

An Appraisal of Archaeological Excavation of Gudi Hilltop Settlement Site, Southern Yobe, Yobe State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Recently archaeological excavation was carried out on Gudi hilltop settlement site to unravel material culture from their context for better understanding of the former inhabitants' culture history. Gudi is one of the abandoned hilltop settlement sites in the southern Yobe area that host Ngamo ethnic group from the Birnin Ngazargamu, the ancient capital of Kanem Borno. A test pit trench of 2x4 was excavated using an interval of 20cm (spit level). The excavation has yielded collections of different cultural materials such as ceramic objects, lithic objects, iron working residues and tools, bone, charcoal samples among others. This paper outlined the preliminary report carried out on this site by adding to the existing knowledge of the archaeology of Lake Chad region and more especially the hilltop settlers. The research has shown a clear transition from stone age to iron age period and how these cultures were interrelated within time and space.

Introduction

Southern Yobe area is one of the three geopolitical zones of Yobe state, comprising of Potiskum, Fika, Nangere and Fune Local Government Areas. The area is characterised with massif range of hills, inhabited in the past. Majority of the hills are located in Fika and some parts of Fune Local Government Areas. Those in the present day Fika LGA includes the famous Gudi, Daniski, Dotto (Ndokto), Kalefo, Wala, Shiyo, Bonti and Dozi abandoned hilltop settlements as well as the famous Kadi escarpments among others. The inhabitants of these hilltop sites speak Ngamo as their native language. They also speak Hausa and Bole as their lingua franca and live together in the area with their fellow Chadic language families the Kare-kare, Ngizim and Bole people who occupied different locations in the area. These ethnic groups all belongs to the Afro-Asiatic, Chadic west families (Simons and Charles, 2019). The site is located in Gudi district of Gudi emirate council of Yobe state, which is located to about 27km northwest from Fika, the headquarters of Fika Local Government Area of Yobe State. The site is however, located 18km northwest from Gadaka the major town where most of the descendent

of these hilltop sites are living today. Gadaka however, is the headquarters of Gudi emirate council of Yobe State.

Gudi hilltop settlement site was reported to have been occupied by the Ngamo ethnic group who migrated from Kanem (Kanembu) through Ngazargamu and Kukawa (Ghali, 1981; Farouq 2000; James, 2005; James, 2005 and Disa 2017). Geographically Gudi hilltop settlement site lies between latitude 11°25'17.977"N to 11°26'14.912"N and longitude 11°10'53.123"E to 11°11'52.897"E, which is situated in the Sudan savannah vegetation of the Gongola Basin where the Nigerian north-eastern principal tributary of the Benue River cut across (Heinrich, 1994). The area has a dry and open savannah vegetation with patches of dispersed varieties of trees made up of short and long trees.

As reported by oral informants (Mai-Gullo Pers. Comm., 2018) Gudi hill was the first settlement occupied by the Ngamo people before spreading to Daniski hilltop settlement site, situated just about 5 kilometres to the southeast. Decades later their fourth brothers *Bole* arrived at the area and overpowered them to have total control of Daniski hilltop site (Seidensticker, 1987). Two routes of migrations were associated to the peopling of this people from Kanem to Ngazargamu and finally to Gudi, Daniski, Dozi, Kadi and many more hilltop and plain sites in the area. It was after that time around early 20th century the people begun to move to Gadaka and its environs. The second route of migration traced the history of *Ngamawa* people from the same Kanem to Mandara area of present-day Adamawa state to Daura Kaula area in the present-day Fune Local Government area of Yobe state before establishing some hilltop sites among which are Dotto-Ja and Dotto-Fara as well as plains like *Janga* (red soil) community among others. These migrations give birth to the major three (3) clans among the Ngamawa's which are Ngamo Gudi, Yaya, Dotto as well as the Janga clans

Method of the Excavation

On Gudi abandoned hilltop settlement site, a test pit trench of 2x4 was excavated using 20cm arbitrary spit. In setting out the pits a handheld prismatic compass was used to mark and aligned the four cardinal directions of the trench. In doing so, true north was first located followed by eastern, southern and western cardinal points. Having locating the four cardinal points, the pits were setup at different time to perfect 2x4 rectangular squares. White twine was used in demarcate the trenches, and a 20cm corners at the back of the trenches were set and also tied with another white twine to protect the walls from collapsing while excavation was on-going.

A refuse mound claim to have served as a central location where every household in the entire settlement dumps his/her trash was chosen for this excavation. This was guided by the level of oral information collected and reconnaissance survey on the site. Through this method it was understood that the refuse mound encompasses general idea or knowledge about the culture of the larger Gudi inhabitants as well as other neighbouring communities' culture who interacted with them through sociocultural and economic means.

The excavation was given an acronym (YB/GUD/2020). The northern wall of the pit was made up of station C to A (4cm), east A to B (2cm), south B to C (4cm) and west C to D (2cm). The geographical positioning system (GPS) of station “A” was taken on latitude 11°25’39.6”N and longitude 011°11’27.9”E which stands as the reference or datum point (see figure 1). At the course of the excavation, finds were collected from their context, bagged and recorded based on arbitrary spit. Potsherds, iron slags and stones ball were found in large quantities that cannot be conveyed all to Zaria for analysis. In order to ease transportation, simple method of on-site sampling/analysis was adopted, where only diagnostic potsherds, few sampled slag and stone balls from each spit were taken to Zaria. Eastern wall was consistently used as the origin for digging and point “A” as reference point. The depths of each spit were measured with tape after some time to ensure 20cm was achieved in relation to the top soil.

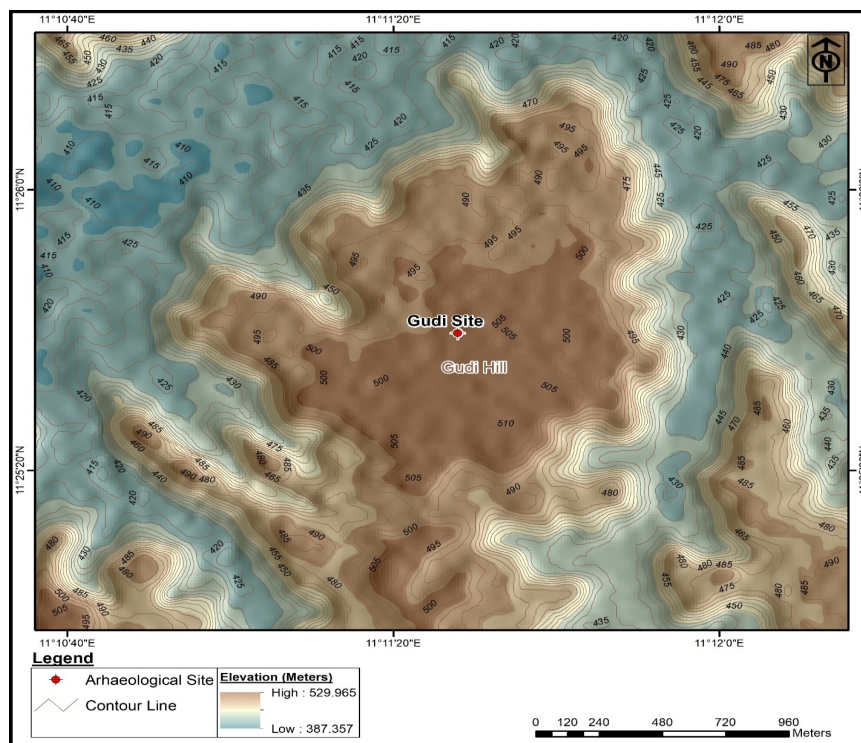


Figure 1: Digital Elevation Model (DEM)/Contour Map of Gudi Hill

Source: Modified from <https://search.asf.alaska.edu/>

After setting up the pit (see plate i), a total number of 38 potsherds were collected from the surface of the pit before excavation, other materials include stones debris in form of laterite, grasses and flowers of *cenchrus ciliaris*. Later the surface of the pit was cleared for proper excavation.



Plate i: Gudi site plan of 2x4 pit

i. Spit one (0-20cm)

After clearing all grasses and other flowering plants, proper excavation starts from the eastern part of the pit down towards west. At this spit the nature of the soil was so compacted with high number of cultural materials, roots and rootlets. The colour of the soil was identified to be dark brown in colour and the topography of the pit was uneven (see plate ii). Cultural materials found at this spit includes different segments of potshers totalling 8342, one ceramic bead, one fragment of tuyere, one spindle whorl, 3 fragments of smoking pipes, 532 iron slags, 365 stone balls made of granites and slags, two iron implements, a bone, and charcoal samples.



Plate ii: Spit one (0-20cm)

ii Spit two (20-40cm)

At this spit the nature of the soil remains compacted and the colour of the pit started changing to reddish brown from the eastern wall and down to the western wall the pit remains dark brown. The topography also remains uneven and undulating in nature (see plate iii). Cultural materials here present include 4650 potsherds, six upper grinding, one lower grinding stone, three stone balls, 100 iron slag, one fragment of smoking pipe, two iron implements, a bone, and charcoal samples among others.



Plate iii: Spit two (20-40cm)

iii Spit three (40-60cm)

The soil colour of the pit changed completely to reddish brown throughout the four cardinal points of the wall. The nature and topography of the pit remains compacted and uneven (see plate iv). Cultural materials recovered from the pit include one iron implement, 310 iron slag, 6230 potsherds, 282 stone balls, 17 upper grinding stone, exposed half buried pot was identified at the northern wall, one fragment of tuyere was also found in association with high concentration of slags and finally charcoal samples were also collected.



Plate iv: Spit three (40-60cm)

iv Spit four (60-80cm)

At this spit a complete ceramic bowl was found at the northern wall and measured about 3.18m and 0.82m to station A and B respectively (see plate v). Other cultural materials here are 470 potsherds, 153 stone ball, 180 iron slags and charcoal samples were collected. The soil colour here changed to dark brown and the nature of the soil also became relatively loose. The topography remains uneven from the eastern to the western wall.



Plate v: Spit four (60-80cm)

v. Spit five (80-100cm)

The pit at this spit produced evidence of 995 potsherds, 76 stone balls, undiagnostic stones, 272 iron slags, two iron implements and charcoal samples. The nature of the soil and topography of the pit remains loose and uneven while the colour of the soil also remains reddish brown (see plate vi).



Plate vi: Spit five (80-100)

vi Spit six (100-120cm)

At this point, the depth of the pit was not up to 120cm due to the presence of the bed rock which marked the sterile layer, although two stone balls and some undiagnostic stones debris were found. The nature and colour of the soil remain loose and reddish brown in colour with uneven topography (see plate vii).



Plate vii: Spit six (100-120cm)

Table 2: Inventory of Gudi Excavation (X means no material)

S/N	ITEMS	LAYERS (cm)							TOTAL
		Surface collection	0-20	20-40	40-60	60-80	80-100	100-120	
1	Potsherds	38	8249	450	6234	470	995	X	16398
2	Complete bowl	X	X	X	1	X	X	X	1
3	Bone	X	X	1	X	X	X	X	1
4	Iron implements	X	2	2	1	X	2	X	7
5	Iron slag	X	532	100	310	180	272	X	1392
6	Stone ball	X	365	3	282	153	76	2	881
7	Ceramic bead	X	1	X	X	X	X	X	1
8	Fragment of smoking	X	3	1	X	X	X	X	4
9	Fragment of tuyere	X	1	X	1	X	X	X	2
10	Fragment of spindle	X	1	X	X	X	X	X	1
11	Upper grinding stone	X	X	6	17	X	X	X	23
12	Lower grinding stone	X	X	1	X	X	X	X	1
	TOTAL	38	9154	564	6844	803	1345	2	18712

Discussion and Conclusion

The archaeological investigation of Gudi hilltop settlement sites has yielded significant results in the understanding of the people's culture history and anthropogenic impact on their environment through both tangible and intangible resources. The tangible resources mostly came in form of archaeological materials representing the peoples cultural contacts, craftsmanship, provenance, environmental impacts and social stratification among others. Intangible aspects of the people's culture were mostly sourced through oral interviews about their migration, history and festivals among others. This set of people can be argued as iron smelters due to the evidence of iron smelting residues found at the different spits of the site as well as iron tools. Cloth weaving and dyeing activities must have also been very common among the people of the area due to the evidence of spindle whorl and oral information available from the site. In terms of cultural contacts, it appears that the people interacted well with their neighbouring communities especially other Ngamo communities such as Dotto, Dozi, Daniski hilltop sites and many others due to their shared local language, potsherds decorations, festivals, and stone tools which might probably be sourced from the same place. According to oral informant (Kiri, Pers. Comm. 2016) the people of this area buys their grinding stone from Potiskum and Kadi markets. The markets are all located within the same axis with Gudi hilltop sites, which is today called southern Yobe.

Materials culture on both the surface and beneath the earth of Gudi site clearly suggest direct evidence of early food production. The oldest activity layer was only identified with evidence of stone tools in form of stone ball used as a weapon to repel attacks on enemies upon citing them from far (Idris Pers. Comm., 2019). Other activities that took place during this period of time include evidence of the use of fire. This suggests another form of sedentary or agriculture during the period. Looking at the activities here, this paper argue that this settlement must have been established during the Stone Age period. The second oldest layers on this site provides evidence of iron working, pottery making, use of stone ball, evidence of complete ceramic bowl and burrows. All these could suggest further evidence of agriculture and beginning of craftsmanship among the people. This period can also attest to the beginning of iron working, pottery and making among the people as well as serious homogenic impact on the natural environment. Gudi third cultural layer appears to have only come from two walls the north and east due to the topography and elevation of the mound as seen in (plate i). The period also witnessed fewer human activities than the second layer which is evidently seen through production of potsherds, stone tools in form of balls and use of fire. The fourth layer of the excavation has more technological advancement than the previous cultural layers. There was evidence of the use of ceramic wares which was identified through the recovery of potsherds, and fragments of smoking pipes. Other evidence came through extensive smelting of iron and production of tool. This was deduced from the presence of iron working debris such as iron slag, tuyere, and a knife. There was also advancement in the used of stone tool, where at this layer both stone balls and grinding stones were found. This layer of human

activity can strongly be argued as advance period of technology over the previous layers but the nature and form of cultural materials suggest a continuation of cultural activities from the former to later layers. Finally, the youngest layers from this site appears to be more advanced than the previous four layers. In addition to cultural materials from the fourth layer, evidence of bone and ceramic bead were identified at this layer. This could suggest the type of animals domesticated or killed at the time as well as advancement in producing more tools from clay than only pottery wares. In essence there is strong cultural relationship and cultural similarities as well as advancement from this Gudi excavation.

In terms of pottery decoration, the presence of checker decoration (rolled folded strip roulette) dated to the first millennium AD from excavation at Hambor Ketolo, Mali was found similar at Gudi excavation spanning throughout the layers of the excavation as well as surface of the pit before excavation. Another cruder decoration identified to be code braided roulette appeared at the first and second cultural layers of this excavation. Similar decoration to this was dated A.D 200-500 from Cubalel, Mali and A.D 1200- 1400 from Djene-Jeno, Mali. Twisted knotted cord roulette is another fascinating decoration that appeared at the first (oldest) and suddenly got disappeared until youngest (recent) layer before reappearing. This similar decoration was dated Mid to late third millennium BC from Er Negf, lower Tilemsi valley, Mali excavation. Loosely folded rolled strip is another decoration dated between AD 700-950 at the Tongo Mere Diable, Mali excavation and a similar decoration was found at the surface of Gudi excavation. This decoration was argued to have been very common during this time among the Lake Chad people, more especially Daima, Dikwa, Yau, and Mege sites (Hour, 2010). Presence of Sgraffito motif from the surface of Gudi could suggest probably strong link or relationship with the movement of Mai Idris Aloma dated back to 16th century A.D (Connah, 1981).

Conclusively, the archaeology of the Ngamawa people who occupied Gudi hilltop settlement site, could be seen as a set of agrarian immigrants, hunters and craftsmen from Kanem Bornu to Ngazargamu through Kukawa to their present locations. Their migration to this area can be relatively argued to have been gradual or in batches, which started around the third millennium BC (relative date from pottery decoration). Their migration to this area was however, also observed to have been possibly a quest for available natural resources, displacement as a result of the incessant wars in the upper Lake Chad area, desiccation of the Sahara and perhaps to reunite with their Chadic language speakers. The people occupied the area and made use of the natural resources at their disposal within the immediate environment to establish a well organised and complex society that has a centralised system of government with diversity of economic activities on the hilltop settlement site.

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