
Here is a detailed political history of the decline and fall of the Ghaznavid dynasty. In 1963, Dr. Bosworth published a study of the Ghaznavid empire at its height in eastern Iran and Afghanistan. Now he concludes his account with a description of the decay and final collapse of the dynasty. He believes that the battle of Dandanqan, near the celebrated Persian town of Merv, was the crucial event in the history of the Ghaznavids. There in 1040, the Seljuq Turks, showing the military force that eventually enabled them to conquer much of the Middle East, defeated the Ghaznavids and expelled them from Iran. Mas'ud II, the Ghaznavid ruler, moved his people to Northern India. But he and his successors were never able to recover, and in 1186, the Ghûrs from Western Afghanistan crushed the last remnants of the Ghaznavids.

Bosworth is, on occasion, hampered by the sources. Again and again he is forced to tell us, for example that “considering the internal administration of the empire under Ibrâhîm, we again have little information…” (p. 69). And at another point he writes that “considering the sixteen years’ length of Mas'ud’s apparently successful reign, we are woefully uninformed about specific events falling within it” (p. 83). He is limited to a political history of the dynasty, offering a chronicle of the battles and governmental actions of the various Ghaznavid reigns. Though the work is competently written, it is often dry. Bosworth cannot be held responsible for these dull passages. The sources are frequently colorless. They yield scant data about social and economic developments. Bosworth does his best with the material at hand, and his book will surely be the standard work on one of the Islamic dynasties of Central Asia.

Case Western Reserve University
Cleveland, U.S.A.

Morris Rossabi


Graham Connah reports here the results of excavations and field surveys he conducted between 1961 and 1964 on behalf of the Nigerian Federal Department of Antiquity. Little archaeological research had been done in the State of Benin prior to 1960: the belief prevailed until then that the soil, vegetation and climate of the tropical forest were not favorable to the preservation of prehistoric remains; deep excavations were considered difficult if not impossible. In addition, the growth of the modern city within and around the traditional compounds threatened to destroy whatever was preserved of the city’s past. Most of the excavations described in this monograph were salvage work done on the sites of various construction projects. In spite of the limitations inherent to any salvage operation, the author was able to develop a research design and to pursue the research objectives he outlines in the introduction.

The history of Benin before the British conquest of 1897 relies on an oral tradition going back 800 years, on the more or less accurate accounts of European travelers who first reached Benin in the 15th century as well as on the study of the bronze sculptures. According to these sources, Benin was first settled in the mid 13th century. The city knew a period of greater cultural development during the 16th and 17th century.
perhaps due, as the author suggests, to active trading with North Africa and the Mediterranean world. The archaeological program was set up with the oral tradition as a background; its goal was to search for corroborative data. To this end, G. Connah looked for, and selected, excavation sites likely to uncover series of undisturbed stratified deposits containing archaeological materials suitable for dating. He opened major excavations in two locations and limited testing at several other sites. In every case, reasons for site selection are outlined, working conditions described, and results evaluated. These comments found in the excavation reports were meant to guide future research and should prove to be useful.

Deep excavations within the city walls resulted in a great deal more than a basic chronology; they brought to light a considerable amount of information on the architecture and organization of Early Benin. Stockades, timber houses, inlaid potsherd pavements similar to those found at Ife, and elaborate cisterns existed at Benin since the early 13th century and perhaps before. Substantial mud-walled structures attributed to that early period were found at a site marked by oral tradition as the palace of the first Obas. A mass burial containing the remains of at least 41 women between the age of 19 and 25 suggest that the practice of burying sacrifice victims into abandoned cisterns is a ritual as ancient as the city itself. So far excavations have yielded little information on the city of the 16th and 17th century, enough however, to suggest that the center of the City, its shrines and its palace shifted from place to place as the oral tradition indicates.

The survey of about 90 miles of earthen walls and ditches was a major undertaking. The author was able to confirm that the so-called inner-city walls were defensive structures erected during the 15th century—there again Carbon-14 dates corroborate oral tradition. Another very important result of that extensive survey was to generate new interpretations of the outside walls. The author sees them as territorial boundaries built progressively through time as the city population expanded. As G. Connah suggests, continued work on these earthworks would be essential to a study of the growth of a West African urban center.

A large section of the book is devoted to the description of objects recovered during the excavations. This includes detailed reports on bronze and iron metallurgy which will serve as reference materials for future studies. The author gives an important place to the pottery analysis; pottery seriation is viewed as essential to establish the chronology which was a primary research goal. Abundant materials found in stratigraphic sequence provided an adequate data base. The typology is traditional, based on two sets of observations, 1) vessel forms, and 2) decorative techniques and designs. Tables summarize the association of classes of vessel forms with classes of decoration. Unfortunately the tables do not give actual frequencies. Complete contingency tables would have been useful to justify the definition of pottery types and sub-types. Besides, these tables would be needed by anyone wanting to replicate the classification. The seriation based on these pottery types is presented in a section of the specialists’ reports; it is done by means of a multivariate, difference analysis of a distance matrix where distance between stratigraphic units is estimated on the basis of pottery type frequencies. The success of this type of analysis depends on the interpretative model where factors that account for the variability in the sample are outlined before the analysis is done. Here, as in many artifact studies, the factor “time” is assumed to account for the greater proportion of the variation and the role of other, undefined, factors is expected to be small. Pottery technology at Benin was more complex; numerous, although unidentified, factors influenced variations in the shape and