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VIBRATIONS OF MAROONS AND MARRONAGE IN CARIBBEAN HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

E. Kofi Agorsah

ABSTRACT

A discussion of the phenomenon of "resistance" as an important element in the shaping of the History of the New World, and the geographical distribution of Maroon resistance groups in the Caribbean and adjoining areas, introduces this paper. It is contended that historical and ethnographic evidence fail to adequately present the true picture of Maroon culture, considered as a only most important element that brings others together in a coherent way. Using evidence from Jamaica, it is illustrated that filling in the existing gap in our knowledge about Maroons and marronage as well as identification of cultural continuities and discontinuities, is becoming more rewarding by resort to archaeological data.

KEY WORDS: Maroons, Resistance, Jamaica, Accompong, Nanny Town.

INTRODUCTION

Resistance is a phenomenon that cannot be separated from slavery or oppression (Singleton 1985, Beckles & Shepherd 1991, Heuman 1986) and therefore remains an inseparable part of New World History and particularly Caribbean History (Augier and Gordon 1962). The development of resistance groups was a direct response to the cruel torture devices on slave ships, the whips and guns, posses of soldiers and dogs sent after escaping slaves, horrible punishments and executions of 'troublemakers' (Beckles 1986, Brathwaite 1977, Price 1992, Robinson 1969). These experiences were life-threatening enough for the enslaved to resort to defensive violence. Archaeological and Historical studies recognize the significance of "resistance" as an important element in the shaping of New World History (Agorsah 1993, Beckles 1986, Price 1973). This is even more important for the Caribbean where the best examples of resistance to slavery can be obtained (Augier, Gordon, Hall and Beckford 1960). While a considerable analysis has been done on Historical and ethnographic evidence (Campbell 1988, Bilby 1983, 1984, Price 1976), the archaeological evidence has received very little or no attention. As a result little knowledge exists about Maroon settlement and spatial behavior patterns, family networks, political systems and many other aspects of Maroon cultural traditions.

On their arrival in the New World, the Spaniards encountered many local ethnic groups such as the Lucayanos living in the Bahamas (Keegan 1987, Keegan, Stokes and Nelson 1990, Loven 1935), Borequinos in Puerto Rico (Alegria 1980), and Tainos in Cuba (Barroso 1984), the Dominican Republic and Haiti (Arrom & Aravelo 1986) and much of the eastern Caribbean inhabited by the Caribs whose ferocity prevented European colonization of islands such as Grenada and St. Lucia. Parry and Sherlock (1965), record that there were "negroes" on board the vessels that brought the Spanish adventurers to the New World. As the Spaniards forced the Indians and their slaves on board their vessels they escaped, sometimes in small groups, into hiding. For example, it is reported (Price 1973) that as early as 1502 an African slave escaped from his enslaver into the interior hills of Hispaniola and that during the early parts of the 16th century strongholds established by escaped African slaves already existed on one of the islands referred to as Samana, off the coast of Hispaniola. These groups eventually developed into Maroon communities who were certainly not the only resistance group in the Caribbean but whose activities have recurred throughout, and shaped the History of the colonial period in the New World.

MAROON SOCIETIES

Some of the known Maroon communities include those of eastern and western Jamaica, the Paramaka, Saramaka, Matawai and Kwinti of Suriname, the Aluku of French Guiana, the

Palenqueros of Colombia, the Garifuna of the Atlantic coast of Central America, the Maroons of the Costa Chica region of Mexico (Price 1973), the Cimarrones of Cuba (Barroso 1984, Pereira 1990) and the Seminole Maroons of Oklahoma, Texas, Mexico and the Bahamas. Owing to the different circumstances and areas in which the societies were formed, different definitions have been used to refer to who the societies were, and what general references can be made to them as identifiable socio-cultural groups or groupings considered as the pioneer heroic freedom fighters of the New World (Agorsah 1992, Bilby and N'Diaye 1992).

The Maroons of Jamaica, the focus of this paper, have been very well known because of the long struggle with the British colonial authorities. These communities are now located around the main towns of New Nanny Town (Moore Town) and Scott's in the east, and Accompong in the west of the island of Jamaica. Archaeological evidence (Agorsah 1992) indicates that the nucleus of the Maroons in the east consisted of various groups who live in the inaccessible areas of the Blue Mountains of Jamaica before or, certainly during, the period of Spanish domination when a large number of slaves escaped into the hills. Documentary evidence (Morales 1952, Bryan 1971) indicates that in the early 16th century, the Spanish government attempted to flush out some of the slaves who went into "marronage" (flight) into the Blue Mountains where they had established themselves. Maroons of Jamaica successfully resisted re-enslavement throughout the History of British authority on the island, forcing the latter to pass more than forty major ineffective laws and taking unsuccessful punitive measures to control marronage and Maroon activities, until a peace treaties were signed in the early 1730's.

Retracing the course of this major thread has been a subject of great emphasis in Caribbean History but seriously archaeologically researched (Agorsah 1990, 1991, 1992a-c; Brathwaite 1977, Campbell 1988). Evidence regarding various aspects of Maroon heritage such as their music, dance, and religion (Bilby 1981, 1984;) now becoming available to a wider audience, indicate that there is background material with and on which to build a more complete picture of the Maroon heritage. Owing to the constant need to fight back slavery and to maintain independence, many of the Maroon settlements would obviously have been semi-permanent or destroyed and rebuilt several times over, perhaps leaving very little archaeological evidence.

THE JAMAICA EXAMPLE

Locations of Maroon Settlements in Jamaica (Fig. 1a)

One of the areas known to have been settled by the earliest Maroons was the Guanaboa Vale in the Juan de Bolas hilly areas located in the modern parish of St. Catherine generally consisting of the area between modern towns of Linstead and Chapelton including the Ginger Ridge, Pindars and Marlie Hill areas which are dominated by the Rock River drainage system. Another settlement referred to as Los Vermmajales generally in the Juan de Bolas mountain area has also been mentioned and described (Campbell 1988). The Spanish period Maroon settlements are less known probably because of the fact that they may not have been well established by the time the English took over the island.

The Maroon groups located and relocated in inaccessible parts of the mountain regions, mainly in eastern portions of Jamaica away from their original locations and were continually being reinforced by other ones who later escaped from the plantations established by the English, who had wrestled the island from the Spaniards in 1655. Another group resettled in the Cockpit country in the west, in the vicinity of modern Accompong in the parish of St. Elizabeth and have since the mid-seventeenth century continued to live in such groups all throughout their fight for freedom. While Accompong Old Town became the main area which controlled the groups living in the west of the island, New Nanny Town (Moore Town) controlled the Maroons in the Blue Mountain region.

Archaeological investigation of these areas has been centered on the identification of territories occupied by Maroon groups, as well as locating these Maroon ancient dwelling sites,

guerilla war camps, hideouts, burial and battle grounds, military tracks and fortifications using available maps which may help identify the changing nature of the settlements over time. By the beginning of the 1700's several Maroon settlements of varying sizes and composition are observed to have developed (Hart 1985). Some of these settlements included Quao's Town and "a fishing and hunting village near Quao's Town with seventy four huts", Nanny Town, Men's Town described as located on the way "going towards Nanny Town with a dancing place". It is not clear what exactly was the function of the dancing place mentioned in the record. But it suggests a place for some kind of community activity. English reports observe that the main town (Nanny Town?) was located in the ridge of the Blue Mountain with two smaller towns in the same area but fairly far apart. Also reported is a "large cave with "two great troughs to hold water" and considered to be an important Maroon hideout. Guy's Town is mentioned as a refuge for Nanny Town Maroons after the British forces had taken control of the Nanny Town site in 1734. In a confession to the English authorities one Seyrus is reported to have mentioned "Hobby's", a "Negro town", and settlements in the Carrion Crow Hill. The locations of these sites are yet to be identified.

The Peace Treaties signed between the British and the Maroons, resulted in grants of land and definition of Maroon lands. Consequently, Maroon settlements became more and more clearly defined spatially. For example in 1741 of a square parcel of land situated on the Negro River, an eastern arm of the Rio Grande was granted to Nanny, described as "a great Negro woman" and her followers in the Parish of Portland. This land grant refers to the location of New Nanny Town which is modern Moore Town in the parish of Portland. Other Maroon settlements that resulted from land grants and colonial survey include Bath, a splinter town to the south of Nanny Town surveyed in the 1760's, Scott's Hall, with the Wag Water River serving as the main boundary in that area, Crawford Town relocated and documented in 1754, Charles Town which was a new settlement of Crawford Town several kilometers from the latter located on the Buff Bay River close to the south shore. In western Jamaica the Maroon lands, like those of the east became more clearly defined. Accompong was granted some 1500 acres of land 1000 of which was for Accompong itself, Trelawny Town (Dallas 1803) was another of such settlements in the west. The examples noted above indicate that only vague information exists about early Maroon sites. It appears as if the British did not know about several sites, especially as accessibility to the mountain areas of the island was problematic for their forces.

Place names such as Parade, Gun Hill, Watch Hill, Lookout Point, Kindah, Bathing Place, Pette River Bottom, Gun Barrel and Killdead are sites mentioned in Maroon oral traditions (Agorsah 1990, 1991). Many of the names are English. In Scott's Hall an area (See Fig. 1a) is referred to as "Konkonsa Ceitful". "Ceitful being a shortened form of "deceitful". According to oral tradition all Maroons accused of various crimes especially circulating false information, were tried at that place. "Konkonsa" is also an Akan (Ghana) word for a liar or a deceitful person. The name of that location, clearly appears to refer to a specific activity area for the Scott's Hall Maroons. Accompong is another name that appears to have a name that can be linked to West Africa. Very few of such names exist today among the Maroons and making it difficult to identify specific settlements being referred to at any one time.

The fascination of the Cockpit country is its tropical karst terrain and unique vegetation the Cockpit country which was to be the scene of some of the wars in which the Maroons set an unprecedented example to the world by successfully engaging the seemingly invincible British army to a military stalemate. This is one of main Maroon areas in Jamaica. Archaeological sites in the neighborhood of Accompong (Fig. 1b) include Kindah, interpreted to mean "**We are a family**" located just outside Accompong Town to the north-east which is the venue for the annual anniversary celebrations of the 1739 Peace Treaty which involve several Maroon ritual, Old Accompong Town where are burials of Kojo, the leader who signed the Peace Treaty and other former leaders of the Maroon community, **Big Ground Grass** site which consists of an open area to the east of Kojo's burial ground and has no apparent archaeological features. Another archaeological site is the Peace Cave site located almost on the eastern border of the Accompong Maroon lands. Strategically located closest to the opponent's military camp situat-

ed in the then Aberdeen Plantation to the east, the Peace Cave also often referred to as "Ambush", was used as a hideout. The last battle ground of the British-Maroon wars, before the Peace Treaty of 1739, took place in the valley area referred to as Pette River Bottom situated in front of the cave. Within this area is located what is called Guthries Defile, an important point of access to Maroon lands. The location of the present elementary school at Accompong marks the location of the site referred to as Parade which traditions refer to as an important "Lookout point" of the Maroons. Other sites to the north and west of Accompong include Gun Hill, Trelawny Town, Flagstaff and Vaughnsfield where structural features such as burials and house foundations can be identified.

In eastern Jamaica, in the Blue Mountain area in particular, identified, include Nanny Town, Pumpkin; Hill, Mammee Hill, Watch Hill, Dinner Time, Marshall's Hall, Gun Barrel and Brownsfield. These sites are located in and around Windsor, Seaman's Valley, Ginger House and Comfort Castle area as well as parts of John's Hall district in the parish of Portland. The environment is generally fragmented because of its mountainous nature and the deep gullies of the Rio Grande, Negro and Dry Rivers, which cut through the region. The Blue Mountain region has been particularly suitable as settlements for the Freedom fighting Maroon settlements. Documentary evidence indicates that in 1601 the Spanish government sent troops to flush out some "Arawak" escapees who had taken to the Blue Mountains (Morales 1952, Bryan 1971). This confirms the speculation that some prehistoric groups enslaved by the Spaniards or others who escaped from the Spaniards had built settlements in the Blue Mountains before that time and also supports the view that Maroons were not totally African in origin.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION

Accompong (Fig. 1b)

The Accompong settlement was surveyed and mapped in order to determine the boundaries of the Old Town and to relate it to other sites adjoining it. An excavation was conducted near the burial ground of Kojo. Although not an extensive excavation, the finds were of great significance. Artifacts recovered include local earthenware, a bead (probably imported), a copper bracelet, fragments of green glass bottles, a few musket balls and a cowrie shells identified as West African where it was used as currency in ancient times. No specific period or date has been assigned to the excavated material but many of the artifacts point to late seventeenth/early eighteenth century, although occupation of the area could have been much earlier. Accompong has been known as one of the main areas of the encounter between the Maroons and the British forces (Kopytoff 1973, Eyre 1980).

Nanny Town

The Nanny Town site is strategically located within the loop of the Stony River which marks its southern and eastern boundaries. Blocking off the Stony River and standing steeply against it is the Abraham Hill. To the north and west of the site is Nanny Hill from which Nanny Falls splashes down on to the open level grounds and flows into the southeastern bend of the Stony River marking the boundaries on that side of the settlement.

The main features of the site include stone structures considered to be military fortifications. They are rectangular and until recently only one large and one small one had been reported (Teulon 1967, Bonner 1974, Agorsah 1991, 1992). A large block of stone located near the stone structure is engraved with a message that the settlement was taken and briefly controlled by the British forces. Another stone monument measuring 27cm by 35cm which appears to be more recent has the inscription "BERMUDA REGIMENT 1971".

As indicated above, the Stony and Peters Rivers and their tributaries dominate the drainage

pattern of the site and areas around it while the Abraham Hill to the south and Sugar Loaf to the north and northwest dominate the topography. Rocky and rugged, the Nanny Town site and the surrounding areas are engulfed in a thick luxuriant green vegetation. Until this day the Maroons have very good knowledge of the medicinal and other traditional uses of many of these plants and claim the knowledge of the uses as handed down from their ancestor (Lang 1991). The Nanny Town site continues to be populated by wild hogs as well some of the very few types of known snakes in Jamaica. Hunting and fishing by hunters, who are the only people normally encountered in those remote areas of the Blue Mountain, according to Maroon traditions, were occupations from ancient times.

Excavation

The site was differentiated into areas during the pre-excavation survey as Area 1, Area 2 through 10 (**Fig. 2**) firstly for logistic reasons as well as according to the distribution of artifacts and the general topography of the site and adjoining territories. The period 1991 to 1993 has seen three major excavations which so far appears to have covered approximately 40% of the total site of Nanny Town and was based on a three meter grid, superimposed on the 10 feet grid of the 1973 excavation. Depth to bedrock or sterile layer of the 3 x 3 or 1.5 x 1.5 meter pits and sometimes 1.5 x 6 or 8 meter trenches ranged from 10 to 72 cm and only more than 1 meter in very few, especially in areas to the east and south of the site. Several areas appear to have been disturbed by recent military activities at the site but these were easily identifiable. The stratigraphy, particularly the texture and humus content of the soils vary from area to area depicting differential site utilization which could be related to different periods of time or to the same period but for different activities.

Considering the distribution of artifacts in the pits generally, one thing is clear: local ceramics (earthenware) are more common as one moves away from the west toward the east and southeastward of the site. Four more stone fortifications have been identified, two of which are much the same in size as the only one known so far, and two smaller ones, one at the entrance to the site coming from the west and the other on top of the highest point of the site. One of the newly discovered large stone structures has been excavated and one side which had completely collapsed has been reconstructed. Much of the local earthenware were recovered from this particular stone structure at depths that indicate that it had been built over a previous living floor which obviously would have been the Maroon level dateable by a coin find in that level to approximately 1681. But this speculation must await a complete analysis of the finds. Results of soil chemical analysis and further dates are expected to also confirm the relationships of the levels.

Finds

Artifacts recovered from the site of Nanny Town consist of a wide variety of items such as local earthenware and terracotta figurines, imported ceramics such as Belarmine jar, tin glaze and delftware, glass including wine, alcoholic and medicinal or pharmaceutical bottles, metal implements and fragments of gun barrel and musket balls of various sizes and weight, nails, lead, and such other metal objects as knife, spearhead and door hinges, crockery, red clay and kaolin (white clay) smoking pipe stems and bowls, grinding stones and other stone implements, including fragments of worked and unworked flint, glass and stone beads, and button. Spanish coins, popularly known as "pieces of eight", one of which dates to 1668, defines the latest part of the earliest phase at the Nanny Town site. That date is only thirteen years after British occupation of the site and indicates that some slaves who had escaped from Spanish domination had already set up settlements in the heart of the Blue Mountains. At the location of the second stone structure excavated in 1993, the phase with a mixture of what is speculated to be the Maroon phase and the European material (mainly British military equipment), appears to have been built directly over phase one.

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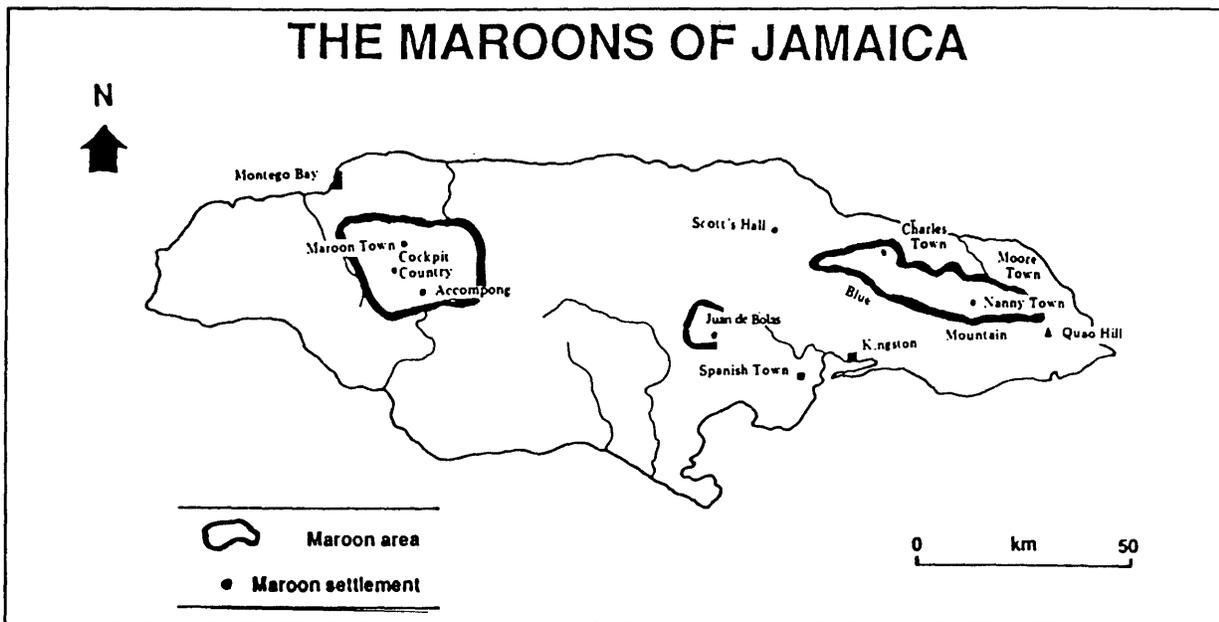


Fig. 1 (a) Location of Maroon settlements in Jamaica

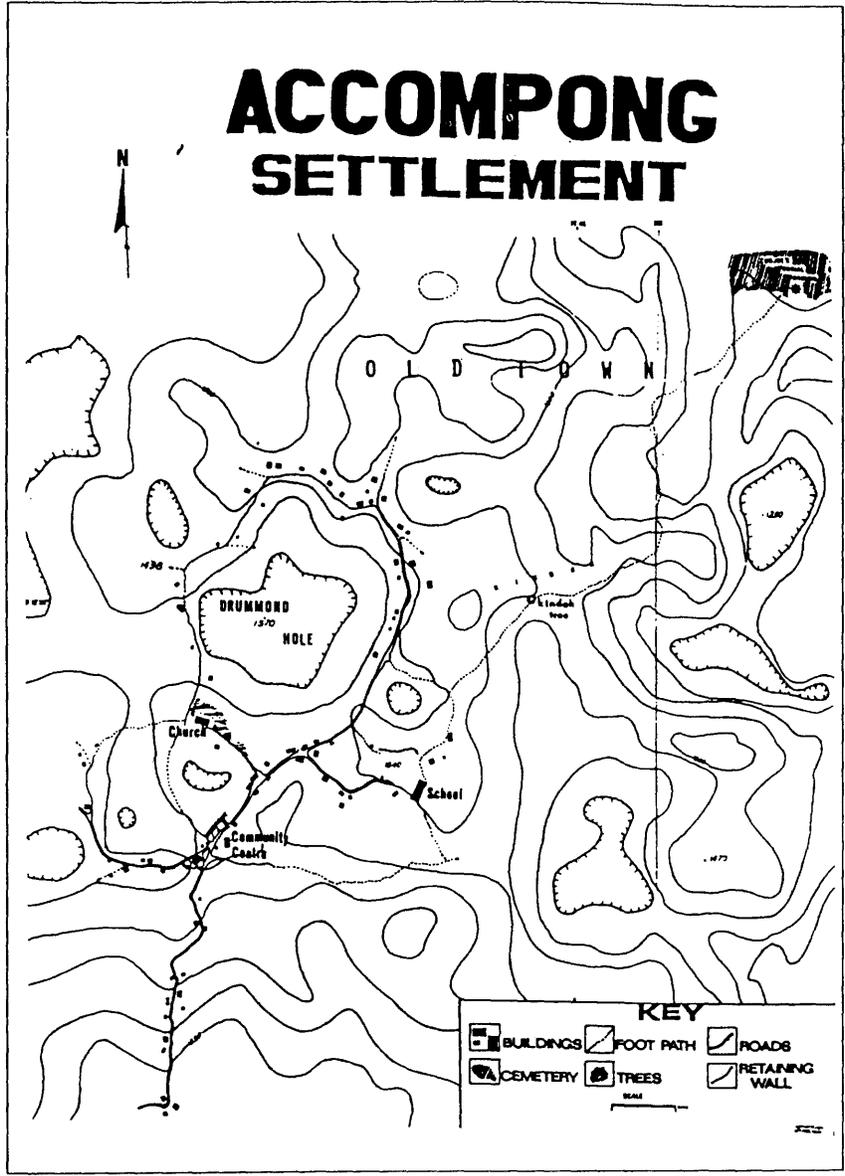


Fig. 1 (b) Accompong settlement

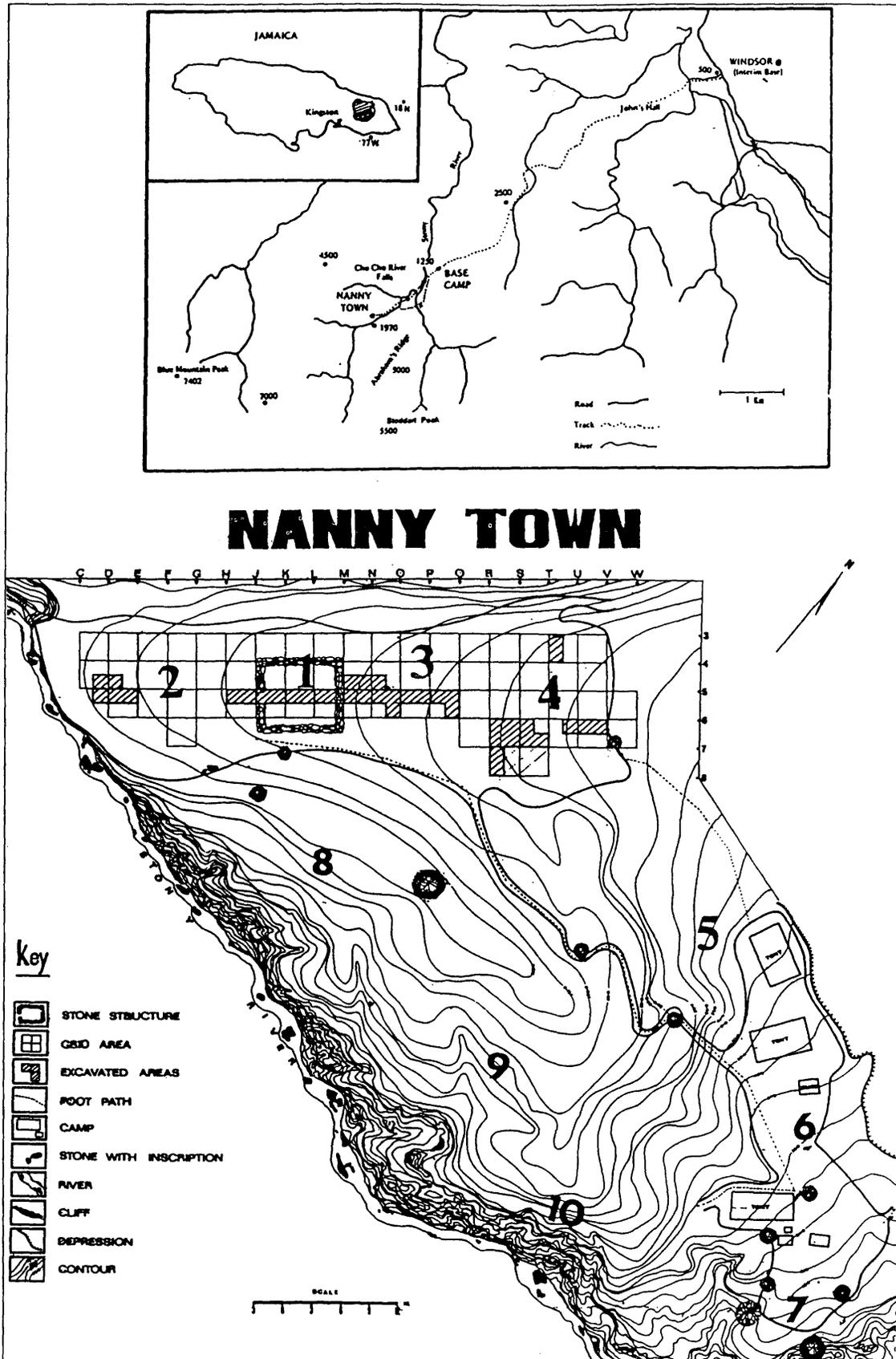


Fig. 2 Nanny Town

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