

# Two Thousand Years in Dendi, Northern Benin

*Archaeology, History and Memory*

*Edited by*

Anne Haour



BRILL

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## Bogo Bogo (GOG-14-SI)

*Nicolas Nikis and Alexandre Livingstone Smith*

### 1 Location

Bogo Bogo is a modern village situated away from the Niger River on a plateau northwest of Gorouberi. Its position is interesting as it is in the middle of a dry plateau, but the core of the village is slightly elevated. According to oral history, the foundation of this settlement is lost in time, at the very least preceding the foundation of Boyeri, whose inhabitants had asked the chief of Bogo Bogo for permission to settle their land.

### 2 Geographical Coordinates

LAT: 12,1029479987919 LONG: 3,10428704135119 (WGS84)

### 3 Discovery

GOG-14-SI was identified and excavated by Nicolas Nikis and Alexandre Livingstone Smith on 30 January 2014.

### 4 Destruction Risks

The site is a village and the locus of excavation is a trash midden. It is not under any specific threat and mitigation measures are not urgent.

### 5 Site

The initial survey yielded a few potsherds and a great deal of modern trash scattered on a large mound of ashy material (plastic, glass, human and animal faeces, etc.). The extent of the site is unknown. Modern houses appear to be built on it.

### 6 Excavation

Bogo Bogo had never been excavated before. A single test pit was dug in a trash midden located just on the side of the oldest concession of the village (between the house and the reported position of the former *birni*). The test pit

was 1 × 1 m in size and was 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 (except towards the bottom where Contexts 5, 6 and 7 were missed due to the restricted size of the trench and poor light). All spits were sieved down to 5 mm. The trench was interrupted at 190 cm, 5 cm into the sterile soil, a compact yellow sand.

### 7 Stratigraphy

The stratigraphy in this trench extends down to 190 cm. It can be divided in three main horizons. The first, from 0 to 40 cm, consists of a series of modern trash accumulation, mainly ash mixed with objects such as plastic beads and discs, glass fragments, cloth, and bones (Contexts 1, 2 and 3). This horizon contains little pottery. The second horizon (Context 4), extending from 40 to 100 cm, also consists of a layering of trash, but with a different set of artefacts. While a handful of plastic beads were recovered, and glass fragments occurred, pottery became the dominant artefact. Slag fragments and one cowrie shell (SF 2014-06a, possibly part-ground, see Christie & Haour, this volume) were retrieved. At least seven fragments of glass bracelets were recovered, distributed between 0 and 90 cm (SF 2014-11, -17, -18, -19, -20, -38 and 39 (see Catalogue for TOU, Figure AC.2, for images of four of these).

The first two horizons overlie two final contexts, which are probably two refuse pits. Context 5 (pit 1) is covered by Context 4 and sealed by a deposit of burnt earth. Context 5 is dug into another, completely refilled, trash pit labelled Context 6 (pit 2), which in turn is dug into the natural soil. This means that Context 6 had to be filled completely before Context 5 was dug into it, indicating that a significant stretch of time separated these events.

It is interesting to note that the layering of Contexts 1 to 4, which can be associated with today's surrounding spatial organisation, extends from 0 to 100 cm. The two previous horizons may indicate a slightly different spatial organisation (pre-*birni*?).

Combining the various elements, we can divide the stratigraphy as follows. From Context 1 to 3: sub-present layers. Context 4: contemporary (or "post *birni*"). Contexts 5



FIGURE H.1  
Site under excavation



FIGURE H.2  
GOG-14-S1, West section at  
completion



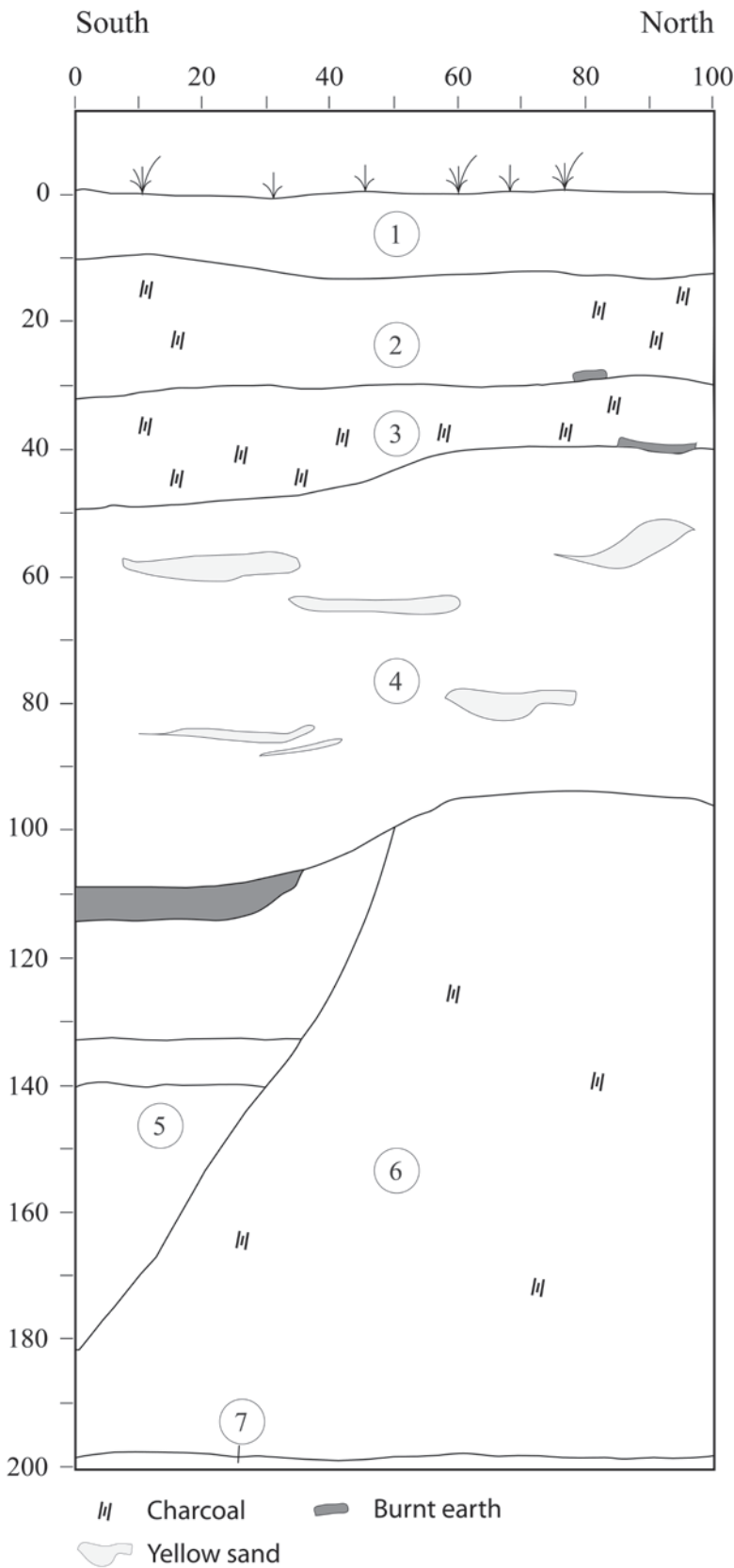


FIGURE H.3  
 GOG-14-SI, West section

- 1 Loose grey ash layer with cloth, plastic, glass, pottery, charcoal (top layer of trash midden)
- 2 Loose grey brown ashy sand with pottery and burnt earth fragments
- 3 Organic rich (glossy black) clayey sand with very abundant charcoal
- 4 Loose heterogeneous brown to yellow sand
- 5 Pit 1, filled with organic rich (glossy black) clayey sand with abundant charcoal. This unit is interrupted in the middle of the filling by a layer of yellow to red clayey sand and topped by a layer of burnt earth. Unit 5 cuts unit 6
- 6 Pit 2, filled with heterogeneous dark to yellow sand with abundant charcoal
- 7 Compact brown to yellow sand (natural substratum)

and 6: modern to contemporary (or post-medieval to “pre-*birni*”).

Unfortunately, Contexts 5 and 6 were not distinguished during excavation. However, they were subsequently sampled for archaeobotanical data, directly from the profile. These yielded abundant vegetal remains – this was particularly true of Context 5 – which were dominated by *Pennisetum* but also featured nut fragments (Champion & Fuller, this volume).

## 8 Finds

The second horizon yielded pottery decorated with twisted cord roulette as well as sherds with red paint designs. The pits at the bottom yielded *blepharis* and twisted cord roulette decorated pottery. Glass was frequent and occurred down to 130–140 cm (SF 2014-65, a clear iridescent fragment).

Seven metal objects from the site of Bogo Bogo were studied (see Filippini, Figure 19.1 for some of these). It seems that the objects discovered in the upper 50 cm of the trench correspond to modern occupation, or at any rate to disturbed layers, the context of which is difficult to determine. These objects include a coin made from an unidentified metal (SF 2014-03) and seemingly used as a pendant, a steel cylinder, the function of which remains unclear (SF 2014-04); a brass eyelet (SF 2014-02), and a small decorated disc resembling an item of adornment (SF 2014-01), also made from an unidentified metal. An iron rod is also included in this collection. Only two iron objects seem to belong to the archaeological context. These are a plaque in several fragments and a small rod, possibly a nail shank (SF 2014-05 and SF 2014-06, the latter comprising two fragments).

## 9 Interpretation and Cultural Attribution

The thickness of the deposits indicates a long occupation (more than one or two generations).

Oral testimonies, supported by the presence of new types of pottery, may indicate a post-thirteenth century occupation. The upper horizon is clearly modern (plastic & glass), the middle horizon could be nineteenth to early twentieth century (glass, painted pottery, cowrie), while the lower horizons are characterised by the presence of *blepharis* roulette decorated pottery. Here pre-contemporary deposits could possibly be divided into two. The radiocarbon dates fail to capture the earlier occupations at the site.

## 10 Radiocarbon Dates

OxA-X-2605-39	183	38	GOG 14 S1, context 5	Phase 5
OxA-31581	136	25	GOG 14 S1, 70–80	Phase 5
OxA-31582	129	25	GOG 14 S1, context 6	Phase 5

TABLE H.1 Desampling

Level	Number
0–20	11
20–30	9
30–40	25
40–50	47
50–60	26
60–70	54
70–80	64
80–90	33
90–100	33
100–110	31
110–120	21
120–130	31
130–140	29
140–150	25
150–160	15
160–170	14
170–180	7
180–190	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>475</b>

Analysis in the field by Anne Haour and Jennifer Wexler and at UEA by Sam Nixon

TABLE H.2 Category 4

Level	Undecorated	Illegible
0–20	1	1
20–30	1	0
30–40	5	0
40–50	17	2
50–60	2	0
60–70	0	0
70–80	12	1
80–90	7	0
90–100	12	0
100–110	6	0
110–120	4	0
120–130	14	1

TABLE H.2 Category 4 (cont.)

Level	Undecorated	Illegible
130-140	5	0
140-150	11	0
150-160	3	0
160-170	4	0
170-180	0	0
180-190	2	0
<b>Total (108)</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>5</b>

Analysis by Sam Nixon

TABLE H.3 Category 3

Context	#	Burn	Dec1	Dec2	Dec3	Dec4	Dec 5	Dec 6
0-20	2	ext						
	1	int	plain	sl-1	roul			
	1	int	rc-1a					
	1	int	roul					
	1	int	plain	sl-1	rc-1a	sl-1	plain	
	1		plain	ch-1	roul			
20-30	1	ext/int	plain	sl-1	roul	sl-1		
30-40	2	ext						
	1	ext						
40-50	1	int						
	1		rc-1b					
	1	ext	roul					
	1		pnt-r-l-1	n/a				
50-60	9	ext						
	1	int						
	1	ext/int						
60-70	1		indis					
	4	ext						
70-80	1		pnt-r-c					
	1		pnt-r					
	2	ext						
70-80	1	ext/int						
	1	int	rc-1b					
	6	ext						
	1	ext	sl-1					
	1		pnt-bl-c					
	1		pnt-r-c					
	2		pnt-r					
	1		pnt-r-l-1					
	2	int						
	1	int	sl-5	rc-1b				
1	ext	pnt-r-c	pnt-bl-b					
1	ext	pnt-r-c	pnt-bl-b	pnt-r-c				

TABLE H.3 Category 3 (cont.)

Context	#	Burn	Dec1	Dec2	Dec3	Dec4	Dec 5	Dec 6
80-90	1		rc-1b					
	1		pnt-r-l-1	n/a				
	1		pnt-r-l-1					
	2	ext						
	1		pnt-r-c					
	1		pnt-r					
	1		pnt-r-b	pnt-r-l-3	pnt-or-b	pnt-bl-c	pnt-or-l-3	pnt-bl-l-3
90-100	1		plain	roul				
	1	ext/int	plain	rc-1a				
	1	int	blepharis					
	1	int						
	1		pnt-r-c					
	1	ext	plain	blepharis				
	1		pnt-r		ext			
100-110	3	ext						
	1	int						
	1	ext/int						
	1		pnt-r-l-1					
	1	ext	pnt-r-l	plain	pnt-bl-l	pnt-r-c		
110-120	1	ext	pnt-r-l	sl-3	rc-1a	pnt-r-b	sl-3	rc-1a
	1	int	pnt-bl-l-1	ext	pnt-r-l-1	ext		
	1		plain	blepharis				
	2	ext/int						
	1	ext						
	1		pnt-r-c					
	1		pnt-r					
120-130	4	ext						
	1	int						
	1		rc-1a					
	1	ext/int	sl-6	rc-1b	plain			
130-140	2	ext/int						
	1		pnt-r-l-1	ext				
	2	ext						
	1		rc-3					
	2	ext/int						
140-150	1	int	plain	rc-1a				
	2	ext/int						
	2	ext						
150-160	2	ext						
	1		pnt-r-c					
160-170	2	ext						
	2		blepharis					
<b>Total</b>	<b>111</b>							

Analysis by Sam Nixon and Anne Haour

TABLE H.4 Rims

Context	#	R. Type	Brn	Dec1	L1	Dec2	L2	Dec3.	L3	Ang	Diam	Mx. thick
0-20	1	E4	ext									0.9
20-30	1	S1										1.1
30-40	1	S1	ext							2	28	1.3
40-50	1	S1	ext/int									0.9
	1	E32	ext/int							4	16	0.9
	1	S6	ext/int									1.0
60-70	1	E										
	1	E4	ext									0.9
	1	E38	ext/int									0.7
70-80	2	E	ext									
	1	E	int	pnt-br-c	n/a							
	2	E	int									
	1	Rim	Y									
	1	Rim										
	1	E	ext/int									
	1	E	int									
	1	E37								5	20	0.8
	1	S1	ext									0.7
	1	E1										0.8
80-90	1	Rim	ext/int									
	1	E										
	1	S6										0.8
90-100	1	E1	ext/int							4		0.6
	1	E	int									
	1	E1		pnt-bl-l-1	lip	pnt-r-l-1	c int	pnt-r	upp body			0.6
	1	S6		pnt-bl-c	lip							0.7
	1	E35	ext/int									1.4
100-110	1	E	ext									
	1	E		pnt-r	lip							
	1	E1		pnt-bl-l-1	lip	pnt-r-l-1	C ext	pnt-r-c	C int	4	14	0.5
110-120	1	S4	int							4		1.2
	1	E11	ext/int									0.9
	1	E37	ext/int									0.5
130-140	1	S2	ext/int									1.0
	1	E6	ext/int									0.7
	1	E9	ext	rc-1a	u	sl-1	u	sl-1	n			0.45
140-150	1	E4								4		0.6
	1	S6		pnt-w	u							0.4
150-160	1	S1										0.8
	1	S1										0.6
160-170	1	E4								4		0.55
80-90	1	S1										0.65
	1	E10								4		0.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>											

Analysis by Sam Nixon and David Kay

E indicates a portion of the lip of a rim which is clearly everted but is not sufficiently complete to be classified within the typology.