CHAPTER SEVEN

KIRFI, BAUCHI: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE HAUSA LANDSCAPE

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1. Introduction

Kirfi, in Bauchi state (Nigeria) constitutes generally undulating terrain at an altitude of about 700 metres, watered by the Gongola River, the largest right-bank tributary of the Benue. This is an area of open savannah woodland (Udo 1970: 151), with predominant soil parent materials derived from Pre-Cambrian granites, gneisses and migmatites of the basement complex (Oluwatoyin 2004: 17–25). Culturally, Kirfi accommodates mainly people known as Kirfawa (Giiwo), and falls in a region where Hausa is the dominant identity.

Investigations of Kirfi can shed light on the questions related to Hausa identity: the finds and monuments of Kirfi share commonalities with other parts of the Hausa geographical area and relate to religion, socio-economic complexity, political arrangements and technology. Work carried out at Kirfi has the potential to contribute to broader debates on the emergence of Hausa identity and society. These include the notion of walls as symbols of autonomy and images of the Hausa way of life (Mabogunje 1968; Obayemi 1973; Sutton 1976b, 1993; Haour 2005), the existence of furnace-types and associated apparatus similar to sites of Samaru-West and Tsauni in the Zaria region (Sutton 1976a, 1985), or the trend of the occupation of hilltops associated with iskoki ('spirits'). Historical writings about 'Hausaland' refer consistently to urbanisation, militarism, belief systems, craft specialisation, complex subsistence strategies, and architecture; these aspects

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1 This paper builds on work carried out as part of a Masters dissertation at the University of Maiduguri, Nigeria. I am grateful to Garba Ibrahim for introducing me to Kirfi; and to Anne Haour and Benedetta Rossi for including me in the present research project and for comments on earlier versions of this paper.
are illustrated in the archaeology of Kirfi and shall be discussed in succeeding sections.

Very little was known previously of the history and archaeology of the Kirfi area, and virtually no written literature exists on these aspects. However, three sources relating to Bauchi generally can be highlighted here. These include a report of excavations of two exposures in a rock shelter at Kariya Wuro (about 75 kilometres northwest of Kirfi), conducted in 1981 and 1983 by Allsworth-Jones (1983: 154). The work includes ethnographic details as well as archaeological data; although the excavated materials were never dated, they are thought to relate to an earlier period of occupation. A second relevant source, Aremu (1999), discusses iron smelting processes and furnace types within the context of Yankari National Park (about 45 kilometres southwest of the Kirfi area), and presents a survey of the archaeological potential of the park. Yankari and Kirfi share common physical and cultural characteristics, and remains such as the shaft-furnaces and barrel-like tuyères recovered at Yankari are similar to those of both the Kirfi and Zaria regions (Figure 7.2.). Finally, Abubakar (1974) utilised linguistic, archival and ethnographic sources to interpret the historical relationships amongst the ethnic groups occupying Bauchi region, and the later attendant influence of the jihad struggles on the development of Sokoto authority over the Bauchi emirate.

The present archaeological reconnaissance and survey therefore represents a pioneering investigation of the archaeological potential of the Kirfi area. It revealed surviving evidence of extensive industrial iron working at the site of Tekkira, and of abandoned settlement sites involving remarkably well preserved standing structures on the Kirfi hills and in the western valley plains (Map 7.1.). Two distinct occupation phases are suggested: an intensive iron-working phase, and an occupation in the historical period by people whose settlement pattern and subsistence are well recorded in an ethno-archaeological context. Thus, while the habitation sites of the historic Kirfawa are documented, those of the iron working people which are assumed to have preceded them still remain to be discovered.

2. The archaeological survey

Sites were identified with the aid of oral tradition and interviews with selected groups. I transected the study area into four zones reflect-