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Materializing Performance and Ritual: Decoding the Archaeology of Movement in Tallensi Shrines in Northern Ghana

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Abstract

Within much archaeological interpretation and conceptualization in relation to ritual and religion the static is often given prominence. This is potentially due to the fact that static material residues are being considered and, in turn, this static image is transferred onto the ritual practices, beliefs, and communities that generated the archaeological material. Instead some of the material encountered archaeologically might be structured by much more dynamic, fluid, and active ritual behaviors. Considering performance, movement, and bodily understandings in relation to space and material culture offers a potential mechanism to begin to explore this, and will be considered with reference to the Goli festival and the archaeology of Tallensi shrines in the Tongo Hills of the Upper East Region in Northern Ghana.

Introduction

Within much archaeological interpretation and conceptualization in relation to ritual and religion the static is often given prominence (Renfrew 1994; Brück 1999; Insoll 2004). This is potentially due to the fact that we are considering static material residues and, in turn, albeit perhaps subconsciously, this static image is transferred onto the ritual practices, beliefs, and communities that generated the archaeological material. Instead it can be posited that some of the material that we encounter is possibly structured by much more dynamic, fluid, and active ritual behaviors. But the question of how to begin to explore and reconstruct such behaviors in archaeological contexts is a pertinent one. Considering performance and bodily understandings in relation to space and material culture offers a potential mechanism to begin to achieve this, and will be considered with reference to the archaeology of shrines in the Tongo Hills of the Upper East Region in Northern Ghana (Figure 1).

The Tallensi ethno-linguistic group inhabits the Tongo Hills and its immediately surrounding area; they are subsistence agriculturalists speaking a Gur language of the Oti-Volta subgroup (Naden 1988: 12, 1996: 4). Tallensi society is divided into two main groups of clans, the Namoos and the Hill Talis, the latter occupying the Tongo Hills (Fortes 1945, 1949). Archaeological research has been ongoing in the Tongo Hills since 2004 with the aim of both examining the archaeological signature and extant material culture of indigenous religion in the region, and reconstructing occupation chronologies (Insoll, Kankpeyeng, and MacLean 2004, 2005, 2007a, 2007b; Insoll, MacLean, and Kankpeyeng In Press; Insoll 2007a, 2008a). The Tongo Hills, though relatively circumscribed in size, at about five km north to south by three km east to west, are the location of innumerable shrines of different sizes, configurations, and purposes (Insoll 2006). Of these, the Nyoo shrine, an Earth shrine that is controlled by the Kpatari or Kpataar section of the Talis (Kankpeyeng 2005: 16), was

made the focus of excavation in 2005 and 2006. It is this shrine that will be primarily considered in relation to materializing performance and ritual, and examining the archaeology of movement.

The Nyoo Shrine and its Archaeology

The Nyoo shrine is in active use, annually as an arena for performance during the Golib or Gologo sowing festival, usually held in March, as well as on a day-to-day basis as a focus for sacrifice. But besides being an active ritual centre Nyoo is also an archaeological site. The Nyoo shrine is almost entirely covered with archaeological remains that form three distinct zones. These are composed of, first, an area in which 143 whole or fragmentary standing stones were recorded. These average between 60cm to 80cm in height (above ground) and were made from a variety of rock types including meta-chert, Leocratic and Bongo granites, and amphibole/chlorite schist (Baneong-Yakubu et al 2006). Second, and slightly south of the standing stones, an area some 200m north to south formed of stone arrangements and accompanying spreads of pottery which had been forced into the ground surface was noted (Insoll, Kankpeyeng, and MacLean 2005). The third zone is that of the active sacrificial area and contains little or no visible archaeology in comparison to the other two zones.

The excavations completed in Nyoo exposed elements of this archaeology (Insoll, Kankpeyeng, and MacLean 2007a, In Press). The first unit of 8m × 4m (NYOO 06 [A]) was located in the area of stone arrangements, and these are the features that will be the primary focus of discussion here. Seven stone arrangements interspersed amongst dense pot-filled deposits were ultimately delimited (Figure 2). These were almost entirely formed of a single layer of stones, and the number of stones composing the arrangements varied between 16 and 51. Hence no numerical significance was seemingly represented though care had been taken in the arrangement of the stones possibly with color patterning as a dominant concern. Black, grey, pink, and red, as well as white quartz and white banding in some of the granites were all recorded. This is perhaps indicative of the red-white-black color symbolism noted elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa (Jacobson-Widding 1979; Turner 1985; Insoll, Kankpeyeng, and MacLean In Press), or may merely be representative of the color of the available materials.

The associated layer of ceramics was between 15-20cm in depth and was composed, predominantly, of broken sherds. The pot layer would seem to have been deposited after the stone arrangements were laid (Insoll, Kankpeyeng, and MacLean In Press). The relationship between the sherd filled deposits and stone arrangements is clear archaeologically but ritually has no contemporary analogues. The pots and pot fragments seem to have been deposited intentionally, possibly as a single action. Why this action was completed was unclear but it can be speculated that perhaps this is the residue of a ritual act related to Earth cult beliefs; i.e. depositing pottery, made of clay, back into the earth, the medium from which the clay and thus the pots came (Insoll In Preparation a). An OSL date from the ceramic filled deposit was obtained which gave a date range of AD 955-1155 and an age of AD 1056 (ibid).

A second unit of 6m × 4m (NYOO 06 [B]) was placed in the area of Nyoo covered in standing stones. Within this unit twelve clusters of either paired or single standing stones associated with a variety of material culture were recorded. This included ceramic sherds, iron bracelets and points, stone grinders or rubbers, and complete pots (Insoll, Kankpeyeng, and MacLean In Press). Two OSL dates were obtained from this unit. One sample from immediately below a pot associated with a standing stone gave a date of AD 650-895 and an

age of AD 773. The other sample from the base of the deposits in this unit gave a date range of AD 80-430 and an age of AD 255 (Insoll In Preparation a).

The Nature of Ritual and the Implications for the Archaeology of Movement

“What ritualization does is actually quite simple: it temporally structures a space-time environment through a series of physical movements.....thereby producing an arena which, by its molding of the actors, both validates and extends the schemes they are internalizing” (Bell 1992: 109-110).

Catherine Bell, in her important study on ritual, informs us here about the link between ritual and time, and through the notion of validation, the construction of memory. She also, crucially, indicates that movement can be a key component of ritual. Movement is equally related to time and all these elements, time, movement, memory, space, interconnect within the process of ritual action. But how do we reconstruct the components of this spatial-temporal environment in archaeological contexts where the deposits are static and potentially misleading? First, it needs to be recognized that ritual time is not a simple construct, a stable edifice of practice and custom. For even over comparatively short periods of time ritual practices and the deposition events by which they are materialized archaeologically could be subject to considerable trajectories of change.

This notion of ritual change and flexibility needs acknowledging, and part of the problem as to why it is frequently not, and instead ritual stability suggested, could lie in how indigenous or so-called ‘traditional’ religions have become ‘textualized’, which can stand at variance with their truer ‘oral’ character. To adapt a point made by Shaw (1990: 350) we have to take account of “peoples whose understandings of the world and of themselves are expressed primarily in implicit rather than explicit forms, in symbolic action rather than in authorized written texts”. This certainly has implications for archaeology, as it is precisely these types of religions that are usually used as analogues for interpreting prehistoric contexts. Moreover, it can also have implications for concepts of ritual practice. This is because, as Bell (1992: 137) notes, “writing ‘fixes’ things, turning patterns of custom into preserved models of tradition”. Instead, the nature of ritual can be more flexible and pragmatic in oral as opposed to literate societies.

Hallgren (1995) provides a fascinating example of how indigenous religion can become ‘textualized’ in his consideration of the Yoruba concept of *àṣe*, or “life force” in southwestern Nigeria. He describes how the “process towards an orthodoxy” (Hallgren 1995: 83) has taken place allied with the creation of almost what could be regarded as “canonical texts” (ibid) by scholars of Yoruba religion, both African and European. This textual process has had profound implications where “alternative interpretations or research results run the risk of losing reliability or being rejected as ‘heretical’ in the light of the dominant view” (Hallgren 1995: 83). We cannot suggest that Fortes monographs (e.g. Fortes 1945, 1949) serve also to ‘textualize’ Tallensi religion and ritual practice but Fortes does present a textual image that becomes fossilized at a certain point in time (see Allman and Parker 2005: 15-16 for relevant discussion). This point is not made as a personal criticism of Fortes, but rather is indicative of the predominantly timeless Structural Functionalist approach he employed (see, e.g., Moore 1994: 35-36; Fardon 2005: 74).

It can thus be seen that such processes can lead to a certain ‘freezing’ of time and tradition, and the notion of change in relation to both ritual processes and religious ‘forms’ or ‘types’ could, as an adjunct, become suppressed. Furthermore, this static image can be projected onto archaeological interpretation, in failing to consider or recognize the potential for exploring movement in ‘ritual’ contexts. Yet in making these points it is not the intention to necessarily deny the existence of an underlying core of stability in belief and practice with

regard to ritual. This can and does exist, in religious beliefs, in bodily understandings in relation to the use of space, and in the symbolic and metaphorical qualities ascribed objects and materials utilized in rituals (e.g. Nooter Roberts 2000: 75-78). Additionally, movement can form part of these strata of stability, for stability does not equate with 'static' (e.g. Fowler and Fowler 1986: 885, 891).

On the contrary, movement can serve as an element within a potential ritual 'reservoir' (Insoll, Kankpeyeng, and MacLean In Press) drawn upon in support of ritual and practice. This is broadly analogous to the notion of "symbolic reservoirs" as discussed by Sterner (1992:171-172; and see MacEachern 1994), but 'symbol' would here be translated into 'ritual'. The possible net result of this could be the creation of the seemingly contradictory position whereby, to utilize terms usually applied within the context of considering ethnicity (Lentz and Nugent 2000: 4), both "constructionist" and "primordialist" elements are evident in the overall ritual structure. Within such a construct there is then, conceivably, the fusion of, to adapt Lentz and Nugent's (ibid) definitions, "primordial ties", that are "deeply rooted in the past", as well as "manipulated" elements reflecting the "strategic character" of ritual - material religion can be constituted by both.

Discussion. Materializing Performance and Ritual in the Archaeology of the Nyoo Shrine

To begin to materialize performance and ritual in the archaeology of the Nyoo shrine there is an obvious requirement for an anthropologically informed approach that integrates all available sources of evidence, archaeology, anthropology, ethnography, and historical ethnography. This is undertaken in the following discussion, but the latter is also broadened out to explore themes cognate to performance and ritual such as bodily understandings of space, dance, gender, sensory perception, and memory and places of memory.

i) Movement and Ritual Action

Movement can form a fundamental part of the ritual structure, and movement can be subsumed within 'performance'. This in turn links with ritual for both the definitions and etymology of 'performance' and 'ritual' indicate them to be highly complimentary (Schechner 2002:613). Fortes (1987:58), for example, refers to the "ritual performance" which is undertaken at the start of the Golib festival (see below). Within the context of ritual theory this complementarity has of course been noted (e.g. Lewis 1980: 33-35; Parkin 1992: 17; Schechner 2002), as have the problems inherent in a "performance theory" based approach to ritual (e.g. Bell 1992: 42-43, 1997: 159-60). The complimentary nature of ritual and performance is evident both in the great Tallensi festivals such as Golib and Boardaam, and in the day to day rituals completed at the major shrines such as Nyoo and Tongnaab/Yaane. However, the degree of performance, and thus movement, obviously differs significantly dependent upon the scale and duration of the ritual activity.

It is a truism that shrines can enter the archaeological record (Garlake 1974; Insoll 2004, 2008b; Kankpeyeng and Nkumbaan 2008), but it is impossible to generalize as to what degree the movements involved in their associated rituals, let alone the total performance, if valid, could be reconstructed from archaeological evidence. This can be illustrated by considering two examples of relevance to the archaeology of the Nyoo shrine. First, the possible rituals associated with the placing of the objects around the standing stones recorded in the Nyoo shrine can be considered. As noted, adjacent to the standing stones were found items of material culture (Figure 3). These had been intentionally deposited, with, for instance, based on ethnographic parallels, the presence of the iron bracelets perhaps representing the interring of 'personal gods' associated with the dead, possibly following the

instructions of diviners to carry out such actions (R. Naatoam pers. comm.; Insoll, Kankpeyeng and MacLean In Press). The movements associated with their deposition would have included, presumably, the digging of a small hole for the complete pot that was recorded next to each of the standing stones, in some instances the subsequent capping of the vessel with a pot sherd, the refilling of the hole, and then the placing of the iron bracelets, stone grinder-rubber-pounders etc. around or adjacent to the stone. This sequence of actions can be reconstructed with a fair degree of confidence as post-deposition movement of the objects, though possible to a certain degree, seems on the basis of the repeat patterning of the artifact clusters to have not been of great significance.

Yet what is suggested hardly constitutes the reconstruction of ritual action. The ‘total’ ritual is unknown. Could it have been linked with sacrifice? dancing? solemn silence? the breaking of pots? The physical actions might be reconstructed to a certain degree but these are at a very basic level, what other movements and ritual/performative actions might have accompanied these is not known. This is because, beyond the limitations of the evidence itself, direct analogies for this aspect of material religion are lacking. Although it is possible that information on this has been withheld, it would seem that rituals involving standing stones are no longer performed, and they are apparently no longer erected according to local informants. This would seem to signify a change in ritual practice for Fortes (1934a: 15 [¹]) describes a ritual he observed in the Nyoo shrine during the Golib festival which involved a man attempting to wrest millet from a boy around a standing stone. This ritual was not observed in either 2006 or 2008, and even if it was missed, information on it was not forthcoming. Yet bearing these cautionary points in mind, there certainly persists a consciousness in contemporary Tallensi understanding that the standing stones are ritual objects, linked both with the ancestors and personal gods, though their precise meanings are apparently lost (Insoll, Kankpeyeng, and MacLean In Press).

ii) Performance and the Golib Festival

The second example, the Golib festival, is perhaps of relevance for interpreting the stone arrangements in Nyoo, and as it is related to a larger scale event possibly offers greater potential for reconstructing the archaeology of ritual movement and performance elsewhere due to its size. The Golib festival is centred both upon Nyoo and the adjacent smaller Nyoo Biil shrine for ritual activities. This is a festival that was recorded both by Fortes in the mid-1930s and by this author in 2006 and again in 2008. The Golib is at the end of what Fortes (1987: 98) describes as the “cycle of the great festivals” of the Tallensi, all of which are concerned with the “unpredictable potentialities of threat inherent in the climate and the environment” (ibid: 43). It is a festival held by the Hill Talis prior to the sowing of the early millet and takes place at the end of the dry season. The Golib is composed of dances in various locations, for example at Yinduri, Wakii, and Tengzug, accompanied by other ritual activities including solemn congregations, as in Nyoo Biil, as well as more esoteric rites (see Fortes 1987: 50-51, 54-61).

Movement seems to run as a strand throughout the Golib festival and would seem to be crucial in understanding it; movement of different Talis communities in groups; movement of individual bodies in dance; movement of ritual objects such as the two Golib drums, and the *sikpatuure* (see below), and movement of ritual locations. Hence the Golib is not static, and Fortes (1987:53) point that the “Golib is the name of the dance, signifying the meandering circular movement of the dancers at the climax of the festival” indicates that the origins of the whole festival are directly related to performance and movement. The rituals

¹Fortes has given his notebook the date of 1934. However it sits somewhat uneasily in his notebook sequence and might in fact date from 1935.

associated with the Golib contain both aspects that have remained unchanged, or largely so, and others that have altered in the 70 plus year interval between the two records of the festival. The dances, orations, locations for the rituals, and structures of the rituals seem all to be comparable, in so far as the less detailed records taken of the festival in 2006 and 2008 permit comparison with Fortes comprehensive account from the mid-1930s. Space precludes their detailed consideration and dance is considered below, but the notion of continuity can also be extended to aspects of the material culture used in the Golib festival. It should be noted, however, that Fortes records are less detailed on the material culture as opposed to the rituals completed, which would seem to again be a reflection of his Functionalist approach.

This material culture includes drums, costumes, and ritual equipment. Firstly, the importance of the drums as central components of the festival persists, but because of their sacred character access to the drums is restricted and for ethical reasons neither illustrations nor descriptions of these objects are provided. On more open display are the dance staffs or *sikpatuure*. The function of these was described as being “directional gods” for the Tendaanas or Earth Priests, as well as their acting as “shrines” (E. Aboluah pers. comm. 26/3/08). The way the *sikpatuure* are used and made today would seem to be identical with what Fortes observed. For instance, Fortes in his field notebooks (Fortes 1934b: 24), refers to two men appearing at one point in the Golib festival, “one flinging aloft a long staff to the top of which was attached a large bunch of what appeared to be eagles (?) wings, the other carrying a similar staff, decorated similarly with animal tails”. Whether Fortes self-questioning of his species identification of the bird wings on the staff is justified is unknown, but his putative identification is not improbable considering the prominence of raptors beaks in dance costumes seen today (Figure 4). Equally, seemingly identical staffs were recorded in use in March 2006 and 2008, with bunches of egret feathers and egret wings on one staff, unidentified animal tails on another, as well as miscellaneous stuffed animals held aloft by dancers on sticks not related to the *sikpatuure* (Figure 5).

Hence continuity in the use and prominence of both the drums and *sikpatuure* is evident. However, other aspects of the material culture have altered as, no doubt, fashions have changed. For example, in one of Fortes photos (1945: XV, b) of a Golib dance, turbans seem to be in vogue as dancing headgear, but are now rarely seen (Figure 4). Similarly, the use of ex-military boots as dancers’ footwear today was probably rare in Fortes time. Thus as expected differences exist, but equally a considerable degree of continuity is evident materially in the Golib festival. However, the material from the Nyoo shrine, based upon the results of the OSL dates, is from considerably earlier. Is it still possible to talk of continuities in material culture, ritual, performance, and movement, potentially over a 1000-year period?

iii) Bodily Understandings of Space

In assessing this, a starting point is provided by considering bodily understandings of space. These, across 1500 years could not, either from a biological, physiological, or psychological perspective, have been expected to have changed, even if we have to recognize the possible varying cultural weight lent aspects of their interpretation (Matsumoto 2000; Berry et al. 2002; Lewis 2002:566; Insoll 2007c: 49-50). Hence from the outset continuity of ritual and performance is not necessarily precluded in relation to spatial understanding. The presence of the stone arrangements in the Nyoo shrine and the use of similar arrangements as spatial markers for movement and performance in Nyoo Biil during the Golib festival adds a potential material similarity as well. For of recurrent importance is the use of space in Tallensi ritual practice. People know their place in relation to natural features such as rocks and trees, and human created ones such as seating places in shrines. This locational knowledge in relation to known ritual practitioners, elders, and other sections of Hill Talis, leads to careful orchestration of the ritual performance.

This can be seen in Figure 6. The first two plans are from one of Fortes (1934a) unpublished field notebooks and indicate the seating positions occupied in the active sacrificial area in Nyoo in March 1934 (1). The second plan is of seating positions in the same shrine as described by E. Yin and R. Naatoam in July 2006. Plan two is essentially a more detailed version of plan one but what is evident in comparing both of Fortes's plans with the diagram from 2006 is, fundamentally, continuity. It is unnecessary to detail this in its entirety but is evident in, for example, the locations of the Kpataar elders, Tamboog Tendaana and Wakii Tendaana, Golib drums, and Golibdaana positions. Social memory is here, to use Connerton's (1989:73) term, seemingly 'inscribed' in the layout of the shrine and evident over a 70-year period. Such longevity of spatial understanding and ritual practice is perhaps often neglected in contexts associated with indigenous as opposed to World religions where such continuity is frequently presumed to be a correlate of the latter and not the former (Insoll 2001, 2004).

iv) Dance

Yet identifying continuity is not to imply that ritual activity is static. Stable foci might exist in the form of clusters of elders, the chief(s), and Tendaanas in their customary places in shrines, but these foci, as in the Golib festival in Nyoo Biil, can be the focus of dynamic movement. This movement is of a precise type. The dancers move in single file slowly shuffling along, moving the upper part of the body in time to the songs, chants, and rhythm of the Golib drums but more so the rhythm generated by singing and the hard stamping of the feet, especially the right one, which is accentuated by the *nansahi* attached to the dancers ankle. These are iron dance jangles which are formed of three pieces, usually arranged as a male, *nansahidaa*, and two females, *nansahinyeng*, which are differentiated by sound (R. Naatoam and F. Yin pers. comm. 24/3/08). Occasionally the dancers, individually, in groups in the line, or the whole line, become more animated, even ecstatic, wildly pounding their feet before dropping back to the slower movement, but always maintaining the same winding processional route in front of, and sometimes around, the chiefs, Tendaanas, and elders.

This description of the dance amalgamated from observations in Nyoo Biil in March 2006 and 2008 would appear to be almost identical to the dance observed by Fortes seventy-four years before in March 1934. Fortes (1934b: 17) describes the dance thus, "these appeared to be a synchronized rhythm of [unclear word] movements with the hand, shaking and thrusting movements of thorax and hips, exactly like those we saw at the funeral custom.....and astonishingly suggestive of coitus, and a stamping of the inner foot, and a slow forward push of the outer foot, hardly lifting it". Similarly, on the next page Fortes (1934b: 18) refers to the dancers staying broadly in the same place and, "thus they might have danced in what eventually amounted to a circle, a solid circloid body revolving on a fixed axis".

The location of the dance Fortes observed is not given, possibly this is Nyoo Biil, but other than questioning the coital association, which seems to be a recurrent feature of some of Fortes notes (Insoll In Preparation b), the description provided could equally apply to the Golib dances of 2006 and 2008. The individual dance techniques are identical and likewise the group dance patterns are very similar. The latter are recorded in a sketch by Fortes (1934b: 28) (Figure 7), and in the sinewy winding patterns illustrated, in particular numbers 1 and 2, match those used by groups of dancers at recent Golib dances to move away from or into larger dance groups (numbers 1 and 3, Figure 7), whilst the "solid circloid body" is mirrored in the main dance at Yinduri (number 1, Figure 7).

Based upon this evidence, it can be suggested that the stone arrangements excavated in Nyoo might, possibly, be interpreted within similar frameworks. For rather than representing

static markers they too could, perhaps, have served to structure and direct movement, conceivably dance, of a similar type to that described. This is conjectural but might be lent indirect support by Connerton's (1989: 59) reference to ritual gestures such as attentive standing, kneeling, prostration etc., being given strength through, "the *relative sparseness* of such gestures" (emphasis added). Dance is not discussed, but where kneeling, prostration and similar actions do not necessarily form an element of ritual practice, as in the Tongo Hills, it is not impossible that dance of a certain type, or at least specific movement in relation to certain categories of spatial markers could function in a similar way to that described by Connerton (ibid). Specifically, in being derived from a limited repertoire of ritual movements, and thus subject, perhaps, to significant temporal continuity of use in ritual contexts.

Expanding the analysis of movement beyond the context of the Tongo Hills is potentially helpful in assessing possible continuity of bodily understandings, movements, and practices further. Some relevant comparative material from West Africa exists. Van Beek (2001: 130), for example, refers to the dancers in the Dogon village of Anacana, Mali, marching "through the village in a snake like fashion, weaving in and out to the beat of the drums". Whilst Preston Blier (1987:104) describes the ceremonial paths which wind back and forth through Batammaliba villages of northern Togo, and which recall, "the winding form of a python across village terrain". The latter being of interest as the Batammaliba are an ethno-linguistic group with whom parallels have been drawn in interpreting clay ritual objects recovered from the standing stone site in Nyoo (Insoll, Kankpeyeng, and MacLean In Press; Insoll 2007b: 331). It can be seen from this material that a snaking sinewy group dance movement is not unique to the Tallensi. However, it is both unwise and impossible to reconstruct either a specific dance or a complete Golib festival for, potentially, the beginning of the second millennium AD. Profound differences with contemporary ritual practices exist, for although Nyoo is used for dances today (Figure 7, number 2), the area with the archaeological remains in it is not used for this purpose. Equally, contemporary deposition practices differ, as in the secondary deposition of pot sherds around the stone arrangements, as described, which indicate ritual acts that have no direct equivalence today (Insoll In Preparation a).

v) Gender

Similarly, the gender of the individuals who could have used Nyoo as a locus of performance is impossible to reconstruct. Both male and female obviously share the same abilities for movement, including dance, and bodily understandings in relation to space, but cultural rules can limit their expression (see, e.g. Berry et al. 2002: 75-78). Today in the Golib festival the dancers are predominantly male, women can participate but this is more unusual (Fortes 1987: 52). Meyer Fortes (1934b: 65) records a pertinent observation in his field note books which might explain why this is, in noting that his wife, Sonia, "asked the Gbeog boys how it happened that she saw quite an elderly woman dancing. They said it was because she wanted to get a man to fuck her". This point might be valid in relation to gender and sexual relations in the 1930s, or again a reflection of a recurrent sexual interest in Fortes field notes (Insoll In Preparation b), but it cannot be projected back in time. In interpreting the Nyoo stone arrangements within the context of movement, performance, and dance, it is not possible to be precise about gender associations, though some degree of female presence might be imbued in the rituals through the presence of the masses of broken pots in Nyoo, pots being objects, based on current analogy, with potential female connections (Goodall 2007; Insoll in preparation a).

Interpretive limitations need acknowledging, but new directions might also be explored in pursuing material religion in the archaeology of the Nyoo shrine. Besides the possibility of exploring movement, the associated but equally elusive dimensions of emotion and sensory

perception (sound, vision, smell) can perhaps also be considered. For both emotions and sensory perception and responses can be affected by ritual performance utilizing a variety of techniques as Lewis (2002: 583) describes, in so doing contributing to the creation of the overall “synaesthetic environment” (Schechner 2002: 632). Certainly, dance can serve to heighten or alter emotions and conscious states, and such effects occur amongst contemporary Golib dancers, but again, this is not something that can be explored in this instance through the available archaeological evidence, even if it is not precluded in archaeological hermeneutics more generally (see Tarlow 2000; Insoll 2007c: 56-59).

vi) Sensory Perception

In contrast, sensory perception is potentially more amenable to exploration via the evidence from Nyoo, specifically, sound. This is because it is conceivable that sound, particularly percussive action, is ‘embedded’ in the Nyoo materials, and in the soundscape that the surrounding hills provide. Sound forms an integral part of the Golib festival and besides drumming which has already been referred to, the aural environment surrounding both Nyoo and Nyoo Biil is effectively utilized by participants in the festival to carry and amplify chants (Fortes 1987: 34), drumming, and dance refrains. Each Talis section has a new song each year, satirizing local politics and events etc., but the songs have the same time and rhythm, just new words (Kankpeyeng, Insoll, and MacLean submitted). Hence again both continuity and change exist side by side. Outside the ritual sphere, percussion assumes significance in other aspects of Tallensi life, in structuring activities such as floor tamping (S. Croucher pers. comm. 31/10/06; Eyifa 2007: 147), and is implicitly embedded in the daily round through, for instance, yam pounding or millet processing.

A sound or acoustic dimension should be acknowledged in relation to the Nyoo material, even if the specifics of what this might have been remain mute (Scarre 2006:2; Cross and Watson 2006: 107). For, as already suggested, the stone arrangements functioned within a dynamic ritual context that is highly unlikely to have been a silent one. Within oral cultures the importance accorded sound, and in particular percussion has been explored. Needham (1967: 610-611) has, for instance, connected percussion with transition, as represented by the use of percussion in rites of passage or in communicating with “the other world”. McLeod (1984: 376) takes this a stage further in suggesting that the use of percussion, sudden sounds, can create new discontinuous experiences of time in contrast to the continual visual temporal experience. Hence transition is literally heard, and overall, the primacy of sound in oral culture, which Nyoo represents, has been clearly indicated by Ong (1982: 71-74) in exploring what he terms the, “psychodynamics of orality”.

Ong might move us away from rhythm and percussion into more general terrain, but the former need centralizing here. Both can be linked with creating time, as we have seen, and as Connerton (1989: 76) notes, the rhythm of oral verse can also function as a mnemonical device. This is a point that it can be suggested can be extended more widely to encompass, in certain contexts as perhaps in Nyoo, rhythm and percussion more generally. Thus through such linkages the interrelation of all the different elements, sound, movement, time, performance, and memory, is again evident, and it is questionable if this would necessarily be any less complex in ritual contexts in prehistory, as represented by the stone arrangements in the Nyoo shrine.

vii) Memory and Archaeology

Memory, which has already been referred to as a key component of ritual must also be included and in considering interpretive options for Nyoo, the approaches adopted within the nascent ‘archaeology of memory’ (e.g. Rowlands 1993; Chouin 2002; Van Dyke and Alcock 2003; Lane 2005) would seem of relevance. And they are, to a degree, in recognizing the

importance of exploring, for instance, the construction of “social memory” (Van Dyke and Alcock 2003: 2). But to make this effective, recourse to ethnography must again be made. Mather (1999: 71), for example, notes how both Sisala and Kusasi shrines in northern Ghana, “are a physical mnemonic used to aid in recounting the past”, and how, “if the rites at shrines are successful, if spirits accept the offer of continued reciprocity, the version of the past recounted during the ritual is authenticated”. Perhaps the stone arrangements at Nyoo functioned in this way, in materializing memory via a process that Connerton (1989: 37) has described as, “referring them to the material milieu that surrounds us”.

Yet this point made, it is of course impossible to be sure what the stone arrangements in Nyoo might be in terms of their memory associations, for as Rowlands (1993: 144-148) indicates, these can be complex. But, drawing upon his consideration of the role of memory in the transmission of “culture” (ibid), it is perhaps better to see them as ‘made’, deposited, and manipulated in different ways. Hence, perhaps, they connect with the past through their links with the Earth and its possession, with the present through the living and their continued recognition as ‘ritual structures’, and the future through their implication, via Nyoo, in the Golib festival, which looks to agricultural success, but with an eye firmly pointing behind, to ancestral validation of this process as well. In other words, they serve to function within the types of “recursive relationships” described by Lane (2005: 21) by which societies use ancient remains to construct their past and by which these remains are passed on to future generations.

viii) *Lieux de Mémoires*

Interpreted in such a way, Nyoo provides the context for the construction of memory. It is seemingly a ritual “reservoir” (Insoll, Kankpeyeng, and MacLean In Press), but it is perhaps also a physical location of memory. If considered in such a way Nyoo might equate with the useful concept of *Lieux de Mémoires* described by Chouin (2002: 41), as sites that “allow a series of dialogic correspondences between history, memory and material remains to be established”. Moreover, an equation that perhaps extends to considering Nyoo as structured by both diachronic and synchronic elements as also discussed by Chouin (2002: 42). If such ideas are considered within the context of the comments of the eminent Tallensi chief and elder, John Bawa Zuure, that Nyoo should be considered as the great shrine for all the Tallensi, where worship started and spread from (J.B. Zuure pers. comm.; Insoll, Kankpeyeng, and MacLean in press), becomes almost akin to the ‘place’, recurrently found in myth. A generically mythic ‘place’ described by Sow (1980: 225-226) as, “the stage for some primordial event, crucial for the present human universe, and that belongs to a complex that also encompasses plant and animal species, minerals, and the founding Ancestor’s remains incorporated in the soil”. Besides Nyoo, other places of ‘memory’ exist throughout the Tongo Hills (Insoll 2008b), albeit of lesser significance, but all serve, as Jacobson-Widding and Van Beek (1990: 34) note to “render the remote past tangible in the immediate present”. Nyoo is thus not unique in this respect, or in being a place that might be subject to a) historical or, b) functional inaccuracy in contemporary tradition even when memories of place persist (see Vansina [1985: 187] for other African examples).

It also needs to be recognized that in constructing memory with reference to places and material culture, the importance of the body as an agent in negotiating and/or understanding these through movement again needs emphasis. This is especially so considering Vansina’s (1985: 43) point that, “studies of memory emphasize that remembering is action”. Connerton (1989: 72) describes how “memory is sedimented, or amassed, in the body” in two ways via “incorporating” and “inscribing” practices. The former could include postures, and the “choreography of authority” (ibid: 74) and is of relevance here, whilst the latter, fundamentally, includes use of the alphabet. Fundamentally, for the consequences of literacy have already been touched upon in considering the ‘textualization’ of ritual, and are no less

consequential for tradition and performance in regard to what Connerton (1989: 76) refers to as the freeing of “communal memory.....from its dependence on rhythm”. We might not be able to materialize the ‘embodied’ memory (e.g. Connerton 1989; Hallam and Hockey 2001) beyond the suggestions made here with regard to dance in Nyoo, but we can at least recognize its possible importance. Second, we should also acknowledge the potential limitations imposed by the text-based interpretive environment which surrounds the archaeologist (Insoll 2007c), and the consequences of increasing literacy for the Golib of the future, and hence in turn the changing role of analogy for interpreting similar archaeological contexts.

Conclusions

The residues of material religion such as those recorded in the Nyoo shrine can be the result of complex interrelationships between beliefs, ritual and performance, and movement involving bodily understandings and practices. These are unlikely to ever be reconstructed in their entirety, even allowing for an anthropologically informed approach, and this discussion has to a large degree focused upon one element, movement, and admittedly with an emphasis placed upon hypothesis, and a certain degree of speculation. This is justified for it is vital to acknowledge human nature as also generative of ritual fluidity and dynamic movement rather than leave unchallenged the static often Judaeo-Christian derived hermeneutics that are frequently projected onto inappropriate archaeological contexts. Although the Golib dance might have been projected back to begin to interpret the stone arrangements in the Nyoo shrine dating from, it seems, 1000 years ago, it is possible that the latter also serve to inform and underpin the contemporary Golib dance. Thus, in effect, constituting a reciprocal relationship, the complexities of which are only now beginning to be understood.

Memory is constructed through verbal, visual, and semantic codes, but as Connerton (1989: 28) notes, the semantic code is “the key to the whole operation of memory”. The applicability of this in the context of Nyoo is debatable, but perhaps the stone arrangements as they endured materially assisted in the construction and sustenance of memory, as ritual “*aides memoires*” (Ong 1982: 34) in this, until recently, non-literate context. As observed previously, continuity of ritual and performance is not necessarily precluded in relation to spatial understanding and so conceived the stone arrangements are possibly best seen as enduring material symbols of performance, movement, and ritual.

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Biography

Timothy Insoll holds a Chair in Archaeology at the University of Manchester. He is the author of several books including *Archaeology, Ritual, Religion* (Routledge 2004). His primary research interest is in the archaeology of religion and ritual practices.

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Figure 1.
Map of northern Ghana indicating the location of the Tongo Hills, by number 3, Tongo.

Figure 2.
The stone arrangements in the Nyoo shrine (NYOO 06 [A]) before the pottery infill was removed (left), and afterwards (right) (photos. T. Insoll).

Figure 3. Cluster of objects around a standing stone (NYOO 06 [B]). These include an iron bracelet and stone grinder-rubber-pounders, as well as pot sherds and vessel fragments (photo. T. Insoll).

Figure 4.
Golib dancer with raptor beaks encased in leather as part of a head dress, Tengzug, March 2006 (photo. T. Insoll).

Figure 5.
Sikpatuure, dance staff or 'shrine', Nyoo Biil, March 2006 (photo. T. Insoll).

Figure 6.
Seating plans in Nyoo Biil. Top (1 and 2), March 1934 (Fortes 1934a), bottom, July 2006.

Figure 7. Dance patterns in the Golib festival. Top, 1-3, recorded by Fortes (1934b:28) at unspecified locations. Bottom, locations as stated, March 2006.