Shrine Franchising and the Neolithic in the British Isles: Some Observations based upon the Tallensi, Northern Ghana

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Ethnography of the Tallensi shows how rights of access to shrines could be granted to people in other places and how beneficiaries may take with them samples of stone used at the mother shrine. Reasons for taking the samples are considered. It is suggested that Tallensi practice offers an analogy for selection and transfer of stone in the Neolithic of Britain and Ireland.

The nature of religion and ritual practice in the Neolithic of the British Isles has been the focus of much discussion (Gibson & Simpson 1998; Whitley 2002), with emphasis placed upon, variously, among other themes (and selectively referenced), ancestors (Edmonds 1999), shamans (Dronfield 1996), monuments (Burl 1997; Scarre 2002), depositional practices (Richards & Thomas 1984), burial (Hedges 1984; Thomas 1988) and landscapes (Tilley 1994; 2004a; Cooney 2000).

Moreover, much discussion has both used, and hinged around the applicability of, ethnographic analogy in relation to the Neolithic and material derived from Madagascar (Parker Pearson & Ramilisonina 1998; and see Barrett & Fewster 1998) or Papua New Guinea (Whittle 2003), for instance, as well, of course, as in more general terms (see for example Binford 1967; Gould 1980; Hodder 1982, 11–27; Wylie 1985; Oestigaard 2000, 2–3). Neither the use nor the applicability of ethnographic analogy in general or in relation to the Neolithic, will be considered in any detail here for this is all ground well covered. Nonetheless, perhaps it could be suggested that the discussion in general has become somewhat cyclical in frequently citing the same range of ethnographic examples and reiterating the same polarized positions with regard to the utility of ethnographic evidence for developing interpretations.

This article works from the position that ethnographic analogy is useful in broadening interpretive horizons rather than seeking direct resemblances (see Insoll 2004, 113–16). It attempts to introduce to the debate over the possible nature of religious and ritual practices in the Neolithic of the British Isles a further case study derived from the Tallensi in northern Ghana. Although, apparently as yet ignored by archaeologists considering the Neolithic, Tallensi material about the exclusivity and inclusivity of shrines has been utilized by archaeologists to inform interpretation of the Pueblos of the United States (Buisktra & Charles 1999, 205). For the Neolithic, the omission could be of some consequence both for the implications that Tallensi religious beliefs and practices have for the creation and replication of shrines, their franchising, the purchase of ritual clientship and for the complexities they signal as regards our notions of religious 'forms'. This article is also offered in the hope of beginning to address the absence of studies concerned with the uses of both material culture and the environment 'in the construction of social and individual memory' Lane (2005, 42).

The material drawn upon here is derived from a project started by this author in the Tongo Hills, the epicentre of Tallensi settlement in 2004, and conducted in co-operation with Dr Benjamin Kankpeyeng, Director of the Upper East Regional Museum, Ghana, and Dr Rachel MacLean, affiliated to the University of Manchester (Insoll *et al.* 2004). The remit of this project is, firstly, to reconstruct occupation sequences in the area; secondly, to evaluate varying perceptions of landscape as manifested by different interest groups, ages, and genders; thirdly, to consider the contemporary material manifestations and archaeological implications of traditional religion (totemism, animism,

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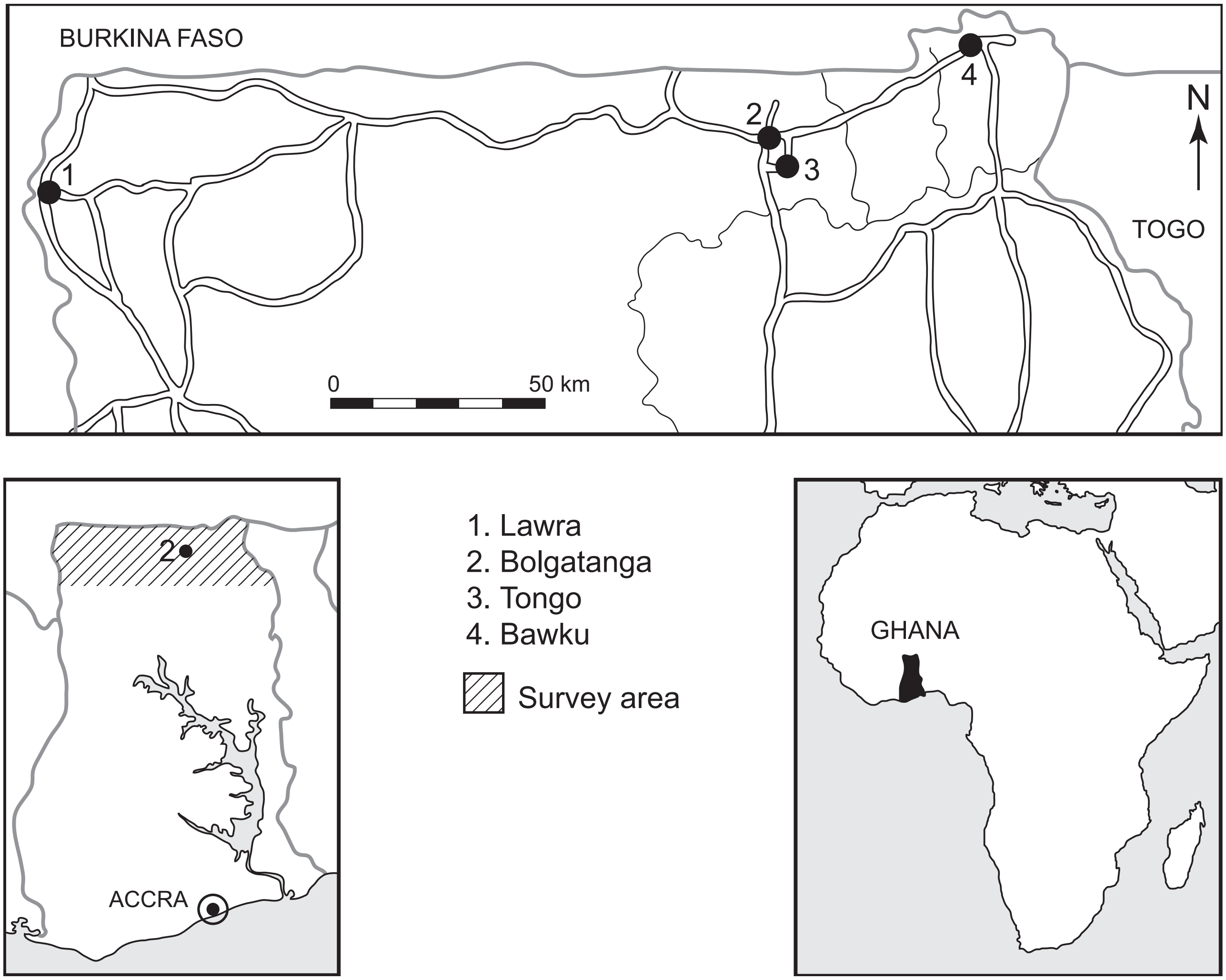

Figure 1. *Northern Ghana and the areas mentioned.*

ancestral 'worship') among the Tallensi; and, finally, to assess the utility of myth and other forms of oral tradition as archaeological interpretive aids (see Insoll 2004, 123–8). This article primarily derives from the third objective.

No archaeological research had been conducted in the Tongo Hills until the start of this project (Kankpeyeng pers. comm.) but, anthropologically, it is one of the most intensively studied areas in West Africa. A further source drawn upon extensively here is the exemplary anthropological research completed by Meyer Fortes (1945; 1949; 1987) among the Tallensi largely just prior to the Second World War. In terms of methodological precision, research depth, cultural understanding, and theoretical awareness, it is unequalled, certainly within the West African anthropology context and, indeed, it has few rivals within sub-Saharan African anthropology as a whole.

The Tallensi and their origins

The Tallensi are an ethnic group who live to the south of Bolgatanga, the administrative capital of the Upper East Region in north Ghana. They are subsistence agriculturalists speaking a Gur language of the Oti-Volta group (Naden 1988, 12). The Tallensi divide their society into two main groups of clans, the Namoos and the Hill Talis. It is with the latter that this article is primarily concerned, for they are the Tallensi clans, approximately 25 in number (Fortes 1950, 244), who inhabit the Tongo Hills, a small chain enclosing a plateau. This landscape is densely settled, containing a number of villages and their associated farmlands as well as several important shrines, with the whole area referred to as Tongo-Tengzug (Kankpeyeng 2001; Fig. 1). Tallensi oral tradition describes the Talis as the autochthonous inhabitants, 'sprung from the earth itself'

(Fortes 1987, 43). In contrast, the Namoos of Tongo, a settlement just northeast of the Tongo Hills, trace their origins to Mamprugu, an area (and a kingdom) associated with the Mamprusi ethnic group, situated about 30 km southeast of the Tongo Hills, on top of the Gambaga Escarpment (Kankpeyeng 2001, 23).

This subdivision is of interest, apart from the specific element of migration history which it contains, because it also seemingly reflects the development of chiefly authority among the Tallensi which, again according to oral tradition, was brought with the Namoos by their ancestor Musuor to the aboriginal Talis (Fortes 1950, 245–6). Meanwhile, the Talis, through prior occupation of the land, had the dominant association with the earth, as its ritual custodians, and thus constituted the earth-priest clans (Fortes 1987, 43, 92). Hence the oral tradition would seem to reveal both the marriage of the two groups and of their ritual and administrative systems.

When this occurred is difficult to reconstruct, except vaguely. Archaeology, as yet, can contribute little, for settlement histories have still to be established, and test excavations did not provide any information of relevance in this respect (Insoll *et al.* 2004). Nonetheless, turning to the traditions again, Fortes (1987, 43) records that these suggest that the immigration from Mamprugu occurred some fourteen to fifteen generations ago (presumably with a base line of the 1930s–40s, the era of his primary field research) which, perhaps, could be construed as 300 years, *c.* 1650. Yet whether this is reliable is unclear, for elsewhere Fortes refers to the historical span recognized by the Tallensi as five or six generations, and he states that historical time is not a 'specific dimension of their social life' but rather that the lapse of time is considered 'as a periodical or cyclical rhythm of eternal repetition' (Fortes 1945, xi). In addition, the mythological or historical past is not seen as an era when people behaved differently from the present for, again (Fortes 1945, 24), the days of the ancestors function in 'the life of to-day on the same rational plane of existence'.

Leaving aside the potential similarities to Eliade's (1987, 109) 'myth of the eternal return', the conceptualization of time, history, and tradition by the Tallensi could have implications for how the land, and its constituent parts, such as rock (of potential consequence, as will be seen), might be considered as immediate, 'present', rather than foundational, historical, or epic. Thus the material components derived from powerful elements such as shrines could endure in ritual or religious significance without precise biographical events or details attributed to them. Historical details need not be significant, where as the biography of place, locked into a cycle of the important enduring 'present', might be. This, it will be suggested, may be of importance for aspects of material from the Neolithic of the British Isles as well.

Tallensi religion

Concepts of history and temporality also have implications for aspects of Tallensi religious belief and practice, specifically with reference to the ancestor cult which is a central element of the latter, primarily because the notion or assumption of continuity is central to Tallensi philosophy. Fortes (1945, 26) notes that it encompasses the view that 'the social structure of to-day is the same as it was in the past'. Hence, rather than emphasizing longevity and a 'deep' understanding of the past and complex relations therewith, as archaeologists may be wont to do when considering ancestor cults as interpretive explanations for their material, such cults might also function as immediate links to the present. Over all, conceptual complexity would seem to be key not only in the consideration of religious forms but also in conceiving of the temporal associations which are frequently attached to phenomena such as ancestor cults, and which are represented to us by aspects of the material culture we consider.

The subtleties of Tallensi ancestor beliefs must also be acknowledged. Various tiers are apparent: each segment of a Talis composite clan has a lineage shrine to distinguish it from other segments (Fortes 1949, 6), to which they sacrifice individually (Fortes 1950, 253). Contrasting with this, groups of maximal lineages belonging to different clans (but not necessarily united by ties of clanship) collaborate 'in the cult of their collective ancestors' by joint sacrifice (Fortes 1987, 6). The ancestor cult can be manifest in various ways, as a household shrine (Fig. 2) or in an external shrine such as a sacred grove or cave (Kankpeyeng 2001), but involving ritual practices which have no specialist priests (Fortes 1987, 150).

Yet the complexity of Tallensi religion is much greater than the label 'ancestor', applied in the singular, allows for. An awareness of time, history, and temporal distance exists within it. This would, for instance, appear to be reflected in the cult for maintaining the fertility of the Earth, which functions alongside the ancestor cult. Although accommodating the desires of the present, it is locked into a sequence of possession and association which is underpinned by substantial temporal foundations.

The Earth Cult also differs from the ancestor cult in various ways. It is associated with specialist priests, the tendaana, the 'Custodian of the Earth' (Fortes 1987,

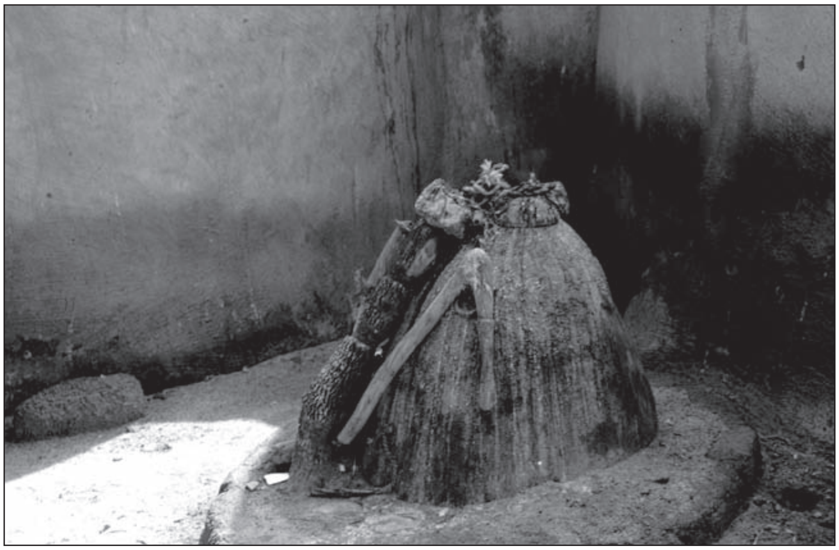

Figure 2. *Household shrine incorporating a hoe, lithics, pottery, and animal material, Tongo-Tengzug. (Photograph: T. Insoll.)*

43), and is materially manifest through sacred places, ten, in which are located the earth shrines, tengbana, which the priests serve. It also differs in the beliefs it reflects, being, obviously, connected with the sacred aspect of the earth, which is personified, and which is envisaged as 'a living force ... complementary to the collective ancestors' (Fortes 1987, 135–6). Yet a simple ascription of personhood to Talis concepts of the earth would be incorrect (see Fortes 1950, 255), for, as in their relations with, and concepts of, material culture (discussed below), so the relation with the earth is more complex: it is attributed with 'qualities of livingness' (Fortes 1987, 254) but is not analogous to a person.

To the ancestor and earth cults must be added totemism as an element of Tallensi religion. Although totemism is often misused and misdefined to describe religious 'wholes' when only 'parts' should be invoked (Levi-Strauss 1991), it is apt for describing an aspect of Tallensi beliefs and observances which help to structure social relations and which functions, primarily, to produce taboos on what people can eat (Fortes 1945, 126–7), with all the potential material consequences (Saunders & Politis 2002). Also of possible significance is the elements which are absent as well, notably possession and trance, which by modern convention would probably be classed as 'shamanic' (Eliade 1989). These, according to Fortes (1987, 196), are known about by the Tallensi through 'hearsay' but scorned as 'preposterous' and 'spurious'.

Finally, the well spring and role of Tallensi religion also needs to be mentioned. For what have been considered thus far are components of a more complex whole, often formerly neglected in the study of African (and other traditional) religions (Mbiti 1991). Over all, Tallensi philosophy would seem to be this-worldly, focusing upon life in a difficult environment (Fortes 1987, 196). Moreover, Fortes (1950, 253) describes Tallensi religion as 'a potent instrument of social control', with the ancestral cult supporting the lineage system, and the earth cult functioning in relation to 'location'.

Thus the Tallensi are fixed in space and time by their religion. It could be argued that, practically, totemism and the earth cult also function as an ecological or environmental device (Kankpeyeng 2001) to moderate exploitation and mediate existence. This would appear to make sense within, for example, the context of some of the actions of the tendaana, described by Fortes (1950, 261), such as their turning the first sod in making a new farm or house in virgin land or in the taboos associated with exploitation of certain resources and with access to parts of the landscape, depending upon the status of the person involved. Yet to attribute Tallensi philosophy and religion solely to environmental or economic reasoning would be deterministic and erroneous. For their religion 'springs directly out of the social structure ... fed by streams whose sources lie beneath and beyond social structure' (Fortes 1945, 142). In other words, what seems also to be apparent is the recurring element of the numinous (Otto 1950), the irreducible, indefinable essence of holiness (Insoll 2004, 19–20).

Compared with religious beliefs of their neighbours, Tallensi religion can be seen to have both similarities and contrasts. Mathers (2003), for example, discusses the Kusasi, an ethnic group situated immediately northeast of the Tallensi. 'Land gods' are of especial importance in Kusasi religion. They consist of 'places of power' such as natural features and also stones (*c.* 30 × 20 × 20 cm) which are set into the ground in compounds associated with ancestral founders and at prominent natural features such as streams, ponds, and hills. These shrines form a hierarchy and are, in turn, fused with ancestral beliefs (Mathers 2003, 33). Furthermore, they serve the remit of ecological protection through the prohibitions and taboos they enforce and entail.

The parallels with Tallensi religion are obvious in the Earth and ancestor cults and in the associated ecological or environmental protective framework which exists. In addition, the social role of shrines is similar, with shrines functioning among the Kusasi to denote 'who does and does not belong to specific social groups' (Mathers 2003, 42). This would appear to be especially so with regard to the social 'inclusivity' of Earth and fertility cults and, conversely, the 'exclusivity' of ancestral shrines (see also Luig & Van Oppen 1997). But contrasts also exist and, although Kusasi religion is undoubtedly multifaceted, with variant strands conceptualized and utilized, it is not as complex, perhaps, as Tallensi beliefs and practices, possibly because it does not serve to integrate two strands of population, the Namoos and Talis, in the same way. It is, maybe, in regard to its tangible success in achieving this, and thus its perceived power, that aspects of Tallensi religion have had a much wider appeal than their neighbours'. That, in part, might explain why the pre-eminent Tonna'ab shrine has become a focus of both pilgrimage and 'franchising'.

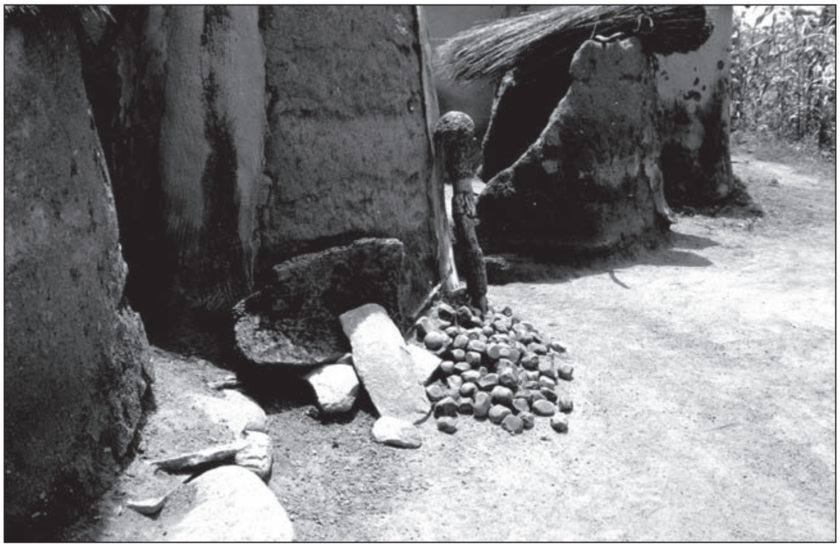

Figure 3. *Household shrine incorporating grinding stones, Sameed, Tongo-Tengzug. (Photograph: T. Insoll.)*

If the comparative perspective is extended to another Voltaic people, the Dagara or Lo Dagaa of northwestern Ghana (Goody 1962; Kuba & Lentz 2002), parallels and dissimilarities can again be seen. Similarities, for example, would seem to exist in the permeability of religious 'forms', so that Earth and Ancestor cults co-exist and intermingle as in Tallensi religion. This also has a material dimension as is well illustrated by Goody's (1962, 389) description of the decay of the carved wooden lineage shrine of Zeng, the founder of the village of Tom, as it was eaten by white ants: 'Zeng in tan, Zeng is earth' ... 'the shrine gradually disintegrates into dust; at this point the worship of the Earth and the worship of the ancestors merge'. Thus it can be seen that, conceptually, the material is transformed as it decays and, in so doing, raises salutary points for archaeologists perhaps too intent on categorizing their religious forms in singular terms. Moreover, as Kuba & Lentz (2002, 390) relate, the Dagara, when settling new areas, maintain a 'ritual umbilical cord' with the original lineage ancestors and their home region via a power object such as a small stone which might be installed as a shrine in a new settlement.

Thus both similarities and differences can be seen in comparing the Tallensi with the Kusasi and Dagara. Again, discussion should acknowledge complexity in configuring conceptions of past religions, ritual behaviours, and accompanying material manifestations.

Tallensi shrines, materiality and 'franchising'

The shrine is the primary vehicle of Tallensi ritual. It is conceivable that shrines may also have been a major element of ritual attention in the Neolithic of the British Isles as well, and it is worth exploring Tallensi shrines, how they are franchised, and associated concepts of materiality, in a little more detail, before moving on to examine the Neolithic material further.

Shrines are manifest in great quantities in the Tongo Hills and they vary considerably in size and composition, indicating the weakness of the term, 'shrine' (see Insoll 2004, 104–5). This would seem to be a point of consequence even at a gross level, as in attempting to differentiate between 'shrines' as constituted by natural places and those created by human action (see Luig & Van Oppen 1997, 22). For, as with descriptions of the religious forms themselves, a blurring between the two occurs in that, for example, the natural place is created as a shrine by sacrifices, prayers, offerings etc., even if otherwise unaltered (see Insoll 2004, xiii–xv). Moreover, in many instances, especially today, by its mere survival as a natural place in landscapes otherwise denuded, it is subject to human action. Once again, we have to think carefully about our criteria for definition.

Yet we lack alternative definitions for 'shrine' at present, and an attempt at classifying Tallensi

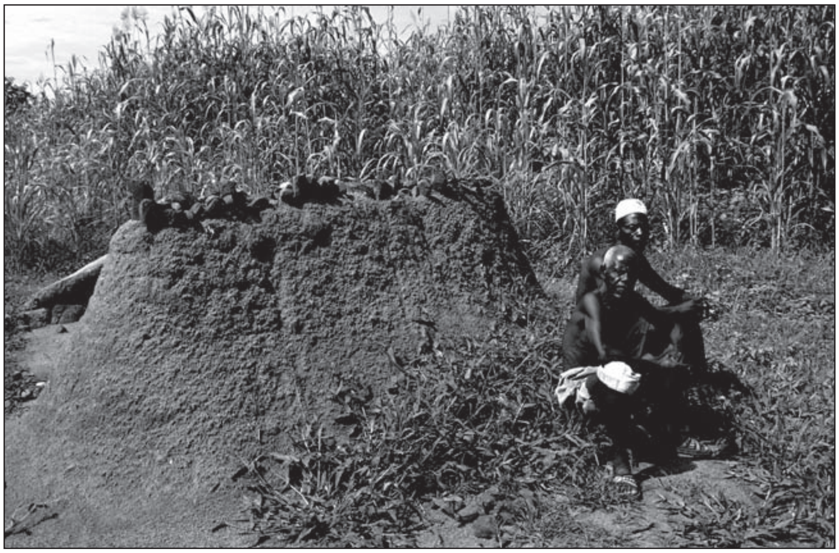

Figure 4. *Shrine associated with the Boardam festival incorporating pounders and grinding stones, near the grove of Yaab, Tongo-Tengzug. (Photograph: T. Insoll.)*

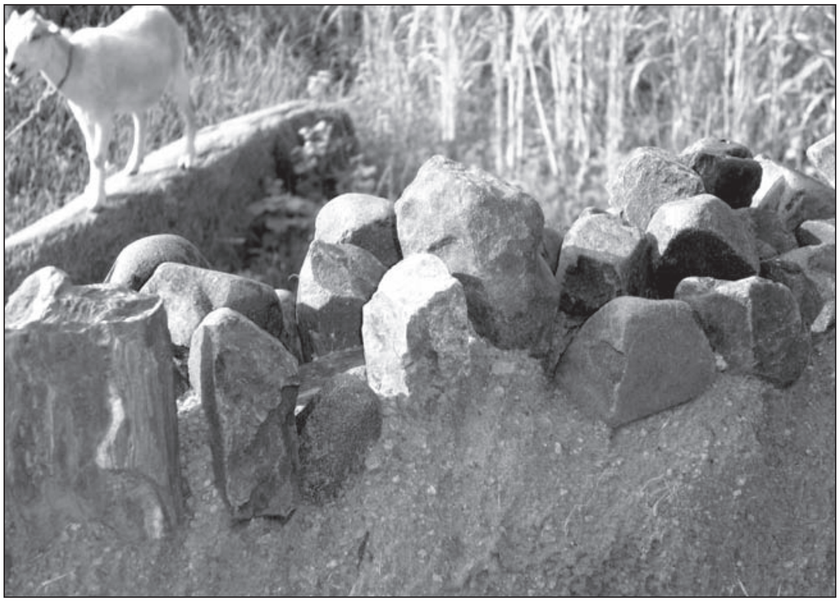

Figure 5. *Detail of the Shrine associated with the Boardam festival, near the grove of Yaab, Tongo-Tengzug. (Photograph: T. Insoll.)*

shrines other than in the broad ancestral/earth cult division would be meaningless owing to their inherent diversity and apparent variability as to how they are conceptualized. However, commonalities exist in shape, size, and form, and a recurrent theme of archaeological interest is the reworking of material culture within shrines which is apparent. Thus tools used to work the earth, axes, and hoes, for example, as well as iron spears, bronze and iron bracelets, animal remains, and material ultimately derived from the earth such as worked stone pestles and grinders, were frequently found to form core elements of smaller shrines amongst the Tallensi (Figs. 2, 3, 4 & 5). An emphasis upon enshrining tools of production is also found among the Dagara. Goody (1962, 84, 204–5) describes how the bow of a married dead man can become an ancestral shrine, or how the axe and hoe blade of a deceased man are handed to his sons, and how worn iron hoe blades (and other pieces of manufactured iron) are considered as belonging to the earth shrine and hence placed at the base of shrines associated with the Earth cult. Similarities thus exist with Tallensi practices, but the complexity of the latter again seems apparent, not least in that not all Tallensi enshrined tools are predominantly either iron, or worn.

Furthermore, an emphasis upon the symbolic and practical importance of rock would also seem to recur amongst the Tallensi. As evident in, for example, the use of rockshelters as shrines, schools, refuges, and for storage purposes; the use of rock outcrops for pounding, grinding, axe and machete sharpening, entertainment (as gaming boards); the use of rock for pestles, pounders, seats for elders (Fig. 6), as plaques for hanging ritual items on outside compounds, and as key components of shrines; as well as in building, path edging, and the construction of agricultural terraces (Fig. 7). This could be explained as merely appropriate use of an abundant material but it may be of greater significance.

For, firstly, the profound links to the land and its component parts which are manifest by the very existence of the Earth cult itself could suggest that the Tongo Hills are in themselves ascribed with a degree of sacrality, as is the material from which they are formed, rock and earth. Secondly, within such a framework, rockshelters can be of primary importance, as is seemingly manifest in one used to store the drums associated with the Gologo festival (Kankpeyeng 2001,

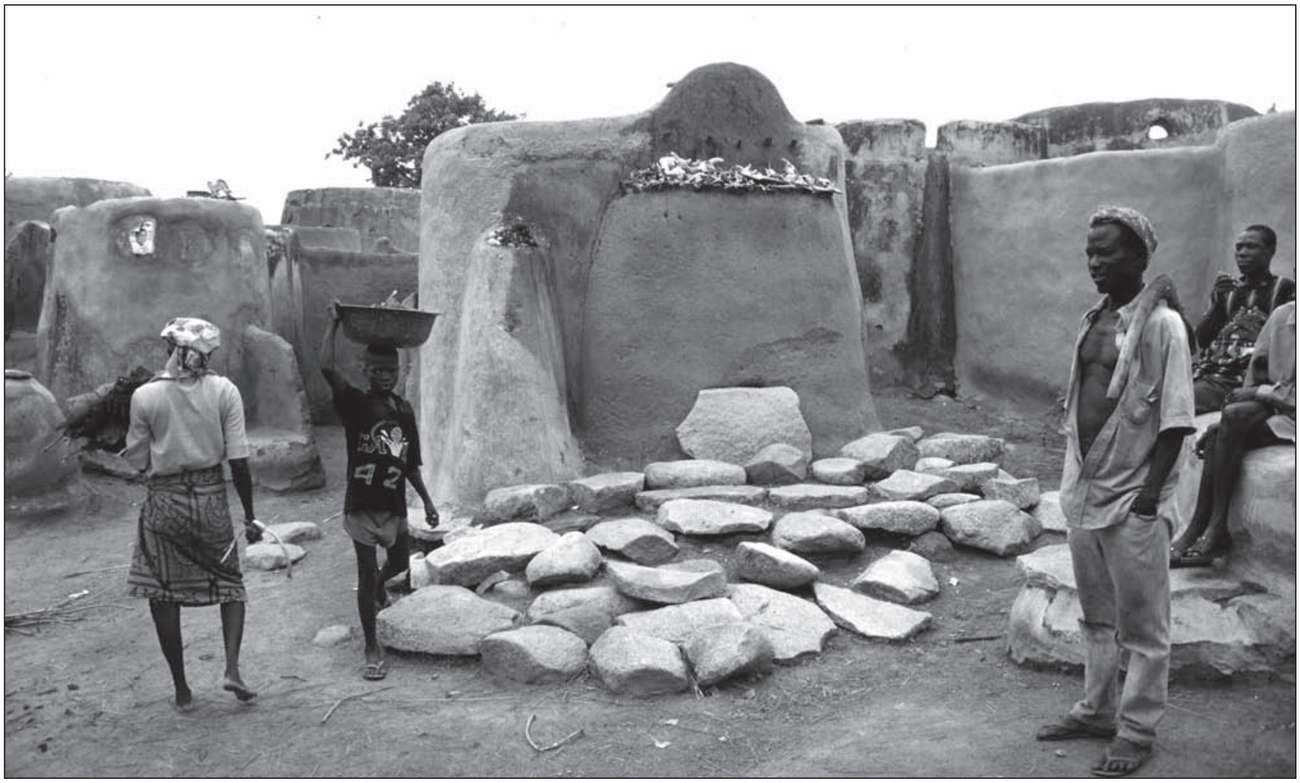

Figure 6. *Stone slabs used for seating elders, Tongo-Tengzug. (Photograph: T. Insoll.)*

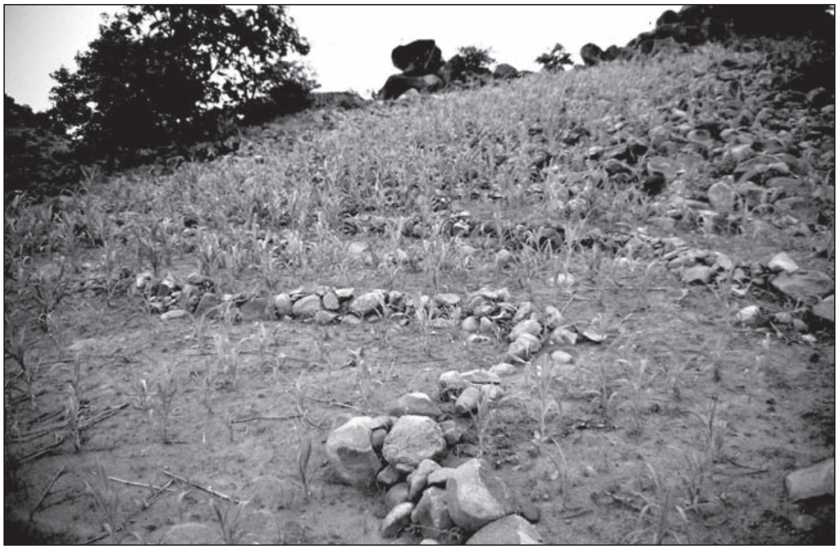

Figure 7. *Agricultural terracing, Sakpee, Tongo-Tengzug. (Photograph: T. Insoll.)*

24–6) when, equally, a building could have served the same purpose; or more significantly in the pre-eminent importance ascribed to the Tonna'ab earth shrine, which is situated in the cliffs overlooking the plateau in the centre of the Tongo Hills to the west of the Kpatari area of settlement in Tongo-Tengzuk, Tonna'ab being the most important of a number of key 'external' earth shrines, with others, also in the vicinity of the Kpatari, including the grove of Yaab, and the Nyoo shrine, which are both situated on the plateau itself (see Kankpeyeng 2001). Although the Tonna'ab shrine is the most significant, all have varying degrees of access placed upon them and, for the current project to proceed, permission was negotiated with both these shrines and the elders who control them.

The Tonna'ab shrine is reached by ascending the cliffs from the plateau. It is formed of a large narrow rockshelter with a projecting overhang from which issues, following suitable offerings or sacrifices, 'a mysterious subterranean voice, whose advice, admonitions, and demands are interpreted by its custodians' (Fortes 1945, 252; see Fig. 8). The Tonna'ab shrine is a manifestation of the Earth Cult, of importance as a shrine which abhors evil and is both benevolent and curative (Kankpeyeng 2001, 24). Moreover, its power

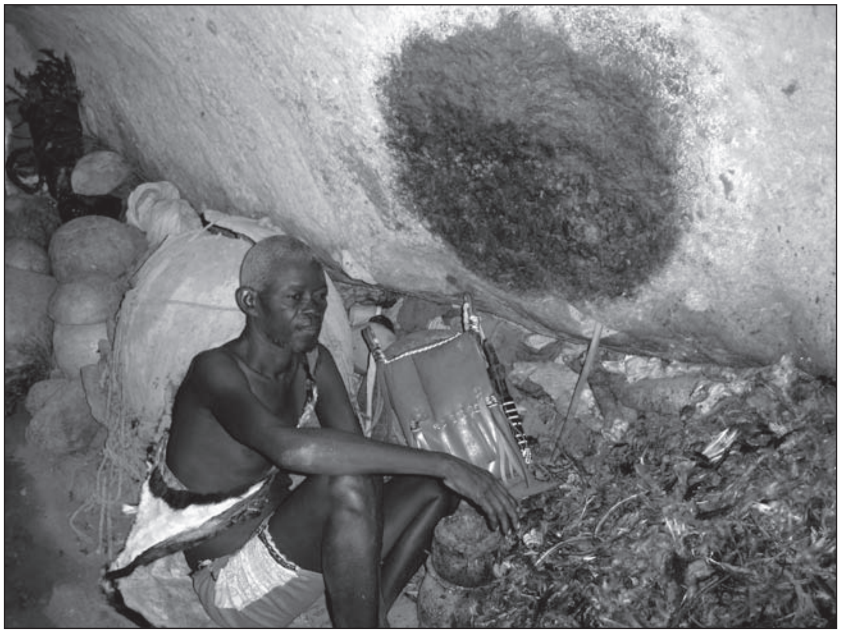

Figure 8. *Interior of the Tonna'ab shrine illustrating sacrifice area, sacrificer, sacrificial knife contained in the bag, and sacrificial residues (feathers and bones to right of man). (Photograph: T. Insoll.)*

would seem, in part, to be intrinsically associated with the substance from which it is formed, rock.

Thirdly, the power of the Tonna'ab shrine has meant that its fame has spread both among peoples neighbouring the Tallensi such as the Bulsa, Mossi, and Kusasi and much further, to southern Ghana where it is known among the Asante (Ashanti). Hence, pilgrims from throughout the region regularly visit the shrine, especially in connection with seeking help for infertility. This has generated significant income for the keepers of the shrine, as livestock (cattle, sheep, goat, fowl etc.), iron hoes, salt, cloth, and money are all brought as offerings. Fortes (1945, 252) refers to these visits and it can be inferred that pilgrimages to the Tonna'ab shrine could have been occurring for at least a century, for the clandestine re-occupation of the Tongo Hills, following forcible British clearance of the area in 1911, was due in part to 'its sacred power' (Kankpeyeng 2001, 24).

Besides the pilgrimages, the shrine itself has been 'franchised' to meet the demand for its power. This is a purchase which entails setting up an affiliated shrine in the client's home area. In Fortes's time of writing (1940s), such franchised shrines had been established in southern Ghana, several hundred miles away from the 'mother' shrine. Whether they existed in other directions is not known, but it is not infeasible and, certainly today, the implications are even more profound, with diaspora Ghanaian and other West African communities in many areas of the world for whom such franchised shrines could be equally powerful. The exciting possibilities that this notion of shrine 'franchise' and clientship holds for interpreting the archaeological record are explored further below, but as stated, rock plays an important role within this process, further seeming to affirm its special material status. The physical process of transferring legitimate right to individuals from distant areas to operate Tonna'ab has been described by Benjamin Kankpeyeng, as follows (paraphrasing pers. comm. 2004).

Importantly, the procedure involves both ideas and material culture. The individual is counselled or provided with information on the shrine. The individual offers a cow for sacrifice to the shrine at its request. The horn or the tail of the cow is then treated specially, including sewing of leather around it. Some 'medicine' or substance is also added or sealed by the leatherwork around the horn or tail. A representative of the shrine accompanies the individual to the town or village they come from. After the shrine accepts the location following various sacrifices, the individual returns to Tongo-Tengzuk with the shrine's representative. A stone or boulder (of a type used by the caretaker of the shrine to call the attention of the shrine by knocking three times) is given to the individual to be used at the location of the new shrine. Several of these shrines exist among other ethnic groups in Ghana. Examples include Bokobi in the Volta Region, Ahenkro near Kumasi in the Ashanti region (with Nana Donyina Ahenkro as the custodian), Accra (Nii Amoakwa Takyi as custodian), and Tafili near Sogakope (Baba Tafili). Bosomfo Issifu established the first such shrine in southern Ghana at Kumasi.

From this description it can be seen that the process of establishing franchised shrines involves ritual actions at the 'mother' shrine encompassing sacrifice, the transfer of ideas and authority, and the manipulation of material culture. But crucially, this is followed by the journey of a representative of Tonna'ab to the new location and the return of the 'franchisee' to the mother shrine; and a further movement of material culture, rock, of a special provenance and biography.

Understandably, there was a reticence from the guardian of the Tonna'ab shrine to give any more precise information as to what this specific rock was like (Yiran pers. comm. 2005), other than that described above, as outlined to Kankpeyeng. Nonetheless, the importance of rock as a substance would seemingly be indicated by how it, rather than other materials, was used to awaken the shrine, as shown by it being transferred in the second and final phase of franchising, almost as if it is the key to bringing the shrine to life. It cannot be assumed that this is unique either to the Tonna'ab or the Tallensi. The existence of similar processes in prehistory cannot be discounted; nor can the possible interpretive relevance of such action for aspects of material culture patterning and, more specifically, for the movement of stone and stone artefacts in the Neolithic of the British Isles, as considered below.

Consequently, rock could be seen to be of significance and a fourth reason which might suggest the especial power of rock is the seeming absence of rock art (cupules possibly excluded) in the Tongo Hills. Survey of the whole area has yet to be finished, but to date none has been found. This is surprising, as the rock surfaces are amenable to both engraving and painting, and rock art has been recorded in the surrounding area as at Gingana on the Gambaga Escarpment where a schematic design executed in what seems to be red ochre was recorded (Fig. 9), whilst previously at Tusig on the Ghana–Togo border various rock paintings have been noted (Carter & Carter 1964). Although rock art is very rare in Ghana, perhaps partly a reflection of the lack of research, it is found amongst other ethnic groups with similarly complex systems of religious beliefs, as among the Dogon of the Bandiagara Escarpment in Mali (Griaule 1965; Van Beek 1991), where totemic emblems are frequently depicted (Fig. 10). Could the absence of rock art in the Tongo Hills be due to the fact that the rock might be attributed with power, 'livingness', such that altering it might not accord well with such beliefs?

Consider the reaction of the Tallensi to a quarry which has recently been established at the base of the northwestern corner of the Tongo Hills (Kankpeyeng 2001). This quarry has caused extensive damage. For example, it is said to have destroyed a waterfall which ran down from the plateau, and it caused a stream to cease flowing. Many Tallensi men stopped the quarrymen and the bulldozers, armed only with bows and arrows, as they were so upset by what was occurring (actions largely successful as quarrying is not undertaken on the plateau itself any more). The base premise of this being described as a reaction to the destruction of a landscape full of shrines which, if destroyed, would cause the rains to fail and the people to starve (it must be added that there was a perceived lack of economic benefits for the Tallensi from the quarry operations, which are run largely by outsiders: Kankpeyeng pers. comm. 2004). Yet perhaps also implicit within this is the removal of rock itself, i.e. the land, without consent, either physically or ritually, and undertaken in a manner which stands in direct contrast to the negotiated processes involved in shrine franchising.

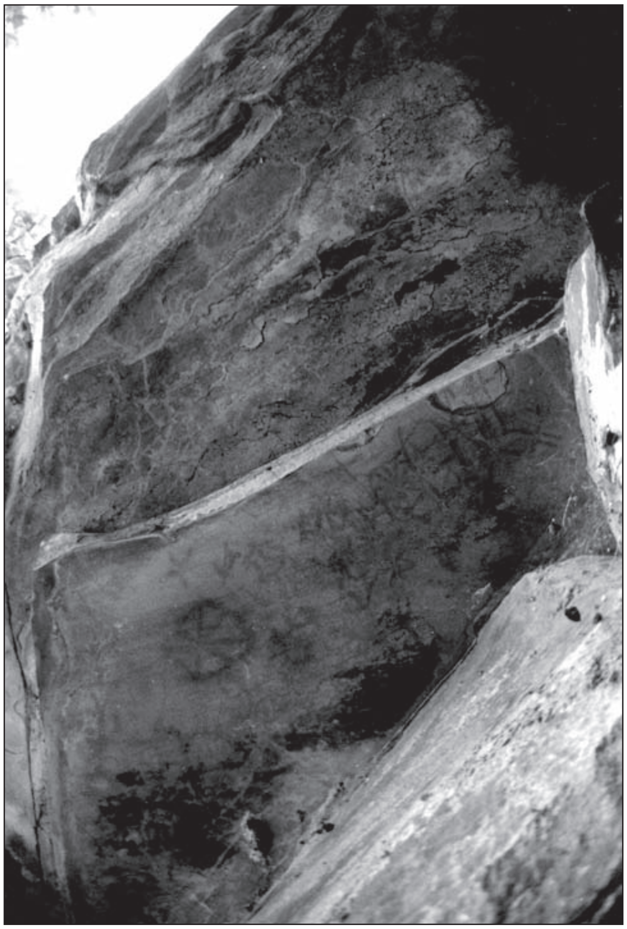

Figure 9. *Schematic rock painting, Gingana, Gambaga Escarpment. (Photograph: T. Insoll.)*

The complexity of Tallensi concepts of materiality could also be relevant here, though this would be more applicable to the re-working and enshrinement of material culture in general than to the specific status of rock *per se*. These concepts have already been referred to, and Fortes describes how trees, stones and artefacts can all become charged with 'elements of personification', but again stresses that this does not amount to personhood, 'in the specific sense'; rather, they can serve as the sitting place of the ancestor, the 'locus of accessibility to prayer and other ritual acts' (Fortes 1987, 256). Additionally, besides both material

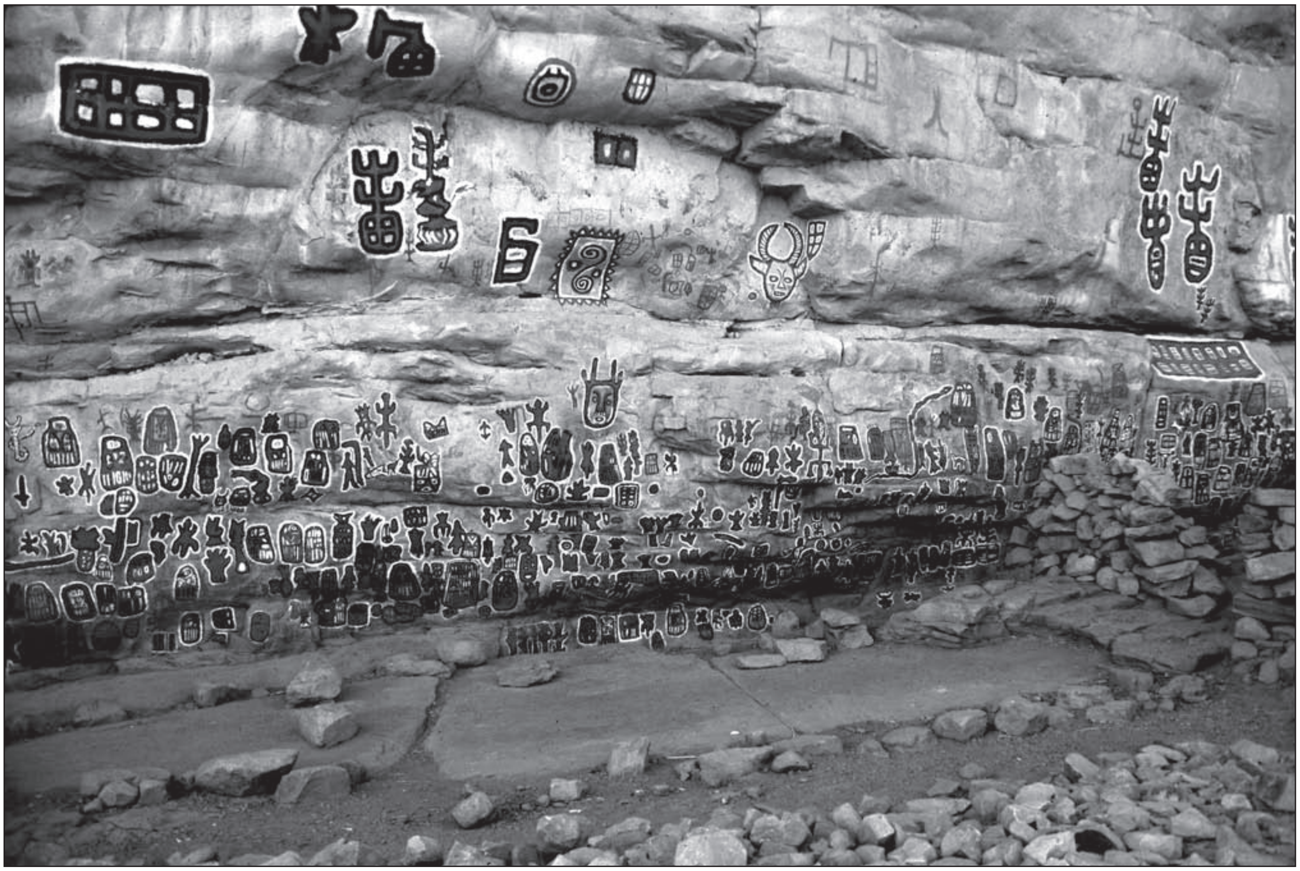

Figure 10. *Dogon totemic rock paintings, circumcision place, Songo, Bandiagara Escarpment, Mali. (Photograph: T. Insoll - some rock paintings electronically enhanced for clarity.)*

culture and natural features being accorded a special place within the ancestor cult, the sacredness of the earth has connotations with regard to material culture. For artefacts (in particular iron objects) or stray animals if found must be handed to a tendaana, it being particularly heinous 'to take anything found near an Earth shrine, where the mystical power of the Earth is already localized' (Fortes 1945, 176).

Finally, the recurrence of rock in ritual contexts such as shrines would further support the interpretation of its pre-eminent importance. This would seem to be confirmed by the incorporation of artefacts such as quartz spheres and groundstone pestles within shrines. Two examples of this are illustrated in Figures 3, 4 and 11. The former is a shrine linked with the Boardam or harvest festival and is situated near the entrance to the Yaab or Bonaab sacred grove. According to the chief of Kpatare, Sahabazaa (pers. comm. 2005), the stones are found around the shrine in the form in which they are enshrined, i.e. already seemingly used. The shrine in Figure 11 is also linked with the Boardam festival, and the stones were described by the caretaker of Tonna'ab, Yiran (pers. comm. 2005), as coming from 'time immemorial'.

Moreover, stone and other artefacts would also seem to function within a further frame of reference which exists with regard to material culture, namely, that the propensity of Tallensi culture is to 'conserve and contain', a correlate of this being that the activities and products of human existence — good (food, children) and bad (corpses, excrement) are 'kept within or close by the family' (Fortes 1987, 212). Notions of personification combined with curation, set within a frame of Earth and Ancestor cults, potentially creates a powerful relationship with material culture in all its facets, but that with rock would seem to be especially so, because of, to recapitulate:

1. the potential importance ascribed to rock as a direct product of the Earth;
2. the pre-eminent role accorded to rock shelters such as the Tonna'ab shrine;
3. the use of rock within shrine franchising processes seemingly as a physical link to places of power, and potentially as an initiator of this power;
4. the seeming absence of rock art possibly to avoid altering the rock;

5. the recurrence of rock in ritual contexts such as shrines.

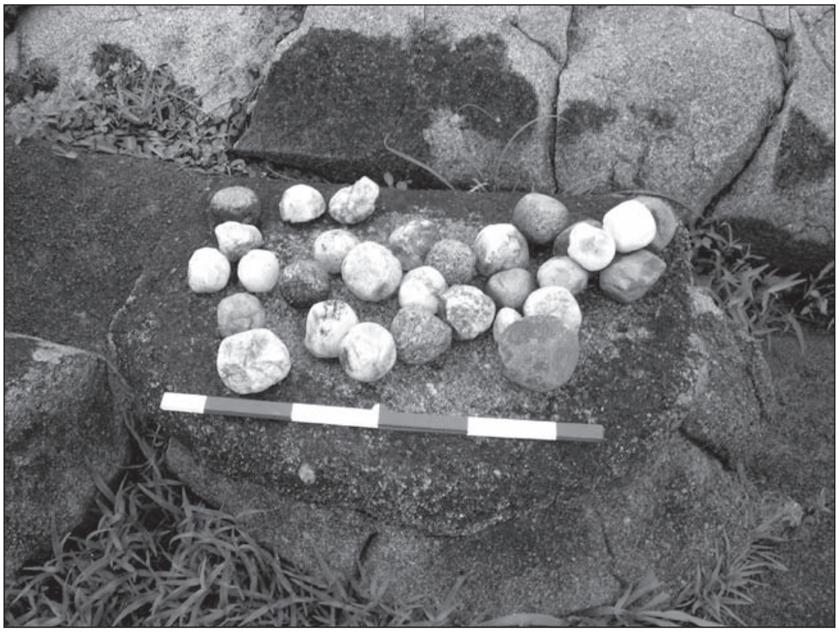

Figure 11. *Shrine associated with the Boardam festival incorporating quartz spheres and other lithic materials, near Tonna'ab, Tongo-Tengzug. (Photograph: T. Insoll.)*

It should also be noted that, in describing aspects of Tallensi concepts concerning materiality, the terms 'personify' or 'livingness' have been used here over that of 'animism'. The latter could be applied to aspects of Tallensi relations with material culture and natural features, as can be seen, and hence it could be added to the list of religious elements already identified as forming Tallensi religion (see above). However, 'animism' too is a frequently misunderstood and misapplied term, certainly within the African traditional religious context, where it is often used as a descriptor for the religious whole rather than, as it usually is, one of its parts (Mbiti 1991; Insoll 2003, 24–5); hence the recourse made to the alternative descriptive terms. Similar pitfalls could exist for archaeological contexts as well: useful for describing elements of religious belief and concepts of materiality but not necessarily relevant as a primary mode of religious classification.

In summary, it has hopefully been shown that Tallensi ontology is formed of multiple complex strands as reflected in religious beliefs and accompanying material manifestations. The elements of the discussion which are of consequence, potentially, for the interpretation of religion in the Neolithic of the British Isles fall into two categories. Firstly, constructs which tend toward 'mono'-categories such as ancestral cults, totemism, animism, shamanism, or whatever, probably deny the complexity which may have existed. Secondly, much more specifically, the notion of shrine franchising is perhaps a useful one to explore for interpretive purposes in a little more detail with reference to Neolithic material from the British Isles.

Shrine franchising, rock, and the Neolithic in the British Isles: some suggestions

As stated at the beginning of this article, ethnographic analogy is useful in broadening interpretive horizons rather than for seeking direct resemblances (Insoll 2004, 113–16). Hence parallels between specific sites and the Tallensi case study are not being sought but, rather, general themes which might merit further consideration by others better qualified are proposed. The notion of shrine franchising would seem to provide a good example of just such a theme. For, in the Neolithic of the British Isles, the movement of rock in various forms around the landscape and its incorporation in various ways has been the focus of much research.

Selected examples of this include the use of 'exotic' stone within monuments, as in the white quartz used to decorate the exterior of cairns and placed around the entrances of both large and small tombs at Newgrange and Knowth which Cooney (2000, 136) suggests came from the Dublin/Wicklow Mountains 40 km south, whilst the rounded granite cobbles and banded siltstones similarly used came from the northern shore of Dundalk Bay, 35 km northeast of the monuments. This quartz, granite and siltstone, according to Cooney (2000, 136), was 'extracted, carried and re-assembled to link together physically places that had been distant'. Carn Meini, the Welsh source of the Stonehenge bluestones, provides a further example of the use of imported rock within monumental contexts, with Bradley (2000, 95) suggesting that the separation of the various categories of rock within Stonehenge indicated that '*the sources of the different stones were still important after 500 years*' (italics in original). Cummings (2002, 119) posits that, through this use of rock at Stonehenge, people 'had begun to appropriate the most potent ancestral places', and similarly Scarre (in press) has considered how the long-distance transport of the Stonehenge bluestones potentially indicates that its source was highly significant.

A further example of the use of 'exotic' rock within Neolithic monuments which can be focused upon in a little more detail is provided by the groups of sites of which the West Kennet Long Barrow forms a part. These barrows form two main groups, the first, including the West Kennet Long Barrow, spaced around the headwaters of the River Kennet, and the second related to the southern chalk escarpment above, for example, Pusey Vale; whilst the Avebury monuments are central to the overall distribution (Piggott 1962, 57). If the idea of the tombs as shrines is entertained, movement of ideas along with raw material from outside the region would seem possible, and hence 'franchising' might be what is represented, with rock the potent material activating the shrine as already discussed with reference to the Tallensi. Although the sarsen material used in the barrows is local, much of the drystone walling was completed in oolite slabs imported from the Frome-Bath-Atworth areas about 30 km southwest. Piggott (1962, 58) also refers to the use of oolite grains as grit in pottery at West Kennet and Windmill Hill, and this too could be interpreted as a further instance of potential rock use in franchising processes, albeit in an altered form, for, as has been discussed, the concept of 'shrine' is not easily defined and can encompass many forms.

Concepts involving the potency of raw material have been considered in relation to the actual extraction of rock in the Neolithic. Bergh (2002, 149), for instance, has proposed that the chert from the mountain of Knocknarea in Ireland was potentially imbued with a 'special significance' perhaps because this conspicuous mountain was perceived as an 'unusual' location. Cooney (1998, 11) states that tuff axes from Great Langdale in Cumbria, 'literally carry their place of origin in their colour and appearance'. The latter was a source which was also potentially a place of some power, considering its remote location and the effort invested in quarrying the rock from which the axes were produced (see Bradley & Edmonds 1993, 73–82).

The movement and deposition of stone artefacts has also been considered in various ways. Bradley & Edmonds (1993, 52), for example, have described the differential patterning of stone axe finds in henge monuments and large stone circles where they suggest that it seems as if axes were not deposited inside enclosures, whereas, outside the earthworks, axes are often found as part of complex deposits, with a high proportion of non-local origin, it being apparent, 'that they had been deposited with some formality'. Perhaps, if we were to seek resemblances with the Tallensi, it could be suggested that rock is a powerful material, as can be seen in various ways; in its incorporation as an architectural element within monuments, at its point of extraction, and often in a finished form, in how it is deposited. Although this cannot be proven, perhaps rock was being used in 'franchising' power and ideas, the latter obviously unknown but possibly more complex than an ancestor label might do justice to. Moreover, rock, whether as finished artefact such as axes, or mace heads, or raw material, could be many things: the shrine itself, the representative of a shrine, or the power to inaugurate a shrine.

The 'power' of rock as an agent within shrine franchising is being emphasized not at the expense of other alternatives. These could have encompassed all aspects of material culture, be they pot, animal, or human remains, or aspects of less-durable material culture (Figs. 12 & 13). An obvious example where a 'franchising' explanation might work in non-lithic contexts is in helping to interpret the Grooved Ware tradition which Bradley & Edmonds (1993, 189) explain as having its origins about 3000 BC in 'the outer edge of the British Isles, in Orkney'. Moreover, they describe how it served predominantly in ritual and ceremonial roles, and although there was not a 'cohesive artefact assemblage' rolled out across the land, what seems to be indicated is 'the piecemeal adoption of exotic artefacts and ideas from a distant area' (Bradley & Edmonds 1993, 192) so that, by 2500 BC, it was being used in southwest England (and see Cleal & MacSween 1999). Certainly, in Orkney there is the clustering of monuments at West Mainland, the potential relationship between monuments such as the Ring of Brodgar and the Stones of Stenness, and water (Richards 1996), and, over all, its seeming importance as a place of power. Turning to the Tallensi case study again, Grooved Ware could be interpreted as the container or agent for 'enshrined' ideas, if not as the 'shrine' itself, hence helping in part to explain its transport over large areas.

Yet it is on rock that the focus remains, and it is the notion of durability which might be of importance here, both in terms of the obvious archaeological durability of stone in comparison to, for example, wood, because durability may have been of actual consequence within its primary context, perhaps more than for other materials. For the resilience of rock could help in sustaining a biography, as opposed to, for instance, the wooden lineage shrine of the Dagara, Zeng (Goody 1962, 389), discussed previously, which is much more transient, and, as has been described, its biography can become altered and ultimately forgotten. Rock 'biography' could be more enduring, and it is possible that this was also key in the Neolithic (Bradley 2000; Cooney 2000).

This notion of enduring rock biography in franchising might be what is represented by the re-use of, for example, decorated rock panels or slabs. Jones, for instance, has considered how an appreciation of memory might be important in understanding Bronze Age practices. He describes how, in the Kilmartin Valley, in Scotland, a 'continuum of iconographic images' (Jones 2001, 220) is seemingly represented, so that rock re-use is indicated through art, by superimposition, reworking, and reuse. This is well attested by the repeated reworking of a cist slab, inscribing axes over cup marks, prior to its re-use and incorporation into a cairn at Nether Largie, or in the construction of cairns over decorated rock surfaces, interpreted as arresting the process of reworking (Jones 2001, 222–3).

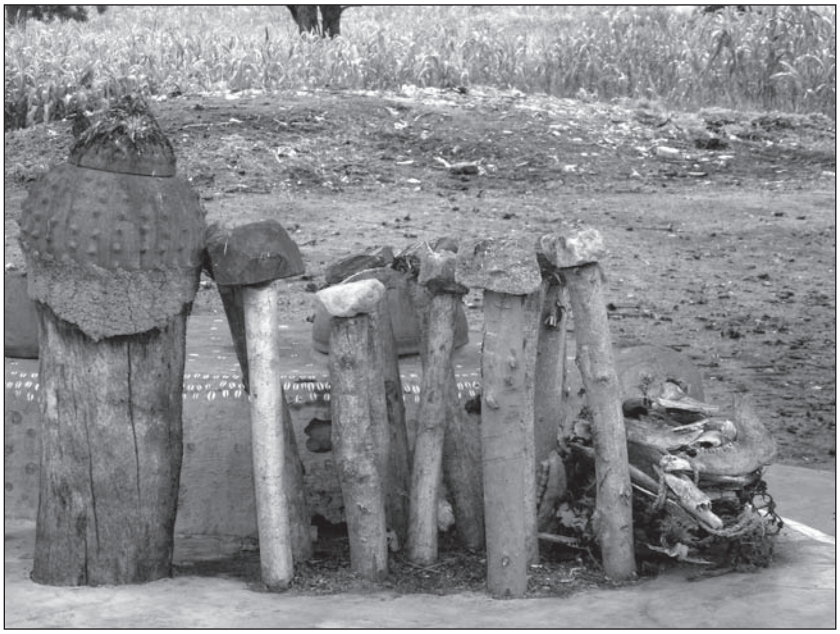

Figure 12. *Tallensi shrine utilizing a variety of materials, pottery, wood, stone, animal remains, cement. The stone blocks supported on wooden posts were described as associated with the spirits of dead children and grandchildren, Tongo-Tengzug. (Photograph: T. Insoll.)*

Similar ideas have been explored by Evans & Dowson (2004), who have described how so-called cup and ring motifs found on Bronze Age cist slabs seem to represent rock which was quarried already carved, and hence was probably Neolithic rather than Bronze Age in date. This is considered with reference to a variety of sites, the Kilmartin Valley again, but also other areas of Scotland, Ireland, and England, as at Weetwood Moor, in northeastern England, where several Bronze Age cairns were found to have been built upon previously carved rock outcrops. The specifics of biography might be absent, but the material, the rock, is seemingly of enduring significance.

The reasons why shrines might be franchised and created are also various. Shrines could perhaps function as mechanisms for negotiating relations between the respective areas denoted by mother shrines and their offshoots, as proven sources of 'power', possibly used in establishing relationships with the land itself, perhaps as it was colonized or transformed through farming. Franchised shrines could also be used in reconciling diverse relations between different groups in its area. Hence, if it was seen to work effectively in this manner at its source, as with Tallensi shrines in maintaining relations between Namoos and Talis, this power could be drawn upon for similar purposes elsewhere. The notion of franchised shrines could serve as an interpretive mechanism for helping to begin to understand relations between autochthonous groups and incomers; between Mesolithic and Neolithic population strands and lifeways. Here, a point made by Scarre (in press, 6) is of interest, in his relating megalithic monuments (and associated stone use or transport), in a wider Western European context, to areas 'with the strongest argument for continuity of population across the foraging/farming transition'.

Similarly, the movement of shrines and associated beliefs could have served in associated processes of reconciliation and negotiation of the old and new, in integrating the past within the present (see Bradley 2002). The existence of shrines themselves indicates an awareness of history, for they refer to the past through physical enshrinement. The recognition of this assists in ascribing a 'consciousness of history' to prehistoric peoples (Gosden & Lock 1998, 3). But this is not necessarily a history, conceived as a linear sequence of dates, or precise associations with people or events, nor need it be a conscious association with a 'deep' tradition, but rather, as has been discussed with reference to Tallensi concepts of temporality, it could be complex, variant, and multi-facetted. Additionally, the landscape 'memory' or 'biography' locked into an enshrined object need not be necessarily significant in direct terms for the 'franchisee', for, as can be seen with Tallensi franchising, they need have no direct

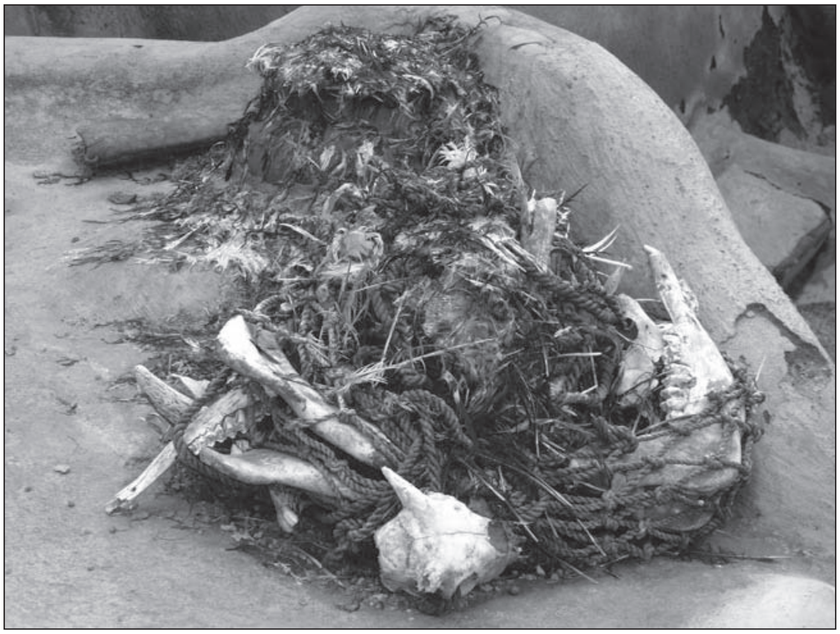

Figure 13. *Tallensi lineage 'founders' shrine utilizing pottery animal remains and iron, Tongo-Tengzug. (Photograph: T. Insoll.)*

'ancestral' connection with the 'mother' shrine. Rather, it is the proven power which might be of significance, and the franchised shrine could be used in constructing new obligations and new ancestral and other frameworks.

But to repeat, the ideas suggested here are not being stated as fact. Rather possible resemblances between Tallensi concepts and aspects of Neolithic material from the British Isles are being suggested, specifically with reference to how powerful ideas may be transmitted from powerful places via the potential agency of shrine franchising. Powerful places were undoubtedly a feature of the Neolithic, and, by inference, powerful ideas were of probable significance as well, for the movement of which shrine franchising would have been ideally suited, encoding power in material culture accompanied with their own biographies and ritual and mythic associations.

Conclusions

Ethnographic evidence is certainly of use for broadening interpretive horizons. Moreover, the available ethnographic examples would seem to be far from exhausted, so the regurgitation of the same sometimes limited repertoire is not necessarily always useful. These ethnographic case studies are at times perhaps chosen because they seem, beguilingly, to contain material aspects such as chambered tombs or megaliths which are then seen to be of direct comparative applicability (see for example Bloch 1971; Joussaume & Raharijoana 1975; Parker Pearson & Ramilisonina 1998). Yet, notwithstanding immediate material similarities, the frameworks in which this material sits might actually be of little over-all interpretive relevance to the contexts in which it is being applied. The existence of such a hermeneutical approach might help, in part, to explain the focus upon the 'ancestors' in the Neolithic (Whitley 2002). In contrast, ancestor cults were probably merely one element (which need not be present anyway) of much more complex systems of belief. Expanding the ethnographic repertoire might allow greater recognition of ritual and religious complexity, and in turn expand interpretive horizons.

Related to this is the notion of time. For in much of the ethnographic literature there is a certain a-historic aspect to the 'ritualizing' of landscape or how it is peopled with ancestors, of which shrine franchising would form an important part. This does not adequately consider how landscapes have been reworked as new populations might have been assimilated, or as new land is colonized or domesticated physically but also mentally. It is as if anthropologists and ethnographers have been frequently deceived by what Morphy (1995, 204) refers to as the 'mythic screen that covers landscape' which makes the relationship between social groups and landscape appear unchanging. Such a-historicism is not, obviously, a useful paradigm for archaeologists and moreover it serves further to camouflage complexity of the types already described.

The issue of rationality also needs to be addressed. For it can be seen that the Tallensi are very much not the irrational 'other' (see Fabian 1983). On the contrary, the process of shrine franchising would seem highly rational, generating income and spreading Tallensi ideas and material culture. But, at the same time, no pretence is entertained here about understanding the complexities of Tallensi belief and its relation to metaphysics; so, at the same time as recognising the rational, irrationality is accepted, when in reality the line between the two is of course blurred, depending upon whose concepts of rationality are accepted (Insoll forthcoming). The implications for archaeology are thus that divisions between rationality and irrationality, or between economic or symbolic (see for example Tilley 2004b; Brück 2004, 201 for a discussion of the latter with regard to monuments in southern England) are not necessarily useful, and are certainly context-specific.

As work on the Tongo Hills project proceeds, it is hoped that, besides addressing the research questions previously outlined, further interpretive 'resemblances' of potentially greater archaeological applicability than the context of northern Ghana, or indeed West Africa, will emerge.

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