

THE INTERNAL SPATIAL ORGANISATION OF TRADITIONAL
HOUSES IN THE NORTHERN VOLTA BASIN OF GHANA

By

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The consequence of human behaviour in terrestrial space pose a real challenge to archaeologists, especially when it comes to explaining the frequency with which human societies encounter different phenomena in space and the way in which various aspects are bonded together. The problem arises mainly from the complex situation resulting from the simultaneous arrangements of like and unlike features and the dynamic interconnections and associations between them. Looking at this challenge in relation to prehistoric societies is even more problematic. It is common practice among social scientists to attribute certain elements of human behaviour to unique factors and thus place limitations on their analysis and generalisations. My experience of doing an ethnoarchaeological study of a traditional society over the past twelve years indicates that certain principles which govern spatial behaviour are generally applicable, especially when viewed within certain clearly defined social and environmental parameters.

The focus of this paper is on the internal arrangement or the pattern of the distribution of features within households. The question of "whereness" of features and equipment within the house will be the most emphasised. In relation to this an attempt will be made to examine how the placement of features within various divisions of the traditional house can provide leads towards their recognition in the archaeological record. The subject will be discussed from the methodological point of view which I characterise as the "situational approach".

This approach begins with the proposition that human behaviour occurs in situations and that the unit of analysis is the situation that combines the society and its environment into one typical scheme: In the case of the society in question, the Nchumuru, this situation is the house.

In this paper an attempt will be made to demonstrate how each part of the Nchumuru traditional life-style contributes to the spatial patterning within their houses as units of their settlements. The geographical focus is the settlement of Wiae in the Banda-Wiae traditional area, north of the town of Kete-Krachi in the northern section of the Volta basin of Ghana.

The settlement history of the Nchumuru occupation of their present home - the Banda-Wiae area, (Fig. 1) has been reconstructed into four phases each of which is characterised by the interplay of

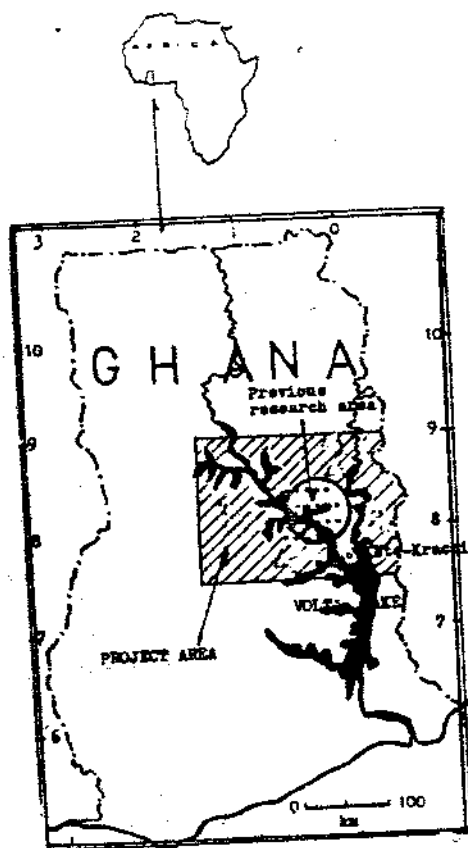


FIG. 1

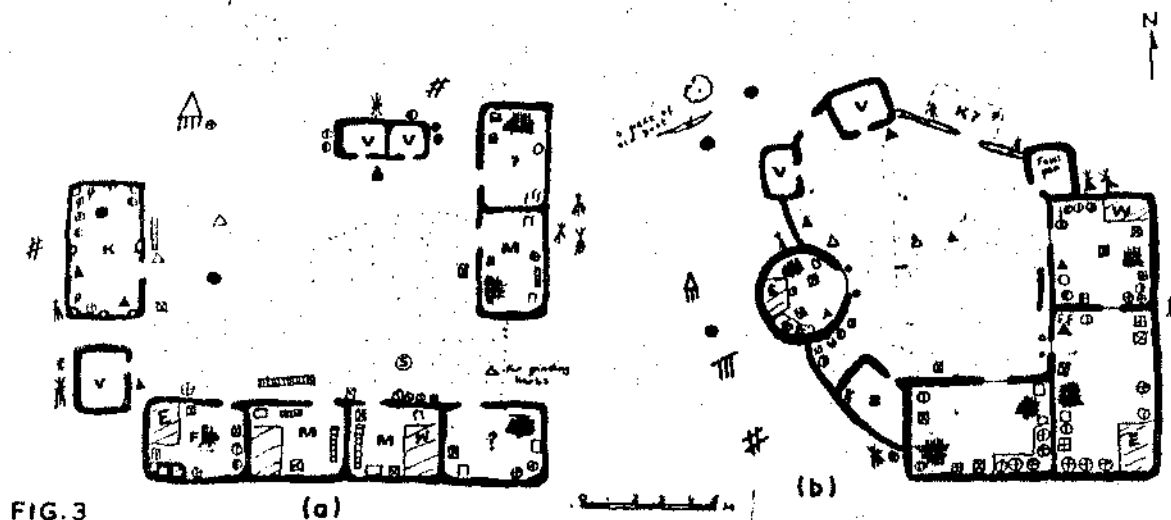
KEY TO ILLUSTRATIONS

KITCHEN	STORAGE BARN	POT	BOX
BASKET	WOODEN BED	PILE OF FIREWOOD	TREE
DRYING PLATFORM	GOURD	GRINDING STONE	STOOL
RESTING PLATFORM	HEARTH	FISHING BASKET	FOOD STUFF
RUBBISH DUMP	WOODEN POST	SHRINE	FEMALES ROOM
FISH-SMOKING OVEN	HOLE	MALES ROOM	MORTAR
METAL CONTAINER	DRUM	BENCH	TABLE
VACANT ROOM	BATH-HOUSE	THATCH	BURIAL
EARTH PLATFORM FOR HOLDING POTS	BORROW PIT	SLEEPING MAT	WELL
WALL UNDER CONSTRUCTION OR COLLAPSED WALL		BEATEN COURTYARD FLOOR	
		EARTH PLATFORM BED	

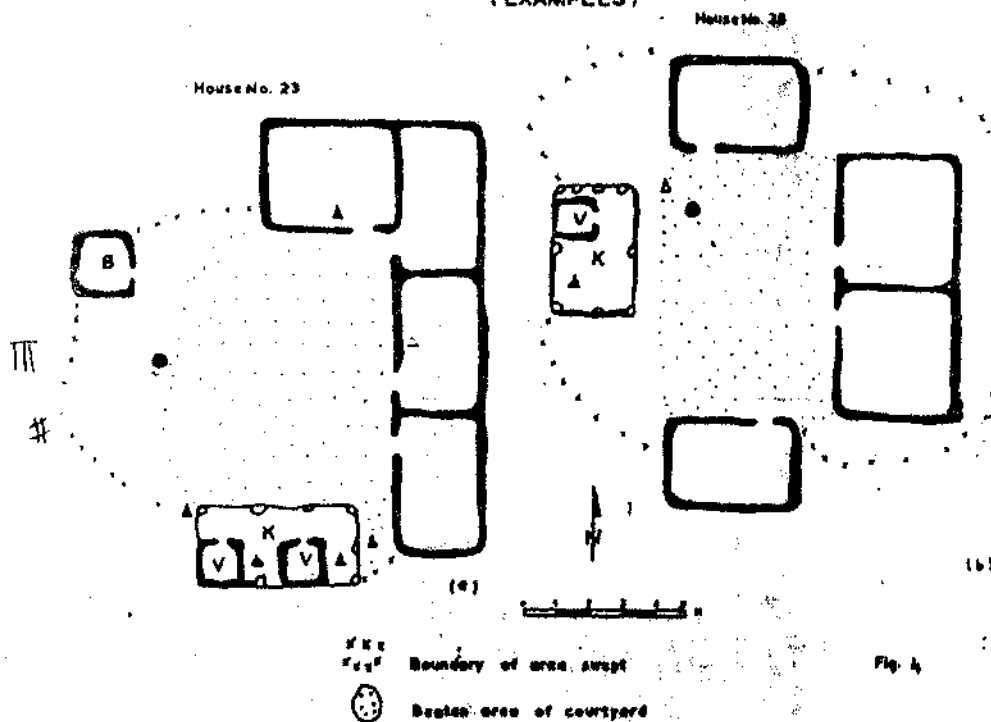
Scale: The dimensions of the structures are approximations. The average for a sleeping room is 3 x 4 meters.

FIG. 2

LOCATION AND DISTRIBUTION OF STRUCTURAL FEATURES IN HOUSES



DEMARCATING AREA OF A HOUSE (EXAMPLES)



social and spatial adjustment (Agorsah, 1983). Strictly, these are phases identified only on the basis of location of settlement, changes in house forms and placement of structural features within the units of the settlement.

The first phase was marked by the historical break-up of the whole Guang-speaking ethnic group (Painter, 1967; Dakubu, 1976). On their arrival in the Banda area the ^{Nchumuru} ~~the~~ as part of the major Guang group had also broken up into phratries (nsuro). There is no archaeological evidence so far to suggest that they settled in their nsuro groups, as indicated by the small size of their early settlements, which probably belonged to family groupings or clans which however, found it necessary to identify themselves with the larger phratry not only for purposes of co-operative defense during the unstable war period, but also for fear of loss of cultural identity. The settlements were small and closely packed. The house structures were circular and contained special entrance huts.

The second phase of the Nchumuru settlement in the area was marked by a period of experimentation with the natural resources of the area. Natural calamities such as fire, flood and famine were considered as tragedies caused by their gods as punishment to show disapproval of the settlement locations. The result was a series of movements from location to location until in the face of the threat

of Gonja power as well as the expansionist activities of the Asante (Maier, 1981), the various phratries began to come together to form single settlements, one of which was the site of Old Wiae. At these settlements the identities of the phratries continued as a mechanism for maintaining the inter-settlement contact and cultural identity, and co-operation.

The third phase is clearly marked at the site of Old Wiae the beginning of which is C14-dated to the mid sixteenth century. At Old Wiae some of the Nchumuru, having settled down, maintained the tradition of building circular huts but failed. However, feeling more secure as a result of their alliance with the Gonja people and connections with the Krachi (who had the most potent oracle of the time), the spatial arrangement in their settlements began to change gradually into rectangular forms. This change which is archaeologically manifested at the Old Wiae site, was completed when it was relocated at its present site.

It is within the framework of the arrangement of the rectangular house structures at New Wiae that this paper will examine the internal spatial organisation. The final phase of their settlement history relates to the present and seems to be continuing.

Social Network:

Each Nchumuru village belongs to one of its major family groupings or phraties: Banda, Chachai, Nchenke, Kpentanai and Sunwiae. These groupings as mentioned are traditionally referred to as nsuro (kasuro, sing.) each of which has one of its constituent villages as the head village. Within each Nchumuru village one finds one or more patri-clans called mbuno (kabuno, sing.) each having a male head, its own ancestral shrine, secrets, properties and relationships with other villages. Inheritance is by homogeneous transmission (male to the next oldest male and female to the next oldest female in the kabuno). There are five mbuno at Wiae, our data base, as follows: Breniase, Dapoeta, Kpenwiae, Ntrapo and Tarieso.

Recognition as an Nchumuru in the village is determined by one's relationship with a kabuno, membership of which consists not only of the living but also and primarily, the dead ancestors. The ancestral shrine of the kabuno is the controlling factor within the kabuno, traditionally should be located in the kabuno head's house.

To the Nchumuru the seasons of the year are not thought of in terms of a large solar clock or calendar but are seen as a sequence of activities calculated around traditional events such as planting and harvest times and the days are divided into activity spans such as the cool of the day and evening. In the Nchumuru concept one

cannot separate leisure from "other time". The social network of the Nchumuru is highly summarised here but provides an adequate background for the discussion of internal arrangements with their houses.

In Wiaae, the main activity areas of the house are the room, courtyard, kitchen and backyard. I shall discuss each of these divisions and their associated features and activities, and then demonstrate the extent to which each part contributes to the spatial patterning within the house. Even though the house is divided into the above four typical areas, the activities related to them can hardly be placed in clear-cut compartments. Further, not all the divisions are symbolised by physical or structural features. For example, the courtyard refers to the space enclosed by the walls or other features of the house rather than a structure.

The Rooms:

Every house in Wiaae initially consists of at least two rooms. However, the number of rooms added to the initial structures depend upon the occupational priorities of the owner at the time, the number of people, the season and, above all, the capability of the builder or owner to add more structures. The total number of rooms in a house at any time can be divided by the number of persons in it and multiplied by the size of a room expressed in square metres in order to obtain the

average space area per person. This is expressed in the equation:

$$S = \frac{(R)}{P}s$$

Where R = total number of rooms per house;

P = total number of persons per house;

S = mean room space per person;

s = average size of room space held at a
constant of 12 square metres per room.

On the basis of this estimation it was observed that each person (child or adult) had in 1981 (Agorsah, 1983a) an average room space of .5 in the range of 1.0 to 0.3.

The only rooms of purely specialised use in Wiaae are shrine rooms. In the short term, it is possible to indicate allocation of rooms to inhabitants of a house. However, there is a great deal of movement of people with the arrival and exit of family members. This makes it more difficult to recognise any pattern of long-term allocation. Generally, however, rooms in Wiaae are meant for shelter in the real sense of the word. They are first of all sleeping rooms and secondly repositories for personal properties, and the rooms are sometimes communally shared.

The distinguishing marks of a woman's room are raised clay platform bed(s) and smaller platforms along the walls of the rooms with pot holes in them for holding pots of all sizes (Fig. 3). A female adult's room

may also have a hearth in one corner, close to the entrance. Such a hearth may be used for heating rooms in cold weather or as alternative cooking places when the kitchen is inaccessible during the rainy season. The practice of erecting a hearth in rooms is becoming less popular, especially with the young. There is never a shrine inside, in front of, or at the entrance of a female's room. Large, tall piles of pots are a characteristic feature of the adult female's room but as the pots and other similarly unfired objects are moved around from time to time they cannot be used as a final indication of female or male room. The structural features consist of the hearth, earth-bed and the raised platform for holding piles of pots in which personal effects are stored.

The floors of many of the rooms are beaten hard and smoothed. A whole range of objects can be found on the floor of the room, mostly along the walls. These include stools, food baskets containing cooking utensils, ceramic pots and bowls, wooden ladles, gourds, empty bottles, sandals, and tables. The cooking utensils, stools and sandals are very frequently moved in and out of the room. The other major objects remain at their positions for fairly long periods of time. Once in a while the baskets are brought out, cleaned and refilled with fresh food supply. The main link between the rooms and their users is the courtyard, which will be the activity area that is discussed in

the section which follows.

The Courtyard

The courtyard is the area of the house enclosed by the inner walls of the building and other structural features. Semi-private, it is the centre of the house and the area used for the activities that members of the household share in common, such as cooking, eating, and discussion of family affairs. It provides access between sleeping and bathrooms. The courtyard thus consists of the area for the location of hearths, benches, fish-smoking ovens, mortar, large water pots, family shrines and graves. It is also a place for resting in the evenings and on kepowe (non-work) days. It is also the area for the manufacture and maintenance of fishing and farming equipment and tools. Further, it is an extension of the bedroom during the nights of the warm and humid season. The courtyard in Wiaa does not possess an enclosure and has not controlled entrance or privacy. Only the sleeping room is really private and always requires a complete enclosure, good ventilation and subdued light. There is no clear physical boundary between courtyards. However, observations indicate that, through the courtyards the spatial dimensions of the house are making up for what social factors are unable to maintain. Fundamentally the physical developments of the activity areas of the Nchumuru house

entail more than satisfying the purely functional requirements of the society. In general terms, the development of the individual house provides a history that links the basic unit (the house) and its activity areas to the social context.

The house (lonno) to an Nchumuru, in a territorial sense refers to the geographical location and extension of the kabuno and its members. It also means an assertion by a family that a geographical space is under its influence and control. The concept which is reflected in the activities connected with the courtyard concerns two rationales: caring and sharing, which are embodied not only in the kabuno relationship but also and necessarily, in the phratry (nsuro) relationships. This has support in the fact that the individual builder provides in his structure, an openness based on the courtyard, that links it to the houses of other kabuno members. The grouping of the houses and the openness of the courtyard into one another reflect the social order. Each person's house is usually surrounded by those of his kinsfolk as social norms require. This clearly indicates how the pattern of activities, values and constraints and also the pattern of daily life are fused in the physical form. That the house forms and their related activity areas are versions of the same simple form and convey a powerful sense of physical coherency has been demonstrated (Agorsah, 1985). Although the physical requirement of the orientation

of the Nchumuru courtyard and related activities aesthetic considerations such as beating hard of the floor, the main goal is the cultural and practical function.

The relationship of the courtyard to the other parts of the Nchumuru houses can be clearly contrasted to that relationship in non-Nchumuru houses (Prussin, 1969; Tait, 1961). Among the non-Nchumuru the residence unit aggregation results in a group of interconnected courtyards into which access is obtained through only one main entrance hut. In the case of the Nchumuru (Agorsah, 1983a) the house is a more open though private, part of the settlement, the whole of which forms the setting for all their activities. In non-Nchumuru houses such as those of Konkomba settlers in the north-eastern section of modern Wiae, the house (compound?) is the whole setting for domestic life. The significance of this comparison is that while connectivity is **strong** between Nchumuru individual courtyards, it is very weak between those of non-Nchumuru. This difference demonstrates the consequences which socio-spatial relationships can have in the placement of structural units and which can be invoked to explain patterning within residential units. The type of connectivity observed in Wiae is a basic characteristic, and a mechanism for maintaining liberal social connection between family groups and between the houses and also area of the traditional settlement and its adjoining activity areas. "Connectivity" is used here to indicate the

degree of accessibility between houses. The most enclosed courtyards are considered to have least connectivity while the most open courtyards have most connectivity. The connectivity pattern is also emphasised by the network of foot-paths which accommodate the criss-cross movements between relatives in different compounds and give access to the main paths leading out of the settlements to the streams, farms, shrines and the lake-side. The importance of the foot-paths lies in the fact that courtyards and structural features located near each other can give greater connectivity, but this juxtaposition may not necessarily ensure connectivity.

Growth and Development of the Courtyard

The definition of the courtyard is linked with the growth of the house. As has been observed in Wiaa, the erection of the initial two-room structure determines which side the courtyard would be. However, ^{when} it is only another structure such as the kitchen or drying platform or additional rooms have been erected that the courtyard begins to take shape. The development of the courtyard is characteristic of the growth of the house in Wiaa such that even when not fully defined, the courtyard area is somehow recognisable. One way of recognising the courtyard is by monitoring the area of the house swept by the women usually each morning or at any other time.

Measurements taken of the courtyard sizes indicate that there is some degree of close uniformity. It is not possible to classify the shape of the courtyards into any descriptive geometric terms because of most them are open, and even though the builder knows the eventual extent of his courtyard it is not physically apparent until the erection of the structure that encloses it. Figure 4 provides examples of the courtyards as they are defined by the beaten floor area, the swept area and by the position of structural features. It is evident that the courtyard area immediately in front of the sleeping room is the area that is initially beaten hard. The expansion of the beaten courtyard floor area is also illustrated by the structural growth of some selected houses (Agorsah, 1983a: 118-120).

Courtyard Activities and Associated Features

The courtyard experiences not only the highest rate of traffic - flow in the house but also many and varied activities. It is, therefore, one of the most important areas for inter-house information flow and action. Even without a clear definition of the physical limits of the courtyard, it is very well known which activities are or are not courtyard activities. However, not all activities are represented by structural features, and in some cases where they exist they are not fixed.

An important courtyard feature is the hearth. Observation indicates that at least one out of every three hearths in the house

is located in the courtyard usually close to kitchen walls or fish-smoking ovens. It is not uncommon to find a hearth in the middle of a house. Because of its permanency and its heat effects on its location, the hearth is an important feature for recognising food preparation activity in the courtyard. In the absence of a kitchen a hearth is usually fixed at the location where the kitchen is likely to be built, under a drying platform for shade or shelter. However, this is not a hard-fast rule because drying platforms could be erected anywhere in the courtyard, and are often considered temporary structures. They are often dismantled to give space for the erection of other structures.

Another feature of the courtyard besides the hearth and drying platform is the mortar. Fixed mortars in the courtyard are mainly for the preparation of a popular food called kapare (fufu in Ewe and Akan). They are sometimes communally used for pounding grain, in which case they are erected in the courtyard and are rarely removed even when in disuse. Unlike other objects of the courtyard, mortars are positioned off walls of the house to prevent damage to the walls.

Another courtyard feature of considerable importance is the clan (kabuno) shrine which is located in the courtyard on the immediate outside of the wall, and by the entrance of the doorway to the room of the kabuno head. Family shrines which are specifically for the family of a house are also located inside the courtyard. A third type of shrine, the twin (ntaa) shrine is erected on the outside of the wall near the entrance of the family, not kabuno head's room. However,

where there already is a kabuno shrine in a house as mentioned above the twin shrine is fixed near to it. The courtyard is also the location for burials of important family personalities. The practice of burying the dead in houses is one that is observable in other Nchumiru settlements in the area such as Akaniem, Banda, Buafiri and Grubi. There is no specific location for graves in the courtyard, but they tend to be located away from the kitchen side of the house. Wiae traditions mention that properly, deceased kabuno heads should be buried in the courtyards of their houses. However, today, it is the deceased's family that makes the final decision which is invariably accepted by the community.

As part of the development process of the house in Wiae, burrow pits sometimes end up being the part of the house that eventually becomes the courtyard. In such a situation the pit is turned into a rubbish dump. It may take several years to fill up. For example one such a pit being used as a rubbish dump by a house during my visit in 1972 was only half-way filled in 1981. The restriction imposed by the courtyard until ^{it} is fully filled with trash, is that structural features such as mortars and hearths can only be located around it. The pit thus becomes a trap for left-over food and other discarded objects for several years. Another restriction is that only certain parts of the courtyard can be beaten hard.

Other features or objects located in the courtyard include wooden benches, water storage pots, grinding stones, gourds, stools,

chairs, tables boxes, piles of firewood and various items of household equipment and tools. These objects are so much moved around between rooms, courtyard and kitchen, that it is not possible to earmark any specific locations. However, an overall observation indicates that the above-mentioned objects tend to be lived up along the house.

Clearly, the courtyard is a multi-purpose area which probably accounts for the fact that it is open with a few permanently fixed features. Perhaps the purpose here is to make it possible to arrange or shift objects around for different activities. Even though the activities carried out in the courtyard and objects associated with them are very important, the availability of alternative locations seems to reduce its importance as a unit of the house. Taken individually, the activities that take place in the courtyard such as sleeping, exchange of goods, family discussions, pouring libation at the family kabuno or personal shrine, burial and food preparation or drying food on the beaten floors, have too low frequency of occurrence to require any physical expansion in terms of erection of structural features. It is certain however, that the courtyard, by virtue of its location and its multi-purpose activity area, is important as a connective space area for all other activity areas. Paths flowing through the courtyard indicate the connectivity that it provides between activity areas of the house and between kabuno areas of the settlement. It maintains an openness that facilitates the social connections required for the maintenance of

the kabuno system or relationships.

THE KITCHEN

The kitchen (gyaare) is one of the most important fixed structural features of the residential unit in Wiae. It may consist of anything from a raised rectangular platform with one or two hearths to a wall enclosure with a thatch roof. The raised platform, about three metres high is often the nucleus or location indicator or a future kitchen. Owing to the lesson of the outbreak of fire which destroyed Old Wiae, the people of modern Wiae have the tendency to locate kitchens a fair distance away from the main buildings. After erection of the kitchen, other features are constructed to fill in the gaps and to square up the house into the "L" and "U" shaped patterns that are the geometric characteristics of Wiae houses (Agorsah, 1983a). The erection of the kitchen invariably gives the house its initial spatial definition. Later additions to the initial building, such as ovens, fowl pens, storage barns and similar structures are then built at appropriate locations. Finally, objects in the kitchen tend to be located close to the walls, either outside or inside of the kitchen (Fig. 3).

Features Associated With Wiae Kitchen

A kitchen in Wiae must have at least a hearth, but not all hearths in the house are in the kitchen. More than 50% of the total number of hearths in the house are located outside the kitchen. Many of this number are located in the courtyard and,

in two out of three cases, located against or very close to the kitchen walls on the courtyard side.

The kitchen provides shelter for fish-smoking ovens and hearths, as well as household equipment such as pots, bowls, baskets, water containers, hoes and hoe handles, mortars, pestles, brooms, gourds and calabashes. Others include broken pieces of canoe, stools, benches, cutlasses, grinding stones, clubs, firewood and a host of unfixed household objects. The kitchen, therefore, is one of the units of Wiae residential area which contains important features that can be used to explain the occupation and food preparation and food preparation habits of the people in the settlement. The kitchen is also a storage area. Owing to its location and associated features and objects the kitchen constitutes a central area of the household activity, but mostly complementing that of the courtyard.

THE BACKYARD

The backyard is the area of the settlement immediately surrounding the space within which are located the sleeping room, kitchen and courtyard. Many of the manufacturing and processing activities take place in the backyard. These activities include basket-weaving, mending of fishing nets, pottery-making, carving of stools, mortars and pestles, preparation of slaughtered, trapped or hunted game, and storage of firewood and building materials. Storage barns and bathhouses are also located in the

backyard. Rubbish dumps and toilet pits are located on the outermost limits of the backyard. Community features such as mortars for communal pounding of grain and resting platforms or benches are also located in the backyard. Currently the cemetery of the village is located out of the village but burials continue to be made in the backyard. In addition to the above activities other activities such as drumming and dancing, meetings and exchange transactions take place in the backyard. Most of these activities vary in frequency of occurrence.

Traditionally, the end of the backyard marks the boundaries of the settlement. The area beyond the backyard is the afuito, meaning "empty space". The afuito is the area beyond the rubbish dumps and latrine pits which physically mark the outskirts of the settlement. Afuito is a term also applicable in Nchumuru everyday language to open space which in Nchumuru traditional sense, is the word which refers to the backyard. Its contents are considered as part of the settlement. That is, afuito refers to a space that has at the time of mention, not been incorporated into the residential part of the settlement. The location of some of the most important features such as storage barns, rubbish dumps, and piles of firewood indicate the importance of the backyard as part of the settlement, and the boundary connections that it provides between the residential area and the farm lands.

Locational Decision-making Among the Nchumuru:

With the above descriptions of the backyard it is now possible to review the form that, together with rooms, kitchen and courtyard, it provides. The discussion so far indicates that even though the various divisions of the house have different functions, they are connected by the activities related to the objects that lie in them. The courtyard is seen not only as a multipurpose division of the house but also as the area that provides connectivity between the other activity areas as well. Relating behavioural variables to material objects in spatial terms is an exercise that eludes many spatial archaeologists. Owing to the static nature of the eventual archaeological record, the understanding of the dynamics of an ongoing cultural system, constitutes one of the best ways of explaining behaviour related to the recent past. Yet adopting such an approach is only a first step. Different spatial processes may produce the same spatial patterns and vice versa. A wide variety of internal spatial patterning in houses may be developed, but these can only be useful when seen in relation to the traditional values of the society and also when those values can be defined in practical and measurable terms.

Throughout Nchumuru settlement history in the Banda-Wiaa area, decisions regarding location of features and objects are observed to be taken at three levels: at the nsuro (phratry) level to maintain cohesiveness between members of the nsuro in the Nchumuru area as a

whole; at the mbuno level within a settlement, to maintain relationship between family groups; and at the household level, to maintain family identity. The first two decisions are at the group level while the third one is at the individual level. It is ^{that} the individual decision _∠ affects the internal patterning in the house and accord with the taste and values of the builder and his dependants. However, all the three decision levels affect not only the location and distribution as well as the form and arrangement of houses and objects within the settlement as a whole but also the location or other structural features within the individual houses.

The principles of locational decision-making within Nchumuru households as considered in my study are not the types familiar in mathematical logic and other similar spatial theories. They cannot be fed into a computer to yield decisions that would be of help to the archaeologist. Their application requires sensitivity and intuition. In view of the vagueness that this type of analysis can generate, it may be questioned whether and in what sense the decisions are rational at all. This question is difficult to answer as there is no universally agreed definition of "rationality". Simply, the decisions are considered as rational because they are derived from principles appearing in the trends of an on-going society, and therefore, represent a type of effectiveness. They are effective in creating a type of internal organisation in the house that produces its own kind of pattern. The point of my study has been in the identification of the factors which ^{determine} _∠ the locational decisions rather than judging the rationality of those decisions.

Available archaeological evidence supports the speculation that the locational decision-making at all three levels is continuous between early Nchumuru settlements and modern ones in the area (Agorsah, 1983a). The observed continuity has also been shown to constitute the various stages of the growth of the spatial behaviour of the Nchumuru in the area. Cultural transformation indicated by the shift from circular to rectangular houses has however been noted as having necessitated an adaptive deviation in the location of features within the houses. The continuity in location decision-making is also indicated by the importance of the Dente shrine in the Nchumuru village. That the Dente oracle originated from the Laterh of the southern Guang area is a historical fact and supported by traditions from Krachi, Nkonya and Larteh-Akwapim (Maier, 1981, Kumah, 1964). The linguistic connection between the Nchumuru and the other Guang societies of Ghana is very well attested (Lhret and Posmansky, 1982).

Another significant cultural element that indicates connection between the internal organisation of early and present Nchumuru houses consists of large wooden mortars located between house structures. This is also evidenced at the excavated sites of Old Wiae and Oseiaye No. 1 and Labeng Ketakpang (Agorsah, 1983; 1986). It is also a characteristic feature in modern Nchumuru villages of Banda, Nanjuro, Nchenke as well as other Guang-speaking villages such as Abujuro, Adamkpa and Monkra in the Kete-Krachi area. Is this a typical feature of the Guang? Anquandah (1982) considers this feature as very characteristic of the Guang of the south and cites the site of Dawu as an example. This evidence so far

seems to give some support to this assertion. However, to apply this to the Guang-speaking people there is the need for more data that will show connection between such a feature and the social organisational rules of the Nchumuru; it is only then that we can suggest that the particular location of such large mortars between house structures is typical of the Guang. Location of mortars further extends the courtyard activities and supports earlier suggestions that the courtyard serves as an area of connection between the houses. Nchumuru ritual also seems to play an important role in the internal organisation of the house. In ritual, the actions of the Nchumuru have consequences which reach far beyond their immediate impact. Their actions have ritual significance not because they are exotic or bizarre but because they take deliberate steps to maintain contact with their ancestral spirits. For example, in their minds the ritual action of guarding the location of the kabuno is a way of maintaining good relationships with the spirits of their ancestors but at the same time it manipulates their use of space and thereby manipulates their life. As has been noted earlier the kabuno shrine has a special location in the house. In the period before modern Wiae, some three decades ago, it used to be located in the centre of a house consisting of circular huts. In modern Wiae it is located at the entrance to the room of the kabuno shrine is therefore, easy by virtue of its location within the house. Similarly, the kabuno shrine locations made them visually and psychologically accessible to the household and other kabuno members. Archaeological evidence obtained from Old Wiae

indicates the importance not only of the ancestral kabuno shrine but also of the Dente shrine which has been described as the protective god of the village.

In a society in which the builder of the house is the user and at the same time the one who also maintains it, it is quite obvious why social connections should play quite an important role in their spatial behaviour or patterning. Generally in building a house and deciding on its internal organisations, the spatial behaviour of the Nchumuru does not pose merely a technological problem but is dictated principally by the character of the villager's social relationships. Although the spatial behaviour involves aesthetic and geometric considerations, the main goal is the cultural and practical function. The house in Nchumuru traditional society, therefore, reflects their life styles, a situation which is not common among Western societies in which the designer of the house is different from the builder, and the user is often neither of the two.

Who in the Nchurumu society decided or decides the internal spatial organisation of the houses or the settlement at large? My previous arguments (Agorsah, 1983b) seem to emphasize Nchumuru decision-making as a group rather than an individual matter. This is not to say that a given society's traditions are maintained only on a group level, nor is it meant to imply that every group which existed in the past has been perpetuated. However, one can hardly conceive of a collection of individuals living in geographical proximity without the eventual evolution of some

form of group membership. Individuals living in such proximity interact, and out of those interactions a group crystallizes. In fact, among the Nohurumu of Wiae, a person's very sense of identity is shaped by the group of significance to him - the kabuno and the kasuro. These groups give the individual his earliest and most complete spatial experience, social identity and a guaranteed link with his ancestry.

The human spatial behaviour evident in the modern settlement of Wiae (for example the decision regarding the location of structural features within the house), therefore, is a result of decision based on the group norms. There are no explicit restrictions, whatever, on the individual's decisions. However, since he shares an overall space area, as well as some ideals with other people, he behaves in the same manner as he wants them to do. Consequently, an informal compromise evolves which, upon repetition over a period of time, crystallizes into accepted values and relationships through which one may be considered as belonging to the group. By identifying the group spatially one can socially identify the individual who then becomes the pivot around which the detailed dynamics of the spatial system can be explained.

The difficulties of isolating individuals by studying cultural material in an archaeological context have been well discussed (Hill and Gunn, 1977; Donnan and Clewlow, 1974) and seem to indicate that material in the archaeological context is a result of combinations of both group and individual action. My study demonstrates that both the group and individual factors are crucial

at specific levels of analysis of observed cultural patterns among the Nchumuru. Considering spatial behaviour at all levels in a general sense, the evidence suggests that among the Nchumuru individuals built their houses for the group - the kabuno in the first instance and ultimately the kasuro. The location of the house identifies the individual as a member of the group; the house form and its internal organisation identify him as an individual.

The discussion of this paper emphasises the hypothesis that in order to understand the internal organisation of settlement structures such as houses, it is necessary to analyse them in relation to the social behaviour patterns that generate them, not only at the level of appearance or what they look like, but more importantly in what they are as the physical organisation of society. This is even more applicable in situations where the builder is the designer and the user at the same time.

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F I G U R E S

Figure

- 1 Map showing location of research area.
- 2 Key to illustrations.
- 3 Locations and distribution of structural features
and objects in houses.
- 4 Demarcating area of a house (examples).