

## Rock art of the Lurum Kingdom (northern Burkina Faso, Department of Pobé-Mengao)



In the autumn of 2016, the first Polish archaeological research was initiated in Burkina Faso as part of the project: *“La préhistoire du royaume du Lurum. La prospection ethnoarchéologique polonaise-burkinabè dans le département de Pobé-Mengao (laprovince du Soum)”*. The project is carried out in cooperation with Bogusław Franczyk (University of Warsaw), Lucian Buchalik, director the Municipal Museum in Żory and Adama Sawadogo, dyrektor the Musée du Korum-Wondè. In the course of the conducted research, the first in the history, comprehensive archaeological prospection of the area of the Pobé-Mengao department, located in the north of the country, was carried out. The main goal of the project is to unravel the issue related to the ethnogenesis of the Kurumba people living in these areas. They created their own dominion, called the Kingdom of Lurum. A total of several dozen archaeological sites have been registered. Starting from the youngest, about whom the oral tradition of the Kurumbas has survived, through settlement points from the Iron Age and Neolithic times, and ending with early Holocene flint mines and Levalloisian industries.

During the research, three places were discovered with rock art in the villages of Senebula, Gidjambo, and Irimpele. Thanks to the ethnological research, we know that modern Kurumbas do not produce rock markings. As they claim, these are the remains of the earlier inhabitants of these lands. They are supposed to be associated with the Berba people, that is the aborigines of this region. Their presence in the vicinity of today's Kingdom of Lurum dates to the Iron Age, which developed in these areas from the first century AD until around the 15th century AD. The Berba community played an important role in forming the Kurumbas. The Kurumbas were educated by combining the Berba aborigines with the arrival of migrants from the areas of present-day West Niger in the 15th and 16th centuries. The newly arrived

community imposed a large part of its culture. During this period, in the vicinity of today's Pobé-Mengao department, the custom of burying people under stone and earth kurchans is fading, as well as the tradition of rock art.

All rock rites were made by pitting technique on granite rock outcrops. The vast majority of uncovered rites present horse riders (fot. bottom, second left) These are simple performances, made very schematically. Their size ranges from 30 to 60 cm. Often, the images of riders are grouped together, creating a rock gallery composed of several such performances. In this case, they do not create any narrative scenes. There is one place near the village of Senebula, where two figural scenes were shown on two rocks lying in close proximity (fot. up, left). They depict an antelope hunted by a group of riders. One of the performances shows a scene of an ostrich hunt (fot. bottom, right).

In a locality of Gidjambo, there is the largest grouping of rock rites. In addition to several larger galleries depicting riders, one can often see individual images of this type. Importantly, they are concentrated in a place where there is a large burial mound, composed of 57 stone and earth mounds. Both of these cultural phenomena, burial mounds and the practice of creating rock rites tends to fade with the formation of the Kurumbas ethnoses.

Contemporary Kurumbas are not in any way emotionally connected with the images of rock rites present in their territory. The exceptions are the so-called Lurum Signs. According to ethnological messages obtained from the local informers, these are crosses inscribed in a circle, engraved on the rocks (fot. up, right). „We do not know who made this sign. When we were born, this sign was already there. This sign was always there. No

one can make one. Until today, the king kills the chicken during the new year to make a sacrifice on the sign” [inf. Sawadogo Almisi]. The informers clearly emphasize that the original Lurum Sign engraved on the rocks is something else, and something else are its copies, made contemporarily: *“Lurum Sign, if you find it on the rock is the work of god, but if you find it on the royal drums of the chief of Lurum, it is made by us”* [inf. Asendesawadogo Sino, Sawadogo Almisi].

During the research, only a place with geometrical representations was discovered (fot. bottom, left first). It was engraved north of the locality of Pobé-Mengao, away from other sites associated with rock art. These are two small rectangles inside which smaller rectangular boxes are inscribed in a checker pattern. They may be associated with the Dogon settlement, which in this area had its temporary and limited episode in the eighteenth century. In less than a kilometer there is an archaeological site, which is an abandoned Dogon settlement just so dated. The discussed rites may symbolize the traditional Dogon system of divination called yurugu konugu. It involves drawing geometrical layouts in the sand, similar to those that appear on the described rites. They are left for the night, and in the morning the fortune-teller reads the characters from the fox tracks.

In the coming years, research is planned to be continued on rock art from the Pobé-Mengao department. They will be conducted in a broader context and will be closely related to the research on the Kurumbas ethnogenesis. This may give an answer to a wide range of questions related to migration in West Africa at the end of the Iron Age in the middle of the second millennium.

