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THE ROCK GONG COMPLEX TODAY AND IN PREHISTORIC TIMES

by

B. E. B. FAGG

UNTIL 1954 the only cave paintings known to exist in Nigeria were at Nok in Southern Zaria Province and thought to be less than fifteen years old. They consisted of a single stylised figure of a man surrounded by innumerable finger prints in white pigment, and were said to have been painted on the vertical rock face during initiation rites. In view of the phenomenal richness of rock art surviving in the dry Sahara region it was no surprise to hear early in 1954 that an important group of rock paintings in the comparatively dry environment of Birnin Kudu had been reported to a touring administrative officer.¹ Always known to the local inhabitants,² this information was offered in response to an appeal for notes of local historical interest for publication in a vernacular newspaper.

The Rock Paintings of Birnin Kudu

The Birnin Kudu rock paintings owe their survival to a combination of their physical protection from rain-water by overhanging rocks and the absence of sustained atmospheric humidity due to the comparatively low annual rainfall of less than thirty inches. The rain usually falls in violent outbursts followed by bright sunshine. A number of the best protected paintings still have the pigment more or less intact, though many are visible only from the faint stain left in the rock face by the pigment which has long ago completely disappeared. Others have been preserved in part only, the rest of the paint having been entirely obliterated by runnels of rain water which, due to the configuration of the rock ceilings, have by-passed the drip line. The paintings which still survive today probably, therefore, represent a very small proportion of those originally painted.

The subject matter of the paintings, which can be divided stylistically into four main styles and three sub-styles, consists of cattle and a few enigmatical designs. The cattle fall into two main categories, both depicting humpless species. The earlier paintings (although it should be stressed that there is no evidence that the whole series covers a very long span of time) depict long-bodied animals with long

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1. Another group has recently been reported by an administrative officer from a remote village North of Bauchi.
 2. Mr. R. B. Woodroffe of the Agricultural Department at Birnin Kudu has heard reports from several independent sources that, according to tradition, the paintings were already there when Baud'a was founded about sixty years before the foundation of Kano, which took place about 1000 A.D., according to the Kano Chronicle.

spreading or converging horns and probably represent the so-called Hamitic Long-horn cattle. The direct descendants of these animals are now to be found only in the Fouta Djallon of French Guinea. The other group depicts thick-bodied, short-legged and short-horned cattle which are almost certainly the West African Short-horn (*Bos Brachyceros*) known to the Hausa as *muturu*, which survive in isolated herds in the savannah further to the South, and as the smaller *dwarf short-horn* in the rain forest region of the Guinea Coast.

Among the designs there is one which can be exactly paralleled in two similar examples at Dermel Tal near Colomb Bechar in Algeria, which tends to suggest both a Saharan and probably North African origin for the art style and a trans-Saharan migration route for the cattle. This piece of evidence is valuable in arriving at a tentative date for the paintings, because the Sahara could hardly have been crossed by cattle much later than the beginning of the Christian era. The only other suggestive, though far from conclusive, evidence is provided by a trial excavation at Dutsen Mesa where pigment was found in the same horizon as iron arrow-heads and also with late Stone Age material. A single fragment of a stone bangle suggests a possible link with the Epineolithic Culture of Nok which is thought on geological grounds to be about 2,000 years old.

The weight of evidence at present suggests a tentative date for the cave paintings of about the beginning of the Christian era, which is important to the main purpose of this paper, the study of Nigerian rock gongs.

The Rock Gongs of Birnin Kudu

Rock gongs were first discovered and recorded at Birnin Kudu in June, 1955, while the paintings were being copied and a trial trench was being excavated in front of a cave at Dutsen Mesa.

They were, in fact, found originally in an archaeological context, for the distribution of ringing rocks which were used as gongs was found to be in significant clusters close to the painted rock shelters, whereas ringing rocks bearing no sign of use can be found throughout the area of granite outcrops covering some two square miles around the newly-rebuilt town of Birnin Kudu astride the main Kano-Eastern road.

The first to be found was a slab of granite roughly four feet long by twenty inches wide and about the same in depth. It was covered with innumerable bruises from hammering, and there were many depressions of various shapes and sizes for which no obvious explanation offered itself. The hammer marks were everywhere, on the vertical as well as the horizontal faces, which seemed to preclude their use as small millstones. I was told that the young boys of Birnin Kudu amuse themselves by hammering on the rock to produce a metallic bell-note. As this could hardly explain the amount of wear on this rock, it was obviously worthwhile pursuing the possibility that it had been used in antiquity and that there were others like it.

It was lying on a gently sloping ledge about twelve feet above ground level under a massive overhang of rock, with only about two feet six inches of head-room (*Fig. 1.*). The ceiling, within the “drip-line,” had the remains of a number of bovine paintings, several of which had been partly obliterated by rain-water trickling from above. About six feet away there was a painting in red of a cow feeding a calf—one of the few examples of composition among the paintings at Birnin Kudu. There was therefore from the beginning the possibility that the rock music might be associated with the cave paintings. About ten feet below the upper ledge was a lower one with about two feet of head-room but there was no trace of any paintings. There was, however, a small pillar of granite rather less than a foot in diameter wedged tight between the floor and the ceiling. It had a ringing tone and had been struck considerably.

The spectacular rock shelter of Dutsen Habude (*Fig. 2.*), which has two of the finest and best-preserved paintings of all (*Fig. 3.*), had many hammered surfaces on three or four boulders and masses of solid granite which gave various notes. There was one single tongue of rock with a very fine ringing tone protruding horizontally, being wedged between huge masses of rock at about eye-level for a man standing on the main ledge (*Fig. 4.*). This specimen, which has a fine metallic tone, showed considerable signs of use but *no evidence of recent hammering.* It is out of the reach of children.

But the most convincing evidence that the rock gongs are topographically related to the painted rock shelters is at Dutsen Mesa, the first of the caves to be protected and declared an ancient monument (*Fig. 5.*). The entire outcrop of Dutsen Mesa was very carefully examined for ringing rocks and there were many of them. But it was only within an arc of about 50 feet from the paintings that any rock gongs were found. There were no less than ten, several of them multiple. There are four rocky hills at this site, surrounding a flat expanse of farmland. Of these, Dutsen Mesa is one, with the painted cave facing the open space. The other three hills were also very carefully examined for rock gongs and unused ringing rocks. The first hill had a single rock gong, the second three multiple gongs and the third a single rock gong, all facing inwards towards the cave site. It is difficult, indeed, to imagine how this distribution could be unconnected with the cave paintings. The small caves of Dutsen Murufu, however, offer the best opportunity for a detailed musicological study of the rock gongs, and at the same time a hint of their probable ritual significance (*Figs. 6, 7, 8.*).

When he heard of my interest in rock gongs at the other sites, the District Head, Sarkin Kudu, informed me that the children of the town often go to Dutsen Murufu to hammer on the slabs of rock to play. Investigation soon revealed some very faint paintings which had not previously been known about. These included a fine painting of a short-horned bull in red pigment, of which only a stain in the rock surface remains. The Sarkin Kudu then informed me of a

curious custom which is not known to be practised elsewhere in Kano Emirate and which takes place exactly at this spot. Every bride born in Birnin Kudu, which is a staunchly Mohammedan town, must go to this rock shelter early in the morning on her wedding day and remain there until late in the afternoon, alone or in company with other brides. No rites of any kind are said to take place and the bride returns to the town in the late afternoon for the marriage ceremonies. This rock shelter is about two miles from the old town but is very close to the original site of Baud'a, the town which preceded the foundation of Birnin Kudu and may have been established there as long ago as about 940 A.D. Since the paintings at Dutsen Mesa were supposed, according to the reports mentioned in the footnote above, to have been there at that time, it seems quite likely that this marriage custom may be at least as old as the original settlement of Baud'a.

At the same site, there are rock slides which are still in frequent use by the children of the town when they play on the rock gongs (*Fig. 9*). It is alleged that no ritual or ceremony of any sort is associated with these children's games, but much more investigation is necessary before this statement can be accepted without reserve.

There are also a few shallow horizontal grooves in the solid granite close to these rock shelters of a type which elsewhere in Birnin Kudu are said to be used for practice in grinding grain by the unmarried girls.

Here at Birnin Kudu, therefore, we had found a complex whose purpose and significance began to become evident as our researches were extended to other parts of the country. Although the rock gongs of Birnin Kudu could plausibly be regarded as archaeological specimens associated with the rock paintings (which were the only ones known in Nigeria), we nevertheless made efforts to find similar phenomena elsewhere in Nigeria, beginning with the high plateau, and it was not long before we were rewarded. Remembering having seen in 1940 near Bokok a hammered slab of rock whose purpose I could not interpret, I revisited the site and found the rock half embedded in a shrine, which made investigation difficult. I began to question the villagers and soon an inquisitive crowd had collected. They firmly denied that such things exist or had ever been heard of, but someone in the crowd asked why I was seeking this information and what was my precise business. While I was explaining, two men in the crowd of remote villagers declared that they had visited the Jos Museum and that it would be quite safe to tell me the facts. Without quite abandoning their caution, they admitted that rocks struck with pebbles are known to ring like a bell at the neighbouring village of Mbar about six miles due West. They omitted to say, however, that two very fine specimens existed within two miles and that the sites could actually be seen from the hill-top of Rui where we were standing. Following this discovery, it has been possible to pursue the study of these rock gongs by enquiry and surface

explanation, as opportunity has offered in many areas where suitable rocks occur, and rarely have the investigations proved negative.

The Rock Gongs of the Mbar-Bokkos-Daffo Area

At Mbar I met the same reluctance to admit the existence of rock gongs but eventually, again through the intervention of a man who had paid a visit to the Museum, I was taken to see them (*Figs. 10, 11*). From that time onwards I ceased to enquire whether rock gongs existed and asked specifically if I might have permission to see them (whether I knew of their existence or not), using in turn all the vernacular names I knew for them. This approach saved a great deal of time and has made it possible to assemble considerable evidence of their distribution in Nigeria.

There are six different rock gongs so far known at Mbar, of which four are said to be used in the initiation ceremonies for boys held every seven years, one for the annual puberty ceremonies for girls and one for casual singing and merry-making in a compound inside the village itself. The word for rock gong in the Ron language at Mbar is variously *Gwangalan* or *Kungereng*, both clearly onomatopoeic in origin.

The first is a flat slab of rock in the open on the side of a small valley just south of the village. It is poised on some boulders so as to project about two feet over the edge. When struck at the end it gives a surprisingly metallic tone. Across the small valley are some caves formed by the spalling off of huge slabs of granite. One of these is lying more or less horizontally and protected from the weather by other rock slabs. An area of about a square yard by about four inches thick has been considerably weathered by hammering. This gong has been recently used and, according to my information, this was six years ago at the last seven-yearly initiation rites. The rites last for two months, during which time the boys, though actually sleeping at home, spend all the hours of daylight in seclusion and under instruction in this valley. On the day of the circumcision operation a dance is held in the valley. Some of the boys play the dancing rhythms on the rock gongs, while the others dance to summon their courage for the ordeal of circumcision which takes place in a sacred grove half a mile to the South-East.

Two other gongs exist among a cluster of huge rocks three quarters of a mile to the South-West. No information is yet available about their use, though one of them must be of considerable antiquity to judge by the depth of wear.

The fifth example on the North side of the village, consists of a large slab of rock poised on edge. Though not deeply weathered it is evidently much used. There were eight moderately worn depressions, whose tones varied only slightly. A number of songs accompanied by the rock gongs were recorded at this site, including the songs sung by the initiates to raise their courage just before entering the sacred grove for the circumcision operation.

The sixth gong at Mbar has not yet been shown to me. It was said to be difficult to reach because of thick grass and boulders and to resonate only feebly at present because it is choked by an excess of goat dung. As it is said to be used at annual puberty ceremonies for girls, there may be other reasons why I was not taken to see it.

At Jukudel, about a mile South-West of Bokkos, there is a fine massive rock gong, as big as a large dining-table, in the open air. It had been struck in half a dozen places on the eastern extremity. It was said to be used as a child's game and not be used by grown men.

At Mandarke, about three-quarters of a mile S.S.E. of Jukudel, there are rock gongs which merely consist of the edges of huge exfoliations which have not yet broken clear of the granite mass. (*Fig. 12*).

At about 100 yards East of the outskirts of Bokkos itself there is a very interesting rock gong, whose two rows of hammer marks are clearly visible from the village. This gong originally measured about eight feet by five feet (as can be seen by weather marks on the rock mass below), but was smashed approximately in half by prisoners who were sent from Pankshin in 1951 to prepare building stone for a new dispensary. Fortunately, the villagers then intervened and half of the gong remained intact. This was lifted and a piece of the freshly broken rock, about nine inches high, was wedged underneath, apparently to improve the tone. The end which had formerly been struck was completely quarried away and the new striking places are at the opposite end.

This gong provides evidence that the desired notes are *selected* on a natural rock slab, and that rock wedges are used to improve the tone: it also gives a very approximate indication of the rate of wear over the last five years, on the basis of its use for perhaps an hour or two at a time, seven or eight times a month. The latter evidence must be used with reserve but does give an approximate indication of the rate of wear, for the hammered places are no deeper or larger than the depression in the palm of a man's hand, whereas there are depressions at Birnin Kudu which have been worn deeper than a discarded grinding stone. The Ron tribe of Bokkos itself say that their name for rock gong is *Hayi*.

At Daffo there are rock gongs in the surrounding hamlets. At Fangai, one mile to the North, I was shown two examples in the open air high on a hill-side, which are in current use (*Fig. 13*). I was told that there were no others in the vicinity, but exploration in some caves revealed an old patinated one which the villagers claimed ignorance of. At Daffo the name for rock gong is *Kongworiang*.

At Batura there is a rock gong close to the stone causeway similar to the one at Mandarke and a domestic specimen weighing less than two hundredweight, with a fine ringing tone. It has hardly yet been used and must have been brought recently to the compound. There is another gong used at the Batura circumcision rites which has not yet been visited.

Rock Gongs of the Nok-Chori-Kwoi Area in Southern Zaria Province

Considering the exceptional archaeological collections which have been found in the Nok valley, it was not surprising to find that rock gongs exist there as well as in the surrounding villages. There are three groups of them half-way up the hill, just above the present village of Nok. Before the village moved down from the hill-top (gradually during the last forty years), these gongs would have been at the lower edge of the village. Others undoubtedly exist in the old village area, but no attempt has yet been made to visit them.

The most interesting group is situated approximately 100 feet above the track which passes through Nok, and is within 400 or 500 feet of the house of the present chief priest. The vast mass of granite which forms the Nok hills has, at this point, weathered into gigantic slabs of rock in tabular form and as much as eight feet thick. There are narrow passage-ways climbing steeply between these blocks leading up to a cave with a very low roof, which is inclined downwards into the hill. At the back of the cave are the rock gongs, but those who play on them are forced to crouch or sit, or even to lie on their sides.

All the major ceremonies at Nok begin with a visit to this cave before the celebrants assemble for the main festivities in the dancing arena in the centre of the village. Certain specific ceremonies take place at the cave of the rock gongs, including the fertility rites just prior to the harvest, during August, of the first *acha* (a diminutive grain crop—*penisetum exiguis*). Recording apparatus was taken up the hill and some of the current popular songs were recorded, songs describing popular events, satirising modern fashions, and generally of a non-religious type classified by my informant as “high-life”. One of the songs lampoons a very important local personage, even making very serious accusations against him. There was evident delight at being able to make this attack in public without risking any ill consequences, for the whole village takes part in the songs. Another song describes the joy of the young people of Nok at a reform of the rules of marriage carried out in 1952 by the chief and elders with the universal agreement of the community, when the two exogamous clans were split into four, and marriage became very much easier to contract.

At Chori, there is a series of rock gongs on a horizontal ledge high up on the cliff with an overhanging shelter overlooking Anguwan Galadima. They have a fine ringing tone which echoes through the Chori Hills.

At Nok some of the rock gongs were used as warning bells to recall men who were out farming in the plains when the look-out men on the hills sighted the white gowns of Hausa and Fulani cavalry in the distance.

At Kwoi there are some very remarkable rock slides approximately 150 feet long. The boys slide helter-skelter and at great speed down these slides, sitting on rock sledges which are sometimes wrapped in grass or leaves. The slide marks on the rocks are deeply worn

and very smooth and boys sometimes slide down without using a sledge. A few feet away there are rock gongs with a hollow ringing sound. They consist of incipient exfoliations and have been considerably used, but their precise purpose is not known.

The Jaba name for rock slide is *Kihguhyuo* and for rock gong *Kuge*. This is the same as the Hausa word for "double iron gong." The name for the girls' grinding grove is *Kwokdyok*.

The Rock Gongs of the Jos-Fobur Area

Efforts to find rock gongs close to Jos were soon successful when a very fine rock gong was discovered at Gwong, about one mile due East of Jos across the Delimi River. This was followed by the discovery of two other groups about a mile away at Gingiring and at Tula. None of these rock gongs is in use today and the Jarawa denied all knowledge of their existence or purpose, and it seems likely that they have been disused for a very long period. One of the two rock gongs at Tula is a thin concave-convex granite flake which appears to have spalled off due to the pressure of a gigantic boulder impinging on a sharp edge. The flake has lodged firmly in a narrow corridor between two large rocks. It has an exceptionally fine metallic tone and has been much used in antiquity, probably only by young boys, for it is almost impossible of access to a grown man. It was found by a boy of six years who was small enough to crawl through the gallery.

On enquiring from the Jarawa living in the neighbourhood of Jos, I was informed that their *Kumusu* or initiation rites are held at Fobur, about eighteen miles South-East of Jos in the foothills of the Shere mountains, just below Shere South peak. Enquiries there soon confirmed that there is a rock gong, and by arrangement with the priest I was taken to see it. It is about three miles South of the foot of the mountain in an exposed position on the side of a valley at Anguwan Madaki. It consists of a single slab of rock whose maximum dimensions are about five feet wide by twelve inches thick and which has exfoliated from a large boulder of granite (*Fig. 14*). It has an unusually wide range of notes, one of which is more "metallic" than any other so far found in Nigeria.

The priest agreed to the recording of the essential elements in the initiation music, which is played at the *Kumusu* festival every seven years. The recordings were made in April, 1956. The novitiates have been undergoing training and have just been circumcised. The priest goes to the rock gong in the evening and strikes seven times to inform the village that the festival is to be held on the following morning. I have heard the gong from a distance of more than a mile and can well believe my informants who say it is clearly audible at the foot of the mountain three miles away. In ideal conditions the sound could well carry further still. A number of *muturu* cattle (the short-horn species represented in the Birnin Kudu cave paintings) are slaughtered for the feast.

On the following morning, the initiates go to the rock gong with the priest and sing their final songs before going to the dancing area to join the rest of the villagers who have already begun the dance.

Of the three songs recorded, the first is a hymn of thanksgiving for the successful completion of the period of initiation. The second describes the acute pain inflicted by the circumcision knife. The third is a rollicking song of anticipation of the feast to come. Singing this lustily, they cross the valley, following the priest who leads them into manhood.

Two secular songs were also recorded at the rock gong at Fobur. One is a song of praise for a very old woman named Martanya, who is congratulated for having lived to such an advanced age. They sing "May many others do the same." The song was composed two years ago and Martanya is still alive.

The other song was composed about twenty years ago, when the entire village came to build the new chief's compound at Fobur. They performed a *gayya*, which can best be described as voluntary community work in which all able-bodied villagers take part. The song has a catching lilt which is very conducive to the sort of work required—the digging of the soil, the treading of the mud, rolling of balls of mud and throwing them up to the builders on the wall.

The Jarawa name for rock gong is *Kula Kubok*, for rock slide *Ahohwo*, and for grinding groove, *Kutakwo*.

In all the examples quoted above, the rock gongs appear to be used rather like drums, as a rhythmic accompaniment for singing, and not more than two or three distinct notes are used at any time. The remarkable series of rock gongs at Birnin Kudu, however, may possibly have been used as *ensemble instruments*, for there is a very wide range of notes available, and many have been very deeply worn.

Rock Gongs Elsewhere in Nigeria

Reports from reliable informants (so far unconfirmed) have been received of the contemporary use of rock gongs from as far afield as Gwoza (Northern Cameroons), Shira (Bauchi), Hinna and Bage (Gongola Valley), Zaria, Chafe, near Gusau, and Iggetti in the Western Region (*Man*, 1956: 23). To these I would add the probability that a ringing rock showing signs of use (seen by me in December, 1955) at the top of Olumo Rock at Abeokuta has been used at some period as a rock gong, though enquiries (I am indebted for these to Mr. P.O. Ogunbowale of Ijebu Ode) have not established that it was so used by the Yoruba.

The rock gong reported by Mr. Morton-Williams at the deserted site of Old Oyo (*Man*, *op. cit.*) was seen by me in November, 1956, and several other very interesting specimens were found in the caves close to the ruins of the Afin in the centre of the town. Signs of use were extensive (though not so deep as on the specimens at Birnin Kudu), and they were patinated, as would be expected since they are unlikely to have been used since about 1837, when the city was

abandoned. They look fresher, however, than many of the rock gongs found in similar conditions in Northern Nigeria, which gives an interesting, though very approximate, indication of relative age.

I have received a report from the Reverend G. D. Schneider that what appear to be rock gongs exist East of Su in the Kimbi River Area of Bamenda, and North of Lemin on the Mambila Plateau in the southernmost part of Adamawa Province. I have also received a report from Mr. D. W. Arnott of the School of Oriental and African Studies (late Administrative Officer, Northern Region) that rock gongs exist near Pambeguwa on the Jos-Kaduna road and their local name is *Kwereng dutse*.

I have been told by Alhaji Mohamedu Munir, M.H.R., that rock gongs used to exist at Katsina (they were destroyed for use as building stone), where they were associated with the legend of the bride being turned to stone, which is almost exactly paralleled at Amaryan Dutse in the Kufena Hills, shown to me by Mr. John W. Court of the Education Department. A similar legend appears to be associated with the rock gongs of Shira. The bride's presents of calabashes and metal bowls were turned to stone with their owner, and they can still be identified by the different sounds which issue when the rocks are struck.

I have been informed by a Fulani living near Jos that there are rock gongs at Kumo, South of Gombe, used for secret rites in caves by the Bororo.¹ At Kangimi, about eight miles from the junction of the Jos, Kaduna and Zaria main roads, the Hausa have rock gongs (local name *Gwagwa*) which are played at the time of circumcision, though the population of the village is Mohammedan. This information was given to me while I was waiting on the roadside with a mechanical fault in my car. In similar circumstances I found two rock gongs which had not been recently used, near Tabula on the Ningi-Lirue road.

From this brief distribution list of the current use of rock gongs, which has been compiled more or less from chance enquiries, it is clear that rock gongs are likely to be found to be used or have been used in most parts of Nigeria where suitable rocks occur.

Rock Gongs and Rock Slides in other parts of Africa

The earliest observation of rock gongs in Africa known to me at present was made by Mr. M.H.V. Fleming in the Sudan in 1929 (*Man*, 1956: 23). I have recently been informed by Mr. O.G.S. Crawford that on a visit to Jebel Sagadi, a granite outcrop about fifteen miles from Jebel Moya in the Sudan, to study some red rock paintings of giraffe,

1. I am indebted to Mrs. H. F. C. Smith of University College, Ibadan, for information concerning a rock gong at a nearby place called Kumbo. It is situated on a hill called Dutsen Bima and was used by the pagans as an alarm bell to warn of approaching Fulani. It is associated in local tradition with the appearance of phantom horsemen. It has been visited several times by visiting Europeans and there is a story that one or two of these have mysteriously disappeared while investigating the gong. Ed.

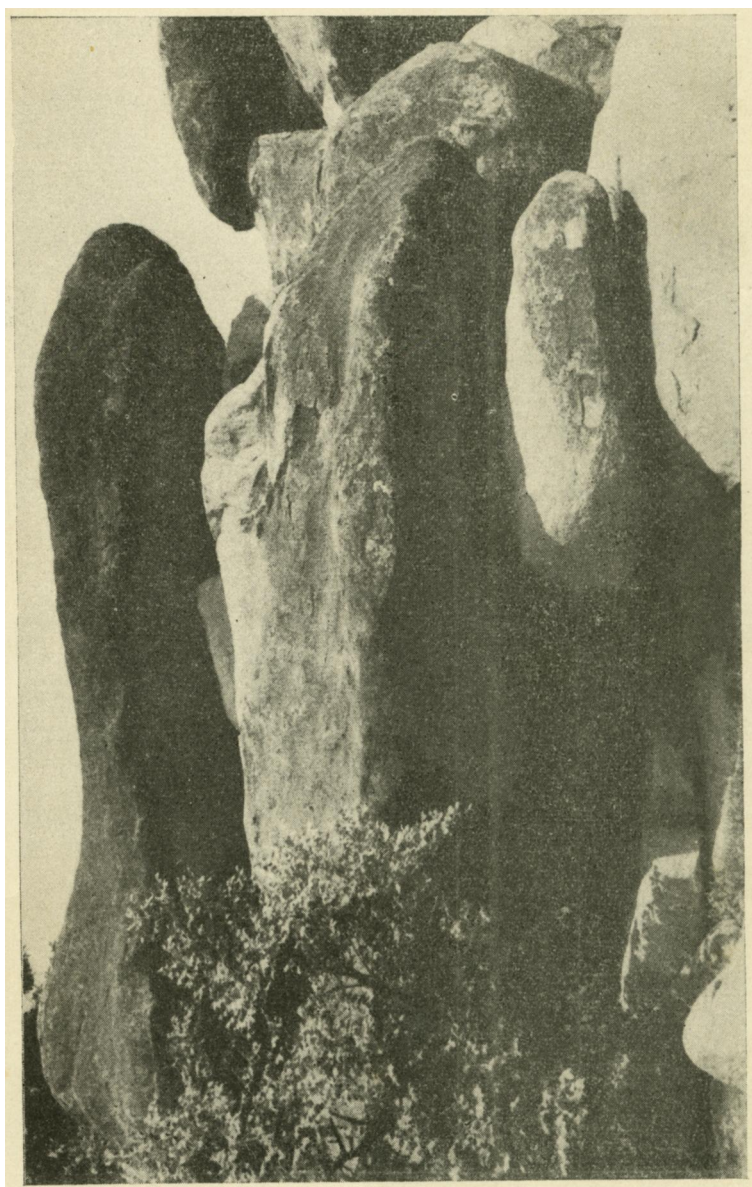
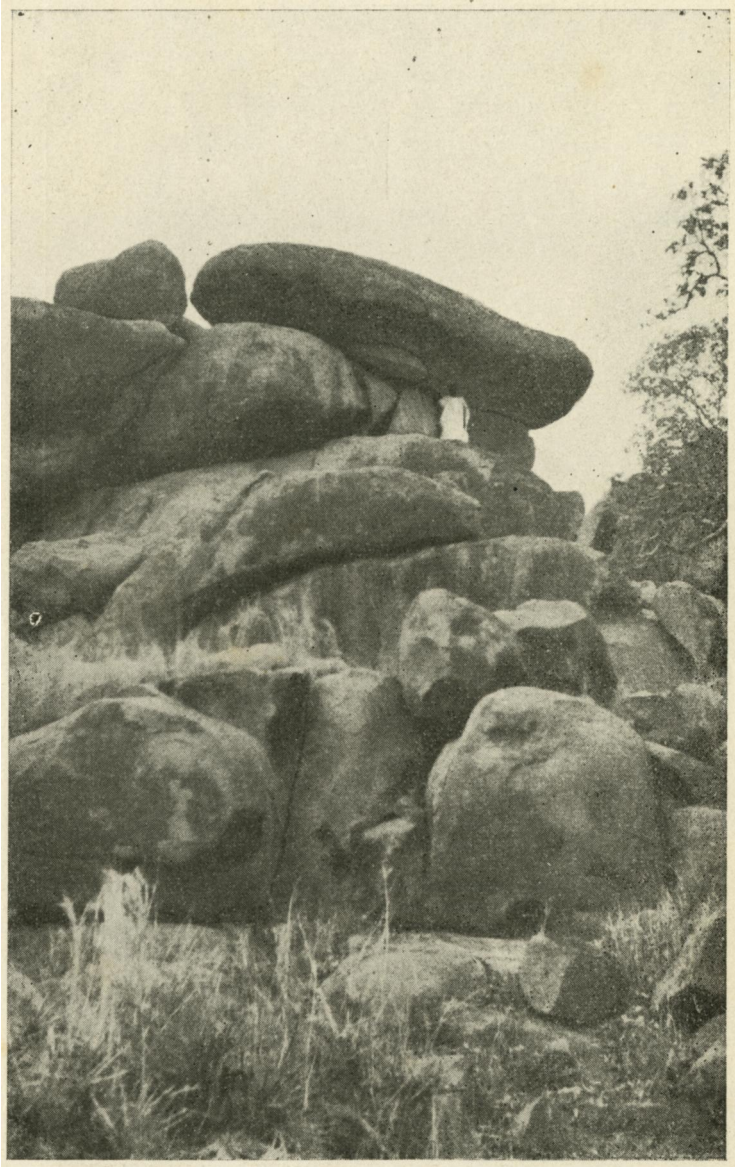


FIG. 1. Site of the discovery of the first rock gong in the upper rock shelter at Dutsen Zango, Birnin Kudu. On the ceiling above the gong there are a number of paintings, mostly fragmentary. There is another rock gong hidden in the lower shelter



*FIG. 2. The painted rock shelter at Dutsen Habude
showing rock gongs*

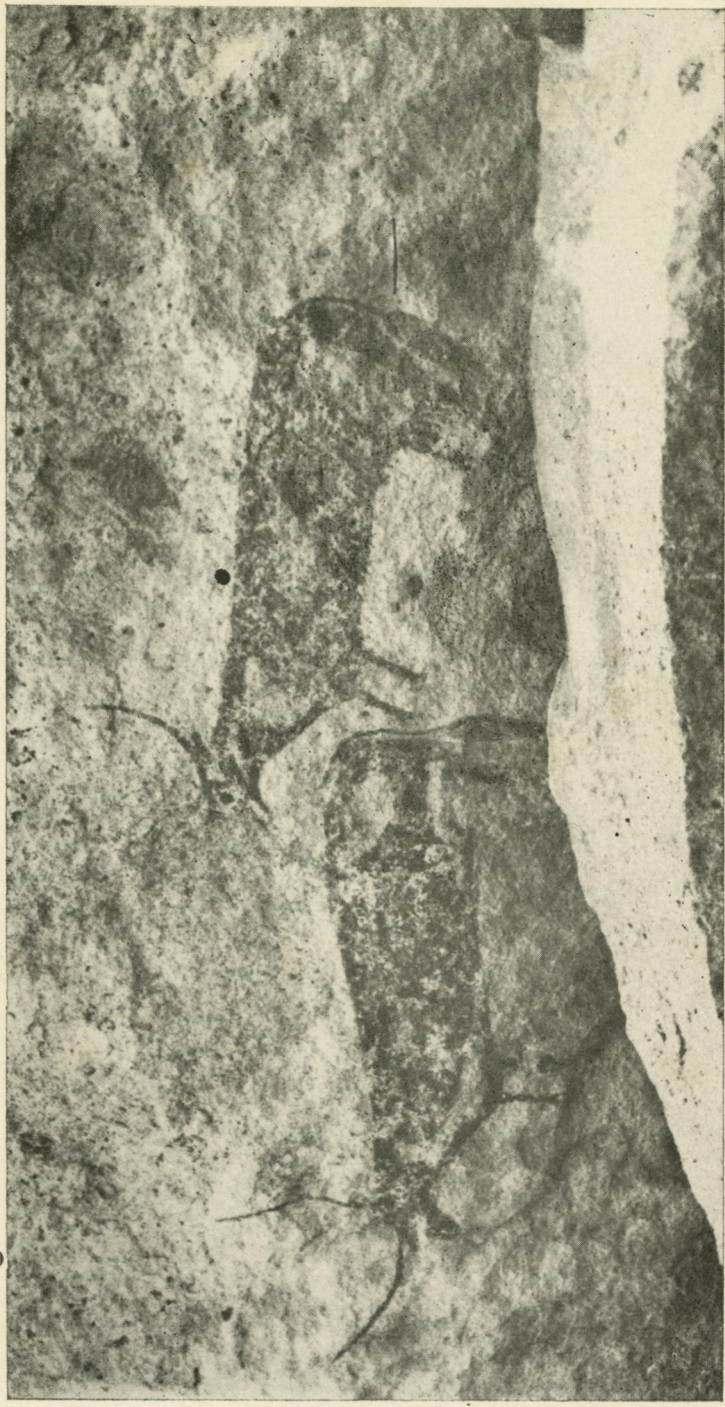


FIG. 3. Two long-horned humpless cows (probably Hamitic Longhorns) painted on the ceiling of the rock shelter at Dutsen Habude. In the foreground is the back of one of the rock gongs

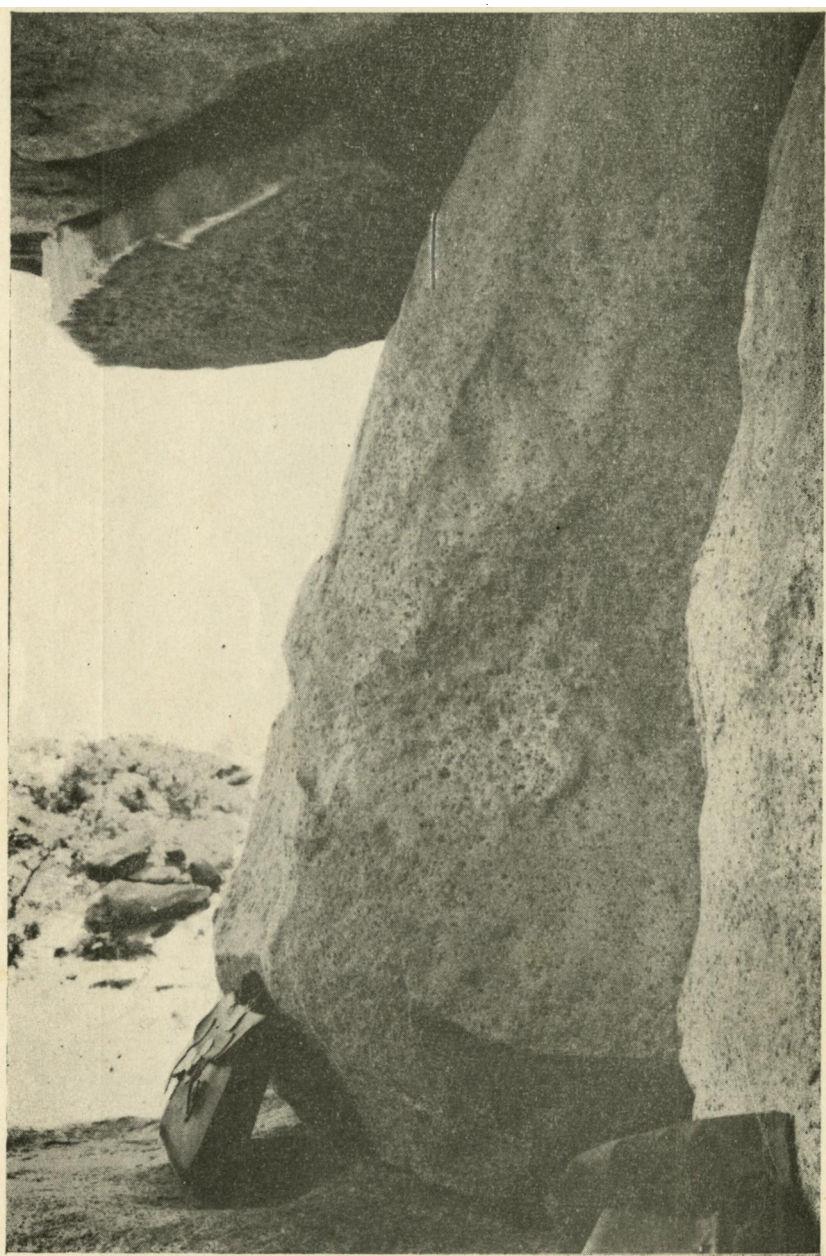


FIG. 4. Two types of rock gong at Dutsen Habude. The upper one is a tongue-like slab of granite wedged firmly between the upper massive boulder and the smaller boulder below, itself a rock gong. Clear signs of wear are visible on the edge of and underneath the upper specimen, and in two places on the lower one

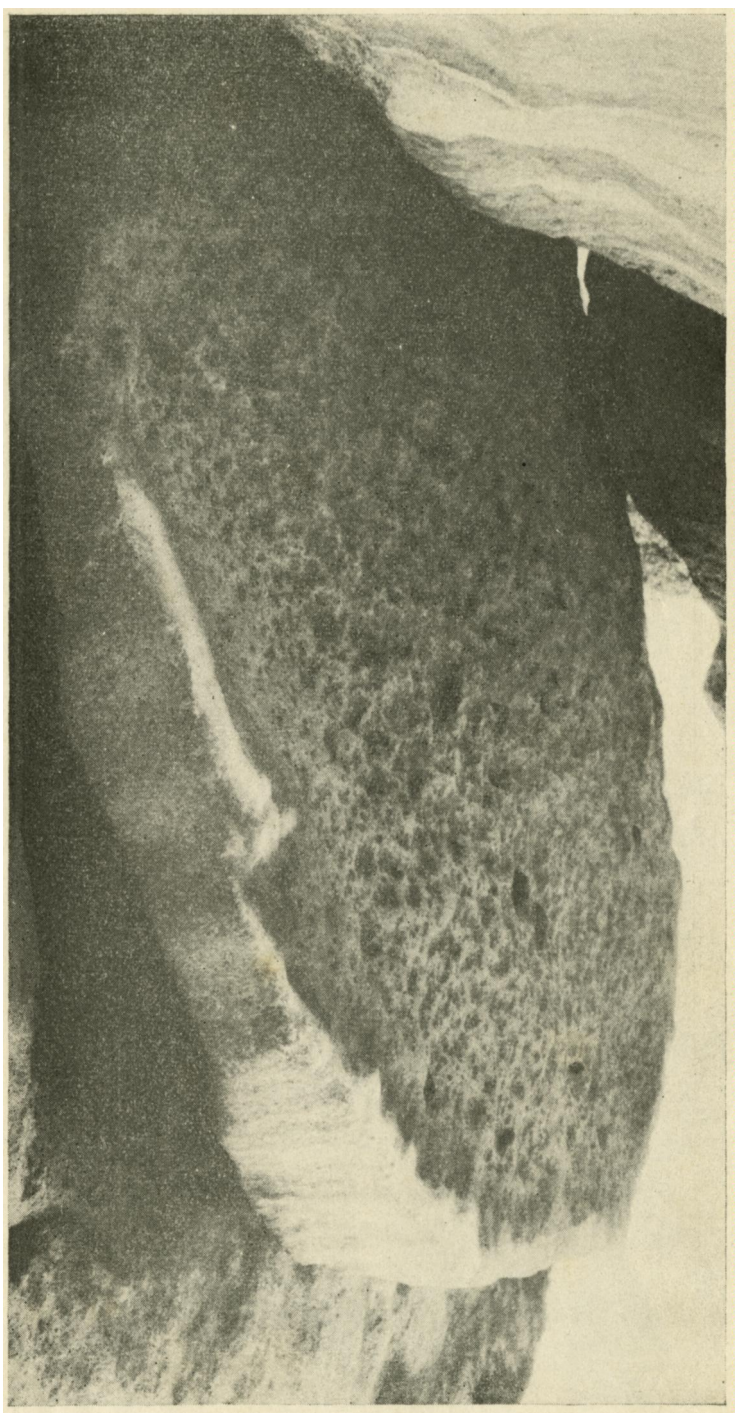


FIG. 4a. Detail of horizontal rock gong shown in Fig. 4.

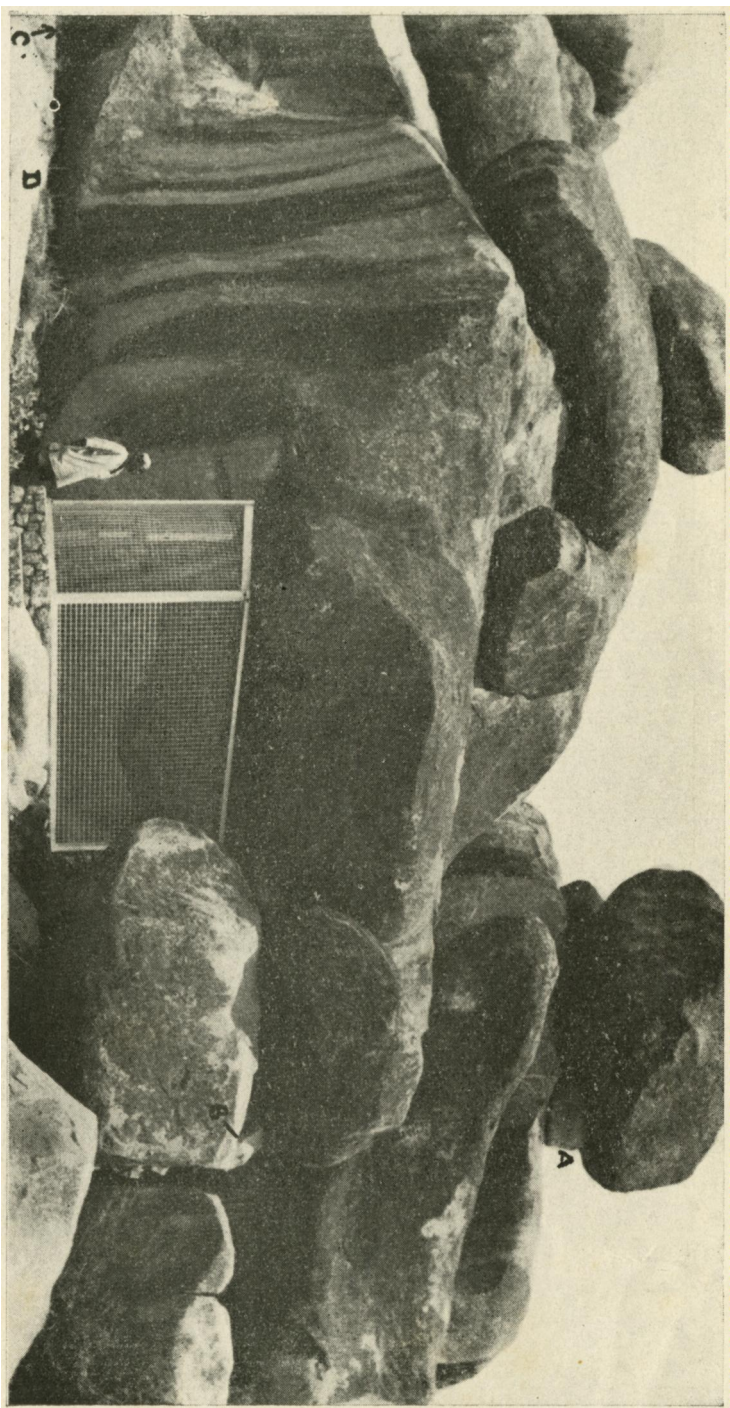


FIG. 5. View of rock shelter at Dutsen Mesa, Birnin Kudu, where the paintings have been protected by a steel screen. A. and B. are rock gongs. C. marks the entrance to a long gallery giving access to several others. D. marks the entrance to a choked-up cave whose excavation is expected to help the interpretation of the rock paintings and rock gongs

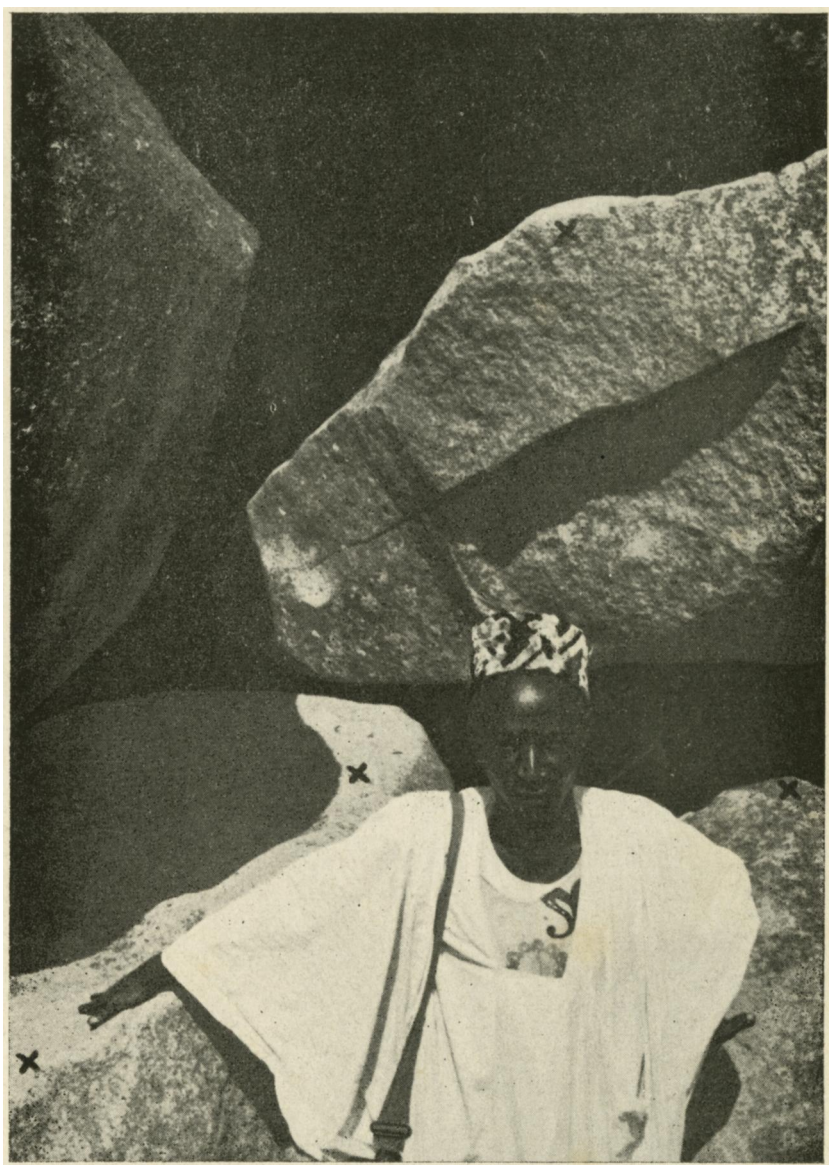


FIG. 6. Entrance to small cave containing several rock gongs in various stages of wear

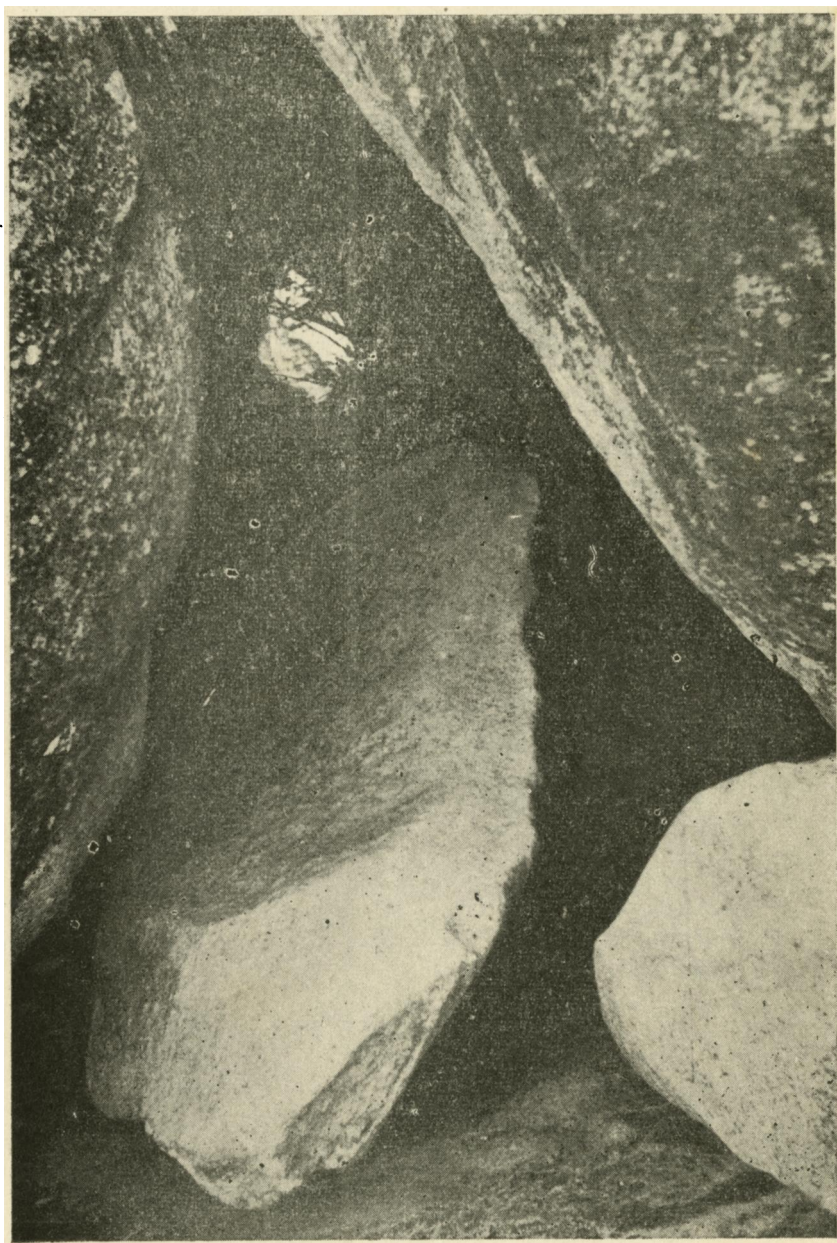


FIG. 7. The main multiple rock gong at Dutsen Murufu, Birnin Kudu. The other side of the boulder at the right-hand side is one of a group of rock gongs in the small adjacent shelter

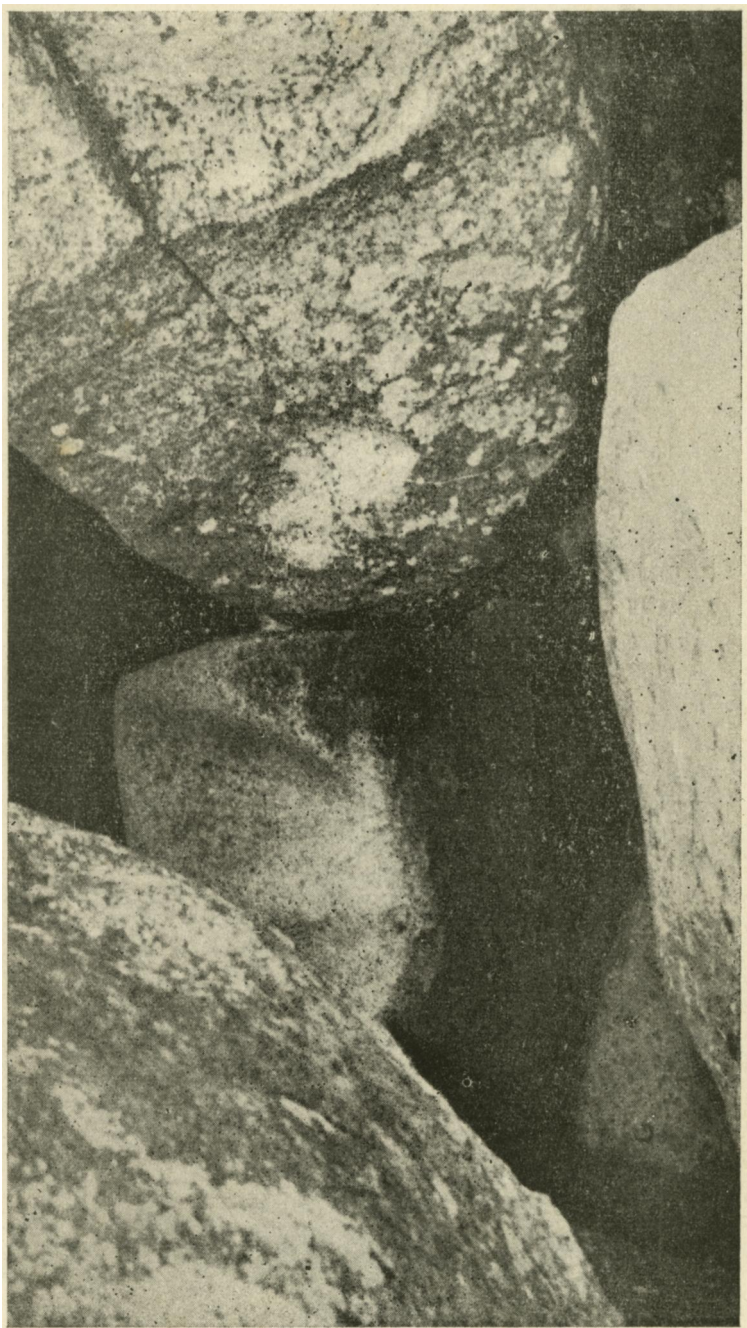


FIG. 8. Enlargement of detail obscured by shadows in Fig. 6, showing depth of wear, which must indicate considerable age

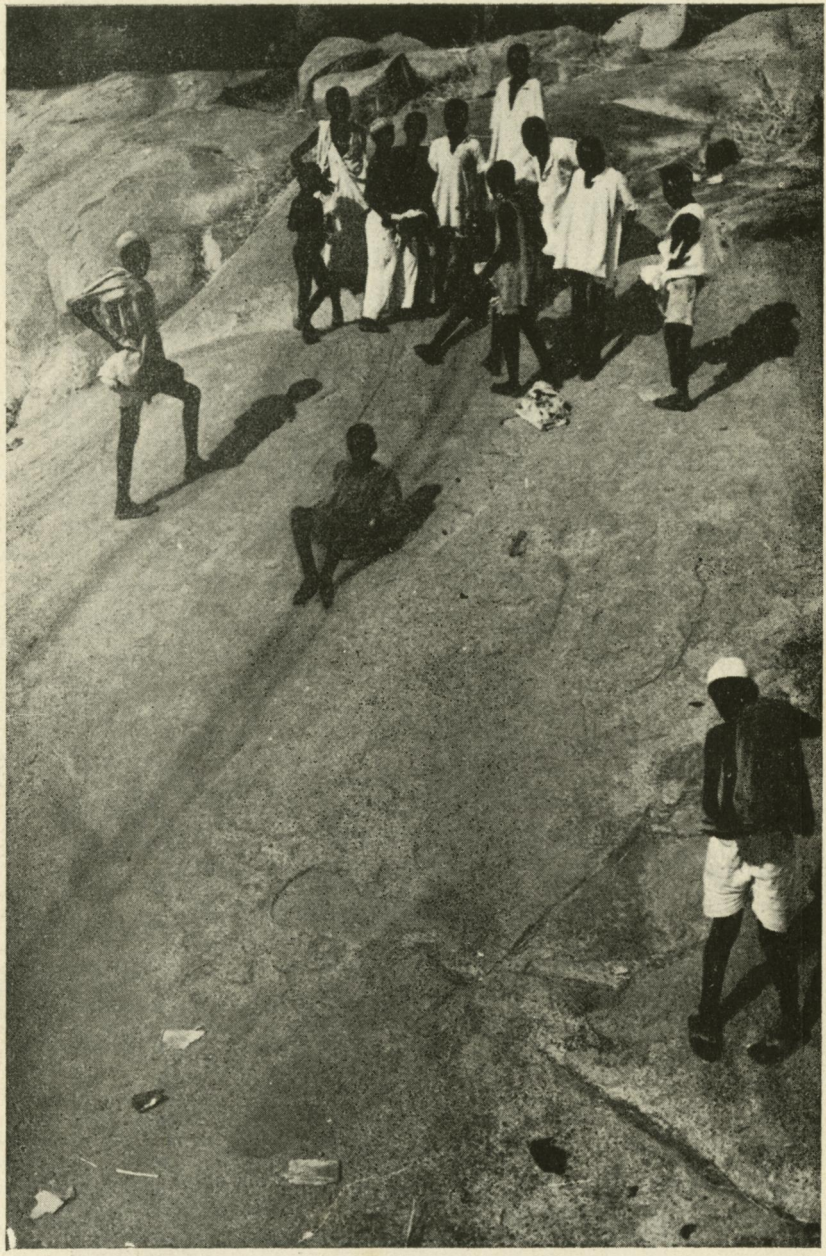


FIG. 9. The rock slide at Dutsen Murufu, Birnin Kudu, showing the extent of the wear on the surface of the granite



FIG. 10. Rock gong in village at Mbar, near Bokkos, said to be used only for merry-making. The men are singing to the rhythms beaten out on the rock gong

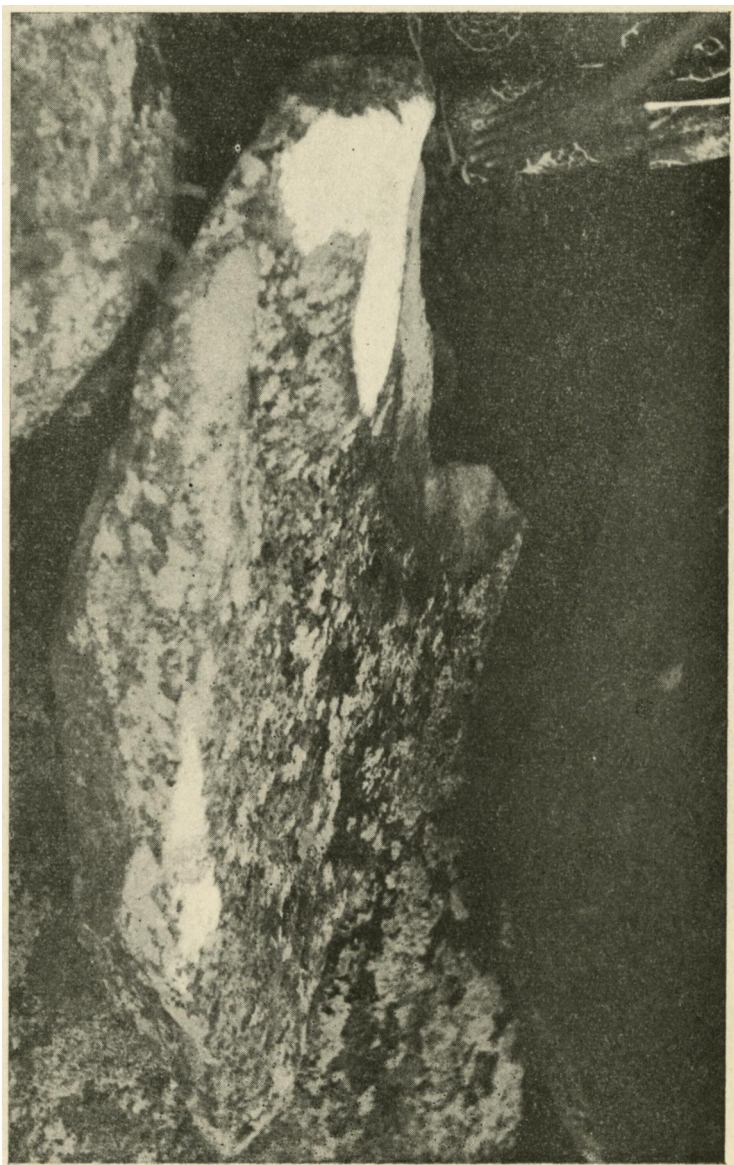


FIG. 11. Flat rock gong with twelve well-worn striking places, situated in a sacred cave not far from Mbar Village, near Bokkos



FIG. 12. Exfoliations of granite at the deserted village of Mandarke, near Bokkos, which are used as rock gongs by the children from neighbouring villages

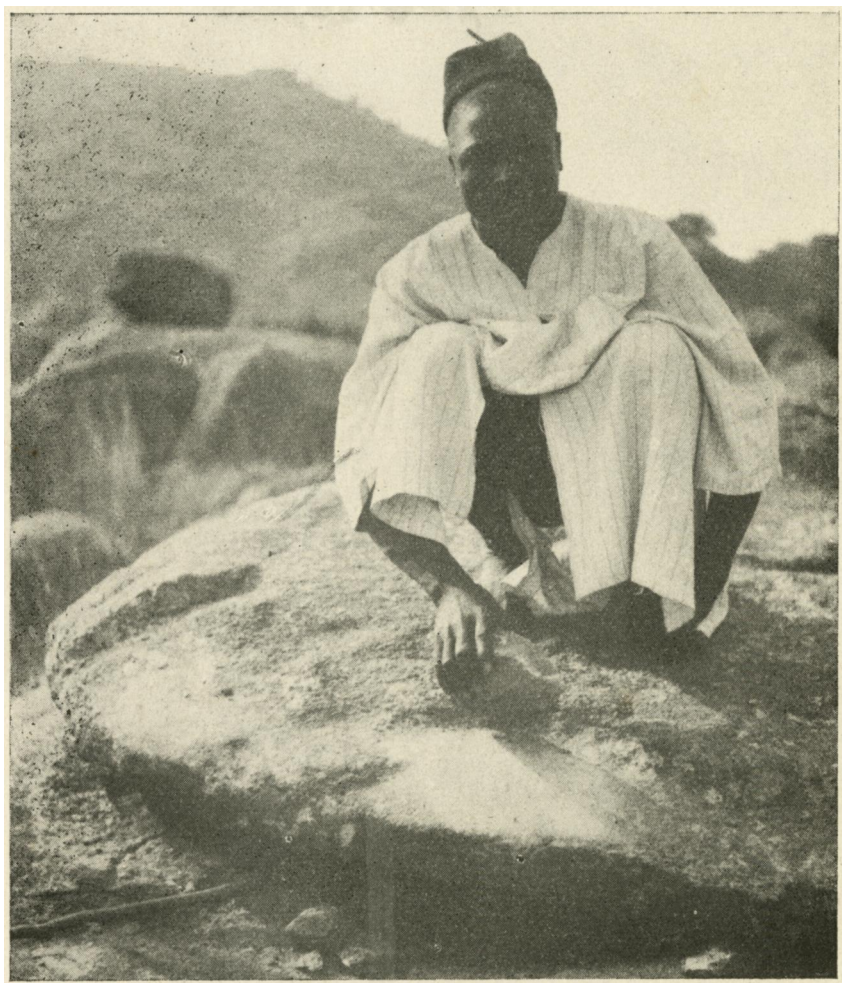


FIG. 13. Rock gong in use at Fangai, near Bokkos



FIG. 14. The rock gong at Fobur about 18 miles East-south-east of Jos. This gong can often be heard three miles away

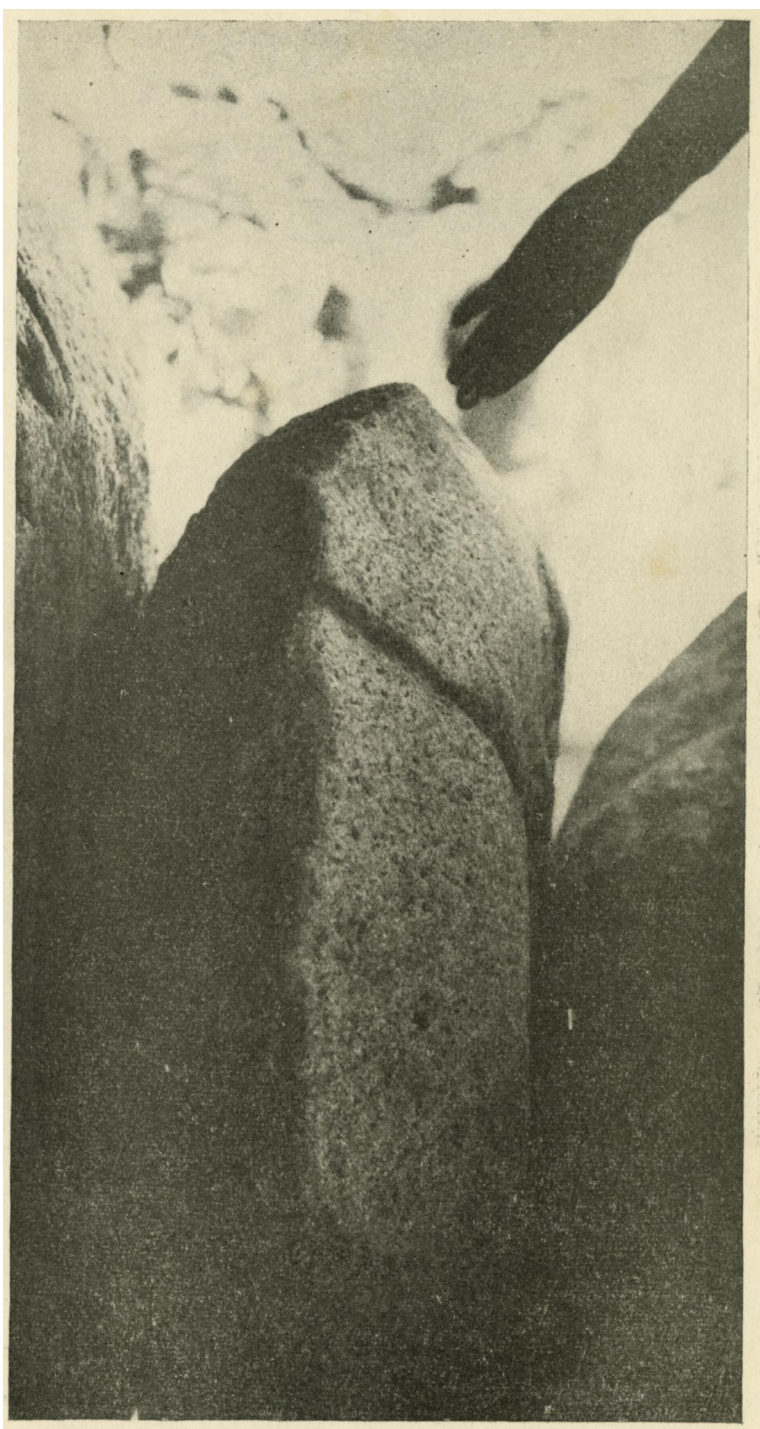


FIG. 15. *Rock gong in a cave close to Duisen Zango, Birnin Kudu. The rock gong associated with the Celtic Saint St. Gildas in Brittany is very similar in size and shape to this specimen*



FIG. 16. The rock slide at Garreg Lwyd near Pembrey in South Wales, where the children of the town meet every Good Friday for games

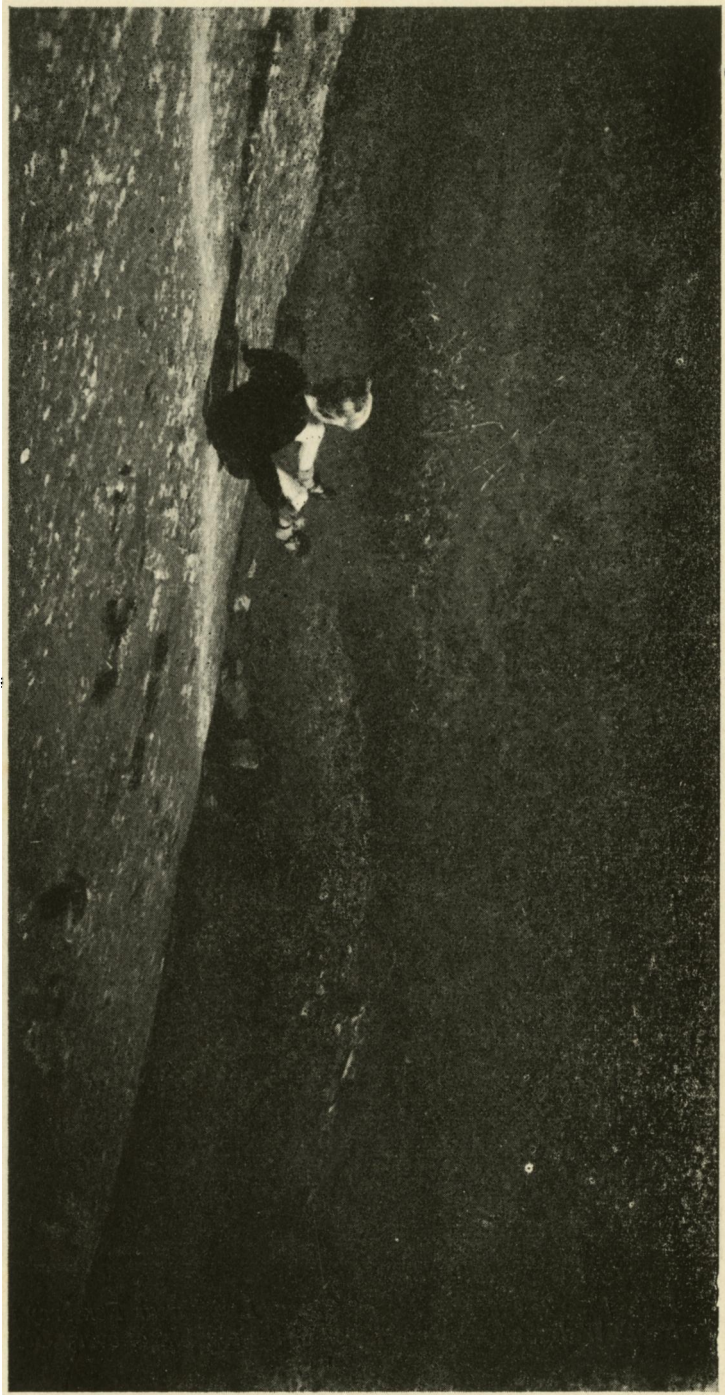


FIG. 17. *View of the bottom of the rock slide at Garreg Lwyd, showing the mound of accumulated rock sledges which have broken into useless fragments, a feature characteristic of the African rock slides*

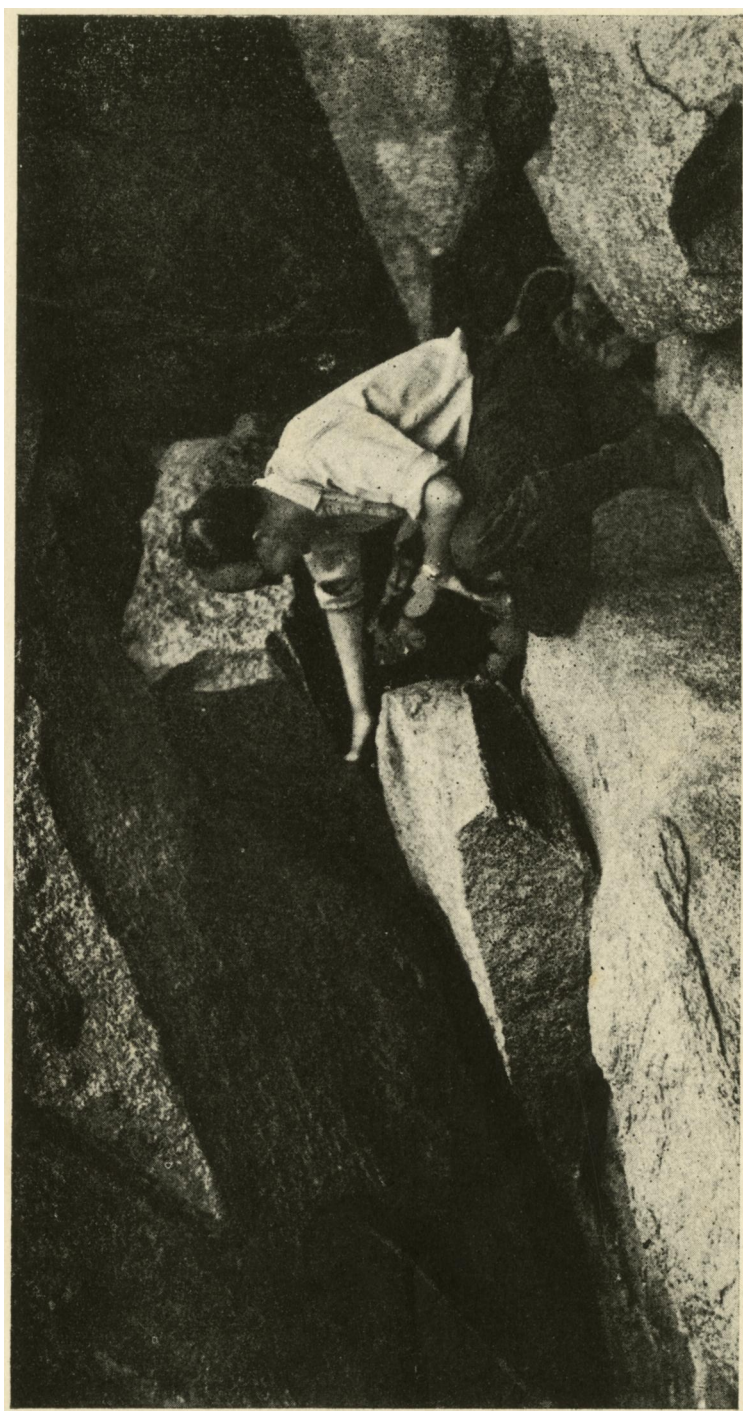


FIG. 18. Rock gong under an overhanging rock close to the main rock shelter in Old Oyo. The large flake of granite, which is lying where it fell after spalling off the huge rock above, has a ringing tone delicate enough to be clearly audible when struck with the palm of the hand. It has only a moderate amount of wear, though there are many other well-worn specimens

he observed several long grooves on the sloping face of the rock which he now thinks were probably rock slides, though at the time he noticed that baboons were disporting themselves on them and he assumed that there was some purely natural explanation for them. This is of considerable interest in view of the evidence at Birnin Kudu linking the rock slides and rock gongs with the cave paintings.

In July, 1955, during the Pan-African Congress on Prehistory in the Federation of Rhodesia, I noticed a rock slide which had been well worn, though probably not in recent years. It was situated in the centre of an important group of pecked rock engravings, which are thought to be of Bantu age, at Ayrshire Farm, near Twin Rivers in Northern Rhodesia. A few days later, at Nsalu Cave, I noticed a ringing rock just outside the mouth of the cave which very probably had been used as a rock gong. However, it was exposed to the weather and the two very suggestive depressions (having different bell notes) had been deeply etched by exposure. I have now heard from Mr. Roger Summers that rock gongs have been found in Southern Rhodesia, though no details are yet available.

Dr. K. P. Wachsmann, Director of the Uganda Museum, in a letter dated 2nd October, 1956, has informed me of a new find in Uganda of a typical rock gong, the first to be recognised there. It is surrounded by boulders of rock covered with impressions, each of which is interpreted as part of an elaborate legend, as are the groups of rock at Kufena, Katsina and Shira in Northern Nigeria.

The use of ringing rocks is recorded by Schaeffner (Andre Schaeffner, *Origine des Instruments de Musique*, Payot, 1936) among the Dogon, but is restricted to games played by the children. A similar insistence that these ringing rocks are exclusively childrens' toys is recorded by Jean Rouch and his colleagues (Jean Rouch, Jean Sauvy, Pierre Porty, *Pierres Chantantes des Ayarou* (Cercle de Tillabery, Niger Francais) *Notes Africaines* No. 33, Jan. 1947) in describing what appears to be a multiple rock gong. The statement that the children amuse themselves by striking it and also slide on one of its inclined surfaces seems to imply that there are rock slides at the site.

Madame Germaine Dieterlen has described seeing rocks similar to the Nigerian rock gongs in a cave at Gourao near Mopti and being told emphatically by the local people that they were not, as she suspected they were, ringing rocks (*pierres sonnantes*). Dr. D. Zahan and Mademoiselle Solange de Ganay have each told me of rock gongs in French West Africa, the former describing them in use today in the upper Volta region.

I have also been informed by Dr. Norman Taylor of the World Health Organisation that a ringing rock, known to local tourists as Bell Rock, exists in a large cluster of boulders between five and ten miles South of Kingwilliamstown on the old East London Road. From his description, it seems to be a typical rock gong, though there is no evidence of its use by the local population.

Rock Gongs and Rock Slides in Europe

I was impressed by the way the African rock gongs had escaped serious notice for so long, and also by the wealth of information which could be collected within less than one year. When I went to Europe on leave in May I was prevented from visiting the Eastern Spanish group of painted rock shelters by delays in the delivery of my car and propose to go there during my next leave. I was able to revisit many of the cave sites of Southern France and will refer later to my tentative conclusions. As a result of a letter from Mrs. E. Ettlinger, I was able to go to Brittany and examine some of the ringing rocks known to exist there as antiquarian curiosities.

At Le Guildo there is a group of amphibolite boulders which appear to be outcropping on the edge of the tidal estuary. They give a clear ringing sound when struck but are apparently weathering spherically *in situ* by natural erosion and do not appear to be of very great age. On the other hand they seem to be well known local antiquities (there is even a large hotel there known as the *Hotel des Pierres Sonnantes*) and are regarded in the local folk-lore as the guardians of the entrance to Satan's Treasury (B. Saintyves, *Corpus de Folk-lore Prehistorique*, Vol. III, Paris, Nourry, 1936, p. 422). The devil endowed them with a metallic resonance so that at the first *choc* he would be warned of the approach of an intruder and take the necessary precautions.* It seems possible that there may have been earlier rock gongs at this site which have settled into the estuarine mud and disappeared, and that the present ones have eroded out of the bank comparatively recently and bear the scars only of tourists' hammering.

By far the most interesting rock gong in Brittany is in the cave-shrine of St. Gildas, where the sixth-century Celtic missionary Saint from South Wales spent many years living as a hermit and died in 570 A.D. (*Guides Bleus, Bretagne*, Hatchette, 1948, p. 331). The cave is situated at the foot of a cliff at Castennec near the lovely valley of St. Nicodeme, a few kilometres South-West of Pontivy. In shape, the rock gong of St. Gildas very much resembles one of those close to Dutsen Zango, at Birnin Kudu (*illustrated in Fig. 15*). It has been mounted on a masonry pedestal about two feet high in recent years, but has been set upside-down, probably through ignorance of its original method of use. A fist-size quartz pebble is resting on the surface for visitors to strike with and there are two small areas which are slightly bruised. It measures approximately 2 ft. 6 ins. by 2 ft. 6 ins. by 8 ins. thick, and for the purposes of this description it will be assumed to be the correct way up.

It has a crisp metallic bell-note and could well have been used by St. Gildas, as local legends state, to summon his flock to Mass in the

* This belief in the power of the rock gong to summon the attention of supernatural powers can perhaps be paralleled at Kusarha near Gwoza in the Northern Cameroons.

cave chapel (*Guides Bleus, op. cit.* and Saintyves, P., *op. cit.*, who quotes Abgrall, Abbe J. M., *Les Pierres Sonnantes de St. Gildas et de St. Bieuzy*, B.S.A.F. (1895), XXII, pp.17-32).

Close investigation of the rock gong revealed that the surface has been deeply worn all round by percussion and is similar in appearance to the Nigerian specimens. A continuous rhythmic tapping has produced relatively smooth and gently-curving surfaces with a matt texture.

Contrasting with this comparatively evenly worn surface there is evidence all round the edge that the gong has been struck heavy blows, which has caused considerable splintering on the perimeter and removed a dozen very large flakes. This would appear to be evidence of either an attempt to destroy the rock gong or of efforts to extract the maximum amount of noise from it, which would be consistent with the legend of St. Gildas. In either case, I believe it probable that a heavy metal sledge-hammer was used, since the rock gong is exceptionally hard, and resistant to damage. The quartz pebble is slightly damaged every time the rock gong is struck, and it in turn makes no impression at all on the rock gong.

The internal evidence on the rock gong therefore seems to suggest that the pious St. Gildas absorbed a popular feature of the old pagan religion and adapted it to the use of the Christian Church. His contemporary, St. Bieuzy, appears to have done the same, though his rock gong is much less used and of much inferior tone. It now stands in the Church which bears his name, not more than two miles from the cave of St. Gildas.

The derivation of these two rock gongs from an earlier pre-Christian culture, possibly even from the megalithic complex itself, is quite conceivable for the following reasons.

The rock gongs are said to be made of a foreign rock, which has not yet been identified and whose provenance is not known.

On the Ile St. Gildas, off the North coast of Brittany, is a ruined dolmen which is known as the bed of St. Gildas.

A very cursory examination of some of the megalithic monuments of Morbihan, including the lines of standing stones at Carnac and the gigantic monolith of Locmariaquer, revealed that a considerable proportion of the stones, including some of the horizontal slabs, have a ringing note and a few have abrasions which are quite consistent with hammering. At Locmariaquer, an old peasant in a neighbouring field left his work to come over and tell us to put our ears to one end of the gigantic base fragment (the monolith was shattered by lightning in the eighteenth century). He walked round to the other side and rapped on the huge mass of rock with a stone and a clear bell note came through. This unsolicited gesture may indicate a folk memory of some function of the monolith connected with its physical properties. In Nigeria, for example, rocks are literally described as being alive or dead according to whether or not they have a "voice".

There is ample evidence in Brittany of the survival (at least until the nineteenth century) of pagan rites and beliefs connected with the megalithic monuments which abound in that part of France (Sebillot, *op. cit.*). There are no less than five places cited by Sebillot where there are rock slides, on which the unmarried girls would slide, usually *a cul nu*, in order to ensure their early marriage.

For example, in the Commune of Montault there is a rock slide called *La Roche Ecriante*. It is a huge mass of polished rock which lies inclined towards the South-West at an angle of 45 or 50 degrees. It has three main sliding grooves where through the centuries, innumerable people have slid down. If a girl dreamed of getting married she would go furtively to the summit of the rock, squat down and allow herself to be carried away. She would abandon herself completely and slide rapidly to the bottom. She would then place on the rock a small fragment of cloth or ribbon as an offering and creep away with heart content but fearing to be seen. For the rock alone must know the secret of her heart, and a year will not pass by without the parish candles being lighted for her marriage.¹

Here, surely, is the survival of a fertility rite closely parallel to that found last year at Dutsen Murufu in Birnin Kudu, in each case improperly understood but clung to tenaciously by conservative womanhood contrary to the tenets of their religions, the one Christian, the other Moslem.

... And still so much remains of that grey cult
That, even now of nights, do women steal
To the sole menhir standing, and insult
The antagonistic Church spire by appeal
To power discredited in vain. . .

BROWNING, *The Two Poets of Croisic*

During the discussion following a paper read by me to the Royal Anthropological Institute I was informed by Professor Mary Williams of the existence of a rock slide in South Wales similar to those described by me in Nigeria, where an annual children's festival is held every Good Friday. I was also indebted to Mrs. Ettlinger for drawing my attention to a legend of ringing rocks close to a sacred well at Ffynnon Fair near Maenlochog (F. Jones, *The Holy Wells of Wales*, 1954, p. 46). She also told me of a Cromlech in Guernsey known as *La Roche qui sonne* of which I have no further details.

I visited the rock slide (Fig. 16) at Garreg Lwyd near Pembrey in Pembrokeshire, and found that it does resemble the African ones, including the existence of a considerable mound of broken rock sledges at the foot of the slide (Fig. 17), which in itself rules out the

1. While this paper was in the press I received a letter from Miss Margaret Bennet-Clark of the Department of Ethnography at the British Museum, informing me of a rock slide which exists in Athens. She was informed that women desirous of children would slide *a cul nu* down a steep rock slope on the Acropolis just below the Church of Hagia Maria.

possibility that it is a recent innovation. The children indulge in the fun of the helter-skelter and then congregate at the top of the promontory (many of which are traditional places of pilgrimage) and drink ginger pop, which has in recent years replaced the orthodox honey-water. In view of the evidence from Brittany, there seems little doubt that the Pembrey festivities are also a survival of a pre-Christian Spring festival.

I was interested to discover that Maenclochog literally means “ringing rock”, but was disappointed to find on arrival that the two rock gongs were no longer in existence. I was indebted to the local antiquarian, Mr. Titus Lewis, for the information that they were destroyed towards the end of the eighteenth century for use as road metal, to the great disappointment of the local inhabitants at the time, as has happened in Bokkos and Katsina, and no doubt elsewhere, in twentieth-century Nigeria. Mr. Lewis gave me the following extract from Fenton’s *Tour through Pembrokeshire*, 1810, pp. 348-349:

“Maenclochog obtained its name—the Welsh for ringing stone—from two large stones that lay near the roadside, about a bow-shot from the Church to the South-West, possessing that property, now broken and removed, but perfect and held in great veneration in Edward Lhwyd’s time, who accompanies his short note with rude, though I daresay correct, drawings of them.”

Maenclochog is at the southern end of the Prescelly Mountains, which are covered with megalithic monuments. The famous Blue Stones of Stonehenge are known to have been quarried at the Northern end of the Prescellies and transported with prodigious labour, partly by land and partly by water, to the site in Wiltshire where they now stand.

In a brief reconnaissance of the outcrops at the Northern extremity of the Prescellies I found many ringing rocks, some with an almost startling bell note. They are all exposed to the weather and are in many places covered with moss, whose roots have deeply etched and pitted the surface of the rock. There is one specimen, in particular, which appears to have been used as a rock gong, for it has a depression which could have been caused by hammering over a very long period. But we have been robbed of conclusive evidence by its exposure to the weather. I am convinced, however, that satisfactory evidence of rock gongs will eventually be found in some of the caves which abound in these hills. It is probable that the Prescellies owe their intense sanctity in part at least to the presence of rocks which are “alive” and have a voice.

Stone Music in Asia and America

An account of the rock gongs of Africa and Europe can hardly be complete without a passing reference to the far more sophisticated

stone chimes and lithophones of the Orient and the New World, if only to draw attention to the possibility that rock gongs may yet be found there as well.

Andre Schaeffner (*Origine des Instruments de Musique*, Paris, Payot, 1936) and Curt Sachs (*History of Musical Instruments*, New York, 1940)¹ describe the extraordinary subtlety of music struck from suspended stone plates which now survives only in Confucian temples, though in antiquity it played an all-important part in everyday life. Suspended sonorous stones also occur in Abyssinia and in many parts of the New World, and go back to a remote antiquity (cf. Schaeffner, *Le Lithophone de Ndut Lieng Krak (Vietnam) Revue de Musicologie*, July, 1951). I am indebted to Professor Paul Fejos for the information that multiple rock slides exist in Peru in close proximity to a large number of carved stones and boulders which have not yet been studied.

There seems to be a general agreement among musicologists that stone instruments may have been among man's earliest methods of accompanying the human voice. To those who have heard a primitive blacksmith beating out a rhythm on his stone anvil, it must seem tempting to speculate how the blacksmith's predecessor, the maker of stone implements, could have expressed himself by beating out a rhythm as he struck the stone which rang with a bell-note at every stroke.

With the apparent association of cave paintings, rock music and initiation rites fresh in my mind, I was struck on my first visit to the recently-discovered painted cave at Cougnac in the Dordogne by the astonishing variety of musical notes which could be produced by tapping the stalactites with a pebble. Here was a wonderful, almost a terrifying, setting for initiation rites. Within ten feet of one of the finest of the painted friezes there were lying fragments of stalactites broken in a remote antiquity, as is proved by new growths of calcareous deposits on top of them.

Later, at Font de Gaume, I crawled into a small chamber, adjacent to one of the main galleries, where tourists in the past would go to strike off small souvenirs of their visit to the cavern. In earlier times, the local peasants are said to have collected such fragments for use as medicine. In these conditions it is hardly possible to seek for evidence that the stalactites were ever struck to produce musical notes. But it may be that evidence of delicate percussion may one day be found where the calcareous deposition had ceased before the caves were penetrated by primitive man. Here, surely, is an opportunity for prehistory, folk-lore and ethnography to combine in making a significant contribution to the history of human behaviour.

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1. Cf. also Wallaschek, *Primitive Music*, London, 1893.