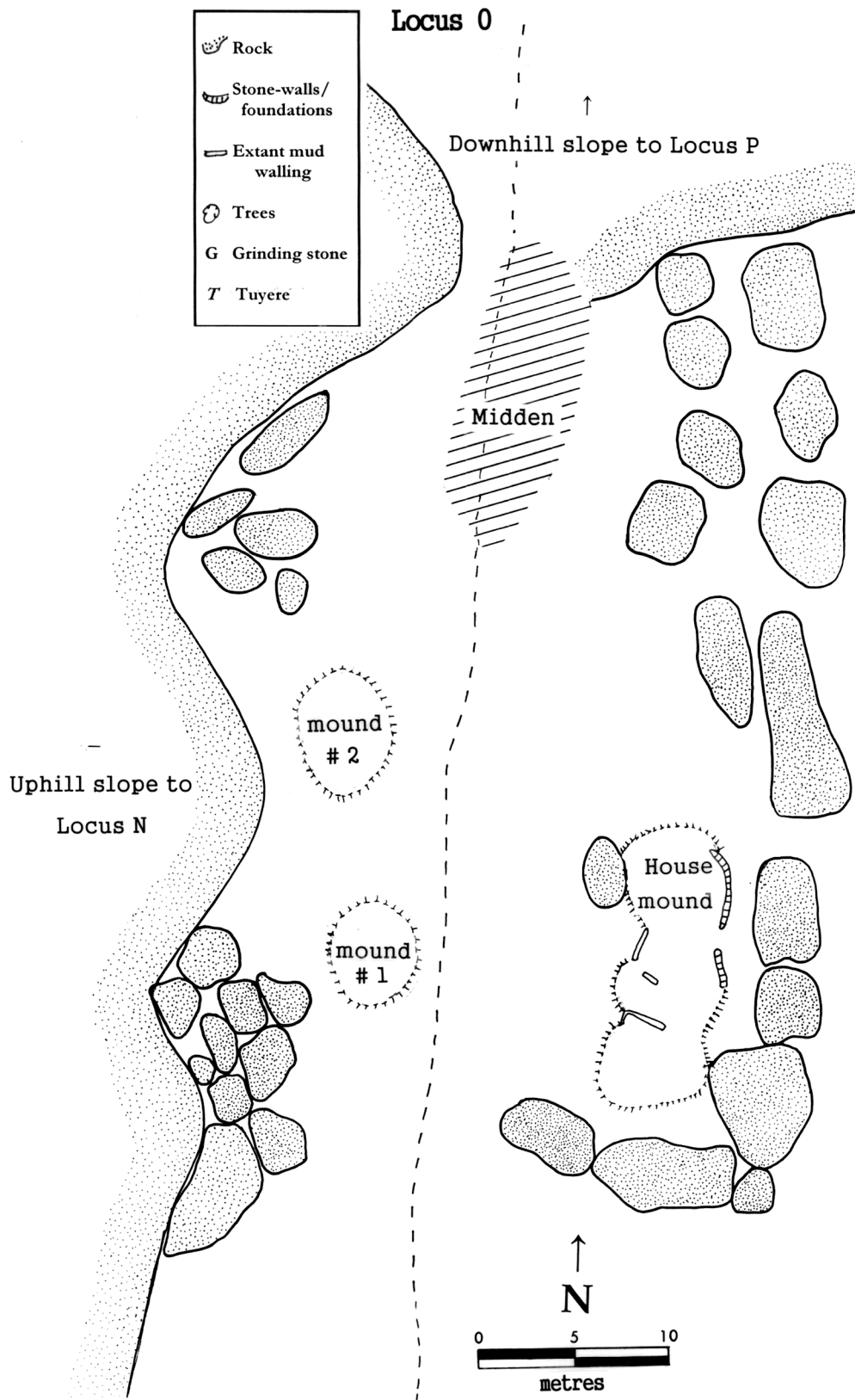
Locus O

Legend:
- Rock
- Stone-walls/foundations
- Extant mud walling
- Trees
- G   Grinding stone
- T   Tuyere

Downhill slope to Locus P

Midden

Uphill slope to Locus N

mound # 2

mound # 1

House mound

N

0   5   10

metres

Figure 5. Locus O, Yalingbong.

Dolbizan as "very scattered. Practically two villages six miles apart."[86] All of these sections had distinct names and identities that are still preserved in the village today: Beinjan (Yela); Sudelijan (Sidolijan), Nazajan, Duruŋ (Sijujan), Lutiajan (Jinje), Gingaren and Zambrungu (Zanbulugu/Zambulugu).

To some extent these sections constituted individual villages in their own right. Thus on the topographical maps of the region, Gingaren[87] (now deserted) is shown, and Rattray named Zambulugu as a separate "town" or "clan settlement" in his discussion of dialects in the region.[88] These distinct locations and names, however, did not prevent Dolbizan from maintaining a unified identity as a village. These scattered sections were regarded as a single village under a single colonial chief by the colonial administration and, even today, the people of the modern day village talk of those sites as historically part of Dolbizan. The mention of sections six miles distant from one another, for example, is in all probability a reference to the sections that remained in the vicinity of Yalingbong, which is approximately ten kilometers (6. 25 miles) northwest of Dolbizan (See Figure 1).

One of these sections was the small settlement of Zanbulugu, which was identified during the 2001 season and excavated in 2002. The people who once lived there now live in a section of Dolbizan called Zambrungu. According to the villagers (and this was substantiated by the archaeological evidence) Zanbulugu was occupied until the 1940s at which point the two old men who remained in residence there were forced to move to their present location, as they had no one to care for them.[89] Similarly the people of Gingaren moved to within close proximity of Duruŋ and are now regarded as largely indistinguishable from them.

Nineteenth-century accommodation to life under siege continued to have consequences for village formation. Sumboro, today a small village to the east of Dolbizan, was also one of its sections within the rock. During the strained times of the nineteenth century, however, when travel between villages was not easy, the taboo on endogamous marriage was violated. As a result, when it was no longer necessary to seek safety in numbers, a separate village was established so as to preserve the necessary distance between the lineages that had intermarried.[90] The seven sections or wards

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[86] P. Whittal, acting district commissioner, Tumu District Record Book, 1912, ADM 62/5/1, G.R.A., T.

[87] Gingaren was located, during the nineteenth century, at another rocky stronghold, Bosumu, which is located immediately north of Yalingbong. Unfortunately time constraints did not allow for an archaeological survey to be carried out there.

[88] Rattray, *Tribes*, 466.

[89] This process was by no means unusual in the region. Hilton, "Settlement Pattern," 871, reports that: "In 1908 Bekembele … had about sixty people. An epidemic 'cause unknown' almost wiped it out in August 1912. The place lingered on, there were five people in 1921 and eight in 1931. Then it disappeared." In 1919, the district commissioner was told that the inhabitants of Bendi were hungry and that they planned to move to Sumboro (See Tumu District Record Book, 10 October 1919, ADM 62/5/1, National Archives of Ghana [hereafter N.A. G.). See Weiss, "Crop Failures," for a discussion of food shortages in northern Ghana during the colonial period.

[90] Mendonsa, *Continuity and Change*, 56.

represented in the modern-day village of Dolbizan and even the ten that are recorded historically, represent a dramatic drop from the precolonial population of the village when it was situated at Yalingbong. Oral traditions and the archaeological remains attest that there were more than twenty sections resident at the site at the height of its occupation. Some of these compounds no doubt belonged to the inhabitants of several of the other villages in the area that took temporary or long-term refuge there, such as Nebiewale, Taffiasi, and Bujan. Others may have belonged to clan segments that later migrated elsewhere and amalgamated with other villages, a common process with villages in this area. Some sections, such as Sumboro, hived off to found separate villages as a result of the violation of the taboo on intraclan marriage during the occupancy of Yalingbong, while once independent communities such as Gingaren, have cleaved themselves to the modern-day village.[91]

The above history of village formation shows that the different sections of Dolbizan were mobile during the first half of the twentieth century. The fact that even those lineage settlements that were consistently identified as belonging to the village of Dolbizan were not always located in close spatial proximity to one another calls into question the extent to which nucleation can be regarded as a core characteristic of Sisala spatial organization, reflective of their past victimization by slave raiders. For the same reasons, their agricultural system cannot be used as a simple explanation. Rather, the reasons for the reaggregation of the sections close to one another probably lie in the conditions of the colonial period.

Discussion

As has been demonstrated above, the village of Dolbizan eventually relocated from an easily defensible settlement location at Yalingbong to their modern day location 60 kilometers from Tumu. This location was close to a seasonal river, was flatter terrain, and provided easier access to farmlands. It would also have been more conveniently located to the newly established local center of colonial power in Tumu. At first, since it was no longer necessary for the village sections to aggregate in one place for protection, they were spread out across the landscape, even though still linked by the common identity of "Dolbizan." Later, some sections re-aggregated, though they did not choose to live "cheek-by-jowl" with one another as seen in the nucleated villages of the nineteenth century. Thus the spatial organization of both early twentieth-century and modern day Dolbizan post-dates the end of slave raiding in the area and does not exhibit the degree of nucleation or the remains of defensive walls common at villages that have been occupied for over 100 years (such as is the case with the walled town of Gwollu).

There were a number of interrelated factors that were key to shaping the organization and placement of Dolbizan over time. These include: the prevalence of warfare in the nineteenth century; the enforced *Pax Colonia*; and the very specific environmental, political, and economic conditions that pertained in the region during the colonial period (1906–1956).

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[91] Swanepoel, "Too Much Power," 65–68.

Slave Raiding, Warfare and Depopulation

Undoubtedly, nineteenth-century architecture and settlement patterns in northwestern Ghana were shaped by the constant threat of raids that the population lived under. Thus, nucleated, walled, and hilltop settlements were common, not only in northwestern Ghana[92] but also elsewhere in West Africa[93] where the same conditions pertained at different periods. In addition, the prevailing insecurity also facilitated the formation of heterogeneous communities as diverse lineage and clan groups, in search of safety, migrated to join the same villages.[94] After the raiding had been brought to an end, one of the factors driving the nucleation of villages or the clustering of sections on the landscape was the low number of residents in the far-flung settlements.

The low population density that characterizes the Tumu area[95] is often attributed to the actions of slave raiders.[96] While no precise figures are available, it is generally accepted that the bulk of slaves sold in nineteenth-century markets such as Salaga originated in northwestern Ghana.[97] Geographers, however, point not to the loss of persons through raiding as the primary factor in low population density but rather the prevalence of disease (tsetse fly infestation, tryapnosomiasis, onchocerciasis, cerebro-spinal meningitis, and influenza[98]) compounded by poor environmental conditions such as soil exhaustion and erosion.[99] Disease and raiding are not, however, unrelated. It is suspected that the depredations of raiders—which led to out-migration, the removal of captives, and the frequent nucleation of the remaining population into larger, fortified settlements—may have left the environment open for infestation.[100] With the arrival of more peaceful times it may have proved difficult for local communities to reclaim the land that they had lost,

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[92] Grindal, "An Ethnographic Classification," 420; Swanepoel, "Socio-Political Change," 272–73.

[93] See, for example, Bah, "Slave-Raiding"; Gleave, "The Changing Frontiers," 127–40; Guéye, "The Impact of the Slave Trade"; and MacEachern, "Selling the Iron," 247–70.

[94] Bourdier and Minh-ha, *African Spaces*, 112.

[95] Bening, "The Administrative Areas," 339–40.

[96] Jack Goody, "Population and Polity in the Voltaic Region," in Jonathan Friedman and Michael Rowlands, eds., *The Evolution of Social Systems* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1978), 535–45; Lentz, "A Dagara Rebellion," 406.

[97] Marion Johnson, "The Atlantic Slave Trade and the Economy of West Africa," in Roger Anstey and Paul Hair, eds., *Liverpool, the African Slave Trade and Abolition* (Liverpool: Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 1976), 14–38.

[98] While it is difficult to estimate the number of deaths during the influenza epidemic of 1918–1919; the Northern Territories, including the Tumu District, was especially hard hit. A total of at least 28,000 people are estimated to have died in the Northern Territories, and 80 percent of the population to have been infected. See K David Patterson, "The Influenza Epidemic of 1918–19 in the Gold Coast," *Journal of African History* 24, 4 (1983), 485–502.

[99] Hilton, "Settlement Pattern," 871; K. David Patterson, "River Blindness in Northern Ghana, 1900–50," in Gerald Hartwig and K. David Patterson, eds., *Disease in African History* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1973), 88–117

[100] Goody, *Social Organisation*, 29.

without adequate labor power or equipment: "most Tumu settlements are small islands surrounded by bush and fighting it."[101]

The Pax Colonia

A central factor shaping settlements in the early twentieth century was the peace (*pax colonia*) forcibly imposed by colonial armies. This was largely concerned with halting the activities of slave raiders (such as the Zaberma) and the prevention of caravan raids, which had an impact on trade in the region. The consequences of pacification for settlement patterns were seen throughout West Africa. The most immediate result was the growth of settlements, such as Bawku or Tumu (both in northern Ghana), which were designated as colonial headquarters and district capitals.[102]

Another common feature was the reorganization and reorientation of settlements as communities that had previously withdrawn to rocky strongholds resettled on the plains where farming land was more accessible.[103] In reference to the Tallensi, Fortes[104] noted that one of the major results of the *Pax Britannica*, which brought an end to the pillaging and raiding in the northern reaches of Ghana, was that it extended their economic frontiers to the Mamprussi country so that young men were going to farm there without any hesitation. In other parts of northern Ghana, too, the new peace allowed smaller, independent settlement units to be founded.[105] Such changes were not always welcomed as it gave young men the opportunity to escape from the authority of their elders. [106] Sometimes communities did not move of their own volition but were forcibly relocated to the plains as the colonial authorities did not wish to allow potentially violent anticolonial agitators to retain possession of their strongholds.[107]

Colonial policies

One of the primary goals of the colonial officers was the improvement of the communities under their charge. They showed an overriding concern about aspects such as sanitation

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[101] Hilton, "The Settlement Pattern," 883.

[102] Dickson, "Background to the Problem," 689.

[103] See Gleave, "The Changing Frontiers," 131; Reuben, "Transformation of Rural Settlement in British Tropical Africa," *The Nigerian Geographical Journal* 9, 2 (1966), 129–44; Jean-Pierre Warnier and Ian Fowler, "A Nineteenth Century Ruhr in Central Africa," *Africa* 49, 4 (1979), 329–51.

[104] Meyer Fortes, "Culture Contact as a Dynamic Process: An Investigation in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast," *Africa* 9 (1936), 24–55.

[105] Kuba and Lentz, "Arrows and Earth-Shrines," 389.

[106] Similar pacification strategies in other parts of West Africa, such as Nigeria, resulted in the gradual expansion of farming groups such as the Kofyar, from their fortified highlands onto the plains of the Jos Plateau. See Glenn Stone, "Agrarian Settlement and the Spatial Disposition of Labour," in Holl and Levy, eds., *Spatial Boundaries,* 25–38, for a discussion of this.

[107] A prime example of this was the series of expeditions against the Teŋzugu shrine in the Tong Hills (Upper East Region), which was viewed as a wellspring of resistance to British occupation and the headquarters of caravan raiders. See Thomas, "The 1916 Bongo Riots," 62.

and the prevention of disease.[108] For example, Captain Poole informed a meeting of chiefs (including that from Dolbizan) that, due to the need to cut down on insect populations, standing crops should not be planted within fifty yards of the houses.[109] It was also advocated that compounds should be smaller and placed farther apart as, due to the absence of raiding activity, it was no longer necessary that they live in "rabbit warrens which are most unhealthy and difficult to keep clean," instead advocating that there should be "separate compounds for each family."[110]

The colonial government also instituted a new chieftaincy system. It was the duty of chiefs to provide labor for the maintenance of roads, the construction of rest houses, and the gold mines in the south.[111] As can be seen from the spatial organization of Dolbizan in the early twentieth century, however, the institution of the chieftaincy did not result in the close spatial aggregation of the village under that authority. Rather, the village sections retained some political autonomy for at least the first forty years of colonial rule. This autonomy is reflected in the distance on the ground between village sections during the first half of the century.

As seen in the case of Zambulugu, however, these outlying patrilineal settlements could not sustain themselves in the face of a population drain. Apart from disease, another cause of the depopulation of smaller settlements was undoubtedly labor migration from the north to the south. From the 1920s onward the north became a primary exporter of unskilled labor for the gold mines and other enterprises, such as the cocoa plantations.[112] In addition the majority of recruits to the Gold Coast Constabulary and the Gold Coast Regiment of the West African Frontier Force originated in the north.[113]

Such labor migration may have contributed to the population decline that saw village sections such as Zanbulugu and Gingaren relocate closer to the main locus of settlement at Dolbizan. This represented a general trend in the region. Many villages in the

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[108] Bening, "Administration and Development," 59; Grindal, "An Ethnographic Classification," 420.

[109] Captain Poole, Official Diary for the Tumu Station, 26 April 1914, ADM 62/5/4, G.R.A., T.; also see Thora Williamson, *Gold Coast Diaries: Chronicles of Political Officers in West Africa* (London: The Radcliffe Press, 2000), 279.

[110] S.D. Nash, District Commissioner, Official Diary for the Tumu District, 17 May 1907, ADM 62/5/4, G.R.A., T. Such governmental interference did not end with colonialism. There was a 1963 government initiative to replace round buildings with "better ventilated" rectangular ones in Bolgatanga. In addition, the way in which agricultural land was to be parceled out was also to be changed. See Hunter, "Social Roots," 349; and Achim Von Oppen, "The Village as Territory: Enclosing Locality in Northwest Zambia, 1950s–1990s," *Journal of African History* 47, 1 (2006), 57–76, for a Zambian perspective.

[111] Goody, "Social Organisation," 9.

[112] Motorized transport was introduced in the late 1920s and, subsequently, informal migration (i.e., those not officially recruited by the colonial government) increased. See Hawkins, *Writing and Colonialism*, 57, 65. Even before 1930, many young men from the Northwest were "officially" recruited (effectively forced to sign up) for work in the gold mines and other enterprises. See Thomas, "Forced Labour."

[113] Raymond Bening, *Ghana: Regional Boundaries and National Integration* (Accra, Ghana: Ghana Universities Press, 1999), 220. Such labor migration was not necessarily permanent as, in order to draw the balance of their pay, migrants had to return to the north. See Holden, "Zabarimas and the 'Grunshis,'" 35.

area declined in population during the first half of the twentieth century. Hilton[114] records that several small settlements in the Dolbizan and Santijan divisions disappeared between 1921 and 1931. Nine of seventeen settlements that in 1938 had been recorded as having a population of less than fifty had disappeared by 1948, while between 1931 and 1948 the population of the remaining villages in the Dolbizan district decreased by a third.

Conclusion

As described earlier, the Sisala, in their ethnographic manifestation, are often classified as having a nucleated settlement pattern and stronger than average village allegiance. This is understood both as a result of their being raided for slaves in the past as well as their agricultural system.[115] Yet what the history of Dolbizan shows us is that there is nothing inherent in Sisala culture, history, or economy that dictates a nucleated settlement pattern. Rather, the village probably re-aggregated in the early to mid-twentieth century as a direct result of a combination of factors characteristic of the colonial period. These include severe droughts and water shortages, the desire of colonial authorities that villages be manageably situated, and, most importantly, the population decline and abandonment of small villages and sections due to disease, environmental factors, migrant labor, and enlistment in the army during the Second World War. These factors should not be underestimated. For example, an outbreak of cerebro-spinal meningitis in the northwestern part of the country resulted in the death of 8,000 people in 1907, sleeping sickness epidemics in the 1920s decimated the population in the Black Volta and Kulpawn valleys, and the 1930s saw yearly locust invasions that badly affected food supplies.[116]

While no specific statistics are available to assess the impact of each of the above factors on Dolbizan itself, it clearly was not untouched by the prevailing economic, social, and political situation. Thus, while those Sisala villages that have been continuously occupied since the nineteenth century might retain some aspects of the defensive architecture that was necessary during the slave-raiding era, there are others that adapted to fit the new circumstances of the twentieth century. This can be documented by tracing the histories of individual communities over time. Archaeology can be used, in conjunction with historical and ethnographic sources, to achieve a greater understanding of these dynamics.

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[114] Hilton, "Settlement Pattern," 873.

[115] Grindal, "An Ethnographic Classification;" Prussin, *Architecture*.

[116] Brenda Chalfin, "Border Zone and the Economic Boundaries of the State in North East Ghana," *Africa* 71, 2 (2001), 202–23; Thomas, "Forced Labour," 81; Holger Weiss, "Locust Invasions in Colonial Northern Ghana," *Working Paper on Ghana: Historical and Contemporary Studies* 3 (2004), 1–59, for a discussion of the impact of locust invasions in the 1930s and 1940s.

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