

## Short Research Report

# A Historical Survey of Karofi Abandoned Settlement, Dutsen-Ma, Katsina State, Nigeria

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**Abstract** - This paper is an archaeological survey of Karofi abandoned settlement, which is located in the north-central area of Katsina State of Nigeria conducted from the 5<sup>th</sup> of January to 30<sup>th</sup> of March, 2018. Despite Karofi's large amount of archaeological resources as the survey shows, the area receives little or no attention from researchers. Through ethnographic survey, an effort is made to examine fundamental features of the site with particular reference to the history of the early inhabitants of the area through the collection and analysis of both tangible and intangible remains using an archaeological survey of site. Among the finds identified in this survey are: house and granary foundations, collapsed defensive walls, grinding stones, dye pits, potsherds, remnants of iron slags, cave and rock shelters, among others. The paper suggests that when closely studied, Karofi abandoned settlement will yield great archaeological results.

**Keywords:** History, abandoned settlement, archaeological survey, ethnography, Katsina, Nigeria.

## Introduction

This paper presents the findings from the archaeological survey of the abandoned settlement of Karofi in the north-central area of Katsina State, Nigeria conducted from the 5<sup>th</sup> of January to 30<sup>th</sup> of March, 2018. Despite Karofi's large amount of archaeological resources, the area receives little attention from researchers (Kabir 2018). Though the area has been previously studied by Usman (1981), Abdulkadir (1982) and Abdullahi (2014), their works are mainly focused on the social and political history of the area on the macro-scale. This paper therefore, sets out to identify and document material remains and ethnographic data of Karofi abandoned settlement. Among the finds analysed in this paper are: cowry shells, spindle whorls, a collapsed defensive wall, dye pits and potsherds (Kabir 2018).

Through an ethnographic survey, we also examine fundamental features of the site with particular reference to the history of the early inhabitants of the area through the collection and analysis of both tangible and intangible remains using a contextual archaeological survey and mapping of the site. Though this research is a survey, we believe that it would open up new doors to researchers, especially archaeologists to conduct excavations with a view to discover more information about the people of the area and their material culture.

## Background

Karofi was an independent chiefdom before its incorporation into the Katsina Kingdom in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Kabir 2018). The growth of the settlement and its emergence as one of the oldest in Katsina motivated the new king Korau to annex it in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Adams and LaMotta 2006). During this period, Karofi was already an established town with fortresses that served as protection to its inhabitants, especially from external aggressions (Gronenborn *et al.* 2012; Shehu 2012).

Different versions of traditions of origin have been put forth for Karofi. According to one of the versions, Karofi dates to the 11<sup>th</sup> century when it was founded by migrants from Daura who were looking for a favorable environment to carry out their cloth dyeing activities. On their arrival, they found the area suitable and rich in dyeing materials and thus, decided to settle under the leadership of Karo and Gazo

(Kabir 2018). The Hausa word Karofi, literary means a dyeing centre (*Marina*) (Abdulkadir 1982). In another tradition, Karofi was said to have evolved first as hunting and gathering society and later developed into dyeing and agrarian society. The town later attracted a number of artisans from across Hausa land which contributed to the economic development of the town and Katsina emirate at large.

In another version, Karofi was said to have first been settled by hunter-gatherers and later developed into dyeing and agrarian settlement (Abdullahi 2014). The fusion of different craftsmen also led to the evolution of a unique system of life that attracted guilds to settle in the area (Abdullahi 2014).

Karofi major economic activities were farming, weaving and dyeing. Dyeing is no longer practiced, suggesting a discontinuity in the crafts. The site is rich in material culture remains among which are ruins of defensive walls, remnants of buildings, grinding stones, dye pits, potsherds, scattered iron slag, cave, spindle whorl, graves, ancient well and rock shelters. However, it is believed that much has been lost and those surviving ones are threatened by human and natural agents of destruction. Therefore, this research is an effort towards documenting the history of the original inhabitants of the selected site before all testimonies are lost.

Most markets emerged with the large business transactions before the development of a uniform currency such as the cowries. This could be true for Karofi, which connected the Bauchi, Kano and Sokoto caravan routes. Items that moved along these routes include household implements, dyed cloth, dye-stuffs, grains, livestock, kolanut, iron, salt and various manufactured goods (Usman 1981). Before the introduction of British currency, commercial transaction in most parts of the Sokoto Caliphate established after the 1804 Sheikh Uthman bn Fudi's (1754-1817) Jihad were cowries, iron bars and bags of salt. In fact, cowries have been recovered from Karofi suggesting they were in use during its occupation. This suggests that the people of Karofi had actively participated in developing the economy of Katsina at multiple levels (Alti, pers. comm., 2017).

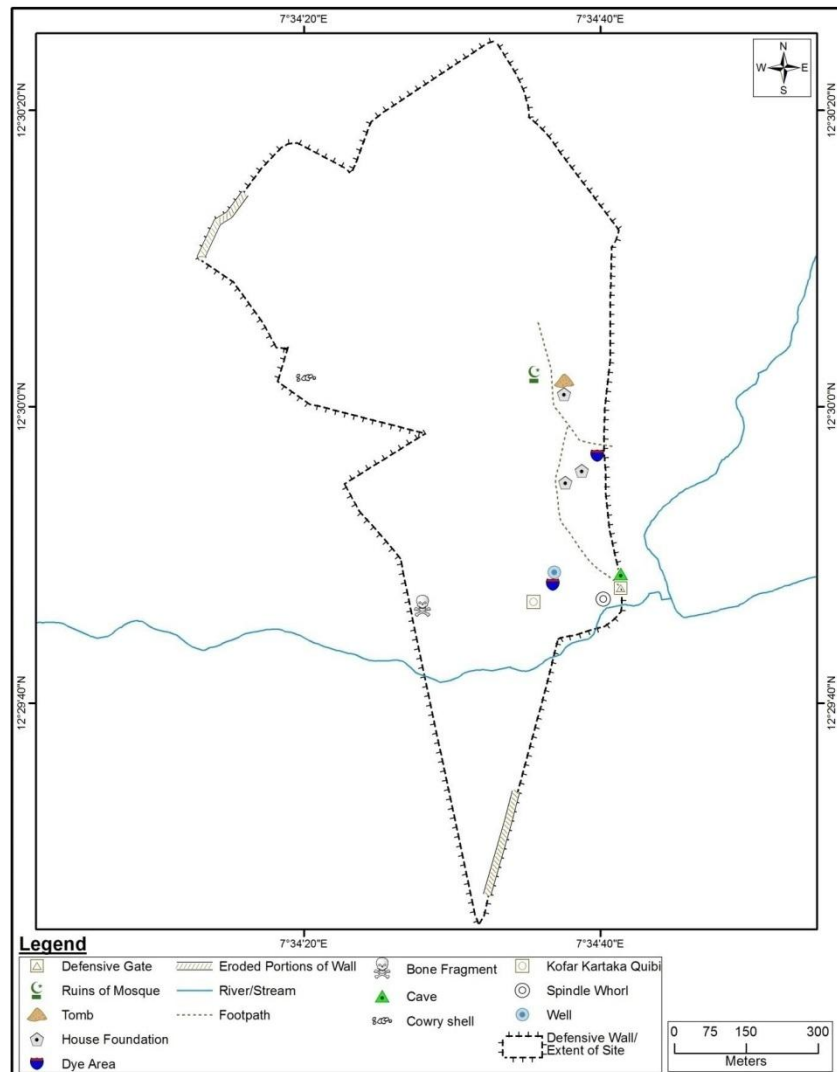
According to Oral tradition, traders in Karofi participated in different crafts and commercial activities such as dyeing, weaving, smiting and others. Consequently, there was the development of periodic markets in which locally made and imported goods were sold (Usman 1985). Besides, oral tradition has it that traders from Karofi visited areas such as Danmusa and Mara where they usually sold dyed materials, which include traditional bed sheet (*Gwado*), gown (*Riga*) and wrapper (*Zane*) in exchange for

building materials such as thick hardwood (*Izara/Gwangiri*) used for roof-making. In the case of Kola nuts, it was acquired from coastal areas and became marketable due to its traditional importance for wedding, naming and other ceremonies (Kado, pers. comm., 2017).

### **Karofi Site**

The Karofi is located on the eastern part of Dutsin-Ma, which lies at  $12^{\circ} 29' 24''$  N- $12^{\circ} 31' 20''$  N latitude and  $007^{\circ} 34' 26.7''$  E- $007^{\circ} 34' 40''$  E longitudes. It is bounded by Radda in the East, Bagaggadi and Kuki in the South, Rawayau and Charanchi in the North, and Dutsin-Ma in the West. There are two accessible roads to the site: the Dutsin-Ma-Kafin Soli road from the East and the Kankia-Dutsin-Ma road from the West, as well as several foot paths linking many neighboring villages to Karofi. The site lies on a plain that progresses into the hills in the west, which have an elevation of 618 m above sea.

The region is composed of crystalline rocks in the basement complex. The rocks in the Karofi area are covered by drifting soil, which had been deposited by the north-eastern trade wind, (the harmattan) over centuries and have accumulated under long dry climatic conditions (Udo 1970). However, Karofi is dotted with granite rocks and lateritic iron stone spreads. These giant rocks served in the past as a natural defense for the local population against external attacks. They are also used for spiritual and domestic purposes such as a playground and Public Square used in the past as a rallying point for warriors in undertaking expeditions (Kabir 2018). The rocks are said to have supernatural power to protect the territory and its inhabitants from external aggression (Alti, per. comm. 2017). In addition, one can clearly see the evidence of human interaction with the environment through the use of local stones for grinding equipment, foundation the construction of houses, granaries foundations, defensive walls, and other related uses. The soil was underlain by smaller crystalline and granite rocks, which comprises sandy, clay and loamy materials that make agriculture suitable where perishable and cereal crops are cultivated (Udo 1970).



**Fig. 1:** Distribution of cultural material from Karofi Archaeological Site (Source: Kabir 2018).

The vegetation of the Karofi site falls within the Sahel savannah, which is characterized by scattered trees, shrubs and grasses. The abandoned settlement sites are surrounded by different types of trees, which include neem trees (*Azadirachtaindica*), baobab trees (*Adansoniadigitata*), locust bean (*Parkia biglobosa*), Iron wood (*Vitexdiniana*) and mango (*Magniferaindica*) providing the researchers with an idea on the types of trees and plant used by the early inhabitants of the area (Shuaibuand Ogunsola 2018; Kado, per.comm. 2017). Other species include: red flower, *Guinea senegalensis*, (*sabara*) and *Sicklepod* plant (*Tafasa*). Moreover, Karofi is endowed with wild animals for hunting.

## Archaeological survey of Karofi site

The archaeological survey was conducted through walking across the site on foot. Archaeological survey is the systematic assessment of human made impacts on the landscape through the recording of features and material culture remains (Renfrew and Bahn 2000). The Karofi site was identified through oral tradition and ground survey method. Oral tradition according to Vansina (1981) refers to information stored in the memory of people and transmitted through the words of mouth from generation to generation.

The survey thus includes walking on foot to collect, document and take photographs of material remains that are observable on the site. The adoption of ground survey in this study was informed by the hilly nature of the site. This reason coupled with cost management and its efficiency, particularly in the visual discovery of cultural objects. Through this process finds such as spindle whorls, dyeing pits, cowries, potsherds and defensive walls were randomly collected, analyzed and documented. It should also be noted that the extent of the site and the locations of finds and features were established and documented using hand-held G.P.S, instrumental in the production of the site map. Secondary data in form of published and unpublished sources such as books, journal articles, theses and dissertations were also used.

The site and associated archaeological remains of the Karofi abandoned settlement were documented via the following:

- i. Use of handheld GPS to map the extent of the site;
- ii. Documentation of cultural remains via photography and GPS recording, as well as measuring their dimensions (size, diameter and lengths) and collection of samples for analyses using measuring tapes.
- iii. The production of a site map in order to examine the spatial relationships between different features of the site.

More so, archaeological survey served to authenticate information from oral accounts. Artifacts and features encountered include potsherds, dye pits, cave, granary, grinding stone, spindle whorl, remnant collapsed building, ancient well, defensive wall, and iron slag.

## Finds

A total of one hundred and forty (140) potsherds were collected from the four cardinal points of the site for classification and analysis. Other finds include: 4 house and granary foundations, 1 collapsed defensive wall, 5 grinding stones, 35 dye pits, 45 iron slag, 2 caves, 1 rock shelter, a well, 5 spindle whorls, 8 bone fragments, 1 smoking pipe and 9 cowry shells (See [Table 1](#) for the finds). However, in this paper, only five different types of finds were purposively selected and described. They include: cowries, spindle whorls, dyeing pits, potsherds and a defensive wall.

**Table 1:** List of the recorded cultural remains

S/N	Features	Karofi
1	Potsherds	140
2	Iron slag	45
3	Spindle whorl	5
4	Cave	1
5	Well	1
6	Bone fragment	8
7	Smoking pipe	1
8	House foundation	4
9	Dye pit	35
10	Grave	2
11	Rock shelter	1
12	Grinding stone	5
13	Defensive wall	1
14	Cowry shell	9

**Source:** (Nadir A. Nasidi 2020)

According to an informant ([Alti. pers. com, 2017](#)) cowry shells for instance, were used as currency. It was also used by females for personal adornment, especially in form of necklaces, or bangles. Nine of them were identified by the researchers; five

were given to the Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria as samples taken for dating (See [Fig. 2](#))



**Fig. 2:** Cowry Shells (Photo by Kabir 2018)

Similarly, the spindle whorls identified were spherical in shapes and each has a round hole at the center. It was said to be used for weaving in the past. They are made of clay material. It is identified as reddish brown and brown in colour ([Fig. 3](#)). Their presence in the site further suggests the peoples' involvement in weaving and cloth production.



**Fig. 3:** Spindle Whorls (Photo by Zainab Kabir 2018)



Dye centre one (1) is located in the western part of the site. It constitutes a cluster in each area, of about 3-5 dye-pits. The soil is loose and grey. Associated finds were two fragmentary smoking pipes. The dimension of the dye-pits was taken as follows; diameter 75cm to 80cm, with a depth of 1.5m. Oral tradition has it that the dyeing area was said to have belonged to Ali *maikaurindahi* (Ali with high concentrated poison). It is said that the pits apart from dyeing activities, were also used to prepare poison, smeared on arrows used for hunting and military purposes (**Fig. 4**).



**Fig. 4:** Dyeing Area (Photo by Zainab Kabir 2018)

There is also an ancient defensive wall built of mud and rock boulders usually used as frameworks. Parts of the wall have been eroded most especially the west and south-eastern parts; adding to the initial number of gates. The highest part of the wall still standing, measures 2 m in height, while other parts are just outlines. The defensive wall as the name suggests was basically constructed by governments in the ancient times to serve as a fortification against external attacks and invasions. Readings of the defensive wall were taken to determine the extent of the site.



**Fig. 5:** Defensive Wall (Photo by Zainab Kabir 2018)

A total of 99 potsherds were among the finds collected from the surface using quadrant to collect samples in their primary context for further analysis and processing (**Fig. 6**). It justifies the claim that pottery is one of the oldest human activities amongst the people of Karofi. The potsherds help immensely in understanding the pre-historic societies in the Hausa land, especially in relations to the use and functions of pottery. Apart from their aesthetic values, they also serve a number of purposes ranging from storage to religious rites.



**Fig. 6:** Potsherds (Photo by Zainab Kabir 2018)

## Conclusion

This survey of Karofi reveals the archaeological potentials of the abandoned settlement site. It features evidence of human occupation and habitation in the form of defensive walls, collapsed building, dyeing pits, iron slags, spindle whorl, grinding stones, granaries, relic of mosque, house foundations and ancient well left behind by the inhabitants of the settlement. Moreover, the analysis and interpretation of samples of data retrieved from the site also brought to light, the ways of life of the past inhabitants, with particular reference to their religious practices, technology, trade contact, security (defense), settlement pattern, economic activities, and migration.

The presence of cowries for instances, suggests the peoples' exposure to the use of currency in economic transactions. It was also used for body ornamentation, especially for the women during festivities. Other function of the cowries in the Hausa community of Karofi included sorcery. Similarly, the presence of spindle whorls implies the existence of textile industry. Its presence in an archaeological site is an indication of the technological advancement of textile production popularly referred to as spinning. Through spinning, cords and yarns from raw plant and animal fibers were used to weave cloth and textile materials for human consumption. While dyeing pits in the Karofi site indicates the involvement of the people of the area in textiles productions, which the Hausa land was known for, the defensive walls identified in this research prove the fortified nature of the site, which served as a protection to the city and its settlements, especially from potential external aggressions.

From the archeological materials discovered, it is enough to say that Karofi people had to have adequate knowledge on how to utilize the available environmental resources for sustainability. This research also opens up new doors for other researchers that are interested in conducting a bigger archaeological excavation there so as to further unravel the mysteries of the past.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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