

Two Thousand Years in Dendi, Northern Benin

Archaeology, History and Memory

Edited by

Anne Haour



BRILL

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Gorouberi (GOB-14-SI & II)

Nicolas Nikis, Alexandre Livingstone Smith, Anne Filippini and Anne Haour

1 Location

Gorouberi is a contemporary village on the Niger River just north of Karimama. According to oral history, the foundation of this settlement is ancient (Gosselain pers. comm. 2014). Its predecessor is said to have been Kwara zeno (KAZ). Gorouberi is said to have been surrounded by a *birni*.

2 Geographical Coordinates

LAT: 12,0930629689246 LONG: 3,16706296987831 (WGS84)

3 Discovery

GOB-14-SI and SII was identified and excavated by Nicolas Nikis, Pascal Gnankpo Amoussou, Inès Corolin Amoussou and Alexandre Livingstone Smith on 2 and 3 February 2014.

4 Destruction Risks

The site of GOB-14-SI is a contemporary settlement, while GOB-13-SII is a much older settlement on the northern side of the town (Robion-Brunner, this volume) GOB-14-SI lies in a modern village and is not under any specific threat and mitigation measures are not considered.

5 Excavation

Gorouberi had never been excavated before. We placed the test pit in the location which informants stated lies inside the oldest concession of the village. The test pit 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 140 cm into sterile soil (compact yellow sand).

6 Site

The extent of the site is unknown as it lies under the modern village. The large mound site at the northern side of the town covers most of the first millennium AD and thus seems to represent an early settlement (see discussion of GOB-13-SII).

7 Stratigraphy

The stratigraphy at Gorouberi is varied. s1 displays at least 5 contexts, which appear to be related to 2 or 3 horizons. The first consists of a series of horizontal deposits which can be correlated with the accumulation of sediments in a village – this layering of floors and trash deposits continues down to 45 cm below the surface. This layering of deposits appears to reflect the spatial organisation of this compound backyard. The fact that it is found down to 45 cm can be taken as a reflection of the age of this part of the house. The second horizon may be correlated to the levelling of the area. It overlays a small mound of slag and charcoal indicative of iron being worked or smelted nearby (the deposit is slightly convex). Finally, h 3 may be related to Horizon 2 but its nature is not clear.

8 Finds

Surface finds were very poor, a very worn potsherd decorated with folded strip roulette being the most diagnostic potsherd (but it should not be considered as directly related to the deposits). The striking element in this test pit is the abundance of charcoals and slag, probably related to ironworking activities nearby. A magnetic plate (SF 2014-86), possibly reduced slag, from levels 0–20, would support this hypothesis. Plastic, including a pill blister, occurred at 20–30 (SF 2014-14), and plastic beads occur up to 40 cm. Glass was rare, with just one fragment (SF 2014-10, at 0–20cm). There were two cowrie shells (SF 2014-04 and 05). *Blepharis*-decorated pottery is present at 40–50 cm and pottery decorated with twisted string roulette is also present. There were ceramic pipe bowls at 100–110 (SF 2014-08a) and 110–120 (SF 2014-10a). Metal objects were



FIGURE K.1
Site under excavation

fairly abundant. The site yielded eight metal objects (SF 2014-80-87), of which six are iron, one is modern steel and one is of an unidentified metal. Three objects were discovered in the upper part of the trench: the magnetic plate mentioned above (SF 2014-86); a modern bottle cap (SF 2014-87), and a complete carpentry nail (SF 2014-85). Among the rest of the objects, one chainlet (SF-2014-82) has been classed among hardware, formed of five links with a figure of eight shape. The remainder (two rods, one plaque and one sheet) have been classed as indeterminate.

9 Interpretation and Cultural Attribution

The deposits indicate a medium span occupation. The abundance of charcoal could be indicative of ironworking nearby. The pottery is indicative of post-medieval contexts. The two radiocarbon readings indicate a Phase 5 date.



FIGURE K.2
GOB-14-SI, West section at completion

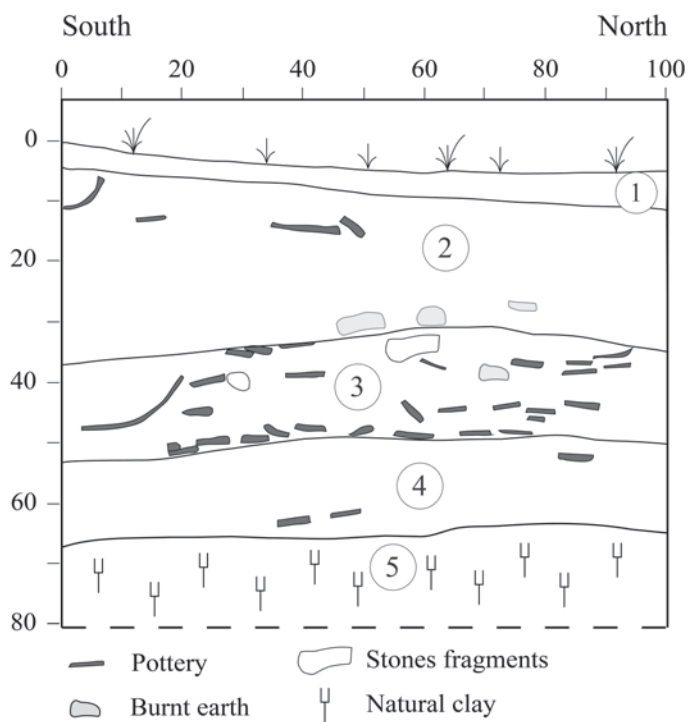


FIGURE K.3
GOB-14-SI, West section
1 Grey sandy topsoil
2 Yellow brown compact sandy clay with burnt earth fragments and pottery
3 Dark brown sandy clay with gravel, burnt earth fragments, animal bones, stones fragments and abundant pottery
4 Yellow brown compact sandy clay with pottery
5 Yellow compact sandy clay (natural substratum)

10 Radiocarbon Dates

Beta-402969	170	30	GOB 14 SI, 60-70	Phase 5
Beta-402970	100	30	GOB 14 SI, Context 3, 80-90	Phase 5

TABLE K.1 Desampling

Context	Number
0-20	197
20-30	16
30-40	46
40-50	34
50-60	48
60-70	29
Con. 2 70-80	69
Con. 3 80-90	21
Con. 3 90-100	18
Con. 3 100-110	14
Con. 3 110-120	10
Total	501

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

TABLE K.2 Category 4

Context	Undecorated	Illegible
0-20	1	
20-30	1	
30-40	4	
40-50	7	
50-60	14	
60-70	15	
Con. 2 70-80	27	
Con. 3 80-90	9	
Con. 3 90-100	8	
Con. 3 100-110	3	
Con. 3 110-120	1	
Total	90	0

Analysis by David Kay

TABLE K.3 Category 3

Context	#	Burn	Dec1	Dec2	Dec3	Dec 4	Dec 5
30-40	1	ext/int	undec	pnt-r			
	1	ext/int					
	1	ext					
	1		pnt-bl-b	pnt-r-b	pnt-bl-b	pnt-r-b	
	1	ext	pnt-bl?				
40-50	1	ext	indis				
	2	ext/int					
	2	int					
	1		blepharis				
	1	int	sl-2	sl-1			
	1		undec	pnt-r-c			
	1	ext					
50-60	1	ext	is-geo 26				
	4	ext					
	1	ext/int					
60-70	1		rc-1a				
	1	int					
	3	ext					
	1	ext/int					
	1	ext/int	indis				
	1	int	undec	pnt-r-b	pnt-bl-b		
	1	int	undec	rc-1a	pnt-rc		
	1	ext/int	undec	sl-1	pnt-r		
	1		sp3-v				
	2		undec	pnt-r-b			
	Con. 2 70-80	2	ext				
2		ext/int					
1			undec	sl-2			

TABLE K.3 Category 3 (cont.)

Context	#	Burn	Dec1	Dec2	Dec3	Dec 4	Dec 5
	1	ext	undec	sc-4			
	1		undec	pnt-r-b			
	1		rfp-4				
	1		rc-1a				
	1		blepharis				
	1		indis	rfp-1a			
	1	ext/int	undec	pnt-r			
	2		sl-2				
Con. 3 80-90	1	ext					
	1	ext/int	sp1	sl-1	roul	pnt-r	sp1-l
	1		rfp-1a	indis	smth		
	3	ext					
Con. 3 90-100	1	ext	undec	sl-1	rc-1a		
	2	ext					
Con. 3 100-110	1	ext					
Con. 3 110-120	1	ext/int					
Total	58						

Analysis by David Kay

TABLE K.4 Rims

Context	#	R.Type	Brn	Dec1	L1	Dec2	L2	Dec3	L3	Motif 4	L4	Ang.	Diam.	Mx. thick
30-40	1	S1	ext/int									2		0.7
	1	E20	ext/int									4		0.7
40-50	1	S1	ext/int	sp4-l	L									0.7
	1	E19	ext/int									4		0.8
50-60	1	S1										3		0.7
	1	S1	ext/int	undec	U	rg	U					4		0.7
	1	S4	ext/int									4		0.8
	1	E18	ext/int	undec	C	roul	U	pnt-r	U	undec	U	4		0.8
60-70	1	S1												0.8
	1	E32	ext									4		0.8
Con.2 70-80	1	S1	ext	undec	U	roul	U	sl-1	U			3	20	0.6
	1	E1	ext/int									5		0.6
	1	E21	int									5		0.8
	1	E4												0.8
	1	E4												0.6
	1	S2												0.7
Con. 3 80-90	1	S1										3	15	0.7
	1	E23										5		0.5
	1	E30												0.9
Con. 3 90-100	1	S1	ext/int											0.8
Con. 3 100-110	1	S4	int									4		0.6
Con. 3 110-120	1	E9	ext/int									5		0.8
Total	22													

Analysis by David Kay