

## Notes and News

### *Archaeological Discoveries in Senegal*

M. J. JOIRE of the Institut d'Afrique Noire, Dakar, reports in a short paper in *Man* (May-June 1943) on his excavations of sand mounds in the vicinity of Rao, near St. Louis, Senegal. These mounds—funeral barrows—approximately circular but very variable in size, contained, apart from the extended skeletons, a large amount of gold, silver, and copper jewellery, cornelian and quartz beads, and an iron sword and assegai head. Scattered through the sand some pre-historic artifacts were found and many sherds of coarse earthenware identical with that of the Natives of to-day.

Among the jewellery the most interesting objects were: a necklace of a hundred and thirty-eight gold ringlets, a gold four-lobed pendant, a large necklace of six hollow silver bells, made of juxtaposed spirals of filigree-work, sixteen heavy fluted ankle rings, and the finest jewel of the set, a very large gold pectoral plate, ornamented with filigree and smooth, hollow, hemispherical cabochons, only the big central one bearing some of those granules which are still known to the modern Senegalese jewellery as 'millet grain' decoration.

M. Joire states that the tombs are not Islamic, and it is important now to investigate their cultural and geographical affinities. The dating of the finds is for the time being impossible.

The excavations of these mounds were the first conducted on a larger scale in French West Africa, and the finds are of great interest for the progress of West African archaeology. I do not know of any professional excavations conducted in British West Africa which could compare with them, and hope that the French enterprise will stimulate British scientific work of a similar nature.

Nigeria, in particular, with its ancient history, where the earth is studded with the material culture of hitherto unexplored civilizations, should at long last receive the attention of serious archaeological research. One need only draw attention to Ife, famous for its bronzes, terracottas, and stone sculpture, most of which have accidentally been found during the laying of house foundations. Many bronzes in Benin, Lagos, and at Awka in the Ibo country have also been unearthed accidentally; while clearing the grove at Esie about 300 stone figures and a few terracottas were found buried in the soft soil.

During my stay at Ife, I paid a visit to the Rev. Adejimo who showed me a large, solid, spiral ornament in bronze and two ram-heads in stone which he had found while digging in his garden. At a school at Modakeke near Ife I was shown a lovely, small, terracotta head, undoubtedly some centuries old, which was found while clearing a playground for the school.

About fifty miles west of Ibadan is supposed to be a 'robber's cave' that from its description cannot be anything else than a royal rock tomb of pre-Yoruba times, that is pre-twelfth century, perhaps the tomb of one of those kings who are portrayed so magnificently in the bronzes and terracottas of Ile-Ife. Mr. H. L. Ward-Price gives a short, but unfortunately not very clear, description of this cave in his book, *Dark Subjects* (p. 279), where he says that this cave is situated in the face of a cliff of a huge mountain rock and has an entrance about eight feet high. The ceiling of the cave then slopes down for twenty yards inside till the cave has narrowed to the size of a man's body. Through this opening there is a circular chamber with a high dome-shaped ceiling, which on the farther side has a black cavern about four feet wide. This is the entrance to a shaft which slopes downwards into the interior of the mountain at an angle of forty-five degrees. There is no question of all this being a natural cave: the high-ceilinged circular chamber and the shaft are definitely man-made and hewn into the solid rock.

There also exist, near the nine-mile corner at Enugu, ten 'step-pyramids', which stand in two rows on high ground and are of red earth, each about thirty feet high and forty feet in diameter at the base.<sup>1</sup> The people who live in the villages near them know nothing about them, and associate them with a juju to prevent theft. Excavations will show them also to be royal tombs. But these are only a few examples.

Also in the Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, and the Gambia one can expect interesting finds, although probably less spectacular. Amongst other things there are the gold ornaments, stolen from time to time from old Ashanti graves, which still reach the Syrian pawnbrokers, who smash them up in order to sell the gold to British banks.

Archaeological finds in West Africa will be of particular interest, for they may testify that centuries ago this part of the world was in close contact with ancient civilizations, especially with the Nubian during the first to the seventh century A.D. Many tribes now living in Nigeria, for instance, claim to be able to trace back their ancestry to peoples who, as they allege, were once settled in this region of Africa.

Apart from its value to the recording archaeologist such surveys and excavations would be of immense psychological importance, if they could establish even the rudiments of a history for the present West African generation, which is searching for such a basis upon which to build its future cultural development.

(Communicated by MRS. EVA L. R. MEYEROWITZ.)

### *Institute of West African Arts, Industries, and Social Science.*

On the eve of going to press, we can only record briefly that the scheme for setting up an Institute of West African Arts, Industries, and Social Science has been approved by the Colonial Office. A grant of £127,000 has been made by the Treasury, under the Colonial Development and Welfare Act, to cover the capital and recurring expenses of the first five years.

This event bids fair to be a milestone in the history of West Africa. Although the Institute will be limited in its scope till after the war, its beginning, as a centre for research and training in arts and crafts with a view to their economic development, is none the less a notable event. And when, after the war, it expands into a centre of research and training in all aspects of West African culture, its potentialities will indeed be great.

One of the chief promoters of the Institute, Mr. H. V. Meyerowitz, gave a very interesting talk at the most recent of the International Discussion Group meetings held by the International African Institute and the School of Oriental and African Studies. The substance of his paper will be published in a forthcoming number of *Africa*, which will be devoted specially to the subject of African arts and crafts in the light of present economic conditions. Some of the innumerable and pressing problems involved will be discussed by experts in that number.

### *Literature and Language Publications in the Gold Coast*

ONE aspect of co-ordinated planning in the Gold Coast is shown by the appointment of a committee by the Methodist Mission with the following terms of reference: 'To write under the general editorship of the Rev. Gaddiel Acquah, a series of graded Readers in Fante from Primer I to Reader VII, which would equip the schools for the reading of, and appreciation of, the standard set by such books as *Oguaa Aban*, *Fante Proverbs* and *John Wesley*.'

The first books published under the auspices of this committee are *A Fante Word List*,

<sup>1</sup> A photograph of these appeared in *Nigeria*, No. 16, 1938, p. 299.