

Two Thousand Years in Dendi, Northern Benin

Archaeology, History and Memory

Edited by

Anne Haour



BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

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Birnin Lafiya (S₅)

Alexandre Livingstone Smith, Nicolas Nikis, Louis Champion and Anne Haour

1 Location

This test pit is located on the northern end of the large settlement mound of Birnin Lafiya. The locus was called by our informants “La poubelle du Roi”, the king’s rubbish heap.

2 Discovery

The site was identified by Didier N’Dah in 2001 and surveyed by Didier N’Dah, Anne Haour and Alexandre Livingstone Smith in 2011. The excavation of S₅ was carried out in 2012. The area was surveyed sporadically over the years, as it lies in the main Birnin Lafiya site.

3 Destruction Risks

The site is ploughed and this area is eroding. Villagers collect potsherds nearby and herders regularly pass on its summit. This part of the site of Birnin Lafiya is disappearing fast.

4 Site

Roughly oriented south-north, this unit is essentially a huge heap of ash held in place by a hardened floor. Remnants of a pavement were visible some 30 m south of S₅ and superimposed hardened layers indicate that activities, besides trash disposal, may have taken place within the unit. Many surface finds were made in the vicinity including items such as finely incised fragments of a small bowl with internal folded strip roulette decoration, beads and a miniature pot.

5 Excavation

The test pit was excavated on top of this ash midden. It was 1 × 1 m in size and excavated in spits of 10 cm. Within each spit, archaeological contexts (i.e. distinct contexts)

were separated, sieved and bagged separately. All spits were sieved down to 5 mm.

6 Stratigraphy

The stratigraphy displays a superimposition of ash with abundant finds. The deposition process must have been interrupted at least twice, as two layers of compacted burnt earth are visible in the stratigraphy. The two radiocarbon dates obtained show the overall process of accumulation must have been rather short compared to the history of the settlement mound.

7 Finds

This locus displayed excellent conditions of preservation. Besides the usual pottery finds, decorated with incision and folded strip roulette impression, organic remains were abundant. Hardened areas, which may represent floors, were observed on the surface and during the excavation. A horse mandible (*Equus caballus*) was found at 50–60 cm, the only definite occurrence within the entire site (Linseele & Wouters, this volume).

8 Interpretation and Cultural Attribution

Oral testimonies report this place to be “La poubelle du Roi”. This locus was clearly a trash disposal area. The two radiocarbon dates obtained give a thirteenth century AD date, showing that this structure was created towards the end of the occupation of the mound.

9 Radiocarbon Dates

320521	900	30	BLAF-12-S5, 60–70 cm. Pooled fragments of charcoal	Phase 4
320522	920	30	BLAF-12-S5, 110–120 cm. Pooled fragments of charcoal	Phase 4



FIGURE S.1 Location of Birnin Lafiya Trench 5 2012



FIGURE S.2 Aerial view of Trench 5. The darker, ashy, elevated spit on which it is situated stands out in clear contrast to the surrounding brown soil and the fields in the distance.



FIGURE S.3 South section at completion

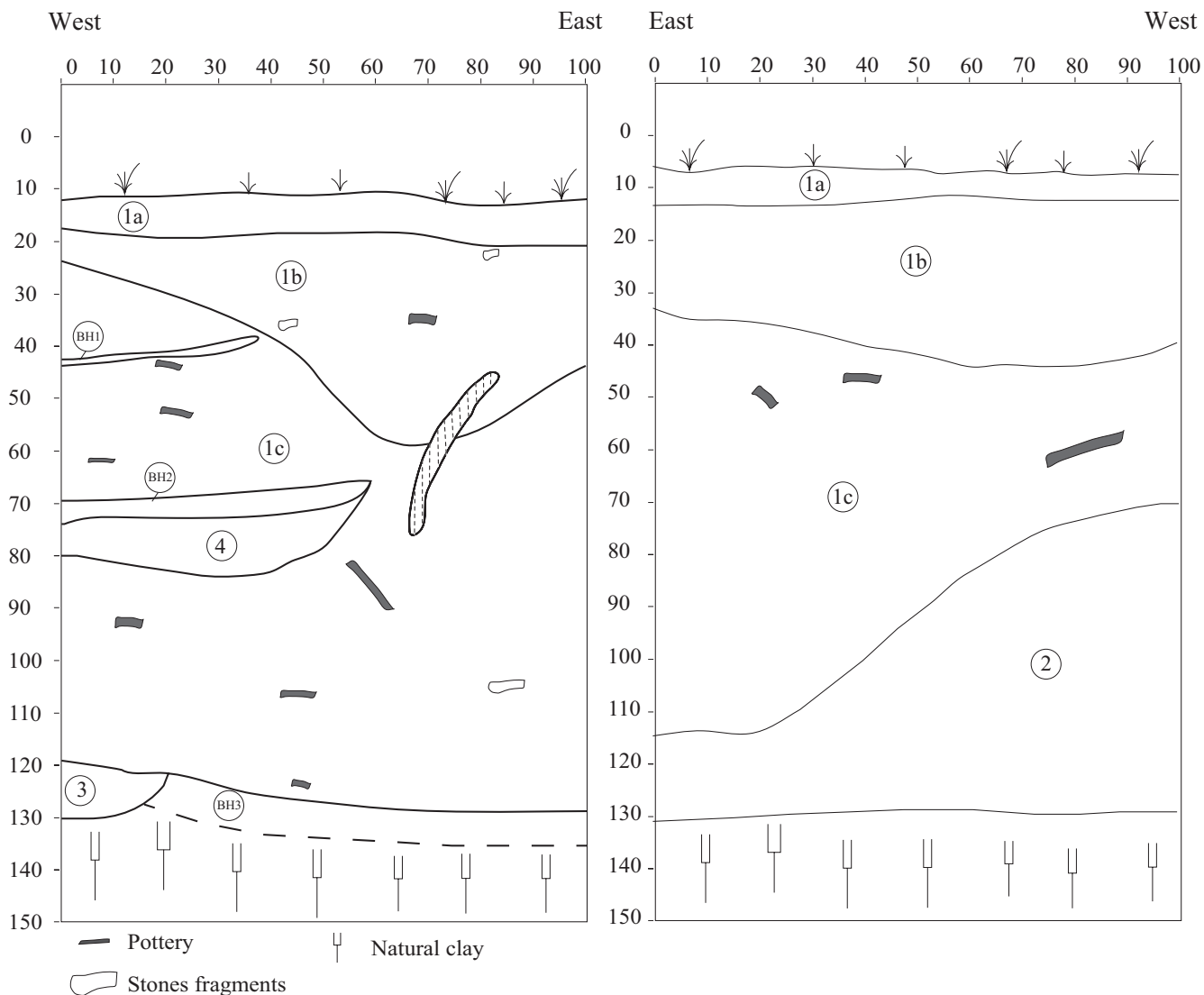


FIGURE S.4 Birnin Lafiya Trench 5, North and South sections at completion

- 1a Compact grey ash layer with pottery and charcoal
- 1b Pulverulent grey ash layer with pottery and charcoal
- 1c Pulverulent grey ash layer, compacted below burnt earth with pottery and charcoal
- 2 Very compact yellow clay with red nodules
- 3 Yellow clay
- 4 Compacted grey ash below earth
- BH1-2-3 Very compact burnt earth and grey ash

Desampling data not recorded.

TABLE S.1 Category 4

Level	Undecorated	Illegible
0-10	2	7
10-20	1	4
20-30	2	10
30-40	10	10
40-50	10	7
50-60	3	2
60-70	7	6
70-80	1	2
80-90	3	7
90-100	5	5
100-110	2	3
110-120	4	8
Total	50	71

Analysis by Sam Nixon

TABLE S.2 Category 3

Context	Num.	Brn	Dec1	Dec2	Dec3	Dec4	Dec5	
0-10	1	ext	undec					
	1	ext/int	undec					
	1	int	undec	ext. indis				
	1		rce-8	sl-2	indis			
	1		rfp-4					
	1		rfp-1b					
	1		rfp-1b	undec	pnt-rp	pnt-rb		
	1		perf	rfp-1b				
	1	int	perf	roul				
	1		perf	undec				
	10-20	2	ext	undec				
		3	ext/int	undec				
		8		rfp-4				
5			roul					
1			rfp-1b	undec				
7			rfp-1b					
1			rfp-1a					
1		ext/int	is-geo 10	undec				
1		ext/int	sl-2	undec				
1			sc-5					
1			perf	undec				
20-30	1	ext	rfp-1c (int)					
	3	ext/int	undec					
	2	ext						
	2	int	undec					

TABLE S.2 Category 3 (cont.)

Context	Num.	Brn	Dec1	Dec2	Dec3	Dec4	Dec5
	2	ext	undec				
	1		rce-8				
	1		rc-1a				
	1		roul	undec	sl-1		
	3		roul				
	1		rfp-4	undec			
	6		rfp-4				
	1	ext	rfp-1b	undec			
	6		rfp-1b				
	1	int	rfp-1a				
	1	int	perf	rfp-5			
	1	ext	undec	sl-2	sh-14		
30-40	1	ext	rfp-1b (int)				
	5	ext/int	undec				
	1	int	undec				
	5		roul				
	1		roul	undec			
	5		rfp-1b				
	2		rfp-1b	undec			
	11		rfp-4				
	1	int	rfp-1b				
	1	int	rfp-1a				
	1		perf	undec			
	1	int	rc-1a				
40-50	3	int	undec				
	14	ext/int	undec				
	1	int	rc-1b				
	1		rc-1b				
	9		roul				
	1		rfp-4	undec			
	10		rfp-4				
	5		rfp-1b				
	1		rfp-1b	sl-2			
	1		rfp-1b	undec			
	1		rc-5				
	2	ext/int					
	2		perf				
50-60	1	ext	is-geo 10	undec			
	1		rc-1b				
	4		rfp-1b				
	1		rfp-1b	undec			
	1		rfp-4	undec			
	4		rfp-4				
	4		roul				
	1	ext	rfp-1b (int)				
	2	ext	undec				
	1	int	undec				

TABLE S.2 Category 3 (cont.)

Context	Num.	Brn	Dec1	Dec2	Dec3	Dec4	Dec5
60–70	3	ext/int	undec				
	2		rfp				
	1	ext/int	undec	is-geo 10	undec		
	1	ext	undec	is-geo 3	undec		
	3		rfp-1b				
	1		rfp-1b	undec			
	7		rfp-4				
	2		roul				
	1	int	undec				
	1	ext	undec				
	9	ext/int	undec				
	2	int	perf				
	2		perf				
70–80	1	ext/int	undec	sh-8	sh-12		
	1	int	undec				
	4	ext/int	undec				
	1		sc-3				
	3		rfp-1b				
	2		rfp-4				
	1		roul				
	1	int					
	1	ext	is-geo 27				
	4	ext/int	undec				
	1	ext	undec				
	1	ext/int	indis	sl-1			
	4		rfp-1b				
4		rfp-4					
5		roul					
1		sl-6					
2		rfp					
2	ext/int						
90–100	1		undec	sl-1	sl-10	sh-21	rfp-1b (int)
	1		undec	rc-3	rfp-1b		
	3	ext	undec				
	1	int	undec				
	2	ext/int	undec				
	4		rfp-1b				
	1	ext/int	rfp-1b	undec			
	1		rfp-1b	sc-1			
	5		rfp-4				
	1	ext	perf				
	9		roul				
	1		undec	rfp-1c	smth	rfp-1c	
	1	int	undec				
100–110	4	ext/int	undec				
	1		rfp-1b				
	1		rfp-1b	pnt-r-b			

TABLE S.2 Category 3 (cont.)

Context	Num.	Brn	Dec1	Dec2	Dec3	Dec4	Dec5
	3		rfp-4				
	1		rfp-4	undec			
	5		roul				
110-120	1	ext	undec	sc-4	sh-23	sl-5	sh-20
	6	int	undec				
	2	int	indis				
	3	ext/int	undec				
	2	ext	undec				
	1		rc-1b				
	2		rfp-1b				
	11		rfp-4				
	6		roul				
	2		comb				
Total	336						

Analysis by David Kay

TABLE S.3 Rims

Context	#	R. Type	Brn	Dec1	L1	Dec2	L2	Ang.	Diam	Mx. thick
0-10	1	E35		rfp-1b	c			4		1.6
	1	S4								1.1
	1	S4	ext/int					5		1.1
	1	S6	ext/int					4		0.8
	1	S4	ext/int					3	12	0.5
	1	T6	ext/int					3		0.6
	1	E46						4		1.1
	1	S1	ext/int					4		0.7
	1	S1	ext/int					3	14	0.6
	1	S4								1.1
	1	S4						4		0.9
20-30	1	E32						4	30	1.0
	1	E45						4	22	1.6
	1	S4	int					4	20	0.8
	1	E9	ext/int	peigEL-12+	u			2		0.4
	1	S4	ext/int					3		0.6
	1	S4								0.9
	1	S6						4		0.8
	1	S3	int							0.9
	1	E11	ext	sl-1	?					0.6
30-40	1	S6	ext/int					5		1.0
	1	S1	int					4		0.8
	1	S6	ext/int					5		1.0
	1	E38	ext/int					4	18	1.0
	1	S4								1.2
	1	S4						4		0.8

TABLE S.3 Rims (cont.)

Context	#	R. Type	Brn	Dec1	L1	Dec2	L2	Ang.	Diam	Mx. thick	
40-50	1	S4	ext			is-geo 14	u	3		0.7	
	1	E47	ext/int					5	26	1.2	
	1	E38	ext					4	26	1.0	
	1	E38	int					4		1.0	
	1	E5		ch	l					0.8	
	1	S4	ext/int					4		1.0	
	1	E11	ext/int					4		1.0	
	1	S4						4		1.0	
	1	E4	ext/int							0.6	
	1	S1								0.7	
50-60	1	S4	ext					4		1.0	
	1	S6	ext/Int	is-geo 10	u					0.7	
	1	T20								0.7	
	1	S1		rfp-1a	u					0.8	
	1	S4	ext/int	is-geo 10	u					0.6	
	1	S4	ext	is-geo 10	u			3	14	0.6	
	1	S4						4		0.8	
	1	S1	ext/int					3		0.6	
	1	E38	ext/int					4		0.9	
	1	S4	ext/int							0.8	
60-70	1	S1	int							0.8	
	1	S4								1.1	
	1	S6								0.8	
	1	S3		rc1-b	u					1.1	
	70-80	1	T6								
		1	S4	ext/int							1.2
		1	S4	int							1.1
		1	S4						4		0.8
		1	S1	ext/int	is-geo 10	u	rfp-1b	u int			0.4
		1	T6	int	is-geo 16	u					0.6
1		E14	ext/int							0.8	
1		E9	ext/int	plain	u	rfp-1b	u	3	10	0.6	
1		S4		is-geo 10	u	smooth	u+m			0.6	
1		S1	ext/int	is-geo 10	u			3	10	0.4	
80-90	1	S1	ext					4		0.8	
	1	S1		smooth	u	roul	u	4		1.0	
	1	S1	ext/int					5	14	0.6	
	1	T10								0.9	
	1	E11	ext/int							1.0	
	1	S3								0.7	
	1	E11	ext/int					3		0.6	
	1	T11								1.0	
	1	S4	ext/int					5		1.0	
	1	E9		sl-1	u	roul	u	4		0.7	
100-110	1	S4								1.0	
	1	E38	ext/int					4	20	1.2	
	1	E46		smooth	u	rfp-1b	u	4		0.9	

TABLE S.3 Rims (*cont.*)

Context	#	R. Type	Brn	Dec1	L1	Dec2	L2	Ang.	Diam	Mx. thick
110-120	1	E4	ext/int	roul	u	sl-2	u			0.7
	1	S1						4		1.1
	1	S6								1.1
	1	S1						3		0.7
	1	S4	ext/int							0.7
	1	S4						3	12	0.4
	1	S1	ext/int					4		0.8
	1	S4	ext/int					3		0.7
	1	S6	ext/int					2		0.7
	1	E4	int							0.7
	1	S1	int					4		0.4
	1	S4	int							1.1
	1	S4	int/ext					5		0.9
	120-130	1	S4	ext	is-geo 15	u				
1		S4	ext/int							0.8
Total	88									

Analysis by Sam Nixon