

# Two Thousand Years in Dendi, Northern Benin

*Archaeology, History and Memory*

*Edited by*

Anne Haour



BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

# Contents

Acknowledgments	XI
List of Figures and Tables	XIII
List of Maps	XVIII

## PART 1

- 1 Introduction 3  
*Anne Haour*
- 2 Crossing Archaeology and Oral Tradition: Approaching Dendi History from Sites of Memory 6  
*Olivier Gosselain and Lucie Smolderen*
- 3 Palaeoenvironmental Data on Dendi, in the Last 3000 Years 20  
*Anne Haour*
- 4 The Archaeology of the Eastern Niger Valley 23  
*Anne Haour and Didier N'Dah*
- 5 An Archaeological and Ethnographic Approach to a Site and Its Region 26  
*Anne Haour, Olivier Gosselain, Alexandre Livingstone Smith, Sam Nixon and Didier N'Dah*

## PART 2

- 6 Landforms, Hydrography, and Vegetation 31  
*Raoul Laibi, Didier N'Dah and Paul Adderley*
- 7 The Archaeological Landscape: Survey and Settlement 41  
*Nadia Khalaf, Anne Haour, Didier N'Dah and Alexandre Livingstone Smith*

## PART 3

- 8 Ethnographic Methods 53  
*Olivier Gosselain, Lucie Smolderen, Victor Brunfaut, Jean-François Pinet and Alexandre Livingstone Smith*
- 9 Architecture and Settlements Today 58  
*Victor Brunfaut and Jean-François Pinet*
- 10 Textile Production in Dendi: An Ethnographic and Historical Study of a Chain of Production 73  
*Lucie Smolderen*

## PART 4

- 11 Excavation Strategies and Methods: Approaching an Archaeological Terra Incognita 85  
*Anne Haour, Didier N'Dah, Carlos Magnavita, Sam Nixon and Alexandre Livingstone Smith*
- 12 The Mound of *Tombo*: Introduction to the Site 92  
*Didier N'Dah, Carlos Magnavita, Sam Nixon, Anne Haour and Alexandre Livingstone Smith*
- 13 The Geophysical Prospection of Birnin Lafiya 96  
*Carlos Magnavita*
- 14 The Pavements at *Tombo* Birnin Lafiya 103  
*Didier N'Dah and Barpougouni Mardjoua*
- 15 Pavements and Other Architectural Features 112  
*Sam Nixon*
- 16 Stratigraphy and Dating: Excavation Units and Associated Dates 132  
*Alexandre Livingstone Smith, Louis Champion, Nicolas Nikis and Anne Haour*
- 17 The Pottery 139  
*Anne Haour, Sam Nixon, Alexandre Livingstone Smith, Nicolas Nikis and David K. Kay*
- 18 Ironworking 174  
*Caroline Robion-Brunner*
- 19 Metal Objects and Slag from Birnin Lafiya 193  
*Anne Filippini*
- 20 Beads and Pendants 199  
*Sonja Magnavita*
- 21 The Cowrie Shells 205  
*Annalisa Christie and Anne Haour*
- 22 Figurines and Terracotta Objects 211  
*Romuald Tchibozo*
- 23 Archaeobotanical Remains 216  
*Louis Champion and Dorian Fuller*
- 24 Wood Charcoal 234  
*Barbara Eichhorn*

25 Animal Remains 240  
*Veerle Linseele and Wim Wouters*

26 Human Skeletal Material 254  
*Ronika K. Power and Anne Haour*

**PART 5**

27 Birnin Lafiya within West African Archaeology 283  
*Anne Haour and Sam Nixon*

28 The Site within West African Political and Craft History 294  
*Olivier Gosselain and Anne Haour*

**PART 6**

*Catalogue of Trench Descriptions*

A Pekinga (PEK) 307  
*Abubakar Sule Sani*

B Toutokayeri (TTO-14-SI, II & III) 316  
*Nicolas Nikis, Alexandre Livingstone Smith and Anne Haour*

C Kompa Dune (KOD) 325  
*Anne Haour and Nadia Khalaf*

D Torouwey (TRO-14-SI) 333  
*Alexandre Livingstone Smith and Olivier Gosselain*

E Kompanti (PTI-14-SI) 336  
*Alexandre Livingstone Smith and Nicolas Nikis*

F Tin Tin Kanza 339  
*Louis Champion, Nadia Khalaf and Anne Haour*

G Boyeri (BOY-14-SI & II) 359  
*Nicolas Nikis, Alexandre Livingstone Smith and Olivier Gosselain*

H Bogo Bogo (GOG-14-SI) 366  
*Nicolas Nikis and Alexandre Livingstone Smith*

I Kwara zeno (KAZ-14-SI & II) 373  
*Pascal Gnankpo Amoussou, Inès Corolin Amoussou, Nicolas Nikis, Olivier Gosselain and Alexandre Livingstone Smith*

J Gorouberi (GOB-13-SII) 379  
*Caroline Robion-Brunner*

- K Gorouberi (GOB-14-SI & II) 390  
*Nicolas Nikis, Alexandre Livingstone Smith, Anne Filippini and Anne Haour*
- L Karimama (KAR-14-SI) 395  
*Alexandre Livingstone Smith and Nicolas Nikis*
- M Kusulabu (KUS-14-SI & SII) 399  
*Alexandre Livingstone Smith, Nicolas Nikis and Barpougouni Mardjoui*
- N Kozungu (KOZ-14-SI) 405  
*Alexandre Livingstone Smith and Nicolas Nikis*
- O Tondo windi (TOW-14-SI) 416  
*Louis Champion and Anne Haour*
- P Bokorobu (BOK) 421  
*Franck N'Po Takpara*
- Q Birnin Lafiya (S1) 427  
*Anne Haour*
- R Birnin Lafiya (S4) 434  
*Anne Haour and Barpougouni Mardjoui*
- S Birnin Lafiya (S5) 450  
*Alexandre Livingstone Smith, Nicolas Nikis, Louis Champion and Anne Haour*
- T Birnin Lafiya (S8) 460  
*Richard Lee*
- U Birnin Lafiya (S9) 467  
*Alexandre Livingstone Smith and Nicolas Nikis*
- V Birnin Lafiya (S3/10) 485  
*Sam Nixon*
- W Birnin Lafiya (S11) 498  
*Richard Lee*
- X Birnin Lafiya (S13) 519  
*Jennifer Wexler and Nestor Labiyi*
- Y Kargui (KGI-14-SI) 526  
*Alexandre Livingstone Smith and Anne Filippini*
- Z Alibori I 532  
*Didier N'Dah*
- AA Alibori Site 2 536  
*Didier N'Dah*

AB	Molla (MOL-14-SI)	541	<i>Inès Corolin Amoussou, Nicolas Nikis, Alexandre Livingstone Smith and Anne Haour</i>
AC	Tomboutou (TOU-14-SI)	546	<i>Pascal Gnankpo Amoussou, Alexandre Livingstone Smith, Nicolas Nikis and Anne Haour</i>
AD	Kantoro (KRO-14)	551	<i>Louis Champion, Anne Haour and Anne Filippini</i>
AE	Garou (GAR-14-SI)	575	<i>Alexandre Livingstone Smith</i>
AF	Guene zeno (ENE-14-SI & II)	579	<i>Alexandre Livingstone Smith</i>
AG	Guene (GUE-14-SI)	582	<i>Alexandre Livingstone Smith</i>
AH	Kouboukourou (ROU-14-SI)	585	<i>Alexandre Livingstone Smith</i>
AI	Madekali (KLI-14-SI & RCI)	590	<i>Alexandre Livingstone Smith, Louis Champion and Nicolas Nikis</i>
	Pottery Plates	601	
	Catalogue of Small Finds	640	
	Radiocarbon Dates	696	
	Gazetteer	710	
	References	755	
	Maps	779	
	Index	786	

## Molla (MOL-14-SI)

*Inès Corolin Amoussou, Nicolas Nikis, Alexandre Livingstone Smith and Anne Haour*

### 1 Location

Molla is a contemporary village on the Niger river, north of Guene. We placed the test pit (SI) in what informants described as the oldest part of the village.

### 2 Geographical Coordinates

LAT: 11,890000 LONG: 3,260000 (WGS84)

### 3 Discovery

The site was identified by Nicolas Nikis, Alexandre Livingstone Smith, Olivier Gosselain and Anne Haour. It was excavated by Carolin Amoussou, on 6 February 2014.

### 4 Destruction Risks

The site is a rubbish dump. It is not under any specific threat and mitigation measures are not urgent.

### 5 Site

The test pit was situated in the oldest part of actual Molla according to oral history.

### 6 Excavation

Molla had never been excavated before. One test pits was excavated. It was 1 × 1 m and excavated by spits of 10 cm (except for the superficial layer which was excavated in one spit of 20 cm). Within each spit, archaeological contexts (i.e. distinct units) were separated, sieved and bagged separately. All the spits were sieved down to 5 mm. The test pit was interrupted at 110 cm into sterile yellow sandy soil.

### 7 Stratigraphy

The stratigraphy of MOL-14-SI displays two major phases of occupation. From the modern surface down to -50 cm, there are several layers which include modern rubbish such as plastic bags. A compact yellow sandy layer (Context 7), with no plastic, would represent an older occupation as well as the thick layer (Context 8) which it overlays.

### 8 Finds

This investigation generated a huge number of small finds. Surface finds include mainly modern plastic and other refuse. Excavated materials include two cowries (SF 2014-07 and 08, at 60–70 cm and 50–60 cm respectively; the latter featured linear incisions on the collumellar and labial sides of the aperture, see Christie & Haour, this volume), a shell bead (SF 2014-64, at 80–90 cm), a modern glass bead (SF 2014-71; S. Magnavita's 'Type 1'), and numerous plastic beads, including one in the shape of a rose (SF 2014-10) and another in the shape of a cowrie (SF 2014-12). A stitched and folded textile (SF 2014-03), very numerous metal fragments including a reworked robar fragment (SF 2014 136-9) and a reworked blue and white painted packaging fragment (SF 2014 136-6), are some of the likely modern materials retrieved. Glass fragments, including a reddish bracelet fragment (SF 2014-34) and a complete clear bottle (SF 2014-32; see Figure AB. 4, left), also figure. Pottery was abundant, with incisions and twisted cord roulette predominating, but painted motifs and *blepharis* also featuring. Three sherds featured what may be a type of untwisted cord roulette. As regards the metal artefacts, 28 items were studied by Anne Filippini but archaeological and contemporary materials are indistinguishable.

### 9 Interpretation and Cultural Attribution

The upper part of the test pit is clearly a witness of the modern occupation of Molla – a trash midden. The lower part may attest to an older occupation. These can



FIGURE AB.1  
Molla west section at completion

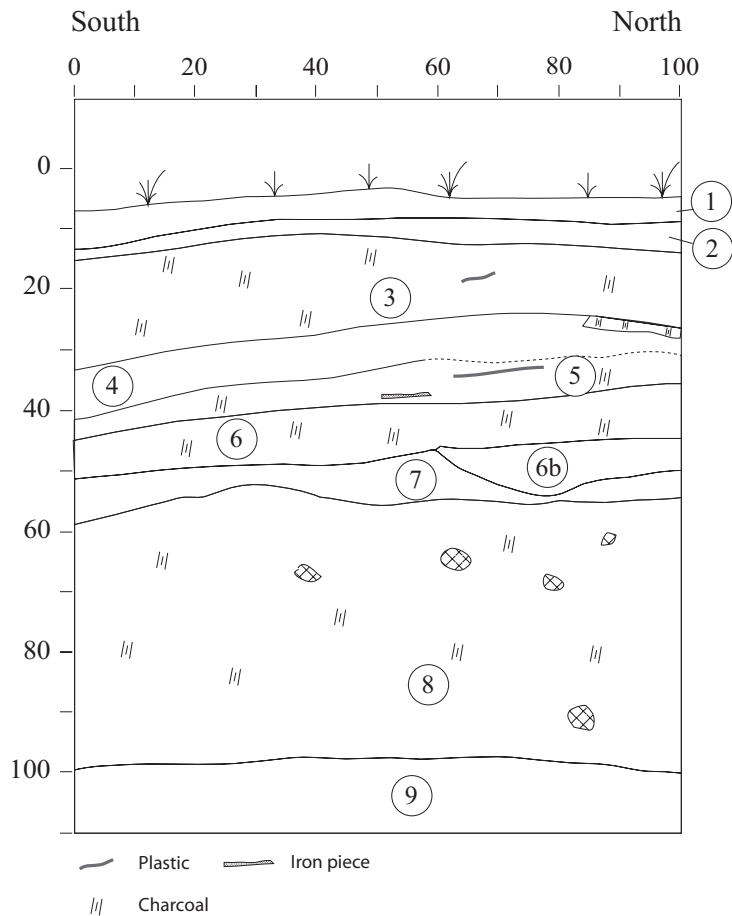


FIGURE AB.2 Molla west section at completion

- 1 Loose dark grey sandy sediment. Top soil
- 2 Loose grey sandy sediment with plastic
- 3 Grey sandy sediment with charcoal and plastic residues
- 4 Loose grey sandy sediment with plastic. A thin layer of darker sandy sediment with charcoal occurred at a top corner of the layer.
- 5 loose silty sediment with charcoal, plastic residues and iron fragments
- 6 Grey sandy sediment with charcoal
- 6b Small pit dug into layer
- 8 Grey sandy sediment
- 7 Yellow compact sandy sediment
- 8 Compact dark grey sandy sediment
- 9 Compact yellow sand (natural substratum)





FIGURE AB.3  
Glass bottles (left: MOL-14-SI, SF 2014-32;  
right: GAR-14-SI, SF 2014-09)

tentatively be attributed to the eighteenth or nineteenth century because of the presence of glass and cowrie shells. The plastic disc at 70–80 cm can be considered intrusive, especially given that there were many plastic beads higher up in the stratigraphy. Alternatively the presence of *blepharitis* and black pottery are background noise in a recent, post-1950 AD midden.

TABLE AB.1 Desampling

Level	Number
0–20	1
20–30	0
30–40	4
40–50	2
50–60	30
60–70	93
70–80	71
80–90	25
90–100	15
100–110	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>

Analysis in the field by Anne Haour and at UEA by David Kay

TABLE AB.2 Category 4

Context	Decorated	Illegible
0–20	4	0
20–30	4	0
30–40	2	0
40–50	7	0
50–60	9	1
60–70	27	0
70–80	63	0
80–90	9	0
90–100	5	0
100–110	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>1</b>

Analysis by David Kay

TABLE AB.3 Category 3

Context	#	Burn	Dec1	Dec2	Dec3	Dec4
0-20	2	int				
	1		mch-4			
	1	ext/int	plain			
	1		rfp-1b			
20-30	1		rc-1a			
30-40	1	ext				
	1		undec	ch-2	ch-2	sp1
	1	ext/int	undec	sl-3 over rc-1a	undec	
40-50	1	ext	rc-1a			
50-60	1		pnt-r l-i			
	1		sl-1			
	1		sl-2			
	2	ext/int				
	1		ch-2	ch-2	blepharis	
	1	int	rc-1b			
	1		sl-1	undec	roul	
	1	ext/int	sl-4 on inside and outside			
	1		rc-1a			
	1		rc-1b			
60-70	1		blepharis			
	1	ext/int	pnt-r c			
	1	int	rc-1a			
	3	ext				
	1	ext/int	sl-1			
	1	ext/int	indis			
	1	ext	cl-1	indis		pnt-r
	2		sl-3			
	2		rc-1a			
	1		sl-1	indis		pnt-r
	1		sl-2			
	2	int	herb			
	2		roul			
70-80	1	ext/int	undec			
	4	ext				
	3	ext/int				
	1		blepharis			
	1		rc-1b			
	1		pnt-r c			
	2	ext	sl-1			
	1	ext/int	rc-1a			
	1		sl-1			
	1		sl-1			
	1	int	rc-1a			
	1	int	rc-1a	sl-1		
	1		sl-1	undec		
	1				sl-2 bracketing sp1-l	undec
	80-90	4	ext/int			
1		ext				
1		int	rc-1a	sl-1		

TABLE AB.3 Category 3 (cont.)

Context	#	Burn	Dec1	Dec2	Dec3	Dec4
	1		rc-1a	pnt-r		
	1	int	rc-1a	pnt-r		
	1	int	rc-1a			
	1		rc-1a			
	1		herb			
90-100	1	int				
	1	ext	blepharis			
100-110	1		rc-1b			
	1	ext/int				
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>					

Analysis by David Kay and Anne Haour

TABLE AB.4 Rims

Context	#	R.Type	Brn	Dec1	L1	Dec2	L2	Dec3	L3	Ang.	Diam	Mx. thick
0-20	1	E38	ext/int									1.1
30-40	1	S4	ext/int									1.5
40-50	1	E4	int							5		0.9
50-60	1	S4	int							4		0.7
	1	T17	ext/int									0.9
	1	E6	int									1.0
	1	E21	ext/int							4		0.9
60-70	1	S1	ext/int							4	13	0.5
	1	S4	ext/int							3		0.5
	1	S1	ext/int							2		0.7
	1	T1	ext/int							4		0.8
	1	T11	ext							2		1.4
	1	E37										0.7
	1	E4	ext/int							4		0.8
	1	E10	ext	sl-1	c-int					5		0.6
	2	E32	ext/int							4		0.7
70-80	1	S1	ext/int	undec	u	sl-1	m	rc-1a	m	2	27	0.6
	1	S1	ext/int							2	18	0.7
	1	S6	ext/int							4		0.5
	1	T13		undec	u	indis	u			2		0.9
	1	T4	ext							2		1.6
	1	E37	ext/int	undec	c	pnt-r	u					1.0
	1	E32	ext/int							4		0.7
	1	E2	ext							5		0.9
	1	E24	int							4		1.0
80-90	1	S1	ext/int							3	20	0.7
	1	T3								4		0.5
	1	E18	ext/int									0.9
	1	E18	ext/int							5		0.8
90-100	1	S6	ext/int							2		0.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>											

Analysis by David Kay