

PRELIMINARY SURVEY AT THE NASIA ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND SMELTING SITES

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I traveled to the Nasia archaeological sites for pre-dissertation research in the summer 2018 ahead of my PhD fieldwork next year. My research investigates the relationship between the practice of large-scale ironworking and processes of socio-political complexities at the Nasia region in the Mamprugu area of Ghana's northern savannah. Mamprugu is the earliest kingdom to have been established in Ghana by 1475. The preliminary visit was to reconnect with the people and traditional leaders of the area and conduct some limited research surveys with funding support from the CAS. I was assisted by three graduate students from the Archaeology Department of the University of Ghana and two local assistants.

Using the Tamale-Bolga highway and the Nasia River as arbitrary reference points, the site was categorized into Eastern and Western zones. This decision was informed by previous studies in 2012 for my master's thesis, which was conducted at the eastern zone of the site. Conducting a walk survey at the western zone provided great insights to understanding the landscape and settlement patterning. Several house mounds were identified, and GPS coordinates recorded. The surface configuration of the mounds included surface scatter of potsherds and an iron ring that was found on one of the mounds. The mounds were heavily disturbed through local agricultural practices. No iron smelting mound was identified at this area, indicating the absence of iron smelting activities at this section of the site.

Conducting further walk surveys at the eastern section of the sites revealed more smelting mounds characterized with several volumes of slags and tuyere pieces. About 5 mounds identified closer to a village called Loagri showed different characteristics from all other smelting mounds. They were taller and had very few or no tuyere pieces at all. The variation suggests some

critical issues which will be investigated in my dissertation 1) a different type of iron technology used at this area; 2) a different time period; or 3) different craft workers.

An unfortunate observation made during this visit was a threat to the archaeological sites at Nasia through developmental projects and agricultural practices. When the Ghana National Petroleum Company (GMPC) explored the savannah region for oil, they cut through the sites to construct a road to their exploratory sites. The road construction destroyed many mounds displacing material culture buried in these mounds. Although the GMPC's actions are contrary to the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board's regulations (which require developers to report materials or objects of archaeological or cultural significance they accidentally encounter to the board), GMPC is likely to escape any sanction due to weaker enforcement of regulations in Ghana.

The team visited Sakpali, a town about 10 km south of Nasia. Sakpali bears the scars of the trans-Atlantic human trafficking (slavery) that displaced the highest number of people in human history. The town was used as market and transit point for captives from the northern sector of Ghana to the southern dungeons. A baobab tree standing at the middle of the town is believed to be the site captives were exchanged. The town was excavated by a former lecturer at the archaeology department from the University of Ghana, but findings from his research were never published. A little house contains materials he recovered from that excavations. They include local and foreign potsherds and two big pots, neck and ankle chains and cowries. Also, in the town there are water wells that were dug ostensibly by captives for drinking water. These wells today serve as memories of the ugliest part of human history.

Many industries including the iron industry that thrived before the commercialization of human trafficking in Africa suffered heavily through raids and

importations. Factors leading to the demise of iron smelting at Mamprugu need further investigation. Some scholars suggest the disappearance of vegetation in smelting centers due to over exploitation resulted in the industries getting defunct, while others suggest human trafficking stimulated by the Atlantic human traffic cargos is the immediate cause of the collapse of the industry.

In conclusion, my pre-dissertation survey at Nasia revealed landscape and settlement patterns at the Nasia archaeological sites, a situation only observed at major iron production centers in Africa. The Sakpali human trafficking market site provides an opportunity to investigate the relationship between human trafficking activities and the collapse of ironworking industries in the savannah regions of Ghana.

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