

ROCK PAINTINGS FROM NORTHERN GHANA

P. L. AND P. J. CARTER

THE GAMBAGA Escarpment, an outcrop of the Voltaian sandstone in the North of Ghana, runs from west to east a distance of some one hundred miles before passing into Togo. The escarpment varies in height and intensity from sheer cliffs of approximately three hundred feet to steep slopes with little or no outcropping rock. In a shelter near the foot of the escarpment on the Ghana-Togo border a site containing rock paintings has been discovered, the very first record of rock paintings in Ghana.

The site ($0^{\circ} 05' 0''$ W. $10^{\circ} 41' 40''$ N.) was first noticed by Mr. J. Evans, a surveyor on secondment to the Ghana Survey Department from the United Kingdom Directorate of Overseas Surveys, when he was engaged in mapping the Ghana-Togo frontier. In August 1961 Mr. Evans discovered a large brass vessel (Plate 2, No. 1) in a small shelter immediately below the edge of the escarpment. He reported the find to the authors and in January 1963 guided them back to the site, which was found to be more extensive than was first thought and also to contain rock paintings.

Access to the site is from the Nakpanduri to Bunkpurugu Road. Turn off this road to the left one-and-a-quarter miles from Nakpanduri, follow the track, which can be used by a Land Rover or similar vehicle, for a further six miles and again turn left about one hundred yards after crossing the third concrete culvert. Follow this track on foot to the village of Nabruk. From the village continue through the bush—there is no defined track—for a further three miles until the escarpment is reached at the Ghana-Togo border. The site stretches across the border and can be reached by climbing down the escarpment on the Togo side of the frontier which is marked by a survey pillar (Number BP 138). The upper shelter where the brass vessel was found is in Togo and the lower shelter containing the paintings is in Ghana.

The lower shelter containing the paintings is divided by a small waterfall coming from the top of the escarpment. The four groups of paintings are all to the east of this waterfall; they may be divided as follows (see Figure I):

Group I. A curved row of four mounted horsemen, three in faded white and one in faded red.

Group II. To the west of Group I and higher up on the rock face is a row of thirteen double circles, a smaller circle within a larger, executed in a thick dirty white pigment. One of the thirteen circles also has traces of red paint. A compact group of four similar double

circles also executed in a dirty white pigment has the upper two inner circles filled with spots.

Group III. Further to the west are paintings in red of human figures carrying double circles painted in a lighter red. There are three such figures but all are very faded. Associated with this group are two circles, a "snake-like" painting and odd smears of paint.

Group IV. Immediately below Group III and very well preserved are four schematic paintings in dark red.

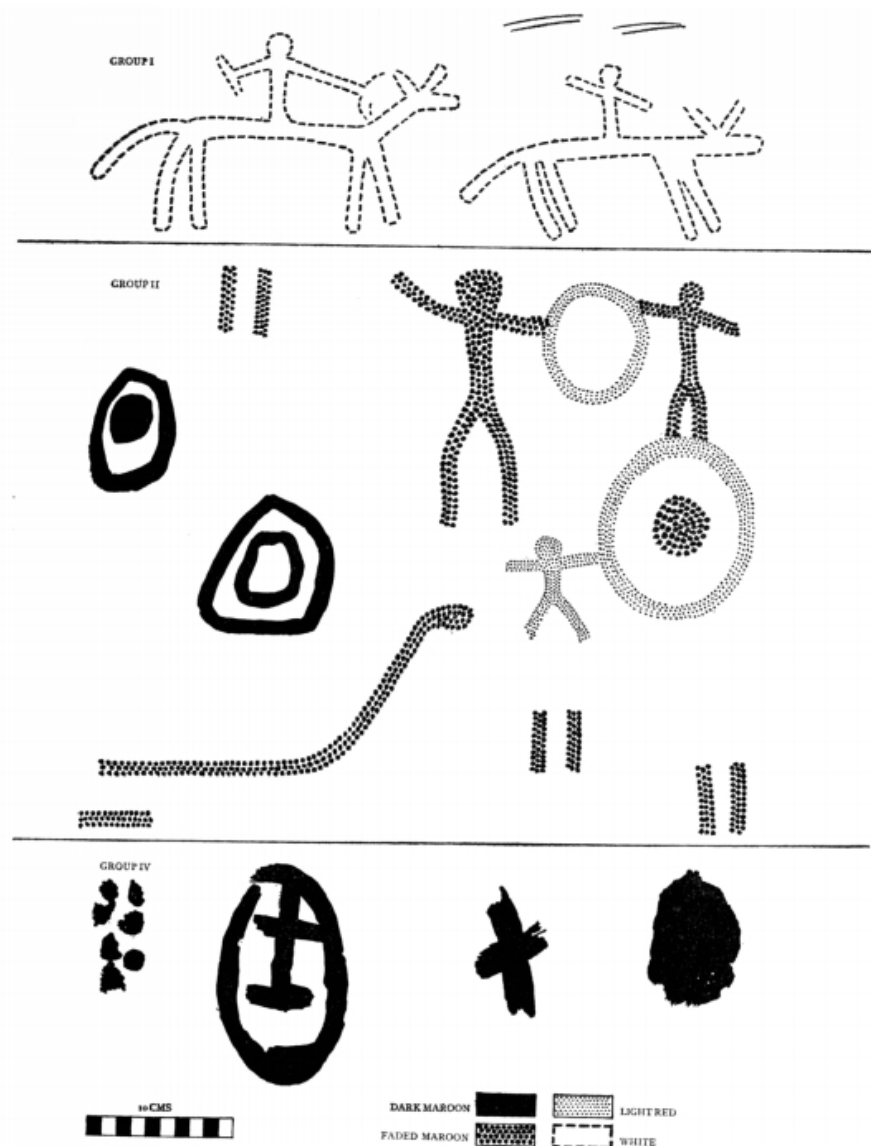


Fig. 1

As well as paintings the shelter contains both well preserved and fragmentary structures of terre pisé (Plate 1). These structures are both round and rectangular and can be recognised as huts and storage bins, and some have very probably been used for funerary purposes. Some of the huts have floors of laid potsherds, the sherds being laid flat and not on edge. The flooring sherds are both red and black in colour, some are burnished and some carry incised decoration. Amongst the artifacts collected from the shelters were the large brass vessel, a small lead bowl (Plate 2, No. 3), a cast brass anklet (2, 2), pieces of chain mail (3, 4), some slag (3, 5), a wooden hoe blade (3, 6) and some very fragmentary pieces of sewn leather.

The situation of the site, the terre pisé structures and the schematic paintings are very reminiscent indeed of the Dogon settlements in the escarpment at Sangha in Mali. It is not known if similar sites occur elsewhere in the Gambaga scarp but were a thorough search made there is no reason to suppose that other sites would not be found. A figure of a man on horseback carrying a circle and similar to the Group III paintings has been published¹, but unfortunately there are no details as to the whereabouts of the site. It would be safe to assume from the publication that the site was to the north of Ghana and in all probability somewhere in the Sahara.

The settlement described cannot at this stage be dated. It is not even certain that the paintings can be ascribed to the people responsible for the buildings, although this would seem probable. All that can be said at present is that the paintings and the presence of chain mail and possibly other imported articles suggest that this site is yet another indication of the cultural influences that have reached Ghana from the country to the north.

The finds from the site are housed in the Department of Archaeology in the University of Ghana.

¹ *Bulletin de Liaison Saharienne*, Number 44, December 1961, p. 360.

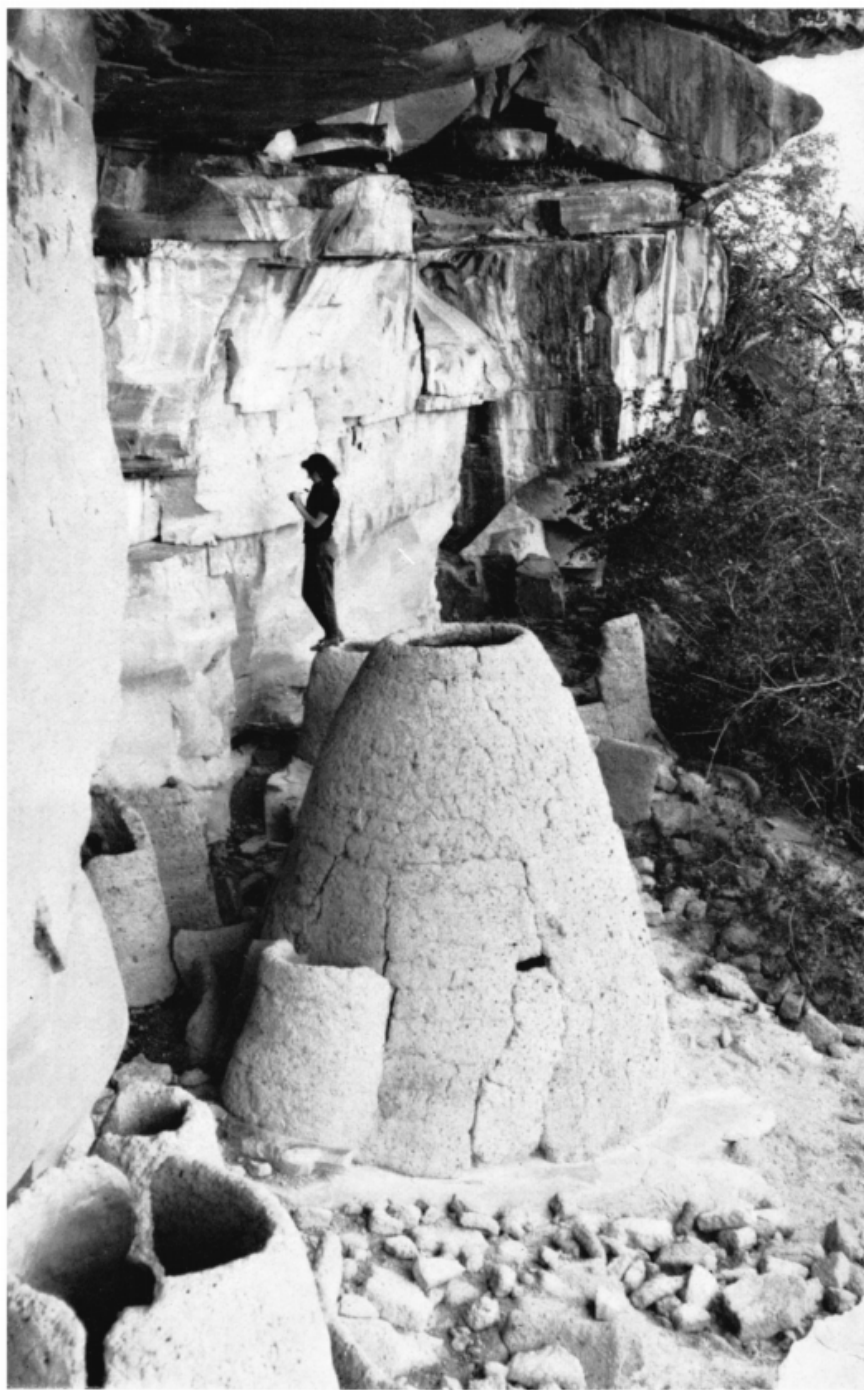


Plate I

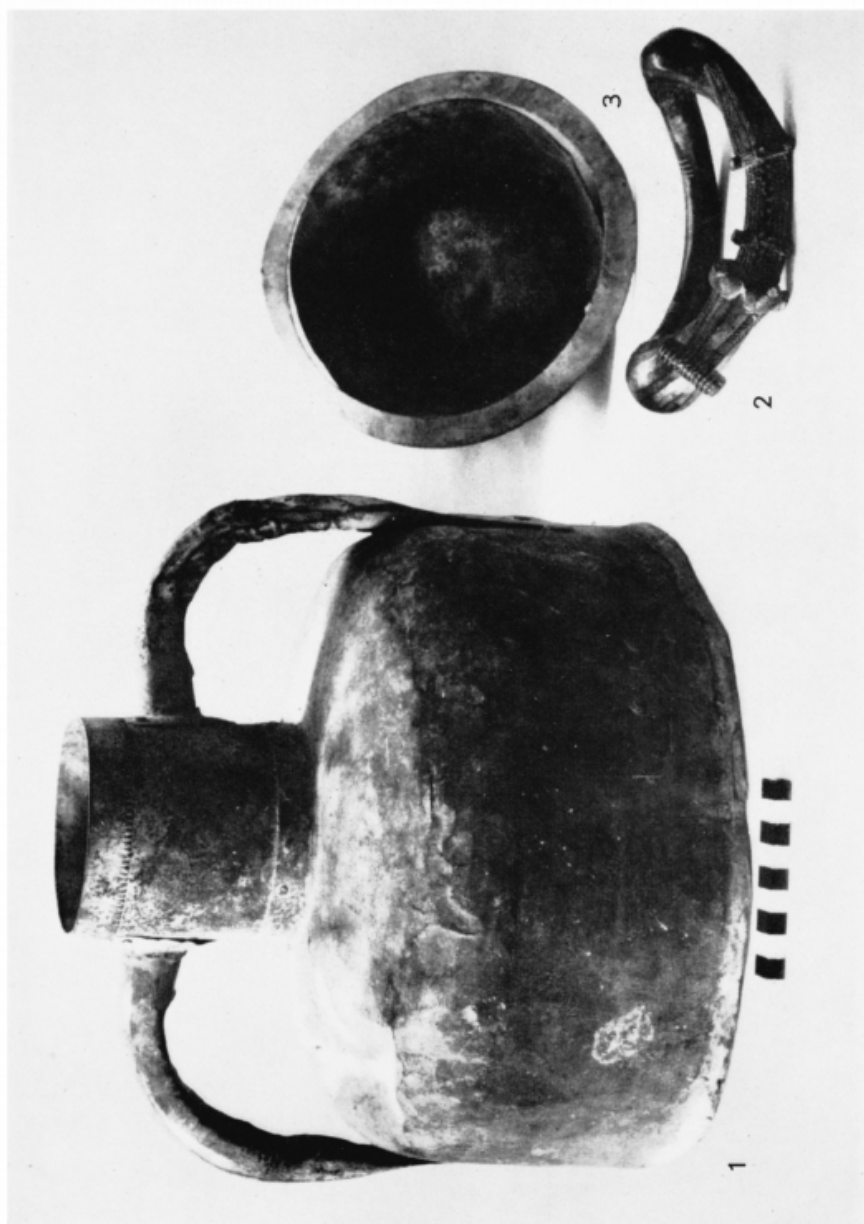


Plate 2

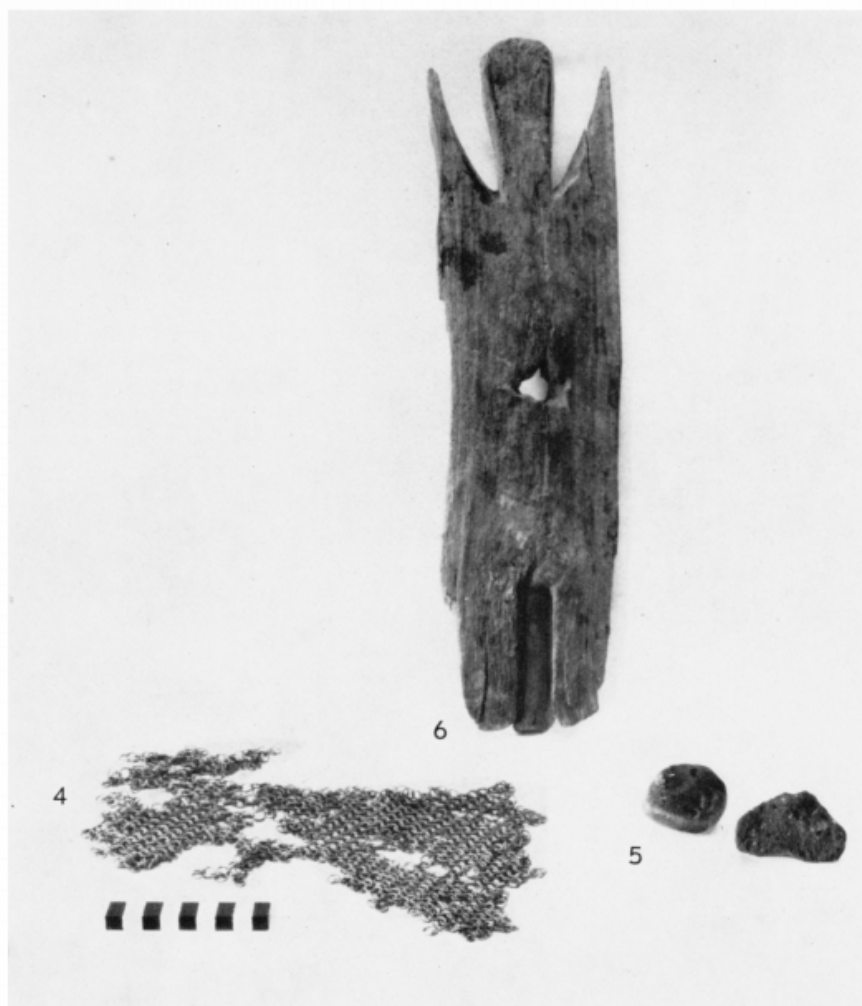


Plate 3