

**HERITAGE MANAGEMENT IN THE SOKOTO
RIMA BASIN: A CASE STUDY OF ALKALAWA IN
SABON BIRNI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF
SOKOTO STATE.**

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Abstract

Alkalawa is an abandoned settlement site, located ten kilometers away from SabonBirni Local Government Area Sokoto State Nigeria. It has got some archaeological features like; grave yard, dye pits, ruins of defensive wall, historical manuscript which speak a lot about the heritage of Gobir people who settled in this site. The site is currently enlisted as one of the tourist site in Sokoto State because of its archaeological potentials. The Ministry of Arts and Tourism started a site Museum which is uncompleted and It also attract people from within and outside Nigeria who come to seek spiritual blessing from the grave of Bawa Jan Gwarzo and other rulers of Gobir Kingdom. Despite these potentials the site is currently managed by the inhabitant of the present day Alkalawa village. Little or no support is coming from the State Government in safeguarding these archaeological resources and the site is under threat due to intensive farming and desertification. This paper attempts to suggest ways towards managing and protecting this historical site for the purpose of education, tourism and economic activities.

Keywords: *Heritage Management, Sokoto Rima and Archaeological potentials.*

Introduction

Alkalawa is located on latitude 13° 36' 47" N and longitude 06° 15' 36" E and in *Sabon Birni* Local Government Area of Sokoto State. The early settlers in *Alkalawa* were said to be *Gobirawaw* who were said to have been *Kipiti* (Copts) from *Misra* (Egypt) (Na-dama 1977:289). *Alkalawa* formally became the capital of *Gobir Kingdom* after the defeat of *Birnin Zamfara* in 1757 A.D. It later fell to the Sokoto Jihadist in (1808 A.D) who destroyed the city as they were seen as rebels against the Islamic Faith (Augi 1984: 416).

The old city was said to have been destroyed and abandoned about 200 to 250 years ago. The ruins of the city wall and mound are still visible suggesting that these features were massively built (Augi 1984:419). The founder of the capital Ibrahim Babari was said to have devoted seven years of his reign to building, developing and fortifying *Alkalawa*. (Na-dama 1977: 280).

Archaeological evidence in *Alkalawa* includes; ruins of city wall, dye pit, burial cairns (ground), potsherds, huge mounds among others. This site is also of great spiritual significance as people used to come from within and outside Nigeria to seek blessings from one of the great ruler of the town Bawa Jan Gwarzo, he was said to have been the longest serving king of *Alkalawa* (Augi 1984:412).

The presence of cultural materials on this site which is presently threatened by intensive farming and desertification informed this paper. The paper also attempts to suggest ways towards managing and protecting this historical site for the purpose of education, tourism and economic activities.

Objectives of the Research

The main aim of this research is to identify and document finds and features that are of archaeological interest which are under threat by human and natural factors in Birnin Alkalawa. This aim was achieved through collecting and documenting oral tradition, Archaeological Reconnaissance and desktop review of literatures.

Method of Research

- **Oral Tradition:** Five people were interviewed, the interview centered on origin, migration, environment, political and economic system.
- **Desktop Review of Literatures:** Information about Alkalawa were obtained from a variety of written sources particularly written sources that document events that pre date the jihad period for example colonial records which mentioned Alkalawa. One of the major works found was a manuscript written in Arabic which was gotten from the Gobir Palace in Sabon Birni. The manuscript is claimed to have been sent from Yemen. The author is said to be a *Bagobir* (a descendant) who ran away after

the defeat of the Alkalawa, though some parts of the book has been translated into Hausa, but the original manuscript is not properly preserved hence it is infected by termites and is deteriorating (see plate I and II).



Plate I: Manuscript sent from Yemen



Plate II: The Gaffaka in which the Manuscript is preserved

- **Archaeological Reconnaissance:** The ground reconnaissance method was employed in this research. The reconnaissance involved systematic field walking and traversing round Alkalawa site.

Results

The following features were identified.

- **Grave yard**
This is where prominent rulers of Alkalawa and their family members were buried. There is an ancient well in the grave yard from which water for mixing the mud to cement the grave was obtained. Mallami (Pers. Com. 2013), recounted that people from various parts of West Africa used to come and seek spiritual blessings from the grave of one of the famous and prominent ruler of Alkalawa Bawa Jan Gwarzo. Some herd's men come to the site during the dry season to graze their animals with the belief that there are spiritual benefit when they feed their animals on the site. The grave yard is fenced in a rectangular shape with 27m length and 19m breadth covering an area 513 Square Meters. There are about thirty (30) tombs in the grave yard all form the royal family.



Plate III: Front View of the entrance to the grave yard



Plate IV: Bawa Jan Gwarzo's grave



Plate VI: The well in the grave yard

- **Dye pits**

About fifteen dye pits in a cluster were among the features found on the site. They are located at the lower depression of the site which is about two hundred meters North West of the grave yard. The soil colour of the area differs from other areas as it is whitish and grey. Some of the dye pits are covered with soil. The dye pits range from 0.8 – 1.2m in diameter. The dye pits covers a rectangular area of length 9m by 7m breadth totaling 63m². The clustered dye pits are about two hundred and sixty-six meters (266m) north west of the grave yard.



Plate VII: Dye Pits.

- **Pool of heads (*TafkinKanu*)**

A pool was found in the site, its water is muddy and it looks like *fadama*. Oral sources (Ladan, Pers. Com. 2013) said that whenever Alkalawa archers captured Shehu Usmanu Danfodio's fighters they chopped off their heads and threw them into the pool. Similarly those who committed capital offences and were condemned to death, their heads were also chopped off and thrown into the pool. It is about a kilometers walk northeast from the grave yard.



Plate VIII: Pool of Heads (*TafkinKanuu*)

- **Remains of defensive wall (BazarBirni):** the remains of the defensive wall shows that the wall was built with mud though presently washed away by River Rima which flows by its side. Oral information and written documents confirm the names of the seven gates found on the wall namely; Kofar Malam, Kofar Galadima Kachiro, Kofar Kihin Bis a, Kofar Sarkin Kabi, kofar Sarkin Kwanni, Kofar Sarki, Kofar Baramaka (Augi 1984, Suleiman, per.com 2014). The ruin of the defensive wall has a height of fifty (50) cm.



Plate IX: Remains of Defensive Wall

Discussion and Conclusion

The above features can be termed as cultural heritage of the *Gobirawa*, this is because by the world heritage convention's operational guidelines heritage can be seen as both cultural and natural heritage that are priceless and irreplaceable possessions.

The essence of managing heritage resources is primarily for the benefit of the current users of the resources as well as for posterity. Heritage management is also accompanied with linked vision and target goal, this vision involves the adaptation of strategies that helps to maintain resources in their realistic state for future use (Adedayo, 2007-77).

The site is currently enlisted by the Sokoto state government as one of its tourist attraction site because of its historical significance. Similarly, the Federal Ministry of Culture and Tourism established a site museum which is still uncompleted (see plate X). The museum is 10m south of the grave yard.



Plate X: Front view of the uncompleted site Museum.

Despite these bodies mentioned above who are suppose to be managers of this site, the site is under threat of human and natural factors as shown in the plates above.

Currently the management of the site is done by the inhabitant of the present day Alkalawa village who receive little or no support from the State Government or Ministry in safeguarding these cultural heritages. The condition of the site requires urgent attention by all stakeholders; members of the community, Traditional Institution, State Government, National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Though, this site has been enlisted by Sokoto State Government as a Tourist Attraction Site, which is useful and important in promoting educational,

economical and recreational value of the state. There is the need to deliberately embark on more detailed research and documentation of the site as what is written in the Sokoto State Tourist Guide is very scanty and could be misleading.

The Federal Government and National Commission for Museum and Monuments need to work harder towards completing the site museum in Alkalawa, as this would be the first of its kind in the state and more information would be assessed if the museum is put in place, it would also serve as a medium for public awareness which can also be called public archaeology.

The manuscripts about the history of Alkalawa is a very important document, hence it needs to be properly preserved particularly now that termites have started destroying it. There is the need for the royal home to collaborate with Arewa house in Kaduna in producing a proto type and scanning it to get an e-copy of the manuscript; they also need to partner towards translating the whole manuscript into English and Hausa Languages as this will go a long way in providing more information about Alkalawa.

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