



An Archaeological Investigation of Iyafe Sinta Abandoned Settlement Site in Gurara Local Government Area, Niger State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The presence of archaeological features in Iyafe Sinta as well as the historical account of the people prompted this archaeological survey that revealed a sedentary lifestyle of the Iyafe Sinta people. Iyafe Sinta had a diversified economy and a stratified society which have risen, peaked and then fall to the superior firepower of the white slave raiders in the early 19th century. Through Oral History, this paper traces the history of the Iyafe Sinta people, their migration as well as their cultural adaptation to the ever-changing environment. Methods such as archaeological surveys and Oral Tradition helped in documenting the cultural history of these unique people that once occupied this Sinta site in Central Nigeria. This paper recommends further research that would place the Iyafe Sinta site in chronological order through age determination.

Keywords: Archaeological Survey, Iyafe Sinta, Oral Tradition

Introduction

Iyafe Sinta is an ancient abandoned settlement originally occupied by the Gbagi speaking people. The site is located at the eastern part of Suleja with the coordinates: Latitude 9^o 11'102'' N Long7^o 07' 435''E with an elevation of 268 meters above sea level. It is approximately 7 rekilometres from Suleja along Garki garage to Gurara local government area of Niger State. The tradition of the people has it that the first set of people to harmoniously lived in this area were mostly the Jemsun, Bahago, Panaga and Mijin Zaria who organized themselves and made the ancient Iyafe Sinta known to the outside world. The people of Iyafe Sinta were led to this place of abode firstly by their heads namely Jemsun, Bahago, Panaga and Mijin Zaria and with an overall district head known as Musa Quara. Back in ancient times, the Iyafe Sinta had its own Headquarters called Buyi, which was under the leadership of the king himself. The king served as a director of all affairs in his domain. He solved and resolved any contending and arising issues that affected his people and territory. The first ruler of Iyafe Sinta Musa Quara until his death was said to be a Christian which simply means that Christianity predated Islamic religion in the area. Subsequently, one of his sons Ayuba Quara took over the mantle of leadership and his famous touristic visit to Macca which later proved to be the reason he became a Muslim. On his arrival, he introduced the practice of Islamic religion in the community and out of the strict obedience to the throne, the people accepted Islam and the ideology rapidly spread to almost every household in the community. Thus, Islam became the dominant religion with still some adherents of the Christian religion in Iyafe Sinta community of today. The

tradition of the people has it that, Iyafe Sinta was the first and the original home of Jemsun, Bahaga, Panaga, and the Mijin Zaria before people from various areas joined them and the place became expanded. Farming, rearing of animals, weaving of mat, pottery making, and hunting, amongst others, were the predominant occupations in the area (Damladi, Personal Comm, 2020).

Traditional boxing which was usually complemented with drum beating and dance was said to be the only festival practised at the early period. At the present, however, Islamic festivals such as Sallah celebrations (EduL-Fitr) and (Eidul-Adha) which come twice a year now dominate the social activities in the area under study. The ancient Iyafe Sinta site was abandoned as a result of a series of conflicts with the white slave raiders and the subsequent taking over of the entire surrounding by the colonialists after their unsuccessful resistance. These slave raiders got to the community in full force and disorganized their political and socio-cultural ways of life. During the early period of the white invaders into this ancient territory. Thus, the people of Iyafe Sinta succumbed to the superior firearm of the invaders which led to the death of their then ruler. These frequent attacks led to the abandonment of the ancient settlement of Iyafe Sinta at around late 1800 AD to the present Iyafe Sinta located about 4km east of the ancient Iyafe Sinta abandoned settlement site with the people establishing other areas such Kurmin Kora, Gwajipe, Ushapa, Gaji, amongst other.

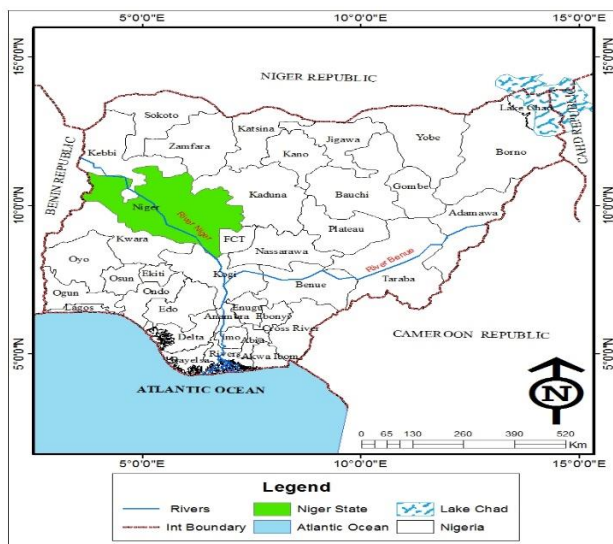


Figure 1: Map of Nigeria in Nigeria State.
Source: GIS 10.3 Software

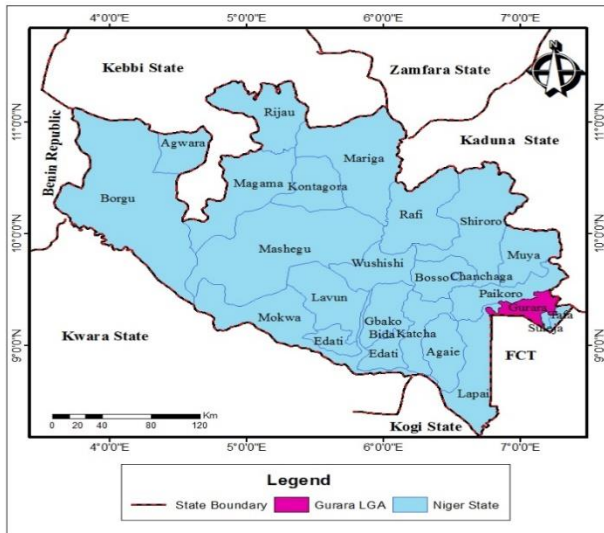


Figure 2: Map of Niger State in Gurara LGA.

Source: GIS Lab Department of Geography Using Arc GIS 10.3 Software.

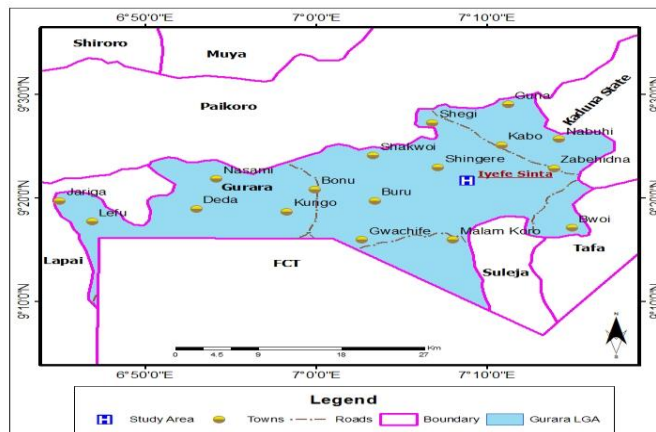


Figure 3. Map of Gurara LGA in the Study Area.

Source: Arc GIS 10.3 Software.

This research aimed to document an aspect of the culture and history of the ancient settlers of Iyafe Sinta abandoned settlement site with the following objectives:

1. Documenting the history of the people through oral tradition
2. Carrying out an archaeological survey to show the spatial distribution of finds and features
3. Analysing and interpreting the finds that represent the ancient people of iyafe Sinta

The Geographical Features of Iyafe Sinta

Climate: The climate within the region is controlled by the movement of two air masses: The tropical continental air mass and tropical maritime air mass. The tropical maritime air mass which is moist and originates from the Atlantic Ocean influenced and controlled the rainy season. The tropical continental air mass which is dry originates from the Sahara Desert and brings dry season as it blows from the northeast across the Sahara Desert carrying with it; the Harmattan dust (Adamu, 2006). Ancient Iyafe Sinta was characterized by four distinct seasons: A dry and cool season which lasts from around mid-November to the end of March and is characterized by the harmattan winds, a dry and hot season which is a short transitional period between the harmattan season and the wet season from March to about mid-May characterized by the warmest temperature of the year, a wet and warm season follows the hot season and ends in mid-October during which over ninety percent of the annual rainfall is received, a dry and warm season (which is the shortest season last from about the end of October to mid-November. The temperature of Ancient Iyafe Sinta range between 28⁰c to 38⁰c, it lies within the guinea savannah region, which has a mean annual rainfall of about 700mm to 1000mm (Ishaku, 2011 & Idowu, 2014).

Vegetation: The vegetation of the area is semi-arid Savanna situated at the transition zone where the guinea Savannah gave way to a drier Sudan savannah. The trees in the area have a considerable wide canopy and are dispersed across the landscape. Most of the trees are resistant to drought and have been suggested to have been available as part of the vegetation resources in the West African Savannah for two to three thousand years (Adamu, 2006).

Trees commonly found in the area are Locust bean tree *Parkiaclappertoniana* (Dorawa), Baobab tree *Adansoniadigitata* (kuka), Acacia *Acaciaalbida* (Gawo), Shea butter tree (*Kadanya*), Tamarind *Tamarindusindica* (*Tsamiya*), Deleb Palm *Borassusaethiopum* (*Giginya*) and Mango *Mangiferaindica* (*Mangwaro*) Locust beans *Parkoafilicoudea*(*Dorawa*) among others. On the other hand, the grasses that grow both during the dry and wet season include Tingernut grass *Cyperusrotundus* (*Aya-aya*), Elephant grass *Pennisetumpurpureum* (*Tofa*).



Plate I: Vegetation

Geology, Topography and Soil: Ancient Iyafe Sinta abandoned settlement shares the same geological components with that of the larger geology and topography of Gurara, Shiroro, Suleja, and kuta areas. According to Garba and Muhammed (2011), the parent material of the soil is Pre-Cambrian rocks usually on the highlands and the loose sandstones/alluvial soils on the lower slopes and river valleys which makes the entire area susceptible to gully erosion. The area is also underlain by gneiss, migmatite and meta-sediments of the Precambrian age which have been intruded by a series of granitic rocks of late Precambrian to Paleozoic ages. The oldest rocks are represented by a series of older meta-sediments and gneiss believed to be Birrimian in age and older. These rocks have been variably metamorphosed and granitized through at least two tectono-metamorphic cycles, so that, they have been largely converted into migmatite and granite-gneiss.

Ancient Iyafe Sinta in particular is underlain by crystalline complex gneiss, and intrusive into the basements complex rocks are intermediate acidic migmatites. The soil in the area is generally tropical sandy-loam, with a mixture of permeable and friable particles of different sizes. The nature of the soil is ferruginous and has a fine texture with medium fertility suitable for growing crops like millet (*Pennisetumglacum*), maize (*Zea mays*), beans (*Phaseolus vulgaris*), groundnut (*Arachishypogaea*), and sorghum (*Sorghum bicolor*). The colour of the soil ranges from light brown, and reddish to dark brown. The soil of Iyafe Sinta ancient settlement is endowed with rich soil, particularly loamy and clay fine texture with fertility suitable for agriculture. This fertile soil has contributed immensely to increase in their farm produce since time immemorial as well as being used in the construction of mud houses and pots making, and other ceramic objects (Garba & Muhammed, 2011).

Economy: The predominant and primary economic activity in the ancient Iyafe Sintawas farming. The types of crops produced include Millet (*Pennisetumglacum*), Maize (*Zea mays*), Beans, Groundnut (*Arachishypogaea*), Sorghum (*Sorghum bicolor*), Ginger, and yam. They purposely produce these crops to feed their family, and the surplus is usually sold in the market. Other forms of economic activities carried out in the area include, intra-trading, and rearing of livestock; almost all domestic animals found are reared in the area while others may wish to render services to mostly farmers and get paid (Interview, Damladi, 2020).

Settlement Pattern: Settlements in the area over the years have shared similar characteristics between the ancient Iyafe Sinta and that of Gaji (Maryam, 2014). The settlement pattern of ancient Iyafe Sinta is linear (Idowu, 2014). The architectural pattern is rectangular with the walls erected with mud and mostly has zinc roofing while others were roofed with thatch. However, other houses were built with modern blocks and cement roofed with zinc.

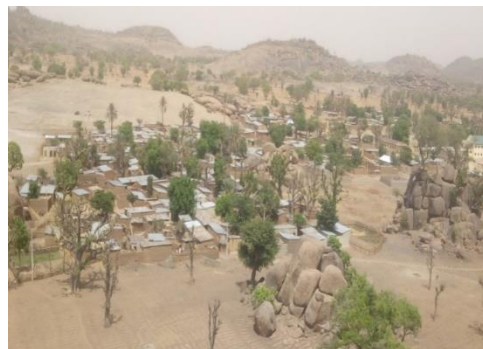


Plate II: Settlement Pattern

The Site: The physical terrain of the Iyafe Sinta site is plain. The ridges appear to be running from south to north others from east to west. The texture of the soil on site is generally loamy while the colour of the soil slightly varies. The soil appeared darkish at the western part of the site. But at the centre as well as the south-eastern parts, the colour is light brown. Some of the site's features include graves, treasure sites, granary foundations, upper and lower grinding stones, and source of water.

Trees like Baobab tree (*Adansoniadigitata*), Acacia (*Acacia albida*), Tamarind (*Tamarindusindica*), Deleb Palm (*Borassusaethiopum*), and Mango (*Mangiferaindica*) are as well found on the site. Potsherds appeared to be the only finds on the site and 51 of them were randomly collected within the site using the principle of transverse.

The Features

Lower Grinding Stone

One fragment of lower grinding stone was identified on the site. It is located at the eastern part of the site. It was found within a circular stone arranged to house this lower grinding stone. It has a 1.5m diameter and the length was 2m.



Plate III: Lower grinding stone

Grave

Located at the western part of the site is a grave believed to be that of one of the rulers of the ancient Iyafe Sinta people. Although the name of the king is not known. The grave is irregular in shape different from the present style of burial. It has a length of 14cm.



Plate IV: Grave

Treasure Area

According to the guides, this hip of flat stones was carefully arranged to cover the treasure belonging to the community. Although this practice was common among the ancient people all over the world where some valuables are kept and sometimes even completely forgotten. The tradition of the people has it that, this was a place where the ancient people of Iyafe

Sinta kept their valuables such as pieces of jewelry, and other valuable materials for safety purposes. The treasure area was not allowed to be opened. The extent of this area was taken to be 42cm and the breadth was 30cm.



Plate V: Treasure site

Granary Foundation

Three granary foundations were identified from the site covering the eastern and the western parts of the site. These were the places that housed ancient Iyafe Sinta. This is clearly not a house foundation as they appeared too small. A place like this served as the warehouse for agricultural produce.



Plate VII: Granary Foundation

Upper and Lower Grinding Stones

Upper and lower grinding stones were identified at the western side of the site. The coordinate reading was taken together with the weight and diameter. The upper grinding stones were placed on the lower and were mostly used for the grinding herbs, millet and other edible food.



Plate IX: Upper and Lower Grindings Stone

Depression

This was also identified at the eastern part of the site. A place where the ancient people of the ancient Iyafe Sinta sourced clay-sand for building houses as well as making ceramic objects. It is evidently clear that the people carried out some form of activities in this place as p o t s h e r d s w e r e recovered there. The soil texture of this place is dark brown and quite different from that of the s u r f a c e .



Plate V: Depression

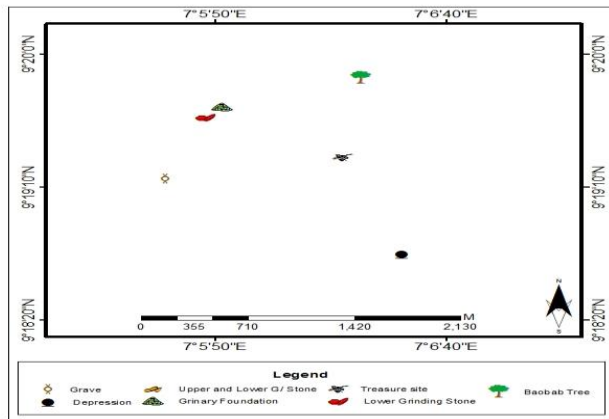


Figure 4: Map of Iyanfe Sinata Abandoned Settlement Showing Various Archaeological features.
Source: GIS Lab Department of Geography, ABU Zaria, Using ARC- GIS 10.3 Software

TIN Section Analysis Result

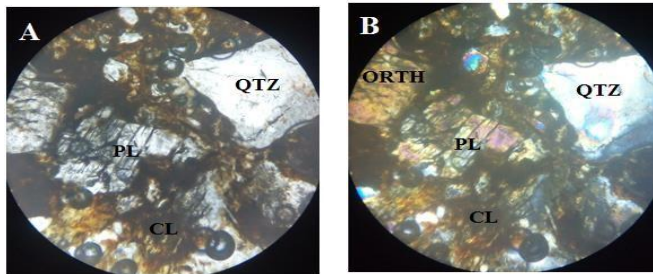


Plate I: Photomicrograph of potsherd 1 (A), under Plane polarized light (PPL) and Crossed polarized light (XPL) showing quartz, clay, orthoclase and plagioclase, Diameter of view= 4.0mm. Mag. =X40

Petrographic study potsherd 1 consists of; quartz, clay, orthoclase, plagioclase feldspar and they display the following characteristics; Orthoclase displays the largest crystal, it is colourless in PPL with a rectangular shape, it also has parallel cleavage and it is twinning. Orthoclase mineral crystal grains are about 1.7 cm in length. Quartz displays small to large grain crystal that is subhedral in shape and other minerals are cemented by the clay matrix. Plagioclase has a grey colour in XPL and is colourless under PPL. Plagioclase is not strongly pleochroism with a blocky subhedral crystal shape and is about 0.5 cm in size. Clay is the cementing matrix within the mineral crystals. This potsherd is generally inorganic in texture and of the igneous protolith.

**Table I: Mineral composition and characteristics of the potsherd 1**

MINERAL	ANALYSIS
Quartz	Colour; Colourless in PPL and cloudy to light grey in XPL Shape; Subhedral Relief; Moderate relief Extinction; Undulose extinction
Orthoclase	C o l o u r; Colourless in PPL and pinkish in XPL Shape; Subhedral Relief; Low relief Twining; Carlsbad twining
Plagioclase	C o l o u r; Colourless in PPL and grey in XPL Shape; Subheral Relief; Low relief Cleavage; poor Birefringence; low Twining; Albite twining
Clay	C o l o u r; Brown in PPL and dark brown in XPL Shape; Anhedral Relief; Moderate Pleochroism; Highly pleochroic Cleavage; Good Birefringence; High

Table II: Estimated Modal Mineralogical Composition of the Potsherd 1 under Microscope

Mineral	Visual Estimation %	Status
Orthoclase	23	Essential
Plagioclase	15	Essential
Quartz	27	Essential
Clay	38	Essential

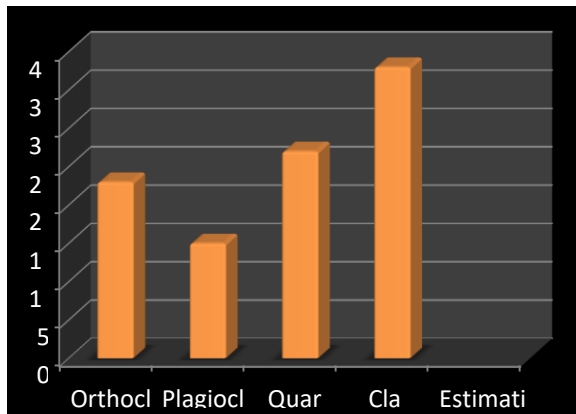


Fig. 5: Bar chart showing estimated modal mineralogical composition of potsherd 1 under the microscope

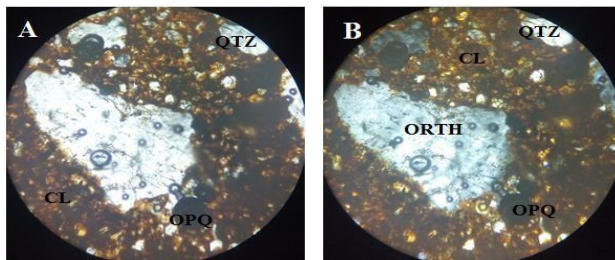


Plate II: Photomicrograph of potsherd 1 (B), under Plane polarized light (PPL) and Crossed polarized light (XPL) showing (QTZ) =quartz, (CL) =clay, (ORTH) =orthoclase and (OPQ) =Opaque Diameter of view= 4.0mm. Mag. =X40

Petrographic study Potsherd 1 revealed the following characteristics of the minerals observed below. Quartz displays small to medium mineral grains averagely about 0.5mm, anhedral crystal form, and low relief. Quartz crystals display no pleochroism or cleavage, it is light to light brown in colour (weak birefringence), and exhibit a characteristic phenomenon known as undulose extinction in cross-polarized light (XPL). Orthoclase display cloudy to ash-grey colour in XPL and colourless in PPL. It exhibits low birefringence (first order), and oblique extinction in cross-polarized light. Orthoclase exhibits subhedral crystal, with moderate relief in plane-polarized light (PPL) and the size of the crystal is about 4.3cm phenocryst. Clay exhibits irregular crystal shape and displays pleochroic haloes which possibly are a result of the presence of alteration. The minerals are majorly inorganic and possible protolith is igneous or sedimentary in nature.

**Table III:** Mineral composition and characteristics of the potsherd 2

MINERAL	ANALYSIS
Quartz	Colour; Colourless in PPL and cloudy to light in XPL Shape; Subhedral Relief; Low Extinction; Undulose extinction
Orthoclase	Colour; Colourless in PPL and ash-grey in XPL Shape; Subhedral Relief; Moderate relief Twining; Carlsbad twining Extinction; Oblique extinction
Clay	C o l o u r; B r o w n i n P P L a n d d a r k b r o w n i n X P L Shape; Anhedral Relief; Moderate Pleochroism; Highly pleochroic Cleavage; Good Birefringence; High
Opaque	C o l o u r; D a r k i n P P L a n d X P L Shape; Anhedral Relief; Low relief Cleavage; No Birefringence; low

Table 1V: Estimated Modal Mineralogical Composition of the Potsherd 2 under Microscope

Mineral	Visual Estimation %	Status
Quartz	28	Essential
Clay	41	Essential
Orthoclase	25	Essential
Opaque	6	Accessory

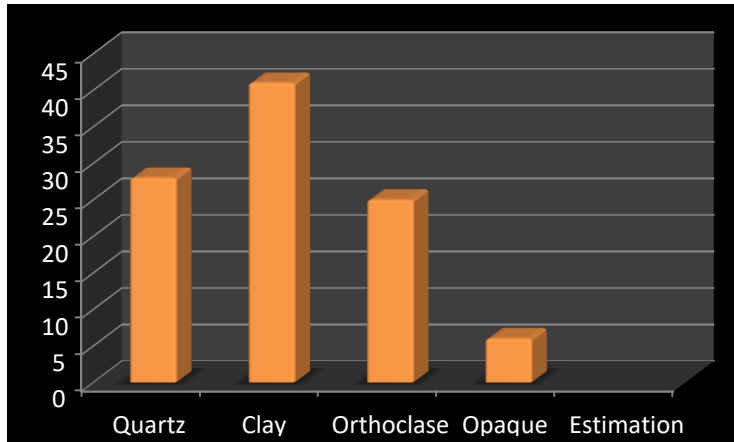


Fig. 6: Bar chart showing estimated modal mineralogical composition of potsherd 1 under the microscope.

Discussion

The Orthoclase displays the largest crystal, it is colourless in PPL with a rectangular shape, it also has parallel cleavage and it is twinning. Orthoclase mineral crystal grains are about 1.7 cm in length. Quartz displays small to large grain crystal that is subhedral in shape and other minerals are cemented by the clay matrix. Plagioclase also has a grey colour in XPL and is colourless under PPL. The following characteristics; Orthoclase displays the largest crystal, it is colourless in PPL with a rectangular shape, it also has parallel cleavage and it is twinning. Orthoclase mineral crystal grains are about 1.7 cm in length. Quartz displays small to large grain crystal that is subhedral in shape and other minerals are cemented by the clay matrix. Plagioclase has a grey colour in XPL and is colourless under PPL. And also the following characteristics of the minerals are observed above. Quartz displays small to medium mineral grains averagely about 0.5mm, anhedral crystal form, and low relief. Quartz crystals display no pleochroism or cleavage, it is light to light brown (weak birefringence), and exhibit a characteristic phenomenon known as extinction in cross-polarized light (XPL).

Conclusion

Archaeology as a discipline focuses more on the interpretation of finds that are left behind by the extinct people of a particular area. It is the responsibility of the archaeologists to give meaning to these artefacts. Some of these artefacts could be the remains of potsherds, bones, stone tools and as well charcoal samples that resulted from deliberate fire among others. Most of the finds collected from the Iyafe Sinta site are potsherds of different sizes and shapes as well as decorations. The scientific result from the laboratory analysis presented above shows great similarities between the soil and the clay source which suggests that the raw material used for the manufacture of the pots was sourced from the area. The technological advancement of these ancient people can be seen in the way they fashioned some of these natural materials from their surroundings into different tools



used in their daily activities. The upper and lower grinding stones on the site which must have been used for grinding some grains and herbs as well as the remains of granary support the oral tradition of the people which states that the ancient people of Iyafe Sinta engaged in agricultural practice and the people also must have had some form of knowledge of medicine as well as a preservation method. This further showed the relationship between the people and the environment.

The social-political organization of the ancient people of Iyafe Sinta stands out as evident in the peoples' unquestionable loyalty to their rulers as well as respect for the elderly. This loyalty was tested during the era of the slave trade in which efforts were made to resist the raiders. Just like most of the African societies during the colonial era, Iyafe Sinta fell to the powerful white slave raiders that later ushered in the colonization of the entire area. This research has been able to reconstruct the lifeways of the extinct people of the Iyafe Sinta site through the materials found on the site. It recommends that further research be carried out in this area in form of excavations and the date the material remains in order to reveal the age of the site and the time the Iyafe Sinta site was occupied.

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**APPENDIX II****The Co-Ordinates Readings of Finds and Features of the Site**

S/N	Feature	Latitude	Longitude
1	Upper and Lower Grinding Stones	9°11'068'' N	7°07'471'' E
2	Lower Grinding Stones	9°11'632''N	07°7'46.188''E
3	Grave	9°11'100'' N	7°07'4065'' E
4	Treasurer Site	9°11'072'' N	7°07'472'' E
5	Baobab Tree	9°11.112' N	7°07.457' E
6	Granary Foundation	9°11'103'' N	7°07'573
7	Depression	9°11'057'' N	7°07'485. E

APPENDIX III
LIST OF INFORMANTS

S/N	NAME	AGE	GENDER	OCCUPATION	INFORMATION	DATE OF INTERVIEW
1	Alh. Danguda Musa	50	Male	Farmer	General Information	3rd Jan. 2020
2	Sani Danladi	57	Male	Farmer	Oral Tradition	22 nd Jan. 2020
3	Nura Idris	56	Male	Farmer	General Information	11 th Jan. 2020
4	Muhd Tanko	60	Male	Hunter/Farmer	Oral Tradition	7 th Feb. 2020
5	Sani Idris	45	Male	Civil Servant/Farmer	Oral Tradition	8 th Feb. 2020
6	Musa Sarfilu	30	Male	Farmer	Oral tradition	9 th Feb. 2020
7	Sa, adu Jibirin	56	Female	Nil	Oral tradition	2 nd March 2020
8	Sadiya Sani	48	Female	Farmer	Oral tradition	3 rd March 2020
9	Amina Idris	50	Female	Nil	Oral tradition	5 th March 2020
10	Salamatu Mohd	58	Female	Nil	Oral Tradition	6 th March 2020