

Africa

Nigeria

On the Edges of Slavery: Preliminary Evidence, Prospects, and the Future of an Archaeology of Resistance on the Coast of Badagry, Lagos State (submitted by Abiola Ibirogha, Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences, Columbia University, aji2121@columbia.edu)

Abstract: Two decades after the first archaeological research conducted in the Badagry region on the coast of Lagos State, Nigeria, there is still a lacuna in the multilayered histories associated with lived experiences on the West African coast in the Atlantic era in the region (beginning in the 18th century). This article presents the results of a preliminary archaeological survey conducted as part of the author's doctoral dissertation research in the summer of 2022. It highlights the materiality of coastal populations living on the edges of African kingdoms caught in the crosshairs of European mercantilism and the trade in enslaved persons in the 18th century. This research points out evidence of Atlantic entanglements on the one hand as well as dissociation from the webs of connections formed during the Atlantic era (15th–19th centuries) on the other. It contributes to the debate on the agency of African peripheries on the coast in the 18th century. The survey revealed mound structures, remains of architecture, smoking pipe fragments, cowrie shells, and potsherds, showing intense human exploitation of coastal resources to navigate enslavement on coastal edges. The paper meshes these data with myth stories, oral histories, and documentary sources to highlight the agency of African peoples in making movement and settlement decisions in response to the uncertainties of war and enslavement on the coast of West Africa.

Resumen: Dos décadas después de la primera investigación arqueológica realizada en la región de Badagry en la costa del estado de Lagos, Nigeria, aún existe una laguna en las historias de múltiples capas asociadas con las experiencias vividas en la costa de África Occidental en la era Atlántica en la región (comenzando en el siglo 18). Este artículo presenta los resultados de una prospección arqueológica preliminar realizada como parte de la investigación de tesis doctoral del autor en el verano de 2022. Destaca la materialidad de las poblaciones costeras que viven en los límites de los reinos africanos atrapadas en la mira del mercantilismo europeo y la esclavitud en el siglo 18. Esta investigación señala evidencia de enredos atlánticos por un lado, así como la disociación de las redes de conexiones formadas durante la era atlántica (siglos XV-XIX) por el otro. Contribuye al debate sobre la agencia de las periferias africanas en la costa en el siglo XVIII. La prospección reveló estructuras de montículos, restos de arquitectura, fragmentos de pipas humeantes, conchas de cauri y fragmentos de cerámica, que muestran una intensa explotación humana de los recursos costeros para navegar la esclavitud en los bordes costeros. El documento combina estos datos con historias míticas, historias orales y fuentes documentales para resaltar la agencia de los pueblos africanos en la toma de decisiones de movimiento y asentamiento en respuesta a las incertidumbres de la guerra y la esclavitud en la costa de África occidental.

Résumé : Deux décennies après les premières recherches archéologiques menées dans la région de Badagry sur la côte de l'État de Lagos, au Nigeria, il existe encore une lacune dans les histoires multicouches associées aux expériences vécues sur la côte ouest-africaine à l'ère atlantique dans la région (commençant dans le 18ème siècle). Cet article présente les résultats d'une prospection archéologique préliminaire menée dans le cadre des recherches de thèse de doctorat de l'auteur à l'été 2022. Il met en lumière la matérialité des populations côtières vivant aux confins des royaumes africains pris dans le colimateur du mercantilisme et de l'esclavage européens dans le 18ème siècle. Cette recherche met en évidence des enchevêtrements atlantiques d'une part et une dissociation des réseaux de connexions formés à l'époque atlantique (XVe-XIXe siècles) d'autre part. Il contribue au débat sur l'agence des périphéries africaines sur le littoral au XVIIIe siècle. La prospection a révélé des structures de monticules, des vestiges d'architecture, des fragments de pipe à fumer, des cauris et des tessons de poterie, montrant une exploitation humaine intense des ressources côtières pour naviguer dans l'esclavage sur les bords côtiers. L'article associe ces données à des histoires mythiques, des histoires orales et des sources documentaires pour mettre en évidence l'agence des peuples africains dans la prise de décisions de mouvement et d'établissement en réponse aux incertitudes de la guerre et de l'esclavage sur la côte de l'Afrique de l'Ouest.

Introduction

The Badagry region is a classifying group for multiple independent settlement areas with similar languages (Ogu), cultures, and practices (Figure 1). These settlement areas include mostly Gun communities such as Badagry town, Ajido, Topo, Gberefu, Akarakumo, and Aivoji, among others, and Yoruba groups (Awori) such as Ilogbo Eremiti, Imeko, Ikawga

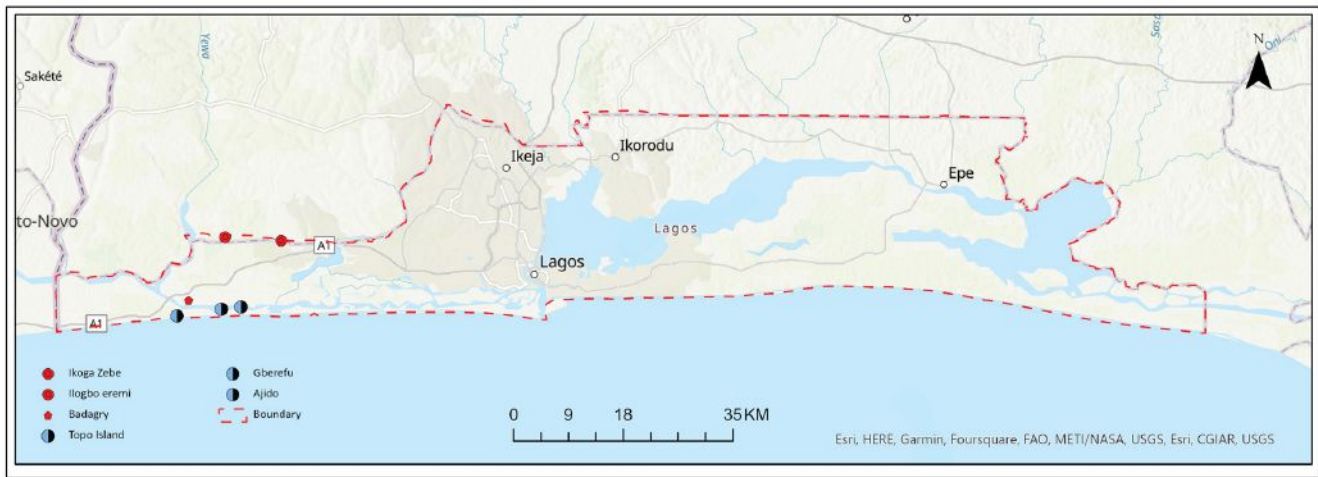


FIGURE 1. Map of Badagry showing settlements discussed. (Figure by the author.)

Zebe/Ikoga Zege, and so forth (Avoseh 1938; Law 1994). Human occupation in the Badagry region began as early as 3000 BCE (Alabi 2002; Allsworth-Jones and Wesler 1998; Orijemie 2014). The establishment of a port in Badagry in 1734 CE led to its integration into the transatlantic trade in enslaved persons (Law 1994; Mann 2007; Ogundiran 2020). Furthermore, as war and the enslavement of persons increased in Whydah and Allada (both in the Republic of Benin) due to the Dahomey expansion in the 18th century, people migrated to the Badagry region, forming various new communities (Asiwaju 1979; Law 1994). These events drove massive population increases and, consequently, large-scale coastal settlement in border towns such as in the Badagry region (Ogundiran 2020).

While the narrative of the presence of a port town in Badagry promotes tourism in the region (*Premium Times* 2022; Aleru and Alabi 2010; Simpson 2008), research has neglected the lived experiences of the Awori and Gun groups navigating the fear of becoming enslaved persons in the region at the time. This is pivotal for understanding regional interactions and strategies for adapting to the social milieu of the time. On the West African coast, increased enslavement of persons and war in the 18th century resulted in the destruction of cities and towns, displacements of people, and, consequently, the resettlement of several kingdoms (Ogundiran 2016). These new kingdoms emerged from diverging experiences of enslavement and war and thus made settlement decisions in response to these multilayered conditions (Akinjogbin 1971; Ogundiran 2020). Understanding the fluidity of these settlement dynamics is valuable for investigating the agency of African peoples in Atlantic encounters, largely underexplored in historical scholarship (Redman 2005; Silliman 2014; Walder and Yann 2018). This article presents a preliminary report of ongoing investigations on the lived experiences of groups living on the edges of zones where the trade in enslaved persons occurred (Evans 1985), with prospects and futures of the archaeology of resistance in Africa (Rathbone 1986).

The Badagry region (Figure 1) provides a rare opportunity to explore the trade-offs involved in making settlement decisions in response to war and enslavement during the Atlantic era using archaeological evidence. As against earlier core-periphery dynamics that attribute the emergence of complex societies on the fringes to core centers of trade (Cressey et al. 1982; Norman 2009; Richard 2010; Schortman and Urban 1994), the focus of this paper transcends the central political dynamic in Badagry town to investigate livingness (Dunnivant 2021) on the peripheries. It explicates how coastal populations living on the peripheries of ports where the trade in enslaved persons occurred protected their people from being enslaved (Diouf 2003). In this regard, I draw insights from approaches of resistance developed by Sylviane Diouf, which involved “mechanisms grounded in the manipulation of the trade for the protection of oneself or one’s group” (Diouf 2003:x). Thus, while Badagry town was involved in the trade in enslaved persons, communities living on the edges of this zone where the trade in enslaved persons occurred manipulated the trade to preserve their people. The main argument here is that autochthonous inhabitants on the edges of these zones were caught in the crosshairs of mercantilism, war, and the trade in enslaved persons on the coast of West Africa. Thus, they created structures that enabled their survival in the 18th century. For this work, I use data on settlement locations, distribution, and features that differentiate peripheries from the port town in Badagry. In addition, evidence of materiality, topographic variations, and operational social institutions helps provide some initial predictions into an archaeology of resistance in the Badagry region.

Methods

For this study, a multisite comparative framework was adopted based on archival research, opportunistic surveys, and oral interviews with local chiefs. This framework made use of a three-dimensional approach consisting of pedestrian survey,

GPS mapping, and recording, focusing on visually examining the landscape to identify surface features, determine the extent of sites, and locate points for future archaeological inquiry. It examined cultural features across both coastal Gun settlements (these include the sites of Badagry, Topo, Gberefu, and Ajido) and inland Awori groups (the sites of Ilogbo Eremi and Ikawga Zebe/Ikoga Zebe) (Figure 1). These sites were chosen because of their connections to the migration history of the Badagry region in the 18th century (Alabi 2001; Asiwaju 1979; Law 1994). The aim was to understand the matrix and distribution pattern of features on the site. Badagry town was explored due to its direct links to the transatlantic trade in enslaved persons. Due to our inability to gain permission from the king, we postponed the survey of Ikawga Zebe/Ikoga Zebe to a later time. However, we make some allusions to the site in the discussion and prospects of the archaeology of resistance in the Badagry region.

Brief history of sites surveyed in the Badagry region

Topo Island – Topo village, a major town about 4 km from the main Badagry town, is located in a swampy forest in the eastern part of Badagry. According to oral histories, the village town is a recent development after the Dahomey war of the 18th century (Alabi 1998; Olaide-Mesewaku 2001). Before this time, the people lived on the island close to the Atlantic Ocean (Alabi 1998; Kiladejo 1982). Historical sources show this island also functioned as a sanatorium for Roman Catholics in Nigeria (Ajayi 1965; Bane 1956; Olaide-Mesewaku 2001). According to these sources, Topo Island served as a place where enslaved persons were redeemed and “pawns” were secured and educated as interns (Ajayi 1965; Gantly 1992). Pawns were individuals who served as credit collateral for debts incurred by merchants engaged in the trading of enslaved persons (Lovejoy and Richardson 2001). They thus functioned as insurance mechanisms for the smooth running of trade in Atlantic West Africa (Lovejoy 2014).

Gberefu Island – Gberefu, believed to be the origin of the Badagry people (Alabi 2002; Avoseh 1938), is located about 1 km away from present-day Badagry town and a few meters away from the Atlantic Ocean. This town is known to have hosted enslaved persons en route to the New World during the period of the Atlantic trade in enslaved persons. Due to its relevance, there are historical monuments on the island that regularly attract tourists to Gberefu. However, the archaeology of this region is sparse. Alabi (1998) records several mound structures, associating them with salt production. These are in addition to pottery scatters on the island, thus associating Gberefu with an industrial salt-producing site for the Badagry region.

Ajido – Ajido is located 10 km away from Badagry town. It was founded around the turn of the 18th century by Aholu Sagbe. The major occupants of this region were mainly Ogu, Ijaw, and Ghanaian migrants (Adekanmbi et al. 2017). Oral accounts reveal that this settlement emerged from a conglomerate of refugees of the Dahomey wars ravaging the West African coast in the 18th century (Tijani 2006).

Badagry Town – This, the main town in the study region, is associated with the trade in enslaved persons (Mann 2007; Sorensen-Gilmour 1995). The area is bounded to the north and the east by the Egbado territory and hemmed in to the west by the Benin Republic (Alabi 1998; Law 1994). The town is on the coast in an area marked by swamps, marshes, and creeks. Oral traditions point to settlement’s having existed in the region since ancient times (Avoseh 1938). However, recent archaeological work identifies two phases of occupation involving the intense exploitation of aquatic resources (Orijemie 2014). The town is divided into eight quarters with different settlement histories.

Ilogbo Eremi – This community is located 18 km northeast of Badagry town. Oral histories collected in the town show occupation since historic times. According to the people, they are descendants of people from Ile-Ife, who migrated to this present site due to political tensions between siblings at their former place of residence. Although no historical or archaeological work has been done in the Ilogbo area, Alabi (1998) places the settlement history of the people of Ilogbo within the Apa and Igbogbele grouping. According to him, divination was the reason behind the decision to settle in this area.



FIGURE 2. Roman Catholic church on Topo Island. (Photo by the author.)

Results

The opportunistic survey of Topo Island and Gberefu (the coastal sites closest to Badagry town) showed evidence of interactions with Europeans and local peoples. Here, we found structures associated with the Roman Catholics in Topo (Figure 2) and 184 smoking pipes from Gberefu (Figure 7). These pipes, mostly stem and a few bowl fragments, were concentrated in a 640 m radius at the center of Gberefu. We also collected three smoking pipe stems from our survey of a 420 m distance scattered around Topo; we retrieved just one smoking pipe from Ajido. The results show that Gberefu provides the largest evidence of European goods, with 97.89% of all the smoking pipes from the region coming from the island (Figure 8).

We also found evidence of earthen mounds across all the coastal sites surveyed. In total, we recorded 35 mound structures across the 3 coastal sites of Topo, Ajido, and Gberefu. They varied in elevation from ground level as well as length across the different sites surveyed (Figure 3). On Topo Island, we found elongated earth mounds with lengths of about 91 m and heights ranging from 3 to 5.2 m, as well as varied earthen mounds as high as 6.4 m and as low as 3.4 m, but separated, mostly by thickets of neem plants (Figure 4). These extensive mound structures have been reported in Alabi (2001) and are associated with salt-making processes.

In Badagry town, we recorded only the location of settlement structures associated with the trade in enslaved persons, because this is the major center of trade for the study region. We identified and recorded the locations of the eight quarters and interviewed local chiefs on the roles of their community in the process of the trade in enslaved persons and correlated this information to the location of features of the trade in enslaved persons associated with the quarters. We also recorded the location of foreign architecture present on the landscape (Figure 5).



FIGURE 4. Mound structure separated by neem plant. (Photo by the author.)

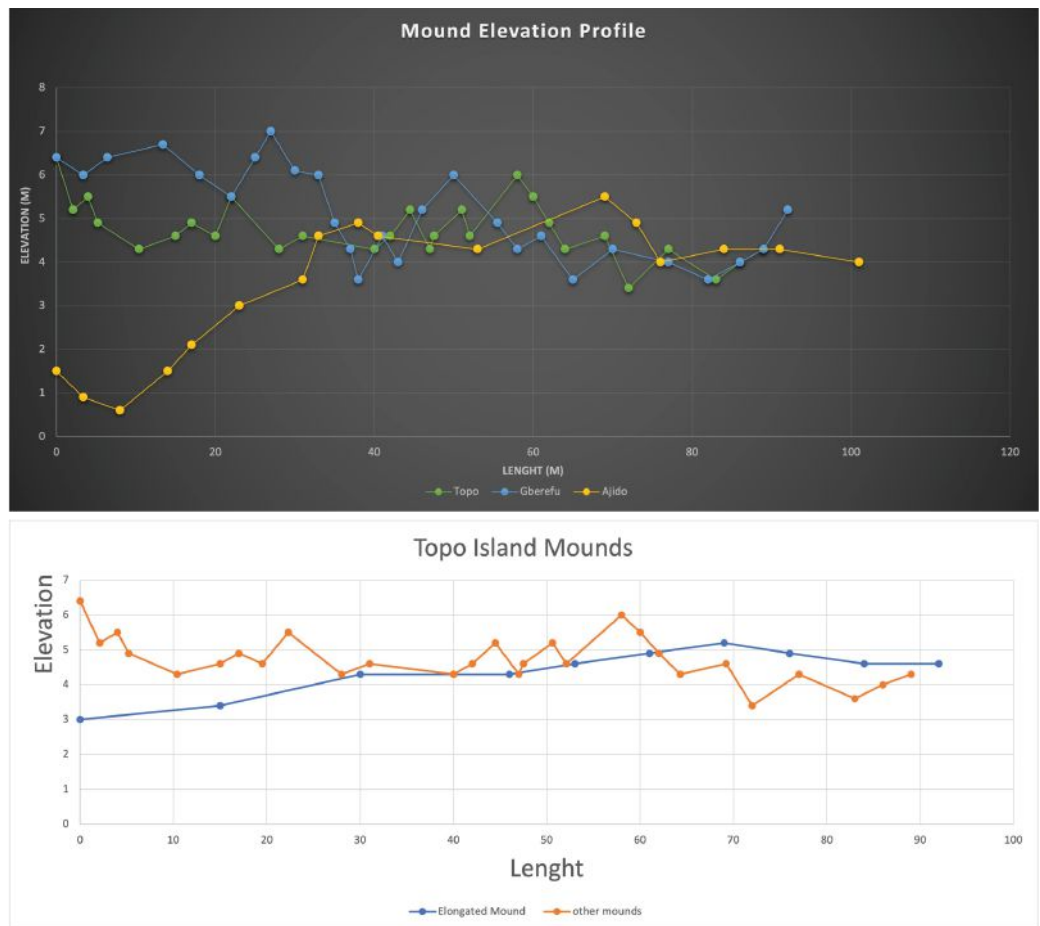


FIGURE 3. Mound elevation variation across the three coastal sites. (Graphs by the author.)

As we moved further away from the coastal port town of Badagry, the materiality of European presence reduced, and we recovered artifacts and recorded features local to the region. These include local pottery, Yoruba-type bank-and-ditch systems (defensive structures), and settlement structures that differ extensively from those of coastal peoples. At Ilogbo Eremi, we found remains of a ditch and embankment similar to those found elsewhere in the hinterland (Aremu et al. 2013; Lasisi 2018; Lasisi and Aremu 2016; Ogundele and Babalola 2007). Oral interviews about this embankment show that it was constructed during the period of the trade in enslaved persons to protect the people from capture. However, what remains

of this structure is only a 7 m bank and ditch surrounding a sacred space left untouched in the now-urban town (Figure 6).

Discussion

Discussion concerning the variation in mound structures across the coastal towns of Gberefu, Topo, and Ajido is ongoing. Alabi (2001) associates the mound structures in the coastal settlements with salt making. He opines that the location of the mounds close to the Atlantic Ocean makes their construction for salt making plausible. He also contrasts this with inland sites such as Apa (Alabi 2001, 2002). However, I argue here that the variation in the elevation profile of the mounds suggests a more nuanced functionality of the mound structures on the coast. This variation can potentially illuminate the multivariate historical uses of the mound structures during the era of the enslavement of people. Who were the makers of these mounds? What purposes did they serve during the era of increased enslavement of people? If the mounds were only used for salt making, as earlier scholars have suggested, then they must have been pivotal in Atlantic commerce and/or regional trade. If all the mounds recorded



FIGURE 5. Brazilian-style architecture in Badagry, reportedly constructed in 1804 by returnees who had learned carpentry in Brazil during their time there as enslaved persons (Abiola J. Ibirogba 2022, pers. comm.). (Photo by the author.)

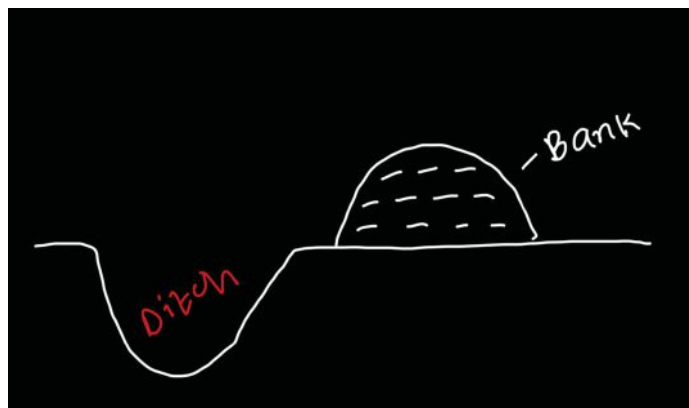


FIGURE 6. Top: Diagram of bank and ditch by author after Lasisi (2018); bottom: northern part of bank and ditch in Ilogbo Eremi. (Photo by the author.)

from the survey were used for producing salt, then there must have been a massive salt-producing industry on the coast of Badagry in the 18th century. Yet this is not mentioned in the oral traditions of the people. The preponderance of these varying mound structures might suggest that they were used for purposes beyond salt making. Also worthy of note here is the association of the mounds with circular shrubs of neem plants. Future work must explore the variation in the materiality of these mounds in order to understand their dynamics for the historic Ogu people in Badagry.

Badagry town, Gberefu, and Topo Island present the largest amount of evidence of European interactions. This might be expected, because they are the closest to the ports where enslaved persons were traded (Simpson 2008). Also, inland settlements such as Ilogbo Eremi and Ikawga Zebe/Ikoga Zebe show variation in terms of materiality and structure. Based on this, I hypothesize that coastal sites closest to the port centers will provide evidence of involvement in the trade in enslaved persons and the development of strategies for protecting the sites' inhabitants during that activity, while those further inland will possess defensive structures for such purposes. While the mound structures in Gberefu may have been used for salt making, those in Ajido may have served functions of protection during the trade in enslaved persons and increased war on the coast.

In addition, oral history collected in Ilogbo Eremi suggests that the people settled in the region for protective reasons. According to the local narrative, Ifa instructed the Ilogbo people to settle on a land surrounded by "ere," meaning swamp. Therefore, these Awori groups chose the site to protect themselves



FIGURE 7. Smoking pipe fragments from Gberefu. (Photo by the author.)

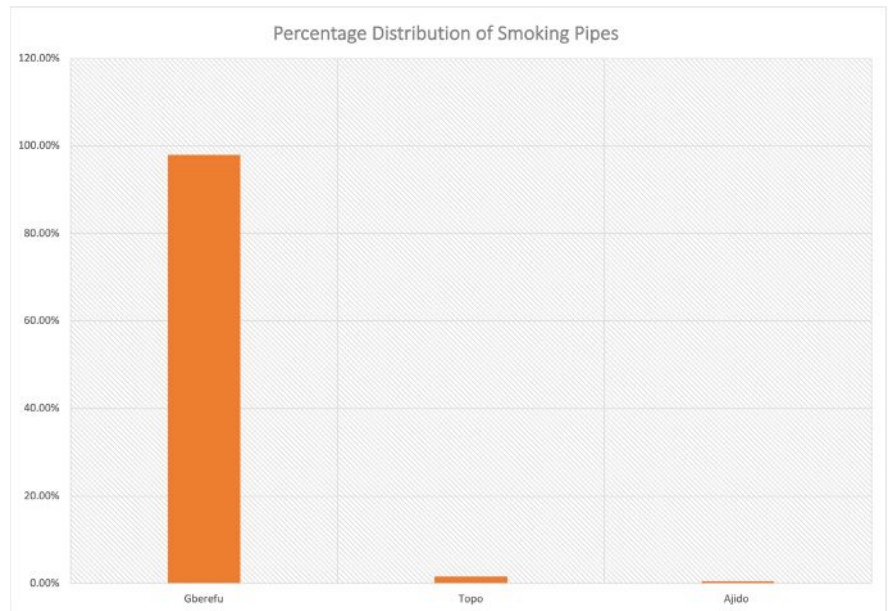


FIGURE 8. Smoking pipe distribution across sites. (Graph by the author.)

from raiders from Yoruba towns attempting to feed the trade in enslaved persons. With the town surrounded by the swamp, it would have been difficult for people from Yoruba warring kingdoms to attack, because this was unfamiliar terrain. However, the people of Ilogbo Eremi also built Yoruba-type defensive structures (a bank-and-ditch system) (Lasisi 2018). These may have been constructed to defend against coastal peoples' capturing persons for the trade. Thus, the people of Ilogbo Eremi in ancient times may have constructed two lines of defense, one to ward off raiding parties from the hinterland and another to ward off coastal peoples attempting to capture people to feed the trade in enslaved persons. While this interpretation is still sketchy, future work will explore the materiality of these sites comparatively in order to identify what the archaeological signature of resistance in Africa could be.

Finally, from this preliminary survey in the Badagry region, an archaeology of resistance seems most plausible in inland communities on the fringes of ports where trade in enslaved persons took place. The findings suggest that distance from zones where people were captured and sold may have been an impetus to develop strategies for resistance. While it must be said that these regions may have also engaged in the trade in enslaved persons due to its economic potential at the time, they also developed structures of protection for their own people. As Diouf (2003) rightly posits, communities in coastal towns sought diverse ways to protect their populations. This may have included diplomatic ways of involvement and withdrawal from the trade in enslaved persons. Undoubtedly, a reconceptualization of resistance is quintessential to unearthing archaeological signatures of resistance in Africa. While the literature on resistance is extensive in the New World (Diouf 2014; Dunnivant 2021; LaRoche 2013; Odewale 2019), approaches to understanding the African case beyond insurrections of enslaved persons will require a reanalysis of the term "resistance." Future work must examine communities on the edges of the trade in enslaved persons and their connections with resistance.

Final thoughts

The evidence provided here, while limited, will be important in developing a hypothesis for the archaeology of resistance in the Badagry region. Settlement histories of the communities on the edges of the trade in enslaved persons are pivotal for understanding how outlying communities navigated the uncertainties of the time. Alabi (1998, 2001, 2002) argues that settlement conglomerations in Badagry followed an east-west pattern to gain access to economic trade. Here, I argue that there was more to settlement choices on the coast than access to trade. Inhabitants on the peripheries created defensive structures to combat the trade in enslaved persons in various ways, and evidence for most of these is present in sites distant from the centers of the enslavement of people. Migrants who fled the Dahomey war and/or hinterland wars of the 18th century in Yorubaland created new landscapes on the edges of the areas where the trade in enslaved persons took place that enabled their survival. Understanding multilayered histories of place is integral to a holistic reconstruction of landscape choices made by historic peoples. In a landscape of the enslavement of persons and war, Gun and Awori people made choices that ensured their preservation by occupying regions protected by natural features such as creeks, swamps, and thick vegetation. In addition, they constructed structures such as mounds, embankments, and ditches to ensure they were ultimately protected.

The impetus for settlement during a period in which the trade in enslaved persons increased was not economic access. Rather, the scale and direction of settlement might have been driven by security and access to critical resources for food. In all, we acknowledge that human habitation choices are complex and guided by overlapping factors that may not be directly legible in the archaeological record. Future work will investigate the potential of satellite data to illuminate landscape features and settlement choice dynamics on the coast of Badagry (Almar et al. 2023; Davis et al. 2020). The decision to settle in a place during the period of increased trade in enslaved persons will have involved trade-offs (Zheng et al. 2020a, 2020b) that are pivotal to the overall discussion of that trade and livingness on the fringes of port cities in the 18th century.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the good people of Badagry, Topo, Gberefu, Ilogbo Eremi, and Ajido for their hospitality during this preliminary survey. Special appreciation also goes to the research assistants who made the project successful: Mr. Ayobami Diya, Mr. Kolade Omigbule, and Mr. Micheal Jivoh, our host in Topo. I also acknowledge and thank Pennsylvania State University College of Liberal Arts Sustainability-Focused Engagement Awards; the Africana Research Center, Penn State; and the Whiting Indigenous Knowledge Grant for funding this work.

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Australasia and Antarctica

Australia

Beyond Making Ends Meet: Ruminating on Faunal Remains in Australian Historical Archaeology and Food History
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Abstract: It has long been understood that sheep and cattle played a large part in the success of the colonial project in Australia. Various authors have referred to these introduced species as “the shock troops of empire” and stated that Australia “rode on the sheep’s back” to success. Despite this, archaeological studies of faunal remains from Australian historical sites (i.e., post-1788) remain relatively uncommon and lack theoretical diversity. Furthermore, there has been limited engagement between archaeologists working with historical food remains more broadly (faunal or botanical) and Australian food historians. By briefly reviewing the relevant literature and analyzing recent advertisements aiming to increase meat sales, the following article seeks to highlight this (as-yet) missed opportunity for archaeological studies of food in post-1788 Australian contexts.

Resumen: Durante mucho tiempo se ha entendido que las ovejas y el ganado desempeñaron un papel importante en el éxito del proyecto colonial en Australia. Varios autores se han referido a estas especies introducidas como “las tropas de choque del imperio” y afirmaron que Australia “montó a lomo de oveja” hacia el éxito. A pesar de esto, los estudios arqueológicos de restos de fauna de sitios históricos australianos (es decir, posteriores a 1788) siguen siendo relativamente poco comunes y carecen de diversidad teórica. Además, ha habido un compromiso limitado entre los arqueólogos que trabajan con restos de alimentos históricos en general (fauna o botánica) y los historiadores de alimentos australianos. Al revisar brevemente la literatura relevante y analizar los anuncios recientes que apuntan a aumentar las ventas de carne, el siguiente artículo busca resaltar esta oportunidad (hasta ahora) perdida para los estudios arqueológicos de los alimentos en contextos australianos posteriores a 1788.

Résumé : On a compris depuis longtemps que les moutons et les bovins ont joué un grand rôle dans le succès du projet colonial en Australie. Divers auteurs ont qualifié ces espèces introduites de « troupes de choc de l’empire » et ont déclaré que l’Australie « roulait sur le dos du mouton » vers le succès. Malgré cela, les études archéologiques des restes fauniques des sites historiques australiens (c’est-à-dire après 1788) restent relativement rares et manquent de diversité théorique. De plus, il y a eu un engagement limité entre les archéologues travaillant avec des restes alimentaires historiques plus largement (faune ou botanique) et les historiens australiens de l’alimentation. En passant brièvement en revue la littérature pertinente et en analysant les publicités récentes visant à augmenter les ventes de viande, l’article suivant cherche à mettre en évidence cette opportunité (encore) manquée pour les études archéologiques de la nourriture dans les contextes australiens après 1788.

Introduction

Given the various ways that food and identity intertwine, particularly in migrant contexts (Janowski 2012), it is somewhat