

# **An Archaeological Investigation of Kufen Karfi Abandoned Settlement Site in Malumfashi Katsina State, Nigeria**

**Isa Muhammad,**

Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies,  
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

## **Abstract**

This article reports an archaeological investigation of Kufen Karfi abandoned settlement in Malumfashi area of Katsina State. The exercise which took place in the month of May, 2016 was conducted by group C of the Field School of Department of Archaeology, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria. This preliminary investigation which involved archaeological survey, excavation and oral tradition collection and documentation, it revealed proven evidence of sedentary way of life by the people and cluster of dye pits in association with human burial, hence compelling the need for further more detailed study for a better understanding of the nature, evolution and development of the dying industry in the area.

## **Introduction**

Karfi lies between latitude  $11^{\circ} 44' N$  and longitude  $007^{\circ} 31' E$ . The old Karfi settlement is about 500 meters on a bearing of  $296^{\circ} NW$  of the present Karfi village (see fig. 1, 2 and 3).

The aim of the archaeological investigation that culminated in this report was to train students in the rudiments of field archaeology and open up a new frontier of archaeological research for the Department of Archaeology, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria.

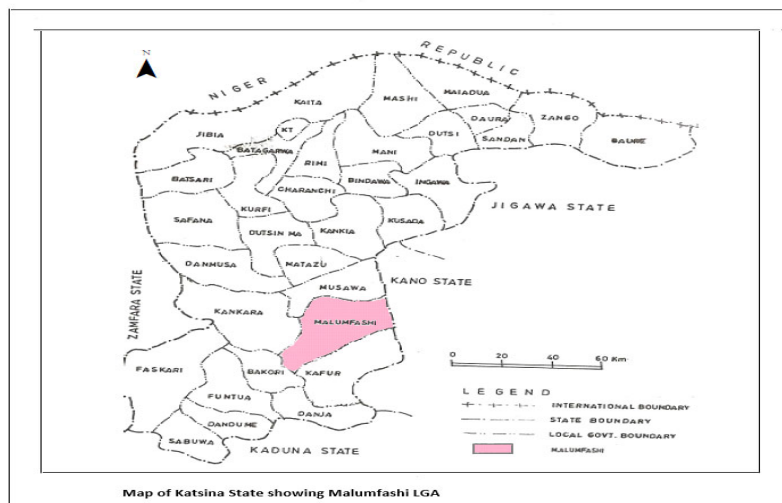
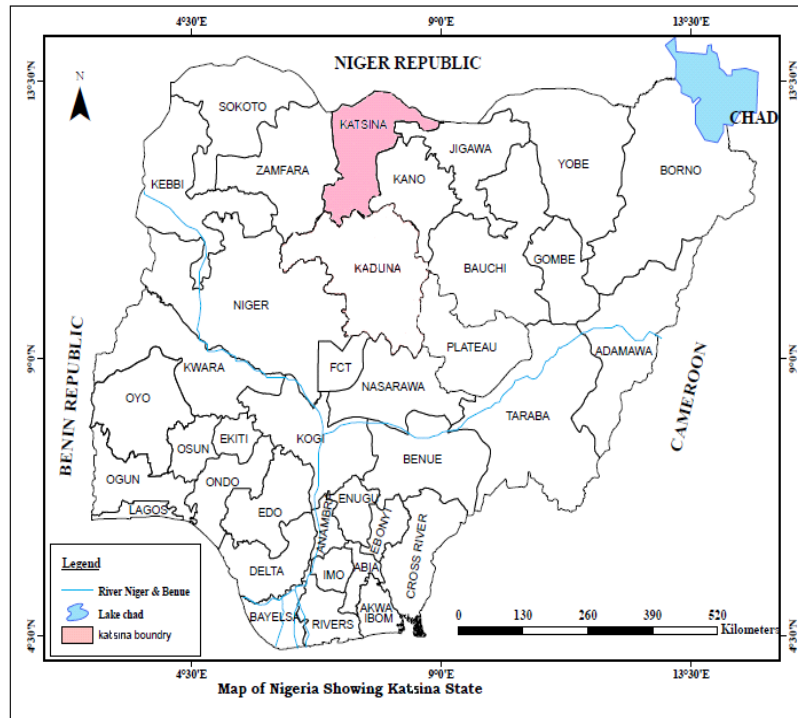
The main objectives of the exercise were as follows:

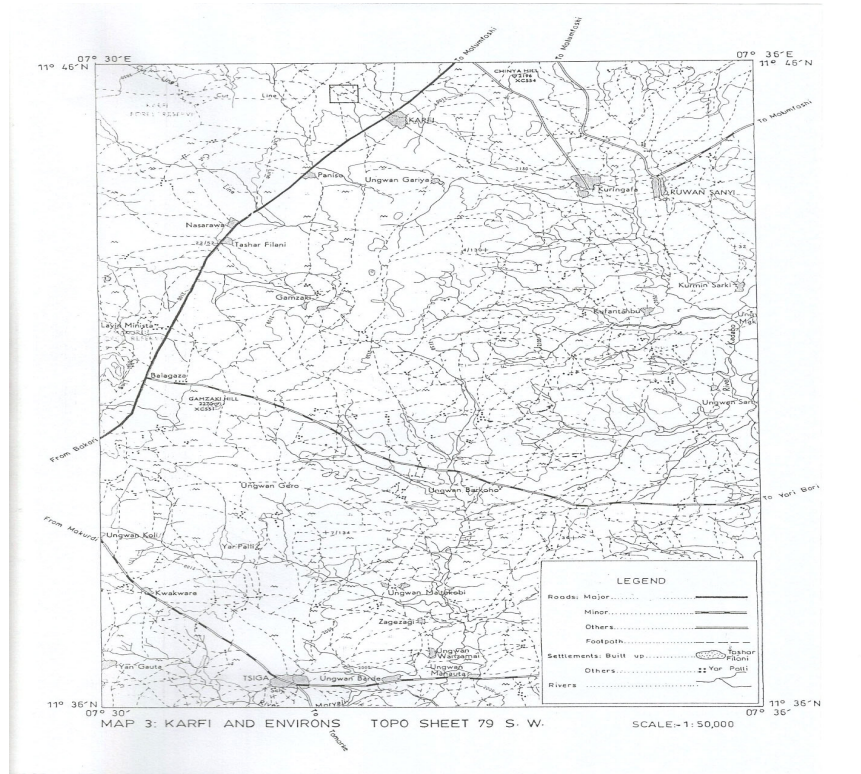
1. To conduct a preliminary evaluation of the cultural viability of the sites investigated.
2. To articulate and document the surface material evidence in order to derive some useful clues about the sub- surface configuration of the sites.
3. To engage the public as stakeholders in the investigation of archaeological problems.
4. To create awareness among the people of the area about the importance of their cultural heritage to them and the nation.

**Research Methodology**

This investigation was conducted by adopting three methods of study:

1. Archaeological Reconnaissance Survey
2. Excavation
3. Oral tradition





### Archaeological Reconnaissance Survey

Archaeological reconnaissance is generally referred to as the systematic recording and identification of archaeological features and finds, in other words, it is the careful observation of a landscape using a broad range of techniques by the archaeologist in locating archaeological sites (Renfrew and Bahn, 1996).

Archaeological survey carried out in this investigation involved foot walking by crew and guides. Traverse survey was conducted by using Global Positioning System (GPS), prismatic compass, measuring tapes, digital camera, ranging pole and photographic scale. In addition to identifying the material evidence on the surface of the site, attempts were also made to determine the size of the site.

### Excavation

Excavation involves the systematic and orderly digging of the earth surface so as to unveil what lies beneath the earth. Most excavations are done when it becomes necessary among all the archaeological processes, excavation is the most tedious and time-consuming, it is also expensive that is why individuals hardly engage in it. Excavation becomes most important because it is the major means through which the history of ancient societies that has been buried is being brought back to life using reliable evidence. Data obtained through excavation are particularly important in archaeology because buried data are usually been

preserved and less disturbed.

A test pit was dug as a way of assessing the cultural viability of the site. The process had to be halted prematurely because Karfi people were not happy as they believed the excavation was not allowing their buried/ dead live in peace.

### **Oral Tradition**

Cooper (2005) describes oral tradition to mean stories about the past which local populations produce and reproduce orally with the aim of preserving their own history. Interviews were conducted with people of different ages and status. The interviews were also conducted individually and in groups, questions asked were targeted around the origin of settlements, rulership, indigenous craft and industries as well as the relationship of Karfi with other settlements in the neighbourhood. A total of five people were interviewed. Many traditions concerning the origin of the Hausa people and their settlement pattern were often influenced by the hamitic hypothesis which states that Hausa societies emerged as a result of the union between some Berber tribes from North Africa around the 14<sup>th</sup> century and their settlements were like those of the North Africa.

The hypothesis has been contested by indigenous scholars like Prof Abdullahi Smith, who opined that political and city structure among the Hausa cities evolved largely as a result of outside influence, but were developed within the context of Gida-Unguwa-Gari-Birmi system (Smith 1971).

Oral information says that Karfi was founded in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century by a group of migrant from Yantumaki in present day Katsina State. The migrant acclimatized to the environment and built small huts with thatched grasses and also engaged in agriculture practice along the Koramar Mamukawa. The Koramar Mamukawa (water pond) was probably the major pull factor that attracted these people's attention to settle in the area. The original people that inhabited old Karfi in the past are known as Habe (pagans), before the Fulani Jihad, they were later overthrown by the Fulani's after the Jihad of Shehu Usman Danfodio in 1804.

Increase in population due to reproduction and emigration led to the construction of the defensive wall that surrounded the settlement. The wall was also surrounded by a deep ditch that prevents reaching the walls, all these were defensive strategies organized in the past to prevent the settlement from raiders.

The people of Karfi were great warriors and hunters, they fought several battles in the past and were never defeated. They also helped most of the neighboring communities and secured them from external attack especially during the Tawaye (uprising) raids.

In the past, the old Karfi village was bordered by pauwa, to the North, Dayi to the east, Danja to the south and maska to the west.

After the Jihad campaign, an emirate was established in the Katsina kingdom and all kauyuka (villages), and Garuruwa (towns) were incorporated into district and the control administration of the kingdom. This change in the configuration of the chieftaincies of smaller villages, including Karfi, which was then incorporated into the Galadima (District head) in Malumfashi.

According to oral tradition, the earlier inhabitants of old karfi were known for their craft of weaving and dyeing. The women engaged in spinning and weaving while the men dye the end products using local dye substances such as indigo and other leaves. They also practice agriculture and cultivated crops like, maize, potatoes, millet, corn, cocoa yam, among others.

According to oral information and some written sources, about 13 rulers were believed to have ruled karfi. These rulers were again divided into two categories. Those that ruled before the Fulani Jihad (Habe), and those that ruled after the Fulani Jihad.

## Results

### Defensive Wall

- Defensive wall was the first feature found visible on the site, called in Hausa (Ganuwar Kufai Karfi) the wall has four gates namely *Kofar Arewa*, *Kudu*, *Yamma*, and *Gabas* (North, South, East and West) which serves as major entrance of the village in the past. The south western angle of the defensive wall, at; Latitude  $11^{\circ} 44' 38.9''$  N, Longitude  $007^{\circ} 31' 95.6''$  E and an Elevation of 633m above sea level. It has the following measurement, average thickness of the wall 7.3m, an average height of the wall 4.3m, and a total length of 3875.2m.



**The south-western angle taken from the south.**

- The southern gate situated along the southern wall at; Latitude  $11^{\circ} 44' 41.6''$  N Longitude  $007^{\circ} 32' 11.6''$  E and Elevation 631m above sea level.



**Southern gate taken from the south**

- North western angle of the defensive wall at; Latitude  $11^{\circ} 44' 62.3''$  N, Longitude  $007^{\circ} 31' 31.6''$  E and Elevation 659m above sea level



**The north-western angle taken from the north.**

**Dyeing Industry:** it is situated at the northern part of the site, very close to the northern wall. The area is now been farmed on but the soil which is grey in colour suggests it was used for dyeing as corroborated with oral information one of the dye pit in the complex has its edge exposed at the top soil located at; Latitude  $11^{\circ} 44' 48.6''$  N, Longitude  $007^{\circ} 32' 02.6''$  E and Elevation 617m above sea level. The diameter of the pit is 4.6cm.

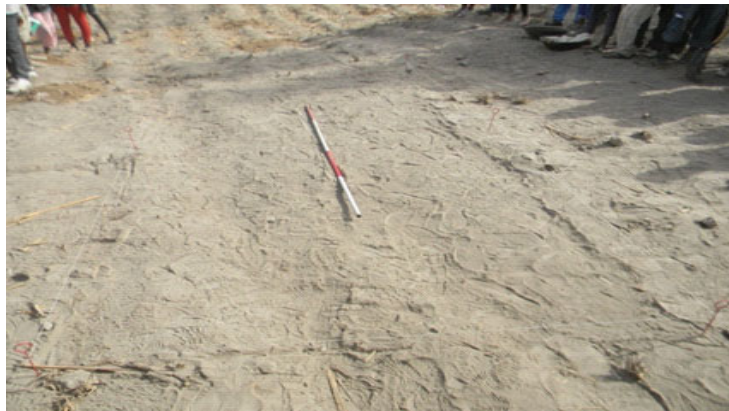


**Dye pit.**

#### **Excavation Process**

The area excavated was chosen within the gridded portion, measuring 2m by 4m given an area of 8m<sup>2</sup>, the two quadrants marked out for the excavation are F5, F7 and G5, G7 giving a rectangular shape. The pit was named KKF/2016/Tp/S (KufenKarfi/2016/testpit/spit). The method of excavation employed was arbitrary level, using an interval of 20cm.

A datum point was chosen before the excavation begins and the datum point chosen was a baobab tree measuring 25.24m from point D. The characteristic of the marked portion for excavation has presence of dried grasses, corn stalksstones. The soil type in the area is loamy and its grey in colour. Broken fragment of dye pit were also collected from the surface.



**Cleared portion for excavation**

**Description of the pit and finds collected at the first arbitrary level (20cm)**

- The soil was loose and humid through the southern part, while the northern part was drier and also loose.
- A slab remain of a dye pit was discovered at the eastern wall. The slab was found at 1.60m away point C.
- 35 potsherds, 2 relics of dye pit and bone samples were collected at this level.



**First arbitrary level (20cm)**

**Description of the pit and find collected at the second arbitrary level (40cm)**

- As the digging continuous the soil become darker
- An upper gridding stone was recovered at the northern part of the pit
- Charcoal sample were also found at the southern part of the pit.
- A bone sample was found toward the eastern wall
- The soil becomes coarse and darker at this level.
- A rubber stone was also received within the pit.
- An upper grinding stone, charcoal sample and a number of potsherds were recovered.





**Second arbitrary level (40cm)**

**Description of the pit and finds collected at the third arbitrary level (60cm)**

- The soil becomes lighter and wetter at this level
- Toward the middle of the eastern wall at 1.1m to 2.1m away from the north-eastern wall, the soil remains darker.
- The soil texture remains coarse.
- 6 potsherds, 1 snail shell and bone samples were also discovered at this level.



**Third arbitrary level (60cm)**

**Description of the pit and finds collected at the fourth arbitrary level (80cm)**

- The soil colour remains lighter (the same with the one observed at the third arbitrary level)
- A burrow was found at about 50cm, extending to 60cm away from the southern wall, and about 63cm extending to 78cm away from the western wall.
- 3 potsherds and bone samples were also discovered

**Fourth arbitrary level (80cm)****Description of the pit and finds collected at the fifth arbitrary level (100cm)**

- The soil colour become yellowish brown
- The texture of the soil remains coarse but becomes more compacted
- A total number of 24 bone sample were recovered
- Four potsherds were recovered from the same area were the bone sample were found.
- A human skeleton was uncovered at this level which comprised of the pelvis, knee cap, ribs and polar bones. The skeleton was found lying on its back and slightly facing the south eastern direction, the skeleton bones exposed ranges from the leg bone up to the ribs, while the rest of it protruded into the eastern wall.



**Skeletal bones discovered at the fifth arbitrary level (100cm)**

The excavation ended at the fifth arbitrary level (100cm) as the sterile layer has been reached. A sterile layer can be identified by observing three things;

- Absence of cultural materials in the soil
- Presence of clay lateritic outcrop
- Presence of rock intrusion

However, it is worthy of note that the presence of any one of the above could make a layer to be sterile, even though in some exclusive cases we may have break in occupation which might not necessarily mean total absence of cultural material when the digging goes further. Therefore, archaeologists must be careful in identifying a sterile layer so that cultural materials are not left lying under the ground after an excavation has been completed.

### **Discussions**

**Pottery:** - pottery tradition has a long antiquity in Katsina state. In most of the abandoned settlements, potsherds were found in greater quantity, it is one of the most prominent site indicators in Katsina state area. There are large numbers of potsherds scattered all over the site.

From the classification and analysis of potsherds collected, several forms and types were identified. Ethnographic information on the potsherds has not been used because at present there is no pottering or pottery making tradition in Karfi. Inferences were made using the nature of the rim morphology and types, with the pots still in use by some house hold. The process of manufacture is the same as any other pottery making community in northern Nigeria. According to oral tradition,

pottery or the art of pottery making was one of the industries that flourished in Karfi, the potters were believed to have come from DawakinTofa in Kano. Most of the potsherds analyzed were bowls, which served as vessels for eating food, others may have served as mediums for cooking food and storage of small items. Some of the rims indicated that of smaller bowls known as “kasko” which are used for warming rooms and huts by firing charcoal in them, especially during harmattan, these traditions still survive in the area.

In Karfi, pottery is mostly made and used for domestic purposes, another use apart from domestic use is burials. Broken pottery and new ones were being and still in use for burial purposes. This is because pottery do not decay easily, it will make the grave to remain hollow for several years. The tradition of using pottery for burials has been with the people even before the coming of Islam. Because it protects the body from rodents or insects. This tradition is still in practice up till today. Even though today modern iron and aluminum pots were introduced in the area, clay pots are still in use. In fact, there are people today who believe that food cooked in clay pots are better in taste than those cooked in iron pots.

The study of pottery in Karfi suffers some serious limitations in some important reports because at present, the craft is no more. This makes it impossible for us to conduct an ethnographic survey, most of the pottery in use today were gotten from different markets and different cultures. Whether there are innovations or discontinuity it could not be established, but according to Karfi finds with regard to potsherds shall be seen as a specific example of pottery making in Katsina and northern Nigeria

**Dye pits:** - dyeing is the process of coloring weaved textile materials or fabric. Dye pits are holes dug into the ground for the purpose of dyeing activities. According to oral information, dyeing was among the traditional industries that flourished at old Karfi community. The people constructed the dyeing pits using materials obtained from their immediate environment and the surroundings.

Three dye pits were exposed during the process of excavation and this has helped us to validate the claim by oral tradition that the earlier communities operate dyeing industries, there exist no ethnographic parallels on the dyeing tradition in the area of our study. In the past dyeing is one of the major industries in Karfi, they were known for their unique indigo dye fabrics, which were traded in various commercial markets within Katsina area, and other places like Kano, Sokoto and Zaria. At present, dyeing industries in Karfi are no more, this is as a result of modern textile industries and chemical dyeing which are cheaper and easier to obtain than the traditional ones.

**Defensive wall (Ganuwa):**- this is one of the most prominent features that still stand in ruins on the site, oral tradition has it that it was built during the reign of Emir of Katsina Musa, the walls appeared to have been constructed with oval shape lumps of dark mud laid in courses (Tubali).

The ruins of the defensive wall can be used judiciously to establish the significance of this settlement in terms of size, wealth, authority and classification of

labour among the people of Karfi. The town walls symbolized power and authority, indicating that at a point in time most of the compacted settlements of Katsina were making optimum use of their available resources for their development.

However, this feature indicates that situation at Karfi and other neighboring areas was not a simple one. The extensive nature of the walls shows that the society was a complex one, probably with a complex socio-economic system and a social stratification comprising of the “freemen” and “slaves” from whom the labour for the construction of the wall must have been obtained through forced labour.

Inferences could be made from the defensive walls that the area must have experienced a complex economy with natural resources attractive to other neighboring areas, for instance the area has a fertile soil for agriculture which attract human settlement. The walls were built not only as defensive mechanism, but also as a protective measure for the peaceful development of the community.

**Skeletal bone:** - the discovery of skeletal bones ranging from; fibula, tibia, patella (knee cap), femur, pelvic, lumber and ribs of a human being clearly validate the oral information that the site was occupied by a group of people in the past. Also, the position and orientation of the remains provided us with information concerning the culture and religion of the past inhabitants of the area. From visual inspection, we can assume that the deceased was buried laying on its backs and the head pointing to the south eastern direction. Therefore, based on this position and orientation we can assumed that the deceased was probably buried before the coming of Islam to the area, because Islamic burials are done with the deceased place laterally on the right hand with the face directly facing the east.

However, the presence of potsherds around the skeletal remain can also serve as a basis to infer that the burial was that of the Hausa culture because it has been known that the Hausa group or culture in Northern Nigeria usually use pottery in their burial since before the spread of Islam in the area.

### **Conclusion**

The presence of dyeing evidence on the surface of the area excavated and the discovery of skeletal remains from the excavated pit probably indicate that the area has been occupied by two different groups. The group that earlier occupied the area buried a dead body beneath the ground and the later group unknowingly practiced dyeing on the surface of the same area. This assumption is based on the fact that the Hausa people do not engage in any activity on the surface of a burial ground if such an area is noticed.

### **Recommendation**

The Ministry of Culture and Tourisms should work hand in hand with National Commission for Museums and Monument to promote tourism in the site looking at the available features on the site. It should also undertake audit of artifacts and other features of archaeological interest in the site. A site museum should also be established in the site so that finds and other cultural material recovered as a result

of continuous research on the site will be properly housed and taken care of in the museum.

Our study area, Karfi has a lot of historical significance; this research has been able to figure out the important of this area in Hausa land. Further research on this historical site is imperative and is expected to cover dating and other scientific laboratory analysis as this will provide answers to the sequence of occupation, dates and other aspects of the site.

### **Bibliography**

- Andah, B.W and Okpokwu A.I (1994) Practicing Archaeology in Africa: Ibadan, Wisdom publishers limited Nigeria.
- Ogundele, S.O (2002) Field Archaeology: An Introduction, Ejmasons Nigeria Enterprise Ibadan.
- Rabiu, Y (2008) "Archaeological Reconnaissance at Old KarfiMalumfashi L.G.A Katsina state. B.A Thesis A.B.U Zaria.
- Renfrew, C. and Bahn, P. (1996) Archaeology: theories, methods and practice, Thames and Hudson, London.
- Smith, A. (1987). The Early States of the Central Sudan. *A little New Light: Selected Historical Writings of Abdullahi Smith*Vol.1.Abullahi Smith Centre for Historical Research.

### **Appendix**

#### **List of Informat**

Name	Age	Occupation
Abdulmumini Haruna	75 Years Old	Farming
Alh Muhammad Abubakar	45 Years Old	Cattle rearer
Alh Muhammad Aminu	47 Years Old	Cattle rearer
Aliyu Muhammad	60 Years Old	Herbalist
Ishaq Ahmad	32 Years Old	Blacksmith