CONTACT ARCHAEOLOGY IN CENTRAL AFRICA

...or how and if hunter-gatherers interacted with sedentary food-producers

An archaeological approach to early interactions between hunter-gatherers and sedentary food-producers in Western Central Africa, an FWO funded, multifaceted approach, will combine a literature study to develop a new theory of contact archaeology, an innovative contact-oriented reanalysis of existing collections, including stone artefacts and the earliest ceramics, and new surveys in order to obtain supplementary archaeological evidence for prehistoric contact between indigenous hunter-gatherers and first sedentary communities in Western Central Africa between 4000 and 2000 years ago (fig. 1).

**Fieldwork**

- The gathering of new archaeological evidence for earliest contact through surveys and test excavations in Western Central Africa will be performed in close collaboration with the BantFirst project headed at the Department of Languages and Cultures of Ghent University.
- The first excavation in the area took place in the summer of 2018 in Mukila.

**Mukila 2018**

During the summer of 2018 Dirk Sedersticker and I, as part of the ERC-funded BantFirst project, conducted the first-ever fieldwork in the area of the Bateke plateau, the old Bandundu province (fig. 2 in red) of the DRC. Up to now the only known site in that vast area, having yielded stone tools as well as pottery, was Mukila (fig. 2-4), situated to the south of Kinshasa. We were able to re-excavate the site next to the school (fig. 4), where Maurice Biquet opened up an 11 by 13 meter trench in 1952 (fig. 18). In fig. 9-10 we show an approximately seven-meter-in-depth, single excavation of 2018 (fig. 5-8). It delivered the first well-stratified finds, such as stone tools, pottery and botanical samples, from this site and the wider region.

**Literature**

- A thorough review of the existing literature on contact archaeology from Africa, Europe and other parts of the world will be aiming at a Checklist of material indicators for contact between hunter-gatherers and sedentary food-producers.
- We will be assembling a quality checked ranking of key sites for evidence-based categories of find and site types to proof contact.
- The assessment of this data's relevance for Western Central Africa in the light of the data available from genetics, palaeoecology, historical linguistics, and ethnography will follow.

**Collections**

- A contact-oriented reanalysis of existing archaeological collections from and literature on sites excavated in Western Central Africa will be performed in collaboration with the RWEA Tervuren, University Tübingen and University of Kinshasa.
- There is need for a combined examination of archaeological materials that have traditionally been studied separately, such as lithic artefacts and ceramics, as well as assessing the feasibility of subsequent archaeometric analyses.
- Pottery in Western Central Africa is often per se associated to increasing communities, hence the few lithics present are mostly seen as intrusive or out of context. However, the Mid- and Late Holocene lithic record from the area is poorly documented and in need of further research.

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