William & Mary
CHARTERED 1693

W&M ScholarWorks

Arts & Sciences Articles

Arts and Sciences

11-2021

Lost in Space? Reconstructing Frank Willett's excavations at Ita Yemoo, Ile-Ife, Nigeria: Rescue Excavations (1957–1958) and Trench XIV (1962–1963)Lost in Space? Reconstructing Frank Willett's excavations at Ita Yemoo, Ile-Ife, Nigeria: Rescue Excavations (1957–1958) and Trench XIV (1962–1963)

Léa Roth

Gérard Chouin
William & Mary, glchouin@wm.edu

Adisa Ogunfolakan

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wm.edu/aspubs

 Part of the African History Commons, French and Francophone Language and Literature Commons, and the History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons

Recommended Citation

Roth, Léa; Chouin, Gérard; and Ogunfolakan, Adisa, Lost in Space? Reconstructing Frank Willett's excavations at Ita Yemoo, Ile-Ife, Nigeria: Rescue Excavations (1957–1958) and Trench XIV (1962–1963)Lost in Space? Reconstructing Frank Willett's excavations at Ita Yemoo, Ile-Ife, Nigeria: Rescue Excavations (1957–1958) and Trench XIV (1962–1963) (2021). *Afrique: Archéologie et Arts*, 17, 77-114.
https://doi.org/10.4000/aaa.3328

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Arts and Sciences at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Arts & Sciences Articles by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.

OpenEdition Journals

Afrique : Archéologie & Arts

17 | 2021
Varia

Lost in Space? Reconstructing Frank Willett's excavations at Ita Yemoo, Ile-Ife, Nigeria: Rescue Excavations (1957–1958) and Trench XIV (1962–1963)

Perdus dans l'espace ? Reconstituer les chantiers archéologiques de Frank Willett à Ita Yemoo, Ile-Ife, Nigéria : fouilles de sauvetage (1957-1958) et tranchée XIV (1962-1963)

Léa Roth, Gérard Chouin et Adisa Ogunfolakan

p. 77-114
https://doi.org/10.4000/aaa.3328

Traduction(s) :

Perdus dans l'espace ? Reconstituer les chantiers archéologiques de Frank Willett à Ita Yemoo, Ile-Ife, Nigéria : fouilles de sauvetage (1957-1958) et tranchée XIV (1962-1963) [fr]

Résumés

Français English
Entre décembre 1957 et janvier 1958, Frank Willett dirigea une fouille de sauvetage à Ita Yemoo, Ile-Ife (Nigéria), afin d'apporter un éclairage scientifique sur la découverte fortuite par les ouvriers d'un chantier de construction d'un groupe de rares artefacts en laiton. Ita Yemoo allait se révéler être un site archéologique majeur, et F. Willett y poursuivit ses travaux de 1958 à 1963. Le site devint fameux pour ses « bronzes » et pour plusieurs têtes en terre cuite découvertes *in situ*, élevées au rang d'icônes de l'art d'Ife durant sa période de « florescence » entre les XIIIe et XIVe siècles de notre ère. Son renom contraste cependant avec l'absence de publication détaillée de son archéologie. Dans cet article, nous faisons usage de photographies, croquis et notes de terrain extraits d'un fonds d'archives, riche mais encore peu connu, légué par Frank Willett à l'université de Glasgow ; notre

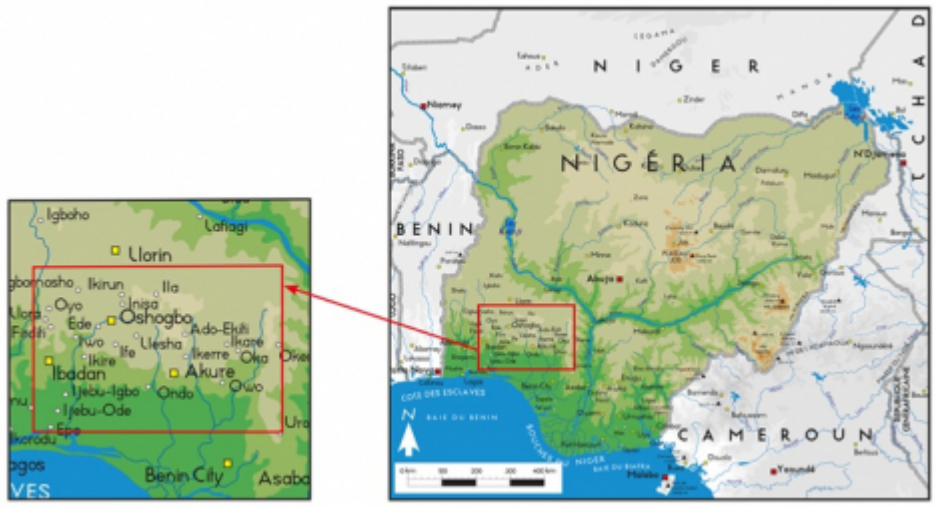
objectif est de reconstituer les détails de sa première saison de fouilles sur ce site, interpréter ses observations et proposer une réflexion sur la nécessité de redécouvrir et de publier les archives oubliées du patrimoine archéologique de l'Afrique.

From December 1957 to January 1958, Frank Willett conducted a "rescue" excavation at Ita Yemoo, Ile-Ife (Nigeria), to investigate the fortuitous discovery of rare brass artifacts by laborers preparing the land for a construction project. Ita Yemoo soon emerged as a significant site, and Willett conducted subsequent archaeological campaigns between 1958 and 1963. The site became famous for its "bronzes" and several terracotta heads excavated in situ, which became icons of Ife's "florescence" period during the 13th and 14th centuries CE. However, the fame of the site contrasts with the absence of detailed published material on its archaeology. In this paper, we use photographs, sketches, and field notebooks from the rich but little-known archival collection donated by Frank Willett to the University of Glasgow, to reconstruct the details of his first season at this site, interpret his findings and reflect on the necessity to rediscover and publish the lost archives of Africa's archaeological heritage.

Entrées d'index

Mots-clés : Willett (Frank), archives de l'archéologie
Keywords: Willett (Frank), excavation archives
Index géographique : Ita Yemoo, Ife, Nigéria/Nigeria

Texte intégral



> "But Nigeria seems to be a country of rescue digs and preliminary reports followed by silence. Choice pieces of sculpture are reproduced often enough, but usually nothing precise is said about their context. Ife is known almost entirely from damaged remnants of sites. The extensive excavations of the 1950s, including several seasons work at the key site of Ita Yemoo, are still unpublished." (Garlake 1979: 209)

Introduction

1 On the morning of November 22, 1957, Mr. Adebayo's attention was drawn to a laborer bending down into the trench he was digging. Unlike the thousands of other strikes into clay, his pickaxe had just made a distinct sound by perforating an object whose green patina stood out against the bright red of the soil. Mr Adebayo, who supervised the construction of the Ife Cooperative Produce Marketing Union headquarters at Ita Yemoo, in the outskirts of Ile-Ife, saw the laborer grab an object and remove the clay stuck to it.

He was holding a copper alloy statuette depicting two figures, one of whom had had his head severed by the pickaxe.[1] The intrigued supervisor ordered workers to search for the missing head. The laborers went back to work, now carefully probing, delicately excavating and sieving through spoil heaps. Not only was the head found by the end of the day—although severely damaged by the pickaxe's initial blow—but six other copper alloy objects were retrieved from newly excavated ground. Three days passed before news of the discovery reached the paramount chief of Ife, the Ooni, who demanded that the objects be deposited and stored in his palace. On the same day, the Nigerian Antiquities Service, created by colonial authorities in 1943 and the powers of which were considerably strengthened after the passing of the 1953 Antiquities Ordinance, took over the management of the site and fenced it in (Willett 1959a: 135; Basu & Damodaran 2015: 257–261). Two weeks later, Frank Willett, a young archaeologist arrived from Manchester started rescue work at Ita Yemoo while preparing the publication of the newly excavated Ita Yemoo "bronzes." In addition to the "arm-in-arm" couple, the first object found, he described the bust of an elite figure, two "masses" each decorated with two gagged heads, two canes each ending in a human head, one of which was gagged, and a container in the shape of a four-legged stool. In academic circles, Ile-Ife was again causing a sensation (Willett 1959a, 1959b, 2006).

2 Since the beginning of the 20th century, material remains of the past unearthed at Ile-Ife are unlike any others in West Africa. In 1910, the German anthropologist Leo Frobenius was the first European scholar to excavate here, searching for iconographic treasures (Frobenius 1913). He described the unique features of Ife antiquities, in particular the Olokun brass head, which has since become an iconic symbol of Ife's rich past (Craddock et al. 2013). From the 1930s onwards, the modernization and rapid expansion of urban infrastructures meant construction workers started excavating at an accelerated pace in areas formerly covered with farms, leading to many new archaeological discoveries. In 1938, the accidental unearthing in the courtyard of the Wunmonjie compound of an impressive cache of new brass heads shook the Western perception of African art and revived the interest of researchers in this ancient city. Indeed, local oral traditions suggest that Ife was where both humanity and civilization emerged (Bascom 1938; Willett 1960). In 1948, the colonial administration funded the construction of a museum at Ife which opened to the public in April 1953.[2] Bernard Fagg, an archaeologist who had previously distinguished himself for his rediscovery of the Nok culture in central Nigeria, was the first to conduct controlled excavations in Ife. In 1949, he supervised the excavation of a dozen test pits located across town. Four years later, he excavated several other test pits, which were focused on sacred sites throughout the city (Willett 1960: 239–241).[3] The archaeologists' main objectives were then to find exceptional objects, document monumental structures, and propose a minimal contextual discourse connected as closely as possible to oral traditions. This first generation of trenches exploratory pits dug by well-diggers did not generate much in the way of publication or surviving records, and only a scattering of information about them appeared. Work by Frank Willett was about to change that.

3 Although Ita Yemoo is only a small district within the much larger ancient urban complex of Ife—all contained within the modern city of Ile-Ife, in southwestern Nigeria—and one among many dozens of sites excavated there, it occupies a prominent place in the academic literature. The discovery of new copper alloy sculptures in 1957—the first since 1938—was enough to promote Ita Yemoo to the rank of an exceptional archaeological site and, in turn, boost Willett's international career and reputation. As time went by, the name of Ita Yemoo became inextricably linked to that of Frank Willett. Based on presentations and publications, Willett made Ita Yemoo a reference and touchstone in West African archaeology. Owing to the dearth of material referencing West African archaeology, publishers and editors eagerly made room for descriptions of

Ita Yemoo in the most influential journals of the day. This paved the way to Willett's successful career at prestigious institutions, first at the Nuffield College, Oxford, then at Northwestern University, and finally as the first director of the Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery, a position he held from 1976 to retirement in 1990.[4] However, as he explored new career opportunities along the way, Frank Willett became less of an archaeologist and more of an art historian. As a result, the Ita Yemoo excavations remained largely unpublished, while its distinctive material culture was described and discussed at length in popular and scholarly accounts.

4 Today, the toponym 'Ita Yemoo' remains synonymous with the small area of Ife, where Willett conducted many of his pioneering, yet unpublished, archaeological excavations.[5] Visitors coming to Ife can visit Ita Yemoo, which has remained a property of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) and an annex to the Ife Museum which still stands next to the Ooni's palace. They can see the potsherd pavement Willett excavated in 1957, now contained under a roofed structure (Fig. 1). Still, there is no interpretative center or other visible trace of the excavations that made the site a reference point in world archaeology. Ita Yemoo is now covered with recent buildings that have impacted the integrity of the site and hidden past archaeological research. Where did Willett conduct his excavations, visitors ask, and what exactly did he find? In what contexts did he find the rich material culture he described? What parts of Ita Yemoo are yet to be excavated, and how can we preserve them for the sake of future generations?

5 The archaeology of Ita Yemoo needs to be discussed in the light of its complicated history, the details of which most scholars ignore or are not aware of. In our shared archaeological consciousness, Ita Yemoo has come to encapsulate the essence of the ancient city. Its artifacts of metal, clay, and glass; its spatial features including the largest-preserved potsherd pavement yet recorded; two documented shrines, and a portion of a city wall—together, these have come to simplistically characterize the archaeological wonders of Ife. Ita Yemoo, as a site, has become the sum of carefully selected, essentialized, and fossilized truths about Ife. In reality, Willett's excavations at Ita Yemoo took place during three seasons from 1957 to 1963 in different contexts and using various methods. It follows that we cannot separate the analysis of artifacts and features Willett presented from his practices and interpretations of these different contexts. However, a critical approach to his work and narratives is difficult in the absence of detailed archaeological reports. In this paper, we use Willett's archives and other sources to retrieve, document, and partially disentangle the different parts that make the past archaeology of Ita Yemoo. We believe we can reconstruct a site map, develop some depth of understanding, and reflect on the necessity to engage with Willett's work critically.

The archaeology of Ita Yemoo: A fragmented documentation

Abundant but selective: Frank Willett's publications on Ita Yemoo

6 Frank Willett never published a full report of his excavations at Ita Yemoo. In an article published a few months before his death, he expressed his intention to work towards it: "With my study of the art of Ife now available [reference to Willett 2004], I now turn to complete my final reports on my excavations" (Willett 2006: 155). He did not live long enough to achieve this objective. His archives of notes, gray literature, and photographic material were not integrated into a comprehensive publication of the sites he excavated.

He was nevertheless a prolific scholar with no less than fifty books, chapters of edited volumes, and articles on Ife published between 1958 and 2006. On the whole, these primarily focused on the description and interpretation of the prestigious material culture that made up Ife's reputation among art historians and museum curators. In addition to inventorying these extraordinary objects and writing accounts of the circumstances of their rediscovery, Willett also contributed extensively to debates with other Africanist archaeologists of his time and maintained an impressive correspondence with scholars in Africa, continental Europe, and North America.[6] For example, he developed a long-lasting interest in the question of the composition and elemental analysis of Ife copper alloy casts and the circulation of metals in medieval West Africa (Willett 1964, 1977, 1981, 1983, 2000a; Willett & Werner 1975; Willett & Fleming 1976; Willett et al. 1994; Willett et al. 1995; Willett & Sayre 2006). Frank Willett also engaged more broadly with the long-term comparative history of techniques and styles in the arts of Nigeria—including those of Nok, Igbo-Ukwu, Owo, and Benin (Willett 1966a, 1968, 1973, 1975, 1983, 1986, 1988, 1992, 1997). By cultivating his contacts among art collectors, he also developed an expertise in the touchy question of art trafficking (Willett 1976, 2000b).

7 Willett recounted multiple times how construction workers recovered brass objects at Ita Yemoo in November 1957. The different versions of this account always include the circumstances of the discovery, a description of the artifacts found, and a summary description of the ensuing rescue excavations on the site during his first season from December 1957 to January 1958 (Willett 1959a, 1959b, 1959c, 1959d, 1960). However, details on the rescue excavations are minimal. For instance, he never provided a site map to allow readers to comprehend the scale and the spatial relations between the different areas he excavated. Potsherd pavements featured preeminently in the early publications as markers of ancient living surfaces on which archaeologists might find *in situ* material assemblages. Despite the early adoption of a numbering system for pavements characterized by the abbreviation "psp-n" (where "psp" stands for "potsherd pavement" and "n" for a cardinal number starting at 1, indicating the order in which the pavements were rediscovered), it is often difficult to identify which of the many pavements recovered at Ita Yemoo he discusses in his published material.[7] The only pavement described in some detail is the first one he encountered (pavement #1), a large potsherd pavement, which he later had fenced, roofed, and registered as a national monument (Fig. 1). One significant feature found on top of one of these pavements was a group of terracottas Willett referred to as Shrine I. Although he later published the individual terracotta heads in some detail (Willett 1967: pl. VII, VIII, IX), the overall feature and its archaeological context remain poorly described.

Figure 1 – The patrimonialization of pavement #1, the only archaeological feature from Willett's excavations preserved *in situ*: a, Construction of the roof over the pavement #1, ca. 1959.

© Hunterian Museum and University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Frank Willett collection, GB248 ACCN 3120/12 b, Structure over the pavement #1 as visible today. © Ife-Sungbo Archaeological Project, Photograph by Chouin, June 2021

8 In later publications, we find some mentions of this first excavation season at Ita Yemoo, with a few additional details (Willett 1960: 242; 1966b: 180–182;[8] 1983: 65–68). The most detailed account is available in *The Art of Ife* (2004)—Willett's last important work, published on CD-ROM—where he provided a new synthesis of his work at Ita Yemoo, including hitherto unpublished information and original photographs derived from his notes and personal archive.[9] The CD-ROM is primarily a photographic inventory of Ife's prestigious material culture; however, the write-ups on the archaeological sites included new information that complemented his earlier publications.

9 Overall, Willett's publications focus on the rich material culture recovered at Ita Yemoo without providing comprehensive reports of his excavations. Based on the published material, readers cannot comprehend what exactly took place at Ita Yemoo during the different excavation seasons from 1957 to 1963. The lack of contextual details casts some uncertainty on the meaning of the objects and features associated with the site. As captured in Willett's published scholarship, Ita Yemoo entered West African historiography as a mere illustrative vignette of Ife's past, without the proper academic apparatus that would have enabled later generations of students of Ife's past to discuss, revisit, and reinterpret the site. As noted above, Willett himself was aware of these insufficiencies in his publication record. By the end of his life, he felt confident he could still do what a busy career had prevented him from completing earlier. He knew he could mobilize material from his extensive personal archive. Death, however, decided otherwise, and there is no evidence that Willett had made any significant progress on this project before he passed away on June 15, 2006.

Original material on the archaeology of Ita Yemoo in other published works and theses

10 Many scholars have mentioned Willett's published scholarship on Ita Yemoo, but few have made an original contribution to further our understanding of his work. In his autobiography, British historian Roland Oliver briefly described his stay at Ile-Ife in January 1958 and his participation in the excavation of Shrine I (Oliver 1997: 186–189).[10] James William Mueller, then a graduate student preparing a Master of Arts thesis at the University of Arizona, studied local ceramics excavated by Willett in Trench XIII at Ita Yemoo in 1962–1963 (Mueller 1971). He had access to Willett himself, who was then teaching at Northwestern University, and reproduced some original material such as the stratigraphic section of Trench XIII. Although Mueller's thesis does not stand as an outstanding contribution to Ife's local ceramic study, it provides an overview—sometimes confusing—of Willett's work at Ita Yemoo. In her Ph.D. thesis defended in 1972, Claire Davison studied the chemical composition of glass beads, including samples from Ita Yemoo (Davison et al. 1971; Davison 1972).[11] Work on Ife glass beads, including some from Ita Yemoo, has recently gained traction, resulting in significant progress in our understanding of Ife's glass production technology (Lankton et al. 2006; Ogundiran & Ige 2015; Babalola 2015, 2021; Babalola et al. 2020). Dola Angèle Aguigah included Ita Yemoo in her study of pavements in the Gulf of Benin,[12] and she reproduced a number of unpublished documents provided by Willett, including photographs of some of Ita Yemoo's pavements, a partial site map, and one photograph of Trench XIII (Aguigah 1995: 154, 360, 365, 460; 2018: 262). In 2009, a team of Nigerian scholars published an inquiry about ceramic composition at Ife and selected surrounding sites (Ige et al. 2009). This petrographic and geochemical study was based on a sample of 246 sherds, including 122 sherds picked from potsherd pavements destroyed at Ita Yemoo during the digging of the foundations of a new building (the "hall") in 2006. In 2015, in the early stage of the Ife-Sungbo Archaeological Project, a team from the Department of

Geology of Obafemi Awolowo University carried out a geophysical survey of the defensive earthwork at Ita Yemoo (Olorunfemi et al. 2015). It used electrical resistivity and magnetic methods to record subsurface archaeological features. It also helped determine priority areas for the excavations conducted from 2015 to 2017 in the framework of the Ife-Sungbo Archaeological Project.[13]

11 Overall, archaeological research related to Ita Yemoo has spanned over sixty years; nonetheless, the lack of a comprehensive publication of Willett's extensive excavations between 1957 and 1963 has prevented scholars from the solid historiographical foundation required to develop ambitious and coherent research designs. Such a lacuna has also obstructed attempts to properly manage the site's archaeological resources, especially given the many building projects promoted during the post-colonial period by the same authorities in charge of protecting them. Confusions or over-broad extrapolations about the site abound in publications and illustrate how gaps in the scholarly memory at Ita Yemoo, as for many other unpublished archaeological sites in West Africa, affect the scaffolding process at work in producing knowledge about the deeper historical past and the management of its heritage.

The archaeology of Ita Yemoo in the Archives: The Willett collection

12 Although abundant, the literature on Ita Yemoo lacks a comprehensive discussion of the archaeological works conducted at the site. With this in mind, the authors of this article propose to broaden our understanding of Willett's activities at Ita Yemoo, through a deep description of his excavations between 1957 and 1963, using little-known archival materials.[14]

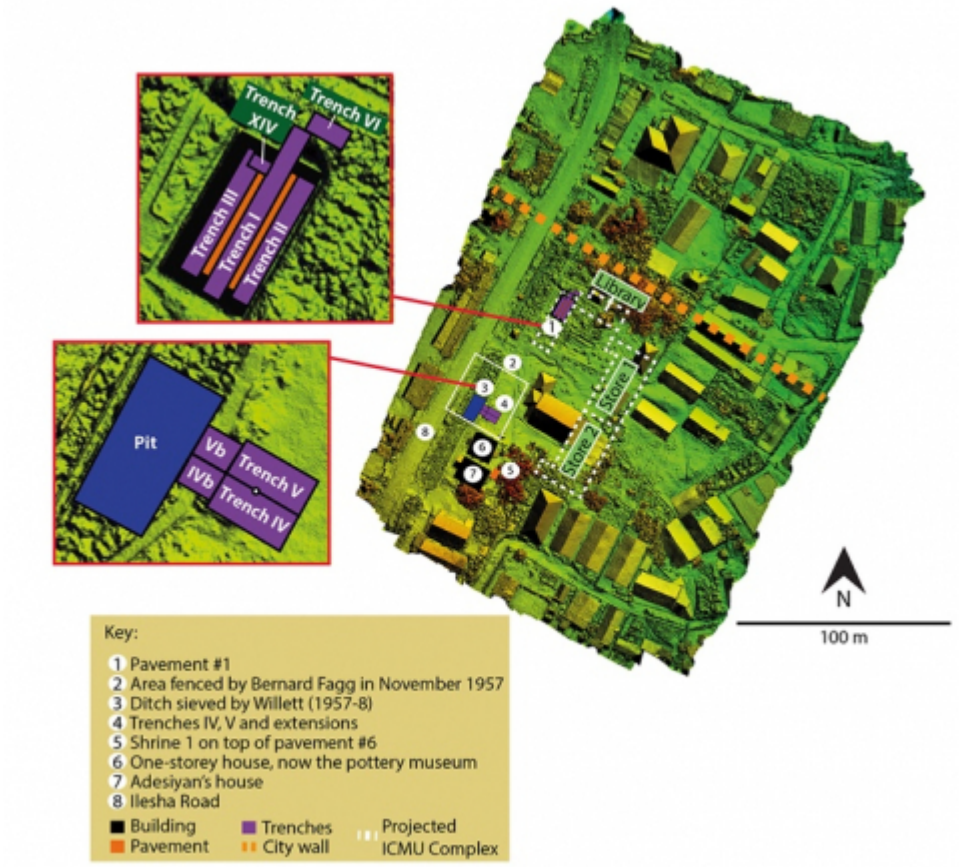
13 The papers of Professor Frank Willett, preserved by the University of Glasgow Archive Service, comprise forty archival boxes occupying 18.6 linear meters.[15] The collection contains a wide range of documents, including field notebooks and excavation records, photographic prints, diaries, several small field sketches, abundant scientific correspondence, press cuttings, notes on seminars and conferences, preliminary notes and drafts of articles and books, unpublished texts, index cards on various topics, analysis reports, drawings of ceramic and lithic material, and even samples of material culture from excavations. In addition, Frank Willett had himself gathered originals and copies of papers on research work in Nigeria.[16] This gray literature contains a wealth of details that enable us to immerse ourselves in Willett's day-to-day field activities and reexamine the archaeology of Ife from the perspective of this primary documentation.

The archaeology of Ita Yemoo: Miscellaneous material from other archives

14 For this study, we undertook a comprehensive survey of files of the Federal Department of Antiquities, Lagos, deposited at the National Archives of Ibadan. This collection is located in the Special Archives repository and covers the period 1946–1973. We could not find much in these files that relates to Ita Yemoo. Nevertheless, personal and administrative files provide clues on the working of the Department of Antiquities and occasionally contain material that can throw light on some lesser-known excavations.[17] At Ife, there is no accessible archive we could use at present. Efforts are still being made to obtain authorizations to explore potential holdings of the Ife Museum under the auspices of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments. Similarly, aside from the most outstanding objects kept in the Nigerian National Museum's safes, the material excavated

by Willett is probably housed in the stores of the National Museum at Ile-Ife. However, the memory of where these collections are has long faded. Recent finds by one of the authors of previously unknown surveyor's maps of Ita Yemoo show how important it is to survey these resources for documentary shreds of evidence of past archaeological works. These survey maps, drafted between 1961 and 1962, were found in the small and long-unattended library of the Ita Yemoo annex of the National Museum. They provided us with crucial indications on the location of some of Willett's excavations, making it possible to position them on a modern aerial view of Ita Yemoo (Fig. 2).

Figure 2 – Localization of Willett's excavations (Trenches I, II, III, IV, V, VI, XIV and Shrine I) on a 2019 digital aerial view of Ita Yemoo.



© Ife-Sungbo Archaeological Project, Figure by Chouin and Roth on a photogrammetric aerial model prepared by Hautefort in September 2019

Unearthing Ita Yemoo from Frank Willett's papers: Why does it matter?

15 Recent studies have highlighted the importance of (re)exploring the archaeologists' archives (Merriman & Swain 1999; Schnapp et al. 2007; Fayet 2013; Aillet et al. 2017; Zanella et al. 2017). All have underlined the importance of the written and visual record of archaeological contexts. Given the destructive nature of most archaeological practices, archival records of unpublished or insufficiently published excavated sites hold potential to be rediscovered, reexamined, and discussed in the light of more recent scholarship. In the case of Willett's work at Ita Yemoo, the careful archiving of notes, drawings, and photographs can lead to a partial reconstruction of how the original archaeological layers looked before destruction and how their interpretation was originally constructed. Willett fully excavated and then backfilled most of the areas he investigated, except for one

pavement kept exposed and on public display. Thus, the memory of these excavated areas lives solely in Willett's papers, including his field notebooks, photographs, and miscellaneous materials. Access to these memories, however, is not easy; one first needs to understand Willett's excavation strategies and techniques, decipher his recording and cataloging system, and make sense of his abbreviations. Even then, one faces the lack of a site map, which makes it challenging to translate the written record into geo-referenced terms. Finally, as in a jigsaw puzzle, one needs to compare and bring together different information in various documents scattered across the holdings and beyond. Even then, the unequal quality of his observations and, therefore, of the written and visual transcript of the archaeological record remain a major obstacle to interpretation and examination.

16 As available records make clear, Willett routinely overworked himself and could not always appropriately supervise the multiple teams working simultaneously in different places, leading to yawning gaps in his notes. Nonetheless, we believe the overall picture we provide is a valuable addition to existing publications, as we engage with many details Willett glossed over in his published work. In an attempt to publish a *postmortem* report of his excavations, we also engage in a critical dialogue with the current state of our knowledge of Ife's archaeology. In addition, a newly rendered field map of Willett's excavations at Ita Yemoo provides a helpful visual aid for scholars interested in engaging with the material excavated at Ita Yemoo, as well as curators managing the site. Governmental officials purchased the property at Ita Yemoo in the early 1960s and dedicated it as an archaeological reserve. In contradiction with this original purpose, many buildings have since been erected at Ita Yemoo. Most are only vaguely related to the core mission of the Ife Museum. In the absence of a site map showing areas yet to be investigated by archaeologists, contractors have unknowingly destroyed valuable archaeological resources during their construction work. Unearthing more information from Willett's papers, we hope, will restore a lost narrative and provide tools to help better manage resources at Ita Yemoo.

First season at Ita Yemoo (December 1957–January 1958), and Trench XIV (1963)

Ita Yemoo in December 1957

17 When Frank Willett arrived at Ita Yemoo on December 9, 1957 (Willett 1959a: 35), he found the site as it had been left by construction workers two weeks earlier, after the government had erected a light wooden fence around it and posted guards. The enclosure covered about 870 square meters,[18] bordered on its western side by a tarred road leading to Ilesha. It was within this perimeter that laborers had recovered the copper alloy artifacts. Although most of the area was still farmland (Fig. 3),[19] it was fast developing and some buildings were already standing on both sides of the Ilesha road. Immediately outside the perimeter of the fence, Willett found two unfinished buildings. One was an almost completed one-story house, which he would later transform into a field office (Fig. 4). It still stands today as the Pottery Museum. The other structure, known as Adesiyan's house, was being built next to the field office along the Ilesha road. When Willett arrived, foundations were in place (Fig. 5), and mud bricks were being made on-site with clay extracted from a nearby pit. Outside the fence, he found the construction trenches of the different buildings that were to become the Ife Cooperative Marketing

Union's headquarters (ICMU). This was to be a large complex consisting of "two large cocoa stores at the back of the area, with a large parking area in front, flanked on the west by an assembly hall and offices, and by a library."[20] Before digging the foundation trenches, workers had "cleared and leveled" the area on which the complex was to stand. Some of the topsoil was removed to fill a ditch, which "had probably served as a quarry for road metal when making the Ilesha road" and to "produce a level building surface."[21] It is unclear how much of the topsoil the laborers had removed and where it had been placed. But as Willett noted:

> "The level chosen happened to correspond to the ancient habitation level, and an examination of the ground before beginning excavations showed that pavements almost entirely made of broken pottery had been dug away in leveling the ground."[22]

Figure 3 – View of Ilesha road and Ita Yemoo, ca. December 1957.

Note the light fence erected by Fagg (visible through the pegs) and, in the background, the row of trees marking the presence of the city wall.

© Hunterian Museum and University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Frank Willett collection, GB248 ACCN 3120/12

Figure 4 – "Almost-completed one-story house," ca. December 1957.

The house would become Willett's field house at Ita Yemoo and was later repurposed as a pottery museum.

© Hunterian Museum and University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Frank Willett collection, GB248 ACCN 3120/16

Figure 5 – Foundations of Adesiyan's house next to the one-story building that served as a field office to Willett, January 1958.

Note the presence of rows of bricks drying under the sun behind the house. They were made from clay collected from a pit that partially destroyed the site of Shrine I and pavement #6. Many fragments of terracotta figurines were later recovered from these bricks.

© Hunterian Museum and University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Frank Willett collection, GB248 ACCN 3120/16

18 All pavements, however, were not dug away or exposed during the leveling of the site. Some were cut by foundation trenches,[23] while others were discovered in test excavations and later excavated by Willett. Thus, modern leveling did not exactly mould the topography of the past occupation but disturbed it in ways we cannot precisely reconstruct.

19 These details are essential to understand the excavation strategy Willett adopted and enable us to read Ita Yemoo as it stands today. Thus, the modern topsoil cannot be examined without reference to the initial clearing and leveling of the site in 1957, together with subsequent weathering, landscaping, and the building of later structures. Before 1957, the site's profile would have been slightly different, with deeper topsoil covering ancient potsherd pavements and associated artifacts. The removal of topsoil and the opening of foundation trenches revealed pavements and created the conditions that led to the rediscovery of bronze artifacts that laid on top of them.

20 To reconstruct the succession of archaeological decisions Frank Willett made during his first field season at Ita Yemoo, from December 9, 1957 to late January 1958, we can rely on some of his published texts, a few paragraphs in Roland Oliver's autobiography, and some archival documents: a Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder where he recorded his thoughts and findings in the field in blue ink; another refillable black notebook that served as a catalog of finds; a handwritten draft of an unpublished article describing the excavations at Ita Yemoo; lists of excavated test units (called shafts); and some photographs, most of which are unpublished. While the notebooks allow us to follow Willett's work day by day, for the most part, the unpublished article includes many added details and reflections that are useful to understand his thought process and research design. In addition, the photographs provide precious clues on the environment and positioning of some of the trenches and features discussed.

21 Upon arrival, Willett's first concern was to inspect, measure, and describe the artifacts excavated the previous month. They had been deposited in the Ife Museum, next to the Ooni's palace. He also mentioned having "treated them at once with sodium sesquicarbonate to arrest the corrosion from which they were suffering" (Willett 1959a: 135). The copious notes he took are already very articulate, and they formed the basis of the several published descriptions that ensued. During the process, Willett met with the Ooni of Ile-Ife, Adesoji Aderemi (1930–1980) and collected some brief answers to some general questions relative to Ita Yemoo and the artifacts.[24] Next, Willett walked through the area in and outside the fence and made a rapid inventory of features that required urgent attention.[25] We do not precisely know the instructions he had received from Fagg.[26] Nevertheless, his intervention was considered a "rescue operation," as construction work was supposed to resume (which turned out not to be the case in the end). One of his priorities was to recover the "face of the damaged bronze pair" unearthed the previous month.[27]

First series of Shafts and Trenches I–III

22 The first excavations at the site were a series of circular test pits, called "shafts" in Willett's notes. Fagg had imposed this method, which he had used routinely at Ife since 1949.[28] Roland Oliver, who spent some days on the site with Willett in January 1958, reported that, upon arrival at Ife, Willett had met a "team of Hausa[29] well diggers sent down by Fagg from his headquarters at Jos in the Northern Region" (Oliver 1997: 187). In his notes, Willett mentioned the shafts were about 2 feet in diameter (ca. 61 cm). He claimed to have used the technique "in a very cautious way," explaining that although they were "in no sense a substitute for proper archaeological excavation," they were nonetheless "a rapid and inexpensive way of making a survey of an archaeological site for the purpose of deciding the most suitable place to excavate."[30] He described the technique in an unpublished paper:

> "The technique is to put a Northern Nigerian well-digger to work at suitable selected points. [...] The tools used are the head of a European pickaxe wrapped in rags to protect the hands, a worn-down or small size shovel, and for deep holes only a bucket with rope, and [a] labourer to draw the bucket up. For archaeological purposes, a trowel is also used, and the soil can be sieved, and finds recorded by depth measurements, or in the case [of] a stratified site, by layers."[31]

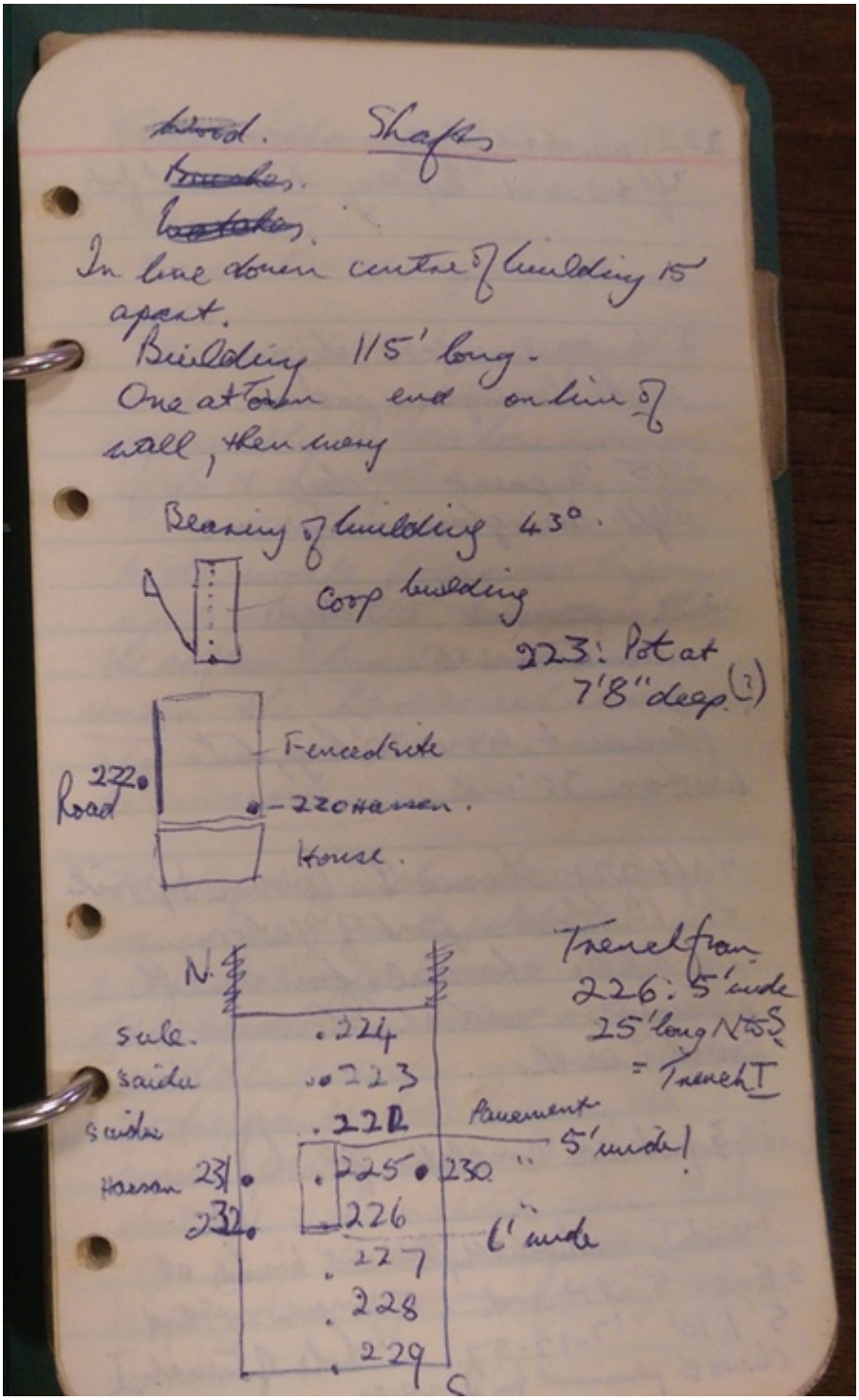
23 At Ita Yemoo, Willet observed that the foundation trenches of the cooperative's buildings cut through several potsherd pavements. Therefore, the shaft technique was used to test the site, both within and outside the fenced area for the presence or absence of ancient pavements. The exact number of shafts dug during this early phase of the excavation is unclear. The earliest shaft recorded in Willett's notebook bears number 220, suggesting that he started his numbering from a list of previously excavated shafts at Ife.[32] Shaft #232 is the last one recorded in his notebook in December 1957, implying that he sank at least 13 circular shafts (#220 through #232). Eleven of them were located outside the fence, in the area marked to be developed as the future assembly hall and office spaces of the ICMU's headquarters. Shafts were dug every 15 feet (ca. 4.5 m) along three lines parallel to the existing foundation trenches.[33] In three shafts (#221, #225 and #226), well-diggers Hassan, Sule, and Saidu found potsherd pavements. Little did they know that they had found the first complete potsherd pavement excavated at Ife, one that Willett would excavate in its entirety as pavement #1, then would have roofed over and listed as a national monument (Fig. 1). The depth of the sediment over the pavement was recorded as 13 inches (ca. 33 cm) in shaft #226, 15 inches (ca. 38 cm) in shaft #225, and plunged to 33 inches (ca. 84 cm) in shaft #221. This profile corresponds well with the intriguing

irregular surface of pavement #1 as we know it today. Only in shaft #221 did Willett provide stratigraphic information. He distinguished three layers, including a 9-inch (ca. 23 cm) thick brown upper level (topsoil), followed by a 1-inch (ca. 2.5 cm) black level with charcoal inclusions. He noted reddish-brown lateritic sediment between the black layer and the pavement, which would have been 23 inches (ca. 58 cm) deep.

24 In the following days, as he excavated a first trench (Trench I) over the pavement, he labeled the upper "brown" level together with the darker horizon he had noticed in shaft #221 as "layer 1"; the lower "reddish-brown" level as "layer 2"; and the potsherd pavement itself as "layer 3."[34] Interestingly, he later described it as "brown humic earth."[35] He noted that the stratigraphy at the northern end—where shaft #221 was located—had been less impacted by the ground leveling done three weeks earlier than the southern end, where layer 2 was now exposed on the surface. As we discuss below, these details are important, as they echo a stratigraphic pattern that we have encountered during excavations conducted at Ife in the framework of the Ife-Sungbo Archaeological Project, between 2015 and 2019.

25 The excavation of pavement #1 probably started on December 16, 1957, with Trench I, shafts #225 and #226 (Fig. 6). It was 25 feet (ca 7.6 m) long, 5 feet (ca 1.5 m) wide at its northern end and 6 feet (ca 1.8 m) wide at its southern end.[36] On December 17–18, Willett laid out two 10-feet (ca. 3 m) extensions on the southern and northern ends "to find out [the] limits of the pavement."[37] This work was completed when Ooni Aderemi Adesoji paid a visit to the site.[38] One photograph kept in the archives shows him, side by side with Frank Willett, standing at the northern end of Trench I and looking down at the pavement (Fig. 7).[39] In the following days, Trench III would be dug in the space separating the western foundation trench from Trench I. On the eastern side, the excavation of Trench II has just started at its northern end, and we can distinguish the string used by Willett to mark its layout on the ground. In the background stands the city wall, still covered with dense vegetation. Trenches II and III ran parallel to Trench I, separated from it by 2-foot wide balks. On December 22, the excavation of the three trenches was completed and the pavement exposed in all trenches.

Figure 6 – Sketch extracted from Willett's field notebook showing the first shafts dug at Ita Yemoo.



The numbers 220 to 232 refer to the shafts.

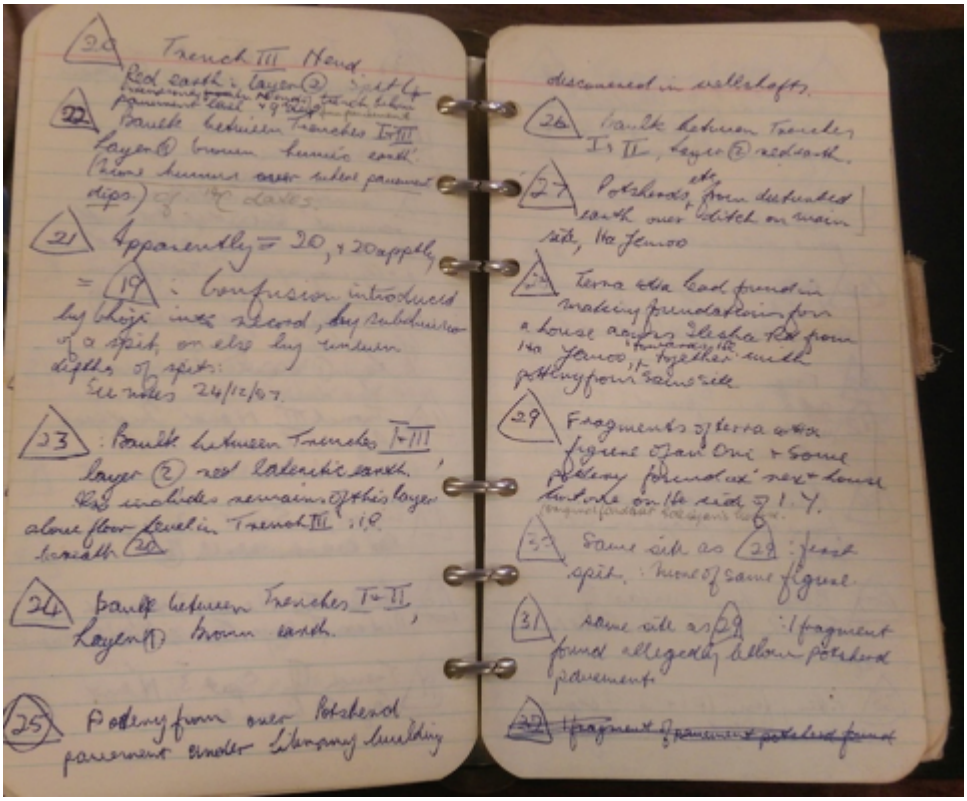
© Hunterian Museum and University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Frank Willett collection, GB248 ACCN 3120/16

Figure 7 – Ooni Aderemi Adesoji and Frank Willett standing in Trench I and looking at pavement #1, probably December 1957.

© Hunterian Museum and University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Frank Willett collection, GB248 ACCN 3120/12

To excavate the trenches, Willett divided each of them into a southern and northern section and excavated each section using 6-inch (ca. 15 cm) artificial levels. Material culture recovered in each spit level was grouped together under a unique number inscribed in a triangle, sometimes preceded with the initials IY for Ita Yemoo. Exceptional finds, including complete or near complete pots, were often given their own number. This was a simple but major feature of Willett's recording method (Fig. 8). It meant that each excavated level or feature that produced any form of material evidence bagged for later study was given a unique number, which was reproduced on a label affixed to each bag (Fig. 9). Importantly, excavated levels that did not produce artifacts retained for analysis were not given a context number. It is worth noting that the first recording unit of this type—IYTr-1—corresponded to the excavation of the first 6-inch spit of the northern section of Trench I. This means that no such context number was attributed to material found in shafts excavated before December 16, 1957.

Figure 8 – Willett's recording of catalog numbers attributed to artifacts excavated at Ita Yemoo.



© Hunterian Museum and University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Frank Willett collection, GB248 ACCN 3120/16

Figure 9 – Bagged artifacts using Willett's cataloging system.

© Hunterian Museum and University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Frank Willett collection, GB248 ACCN 3120/27. Ph. Roth, December 2018

27 Willett's notes make reference to drawing trench profiles before removing the balks, a task that was finally completed on December 29, when he took photographs of the complete pavement (Fig. 10).[40] This was the first pavement extensively excavated at Ita Yemoo, and it was both impressive in its size and intriguing for its topographic profile:

Figure 10 – Pavement #1 after the excavation of Trench I–III and the removal of balks.

© Hunterian Museum and University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Frank Willett collection, GB248 ACCN 3120/12 (also published in Willett 1959a: pl. VIIIa)

> "The pavement measured 31 feet [ca. 9.4 m] from north to south by 12 feet [ca. 3.7 m] and was composed of irregularly broken pieces of domestic pottery laid on edge in more or less straight rows with an inclination in some parts towards a herringbone pattern. At the north west corner is a depression about 10 feet long [ca. 3 m], up to 6 feet wide [ca. 1.8 m] and 18 inches deep [ca. 0.46 m]. Judging by the arrangement of the potsherds, this appears to be an original feature of the pavement. In the south-east corner a depression about 8 feet long [ca. 2.4 m] and 6 inches deep [ca. 0.15 m] appears more likely to be due to subsidence, possibly over a burial. Half way along, on the eastern side was a neat pavement of quartz pebbles which continued underneath the potsherd pavement, which must therefore have been younger than the stone pavement."[41]

28 We know little about the material culture Willett found during the excavation of pavement #1. The only reported significant find was a near-complete pot found positioned "right way up" in the middle of Trench III, close to the balk. The pot was excavated as part of the second spit level of the northern section of Trench III (6 inches to 12 inches below the surface). It was part of layer 1 (brown humic earth), and its base rested at the bottom of the spit level, ca. 30 cm below the surface. A snail shell was found in the pot, and Willett noted the presence of "maize impressions" on the body, an observation that would later prove erroneous.[42]

1962–1963: Trench xiv

29 The pavement #1 excavated by Frank Willett in 1957 is the only *in situ* archaeological feature still visible at Ita Yemoo, in addition to a few other fragmentary, unmarked potsherd pavements (Fig. 11). Taking advantage of the existing foundation trenches originally dug for the ICMU complex, Willett obtained funding to fence and roof the pavement, which was registered on February 20, 1959 as a historical monument under the Antiquities Act of Nigeria.[43] The roofing of the pavement, however, did not mark the end of archaeological investigations. Willett was intrigued by the presence of the deep depression at the northwestern corner of the pavement, a feature he decided to investigate as part of the third archaeological season at Ita Yemoo, in 1962–1963.[44] Trench xiv—the

last trench he excavated at Ita Yemoo—measured 4 feet (ca. 1.2 m) wide and 5 feet 6 inches (ca. 1.65 m) long. Its longer axis was oriented perpendicularly to the western end of the pavement and included the deepest part of the depression. In an unpublished typescript document written between 1964 and 1967, he noted three objectives for this follow-up excavation:

30 Trench XIV was dug to 1) obtain a sample of the original pavement #1; and, since roofed over, 2) if possible, establish the reason for the dip in the corner of the pavement; and 3) obtain samples of pottery predating the pavement.[45]

Figure 11 – Potsherd pavement in parking area, Ita Yemoo.

© Ife-Sungbo Archaeological Project, Ph. Chouin, June 2015.

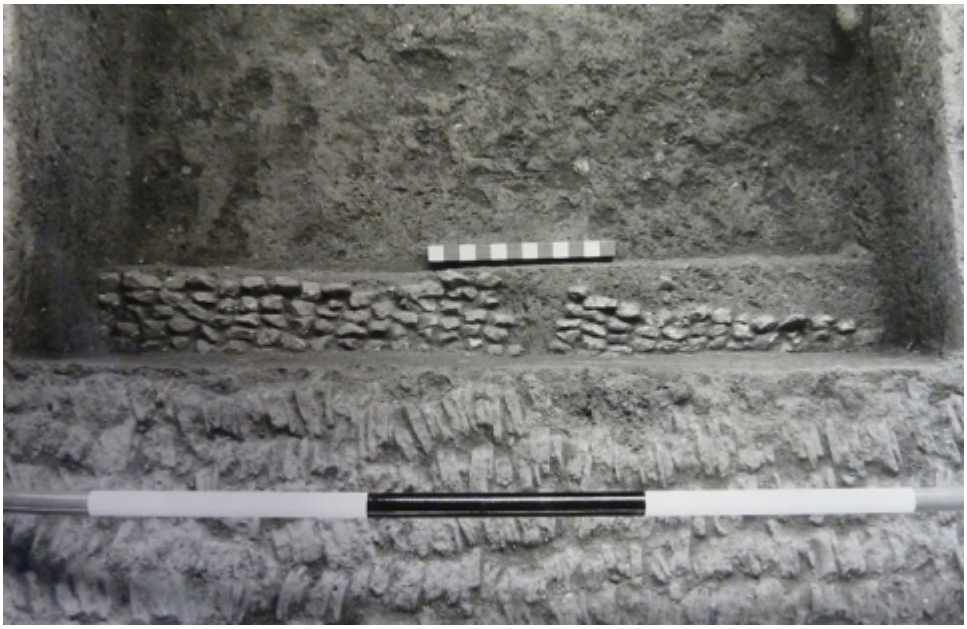
31 Our main resources to reconstruct the archaeology of this trench are four pages in a field notebook, some photographs of the trench in its final stage, and a few descriptive paragraphs in Willett's own words.[46] Although pavement #1 was labeled "layer 3" during the 1957 excavation, it became "layer 1" in Trench xiv. To excavate below pavement #1, Willett had to dismantle some part of the 2-inch (ca. 5 cm) thick pavement located in the depression (Fig. 12 and 13). A selection of the potsherds removed was kept for analysis as IYTr-1377.[47] Underneath, the archaeologists met with layer 2, described as reddish-brown earth in its upper part and ("darker") brown earth in its lower part.[48] The upper part of the reddish-brown earth layer described by Willett can still be observed exposed on the western edge of pavement #1, in spots where potsherds had already eroded away at the time of excavation. It corresponds to the carefully prepared red clay base into which the potsherds were impressed while still fresh.[49] At the bottom of layer 2, at the eastern side of the excavation unit, 14 inches (ca. 35.5 cm) below the surface of pavement #1, the archaeologist discovered the edge of a "neatly laid" 1-inch thick stone pavement (Fig. 13).[50] Forming layer 3 in his stratigraphy, it was labeled pavement #15 and was left *in situ*.[51] Brown earth continued under the level of pavement #15 to form a 6-inch (ca. 15.2 cm) thick layer 4 and a 10-inch (ca. 25.4 cm) thick layer 5, although, in the latter, Willett noted in layer 5 the presence of "successions of horizontal bands with much charcoal."[52] They were followed by layer 6, which formed a 1-inch thick (ca. 2.5 cm) inclusion of red sand "in a corner," while the rest of the next level was labeled layer 7 and described as brown sandy earth.[53] Layer 8 was of white sand, and layers 9 and 10 of brown sandy earth.[54] At the

bottom of layer 9, natural soil appeared in the southwestern corner of the unit; and in the lower part of layer 10, Willet saw what he thought was a pit "sectioned by the [western] side of the trench." The pit was labeled Feature XXII. Soon, however, he realized he had misinterpreted it, as he wrote "Feature XXII is not a pit at all: the layers are continuous right through."[55] Layer 10, he noted, also included "a patch of white which may be ashes," a sample of which received catalog number IYTr-1428. In addition, layer 10 had "bands of white sand" and "scattered charcoal." Underneath, starting below the top of (non-)feature XXII, layer 11, described as "moister darker brown earth," was the last cultural level before "natural red schistose clay" appeared at approximately 8 feet (ca. 2.4 m) below pavement #1.

Figure 12 – View of pavement #1 of Ita Yemoo, showing the position of Trench XIV (in green color and B&W photograph), the limits of the excavation by Marcus Olubode Adesina (purple) and the southern depression (white dotted line).

© Ife-Sungbo Archaeological Project. Ph. Georges, Poissonnier and Chouin 2015. Digital Processing by Léa Roth, Gérard Chouin and Marie-Pierre Chouin, 2021

Figure 13 – Photograph of the eastern part of Trench XIV, showing pavements #1 and #15.



See Fig. 12 for location.

© Hunterian Museum and University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Frank Willett collection, GB248 ACCN 3120/11

32 Overall, we believe Frank Willett was right in suggesting the feature he excavated in Trench XIV corresponded to "the filling of a pit" (Willett 2004, II–2 [14]). The presence of horizontal layers of sediment with charcoal inclusions, pockets of ashes and sand, and concentrations of charcoal and bones indeed argue for the presence of a pit filled with the refuse of a nearby kitchen. The fact that the presence of this feature coincides with the northwestern subsidence of the pavement suggests a causal relationship. We believe the weight of pavement #1 and its clay base contributed to the gradual compression of the pit filling, which included decayable organic materials and other compactable waste. Willett was of a different opinion. Based on the fact that pavement #15 did not seem to be affected by the subsidence, he suggested: "the dip in the pavement was deliberately made" (*ibid.*: I–2, [28]; II–2, [14]). Such a suggestion seems highly improbable to the present authors. We note that only a tiny section of the western edge of stone pavement #15 was exposed during excavations, probably not enough to infer how the pavement in its entirety was affected by the presence of the underlying feature. It follows that the oblong, ca. 15-cm-deep depression located in the southeastern part of the pavement also probably resulted from subsidence due to the presence of a similar, albeit probably smaller, and shallower pit underneath this section of the pavement. Using analogical reasoning probably based on the shape of the depression, Willett thought the underground feature responsible for the subsidence might have been a burial.[56] This depression has not been excavated, and, to date, we lack any comparative archaeological evidence for burial practices in pre-15th century Ife to support this claim.[57]

33 Willett obtained two radiocarbon dates from Trench XIV, the only ones relative to pavements #1 and #15: M-2117 (480±100 BP) and BM-261 (990±130 BP). BM-261 is derived from a charcoal sample retrieved from layer 11, at the bottom of Trench XIV (Willett 1971: 366), while M-2117 is probably derived from several small charcoal fragments found at the junction of layers 4 and 5 (Willett 1971: 366; Crane & Griffin 1972: 187). Willett read BM-261 as AD960±130, and M-2117 as AD1470±100. On this basis, he dismissed M-2117 as anomalous because he thought it was too recent, retaining only BM-261 (Willett 1971: 366; 1975: 298; 2004: I–3, [7]). However, the recalibration of M-2117 (Table 1) with the online application Calib 8.20 (Stuiver et al. 2021) suggests that although this date is indeed problematic, it should not be readily rejected. Willett seemingly collected the samples for this date in the layer that

probably served as a footing for pavement #1, in a part of the trench to which pavement #15 did not extend and just above the upper level of the trash pit marked by the horizontal bands rich in charcoal noted in layer 5. It is, therefore, possible that layer 4 was contemporaneous with pavement #1, although stratigraphically positioned under pavement #15 (layer 3). If such was the case, a date assigning pavement #1 to the first half of the 14th century is not outside the scope of possibilities. The recalibration of BM-261 suggests that the lowest level of the pit underneath pavement #1 would date from a period spanning from the late 10th to late 12th century.[58] This result fits perfectly with dates obtained in a similar trash pit excavated between 2015 and 2017 in the framework of the Ife-Sungbo Archaeological Project. We obtained Beta-476953 from a charcoal sample found at the deepest level of the pit. The resulting radiocarbon date is consistent with an occupation in the 11th century or the first half of the 12th century.

Table 1 – Radiocarbon dating, first season of excavation (1957–1958), Ita Yemoo, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

Reference	Stratigraphic location	Conventional radiocarbon age	Calibrated results at 2σ (cal AD)	Calibrated results at 1σ (cal AD)
BM-261	IY, Trench XIV, level 11 (1963)	990±130 bp	774–779 (1.7%) 796–1274 (98.3%)	899–918 (6.1%) 958–967 (2.3%) 973–1181 (83.7%) 1186–1213 (7.9%)
M-2117	IY, Trench XIV, levels 4-5 (1963)	480±100 bp	1299–1372 (18.9%) 1376–1637 (81.1%)	1321–1357 (16.7%) 1390–1508 (73.2%) 1593–1618 (10.1%)
Beta-476953	IY, Unit C, level 35 (2017)	960±30 bp	1026–1158 (100%)	1033–1049 (19.5%) 1082–1132 (65.5%) 1138–1151 (14.9%)

Table 2 – Thermoluminescence dating, first season of excavation (1957–1958), Ita Yemoo, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

Material	Sample Reference	TL dating	Location
“Bronze” Ooni Figure	OxTL 16h1	AD 1365±70	Ita Yemoo (November 1957)
“Bronze” Royal Pair (for reproduction see Willett 2006: 150)	OxTL 20f 13.1 OxTL 20f 13.2	AD 1440±50 AD 1395±55	Ita Yemoo (November 1957)

34 Trench XIV was not the last archaeological excavation on pavement #1. A signboard standing on the ground at the northwestern end of pavement #1 bears the only known mention that another excavation was conducted in 2008, by Marcus Olubode Adesina, an archaeologist with the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM). At the time of the excavation, Adesina was the curator of the National Museum at Ife. The new excavation encompassed Trench XIV, which was still visible before this operation. By 2015, the year we conducted our first year of fieldwork at Ita Yemoo, Adesina had become the Director of Research at the NCMM, and he generously took some of his time to visit our team at Ile-Ife. He informed us that the objective of the 2008 excavation was to reinvestigate the origin of the depression and that a report of the findings had been filed with NCMM. Unfortunately, all attempts to retrieve a copy of the report proved unfruitful,

and the 2008 archaeological intervention remains unfruitful. On the basis of surface observations of the backfilling, we can only mark the approximate extent of the 2008 excavation unit (Fig. 12).

The pavement at Ita Yemoo grove: Stratigraphy, topography, and chronology

35 Pavement #1 is the sole archaeological feature still visible at Ita Yemoo. In the absence of an on-site visitor interpretive center, it has gradually become eponymous with the Ita Yemoo site as a whole, bringing some degree of confusion about its spatial relationships with other finds. Willett's hypothesis that the "bronzes" unearthed in November 1957 might have initially rested on a potsherd pavement, his use of the pavement as a background to photograph them (Willett 1959c), his observation that the terracotta heads that made up Shrine I were also lying on a pavement, combined with the overall fuzziness that characterizes his publications on the archaeology of Ita Yemoo, contributed to ambiguous claims about pavement #1. The signboard that visitors can read next to the roofed pavement—the only available signage on-site, made after Adesina excavated pavement #1 in 2008—stands as evidence of such public discourse.

36 It reads as follows:

> "Ita Yemoo is an important archaeological site in Ile-Ife, discovered by accident during building construction. Scientific excavation was carried out by Frank Willett in 1957 and Adesina M.O. in 2008. Excavations revealed a complete bronze figure of an Ooni, fine terracotta heads with elaborate headdresses, ancient vessels and several pieces of potsherds."

37 Based on their physical proximity, visitors would naturally associate the narrative found on the signboard with the pavement and would not realize that this short statement is misleading in more than one way. Of course, Willett's excavations at Ita Yemoo started in December 1957, but they continued until 1963, pointing to the complexity and extent of the site and the wealth of associated archaeological features far beyond the sole patrimonialized potsherd pavement. Furthermore, no copper alloy figure was ever found during a "scientific excavation" at Ita Yemoo; all were accidentally unearthed by workers, and their exact *in situ* context was lost. Similarly, if a number of fine terracottas were indeed excavated by Willett at Ita Yemoo, all were found in discrete features located some distance away from pavement #1 and with no recorded stratigraphic relation with the latter.

38 It is significant that the excavation of pavement #1 did not reveal any material culture *in situ*. From a stratigraphic point of view, and from the comparison of Willett's notes with our observations during recent archaeological excavations at Ita Yemoo (2015–2017) and at Oduduwa College (2018–2019), it would seem that Willett excavated two different groups of pavements at Ita Yemoo. A first group includes potsherd pavements that had been in use for some time, before being intentionally backfilled to give way to a different project (pavement #15 could be placed in this group). This first group testifies to the long-term use of the Ita Yemoo area. Pavements in this group are characterized by the quasi-absence of culture material found *in situ* on their surface, an expected outcome of a planned process that would have included the prior removal/relocation of any standing structures or objects. They are covered with a thick, compact, and clayey deposit, described as brown, reddish, or reddish-brown, which we interpret as a backfill used to create a new living surface above an older one. The new surface could be paved or not, an indicator of continuity or change in the use of space through time, as in the case of pavements covering areas previously used as refuse pits.

39 A second group included pavements which were never intentionally backfilled after they ceased being in use. They are often covered either with a less compact, darker brown deposit, sometimes described as humus-like,[59] or with the debris of nearby architectural features that collapsed on top of them and that can be difficult to distinguish from a backfill (see for instance Garlake 1977: 62–63). As surrounding structures gradually collapsed, they contributed to forming a superficial layer that partially or entirely covered the medieval features, while more sediments, often darker, were moved and deposited by the rains and surface waters. The humic characteristics observed in some of the deposits could also have resulted from farming activities between the 17th and 20th centuries. Overall, pavements of the second group are clear markers of the final occupation of Ita Yemoo—and potentially of other sites—during the late medieval period. It is mainly on the surface of these pavements that rich clusters of cultural assemblages were found *in situ,* including the groups of terracottas excavated in Willett's Shrines I and II.[60] Willett was also probably correct to assume that the group of metal objects found by the construction workers at Ita Yemoo would also have been part of a cultural feature initially resting on such a pavement, although the grouping of so many objects in one spot could also have been a hoard. The presence of unusual assemblages left behind on some of these pavements suggests the inhabitants of the area were forced to leave the place swiftly and could not come back. Elsewhere, we suggested that the crisis at the origin of the movement of people away from the habitation structures that made up the cultural landscape of Ita Yemoo[61] is likely to have been sudden and severe, and possibly related to the second plague pandemic if it affected the region in the second half of the 14th century (Chouin 2018b).[62] In any case, the rich material culture left behind by the inhabitants of Ife in the second half of the 14th century stands as an archaeological anomaly, the material manifestation of a major rupture in the ascending trajectory of Ife.[63]

40 Based on Willett's record, it is probable that pavement #1 belongs to the group of "backfilled pavements." Therefore, it would not have been visible during the last phase of occupation of Ita Yemoo—and, as expected, no material culture was found on it. Presumably, it had become a worn and uneven surface decades earlier. The deep subsidences which affected the regularity of the pavement's surface might have motivated the decision to cover it.[64] Backfilling pavements, however, seems to have been a recurrent practice at Ife. The case of pavement #1 overlaying pavement #15 is not a unique stratigraphic feature in the archaeology of Ife, and similar stratigraphic relations between two pavements have been reported elsewhere.[65] As new generations occupied spaces inherited from earlier ones, they seem to have redefined, transformed, and rebuilt them. As such, the stratigraphic landscape of Ife illustrates a diachronic process of change in the way people structured, organized, built, and gave meaning to the urban space around them. And yet, despite this dynamic of change, we observe that overlaid pavements are rare in the stratigraphic record at Ife. None of the cases documented to date had more than two distinct paved levels. These observations suggest that pavements became popular only in the later periods of Ife's settlement history and that they resisted the passage of time well enough to remain in use for an extended period. These suggestions are consistent with Ekpo Eyo's distinction between "pre-pavement" and "pavement" periods at Ife, with the latter originating in the course of the 12th century (Eyo 1974: 409).[66]

41 Eyo's pavement-based chronology has sometimes been criticized because, in the words of Suzanne Blier, "numerous sections of this mosaic flooring can still be seen (and are still used) in the center today, and in some cases one can see its presence in several different construction periods" (Blier 2015: 43). Indeed, the durability of pavements and their unique resistance to erosion make them ubiquitous in the modern city of Ile-Ife. In many cases, the post-15th-century deposits have been washed away, leaving pre-15th-century paved surfaces visible and sometimes reemployed in contemporary contexts. Admittedly, the outcropping of early pavements in modern contexts can be a source of confusion to

scholars unfamiliar with the depositional history of the city. Although Eyo's pavement periodization might need to be critically reexamined, we believe it remains a useful baseline from which to discuss Ife's material culture and urbanization process in a chronological perspective, because it derives from direct archaeological evidence.[67] Blier's comment, however, speaks of the need to add a third group to our stratigraphic typology of pavements. Such a third group includes all pavements that are visible in Ife's contemporary landscape, a fact that indicates that any deposit that covered them at one point has been eroded away through natural and/or human factors. Such a loss of stratigraphic information would not allow archaeologists to replace these pavements in either of the first two groups.

First season, 1957–1958: Second series of shafts and excavations at "the main part of the site"

42 On December 28, 1957, as the work on pavement #1 was coming to a close, Willett started assigning new tasks to his laborers. In his notebook, he recorded sending well-diggers to "clear [the] pavement under the library."[68] The term "library" refers to the original plan of the ICMU's headquarters. This room was to be located next to the area demarcated to become the assembly hall, between the area where Willett excavated the pavement #1 and the city wall. There, the first series of shafts had exposed a potsherd pavement. The well-diggers uncovered part of the pavement, and on December 29, Willett noted that the pavement was cruder than pavement #1 and "fragmentary, lying on laterite which shows through the floor."[69] Willett had hoped to examine its stratigraphic connection to the city wall but soon realized it "stopped short of the wall."[70] Another group of well-diggers started investigating a new area east of pavement #I, where two cocoa warehouses were to be erected as part of the ICMU complex.[71] Finally, another group explored the ditch along the Ilesha road area, which workers had reportedly filled with the soil removed from the construction site. In recovering and sieving the content of the ditch (Fig. 4), Willett hoped to find fragments of copper alloy artifacts, especially the missing face of one of the figures of the pair Blier described as a "royal couple shown with interlocked feet and arms" (Blier 2012: 72–3). We do not have many details on the work conducted in the ditch, other than that it seems to have been carefully excavated using 3-inch spit levels.[72] The soil, in Willett's words, was "carefully sieve[d]."[73] In his field book, Willett noted finding many beads, adding "if we are finding beads, we shall not miss pieces of the bronze."[74] It is unclear when this work came to an end. Since no "bronze" was found, Willett's interest dwindled, and his mentions of work in the ditch became irregular. However, the task of sieving an estimated 80 tons of soil was daunting, and the team was still at work on January 13, when Willett recorded on-going work in the ditch for the last time.[75] Willett finally accepted that the missing "bronze" face had "probably shattered under the blow into tiny fragments, hardly bigger than the constituent crystals."[76] The most significant finds in the ditch were the presence of "a great concentration of beads, chiefly of blue glass," and also "fragments of glass-making crucibles, and droplets of glass."[77] The concentration of glass beads was aligned with the area where the "bronzes" were reputed to have been found. Willett hypothesized that they "almost certainly came from the place where the bronzes had been deposited."[78] Finally, he also recorded excavating a polished stone axe and the shell of a land snail that contained six cowries.[79]

First season, 1957–1958: Shrine I and the Oguusi house

43 On December 31, 1957, when Willett was getting ready for a trip to Osogbo, he learned that a gagged terracotta head with bulging eyes (Drewal & Schildkrout 2009: 111, fig. 79) had been excavated by laborers digging foundation trenches on the other side of Ilesha road, opposite the Pottery Museum. He requested work on the house belonging to Joseph Oguusi to come to a stop to allow his team to "excavate it properly." The following day, excavations started and lasted for four days until January 4, 1957.[80] Together with the terracotta head, the team excavated fragments of a ritual pot, cowries, land snail shells, and "3 tenth of a penny," the latter suggesting that the context of this find was somewhat disturbed.[81] Parts of the ritual pot showed "in relief a gagged head lying beside a decapitated nude male body, with the hands tied behind the back," which Willett interpreted as the representation of a human sacrifice (Willett 1959a: 136–137).

44 In parallel with the excavation at Oguusi's house, Willett also took an interest in another area he first referred to as "the site next but one to Ita Yemoo."[82] This was the site of another house under construction, belonging to Adesiyan, located along the Ilesha road just behind the one-story building that is known today as the Pottery Museum, within the Ita Yemoo compound owned by NCMM.[83] There too, foundation trenches had exposed potsherds pavements, and it seems Fagg had asked Frank Willett to monitor the place.[84] The owner, however, became worried about the sudden interest of the British archaeologist in his land, and seems to have tried to hide archaeological features. In 1957, Nigeria was still under British rule, and archaeology was nothing less than a discipline directly connected with colonial structures of power. We only know Adesiyan through Willett's writings; nonetheless, we can easily imagine that seeing how archaeological investigations at Ita Yemoo had brought an end to the ICMU construction project, Adesiyan might have been worried that the government would also reclaim his modest plot of land and house, and that he might not be properly compensated for it. In this context, Willett was an agent of the British colonial authorities. He thought and acted as such, sometimes with little sensitivity or concern for the impact of his archaeological work on local communities. Where we now see a local actor attempting to protect his interests in the face of an elitist colonial project, Willett saw only an unruly and stubborn man unable to recognize the universal value of the heritage that stood on his property. On January 1, 1958, he visited Adesiyan's house and what he saw infuriated him:

> "I found the owner had from sheer cussedness dug foundation trenches for internal walls, hiding the floor with the spoil. However, the pavement //46// could be seen at about 6 inches deep in the bottom of one of his trenches and at about 2 feet below surface."[85]

45 Behind the house, he also spotted fragments of a terracotta he interpreted as a representation of a kingly figure.[86] They stood at the edge of a burrow pit used by the workers to dig out the clay used to make blocks for the Adesiyan house, overlaying a potsherd pavement.[87] The site's northern edge had already been severely impacted, and Willett decided there was a need for an urgent and thorough investigation. To circumvent the reluctant landowner, the archaeologist immediately took the fragments of terracotta to Ooni Adesoji Aderemi, the traditional leader of Ife who, as an Oba of the first-class, derived considerable power from the colonial policy of indirect rule and served as the highest native authority representing the British administration at Ife. As expected, Willett received the encouragement of the traditional leader, who "agreed that I should dig on the site, whatever the owner may say."[88] With the backing of the Ooni, Willett could now start investigating the new site and control further work by Adesiyan's workers. At the end of the day, reflecting on his work so far, he exclaimed in his notebook: "This is an enormous job and gets bigger every day. There is no end to the digging in Ife."[89]

Figure 14 – On the left, location of Shrine 1, behind the northeastern corner of Adesiyan's house and the "Pottery Museum." On the right, the foundations of the northeastern corner of

Adesiyan's house are still visible, next to the remodeled Pottery Museum.

There is no indication of the location of Shrine 1, which was entirely dismantled and placed in storage by Willett. Ph. Chouin, 2021

© Hunterian Museum and University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Frank Willett collection, GB248 ACCN 3120/12.

46 The following day, Willett met with Adesiyan and persuaded him to produce other fragments of the terracotta figure he had found in the clay pit behind his house, and an "almost complete crucible for glass of quite small size."[90] With these new artifacts in hand, he took Adesiyan at once to an audience with Ooni Adesoji Aderemi, where he was told to give "a full hand" to the British archaeologist.[91] Willett did not have time to waste, and as soon as he returned to the site, his laborers started moving the bricks already prepared to clear the area "to see the relations of the terracotta and the pavement [#6]."[92] Excavations started immediately, and in a few minutes, new fragments of terracotta were found, "apparently lying in [the] top six inches," forcing Willett to ask his workers to drop their hoes and to continue work "with trowels only."[93] It soon became clear to him that pavement #6 "represented the ground surface at the time the shrine was abandoned."[94] At the same time, upon washing the crucible[95] produced by Adesiyan, workers found 1,850 beads, including faceted ones in red stone, and others in multicolored glass.[96]

47 Excavations of this space continued during the following days, and the workers uncovered more terracotta fragments. The excavation of a shrine *in situ* was a premiere in the history of archaeology in Ife. On January 3, 1957, Willett thought there were three terracotta sculptures represented (Fig. 16).[97] He noted they seemed to have been "smashed and scattered, not merely broken by collapse of the building." The following day, however, new observations made him change his mind: "They are not as scattered as I had thought. Found a pot shattered but holding together, with a brass anklet round its neck and more beads inside" (Fig. 15).[98] Clearly, the part of the site that had not been affected by the construction of the Adesiyan's house now appeared largely undisturbed. He also noted the difficulty of excavating these objects without damaging them, as they were "soft and wet" early in the morning and difficult to distinguish from the hardened ground after sunrise. Four days later he wrote: "The difficulty of getting out the terracotta is enormous. It is extremely friable and has already cracked up and flaked apart in the ground."[99]

Figure 15 – The pot with brass anklet around its rim, containing beads, excavated by Willett at Shrine I.

© Hunterian Museum and University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Frank Willett collection, GB248 ACCN 3120/11

Figure 16 – Views of Shrine I.

a, we can see the position of the two intact terracotta heads. b, the heads have been lifted and the arrangement of grinding stones is visible.

© Hunterian Museum and University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Frank Willett collection, GB248 ACCN 3120/1

48 Working under the sun from early morning to nightfall eventually took a toll on Willett, who complained in his notes of an “upset tummy” that kept him at home on January 5, an inconvenience he turned into an opportunity to wash the recently discovered artifacts. The following day, he was back on the site, sharing his time between the shafts dug over the planned cocoa stores—which had also revealed terracotta fragments—and the site behind Adesiyan’s house, which he referred to as the “Terracotta producing area,” the “Royal Ancestral Shrine,” and later “Shrine I.”[100] On January 7, he lifted the first series of terracotta fragments. Chief Akeredolu, who was entrusted with cleaning and restoring the finds, was invited “to see the pieces in situ before I attempt to lift them.”[101] Willett reported finding stones associated with the shrine the following day, “one of which is almost cleared by this morning,” and excavating a broken pottery disc at about 6 inches below the surface.[102] Many stones, especially grinding stones, were associated with Shrine I, as they seem to have marked the boundary of the sacred space (Fig. 16). They

might have been used to prepare meals that were offered to ancestors or other spiritual entities associated with the shrine. Willett provided a detailed description of the lithic ensemble associated with Shrine I, in a handwritten draft article composed soon after the 1957–1958 season:

> "The altar was composed of stones, the main group of which consisted of 15 worn out basin-shaped grinding stones, four of which were more or less complete; 5 small stones with signs of use, one flat quartz slab, and eight large and twelve small unworked stones. These were laid in an arc aligned north to south. To the west of the south end was another group of 8 stones, one of them a flat slab, and one worn out grinding stone. Beneath an inverted grinding stone //10// which had a hole worn in the bottom was a collection of blank iron bars."[103]

49 Fragments of about seven terracotta figures and four heads (including two "practically intact" (Willett 2004: II–2, [4]) were eventually recovered at the site.[104] They feature among the most remarkable artifacts recovered from their archaeological context at Ife. They have since been reproduced in many publications, including Willett's 2004 catalogue.[105] Among the two intact heads, one is often described as an attendant because it does not have any headgear (Willett 1967: 156, 158, pl. VIII; 2004: T96). The other one, wearing among the most elaborate beaded headgear documented at Ife, was referred to as "a queen" (Willett 1967: 156, 159, pl. IX; 2004: T97) They were found very close to one another, the first one with its nose only a few millimeters above the pavement, and the second, face up, about 10 cm above the pavement (Willett 2004: pl. 58). The precise chronology of the excavation of the Shrine I becomes unclear after January 8, as Willett stopped writing about it in his field notes and rather focused on other activities, as discussed below. The next entry that mentions Shrine I is dated January 21, 13 days later:

> "Have continued work, concentrating on Terra cotta site behind Adesiyan's house. Today, a new (fourth) head turned up, in pieces. All the terracottas overlie the potsherd pavement. Face down on it is uncrowned head [with its] nose practically lying on pavement. Above and to one side is a crowned head. They are many fragments of body and beadwork around, apparently lying between the two groups of large stones. Many rosettes from crowns have turned up (about 6 today!)."[106]

50 This gap in Willett's notes betrays the intensity of his self-imposed schedule during the last two weeks of his first campaign at Ita Yemoo, including a new set of trenches at the spot where the "bronze" had been found (Trenches IV and V, see below), and 117 new test shafts sunk in an effort to find the limits of the Ita Yemoo site. Ten days before his scheduled departure, by mid-January 1958, help had come in the person of British historian Roland Oliver. The latter had come to Ibadan to teach in the history department and had traveled to Ife to acquaint himself with the new archaeological discoveries. Willett accepted Oliver's offer to volunteer his time on the site and tasked him with the excavation of the two intact terracotta heads now visible at Shrine I (Oliver 1997: 187–189).[107] As Oliver was busy excavating the two heads with a penknife, Willett could focus on supervising the completion of the test pits. Oliver recounted this unique experience in his autobiography:

> "At the moment of our arrival the face of one such figure, crowned with a triple diadem, was just beginning to be visible in the partially excavated laterite soil. [...] It proved to be one of the most testing weeks I have ever spent. For nine hours a day we worked on hands and knees in the broiling sun. My task was to complete the work on the crowned figure. There was no difference in colour between the terra cotta and the surrounding laterite and only a slight difference in texture. One pressed gently with the penknife until one encountered increased resistance. Then one brushed away the dust and began again. The lady, for such she turned out to be, was worth it. I saw her next at the Royal Academy in London, where she was on loan to an exhibition called 'Treasures of Nigeria'" (*ibid*.: 188).

51 It is probably around January 21 that Willett took several photographs of Shrine I, before dismantling it. One of these photographs offers a close-up as the two terracottas *in situ* as described in the above quotation and was included in Willett's 2004 CD-ROM (pl. 58). A similar close-up photographs, although taken at an earlier stage of the excavation, is included in Roland Oliver's autobiography (2017:188). To our knowledge, these are the only photographs of Shrine I that were ever published. In Willett's archives at the University of Glasgow, however, more photographs are available, including general views of the spatial layout of the shrine (Fig. 14 and 16).

52 Willett's interpretation of the shrine remained fairly consistent from his first 1959 publication to his final 2004 CD-ROM, although with some variations. His overall interpretation is that the feature is an elite shrine with terracotta figures standing over a potsherd pavement, hurriedly abandoned and gradually silted. In 1959, he suggested the shrine had been impacted by the falling walls of the compound (Willet 1959a: 137). The following year, he came up with a different hypothesis:

> "The figures had evidently been standing in a mud-walled house with thatched roof; the roof had been burned off (presumably in war), the figures had thus been left open to the weather for a short time, which had produced slight erosion of the surface; soon the rains had brought the mud walls down on top of the figures, shattering them, and impacting part of one head into the pavement" (Willett 1960: 243).

53 In 2004, he went back to his original idea of a shrine impacted by the falling walls of the surrounding compound rather than the collapse of a built shrine. For the rest, the idea of the abandonment remains key to his argument, with the burning-roof hypothesis explaining why the terracottas were not recovered by the inhabitants (Willett 2004: II–2, [5–6]). There is no documented evidence of a "roof fire" in the limited archaeological record associated with the Shrine I. The fact that there is no known stratigraphic description of layers excavated by Willett does not make his fallen-walls hypothesis any stronger. Willett's only published argument in favor of collapsed walls was the presence of "abraded potsherds [...] found between the terra-cotta fragments" (Willett 1959a: 137). Of course, many processes in the history of the site's formation could explain the fact that some terracottas were found in different states of conservation, and that some small, eroded potsherds found their way into the post-abandonment depositional record. Based on the records left by Willett, Shrine I was likely an outdoor shrine, positioned on top of a pavement, bounded by a number of grinding stones which might have been used for the ritual preparation of food offerings. It seems possible that some of the terracottas found were standing directly on the pavement, particularly the head of the "attendant" documented by Willett. The nose of the terracotta resting directly on the pavement and the excellent conservation of the head suggest it did not fall from any height. The "queen's head" excavated by Oliver, however, might have been standing on an altar made of perishable materials, possibly similar to that shown on one of the pieces of pottery discovered by Garlake at Obalara's land (1974: 127–128; see also Blier 2015: 254–255). Its position above the "attendant" suggests that quite some silting had already accumulated on the site when the altar's advanced decay caused the head to fall. It probably landed on a soft and muddy surface, thereby avoiding breakage.[108] The remaining heads and terracottas apparently had a harder landing and their fragments became encrusted on the pavement or dispersed by surface waters or other environmental and anthropic factors that affected the site.[109]

54 Although Shrine I remains undated, the terracotta heads are clearly affiliated in style with Blier's 1250–1350 CE "high florescence period of artistic brilliance" (Blier 2015: 44). Willett's interpretation of the site as a rapidly abandoned shrine remains convincing in the light of what we presently understand of Ife's depositional history (see for instance Chouin 2018b: §21). The presence of *in situ* artifacts in various parts of the city, mostly

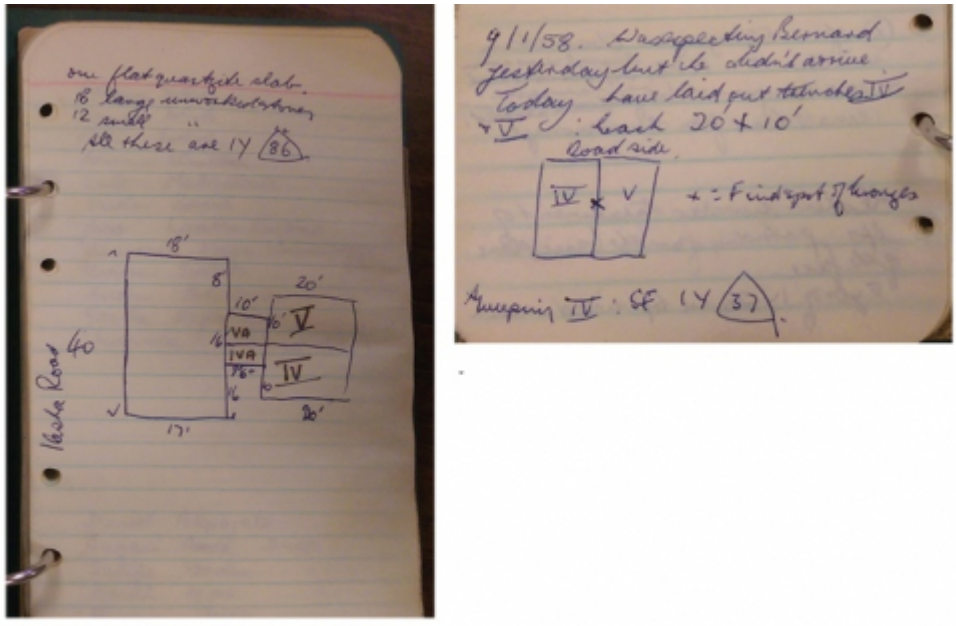
clustering in the 14th century, and the occupational gap the authors observed at several sites across Ife in the framework of the Ife-Sungbo Archaeological Project are compatible with Willett's theory. In fact, our work on the fall of Ife during the late medieval period suggests that the abandonment of Shrine I at Ita Yemoo probably resulted from an event of cataclysmic dimensions which affected most parts of Ife for which we have archaeological documentation. This event, which signals an Ife diaspora across the region, probably took place in the later 14th century CE (Chouin 2018a: 304–305; 2018b: §21).

First season, 1957–1958: Trenches IV–V

55 On January 9, 1958, Frank Willett opened two new trenches he called Trench IV and V.[110] Each trench was 20x10 feet (ca. 6x3 m) and adjacent to the spot pointed to the workers as the exact location where they had found the "bronzes" artifacts.[111] Not much is known about these trenches, as no detail about them is found in his field notebook before January 21, 1958, when he noted laying out two extensions side by side between the western end of Trenches IV and V and the ditch that ran perpendicular to them.[112] Each extension measured 10x4 feet (ca. 3x0.9 m) and were named Trenches iva and va. A sketch in his field notebook is reproduced below (Fig. 17).[113] It proved useful when we recreated the Ita Yemoo site map. Apart from finding the elusive "bronze" face, his objective was to understand the depositional context of the finds better. Fragments of pavements were identified during excavations, but not in the precise spot where the "bronzes" were supposed to have been rediscovered. Willett wrote:

> "No pavement remained under the precise spot indicated as the place where the bronzes lay, but as the work of levelling had continued for some days before the labourers were asked to indicate the spot, an error of 5 to 10 feet is not unlikely. The fragments appeared to be parts of one pavement so it is reasonably certain that the pots containing the bronzes lay on the pavement, and that the pavement was the occupation level at the time the bronzes were deposited."[114]

Figure 17 – Sketches of Trenches IV and V and their extensions, January 1958.



This is the only sketch that indicates the possible position of the bronzes excavated by the laborers.

© Hunterian Museum and University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Frank Willett collection, GB248 ACCN 3120/16

56 In the extension trenches, a terracotta leg of an antelope was unearthed, and the workers met a stone pavement at an unknown depth, which extended "to form a stone-lined pit."[115] Unfortunately, there is no known surviving material providing more information on this series of trenches.

End of the first season, 1957–1958

57 Frank Willett's last two weeks at Ife in January 1958 were hectic. Ita Yemoo had turned out to be a major archaeological site with terracottas and pavements present in different locations. He found himself stretched between many urgent tasks, from fulfilling his initial objective of investigating the precise site where the copper alloy objects had been found and rescuing the important group of terracottas about to be engulfed in the clay pit at the back of Adesiyan's house, to testing the area for other significant remains. In so doing, Willett had rapidly moved out of the small area originally fenced by Fagg, gradually realizing the area was littered with endangered archaeological features. In these early days of 1958, he was under duress. His notes became less precise compared with those he took during the excavation of pavement #1. The excavation of Shrine I and Trenches IV and V and their extension remains very sketchily documented, as all the last pages of his field notebook are dedicated to the result of 117 test pits dug "about 50 feet [ca. 15 m] apart" in the hope of spatially demarcating the extent of the Ita Yemoo site.

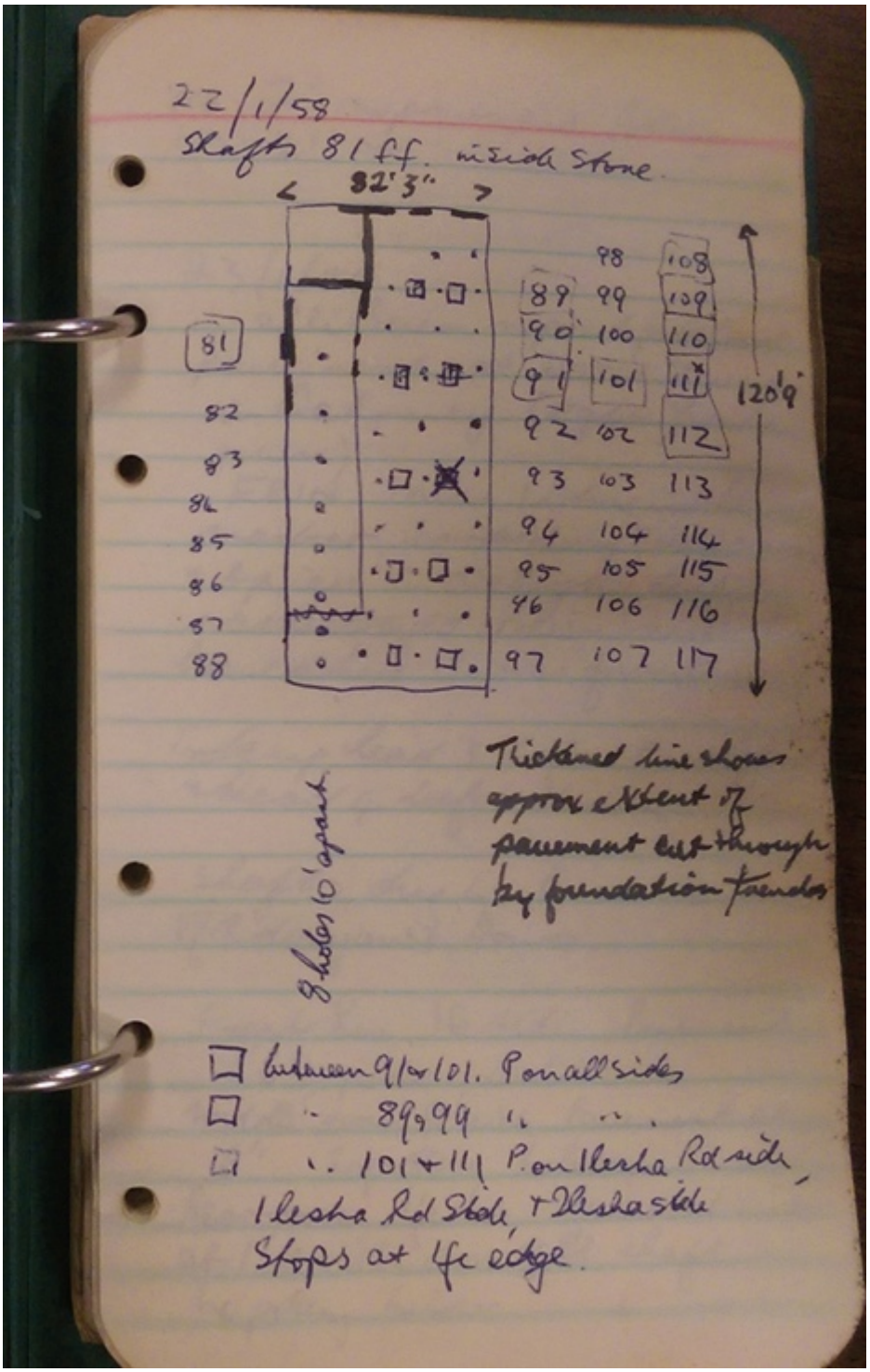
58 It is impossible to know precisely where well diggers dug these circular shafts, and Willett's notes include only some vague indications, which must have been clear to him in 1958 but have now become obscure or, at best, imprecise. This new test-pit campaign started on January 10, 1958. The first series of shafts seem to have been dug north of the city wall that passes through Ita Yemoo, in the area Willett called "the Ilesha side" of the site.[116] For instance, we know that the first shaft was dug "9 yards from the edge of the ditch," that workers struck bedrock at a depth of 2 feet, and that no pottery was kept.[117] Shaft #10 was located about "45 feet from the center of the Ilesha bypass," which was itself about "100 yards from the top of the [city wall's] bank." In the case of shaft #31, Willett noted: "3 yards before [shaft #31] is Beacon WX1748." Shaft #33 did not yield any artifact and was located "on slight bank on R[oad] side of Mokuro road approaching Ife, just before junction to Ilesha road." Shafts were organized in roughly parallel lines, and Willett's work was facilitated by the fact that the area was not yet urbanized. Each shaft is described individually with the depth at which it ended and a quick mention of the finds, usually pottery.[118]

59 Willett developed a particular interest in the area where the cocoa warehouses were to be constructed (especially Store 1) and where pavements were visible in the foundation trenches (Fig. 18). Not fewer than 37 shafts were dug where the cocoa store was to be built. The rediscovery of large pavements and fragments of terracottas convinced Willett of the importance of this specific area. The information he provided proved vital in convincing the government to start negotiating the purchase of the land from the ICMU and other private owners.[119] On January 21, a large delegation of the ICMU came to the site, accompanied by the Ooni. They had first agreed to move their complex away from the present site, but the new location again revealed the presence of potsherd pavements. Finally, the stakeholders agreed to relocate the ICMU complex to a different place, on the other side of the Ilesha road.[120] On the recommendations of Willett, negotiations started for the purchase of the whole area by the government. In his handwritten, unpublished report, he wrote:

"Steps were then taken to schedule the whole site from the 'middle' town wall to the Esinmirin stream, a site forming a truncated triangle about 60 acres in extent. There

was considerable opposition to this move, and a reduced //13// plot (of only approximately 14 acres) has been scheduled."

Figure 18 – Sketch of the shafts dug in the area where Store 1 of the ICMU complex was to be built, January 22, 1958.



© Hunterian Museum and University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Frank Willett collection, GB248 ACCN 3120/16

60 In all, the government of Nigeria ended up acquiring 25 per cent of the total area Willett had initially suggested be transformed into an archaeological reserve. It stands today as the Ita Yemoo Annex of the Ife Museum. On the remaining parts of the land, the Department of Antiquity decided to conduct a systematic campaign of test pits, a task that brought Willett back to Nigeria in July 1958.[121]

61 After this first excavation season, he had returned to Manchester to the job he had temporarily left behind as Keeper of the Department of Ethnology and General Archaeology. Still, his experience with Nigerian antiquities haunted him. Upon his return, he curated an exhibition at the Manchester University Museum with the artifacts rediscovered at Ita Yemoo from November 1957, including the terracottas from Shrine I. A newspaper clipping of the *Evening Chronicle* dated May 2, 1958, reported that "one of his last finds before he left the 'dig' in January was the face of a royal figure. The rest of it lay in fragments. But when the case was opened Mr. Willett was surprised to see that the difficult work of reconstruction had already been done, at the Ife museum."[122] Several press clippings kept in Willett's archives speak of the interest the exhibition generated, suddenly propelling him into the limelight as a local celebrity and, as one of the articles put it, as "a world authority on ancient West African cultures."[123] After Manchester University Museum in May 1958, the exhibition traveled to the British Museum, the *Musée de l'Homme* in Paris,[124] and the Museum of Primitive Art in New York, before returning to Ife, and Willett's fame spread beyond the borders of the United Kingdom.[125]

62 Before leaving Nigeria, Fagg had "pressed" him "to take a contract with the Nigerian Government for five years." In an autobiographical essay published soon before his death, he recalled:

> "I had been very happy in Manchester, but I felt I would perhaps become rather unhappy if I were still in Manchester when someone else was completing the work on this site that I was beginning to regard as my own" (Willett 2006: 154).

63 At the end of July 1958, Willett left Manchester permanently and moved to Ife as the Government Archaeologist. His nomination and departure were significant enough to be mentioned in *The Daily Telegraph*:

> "Mr. Frank Willett, 32, keeper of the Department of Ethnology and General Archaeology of Manchester Museum since 1950, will take up an appointment at the end of this month with the Department of Antiquities, Nigeria. He will, subject to confirmation, become the Department's surveyor of antiquities."[126]

64 To a journalist who asked him what he intended to do, he replied: "to work out just about the biggest, most complicated game [...] of patience imaginable." Indeed, the journalist of *News of the World!* Explained: "under the fierce tropical sun he proposes to piece together 60,000 fragments of pottery unearthed by African laborers clearing and levelling a warehouse site."[127] In fact, Willett would not do much to establish a strong understanding of Ile-Ife ceramic typology, but he would lead the largest series of archaeological works ever conducted in the area, including continuing research at Ita Yemoo in 1962–1963, on the city wall and on "the grid," the same area at the site of the ICMU proposed cocoa store he had started exploring in January 1958. All these works followed the same fate as the rescue excavations discussed in this paper: unpublished, they are to be rediscovered in Willett's archives, edited, and made available to scholars.

Conclusion

65 Ife is the most excavated medieval settlement in tropical West Africa, and it occupies a unique place in Yoruba memory and historiography. Nevertheless, archaeology played only a very limited role in the reconstruction of its past and in the making of historical discourses about the city. What do we know about its depositional history, and what does the stratification of the site tell us about its occupation? What do we know about Ife's pottery, and what does it tells us about its ancient economy? When were its city walls built and why? These simple questions remained unanswered, primarily because most of the

excavations that took place at Ife were not published in detail. This gap in the production of knowledge, in turn, has prevented other scholars from critically examining these older works to broaden their understanding of the site, informing their own research questions, and producing relevant historical content from an archaeological perspective. As a result, Ife's early history remains dominated by a historiography largely derived from oral traditions variously revisited by historians in the decades that followed the independence of Nigeria, and sometimes illustrated by a rich but largely decontextualized iconography. The archives of Ife's archaeology offer many opportunities to retrieve archaeological data about large tracts of land that are now urbanized and inaccessible to archaeologists, and to compare them with data derived from new sites. In fact, research in the archaeological archives is not only about exhuming raw material, but mainly to reconstruct meaning in a way that respects the original documents as primary sources, and to assess and reframe the data through retroactive interpretation. In the case of Ife, the mere size of the ancient settlement—roughly as large as modern Ile-Ife—is a challenge for those seeking to understand the overall urban dynamic while excavating at the very small scale at which most archaeologists work in Africa in particular. The archives have the potential to multiply the number of excavated areas documented and enable scholars to come up with fresh perspectives based on the study of a larger dataset harvested from different areas. In a dialectical manner, the archives stimulate new fieldwork through "reactivatable" data, while current fieldwork provides new insights that can be mobilized to assess archival evidence. Of course, such an archival quest also invites all archaeologists currently active in the field to reflect on their own practice and on the constitution of an archive of their own, where published and unpublished material alike will be made available to future scholars. It also reminds us all of the fact that a large proportion of the archaeological work in West Africa as a whole, including key sites in regional historiographies, such as Begho, in Ghana, still lies unpublished in private or public hands. Finally, the archives of archaeological projects have a role to play in the patrimonialization and presentation of West African archaeological resources to the general public. As the memory of Willett's interventions at Ita Yemoo has faded, the quality of the interpretative material offered to the public has declined. We hope this reconstitution of part of Willett's work will prove useful to revising signage and information for the public. Moreover, the rediscovery and mapping of areas previously excavated should provide guidance to curators to protect areas that have not yet been investigated. At Ita Yemoo, for instance, it is hoped that the information we provide in this paper will help in identifying and protecting the few unexplored areas that have survived the indiscriminate construction of buildings over archaeological resources that characterized the last decades. As we attempt to do justice to Willett's archaeological legacy and to broaden knowledge about the archaeology of Ife, we believe that a more careful/systematic study of the archives of archaeology in Africa, as well as the making and conservation of such collections, has the potential to deeply transform historical knowledge and archaeological/curatorial practices throughout the continent.

Acknowledgments

We thank all individuals and institutions that supported the research for this study. This study benefited from the financial support of the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, through the Ife-Sungbo Archaeological Project (*Mission archéologique d'Ife-Sungbo*). We are grateful to the Archive Service of the University of Glasgow for their support in our consultation of the archives and for providing us with reproductions of a selection of photographs. Tomos Evans and James Renton provided us with photographs of some of Willett's archives used here. Raphael Hautefort prepared the aerial orthophoto

of Ita Yemoo which we used as a basis for the spatial reconstruction of Willett's site map. Marie-Pierre Chouin helped with the reconstruction of the aerial view of pavement #1, based on photographs taken in 2015 by Patrice George, Bertrand Poissonnier, and one of the authors. Oladele Fabeku and Kayode Omiwole facilitated access to the 1962–1963 surveyor's plans of Ita Yemoo kept at the Ife Museum. It was digitized by Mr. Sumah at the Regional Center for Training in Aerial Surveys (RECTAS), Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. Abidemi Babatunde Babalola reviewed the notes on glass. Ann Stahl, Neil L. Norman and Christopher DeCorse gave us their informed comments.

Bibliographie

Aguigah D.A. (1995) – *Pavements et terres damées dans les régions du Golfe du Bénin : enquête archéologique et historique*. Paris, université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, thèse non publiée.

Aguigah D.A. (2003) – Approche ethnoarchéologique : survivance d'une technique ancienne d'aménagement de sol chez les Kabiyè au Nord-Togo. *West African Journal of Archaeology*, 33(2): 95–119.

Aguigah D.A. (2018) – *Archéologie et architecture traditionnelle en Afrique de l'Ouest. Le cas des revêtements de sol au Togo : une étude comparée*. Paris, L'Harmattan.

Aillet C., Cressier P. & Gilotte S. (2017) – *Sedrata. Histoire et archéologie d'un carrefour du Sahara médiéval. À la lumière des archives inédites de Marguerite Van Berchem*. Madrid, Casa de Velázquez, 161.

Babalola A.B. (2015) – *Archaeological Investigations of Early Glass Production at Igbo-Olokun, Ile-Ife (Nigeria)*. Houston, Rice University, Unpublished PhD Thesis.

Babalola A.B., McIntosh S.K., Dussubieux L. & Rehren T. (2017) – Ile-Ife and Igbo Olokun in the history of glass in West Africa. *Antiquity*, 91(357): 732–750. doi:10.15184/aqy.2017.80
DOI : 10.15184/aqy.2017.80

Babalola A.B., Rehren T., Ige A. & McIntosh S. (2018) – The Glass Making Crucibles from Ile-Ife, SW Nigeria. *Journal of African Archaeology*, 16: 1–29.

Babalola A.B., Ogunfolakan A.B., Rehren T. (2020) – Semi-finished glass from Ile-Ife, Nigeria: implications for the archaeology of glass in sub-Saharan Africa. *Antiquity,* 94(375): 1–6. doi:10.15184/aqy.2020.77
DOI : 10.15184/aqy.2020.77

Babalola A.B. (2021) – Creativity, Improvisation, Resilience, and Glassmaking in Early Ile-Ife. *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 54(1): 21–52.

Barker H., Burleigh R. & Meeks N. (1969) – British Museum Natural Radiocarbon Measurements VI. *Radiocarbon*, 11(2): 278–294. doi:10.1017/S0033822200011231
DOI : 10.1017/S0033822200011231

Bascom W. (1938) – Brass Portrait Heads from Ife-Ife, Nigeria. *Man,* 38: 176.

Basu P. & Damodaran V. (2015) – Colonial Histories of Heritage: Legislative Migrations and the Politics of Preservation. *Past & Present*, 226(10): 240–271. https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtu028
DOI : 10.1093/pastj/gtu028

Blier S.P. (2012) – Art in ancient Ife, birthplace of the Yoruba. *African Arts,* 45(4): 70–85.

Blier S.P. (2015) – *Art and Risk in Ancient Yoruba. Ife History, Power and Identity, c. 1300*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
DOI : 10.1017/CBO9781139128872

Chouin G.L. (2018a) – Igbo-Ukwu, Ife et les régions du Golfe de Guinée (IXe-XVe siècle). *In* : F.X. Fauvelle (dir.), *De l'Acacus au Zimbabwe 20 000 avant notre ère-XVIIe siècle*, Paris, Belin.

Chouin G.L. (éd.) (2018b) – Black Death and its aftermaths in Sub-Saharan Africa: A critical exploration of silence. *Afriques* [Online], 9. https://doi.org/10.4000/afriques.2228
DOI : 10.4000/afriques.2228

Chouin G.L. & Lasisi O.B. (2019) – Crisis and Transformation in the Bight of Benin at the Dawn of the Atlantic Trade. In: C.R. DeCorse (ed.), *Power, Political Economy, and Historical Landscapes of the Modern World*, New York, Fernand Braudel Center. Studies in Historical Social Science, Suny Press: 285–306.

Craddock P.T., Ambers J., Van Bellegem M., Cartwright C.R., Hudson J., La Niece S. & Spataro M. (2013) – The Olokun head reconsidered. *Afrique : Archéologie & Arts*, 9 : 13-42. https://doi.org/10.4000/aaa.266
DOI : 10.4000/aaa.266

Crane H.R. & Griffin J.B. (1972) – University of Michigan Radiocarbon Dates xiv. *Radiocarbon*, 14(1): 155–194. doi:10.1017/S0033822200001077
DOI : 10.1017/S0033822200001077

Davison C.C., Giauque R.D. & Clark J.D. (1971) – Two Chemical Groups of Dichroic Glass Beads from West Africa. *Man*, 6(4): 645–659. https://doi.org/10.2307/2799188
DOI : 10.2307/2799188

Davison C.C. (1972) – *Glass beads in African Archaeology: Results of Neutron Activation Analysis, Supplemented by Results of X-Ray Fluorescence Analysis*. Berkeley, University of California, Unpublished PhD Thesis.

Drewal H.J. & Schildkrout E. (2010) – *Dynasty and Divinity: Ife Art in Ancient Nigeria*. Seattle, University of Washington Press.

Eyo E. (1974) – *Recent excavation at Ife and Owo and their implications for Ife, Owo and Benin Studies*. Ibadan, University of Ibadan, Unpublished PhD Thesis.

Fayet S. (2013) – Documenter l'absence : les archives d'archéologues. *Sciences de la société*, 89 : 126-139. doi : https://doi.org/10.4000/sds.301
DOI : 10.4000/sds.301

Frobenius L. (1913) – *The Voice of Africa*. London, Hutchinson, I.

Garlake P. (1974) – Excavations at Obalara's Land, Ife: an Interim Report. *West African Journal of Archaeology*, 4(1): 111–148.

Garlake P. (1977) – Excavations on the Woye Asiri Family Land in Ife, West Africa. *West African Journal of Archaeology*, 7: 57–95.

Garlake P. (1979) – Nigeria: Its Archaeology and Early History. By Thurstan Shaw. London: Thames and Hudson, 1978. *Africa*, 49(2): 208–209. doi:10.2307/1158701
DOI : 10.2307/1158701

Goodwin A.J.H. (1953) – The Origin of Maize. *The South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 8(29): 13–14.
DOI : 10.2307/3886489

Ige O.A., Ogunfolakan B.A & Ajayi E.O.B. (2009) – Chemical characterization of some potsherd pavements from parts of Yorubaland in southwestern Nigeria. *Journal of Archaeological Science*, 36(1): 90–99. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jas.2008.07.014
DOI : 10.1016/j.jas.2008.07.014

Jeffreys M.D.W. (1953) – Pre-Columbian Maize in Africa. *Nature*, 172(1953): 965–966. https://doi.org/10.1038/172965a0
DOI : 10.1038/172965a0

Lankton J.W., Ige O.A. & Rehren T. (2006) – Early primary glass production in Southern Nigeria. *Journal of African Archaeology*, 4(1): 111–138. https://doi.org/10.3213/1612-1651-10065
DOI : 10.3213/1612-1651-10065

Merriman N. & Swain H. (1999) – Archaeological archives: serving the public interest? *European Journal of Archaeology,* 2(2): 249–267. doi:10.1179/eja.1999.2.2.249
DOI : 10.1179/eja.1999.2.2.249

Mueller J.W. (1971) – *Variability in Ceramics from Ita Yemoo from Ife, Nigeria*. Tucson, University of Arizona, Unpublished Master Thesis.

Murray K.C. (1966) – A List of Sites, Buildings etc in Nigeria declared as Monuments under the Antiquities Act. *The West African Archaeological Newsletter*, 4: 31–33.

Ogundiran A. (2003) – Chronology, material culture, and pathways to the cultural history of Yoruba-Edo Region, 500 BC–AD. 1800. In: T. Falola & C. Jennings, *Sources and methods in African history: Spoken, Written, Unearthed*, Woodbridge, University of Rochester Press: 33–79.

Ogundiran A. & Ige O.A. (2015) – "Our ancestors were material scientists": archaeological and geochemical evidence for indigenous Yoruba glass technology. *Journal of Black Studies*, 46(8): 751–72. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934715600964
DOI : 10.1177/0021934715600964

Ogundiran A. (2020) – *The Yorùbá. A New History*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press.
DOI : 10.2307/j.ctv177thv2

Oliver R. (1997) – *In Realms of Gold: Pioneering in African History*. University of Wisconsin Press: 186–191.
DOI : 10.4324/9781315889375

Olorunfemi M.O., Ogunfolakan B.A., Chouin G.L., Oni A.G., Okunnubi O.M. & Akinwumiju A.S. (2015) – Integrated Geophysical Investigation of Yemoo Grove Archaeological Site in Ile-Ife, Osun State, Southwest Nigeria. *Ife Journal of Science*, 17(3): 553–563.

Picton J. (2007) – *In memorium*, Frank Willett 1925–2006. *African Arts,* 40(2): 13–15.

Pole L. (2007) – Obituary Frank Willett, CBE, FRSE (1925–2006). *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, 19: 1–6.

Polet J. (1990) – À propos de thermoluminescence. *Arts d'Afrique noire*, 76 : 55-59.

Schnapp A., Schlanger N., Levin S. & Coye N. (2007) – Archives de l'archéologie européenne (AREA). Pour une histoire de l'archéologie française. *Les nouvelles de l'archéologie*, 110 : 5-8. https://doi.org/10.4000/nda.170
DOI : 10.4000/nda.170

Shyllon F. (1996) – Cultural Heritage Legislation and Management in Nigeria. *International Journal of Cultural Property, 5*(2): 235–268. doi:10.1017/S0940739196000045
DOI : 10.1017/S0940739196000045

Stuiver M., Reimer P.J. & Reimer R.W. (2021) – CALIB 8.2 [WWW program] at http://calib.org, accessed 2021-8-27

Watkins J.E. (2006) – Communicating archaeology: Words to the wise. *Journal of Social Archaeology*. 6(1): 100–118. doi:10.1177/1469605306060569
DOI : 10.1177/1469605306060569

Willett F. (1959a) – Bronze and Terra-Cotta Sculptures from Ita Yemoo, Ife. *The South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 14(56): 135–137. doi:10.2307/3886983.
DOI : 10.2307/3886983

Willett F. (1959b) – Bronze Figure from Ita Yemoo, Ife, Nigeria. *Man*, 59(308): 189–193.

Willett F. (1959c) – The Discovery of New Brasses Figure at Ife. *Odu. A journal of yoruba and related studies*, 6: 29–34.

Willett F. (1959d) – Recent excavations at Old Oyo and Ife, Nigeria. *Man,* 59: 99–100.

Willett F. (1960) – Ife and its Archaeology. *The Journal of African History*, 1(2): 231–248.
DOI : 10.1017/S002185370000181X

Willett F. (1962) – The Introduction of Maize into West Africa: An Assessment of Recent Evidence. *Africa*, 32(1): 1–13. doi:10.2307/1157291
DOI : 10.2307/1157291

Willett F. & Stanton W.R. (1963) – Archaeological Evidence for Changes in Maize Type in West Africa: An Experiment in Technique. *Man*, 63: 117–123. https://doi.org/10.2307/2797291
DOI : 10.2307/2797291

Willett F. (1964) – Spectrographic Analysis of Nigerian Bronzes. *Archaeometry*, 7: 81–83.
DOI : 10.1111/j.1475-4754.1964.tb00600.x

Willett F. (1966a) – On the funeral effigies of Owo and Benin and the Interpretation of the life size Bronze heads from Ife, Nigeria. *Man*, 1(1): 34–45. https://doi.org/10.2307/2795899
DOI : 10.2307/2795899

Willett F. (1966b) – Excavations at Ita Yemoo, Ife, Nigeria, 1957–1963. *In* : *Actes du VII^e Congrès International des Sciences Préhistoriques et Protohistoriques, Prague, 21-27 août 1966* : 180-182.

Willett F. (1967) – *Ife in the history of West African Sculpture*. London, Thames and Hudson.

Willett F. (1968) – New Light on the Ife-Benin Relationship. *African Forum,* 3(4): 28–33.

Willett F. (1971) – A Survey of Recent Results in the Radiocarbon Chronology of Western and Northern Africa. *The Journal of African History*, 12(3): 339–370.

Willett F. (1973) – The Benin Museum Collection. *African Arts*, 6(4): 8–17+94.
DOI : 10.2307/3334794

Willett F. & Werner O. (1975) – The composition of brasses from Ife and Benin, *Archaeometry*, 17(2): 141–156.

Willett F. (1975) – Radiocarbon Dates and Cire-perdue Castings in Ife and Benin, *Abhandlungen und Berichte des Staatlichen Museums für Volkerkunde Dresden Berlin*, 34: 291–300.

Willett F. & Fleming S.J. (1976) – A Catalogue of Important Nigerian Copper Alloy Castings Dated by Thermoluminescence. *Archaeometry*, 18(2): 135–146. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-

4754.1976.tb00156.x
DOI : 10.1111/j.1475-4754.1976.tb00156.x

Willett F. (1976) – True or False? The False Dichotomy. *African Arts,* 9(3): 8–14. https://doi.org/10.2307/3335105
DOI : 10.2307/3335105

Willett F. (1977) – Baubles, Bangles, and Beads. Trade contacts of medieval Ife, Lecture delivered at the University of Edinburgh's Centre for African Studies as part of the Thirteenth Melville J. Hershovits Memorial Lecture, 24th February 1977.

Willett F. (1981) – The analysis of Nigerian copper alloys retrospect and prospect. *Critica d'arte africana,* XLVI(178): 35–49.

Willett F. (1983) – Who taught the smiths of Igbo Ukwu? *New Scientist,* 98(1353): 65–68.

Willett F. (1986) – A Missing Millennium? From Nok to Ife and Beyond. In: E. Bassani (ed.), *Art in Africa: reality and perspectives in a study of the history of African arts*, Modena Edizioni Panini: 87–100.

Willett F. (1988) – The source and significance of the snake-winged bird in southwestern Nigeria. *Art Journal*, 47(2):121–127.
DOI : 10.2307/777065

Willett F. (1992) – Archaeology and the History of Nigerian Sculpture. In: G. Pezzoli, *Dall' archeologia all'arte tradizionale africana*, Milano, Centro Studi Archeologia Africana: 37–50.

Willett F., Torsney B. & Ritchie M. (1994) – Composition and Style: An Examination of the Benin 'Bronze' Heads. *African Arts*, 27(3): 60–67+102. https://doi.org/10.2307/3337202
DOI : 10.2307/3337202

Willett F., Joel E.C., Sayre E.V. & Vocke R.D. (1995) – Stable lead isotope characterization of Various Copper Alloys used in West Africa: An Interim Report. *The Journal of the Historical Metallurgy Society*, 29(1): 25–33.

Willett F. (1997) – Arts du Nigeria. *Trésors de d'ancien Nigéria*, Paris, Réunion des Musées Nationaux : 37-59.

Willett F. (2000a) – The Elemental Composition of Benin Memorial Heads. *Archaeometry*, 42(1): 159–188.
DOI : 10.1111/j.1475-4754.2000.tb00874.x

Willett F. (2000b) – Restitution or Re-circulation: Benin, Ife and Nok. *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, 12: 125–131.

Willett F. (2004) – *The Art of Ife: A Descriptive Catalogue and Database*. [CD-ROM], Glasgow, The Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery, University of Glasgow.

Willett F. (2006) – Royal Art of Ife, Nigeria: A Chapter of Accidents Archaeological Discoveries in Ife. *Arts & cultures*, Musée Barbier-Mueller : 144-155.

Willett F. & Sayre E.V. (2006) – Lead Isotopes in West African Copper Alloys. *Journal of African Archaeology*, 4(1): 55–90. https://doi.org/10.1163/10.3213/1612-1651-10063

Zanella S., Denoyelle M., Rouillard P. & Verger S. (éd.) (2017) – *Les archives de fouilles : modes d'emploi*. Paris, Collège de France.

Notes

1 The "Royal Pair" and the Ooni figure were dated by thermoluminescence using the clay core left in them. See Willett & Fleming 1976; Willett 2004: Table I.3.2, and Table 2. For a critique of some applications of this method to African antiquities, see for instance J. Polet (1990).

2 Hunterian Museum and University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Willett collection, GB248 ACCN 3120, box 16, Ita Yemoo, "Preliminary Investigations at the Ita Yemoo, Ife, Western Nigeria": [1]. We will now refer to this collection as HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, followed by the box number and the file's name. We use page numbers in square brackets when documents have no original pagination. When referring to notebooks, our page numbers in square brackets refer to double pages in the original. For instance, our page [2] corresponds to pages 2–3 in the original, page [3] to pages 4–5 in the original, etc. Others documents about the museum in HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 1, "Annual Report on Antiquities for the year 1948," "Annual Report on Antiquities service for the year 1953–4."

3 See below, footnote 32.

4 See biographies of Frank Willett in Picton 2007 and Pole 2007, and the notice "Professor Frank Willett" in *The Telegraph*, July 26, 2006.

5 Contemporary oral traditions circulating in Ife associate Yemoo with Obatala, one of the famous leaders of Ife's past. Obatala married many wives. Yemoo was his favorite and that is why he built a compound for her at the present site of Yemoo Grove. Today, during Obatala festival, the Yemoo site still plays an important role. Interestingly, oral traditions have incorporated and given meaning to the "arm-in-arm" couple discovered in 1957. It is said that to show his love for Yemoo, Obatala commissioned a bronze statue where Obatala and Yemoo are intertwined (personal contribution by Adisa Ogunfolakan, June 20, 2021). In January 1958, Willett interviewed Rufus Awojodu and learnt that the area was called Ita Yemoo because Yemoo "used to sell her wares at this place. Did not know whose wife she was. When I said Orisala, he said it must be." HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder "Ita Yemoo" Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder: [52]. Much has been written and imagined about the meaning of the sculpture of the Ita Yemoo co-joined male and female members of the Ife elite, in ways that tells us about the plasticity of Ife traditions and the limitations of projecting onto the archaeological record a past so vividly reinvented that it might seem real. See for instance, Blier (2015: 49–52).

6 Willett's correspondence can be found in HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, boxes 16, 17, 32, 35 and 38.

7 Willett recorded 16 pavements at Ita Yemoo, each referenced with this notation system in his archives.

8 For a draft of this article, see HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder "Ita Yemoo, containing several things," "Excavations at Ita Yemoo, Ife, Nigeria": p. 4–5.

9 In particular in Willett 2004: I-2 [28–34] and II-2. The CD-ROM is now difficult to access due to its format having become obsolete. For this reference, we will use page numbers in square brackets because due to the initial format the pagination is not original.

10 See below: "First season, 1957–1958: Shrine I and the Oguusi house."

11 Davison is the first to have provided data on chemical composition on samples of glass beads from Ife by neutron activation and X-ray fluorescence methods. At least 70 samples from Willett's excavation at Ita Yemoo were analyzed or described, including samples from the crucible containing beads discovered *in situ* by Willett in the Shrine I (Davison 1972: 258, 264), in Trench XIII (*ibid*: 342), and perhaps others whose provenance Davison does not describe precisely the provenance (*ibid.*: 243–297, 309). She defines two types of beads among the samples from Ita Yemoo: a Group 1 which she interprets as "quite likely medieval European in manufacture," and a Group 2, which seems to result from remelting Group 1 glasses or glass of Islamic world origin by "local glassworkers of medieval and later periods [...] perhaps along with other glasses contemporary with themselves." (*Ibid.*: 270). Authors have since largely revisited the works on Ife glass and argued in favor of an early primary glass production in or near Ife (Lankton et al. 2006; Babalola et al. 2017) by recognizing the chemical signature High-Lime High-Alumina of the glass "as unique to south-western Nigeria" (Babalola et al. 2017: 735).

12 This author sometimes confuses Ita Yemoo with another site excavated by Willett at the Saint David Catholic Mission, Ife.

13 The Ife-Sungbo Archaeological Project began in 2015, with Gérard Chouin and Adisa Ogunfolakan as co-directors. The French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs provides core funding, with William & Mary, TotalEnergies in Nigeria and ITB Nigeria Ltd providing supplemental support.

14 The pandemic that led to the closure of the archive service since Spring 2020 prevented us from examining some documents that will deserve to be studied in the future. Although we surveyed a vast array of archival material between 2015 and 2021 in Glasgow, Ibadan, Lagos, and Ife, we were unable to consult all the files containing potential material relevant to Ita Yemoo excavations.

15 The archives consist of a main collection (ACCN 3120) available since 2007 and two additional deposits (ACCN 3495 and 3523) available since 2010. At this time, we have had the opportunity to consult only the first collection (ACCN 3120), which is the main deposit. The inventory of the archives is available online at the following address: https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/dc39d463-b288-3200-9312-62c276d7bbb7

16 As examples, this includes field notes by Fagg, internal reports by the Service of Antiquities during the years preceding Willett's arrival in Nigeria, and documents relevant to Frobenius' expedition in 1910.

17 For instance, there is some material on excavations on the site of Saint John, Ilode, Ife in the correspondence between Benedict C. Enwonwu on behalf of the Ife Curator and the Director of the Department of Antiquities (1960) National Archives of Ibadan, FDA 1/6, box 1, TF229, the Ife Museum.

18 Willett 1959a: 135. The area purchased by the government in 1961, and which is still today an annex to the Ife Museum, is much larger than the original area fenced by Fagg, as Willett kept discovering important sites outside the original perimeter. The only traces of this original perimeter are two quick sketches in Willet's field notebook made in December 9–18, 1957 (HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, Ita Yemoo, Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder: [40–41]).

19 Willett described the scenery: "The surrounding area showed that it had been typical mixed farmland cocoa, cassava, coco-yam and pineapple all growing together under a canopy of tropical deciduous forest with occasional trees up to two hundred feet high" (Willett 1959a: 136).

20 Its frontage was to stand 75 feet away from the main road (HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, Ita Yemoo, "Preliminary Investigations at the Ita Yemo, Ife, Western Nigeria": [2]). The presence of a cement slab was also noted by Willett in the sketch of the area mentioned above in footnote 18.

21 The area "leveled" extended 275 feet (84 meters) away from the road, and the ditch ran parallel to the Ilesha road on the Ita Yemoo side. HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, Ita Yemoo, "Preliminary Investigations at the Ita Yemoo, Ife, Western Nigeria": [1].

22 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, Ita Yemoo, "Preliminary Investigations at the Ita Yemoo, Ife, Western Nigeria": [1].

23 Describing his initial encounter of the site, Willett wrote: "The cleared area of bright red, sun-baked earth was cut across by the foundation trenches for the new buildings. In the sides of these, at a depth of about 18 inches [ca. 45 cm] a series of pavements could be seen" (HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, Ita Yemoo, "Further discoveries at Ife. Terra-cotta figures excavated": 5–6).

24 Some of the questions and answers were recorded in the notebook (HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder "Ita Yemoo" Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder: [21–22]).

25 Willett estimated the size of the archaeological cluster around Ita Yemoo as being 25 acres. HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, Ita Yemoo, document entitled "The week ahead, May 1st 1958": [1]. There is no known document indicating the extent of his walking survey.

26 Following Kenneth Murray, Bernard Fagg was from 1957 Director of the Colonial Antiquities Service based in Jos (Shyllon 996: 245).

27 The term "rescue operation" is used in an unpublished handwritten paper entitled "Preliminary Investigations at Ita Yemoo, Ife, Western Nigeria." HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, file "Preliminary Investigations at the Ita Yemoo, Ife, Western Nigeria." The manuscript kept in this file was never published, but it shared many similarities with Willett 1959a. The pair of royal figures is reproduced in several publications. See for instance, Willett 2006: 150–1, fig. 4a and b.

28 See below, footnote 32.

29 Willet noted most of them were in fact Bura people from Borno. HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, file "Preliminary Investigations at the Ita Yemoo, Ife, Western Nigeria": [3].

30 Willet affirmed that each man could carefully go through 4 feet of sediment a day with this method. HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 6, file "Preliminary Investigations at the Ita Yemoo, Ife, Western Nigeria": [3].

31 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, file "Preliminary Investigations at the Ita Yemoo, Ife, Western Nigeria": [3–4]. The use of sieves is worth noting. On December 31, 1957, he noted his 9 sieves were all in use, shared by 29 workers (HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder "Ita Yemoo," Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder: [45]).

32 We know little about the first campaigns of test excavations led by Fagg at Ife. In 1949, he had led exploratory work during which "twelve shafts were sunk and large quantities of fragments of domestic pottery were recovered" (HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 1, folder "Ife Extracts" file "Annual Report of the Antiquities Branch for the period 1/1/49–31/3/50": [1]). This work resumed in the period 1953–1957. In March 1953, Fagg reported having dug more than 80 shafts, some up to 30-feet deep (ca. 9 m), in different parts of Ife, especially in sacred sites. He hoped that "one of these shafts… [would] produce a piece of brass work, some slag, or other evidence of metal casting which, however deep, will be worthwhile excavating by much more expensive opencast methods." HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 1, folder "Ife Extracts," file "Bernard Fagg note 1953 and correspondence," sub-file "Some Archaeological Problems." A short list of 23 shafts excavated in 1953 is included with some of Fagg's papers kept in Willett's archival collection. The list mentions shafts 1–10 and 41–53. They concern the sites of Osangangan Obamakin, Olokun Walode, Ogun Ladi and Olokun Grove (HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 1, folder "Ife Extracts" file "Bernard Fagg note 1953 and correspondence," sub-file "27/A/S1, Shafts"). Willett mentioned using this method at Old Oyo and at Ife in 1956–1957, suggesting that he would have been familiar with the numbering system used for shafts excavated after 1953. HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, file "Preliminary Investigations at the Ita Yemoo, Ife, Western Nigeria," [3]. It is worth noting that shafts' numbers given by Willett in January 1958 started with 1.

33 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, file “Ita Yemoo”: [3].

34 *Ibid*. Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder: [41–42].

35 *Ibid*. Black binder including a list of small finds and features: [3].

36 Willett was unhappy with the difference in width, probably resulting from a measurement error. He realized his mistake on December 18, 1957, while laying out the southern extension of the trench (HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder “Ita Yemoo,” Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder [41–43]).

37 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder “Ita Yemoo,” Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder: [43]. The final length of Trench I was 45 feet (ca. 13.7 m).

38 At least one of the men standing on the right side of the photograph must have been part of the Ooni’s retinue; in later years and up to this day, visits of the Ooni to archaeological sites at Ife have become much less informal.

39 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 12, box of black & white prints “Ife 1957/8: Ita Yemoo Photographs: Excavations.”

40 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder “Ita Yemoo,” Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder: [43]. Willett’s stratigraphic drawings are not included in the archival material we could access.

41 *Ibid*. Manuscript/preliminary Investigations at the Ita Yemoo, Ife, West Nigeria”: 7. All metric conversions are added by the authors for this article.

42 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder “Ita Yemoo,” Black binder including a list of small finds and features: [3]. The find is described under IYTr-15. The rim of the pot must have been missing, and Willett suggested it could have been part of the material excavated as part of the first spit level, regrouped under IYTr-13. The question of the presence of maize cob rouletting on ceramic found at Ife was first discussed by John Goodwin (1953) and became the center of an argument with South African anthropologist Mervyn Jeffreys (1953) about the introduction of this plant in West Africa. In a seminal article published in 1962, Willett rejected Jeffreys argument on the presence of maize in the pre-15th-century Gulf of Guinea. Goodwin (1953: 13) and Fagg (HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 1, file: Ife Extracts & Files–Duplicated. containing various typescripts, “W. Nigeria. Jan. Fev. 1953”: 9) reported finding maize impressions on sherds used in potsherd pavements at Ife. Willett himself spent time studying and experimenting with what he thought were maize impressions on the ceramic of Ife (see for instance Willett & Stanton 1963), before realizing the decorations resulted from the use of twisted cord roulettes: “Other sherds initially identified as having been decorated by rolling a maize ear over the surface turned out on closer examination to have been decorated with twisted string (corded ware)” (Willett 2004: I–2).

43 The Ita Yemoo pavement bears number 13 in a list published by Kenneth Murray (1966).

44 The 1962–1963 season included Trench XIII across the city wall, north of pavement #1; Trench XIV, which explored the northwestern depression of the pavement #1, and an extensive grid over the area which was originally cleared for the construction of one of the two cocoa storage facilities that were planned as part of the original ICMU’s headquarters. Here, we limit our discussion of the 1962–1963 campaign to Trench xiv.

45 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder “Ita Yemoo, containing several things,” “Excavations at Ita Yemoo, Ife, Nigeria”: [4]. Willett also recorded these three objectives in his fieldbook before the beginning of excavations (HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder “Ita Yemoo,” Black binder including a list of small finds and features: [106]).

46 Photographs are found in HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 11, box of b & w prints “IY: Tr xiv Adesiyan’s Hse.” The fieldnotes are part of a black binder kept in HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16. For a short paragraph published on Trench XIV, see Willett 2004: II–2: [14].

47 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder “Ita Yemoo,” Black binder including a list of small finds and features: [53]. They were later analyzed together with other potsherds from several Ita Yemoo pavements, and Willett offered a rapid general description in an unpublished typescript. HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder “Ita Yemoo, containing several things” “Excavations at Ita Yemoo, Ife, Nigeria”: 4–5.

48 It is unclear whether Willett’s field workers were still digging in arbitrary spit levels of 6 inches, but they seemed to be concerned with grouping the findings by natural levels. For instance, potsherds found in the upper part of layer 2 were grouped together under unit number IYTr-1388, whereas those found in the lower part of the same layer were attributed a different number–IYTr-1394 (HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder “Ita Yemoo,” Black binder including a list of small finds and features: [54–55]).

49 For a discussion based on ethnoarchaeological observations, see Aguigah (2018: 166–168). See also Aguigah (1995: 272–277).

50 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder “Ita Yemoo,” Black binder including a list of small finds and features: [107].

51 Trench XIV was not backfilled by Willett, and up to the late 1980s visitors could see the stone pavement #15 underlying potsherd pavement #1. It appears very clearly in a photograph of the Ita Yemoo document taken by Aguigah in 1989 (2003: 112). Work conducted by Adesina in 2008 in the same area resulted in the backfilling of the trench, and pavement #15 is no longer visible.

52 The material in layers 4 and 5 were grouped together into unit IYTr-1397 (HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder “Ita Yemoo,” Black binder including a list of small finds and features: [55]).

53 Below layers 5 and 6, the thickness of the layers is no longer mentioned in Willett’s notes (HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder “Ita Yemoo,” Black binder including a list of small finds and features: [107–108]).

54 Material finds were given the following unit numbers: layers 6 & 7, IYTr-1413; layer 8, IYTr-1416; layer 9, IYTr-1417; layer 10, IYTr-1421 (HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder “Ita Yemoo,” Black binder including a list of small finds and features: [56]).

55 The upper level of the alleged pit was described as rich in charcoal, but bones and pottery were found at a lower level, before Willett realized there was no pit. Materials from the alleged pit were grouped under IYTr-1422 (HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder “Ita Yemoo,” Black binder including a list of small finds and features: [56, 107]).

56 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, Ita Yemoo, “Manuscript/preliminary Investigations at the Ita Yemoo, Ife, West Nigeria”: p. 7

57 To date, no pre-15th-century burial has been excavated at Ife.

58 This is in agreement with Willett’s estimation (2004: I–3, [14]).

59 Garlake spoke of humic topsoil or black gritty humus (1974: 117). At Woye Asiri (Garlake 1977: 60, 62), he described a variation of it: an up-to-45-cm thick grayish-brown deposit, sandy near the surface and becoming grittier at the lower level (his strata 1–3).

60 For Shrine I, see below: “First season, 1957–1958: Shrine I and the Oguusi house.” The Shrine II will be discussed in a forthcoming article.

61 Following Watkins (2006), we conscientiously avoid the term “abandonment” to qualify the depopulation of Ife in the late medieval period. We thank Ann Stahl for providing us with this reference.

62 See also the interpretation of the shrines by Willett (2004: II–2, [5]). Akin Ogundiran (2020: 153–160) suggested that an outbreak of smallpox, among other factors, would have precipitated the decline of Ife’s in the early 15th century. He further suggested: “In the 1570s, the ancient city would have been a skeleton of its Classical-age size.” (2020: 201).

63 See below, footnote 66.

64 Besides the two subsidences, the pavement shows a raised pattern in the form of an arc, which was not mentioned by Willett. Two patches without potsherds located in the northwestern quarter of the feature might signal the presence of wooden posts. Their fairly irregular shape suggests they were not part of the original pavement but might have belonged to architectural features erected on the new surface after backfilling (Fig. 12).

65 See for instance Trench XIII at Ita Yemoo: see the reproduction of the stratigraphic drawing in Mueller (1971: 29).

66 On the basis of published excavations and our own work at Ita Yemoo and Oduduwa College, we hypothesize that pavements appeared between the mid-12th century and the mid-13th century. Eyo suggested the pavement period lasted up to the beginning of the 15th century. In fact, radiocarbon dates we obtained at Ile-Ife suggest the end of the pavement period took place a little earlier, in the later 14th century. As such, the “pavement period” would correspond approximately with Blier’s 1250–1350 “florescence era” (Blier 2015: 43–44) and with the later part of Ogundiran’s “classical period” (Ogundiran 2020: 7). We also concur with Eyo on the proposed post-pavement period extending from the 17th century to the present and characterized by the absence of newly constructed pavements. Like us, Eyo—who conducted extensive fieldwork at Ife—had observed a recurrent gap of about two centuries in Ife’s occupational history, starting at the end of the pavement period. While it remains unclear if this gap corresponds to a drastic reduction of its size, it signals a major crisis and equally a drastic shift in regional history (Chouin & Lasisi 2019; Ogundiran 2020: 153–160). Our revised chronology of Ife would go as follows: 1) Pre-pavement period: ca. 10th–12th c.; 2) Pavement period: 12th–14th c.; 3) Occupational gap: late 14th c.–late 16th/early 17th c.; 4) Resettlement: late 16th–early 17th c. to the modern era.

67 For a review of various and sometimes contradictory chronological frameworks at Ife, see above, note 66, Ogundiran 2003, 2020: 6–7; Drewal & Schildkrout 2010: 78–81; Blier 2015: 43–45. For a

critique of the use of pavements for chronological purpose, see Willett (2004: I–3, [22]).

68 Only part of this pavement was located "under the library." It actually extended north towards the city wall. HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, "Ita Yemoo," "Manuscript/preliminary Investigations at the Ita Yemoo, Ife, West Nigeria": 7.

69 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder "Ita Yemoo," Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder: [44]. It is unclear from Willet's records if this was his potsherd pavement #2. HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, "Ita Yemoo," "Manuscript/preliminary Investigations at Ita Yemoo, Ife, West Nigeria": 7. It does not seem that Willett gave a number to this pavement, and we will refer to it as the Library pavement.

70 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, "Ita Yemoo," "Manuscript/preliminary Investigations at the Ita Yemoo, Ife, West Nigeria": [7].

71 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder "Ita Yemoo," Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder [44]. Potsherd pavements were found there also, as well as a fragment of what he described as a "royal figure in terracotta [...] about a foot over one of these pavements [psp #7]" (HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, "Ita Yemoo," "Manuscript/preliminary Investigations at Ita Yemoo, Ife, West Nigeria": 8). Time did not allow Willett to expose them during that first season. He came back to this area (rebaptized the Grid area) in 1962–1963 for an extensive excavation which led to the discovery of Shrine II. We hope to discuss the archaeology of the Grid area in detail in the third part of the planned trilogy on the archaeology of Ita Yemoo.

72 Willett notes this detail in his field notebook on December 9, 1957, at the beginning of work. We do not know if he continued with this method throughout the excavation (HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder "Ita Yemoo," Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder: [44]). Material found in the different levels were then catalogued under a unique number, IYTr27 (HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder "Ita Yemoo," Black binder including a list of small finds and features: [5]).

73 In his notes, Willett called this area "the site of the finds," the "road-side ditch" or the "ditch on [the] main site." All artifacts recovered from the ditch were given the catalogue number IYTr27. HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, "Ita Yemoo," "Manuscript/preliminary Investigations at the Ita Yemoo, Ife, West Nigeria": 6), Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder [46] and Black binder including a list of small finds and features. A photograph kept in the Glasgow archives shows the workers sieving this material along the Ilesha road. HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder Ita Yemoo containing several things, n. p.

74 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder "Ita Yemoo," Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder: [44].

75 Volume estimation comes from Willett 1983: 67. For the last mention of the ditch (ITTr27), see HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder "Ita Yemoo," Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder: [55].

76 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, "Ita Yemoo," "Manuscript/preliminary Investigations at the Ita Yemoo, Ife, West Nigeria": 6.

77 *Ibid*.

78 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder "Ita Yemoo," Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder: [46].

79 *Ibid*.

80 *Ibid*.: [45, 47].

81 *Ibid*.: [48–49]. The material from the Oguusi's house was labelled IYtr28, 32–33.

82 *Ibid*.: [45].

83 Willett later referred to this site as Adesiyan's house.

84 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder "Ita Yemoo," Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder: [46].

85 *Ibid*.

86 In his field book, Willett wrote "I found fragments of a terra cotta oni, which turns out to have been painted red in parts" (HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder "Ita Yemoo," Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder: [46]). This terracotta was recorded as IYTr29. HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, "Ita Yemoo," Black binder including a list of small finds and features: [5].

87 This is pavement #6, which served as flooring to the entire shrine. We do not know any site map of the area, but Willett provided the following spatial indications "under a tree stump by the near lefthand corner of the house" (HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder "Ita Yemoo," Lefax

refillable notebook in a green binder: [46]). The comparison of photographs of Shrine I found in Willett's papers with the modern site of Ita Yemoo enabled us to precisely identify the location of the shrine. (Fig. 14).

88 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder "Ita Yemoo," Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder: [46].

89 *Ibid*.

90 *Ibid*. When asked, Adesiyan was unable to specify whether these artifacts had been found above or below the pavement visible in the area.

91 *Ibid*.

92 *Ibid*.

93 *Ibid*.: [46–47].

94 *Ibid*.: [48, 50]. This note appears in the January 4 entry.

95 The crucible was 16.5 cm high (Willett 2004: chapter II–29, T828). A recent study compares the dimensions and estimated volumes of several Ife crucibles found in Willett's CD-ROM and the British Museum collection (Babalola et al. 2018: 4). The 10 crucibles studied range in height from 16 to 35 cm and were divided into two groups by the authors (*ibid*.: 25, fig. 23), making the crucible documented by Willett a crucible of 'type B' (small one). For more details on the relationship between the size of the crucibles and the color of the glass produced, and a proposal to view the small crucibles as used for the less common colors (for instance red, black, white or bluish-green, etc), see Babalola 2015, 2018, and 2021.

96 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder "Ita Yemoo," Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder: [47]. On the crucible and beads, see Willett (1959a: 136 and pl. xb; 2004: pl. 60). Some potsherds were found on the top of the beads. It seems that Willett sent a small selection of these beads to the French historian and archaeologist Raymond Mauny, then based at the IFAN in Dakar, with whom he was corresponding during this period. But we do not know whether they were analyzed and studied in detail at the IFAN (Paris 1 BRA, archives collection Raymond Mauny, 4-RM-1R, box 29, letter from Frank Willett to Raymond Mauny dated April 11, 1959). It appears that some of the beads found in the crucible were analyzed by Claire Davison (1972) (see footnote 11).

97 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder "Ita Yemoo," Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder: [48].

98 This find with the coiled anklet is illustrated in Willett (2004: I–10, M36). Willett noted that this type of anklet was represented in known terracottas from Ife (Willett 2004: II–2: [5]). About 260 beads were found inside, including red stone beads (probably carnelian) and yellow and green glass beads. Willett interpreted this collection of beads and the ones found earlier in the crucible as regalia (Willett 2004: *ibid*.), but they could also have been offerings. Willett noted that the pot still stood upright in a hollow on the top of pavement #6, which served as flooring to the Shrine I. He suggested it was broken "by the collapse of the compound" (HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder "Ita Yemoo," Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder: [49]).

99 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder "Ita Yemoo," Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder: [48-49]. Oliver, who helped Willett on the site, also wrote about the difficulty of excavating these terracottas (Oliver 1997: 188).

100 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, "Ita Yemoo," "Manuscript/preliminary Investigations at the Ita Yemoo, Ife, West Nigeria": 9. In his 1957 fieldnotes, Willett also spoke of the "collapsed terracotta complex" (HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder "Ita Yemoo," Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder: [49]). The term "shrine" was used after the 1963 excavation of a second shrine at Ita Yemoo (Shrine II). Material from and underneath Shrine I was recorded under IYTr30-31, 34, 66, 84, 85, 87, 90, 94. HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder "Ita Yemoo," Black binder including a list of small finds and features: [5–8].

101 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder "Ita Yemoo," Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder: [49]. Chief Akeredolu is acknowledged by Willett for separating the fragments of one of the terracotta heads from its matrix, "in the workshop of the Ife Museum" (Willett 1967: 156). In his unpublished paper, he explained that "some pieces [of the figures] had been impacted into the potsherd pavement and had to be raised as a block with the underlying pavement, and separated in the museum laboratory." HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, "Ita Yemoo," "Manuscript/preliminary Investigations at the Ita Yemoo, Ife, West Nigeria": [10]. On Chief Akeredolu's activity at the Ife Museum from 1957 to 1964, see National Archives, Ibadan, FDA1/1, box 4, 2140, personal file, J.D Akeredolu.

102 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder "Ita Yemoo," Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder [49]. The fragmentary pottery disk was recorded separately under reference IYTr34. Willett had found similar occurrences in his excavation at Oguusi's house, recorded under the number IYTr33, although he was unsure they belonged to the same context with the ritual pots and

terracotta finds. HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder “Ita Yemoo,” Black binder including a list of small finds and features: [6]. A flat slab associated with two or the four terracotta heads found in situ at the Shrine I site is visible in Willett 2004: pl. 58.

103 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120 Willett’s archives, box 16 “handwritten paper on preliminary investigation in Ita Yemoo”: [9–10]. The “sign of use” mentioned above is probably the “small flat polishing on grinding stones” noted by Willett in his January 9 entry (HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder “Ita Yemoo,” Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder: [53]). The stones were probably removed on January 25, leading to the discovery of the iron bars under one of grinding stones and in between (HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder “Ita Yemoo,” Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder: [63]). The number of iron bars found remains unknown, but they were labelled together under the reference IYTr85. The stones associated with the Shrine I were kept under the reference IYTr86 (HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder “Ita Yemoo,” Black binder including a list of small finds and features: [8]).

104 Fragments of these terracotta figures were recovered from the bricks of the Adesiyan’s house after the land was purchased by the government and the house was demolished, probably in early 1961 (Willett 2004: II–2: [3]). These fragments became part of IYTr94. The second house, which is still standing as the Pottery Museum, was kept intact, although Willett suspected terracotta fragments were also included in the bricks used for its construction: “The owner of the two-storey house swore that his bricks had been made elsewhere and transported to the site, but his borrow-pit was clearly just behind the house and the fragments of the sculptures which are still missing are no doubt incorporated into the bricks of his house. [...] One day however, it too should be demolished and the missing pieces added to those already recovered.” (Willett 2004, II–2: [3–4]).

105 Published reproductions include Willett 1967: 43, 157–159. The numerous other terracotta from “Shrine I” are illustrated in sections T95 to T172 (Willett 2004).

106 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder “Ita Yemoo,” Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder: [58]. The next entry with details on the shrine is dated January 24 and focused on the stones. It is also his last entry in the field notes for the December 1957–January 1958 season. See above, footnote 103.

107 Oliver’s participation in the excavations was never mentioned by Willett, not even in his field notes.

108 After the purchase of the Ita Yemoo land and standing houses by the government of Nigeria in 1961, the Adesiyan’s house was slowly deconstructed brick by brick to recover the numerous fragments of terracotta contained within. Willett suggested that bricks from the Pottery Museum also included terracotta fragments (Willett 2004: II–2, [3–4]).

109 It is interesting to note that the two remaining broken terracotta heads also include an “attendant” and a crowned figure. It is possible that the two terracottas found intact were, in fact, replacement of older terracotta heads that had been replaced because damaged.

110 Material from Trenches IV and V was catalogued respectively as IYTr37 and IYTr64 (HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder “Ita Yemoo,” Black binder including a list of small finds and features: [6–7]).

111 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder “Ita Yemoo,” Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder: [52].

112 Material from Trenches IVa and Vb was grouped under IYTr65 and IYTr80 (HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder “Ita Yemoo,” Black binder including a list of small finds and features: [7–8]).

113 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder “Ita Yemoo,” Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder: [63].

114 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16 “handwritten paper on preliminary investigation in Ita Yemoo”: [5].

115 *Ibid*.

116 When Willett dug shafts south of the city wall, he mentions them being “on Ife side.” See for instance from IYTr47 in HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder “Ita Yemoo,” Black binder including a list of small finds and features: [6].

117 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder “Ita Yemoo,” Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder: [53].

118 Each shaft that generated material that was kept received a specific catalogue number. It started with pottery and glass fragments from shaft #2, which were collectively labelled IYTr38 (HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16, folder “Ita Yemoo,” Lefax refillable notebook in a green binder: [53–54]).

119 *Ibid.*: [61].

120 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16 “handwritten paper on preliminary investigation in Ita Yemoo”: [12].

121 Press cutting from the *Daily Telegraph*, July 10, 1958 in HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16 Folder Ita Yemoo containing several things.

122 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16 Folder Ita Yemoo containing several things. Set of press cuttings (Anon.). “Royal face lifted,” *Evening Chronicle*, 2/5/1958. The reconstruction was the work of Chief Akeredolu in the lab of the Ife Museum. Willett 1967: 156.

123 Press cutting from the *Manchester Evening News*, July 10, 1958 in HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16 Folder Ita Yemoo containing several things.

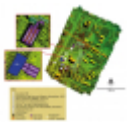
124 Exhibition from December 10, 1958 to January 10, 1959 (Archives *Musée d’ethnographie du Trocadéro et du Musée de l’Homme, Museum national d’Histoire naturelle*, Paris, 2AM1C4e, “*Carton d’invitation à l’inauguration de l’exposition*”).

125 HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16 Folder Ita Yemoo containing several things, “typed university college record” with Willett’s handwritten marginal corrections.

126 Press cutting from the *Daily Telegraph*, July 10, 1958 in HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16 Folder Ita Yemoo containing several things.

127 Press cutting from *News of the World!*, May 4, 1958 in HMUG, FW, GB248, ACCN 3120, box 16 Folder Ita Yemoo containing several things.

Table des illustrations

	**URL**	http://journals.openedition.org/aaa/docannexe/image/3328/img-1.jpg
	Fichier	image/jpeg, 132k
	Titre	Figure 1 – The patrimonialization of pavement #1, the only archaeological feature from Willett’s excavations preserved *in situ*: a, Construction of the roof over the pavement #1, ca. 1959.
	**Crédits**	© Hunterian Museum and University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Frank Willett collection, GB248 ACCN 3120/12 b, Structure over the pavement #1 as visible today. © Ife-Sungbo Archaeological Project, Photograph by Chouin, June 2021
	URL	http://journals.openedition.org/aaa/docannexe/image/3328/img-2.jpg
	Fichier	image/jpeg, 124k
	Titre	Figure 2 – Localization of Willett’s excavations (Trenches I, II, III, IV, V, VI, XIV and Shrine I) on a 2019 digital aerial view of Ita Yemoo.
	**Crédits**	© Ife-Sungbo Archaeological Project, Figure by Chouin and Roth on a photogrammetric aerial model prepared by Hautefort in September 2019
	URL	http://journals.openedition.org/aaa/docannexe/image/3328/img-3.jpg
	Fichier	image/jpeg, 246k
	Titre	Figure 3 – View of Ilesha road and Ita Yemoo, ca. December 1957.
	Légende	Note the light fence erected by Fagg (visible through the pegs) and, in the background, the row of trees marking the presence of the city wall.
	**Crédits**	© Hunterian Museum and University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Frank Willett collection, GB248 ACCN 3120/12
	URL	http://journals.openedition.org/aaa/docannexe/image/3328/img-4.jpg
	Fichier	image/jpeg, 177k
	Titre	Figure 4 – “Almost-completed one-story house,” ca. December 1957.
	Légende	The house would become Willett’s field house at Ita Yemoo and was later repurposed as a pottery museum.
	**Crédits**	© Hunterian Museum and University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Frank Willett collection, GB248 ACCN 3120/16
	URL	http://journals.openedition.org/aaa/docannexe/image/3328/img-5.jpg
	Fichier	image/jpeg, 194k
	Titre	Figure 5 – Foundations of Adesiyan’s house next to the one-story building that served as a field office to Willett, January 1958.

Légende	Note the presence of rows of bricks drying under the sun behind the house. They were made from clay collected from a pit that partially destroyed the site of Shrine I and pavement #6. Many fragments of terracotta figurines were later recovered from these bricks.
Crédits	© Hunterian Museum and University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Frank Willett collection, GB248 ACCN 3120/16
URL	http://journals.openedition.org/aaa/docannexe/image/3328/img-6.jpg
Fichier	image/jpeg, 190k
Titre	Figure 6 – Sketch extracted from Willett's field notebook showing the first shafts dug at Ita Yemoo.

Légende	The numbers 220 to 232 refer to the shafts.
Crédits	© Hunterian Museum and University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Frank Willett collection, GB248 ACCN 3120/16
URL	http://journals.openedition.org/aaa/docannexe/image/3328/img-7.jpg
Fichier	image/jpeg, 121k
Titre	Figure 7 – Ooni Aderemi Adesoji and Frank Willett standing in Trench I and looking at pavement #1, probably December 1957.

Crédits	© Hunterian Museum and University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Frank Willett collection, GB248 ACCN 3120/12
URL	http://journals.openedition.org/aaa/docannexe/image/3328/img-8.jpg
Fichier	image/jpeg, 236k
Titre	Figure 8 – Willett's recording of catalog numbers attributed to artifacts excavated at Ita Yemoo.

Crédits	© Hunterian Museum and University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Frank Willett collection, GB248 ACCN 3120/16
URL	http://journals.openedition.org/aaa/docannexe/image/3328/img-9.jpg
Fichier	image/jpeg, 198k
Titre	Figure 9 – Bagged artifacts using Willett's cataloging system.

Crédits	© Hunterian Museum and University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Frank Willett collection, GB248 ACCN 3120/27. Ph. Roth, December 2018
URL	http://journals.openedition.org/aaa/docannexe/image/3328/img-10.jpg
Fichier	image/jpeg, 191k
Titre	Figure 10 – Pavement #1 after the excavation of Trench I–III and the removal of balks.

Crédits	© Hunterian Museum and University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Frank Willett collection, GB248 ACCN 3120/12 (also published in Willett 1959a: pl. VIIIa)
URL	http://journals.openedition.org/aaa/docannexe/image/3328/img-11.jpg
Fichier	image/jpeg, 230k
Titre	Figure 11 – Potsherd pavement in parking area, Ita Yemoo.

Crédits	© Ife-Sungbo Archaeological Project, Ph. Chouin, June 2015.
URL	http://journals.openedition.org/aaa/docannexe/image/3328/img-12.jpg
Fichier	image/jpeg, 266k
Titre	Figure 12 – View of pavement #1 of Ita Yemoo, showing the position of Trench XIV (in green color and B&W photograph), the limits of the excavation by Marcus Olubode Adesina (purple) and the southern depression (white dotted line).

Crédits	© Ife-Sungbo Archaeological Project. Ph. Georges, Poissonnier and Chouin 2015. Digital Processing by Léa Roth, Gérard Chouin and Marie-Pierre Chouin, 2021
URL	http://journals.openedition.org/aaa/docannexe/image/3328/img-13.jpg
Fichier	image/jpeg, 176k
Titre	Figure 13 – Photograph of the eastern part of Trench XIV, showing pavements #1 and #15.

Légende	See Fig. 12 for location.
Crédits	© Hunterian Museum and University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Frank Willett collection, GB248 ACCN 3120/11
URL	http://journals.openedition.org/aaa/docannexe/image/3328/img-14.jpg
Fichier	image/jpeg, 203k
Titre	Figure 14 – On the left, location of Shrine 1, behind the northeastern corner of Adesiyan's house and the "Pottery Museum." On the right, the foundations of the northeastern corner of Adesiyan's house are still visible, next to the remodeled Pottery Museum.

Légende	There is no indication of the location of Shrine 1, which was entirely dismantled and placed in storage by Willett. Ph. Chouin, 2021
Crédits	© Hunterian Museum and University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Frank Willett collection, GB248 ACCN 3120/12.
URL	http://journals.openedition.org/aaa/docannexe/image/3328/img-15.jpg
Fichier	image/jpeg, 99k
Titre	Figure 15 – The pot with brass anklet around its rim, containing beads, excavated by Willett at Shrine I.

Crédits	© Hunterian Museum and University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Frank Willett collection, GB248 ACCN 3120/11
URL	http://journals.openedition.org/aaa/docannexe/image/3328/img-16.jpg
Fichier	image/jpeg, 127k
Titre	Figure 16 – Views of Shrine I.

Légende	a, we can see the position of the two intact terracotta heads. b, the heads have been lifted and the arrangement of grinding stones is visible.
Crédits	© Hunterian Museum and University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Frank Willett collection, GB248 ACCN 3120/1
URL	http://journals.openedition.org/aaa/docannexe/image/3328/img-17.jpg
Fichier	image/jpeg, 234k
Titre	Figure 17 – Sketches of Trenches IV and V and their extensions, January 1958.

Légende	This is the only sketch that indicates the possible position of the bronzes excavated by the laborers.
Crédits	© Hunterian Museum and University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Frank Willett collection, GB248 ACCN 3120/16
URL	http://journals.openedition.org/aaa/docannexe/image/3328/img-18.jpg
Fichier	image/jpeg, 97k
Titre	Figure 18 – Sketch of the shafts dug in the area where Store 1 of the ICMU complex was to be built, January 22, 1958.

Crédits	© Hunterian Museum and University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Frank Willett collection, GB248 ACCN 3120/16
URL	http://journals.openedition.org/aaa/docannexe/image/3328/img-19.jpg
Fichier	image/jpeg, 126k

Pour citer cet article

Référence papier
Léa Roth, Gérard Chouin et Adisa Ogunfolakan, « Lost in Space? Reconstructing Frank Willett's excavations at Ita Yemoo, Ile-Ife, Nigeria: Rescue Excavations (1957–1958) and Trench XIV (1962–1963) », *Afrique : Archéologie & Arts*, 17 | 2021, 77-114.

Référence électronique
Léa Roth, Gérard Chouin et Adisa Ogunfolakan, « Lost in Space? Reconstructing Frank Willett's excavations at Ita Yemoo, Ile-Ife, Nigeria: Rescue Excavations (1957–1958) and Trench XIV (1962–1963) », *Afrique : Archéologie & Arts* [En ligne], 17 | 2021, mis en ligne le 03 novembre 2021, consulté le 15 juin 2022. URL : http://journals.openedition.org/aaa/3328 ; DOI : https://doi.org/10.4000/aaa.3328

Auteurs

Léa Roth
roth.lea01@universitadipavia.it – *Università degli Studi di Pavia*, Corso Strada Nuova, 65, 27100 Pavia PV, Italia/UMR 8167 Orient & Méditerranée, 27 rue Paul Bert, 94200 Ivry-sur-Seine, France

Articles du même auteur

Ifé, entre archives du sol et objets d'histoire [Texte intégral]
Paru dans *Afrique : Archéologie & Arts*, 14 | 2018

Gérard Chouin
glchouin@wm.edu – *Department of History, William & Mary*, Williamsburg, VA, USA

Adisa Ogunfolakan
babaadii@yahoo.com – *AG Leventis Museum of Natural History Museum, Obafemi Awolowo University*, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

Droits d'auteur

La revue *Afrique : Archéologie & Arts* est mise à disposition selon les termes de la Licence Creative Commons Attribution - Pas d'Utilisation Commerciale 4.0 International.