New perspectives on early farming settlement

patterns on the southern coast of Cameroon

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PhD Research Question

What is the chronotypology of the material culture of the populations having lived in the southern coastal area of Cameroon since 3000 BP?

Plan

I/ Context of Research
II/ Results of SAFA 2006
III/ New data
IV/ Conclusions & perspectives
Context of research:

To complete & to further examine the Chad-Cameroon pipeline project
The Chad-Cameroon Pipeline Survey (2001-2004)

From the Chad border to the Cameroon Atlantic coast: approximately 500 sites discovered
Two Archaeological areas: 3000-1000 BP

- Comb decorated pottery
- Numerous pit features
- Roulette decorated pottery
- Rare pit features (Kome)

Nanga Group

Kome Group

Yaoundé Group

Littoral Group
Further research: 2005-2007

- Sites excavated during pipeline program (2001-2004)
- More recent excavations (2005-2007)
Result:
Two years ago...in Calgary
1) Chronology: Two possible phases of occupation on the southern Littoral area of Cameroon during the Iron Age.

Phase 2: 2000-1600 BP: Bidou, Bidjouka, Ndtoua (and perhaps Mpoengu).

Phase 1: 2800-2200 BP: Ndtoua, Bissiang, Dombè, Makouré I (and perhaps Talla I).
2) Ceramics: Probable evolution of decoration types (3000-1500 BP)

- **Bissiang Pits (2800 BP)**
- **Dombè pits (2500 BP)**
- **Talla pit (1800 BP?)**
- **Mpoengu (1500 BP?)**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROUPS</th>
<th>SITES/ SITE TYPES</th>
<th>MAJOR CHARACTERS OF MATERIAL</th>
<th>DATES BP (uncalibrated)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NDTOUA GROUP</strong></td>
<td>Ndtoua / Rockshelter</td>
<td>lithic tools (LSA)</td>
<td>6000 - 5000 BP</td>
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<td>(hunter-gatherers)</td>
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<td><strong>BISSIANG GROUP</strong></td>
<td>Bissiang, Dombè &amp; Talla/ Pit villages</td>
<td>pottery decoration dominated by Comb/blade rocker stamping &amp; comb tracing + use of iron</td>
<td>3000- 2000 BP</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Sedentary-farmers?)</td>
<td>Makouré I / Iron working</td>
<td>Production of iron</td>
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<td><strong>BIDOU GROUP</strong></td>
<td>Bidou II &amp; Bidjoka / Pits</td>
<td>pottery decoration dominated by comb stamping &amp; tracing</td>
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<td><strong>MPOENGU GROUP</strong></td>
<td>Mpoengu/ Pits</td>
<td>pottery decoration dominated by comb stamping &amp; tracing + cases of comb roulette</td>
<td>1500-500 BP (?)</td>
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<td>(Sedentary-farmers)</td>
<td>Mpoengu/ Levels</td>
<td>Overturned pottery &amp; iron deposits</td>
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New Results
1) Evolution of ceramic traditions

3 ceramic traditions identified:

- Bissieng tradition: 3000 -2500BP (Cal 1105-425 BC)
- Talla tradition: 2500-2000 BP (Cal 395 BC-100 AD)
- Mpoengu tradition: 1800-1500 BP (Cal 265-700 AD)
Bissiang tradition: 3000-2500 BP (Cal 1105-400 BC)

Type site: Bissiang; Other sites: Dombè and Malongo (??)

Major characters of the ceramics:

a) **Morphology**: mostly rounded (22%), straight (24%) or wedged (34%) rims; necks mostly concave. (60-75%) All bottoms are flat; presence of some handles.

b) **Decoration**: dominated by rocker blade stamping (40%) & presence of comb tracing (12-15%).
Talla tradition: 2500-2000 BP; (Cal 400 BC- 60 AD)

**Type site: Talla II**

- **Morphology:** large quantity of closed vessels with everted rims; no handles; open vessels are rare (2-3%); flat bases; flat rim (50%) or flat and channeled (35%)
- **Decoration:**
  - Rare
  - Blade rocker tracing & comb tracing, in almost equal proportion (40%)

Some other main sites: Mpoengu I-A; Bwambé; Kribi-Talla.
**Mpoengu tradition: 1800-1500 BP (Cal AD 200-700)**

**Type site: Mpoengu**

Mpoengu I-C pit: 1470+/-40BP

Mpoengu II-A pit: 1660+/-40BP

**Some other sites:**
- Bidjoka
- Bidou
- Akonyété
- Et
- Mpangu
- etc.

**A Layer**

- Morphology: predominance of pot with curves profiles (70%) & some bowls; presence of conical & carinated pottery; flat bottom (93%), neck slightly concave (80%); rounded (40%) & flat (31%) rim.

- Decoration: Rich; mostly tracing comb (57%) & “peigne-gouge” (40%); appearance of roulette; présence of feet; no handle.

- Other artefacts: lithics (grindings material, flakes, polisher, abundant irons, *coula edulis*, etc.)
2) Sedentarisation of the southern Atlantic coast in Cameroon: Chronology

Three different phases of occupation (and not two)

Phase I: 3000-2500 BP (Cal 1105-400 BC)

Phase II: 2500-2000 BP (Cal 400 BC-60 AD)

Phase III: 1800-1500 BP (Cal 200-700 AD)
MAKOURE I, Iron Working Site (2200 BP):

- **Material excavated:** tuyere fragments; pieces of furnace wall; slag.
- **Absence of pottery and other domestic artefacts.**
- **One C14 date obtained:** 2210+/-60 BP (400-100 BC).

The first metallurgical site discovered in the forest of southern Cameroon.
Phases of occupation & ceramic traditions

![Graph showing phases of occupation and ceramic traditions. The graph includes various sites such as Bissiang, Dombé, Makouré, and Mpoengu, with corresponding dates presented in the form of C14 uncalibrated years BP.]
### Groups, settlement and dates

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<td>Talla II-H, Mpoengu I-A, Bwambé, Mouanko-Lobethal (?) /Pits villages</td>
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<td>MPOENGU GROUP (Sedentary-farmers-iron producers – complex societies (?)</td>
<td>Mpoengu I-C, Bidou, Bidjoka, Talla II-A, Talla I, Eboundja, Bwambé-Beach, Kribi-H-hotel, etc./ Pits &amp; level</td>
<td>pottery decoration dominated by comb stamping &amp; tracing + cases of comb roulette</td>
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After the pits...
Increased complexity from 700-800 AD

Other sites:
- Mpoengu I-C pit (MPO I-C)
  - Mouanko-Lobethal: 1800 BP (Eggert, 2002)
- Mpoengu I-C2 tomb
  - Akonyete and Campo (Conny, 2008): 1700-1900 BP
- Overturned pottery & iron deposits
  - 1560+/-40BP
Conclusion

- The emergence of the first village populations on the southern Atlantic coast of Cameroon begins at about 3000 BP;

- 3000-1500 BP: 3 ceramic traditions on the southernmost Littoral of Cameroon;

- 3000-1500BP: 3 sedentary populations (that produced the pit features) succeed each other in this region.

Perspectives

- Relations between these ceramic traditions and those in neighbouring areas.
- The emergence of complex societies after 1500 BP;
THANK YOU