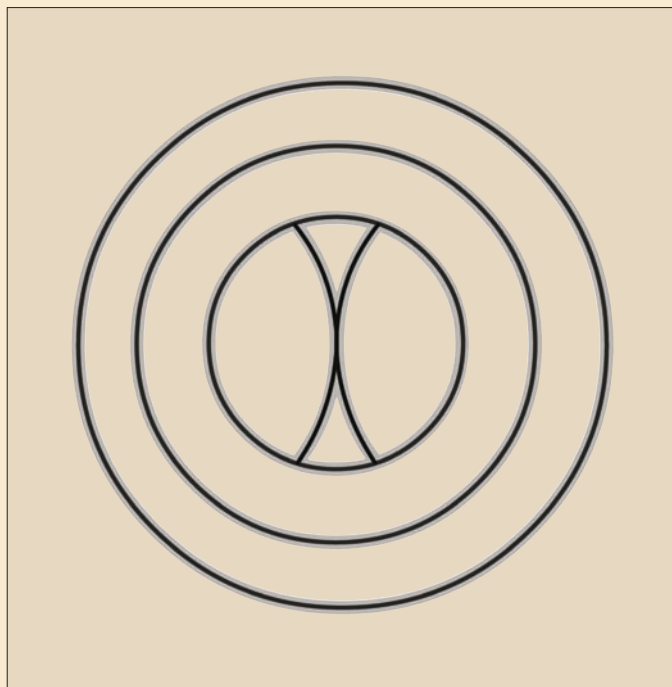


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Andoni Sáenz de Buruaga* & Mark Milburn**

Documentation of burial practices around the Tingefuf E-1 goulet (Dougaj, West Sahara)

Keywords: West Sahara, Tiris, Dougaj, goulet, burial monument, religion

Resumen:

El presente trabajo describe la actuación arqueológica efectuada en el túmulo principal del goulet de Tingefuf E-1, en el Tiris saharauí, de cara a precisar la posible función funeraria del monumento. El hallazgo de algún hueso humano en el sondeo arqueológico practicado aporta la prueba que asocia los goulets con enterramientos. Lamentablemente, la falta de colágeno ha imposibilitado obtener una datación absoluta de los restos óseos.

Abstract:

This work describes the archaeological process carried out in the main tumulus of the goulet at Tingefuf E-1, in Tiris in the West Sahara, so as to show the possible funerary function of the structure. The location of human bone during the archaeological operation has yielded proof that goulets are associated with burial practices. It is unfortunate that the lack of collagen has prevented the obtention of an absolute date for the bone remains.

Zusammenfassung:

Diese Arbeit beschreibt die archäologische Forschung im Haupttumulus des Goulets von Tingefuf E-1 in Tiris in der Westsahara. Der Fund eines menschlichen Knochens während dieser archäologischen Arbeit bringt den Beweis, dass die Goulets im Zusammenhang mit Begräbnissen zu sehen sind. Leider hat der Mangel von Kollagen keine präzise Datierung des Knochen-Materials erlaubt.

Situation and description of the goulet of Tingefuf E-1

The Tingefuf E-1 goulet is located in the "liberated territories" of the Tiris region in the SE of West Sahara which administers the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). It lies approximately 110 km in a straight line to the SE of the Sahrawi village of Aousserd (in the Moroccan "occupied zone"), a further 140 km to the SW of the Mauritanian city of Zouérat, and around 850

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km to the S.SW of the Sahrawi political and administrative centre of Chahid el-Hafed, in the Tindouf Refugee Camps (Algeria).

Located to the south of the Tiris, the site is slightly over 6 km to the NE of Dougaj Base (Military Region I): specifically, in the north-eastern sector of the plain immediately beside Tingefuf mountain, at ca. 3 km from the "*gleib*"; this accounts for its name, the "Tingefuf E-1 goulet" (Sáenz de Buruaga *et al.*, 2011: 25, photo 15). Its geographical coordinates in degrees, taken *in situ* with metric GPS, are: 22° 04.735N and 13° 29.343W, at that point the altitude of the plan being around 300 m.s.l. (Fig. 1).

Its presence was first noted in 2005 by M. Milburn, who kindly reported its exact location to the research team of the University of the Basque Country, directed by A. Sáenz de Buruaga (*in litteris*, 28.11.2009)¹. With that information, it was located in 2010, superficially inspected, and appropriately recorded in the inventory of the archaeological assets of the Tiris monitored during the season (Sáenz de Buruaga *et al.*, 2010: record no. 62).

This is a very special monument whose presence in the Tiris area is exceptional. For unlike the northern region of El Zemmur, where this kind of structure is well represented (Milburn 2005 and 2012), and some have even been excavated (Milburn, 2010), the Tingefuf example is for the moment the only one of its type found in these southern territories of the SE of the West Sahara (Fig. 2).

The site is made up of two lobe-shaped segments, 47 m in perimeter, respectively, separated by a straight corridor, bordered with a double row of blocks, 38 m long and oriented W.SW to E.NE (Fig. 3). These two lobes, or "wings", stretch out from a flattened tumulus, 4 m² ground area and less than half a metre high, located at the W. end. Apart from this, in the central part of the corridor which separates the "wings", there is another stone structure, mostly secondary and dismantled, forming a ring shape, measuring 7 m in diameter and 0.30 m in height (Fig. 4).

Although this is basically the structural design of the goulet, it should also be noted that within this a significant number of fragments of white quartz was recorded, deliberately deposited inside the "wings" of the monument. Many could be seen particularly in the southern "wing", that is, the wing on the right as seen from the main tumulus (Fig. 5). A ritual expression also seen several times in other monumental types in the Tiris, e.g. in tumuli with craters, or "*bazinas*", or examples with a star-shaped front, etc.

Theoretical approach of the archaeological intervention in the goulet, and carrying out of the sounding

One of the activities planned for the 2013 archaeological investigations in

the Tiris Sahrawi², was the possibility of taking a one-off sounding in the main tumulus of the Tingefuf E-1 goulet.

The basic objective was to try to determine the relationship of the monument to a possible funerary function.

As a result, we understood that we should conduct a sounding in the goulet's "main" tumulus; that is, in the tumulus to the W, and from which the two "wings" of the example, respectively, extend towards the N and S.

Coinciding with the research stay in the Dougaj region, and after the administrative agreement of the heads of the Department of Archaeology of the SADR and Military Region I³, we set the date of the intervention as 22 March 2013.

The "main" tumulus of the Tingefuf E-1 "goulet" has a sub-circular floor plan and its dimensions are approximately 2.50 (from W to E) x 2.00 (from N to S) x 0.40 m (in height). Its morphology tends towards a very flattened hemisphere, very similar to a tumular platform (Fig. 6 and 7). It should be noted, however, that the example was constructed directly over a rocky granite dyke which runs through the site, with a NE-SW alienation.

After selecting its central area for excavation, part of the highest area was dismantled to create a slight artificial platform from which the sounding could be carried out in an orderly fashion. The surface in question had a rectangular floor area and measured approximately 1.20 x 0.60 m. From here, the depth coordinates were taken directly in relation to the upper ledge of the tumulus, on the upper part of the platform ledge (Figs. 8 and 9).

However, in the excavation process the blocks, at first sight distributed randomly, were progressively lifted. In fact, these appeared to be spread out chaotically; that is, in no apparent order, inside a heap of stones enclosed in a sedimentary matrix of yellow sand.

No substantial change was noticed in this layout until a depth of -45 cm: a level that probably marked the end of the surface accumulation of blocks and, below it, the natural granite dyke rising above where the tumulus had been erected. So until that depth, the blocks continued to show relatively similar dimensions in section - that is, no stretches were noted with significantly different tipometric components - and the rectangular "box" of the sound stayed in place.

However, when that level was reached, the operational area was substantially restricted by the presence of larger, well matched overlapping blocks on the tumular structure which impeded the course of the sounding in some areas of the reference surface where it had started. As a result, the excavation area had to be adjusted to a more sub-quadrangular plane, of $\approx 55 \times 45$ cm.

From here on, three large blocks constituted a square-shaped space on the S and W sides of the sounding: perhaps the result of the vertical fracture of the rocks in the granite dyke, or else an expression of the deliberate positioning of some large stones. In both situations, it seems clear that the intention was to create a kind of burial "chamber" (Fig. 10).

Once inside this "enclosure", we recorded the first appearance of some bone splinters, very small and corroded, at -53 cm to be precise. This level seems to coincide with the appearance of a horizontal rocky platform, with a flaky appearance, formed by several overlapping juxtaposed planes of natural fairly wide "granite" sheets. A kind of horizontal floor that probably revealed the presence nearby of the bottom "excavated" into the rocky dyke by the builders of the monument.

By carefully moving these flat stones, part of a burial was found, where we recorded the presence of a long bone, set out parallel with the N side of the sounding, and following its profile. The bone, in a horizontal position, seems to belong to one of the lower extremities of an individual buried there. Its dimensions were 17.0 x 2.50 cm, and should probably be identified as a tibia, partly fractured, of which the two ends of the epiphysis seemed to be missing (Figs. 11 and 12).

After reaching the sedimentary bed of the bone (-60 cm), the excavation process was halted, and its practice taken as concluded. The sample was cleaned for photographing *in situ* and its horizontal dimensions were measured. We could now confirm the sepulchral nature of the "main" tumulus of the Tingefuf E-1 "goulet". In other words: the funerary purpose of the stone monument had been demonstrated, in general terms. Undoubtedly an important piece of data that may encourage new archaeological activity in the monument in the future.

Following this, the bone was covered with a layer of sand sufficient to preserve it from the pressure of the stones (and ensure its integral conservation *in situ*), and the blocks, clasts and fine earth extracted from the interior of the sounding were replaced (Fig. 13). In all, the tumulus remained practically restored to the state very similar to that in which we had found it before starting the limited excavation (Fig. 14).

That apart, it must be noted that, except for the bone remain, no other archaeological element (in the form of a cut stone piece, ceramic shard, etc.) was found in any part of the entire sounding⁴.

During November 2013 news was received from the laboratory in Mannheim (the Kurt-Engelhorn-Zentrum Archaeometrie gGmbH, a part of Tue-

bingen University) that no collagen had been found in the material submitted and that no date could therefore be obtained.

Now that human bone has been found in the tumulus of the goulet described above, it is just worth mentioning what was seen in December 2006 near Tifariti during a mere one and half days work. There appeared to be a connection between a tiny amount of ash mixed with earth, pottery fragments and the dilapidated low stone pile initially believed to the burial tumulus of the goulet later dug in October 2009 without result.

Information on the distribution and varied typology of goulets can be found in Milburn (2012: 167-169). The presence of goulets in the Algerian Tassili-n-Ajjer district has been mentioned by Gauthier (2011: Fig. 3) and partly confirmed by Heddouche (in litt., 09 June 2013).

Notes:

¹ A Basque-Sahrawi research activity which has been systematically ongoing since 2005 in this region of El Tiris (*cf.* Sáenz de Buruaga, 2008 and 2010).

² A season that, after an initial postponement of a month and a half caused by French intervention in the war in Mali, we were exceptionally able to carry out between 9 and 30 March 2013.

³ We are very grateful to H. Mohamed Ali (Director of Archaeology; Ministry of Culture of the SADR) and M. Aomar Sidi-Said (Dougaj Military Region), for the facilities given for practising the sounding.

⁴ The archaeological intervention began at 08.00 h and the whole process ended at 09.30 h. on 22 March 2013. The excavation was practiced by J. M. Arruabarrena and E. Telleria, under the direct control of A. Sáenz de Buruaga. The rest of the team consisting of H. Mohamed Ali, O. Chafe Sidahmed, M. Aomar Sidi-Said, D. Mohamed Mberek and A. Abdi Ali participated in arranging the blocks as they were removed, and then in putting them back into the hollow made.

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Captions:

Fig. 1. Geographical location of the Tingefuf E-1 goulet, in the Sahrawi "liberated region of Tiris". The military posts of Mijek, Aguanit, Dougaj and Zug, and, to the W, the line of the "Moroccan defensive wall" are shown.

Fig. 2. General view of the Tingefuf E-1 goulet from the western sector.

Fig. 3. Structural design of the Tingefuf E-1 goulet. In the foreground, the main tumulus, and in the centre, the ring-shaped stone structure.

- Fig. 4.* Detail of the ring-shaped structure, in the central sector of the goulet, which cuts through the outline of the corridor with its double line of blocks.
- Fig. 5.* The pieces of white quartz tended to be concentrated inside the "wings" of the goulet, and were particularly numerous towards the southern area (to the right of the photo).
- Fig. 6.* View of the main tumulus of the goulet taken from the NE sector.
- Fig. 7.* Detail of the main tumulus from the N sector.
- Fig. 8.* Start of the dismantling of part of the upper surface of the tumulus.
- Fig. 9.* Making a rectangular trench as an excavation surface.
- Fig. 10.* Appearance of the sounding after it reached a depth of -45 cm. Three blocks made up a regular square.
- Fig. 11.* In the northern sector of the sounding next to the ledge, part of a partially cracked long human bone was found.
- Fig. 12.* Appearance of the human tibia *in situ*.
- Fig. 13.* After recording the anthropological remain, it was protected and the material removed was put back.
- Fig. 14.* Final appearance of the archaeological intervention, with the tumulus restored to its original state.

Fig.1

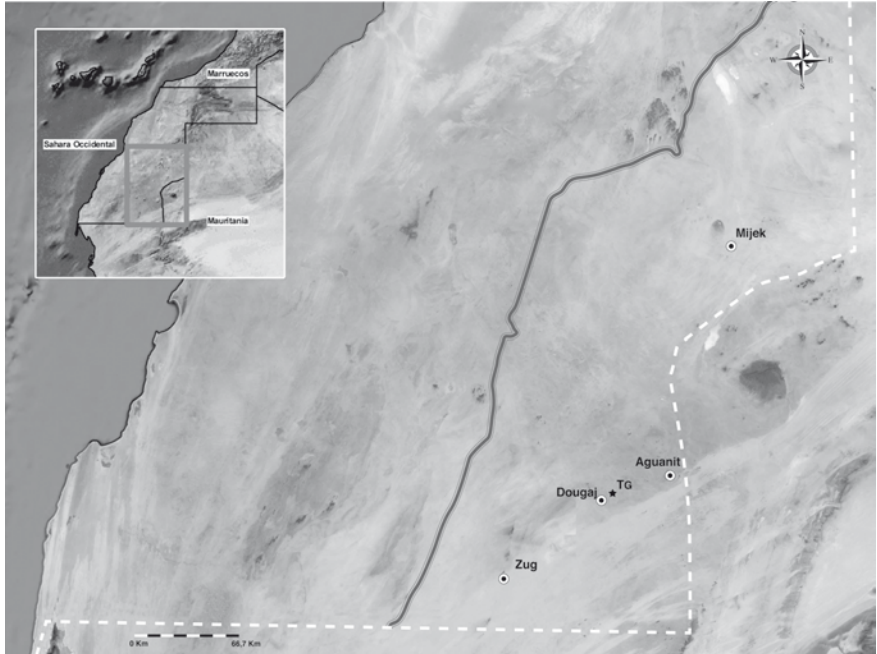




Fig. 2

Fig. 3





Fig. 4

Fig. 5





Fig. 6

Fig. 7

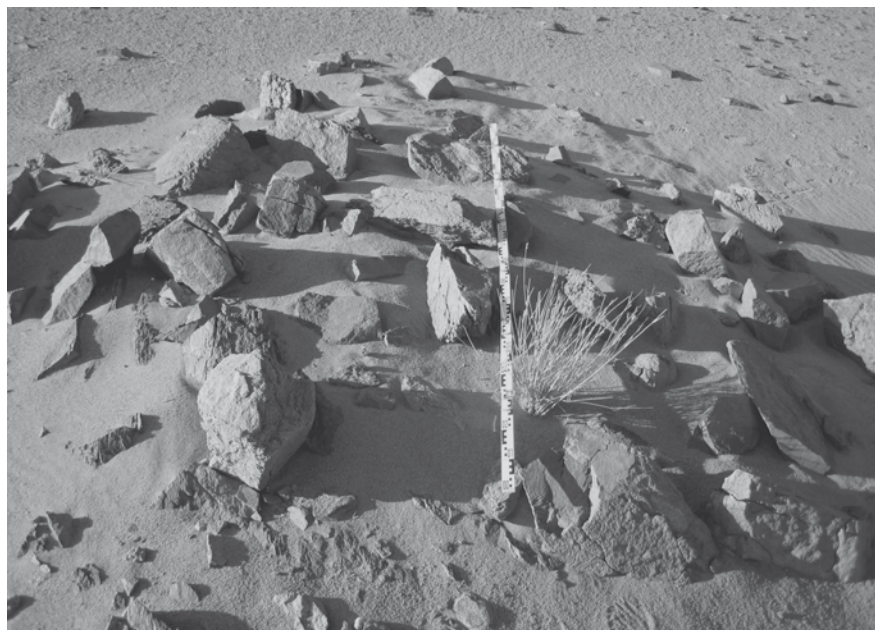




Fig. 8

Fig. 9





Fig. 10



Fig. 11

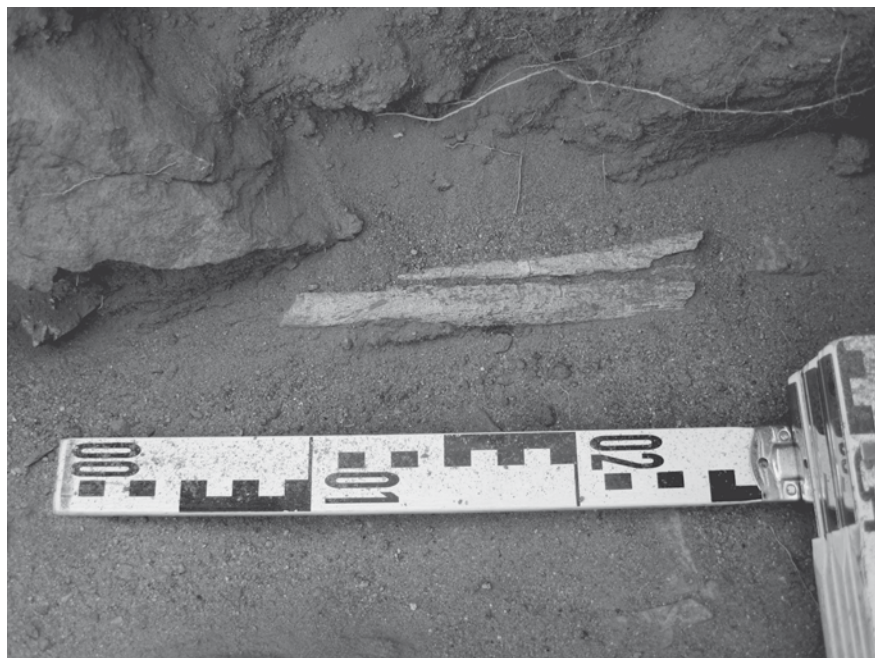


Fig. 12

Fig. 13





Fig. 14