

Capitals of the medieval Sahel: the case of Garumele, Niger

The 2005 season



Capitals of the medieval Sahel: the case of Garumele, Niger (the 2005 season)

Abstract

The abandoned settlement of Garumele, Niger, has often been described, most notably in 1962 by Bivar and Shinnie in the *Journal of African History*; it features an outer enclosure some three kilometres long and a series of fired brick foundations. Oral tradition claims Garumele was the main assembly point for the Kanem-Borno rulers after their exile to the western side of Lake Chad; the site would therefore appear to be related to one of the most enduring and well-known polities of West Africa. Yet it had never been investigated archaeologically.

This paper outlines a September 2005 archaeological investigation, involving test pitting and survey, carried out at the site by Anne Haour and Boube Gado. Results are still preliminary, and will be complemented by broader reflections on the general nature of Sahelian walled settlements.

Le cas de Garumele, Niger

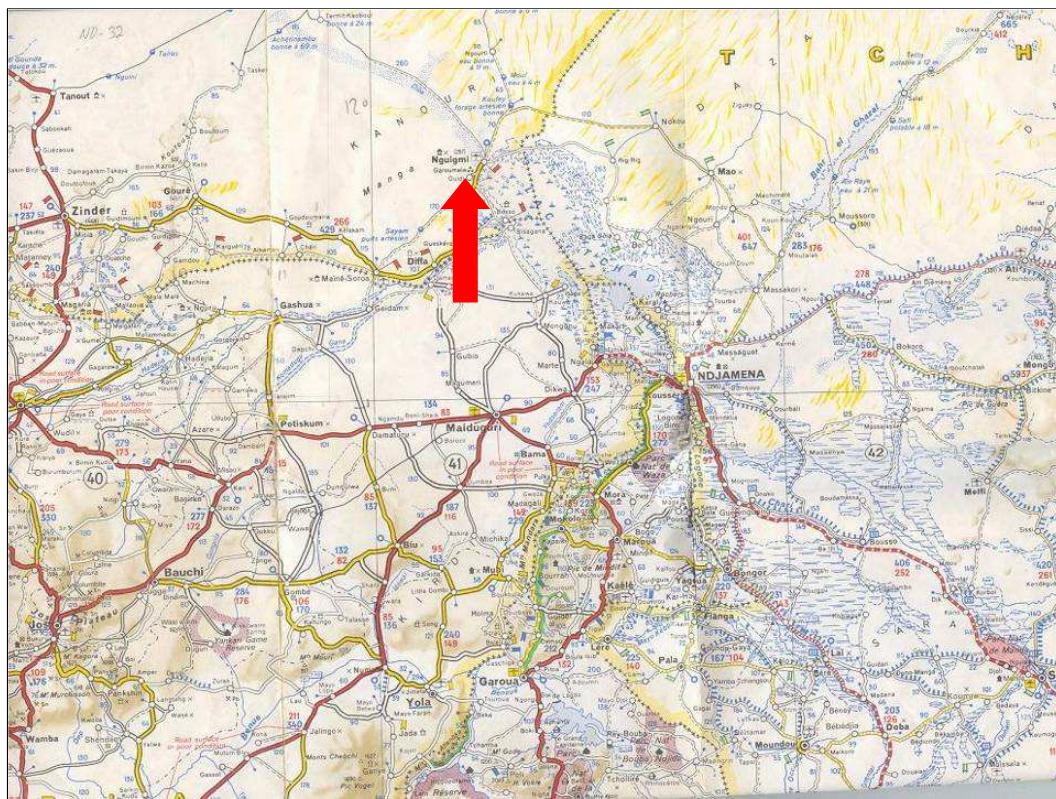
- Où et quand
- Garumele: Historique des recherches
- Garumele: Septembre 2005
(Haour/Gado/*British Institute in Eastern Africa*)
- Intégration de l'Archéologie africaine?
- Where and when
- Garumele: Research background
- Garumele: September 2005
(Haour/Gado/*British Institute in Eastern Africa*)
- Integration of African Archaeology?



Garumele

All photos by A Haour, 2005 unless cited otherwise.

Map by V Winton



Garumele est un des rares (sept au total) sites archéologiques à figurer sur la classique carte Michelin 953 d'Afrique de l'Ouest (ci-dessus); il est en compagnie donc de noms célèbres tels que Awdaghost et Koumbi Saleh

Garumele

- Historique des recherches: sites décrit en 1952, 1962, 1985, 2001 – jamais fouillé
- Description la plus complète: 1962, Bivar et Shinnie, “Old Kanuri capitals”, *Journal of African History* 3: 1-10.
- Briques crues en forme de poire (*tubali*) et “palais” en briques rouges cuites
- Point de rassemblement de la dynastie Seifuwa du Kanem-Borno, avant la fondation de Birnin Gazargamo?
- Research history: site described 1952, 1962, 1985, 2001 – never excavated
- Fullest description: 1962, Bivar et Shinnie, “Old Kanuri capitals”, *Journal of African History* 3: 1-10.
- Sun dried pear-shaped bricks (*tubali*) and “palace” in fired red bricks
- Meeting point of the Seifuwa dynasty of Kanem-Borno, prior to the foundation of Birnin Gazargamo?

3 km long tubali wall.

Descriptions of Garumele -

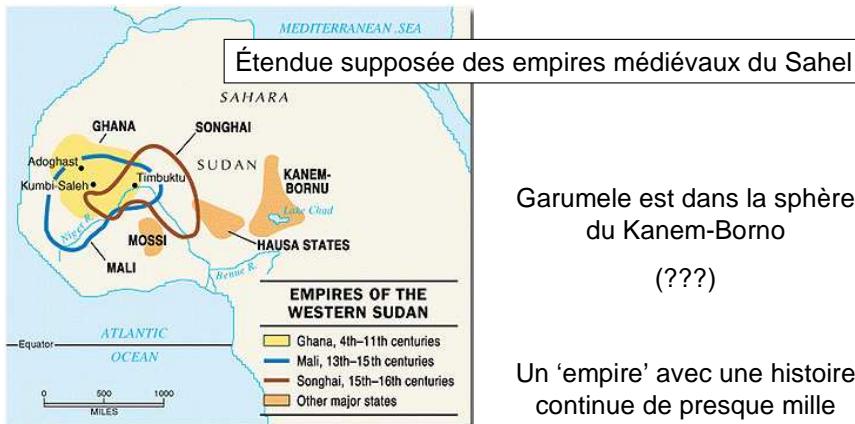
Binet, Capt. (1952). ‘Notes sur les ruines de Garoumélé (Niger)’. *Notes Africaines*, 53: 1-2.

Bivar, A. D. H. and Shinnie, P. L. (1962). ‘Old Kanuri capitals’. *The Journal of African History*, 3: 1-10.

Gronenborn, D. (2001a). ‘Kanem-Borno – a brief summary of the history and archaeology of an empire in the Central ‘bilad el-sudan’’, in C. DeCorse, (ed.), *West Africa during the Atlantic slave trade: archaeological perspectives*. London and New York: Leicester University Press, 101-130.

Zakari, M. 1985. *Histoire des populations du sud-est nigérien. Études Nigériennes* 53. Niamey: Institut de Recherches en Sciences Humaines.

Kanem-Borno

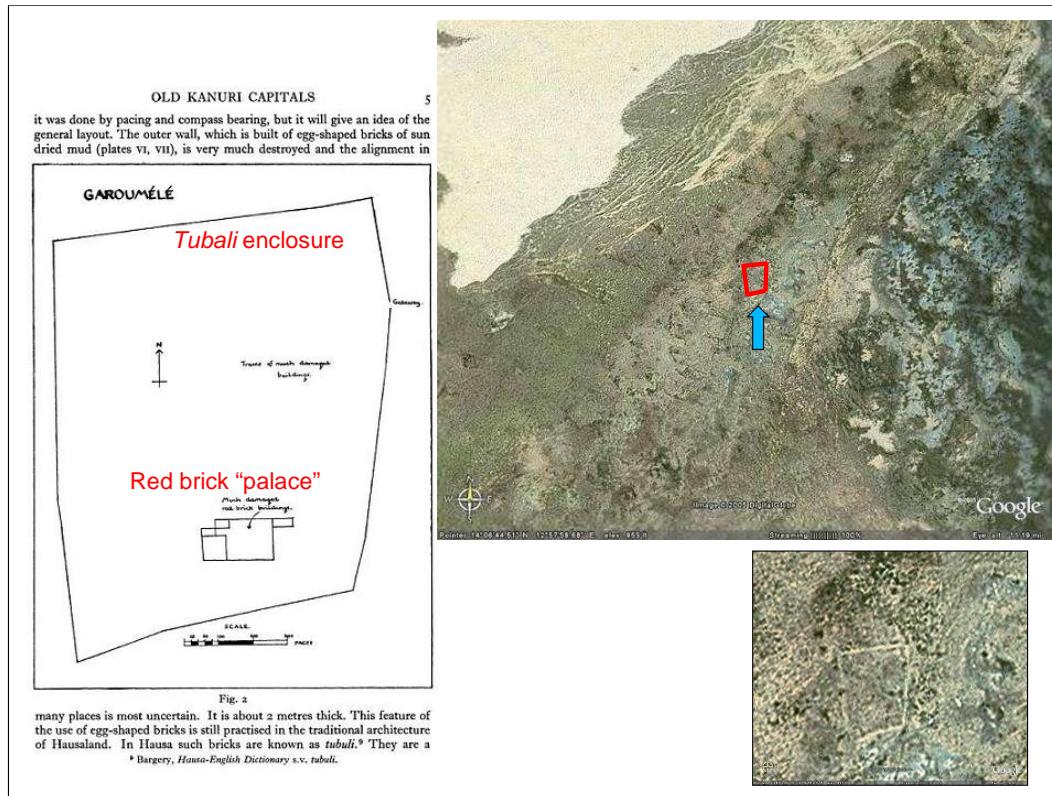


Garumele est dans la sphère
du Kanem-Borno
(???)

Un 'empire' avec une histoire
continue de presque mille
ans, mais on sait très peu
archéologiquement des
premiers 500 ans

Garumele seems connected with the history of Kanem-Borno.

Map from --???



Returning to the evidence on the ground; 3 km long enclosure marks outline of the site

Left – plan drawn by BIVAR, A. D. H. and SHINNIE, P. L. in: (1962). Old Kanuri capitals. Journal of African History 3: 1-10.

Right: Google Earth



Garumele



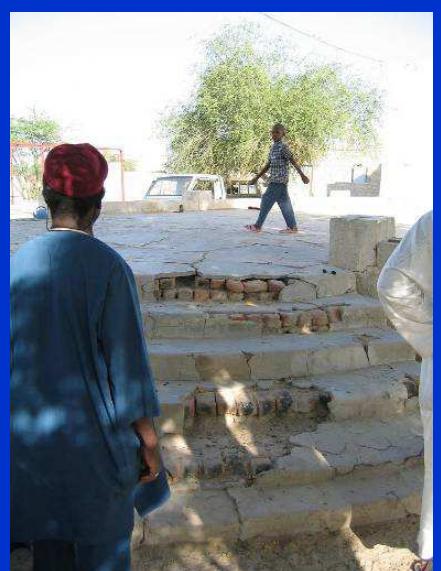
The tubali enclosure runs all around the site. The bricks are friable.

The red bricks are quite different – fired and tough – and they make out a series of structures which have often been called the “palace”.

Garumele

Looting of “palace” – Garumele bricks
in modern Nguigmi

“Palais” pillé - briques de Garumélé
dans la ville moderne de Nguigmi



400 cubic metres of bricks were removed from the site, according to Binet (1952). Notes sur les ruines de Garoumélé (Niger). Notes Africaines 53: 1-2.

Garumele

Fouille / Excavation



Nous avons choisi pour notre fouille le sommet d'un tell, ou accumulation de débris culturels (poterie, cendre, os), à l'intérieur de l'enceinte de *tubali* et non loin de la zone où se trouvaient autrefois les constructions de briques rouges. Le point référence, le coin nord-ouest de la fouille, est à 14 06 689 N, 12 58 155 E (système géodésique WGS84).

Nous avons en premier lieu décapé une surface de 5x2 mètres, divisée en dix carrés (A1, A2, B1... E1, E2). L'aire de fouille a par la suite été réduite au fur et à mesure de la progression du travail. Tout le sable remué à été tamisé à une maille de 1 mm. Les niveaux suivants ont été traversés :

Niveau 1 couche de surface – accumulation et déflation de sol et de strates archéologiques, remanié par la pluie, le vent, et le passage d'animaux et de personnes. Sable fin et cendreux. Céramique, os, métal, perles.

Niveau 25-46 cm de fond – couche culturelle confuse, sans stratigraphie naturelle. Céramique, os, verre/plastique, métal (dont 1.5 kg de scories dans le carré C1), perles

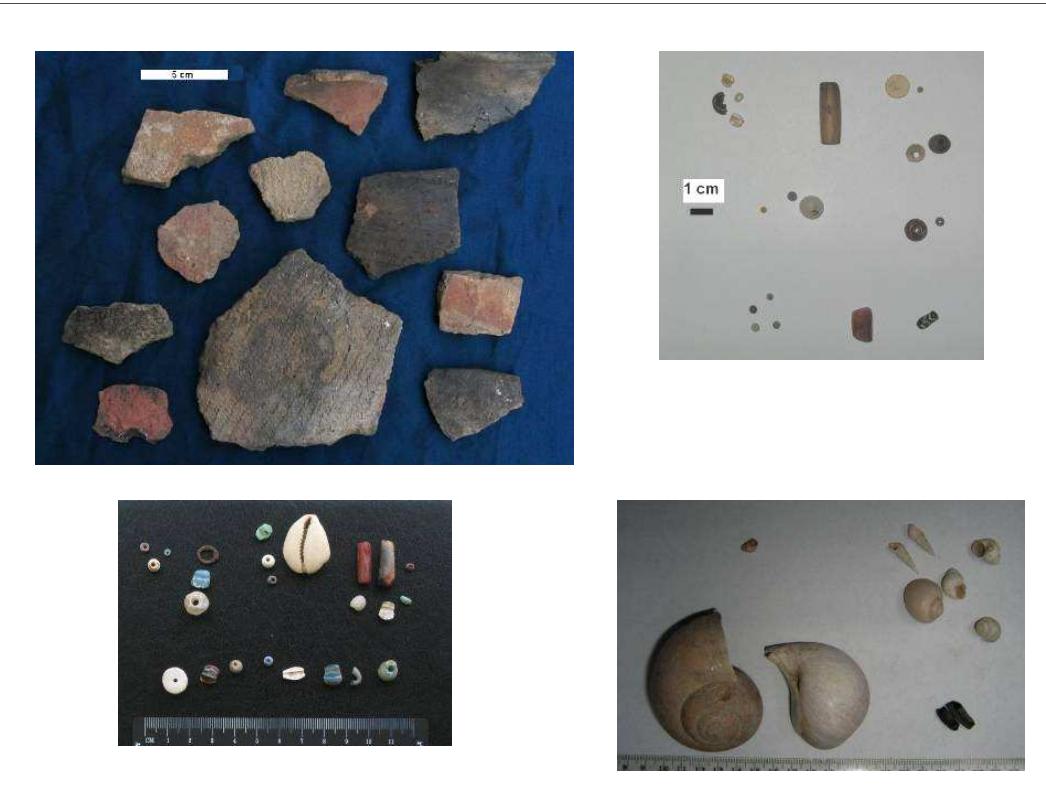
Niveau 346-112 cm de fond – série de couches de détritus ; ossements, tessons, cendres. Céramique, os, perles.

Niveau 4112-215 cm de fond – continuation série de couches de détritus. Beaucoup de charbon. Céramique, os, verre/plastique, métal, perles.

Niveau 5215-263 cm de fond – concentration de charbons, poterie et gros ossements (non articulés). Céramique, os, un fragment de *lantana* (jaspe), perles.

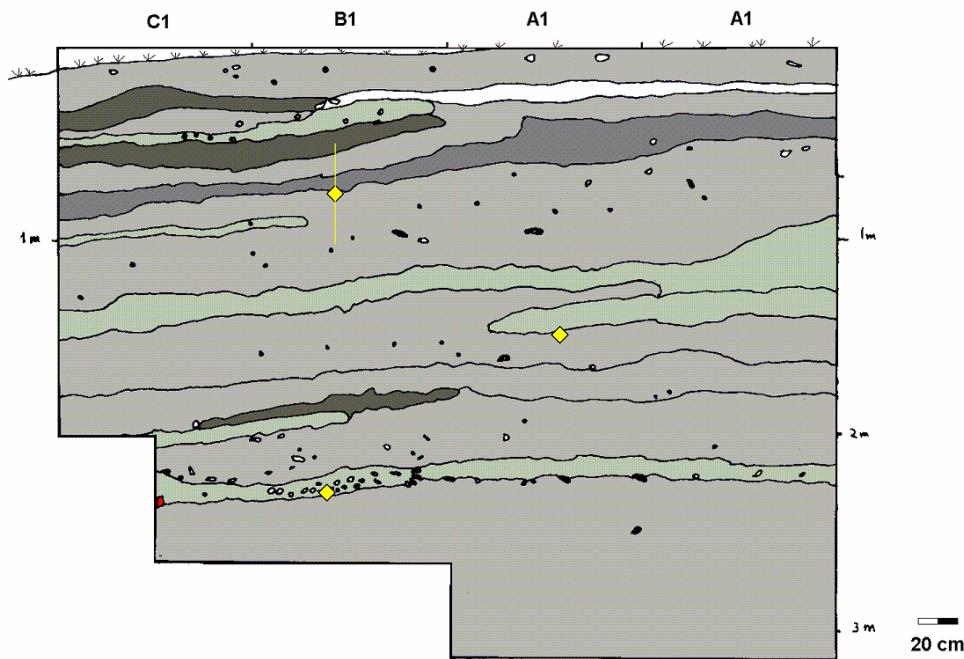
Niveau 6261-315 cm de fond – sol naturel. Céramique, os, cessant après une dizaine de centimètres.

[extract from report to Institut de Recherches en Sciences Humaines by A Haour, Sept. 2005]



Mainly pottery, but also...

Garumele – section finale



Yellow diamonds indicate location of charcoal samples taken for RC dating.
Red dot is a fired brick fragment -> contemporaneity of tell with 'palace'.

Section drawn by A Haour with Malik Saako



Mars 1959 (Bivar & Shinnie)

Septembre 2005

Photo on left is from Bivar, A. D. H. and Shinnie, P. L. (1962). 'Old Kanuri capitals'. *The Journal of African History*, 3: 1-10.

We mapped site, which includes 30+ tells

Animals mainly causing damage to tubali enclosure

This concludes the outline of our research activity.

We had two aims: obtaining material for dating, and a representative collection of ceramics for analysis. We met both aims.

Analyse en cours: la question des dates

- Échantillons de charbon pour datation au C14
- Échantillons de sable/brique pour datation OSL
- La concordance entre ces méthodes pourra donc être testée
- En outre, comment ces dates s'accorderont-elles avec celles données par la tradition orale ?

Analysis in progress: the question of age

- C14
- Sand/brick for OSL dating
- Agreement between methods
- Agreement with oral tradition ?

According to Zakari [Zakari, M. 1985. Histoire des populations du sud-est nigérien. Études Nigériennes 53. Niamey: Institut de Recherches en Sciences Humaines] oral traditions

associate Garumele with Kanem-Borno elite's move south. The city would have been founded in the mid-fifteenth century and then replaced by Birnin Gazargamo, a little further south.

A lieutenant was left behind at Garumele, but after Touareg assaults the city lost importance and disappeared ca. 1838.

Typologie céramique



Sgraffito

Types-signature de
Kanem-Borno

(Connah, Gronenborn,
etc.)



Pleated strip roulette

The preliminary fieldwork at Garumele under the auspices of the BIEA opens doors for work connecting material culture and political framework.

Both sgraffito and PPR, pottery signature-types, highlighted by Connah, 1981 and Gronenborn, 2000 among others as being characteristic of the expansion of Kanem-Borno, are present at Garumele.

Further quantitative analysis will clarify to what extent they occur and whether numbers vary through time.

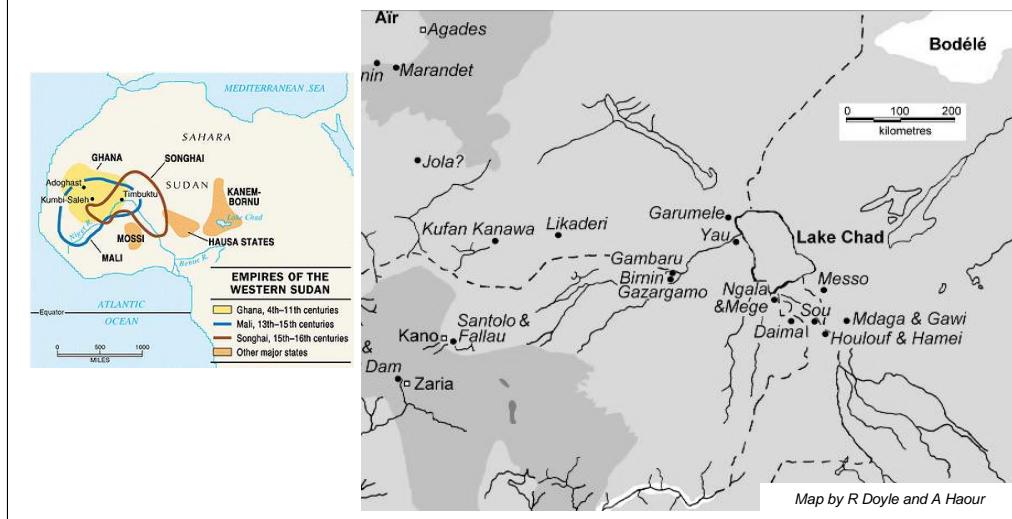
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Garumele within the wider area

Garumele dans la zone plus large



How do the two maps, above, actually match up on the ground?

The baked brick sites of the Lake Chad Basin have attracted considerable attention – among other reasons because the use of baked bricks may be a tradition imported from North Africa (Lavers, in Insoll, 2003) – but this is the first time one of this has been archaeologically investigated within the vast Nigérien territory. This part of Niger is particularly interesting in the question of large-scale polities, since its traditions speak of a fusion of Hausa and Kanuri inputs (Zakari, 1985; Haour, 2003; Lange, 2004).

As mentioned, Garumele sits within a relatively well-studied general area. Comparative data are already available in the form of material issued from test pitting at Birnin Gazargamo (Connah, 1981) and at Gambaru (Hambolu, 1996), both sites within 150 kilometres of Garumele and both also linked to the fifteenth-century expansion of the Kanem-Borno elite.

In addition, these data are complemented by archaeological enquiries along the southern side of Lake Chad carried out by a Frankfurt team (Gronenborn, 2000; Gronenborn & Magnavita, 2000). This research has focused on the development of centralised polities, their ceramic signature, and the relationship of material culture with ethnic identity (see especially Gronenborn, 2000). It is noted, for example, that the sites of Yau and Birnin Gazargamo in the Yobe valley are characterised by two types of pottery – incised red-slipped and knotted strip rouletted – which appear only centuries later farther south at sites such as Ngala. These are thought to indicate an increase in the influence of Kanem-Borno (Gronenborn & Magnavita, 2000; Gronenborn, 2000). This aspect of material culture can in turn be tied to reconsiderations of the written record, which speaks of the expansion of Kanem-Borno and of its slave-raiding expeditions from the fourteenth century onwards (Lange, 1982).

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Integrating African archaeology

- Africanistes en Afrique et au-dehors
- Disciplines alliées
- Le public
- Africanistes in Afrique and outside Africa
- Related disciplines
- The public
- Les autres types d'archéologie (théorie, méthode) et les autres parties du monde
- Other types of archaeology (theory, method) and other parts of the world

Reflecting on the aims for the 18th Biennial SAfA conference: the Garumele project achieved INTEGRATION in several respects.

of expatriate Africanists and their institutions and their African colleagues and their institutions [work carried out together by archaeologists from Niger, Ghana and UK]

of African archaeology and related disciplines: historical linguistics, metallurgy, climatology, paleontology, material culture studies and many others [the question of dates for Garumele]

of producers of African archaeology and its consumers, actual and potential, especially Africans, [the paradox of a high-visibility site (Michelin map) of which very little is known]

But the most important in my view is the integration -

of African archaeology and other archaeologies in terms of theory, methodology and methods , of archaeological data and sequences from different parts of Africa and between regions of Africa and other parts of the world, including the African diaspora

In order to raise our profile.

Integrating African data: research questions in a comparative framework

- Un vaste nombre de sites qui semblent dater de cette période
- Des traditions qui parlent d'emplacements successifs pour les capitales d'un même « état »
- Génération spontanée de ces sites (tradition orale)
- Comment ces vaste sites étaient-ils approvisionnés?
- Comment ces immenses territoires auraient-ils pu être contrôlés ?
- A large number of sites apparently dating from a similar time
- Oral traditions which speak of a number of successive capitals for a single « state »
- Spontaneously generated sites? (oral tradition)
- How were these sites provisioned by their hinterland?
- How were vast territories in fact controlled?

This slide shows some directions I've been moving in – things I've been thinking about – for more, see my book to be published insha Allah next year by Oxford University Press – Rulers, Warriors, Traders, clerics: the North Sea and the central Sahel, AD 800-1500.



http://www.worldcountries.info/Maps/Region/Africa_satellite_plane.jpg

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