

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Reconstructing the Old Palace Landscape of Benin City, Nigeria: Utilizing A. J. H. Goodwin's Archive at the University of Cape Town as a Resource on Edo History and Archaeology

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Abstract

Unbeknownst to many in the fields of African history and archaeology, the South African archaeologist A. J. H. Goodwin conducted important research in Nigeria during the last decade of his life, from 1953 to 1957. Following work at the Yoruba town of Ile-Ife, Goodwin led the first systematic excavations in Benin City in 1954–55 and 1956–57. With little of this material ever published, this article outlines, analyzes, and discusses Goodwin's archives at the University of Cape Town that pertain to his research at Benin City, which contain important unpublished information in reports, sketch maps, photographs, and correspondence. Using this material, the article reconstructs important dimensions of the town's old palace landscape – including the locations and organization of compounds and shrines associated with past kings – and Goodwin and others' excavations within it, situating this novel spatial and archaeological information within the larger landscape of the city.

Résumé

Fait inconnu par de nombreux spécialistes de l'histoire et de l'archéologie africaines, l'archéologue sud-africain A. J. H. Goodwin a mené d'importantes recherches au Nigéria durant la dernière décennie de sa vie, de 1953 à 1957. Après son travail dans la ville yoruba d'Ile-Ife, Goodwin a dirigé les premières fouilles systématiques à Benin City en 1954-1955 et 1956-1957. Peu de ces documents ayant été publiés, cet article présente, analyse et discute les archives de Goodwin relatives à ses recherches à Benin City conservées à l'Université du Cap. Ces archives contiennent d'importantes informations inédites : rapports, croquis, photographies et correspondance. À partir de ces données, l'article reconstitue des dimensions importantes de l'ancien paysage palatial de la ville, notamment l'emplacement et l'organisation des complexes et des sanctuaires associés aux anciens rois, ainsi que les fouilles menées par Goodwin et

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d'autres chercheuses, en situant ces nouvelles informations spatiales et archéologiques dans le contexte plus large de la ville.

Keywords: Kingdom of Benin; Edo; urban archeology; archaeological archives; palace landscapes

Introduction

The archive of A. J. H. Goodwin (1900–59) at the University of Cape Town is a well-known resource for the archaeology of Southern Africa, he having developed many of the foundational principles of classification that continue to define Africanist archaeology to this day after decades of research in the region.¹ His work in Nigeria, however, is comparably less well known. From 1953 to 1957, Goodwin led excavations at Ile-Ife (1953), followed by two consecutive field seasons in Benin City in 1954–55 and 1956–57 (December to February) which largely focused on his excavations of the old palace. These were the first ever systematic excavations in Benin City, and were aimed at better understanding the chronology, typologies, and context of Benin material culture, which up until then had been understood according to study of documentary sources, oral tradition, and predominantly looted objects from (and following) the 1897 British military expedition. However, due largely to his passing in 1959, only a handful of published interim articles that discuss his findings exist, one of which was posthumous.²

Goodwin's work was thus pioneering, and an important step in setting the stage for later excavations such as those of Frank Willett in 1959, Liman Ciroma in 1960, Graham Connah in the 1960s, and the ongoing work of the Museum of West African Art (MOWAA) and its partners in the 2020s.³ Despite its world renown as an important West African kingdom, evidenced by robust documentary, artistic, and traditional records, relatively little archaeological work has occurred at Benin City. This is unfortunate, as over the last several decades, rapid urban development has destroyed or covered over archaeological deposits throughout the city.⁴ Notably, much of the old palace landscape (see below), following its destruction during the British occupation in 1897 – where the majority of past excavations have occurred

¹ S. H. Haughton, "Prof. A. J. H. Goodwin," *Nature* 186, no. 4727 (1960): 761.

² A. J. H. Goodwin, "Archaeology and Benin Architecture," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 1, no. 2 (1957): 65–85; Goodwin, "Walls, Paving, Water-paths and Landmarks," *Odu* 6 (1958): 45–53; Goodwin, [Untitled], in *History and Archaeology in Africa*, ed. D. H. Jones (School of Oriental and African Studies, 1959); Goodwin, "174. A Bronze Snake Head and Other Recent Finds in the Old Palace at Benin," *Man* 63 (1963): 142–145. See also descriptions of Goodwin's excavations in Graham Connah, "Archaeological Research in Benin City," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 2, no. 4 (1963): 465–477; Connah, "Archaeology in Benin," *Journal of African History* 13, no. 1 (1972): 25–38; Connah, *The Archaeology of Benin: Excavations and Other Researches in and Around Benin City, Nigeria* (Clarendon Press, 1975); and, for the politics of Goodwin's work in Nigeria, see Nick Shepherd, *The Mirror in the Ground: Archaeology, Photography, and the Making of a Disciplinary Archive* (Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2015).

³ Connah, "Archaeological Research"; "Archaeology in Benin"; *Archaeology of Benin*; see also Connah, *Polished Stone Axes in Benin* (Federal Department of Antiquities, Nigeria, 1964); Connah, "New Light on the Benin City Walls," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 3, no. 4 (1967): 593–609.

⁴ Connah, "New Light," 599–600.

– has been redeveloped and built over. Goodwin’s archive is thus important as a means of obtaining information since lost that can inform and shape current scholarship and benefit ongoing excavations. This article outlines, discusses, and contextualizes unpublished reports, photographs, and sketch maps present in Goodwin’s archive that derive from his work in Benin City. Although the content of the archive is relatively limited in scope, valuable material is present, most notably novel information about the nature of Goodwin’s work at the old palace of Benin, the arrangement of the palace’s historical landscape (especially the royal *ugha* – the compounds of deceased kings), and the location of Goodwin’s excavations within this space. These materials have allowed new maps to be developed that integrate this novel information, and which offer new insights into this landscape so central in Benin history.

The palace landscape and the royal *ugha*: A historical overview

As Goodwin’s excavations largely occurred at the old palace of Benin, it is important to first turn to the rich documentary record pertaining to this area of Benin City, in order to contextualize Goodwin’s unpublished findings (discussed below), and identify the novel contributions of this material to understanding its history. The palace – the political and cosmological center of the kingdom – was a large, sprawling landscape composed of numerous shrines and compounds inhabited and used by the Oba (sacred king) (including his main quarters and the “palaver” house where he met visitors), the three main orders of palace chiefs (Iwebo, Iweguae, and Ibiwe), and the Oba’s wives and children. The Iwebo senior palace society was involved in administrative duties: they were the keepers of the royal regalia and dress; the Iweguae were the Oba’s servants and responsible for his personal household; and the Ibiwe were the keepers of the Oba’s harem (Erie) where the children and wives (Iloi) lived.⁵

Among the most significant structures within this landscape were the royal *ugha*. These were important inner chambers of the palace: earthen-walled compounds in which previous Obas were said to have lived and were buried, and which were developed as sacred spaces housing important royal shrines developed in memory of these figures.⁶ Each deceased Oba had his own quadrangle, made after his death. The *aru erha*, “shrine to the father,” was an important component of the typical household in Benin, religious beacons important in establishing and continuing the relations between the material world (*agbon*) and spirit world (*erinmwin*) so vital for rights of inheritance, and

⁵ See Robert Elwyn Bradbury, *The Benin Kingdom and the Edo-speaking Peoples of South-Western Nigeria* (International African Institute, 1957), 37–55.

⁶ See Hans Melzian, *A Concise Dictionary of the Bini Language of Southern Nigeria* (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1937), 198–199; Henry Galway, “Benin: Altars and Compounds with Additional Notes on Benin Altars and Compounds by G. P. L. Miles,” *Ethnologia Cranmorensis* 3 (1938), 2–8; William Buller Fagg, “The Great Belzoni,” *West Africa* 3130 (1977): 1330–1331; Daniel Inneh, “The Guilds Working for the Palace,” in *Benin Kings and Rituals: Court Arts from Nigeria*, ed. Barbara Plankensteiner (Snoeck Publishers, 2007), 103–118; Joseph Nevadomsky and Greg Airihenbuwa, “The Rituals of Kingship and Hierarchy in the Benin Kingdom,” in Plankensteiner, *Benin Kings and Rituals*, 119–130.

the extension of the gerontocratic principles of the living into the ancestral realm.⁷ Those within the royal palace compounds (the previous kings being royal fathers) were especially important and were at the top of this hierarchy of sacred shrines in Benin. They stood for and encapsulated all of the *aru erha* of the realm, granted the standing Oba the powers of divine kingship, and ensured the vitality and continuity of the nation.⁸ On the death of an Oba, following his entombment in a burial chamber beneath the palace floor, the planting of such a shrine by his successor was an important dimension of the funeral rites necessary to ensuring the transition of the spirit of the dead monarch to the other world. This was a vital process, ensuring these kings' continuity as powerful ancestors, but also to prevent their potent, dangerous spirits from lingering in the living world.⁹

Therefore, these areas of the palace were mortuary landscapes and places of important public rituals, crucial points of contact with powerful royal ancestors vital to the entire kingdom's functioning and well-being.¹⁰ They were furnished with many of the lavish copper alloy, ivory, and other art objects that Benin is famous for, including cast heads made by each successive king in memory of his predecessor.¹¹ The upkeep of these compounds, the chronicling of the histories of the kings that they manifested, and the burial ceremonies of these monarchs, were largely the domain of the *Ihogbe*, a group of court historians and royal priests headed by the *Ihama*, a chief bearing a hereditary title.¹² Important rituals occurred within these spaces, including the ceremony of the king "making his father," for which people were sacrificed and sent to the royal ancestor to salute him and inform him that his son was not yet ready to join him, as well as ceremonies of royal investiture.¹³ The former (*Ugie Erha Oba*), which would occur before the altar of the Oba's father, followed a series of palace rites (*Ugie Igun*) honoring each of the former kings individually, and served to avert evil spirits, appease the earth, and honor and propitiate the previous king.¹⁴

Of course, given Benin's deep history, the nature of these royal compounds, and their associated arts and rituals, evolved over time. The earliest written references to these places, and the burial rites of recently deceased kings, appear in early modern accounts (of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries). These described a landscape of plains and galleries filled with brasses and ivories, with mention made of extravagant royal burials at these well-adorned spacious courts. They were vast porticos supported by large wooden pillars, with some

⁷ Charles Gore, "Conceptualising Royal, Community and Personal Shrines in the Edo Kingdom," in Plankensteiner, *Benin Kings and Rituals*, 131–140.

⁸ Paula Ben-Amos Girshick, "The Symbolism of Ancestral Altars in Benin," in Plankensteiner, *Benin Kings and Rituals*, 151–160.

⁹ Nevadomsky and Airihenbuwa, "Rituals of Kingship," 125–126.

¹⁰ Bradbury, *The Benin Kingdom*, 40, 55.

¹¹ Philip J. C. Dark, *An Introduction to Benin Art and Technology* (Doubleday & Co., 1973), 4; Bradbury, *The Benin Kingdom*, 55.

¹² See Dmitri Bondarenko, Peter M. Roesse, and T. M. L. Roesse, "Ludewig Ferdinand Römer's 'Nachrichten von der Küste Guinea' (Mid-18th Century) as a Source on the Benin Kingdom History and Culture," *Tribus* 50 (2001): 135–149; Melzian, *Concise Dictionary*, 87.

¹³ See Henry Ling Roth, *Great Benin: Its Customs, Art and Horrors* (F. King & Sons, 1903), 7–74, 99.

¹⁴ Paula Ben-Amos Girshick, *The Art of Benin* (British Museum Press, 1995), 103–104.

examples of copper alloy serpents attached to the rooves.¹⁵ The earliest known image of one of the royal compound shrines is a sketch attributed to the Italian explorer Giovanni Battista Belzoni. This “Sketch of the Burying Place of a King of Benin” from the 1820s shows what is described, in an associated legend, as one of the “Tombs of the Benin Kings” consisting of a thatched, pillared structure containing elephant tusks as well as heads and figures in brass. It describes these as important in the celebration of the “Annual Sacrifices or Customs to the Manes of ‘Their departed Kings’” from June to October, during which people and animals were sacrificed to “Water the Ground or Grave” with blood.¹⁶ In the same decade, an anonymous account in the *Royal Gold Coast Gazette* referring to Benin City described “tombs” decorated with elephants’ tusks, each inserted into “the crown of the head of a colossal brazen bust,” as well as various figurative arts depicting people and animals.¹⁷

Other accounts from the early nineteenth century also reference these royal *ughas* and their shrines. Lieutenant John King in 1820 observed royal stools, made on the accession of a new Oba to the throne, and then placed on the same king’s tomb following his passing.¹⁸ The British sailor James Fawckner mentioned “several fetish places, the depository of the usual absurd objects of worship, skulls, skeletons, and large ivory teeth” and stated that “unfortunate slaves are also sacrificed at different seasons in front of these temples.”¹⁹ The explorer Richard Burton, who visited Benin City in 1862, also described one of these spaces, writing that:

One of the courts contained a grand fetish-house, with a number of ivories showing very curious and interesting work. At the bottom of the enceinte and facing the sacellum was a little grass-grown rise, the margin of a wide and deep well into which the custom’s victims are thrown. The people called this the old king’s fetish court, and it is kept in order by the piety of his son.²⁰

In 1891, the earliest known photograph of one of these royal shrines was taken by the British trader Cyril Punch who, like Burton, suggested the importance of these spaces as sacrificial sites: “The new king constructed a large compound in

¹⁵ For example, see Adam Jones, ed., *Olfert Dapper’s Description of Benin* (1668) (University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1998), 11, 23, who discusses accounts of the palace recorded by Olfert Dapper (1668) and of Capuchin missionaries (1652); van Nyendael’s account from 1702, first published in Willem Bosman, *Nauwkeurige beschryving van de Guinese...* (Anthony Schouten, 1704) – see Roth, *Great Benin*, 109–110; and Jean-François Landolphe’s late eighteenth-century accounts, see Roth, *Great Benin*, 42–44, 99, and Jones, *Description of Benin*, 12, 23.

¹⁶ Fagg, “The Great Belzoni,” 1330–1331; Ben-Amos Girshick, *Art of Benin*, 52–53.

¹⁷ Cited in Ben-Amos Girshick, *Art of Benin*, 53.

¹⁸ John King, “Extrait de la relation inédite, d’un voyage fait, en 1820, aux royaumes de Benin et de Warée,” in *Journal des voyages découverts et navigations modernes* (Paris, 1822), 313–318.

¹⁹ James Fawckner, *Narrative of Captain James Fawckner’s Travels on the Coast of Benin, West Africa* (A. Schloss, 1837), 83.

²⁰ Richard Francis Burton, “My Wanderings in West Africa. A Visit to the Renowned Cities of Wari and Benin. Part II. Continued – The Renowned City of Benin,” *Fraser’s Magazine* 67 (April, 1863): 407–422.

memory of his father with a sacrificial altar at one end, and in one corner a pit, called ‘iyo,’ into which the bodies of the victims were thrown.”²¹ When Punch visited, Oba Ovonramwen had almost completed such a compound for his predecessor Adolo who had died over a year prior, with carved doors of iroko wood covered with Muntz metal, and a newly dug pit (*iya*). The British Army officer Henry Galway, who first visited Benin City in 1892, noted the presence of “several large sacrificial courts, grassy enclosures surrounded by mud walls, with altars, under a great roof, at one end” in the king’s quarter.²²

Following the 1897 British invasion, more detailed mentions of these royal *ugha* emerged from eyewitnesses who were members of the expedition. Various written descriptions exist of the landscape of the royal palace (e.g., a British Foreign Office Report from 1897, Reginald Bacon, Alan Boisragon, Ralph Moor, Robert Allman, and Felix Roth), notably mentions of “ju-ju houses” and “old ruined houses” where former kings and chiefs were thought to be buried.²³ Boisragon’s account counts seven “large ju-ju compounds,” described as being close together in the king’s compound, “each two to three acres in extent, in which most of the sacrifices were performed, and in which the people used to sit while the priest performed the sacrifices.” These he described as “large grassy enclosures, surrounded by mud walls. At one end of each, under a roof, were the sacrificial altars, on which were placed the gods – carved ivory tusks, standing upright, on hideous bronze heads.” In the corners of these compounds were sacrificial pits, and they were close to the “Palaver House” (the structure where the Oba met his guests), as well as the compound that was the Oba’s main dwelling, which were side by side.²⁴ Bacon described one of these “Juju places” as “about a hundred and fifty yards long, and about sixty broad, surrounded by a high wall, and covered with a short brown grass.”²⁵ Moor also mentioned that there were seven of these “large sacrifice compounds,” that were “enclosed by walls 14 to 16 feet high, each 2 to 3 acres in extent” housing copper alloy and ivory objects, and sacrificial pits.²⁶

The exact number of these royal *ugha* present in the palace landscape of the nineteenth century is unclear, and accounts contradict each other. As Allman wrote:

The first things that strike the observer on entering the city are the large walled in compounds, 200 yards square, met with in all the principal quarters of the city; through four of these one has to pass before reaching the King’s palace and Palaver house. At one end of each compound stands an altar decorated with large bronzes and enormous carved ivory tusks, the

²¹ Quoted in Roth, *Great Benin*, 101–102.

²² Galway, “Benin: Altars,” 3.

²³ Alan M. Boisragon, *The Benin Massacre* (Methuen & Co., 1897), 186–187; see also the British Foreign Office Report from 1897 cited in Roth, *Great Benin*, 171.

²⁴ Reginald H. Bacon, *Benin: The City of Blood* (Edward Arnold, 1897), 90; Boisragon, *The Benin Massacre*, 186–187.

²⁵ Bacon, *City of Blood*, 87–88.

²⁶ Ralph D. R. Moor, “Despatch,” *The London Gazette* (May 7, 1897): 2530–2533.

whole being smeared and crusted over with human blood; these altars (seventeen in number) I afterwards learnt from the chiefs who submitted to the Government were the shrines of the defunct kings of Benin. The antiquity of each could easily be traced by the appearance and condition of the carved ivories which decorated them; the most recent one was evidently only in existence about nine years, and it was at this shrine that Duboah the king was making sacrifices to the shades of his father when Mr. Phillips and his ill-fated party sought the interview with him.²⁷

While Allman mentioned four of these near the king's quarters within the palace, and a total of seventeen across the whole landscape, Moor and Boisragon mentioned that seven were counted close to the king's house, while the Foreign Office Report noted five close together in the king's compound. A British sketch map of Benin City from 1897 held by the Foreign Office depicts four structures in this area (labelled "KING'S COMPOUNDS") but this appears to be a very simplified and incomplete representation of the palace landscape.²⁸ Thus, we might conclude that four, five, or seven (depending on the account) of these royal *ugha* were in the area of the palace near to where the king's dwelling and meeting house were located, with the chiefs interviewed by British authorities suggesting that there were seventeen in total within the entire palace landscape. However, the Belzoni sketch from the early 1820s noted "25 or 30" of these "Tombs of the Benin Kings" and, several years after the British invasion, the trader R. E. Dennett wrote that:

The late OBA'S palace was nearly in the centre of what is known as the OBA'S Compound, his predecessors' palaces and their ruins being to the north-west of it. Near to each of these palaces, and I think there were thirty-one of them, was a deep well (OVVIO, being the name of the late OBA'S well), where they threw the bodies of the human being sacrificed.²⁹

The reason for this discrepancy in numbering is not clear. Tentatively, it is possible that Belzoni (twenty-five or thirty) and Dennett's (thirty-one) counts are estimates based on the number of kings remembered in oral tradition (king lists) rather than the true number of royal *ugha* actually stated to have been present in the landscape, with the lower number (seventeen) reported by the chiefs to the British authorities perhaps a more realistic figure.³⁰

Of course, a common issue with these accounts of the palace is that they are very generalized, and typically vague when it comes to the particular order of the royal *ugha* within the palace landscape, which specific ones were identified with what monarchs, and the individual artistic and architectural details peculiar to each example. In this respect, Goodwin's archive offers some new information,

²⁷ Robert Allman, "With the Punitive Expedition to Benin City," *The Lancet* (July 3, 1897), 43–44.

²⁸ F. O. 2/121 (Extract): Copy of Map by Lieut. R. P. O'Shee R. E. Manh 97.

²⁹ Richard E. Dennett, *At the Back of the Black Man's Mind* (MacMillan and Co. 1906), 187.

³⁰ For a discussion of the historiography of these king lists, see Stefan Eisenhofer, "The Benin Kinglist/s: Some Questions of Chronology," *History in Africa* 24 (1997): 139–156.

allowing us to locate where some of these were located and how they were arranged in the palace landscape (according to his informants in the 1950s), which may help further contextualize at least some of the archaeological finds made in the area of the old palace by him and successive archaeologists such as Ciroma and Connah.

Goodwin's excavations in Benin City: Published evidence

It was within the collapsed ruins of this complex old palace landscape that most of Goodwin's excavations of Benin City in 1954–55 and 1956–57 were undertaken, as well as most subsequent excavations undertaken in the city by later archaeologists. During both field seasons, Goodwin worked with a team of trained African excavators, and collaborated with other notable researchers, including the Benin historian and chief, Jacob Egharevba, at this time Curator of the Benin Museum, and Kenneth Murray and Bernard Fagg of the Department of Antiquities. Goodwin was further supported by the Oba of Benin, Akenzua II, who acted as a key informant, as well as the Benin Public Works Department that loaned him tools and sieves for excavation.³¹ His archive also mentions that he collaborated with the Benin Historical Project (led by historian Kenneth Dike), cooperated with anthropologist R. E. Bradbury, and spoke to several local chiefs during his visits.³²

In 1954–55, Goodwin began excavations at the site of the old palace, by then a grassy area with some trees and new developments (east of the site of the new palace), having been ruined by a fire that occurred during the British occupation in 1897.³³ Goodwin's initial excavation started "directly opposite" the European cemetery here, constructed by the British on the grounds of the old palace.³⁴ He excavated an initial trench, then continued the first dig as a series of two foot and six inch by five foot and six inch "boxes" separated by a six inch balk. Goodwin interpreted the features excavated (during relatively shallow – up to approximately five foot – excavations) as a kitchen area, yard, rubbish pit, and living rooms.³⁵ As well as ceramics, these palace rooms yielded fragments of brass as well as "cut tacks and staples" that were historically used to attach brass plate images to timbers and walls in the palace.³⁶ Goodwin stated that four consecutive red-clay floors were visible in the stratigraphy of these rooms, separated by "trench-like breaks" in the stratigraphy, as well as layers of charcoal and debris that he interpreted as evidence of fires, and later rebuilding atop these layers.³⁷ He then opened a second test further west, where an apparently modern clay floor overlay an older floor.³⁸ Due to the shallow depth of these excavations,

³¹ Goodwin, "Architecture," 77.

³² University of Cape Town Special Collections, Cape Town (UCT) BC 290, D5: Nigeria, "Summarised Report on Work Done Under Wenner Gren Grant: December 6 1956 to February 24 1957. Benin City."

³³ Connah, *Archaeology of Benin*, 8.

³⁴ Goodwin, "Bronze Snake."

³⁵ Goodwin, "Architecture," 73–76; "Bronze Snake," 142.

³⁶ Goodwin, "Architecture," 69, 80.

³⁷ Goodwin, "Architecture," 73–74; "Bronze Snake," 142.

³⁸ Goodwin, "Architecture," 76.

Connah has suggested that Goodwin's finds were probably relatively recent in date, from the last two or three centuries.³⁹

Goodwin's second field season (1956–57) focused on another area of the old palace site⁴⁰ where he opened test pits at a location further west.⁴¹ This was “along a line which is the continuation of the northern front of the present palace.”⁴² He opened test pits at a location “18 yards (16.20m)” away from the second test opened in 1955 and reportedly 100 yards west of his first excavation.⁴³ The two preliminary pits were “six feet (1.90m.) apart” and on a true line continuing from the southern aspect of an old brick water-tower near a temporary museum, “some fifteen yards (14m.) or so from the nearest of the government clerks' offices.”⁴⁴ Only a few small fragmentary potsherds as well as some layers of red puddled clay were found, which Goodwin considered evidence of two old floor levels. Two more test pits exposed a waterpipe from 1912, with an area adjacent to this yielding fragmentary potsherds. The four “corner” test pits were then turned into one square excavation unit. Goodwin observed evidence of collapsed walls overlaying a probable floor surface (indicated by white kaolin clay scattering), which he interpreted as a courtyard. Deposits of charcoal that “indicated the fire [of 1897]” as well as rolled brass strip, “cut tacks” and “square-sectioned copper staples” were viewed as evidence of timbering and wooden doors that had been plated with brass. On this presumed courtyard, Goodwin made two particularly spectacular finds: a cast brass serpent head of the type formerly affixed to palace rooves found near the “waterpipe trench” (see Figure 1), and a fragment of brass plaque depicting a catfish tail six inches away from the snake head, at the same level.⁴⁵ Lateral expansion of this trench led to further discoveries of courtyards and probable interior rooms, as well as spectacular metal artefacts some eighteen feet northeast of the location of the snake head: an *ada* (iron sword), a bronze-handled *adebo* (iron dagger) with a pommel fashioned into the form of a leopard's head with stylized canine teeth, and beneath this an *ava* (smith's hammer). He interpreted these objects as “an altar to Ogun, god of iron,” in one of the palace courtyards, between rooms.⁴⁶ He further observed that this courtyard met a wall threshold that was the western end of the room excavated in his second test trench in 1954–55.

Goodwin also published some of his work at other sites in the city including the purported location of the palace of the legendary *Ogiso* rulers – earlier (pre-Oba) kings of Benin – which largely turned up negative data.⁴⁷ Goodwin's published works also include his observations of aspects of the architectural and religious practices of Benin City at the time of his visits. His archaeological

³⁹ Connah, *Archaeology of Benin*, 7.

⁴⁰ Goodwin, “Walls,” 50.

⁴¹ Goodwin, “Architecture,” 77; “Bronze Snake,” 142.

⁴² Goodwin, “Walls,” 50.

⁴³ Goodwin, “Architecture,” 77; “Bronze Snake,” 142.

⁴⁴ Goodwin, “Architecture,” 77.

⁴⁵ Goodwin, “Architecture,” 78–79; “Bronze Snake,” 142–144.

⁴⁶ Goodwin, “Architecture,” 80.

⁴⁷ Connah, *Archaeology of Benin*, 7–9; Goodwin, “Architecture,” 82–84.



Figure 1. The snake head uncovered by Goodwin at the old palace grounds. The context that Goodwin found it in likely dates to the nineteenth century CE, though the object itself is probably older than this. Image obtained from Kathy Curnow, "Oba's Palace, Benin City, Nigeria," *Bright Continent* (23 May 2021), <https://access.thebrightcontinent.org/items/show/2> (accessed 6 January 2025). Creator: Hamo Sassoon; date: 1957.

research never provided any firm dates, including for the purported fires and structural collapses that he described. It is worth noting that Goodwin doesn't provide any maps or site plans in his publications, and is vague about the locations of excavations, mainly siting them using references to modern landscape features such as clerks' houses and the nearby water tower. Details are also missing pertaining to the scale of several of his excavations and to site stratigraphy: no profile drawings are included with only some basic depth measurements relayed in instances where significant finds were made. Connah, however,

published a sketch map that included an estimated area where Goodwin conducted most of his work.⁴⁸ Although Goodwin likely didn't investigate deposits predating the eighteenth century CE, his work remains useful in the novel insights provided into the last two or three centuries of palace history. Connah would excavate older, deeper stratigraphy very near this location, at what came to be known as the Clerks' Quarters site, yielding, among other things, spectacular evidence of a mud building with earthen walls and floors, refuse pits, inverted pottery bowls at the base of walls (interpreted as magical foundation deposits), a large number of copper alloy objects, and a 12.5-metre-deep cistern predating the structure, containing a range of artifacts, the remains of multiple people, and charcoal samples yielding radiocarbon dates of 1180 ± 105 CE and 1310 ± 90 CE (uncalibrated).⁴⁹

Connah also excavated north of where Goodwin's excavations were located, at the site of the Benin Museum, where the Public Works Department (PWD) yard had been located prior to 1958. The excavations showed a general lack of evidence of *in situ* building remains, implying to Connah that the area might have been covered by some of the palace courtyards and part of the open space in front of the palace. Nevertheless, the site was rich in features, including infilled pits and cisterns interpreted by Connah as borrow pits, and within one of these was an adult human skeleton placed in the pit during infilling, which he interpreted as resulting from an execution or human sacrifice. Connah also noted the presence of potsherd pavement materials in pits here, and divided the assemblage into a "late group" and "early group," the latter of which he dated to 1305 ± 105 CE (uncalibrated) from a charcoal sample associated with potsherd pavement remains.⁵⁰ As shall be discussed below, Goodwin's archive helps inform us further of the local significance of the spaces that Connah was excavating within the old palace landscape.

Key spatial, stratigraphic, and contextual details pertaining to Goodwin's excavations remain unpublished – material that can help further contextualize not only his published work, but also that of later archaeologists such as Ciroma and Connah. There are no published site plans, no drawings of stratigraphy and artifact associations, and few photographs of these. His publications also completely exclude any mention of one of the sites that he excavated during his time in Benin City: that of an exposed section of the town's innermost linear earthwork.⁵¹ Goodwin's archives, though relatively limited in scope, address some of these absences, and contribute to a clearer picture of Benin City's past.

⁴⁸ Connah, *Archaeology of Benin*, 8.

⁴⁹ Connah, "Archaeology in Benin," 25; *Archaeology of Benin*, 35–77.

⁵⁰ Connah, *Archaeology of Benin*, 11–35.

⁵¹ Goodwin's unpublished writing on the inner earthwork (*iya*) of Benin is discussed, analyzed, and contextualized in Tomos Llywelyn Evans, "The Walls of Benin Reconsidered: Interpreting West African Linear Earthworks Using A. J. H. Goodwin's Unpublished Excavation Data," *African Archaeological Review* 42 (2025): 309–332. Notably, a report at the archive documents a short, but significant, excavation that he conducted, which identified objects of spiritual significance at a site that appears to have been located at one of the nine traditional gates of Benin City. These likely related to practices of spiritual protection and regulation at a critical threshold of the *iya*.

Goodwin's unpublished material on Benin City: An overview

Unpublished material from Goodwin's work in Nigeria is largely contained in folders of correspondence (BC 290, D5: Correspondence A–Z; Nigeria), papers (BC 290, J2.23 Unpublished book ms on Goodwin's Nigerian expedition [largely focusing on work at Ile-Ife]), and photographs (BC 290: Photographs: Goodwin in Benin and excavations in Nigeria 1955; a118–a124: Excavations, Ceremonies). Overall, relatively little material pertaining to Goodwin's research at Benin City is present in his archive, although what is present is significant. Among his papers are a report to the Wenner-Gren Foundation from 1957 on his research in Benin, a series of draft handwritten and typed manuscripts that would eventually be compiled into his most comprehensive publication on his work in Benin City, notes on the social, political, and cultural dimensions of Nigeria at the time of his visit at the end of the British colonial period, some sketches and notes on shrines, correspondence that sometimes contains information on dimensions of his work, some limited oral traditions pertaining to past Obas (kings) of Benin, a couple of maps of parts of Benin City and his excavations, an unpublished account of his earliest work in Benin City, and a number of photographs (mostly unpublished) revealing aspects of the archaeological work, as well as depicting aspects of the culture city at the time of his visit.

One item appears to be notably absent. Connah was loaned Goodwin's "excavation notebook" by Professor R. R. Inskeep of the University of Cape Town sometime prior to the publication of his collaborative volume *The Archaeology of Benin* in 1975. As far as could be gathered during the author's visit, this wasn't present in the archive, although Connah may conceivably be referring here to Goodwin's handwritten publication drafts which are indeed present in the archive. Connah's summary of Goodwin's work contained little additional information about his excavations, other than some very limited spatial evidence that doesn't appear to be in his published work. This suggests that either there was little new information in the notebook, or that Connah did not deem it relevant enough to include in the book.

Unpublished writings on the old palace excavations

Goodwin's archive on his Benin City excavations primarily consists of records pertaining to his research at the old palace area. A Wenner-Gren grant report contains some details not present in his published work.⁵² Notably, he identifies the structure that he excavated during his second field season (where a complete pot was found) as "the legendary 'Hall of Esigi'" suggesting that informants had identified the area of the site with the Oba Esigie, typically claimed (estimated) to have ruled Benin during the fifteenth or sixteenth century CE.⁵³ This spatial attribution is corroborated by other evidence in Goodwin's archive discussed

⁵² UCT BC 290, D5: Nigeria, "Summarised report on work done under Wenner Gren grant: December 6 1956 to February 24 1957. Benin City."

⁵³ Eisenhofer, "Chronology," 147.

below. Furthermore, Goodwin's published work, which focuses on the more spectacular brass and iron artifacts, makes little mention of the more prosaic finds at this excavation, but this report confirms that "a number of local (Bida) and trade beads were found" here. As well as further evidencing the palace's local and foreign sociopolitical and economic connections, this revelation suggests that Goodwin's published work regularly left out details of purportedly more mundane materials such as these, but unfortunately there is little additional material in the archive describing these missing finds (with some exceptions – see below).

Some further information is present in letters to his wife and family, several of which contain details of his excavations, interpretations, and other potential sites in the area.⁵⁴ In a letter written on 5 January 1955, Goodwin provides some of his early interpretations of his initial excavations which contrast with what he would later publish. He wrote: "We are getting pleasant pottery out of the dig and a lot of old crucibles, presumably from brass smelting, though no brasswork has yet appeared." In a letter written on 9 January 1955, he added further detail to this:

We seem either to have dug into a brassworkers [*sic*] workshop or his rubbish heap as we get fragments of brass from the size of a match-head to a half-teaspoonful, obviously drips from the casting. We also get a few bits of carbonised crucibles and what may prove to be parts of the clay molds themselves. Most interesting, but we are not likely to find any finished brass-heads in a brassworker's place. This is in an old Oba's palace, and bronzes were made to order by the patron and not, of course, for sale.

Interestingly, Goodwin, in his published work, appears to have abandoned the idea that these brass fragments were "obviously drips from the [lost wax] casting," instead favoring the interpretation that they had "melted to pellets" and "to molten puddles" due to the 1897 fire, and by extension, purported fires that he argued were represented in the earlier stratigraphy, and not due to the casting process.⁵⁵ No mention is made in any of his publications of crucibles or clay molds. Depending upon the accuracy of his theory of fires (see below), the possibility arises then that Goodwin had found some limited potential evidence of by-products of brass casting within the palace landscape. Connah's later excavations nearby at the Clerks' Quarters – at similar levels, and thus periods (Connah's "late phase"), to Goodwin's excavations – indeed found abundant evidence of metalworking in the area, such as crucible pieces, fuel ash, and fragments of metal, including droplets, trickles, or small pools of copper alloy interpreted as originating from splashes of molten metal during casting.⁵⁶ The combination of this new

⁵⁴ These are contained in the folder UCT BC 290, D5 D86/35, "Letters from AJH Goodwin to his wife & family from Nigeria 1953–1957." There is also some information on the Benin earthworks (*iya*) discussed elsewhere.

⁵⁵ Goodwin, "Architecture," 72.

⁵⁶ Connah, "Archaeological Research," 469, "Archaeology in Benin," 31, "Archaeology of Benin," 39, 53, 71, 131, 139, 146.

unpublished evidence and Connah's published work perhaps casts some doubt on the extent to which Goodwin's finds had been modified by destructive fires, and supports instead the idea that he had found significant evidence of copper alloy metallurgy. His early interpretations, as represented in his unpublished letters, may thus be accurate, making it unfortunate that he did not include these, or discuss them in detail, in his publications. See below for a further discussion of the validity of Goodwin's theory of multiple fires.

Besides these, there are no other mentions of any excavated finds, or interpretations of these, not already published, with one exception pertaining to the second (1956–57) field season. In a letter from 18 January 1957, he mentions that, following the discovery of the purported Ogun shrine (see above), they excavated further objects: "However, our luck stopped there [after finding the iron objects] and we have only been getting beads & tacks since then, with a few rivets, rosettes, finger-rings etc." Thus, the letter details some of the more "mundane" finds made on the day of the shrine discovery, not all of which are mentioned in his published works (which mention him later finding "iron nails, innumerable copper staples and cut tacks of brass" elsewhere in the excavation).⁵⁷ As well as this novel material pertaining to his excavation finds, Goodwin's letters to his family also mention the potential location, and nature, of a historic cache of elephant tusks. On 29 December 1954, he wrote:

I think meanwhile I may have located the Oba's treasure-house or pit. When Overami [Ovonramwen] the Oba of 1897 was banished, he tried to bribe the Consul General with 500 tusks of ivory to change banishment to imprisonment in Nigeria. These tusks had been cast down a deep well & covered over when the troops came in, thus escaping the fire. It seems pretty sure that this well has sunk in a bit and lies in front of the police barracks. I went across this morning & located a likely spot where a charcoal burner has his clay furnace on top among some bushes. I shall check again, but it looks hopeful. Unhappily it will mean a pit 25 feet across at the mouth, with a spiral stairway dug in the sides, narrowing as it descends to 40 or perhaps even 80 feet.

The colonial police barracks were located just south of where Goodwin excavated (see the reference to "Police lines" next to a dotted line in Figure 2 – this dotted line is also represented in the southern section of the Figure 4 map). This specific cache of ivories, and the Oba's attempt to use them to negotiate with the British following the 1897 invasion was documented at the time, but the account lacks detail regarding the nature of the burial or its possible location.⁵⁸ Goodwin's writing may be useful in this regard, however, besides the presence of a depression, it is not clear what gave him such a firm impression that the pit was located at this spot, and he appears to have never excavated the area. In

⁵⁷ Goodwin, "Architecture," 80.

⁵⁸ See Roth, *Great Benin*, Appendix III, xvii.

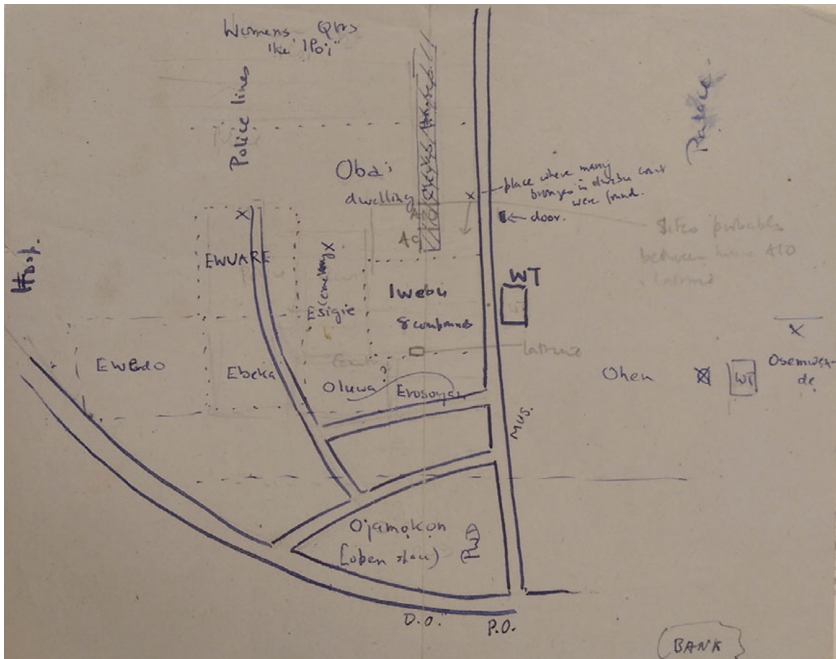


Figure 2. Goodwin's sketch map of the palace, with courtyards associated with prominent past Obas recorded (as according to informants from the 1950s). The main road running from top to bottom is the Ogba Road (now Airport Road), as shown in Connah (*Archaeology of Benin*, 8). The map also describes other features in the old and contemporary landscape. Note that the palace mentioned in the top-right corner is the new palace. This sketch is not oriented to the north (see below).

another letter, written on 20 February 1955, Goodwin mentions another location where Ovonramwen had supposedly hidden artifacts:

On Monday 14th (Marian's birthday) I went to see the Oba [Akenzua II] about digging out a well where his grandfather [Ovonramwen] hid some of his treasures. He sent an old fellow along with us, but unluckily it is 10 feet from the Oba's wall, six feet from a main road, six feet from a cesspool and twenty feet from a watertower and there is thus no way of setting to it apart from excavating it slightly & going straight down which would be very dangerous with so many obstacles near by and the rattle of heavy traffic. So we gave up the idea unless we can get some expert well-diggers to do the job for us – which is impossible in the time. So I sent the two trained men, Akeredolu & Haruna Rashid to look for possible sites beneath the walls, but with no luck there either.

It is not certain if this is a reference to a different purported cache of objects, or the cache of ivories mentioned in his earlier letter: if the latter, then it suggests that Goodwin had come to believe it to be in a different location from the police barracks area. The location he is referring to is likely somewhere between the

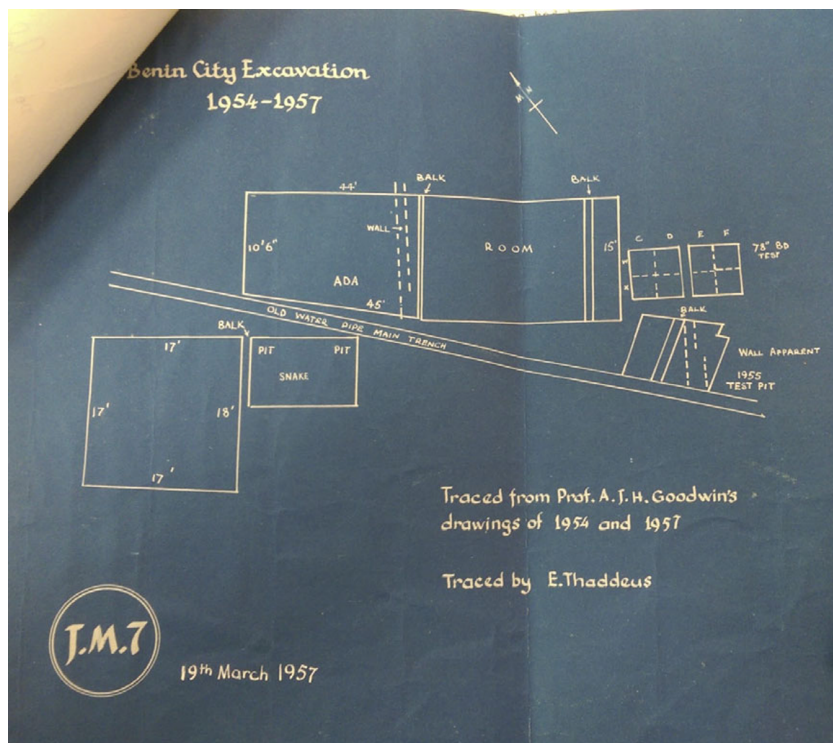


Figure 3. Edward Thaddeus's drawing of the excavations (of both field seasons) according to Goodwin's drawings. See Figures 4 and 7 for information on approximately where these excavations occurred in the contemporary landscape, and Figures 7, 8, and 9 for photographs of some of these excavations.

water tower (WT in Figure 2) and the new palace boundary ("Palace" in Figure 2; see also Figure 4) on the west side of the Ogba Road, although this isn't entirely clear.

Sketch maps of the old palace landscape and his excavations there

More significant are the maps in the archive – notably a sketch map of the old palace landscape (Figure 2), and a map of Goodwin's excavations (Figure 3) – which form perhaps the most interesting part of the collection as pertaining to his work at the old palace site. These yield additional spatial information that help improve our knowledge of the locations where Goodwin (as well as Ciroma and Connah) excavated, and the nature and organization of the excavations. The sketch map reveals the layout of aspects of the old palace area of Benin City – part of the Ogbe: the king's sector of the town – as recalled by Goodwin's informants in the 1950s (likely the Oba, his officials, or Chief Egharevba), and the approximate locations of his excavations here. Oral tradition features little in published



Figure 4. Spatial information from Goodwin's sketch of the old palace landscape, superimposed onto a modern satellite image of the area today, including the approximate locations and dimensions of several royal *ugha*. The *ugha* of Oguola and Ozolua are also shown as per Bradbury/Curnow and unpublished written notes of Goodwin's (see below). The old palace features (the royal *ugha* and other structures from the map) are shown in white. The approximate areas of Goodwin's excavations, as well as those undertaken later by Willett (1959), Ciroma (1960), and Connah (1962–1963) are also marked (yellow text and circles). Furthermore, the site of the bronze finds reported on the sketch map is marked in orange. Note that this is a superimposition of a sketch map – one not made using exact measurements – and so the details are not going to conform exactly to the actual landscape. Spellings (e.g., of the names of kings) have been changed to conform to current, accepted versions rather than Goodwin's ones. One minor change made is that Olua and Eresoyen's *ugha* locations have been swapped by the author, based on interpretation of a curved line on Goodwin's sketch map that appears to indicate that they should be interchanged due to an error. Satellite image source: Google Earth Pro, version 7.3.6, 2024.

accounts of Goodwin's work at the old palace site, so this represents a dimension lacking from what was previously available.⁵⁹

This sketch (Figure 2) is remarkable as the only known map document to date that lays out the approximate spatial organization of the old palace site according to where each Oba was traditionally considered to have lived in the past, and where they continued to be venerated after their deaths. These were the royal

⁵⁹ UCT BC 290 D5: Nigeria, sketch map of the old palace [no title or date].

ugha (see above), of which there were up to thirty-one by 1897.⁶⁰ Goodwin's reference to the "Hall of Esigi" in the aforementioned report is a reference to the *ugha* dedicated to the past Oba Esigie, and this rectangular area is shown near the center of this sketch map. A note on the map reads "Sites probably between house A10 and latrine" which, along with other evidence, helps approximately situate his excavations (see Figure 4 below). Indeed, many of the features of the landscape mentioned in Goodwin's publications – some of which he uses as spatial referents – are observable on his map. These include the water tower, new palace site, European cemetery, and clerks' offices, among other things.

The approximate location of the quarters of the three main palace orders (Iwebo, Iweguae, and Ibiwe) are also shown (explicitly or implicitly) on Goodwin's map – that of the Iwebo (marked "Iwebu"), that of the Iweguae (in the large area marked "Oba's dwelling"), and that of the Ibiwe in the upper part of the map described as the women's quarters ("the Iloi") by Goodwin. The Oba's personal household would have been in the area marked "Oba's dwelling" where Oba Ovonramwen would have lived prior to the 1897 invasion, after which he was exiled. Near this was the "palaver house" where the king received visitors, and where a copper alloy snake was observed connected to the roof in 1897.⁶¹

Situating the royal *ugha* in the old palace landscape using Goodwin's sketch map

As previously stated, documentary sources from the seventeenth to twentieth centuries reference the royal *ugha* of the old palace but largely lack information on their specific whereabouts and the particular Oba that each one was dedicated to – dimensions that are shown on Goodwin's sketch map. Some of the figures mentioned on the map include the Obas Ebeka (Eweka; c. twelfth or thirteenth century), Ewedo (c. thirteenth century), Ewuare (c. fourteenth or fifteenth century), Oluwa (Olua; c. fourteenth or fifteenth century), Esigie (c. fifteenth or sixteenth century), Ohen (Ohuan; c. sixteenth or seventeenth century), Eresoyan (Eresonyen/Eresoyen; c. eighteenth century), and Osemwende (c. nineteenth century),⁶² and Goodwin's approximate positioning of their *ugha* is novel information lacking from previous descriptions (see above) or maps,

⁶⁰ See Zbigniew R. Dmochowski, *An Introduction to Nigerian Traditional Architecture, Volume Two: South-west and Central Nigeria* (Ethnographica in Association with the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, 1990), 1.5; Jacob Egharevba, *The City of Benin* (Aguebor Printers, 1952), 17; Peter M. Roese, Alun R. Rees, and Dmitri M. Bondarenko, "Benin City Before 1897: A Town Map and a Map of the Palace Area with Description," *Ethnographisch-Archäologische Zeitschrift: EAZ (Berlin)* 42 (2001): 555–571. See above for a full discussion of the number of these sites.

⁶¹ See Dmochowski, *Traditional Architecture*, 1.8; Roese et al., "Benin City Before 1897," 561.

⁶² The estimates of the approximate dates of these kings' reigns, and thus the purported occupation periods of each of these *ugha*, is based on the kinglists of Struck and Egharevba reported in Eisenhofer, "Chronology," 149–150. Each of these have their problems and thus should not be taken at face value, but give us a sense of how the sequence of Benin monarchs was remembered by the twentieth century. As is observable in Figure 2 and Figure 4, the locations of their *ugha* as represented on Goodwin's map do not appear to be in a spatial sequence that reflects this chronological sequence.

such as that of Roese et al., itself a compilation of earlier maps and descriptions.⁶³ An important corroborating source for the names and locations of these sites marked on Goodwin's sketch map is R. E. Bradbury and Z. R. Dmochowski's interview with Oba Akenzua II in 1958. The Oba informed them of two rectangular courtyards called *ugha uzamokon* (near the "old colonial PWD site" and shown on Goodwin's map as "Ojamokon") and *ugha ozolua*.⁶⁴ Curnow drew upon some of Bradbury's unpublished notes pertaining to this conversation to describe these places:

In the past, an Oba's living quarters became the site of his veneration, his successor erecting a decorated altar there in his honor. Annual festival cycles demanded each ruler be remembered individually, which moved the Oba and his chiefs through ever-increasing numbers of palace courtyards as he progressed through the festival sequence. Civil wars, fires, and the British destruction of the palace do not allow for complete reconstruction of its prior appearance, though certain courtyard locations are remembered through ceremony or oral history. Oba Ewuare's courtyard is said to have originally been near the police barracks, but during Oba Ewẹka II's rebuilding program, it was relocated to the site of Oba Ozolua's [c. fifteenth century] courtyard, and the two were combined in an open shrine.⁶⁵

Further corroborating Goodwin's notes, she wrote: "Oba Esigie's 16th-century chambers were outside the parameters of the current palace, necessitating the construction of a cloth pavilion in the street near the water tower for one of his celebrations." Another corroboration comes from Wyndham, who confirms that the European cemetery was within "Esigie's compound" as shown on Goodwin's map.⁶⁶ Another document in Goodwin's archive with notes pertaining to traditions of the Obas mentions that "The sixth Oba, Oguola, introduced brass work. His 'compound' was in the present hospital grounds."⁶⁷ On Goodwin's map, Oguola's (c. thirteenth century) *ugha* would thus be somewhere in the vicinity of the area marked "Hosp." Based on these corroborations, it may be that Goodwin's source for this map was Oba Akenzua II himself, or perhaps other palace officials, and Chief Egharevba. Goodwin provides relatively specific locations for each of these places, not previously published. Of course, it is not clear whether these are deep-time recollections of where these Obas dwelt, passed down over generations, more recent reinterpretation and attribution of areas of

⁶³ This map, based primarily on documentary evidence, shows a wide area described as the place of "31 *ugha*'s [sic] for departed kings (up to 1897)" (following Dennett) but does not contain any information on the distribution of these and which ones were dedicated to which past kings.

⁶⁴ Dmochowski, *Traditional Architecture*, 1.8.

⁶⁵ Kathy Curnow (with University of Pennsylvania), *Iyare! Splendor and Tension in Benin's Palace Theatre* (Kathy Curnow, 2016), 10–11.

⁶⁶ John Wyndham, *The Curse of Óbo: A Tragedy of Benin* (Duckworth, 1926), 65.

⁶⁷ UCT BC 290 D5: Nigeria, "H. L. M. BUTCHER, Resident", notes on oral tradition pertaining to Obas [no title or date].

the landscape to them, or some combination of both things. It is certainly known that alterations caused by ruination (deliberate or otherwise) over centuries transformed the palace landscape of Benin.⁶⁸ Neither is it clear how close the purported physical dimensions (scale and shape) of these *ugha*, as shown on the map, are to what their actual dimensions were. Based on limited documentary evidence on this from 1897 (see above) these may be overestimations in terms of scale, especially regarding their width.

Based on the traditional king lists, the cluster of royal *ugha* shown would appear to be dedicated to a scatter of Obas considered to be from quite different sections of the sequence and thus diverse periods, often with significant gaps between their reigns. This would imply that the royal *ugha* did not follow a straightforward spatial pattern conforming to chronological order. The sequence, and dating, of the reigns of the kings of Benin of course remains speculative, disputed, and controversial, being heavily influenced by the work of twentieth-century writers such as P. A. Talbot and J. Egharevba.⁶⁹ Thus, there is unlikely to be complete parity between the observations on this map, historical evidence, and archaeological evidence, pertaining to the organization of the palace landscape. Nevertheless, the uniqueness of this sketch map as a source on the shifting palace landscape, or at least how it was perceived by the 1950s, is valuable for future research on the history of the Benin kings and the old palace site more broadly. Modern features such as roads and structures are also listed on the sketch, some of which are mentioned as spatial referents in Goodwin's publications, and which are thus useful for locating his excavations (see below). These include the (new) palace (and a "door" of this), the cemetery, hospital, clerks' houses (quarters), museum, a latrine, water towers ("WT"), the Public Works Department ("P.W.D."), the bank, the Post Office (P.O.), the District Office (D.O.) and the Ogba (now Airport) road (rightmost) and Sapele (now Benin-Warri) road (leftmost) between which the *ugha* are marked and where Goodwin's excavations took place. As mentioned above, it also notes the approximate location of his sites. This information, combined with other evidence, allows us to locate his excavations in the contemporary and historical landscapes of the area (see below).

A map of Goodwin's excavations

This brings us to the next significant map document in the archive that provides more detailed information about Goodwin's excavations (Figure 3).⁷⁰ This is similarly useful, as Goodwin's published work has no maps showing the locations and dimensions of his excavation trenches – only (sometimes vague) written descriptions that occasionally mention modern spatial referents. This map was created by Edward Thaddeus, based on Goodwin's drawings, and lays out trenches excavated

⁶⁸ Dmochowski, *Traditional Architecture*, 1.7.

⁶⁹ Eisenhofer, "Chronology."

⁷⁰ UCT BC 290 D5 Nigeria, "Benin City Excavation 1954–1957, Traced by E. Thaddeus," enclosed in a letter from B. Fagg to A. J. H. Goodwin, 21 March 1957.

by the team in 1954–55 and 1956–57.⁷¹ It gives us a better sense of the scale and organization of the excavations, their spatial relationships, and the locations of some of the major finds (in terms of stratigraphy and artefacts) within them. The eastern trenches are those excavated during the first field season while the western trenches are those excavated in the second – which meet each other roughly at the wall threshold separating the courtyard with the “ADA” and the room just south-east of it (he gradually extended the excavations of his second field season eastward to meet the first). Noted finds include the snake head (“SNAKE”), sword (“ADA”), and two wall boundaries that he traced, one separating the purported palace room from the courtyard with the *ada* and the other in his 1955 test pit. This latter “WALL APPARENT” refers to the wall section described in Goodwin’s published work, observed in stratigraphic profiles during his first field season (see Figure 9 for photographs of this). Usefully, measurements in feet are given for the dimensions of the trenches, which provide a scale, and a north arrow is included in contrast to Goodwin’s sketch map. The “OLD WATER PIPE MAIN TRENCH” ran southeast from the water tower (“WT”) shown in Figure 2, which was located next to the spot of the precolonial Agbodo pond.⁷²

Locating Goodwin’s two maps in the historical and contemporary landscapes of Benin City

As mentioned above, comparison of several published and unpublished sources makes it possible to spatially situate the new details contained in Goodwin’s unpublished maps – notably the reported locations of the royal *ugha*, other sections of the old palace, and Goodwin’s excavations, in both the pre-British occupation and current landscapes of Benin City. Today, the area shown on Goodwin’s maps is home to the Edo State House of Assembly, offices of the Nigerian Postal Service, the Oba Akenzua Cultural Centre, Edo Specialist Hospital, and newly constructed Museum of West African Art (MOWAA), observable in contemporary satellite imagery. The two maps (shown in Figures 4 and 6), created by the author, show a) information from Goodwin’s sketch map and Thaddeus’s excavation map superimposed upon a satellite image of the modern landscape of the area, as well as representations of the approximate areas excavated by later archaeologists here (Figure 4), and b) spatial information from Goodwin’s sketch map superimposed upon a map of the old palace landscape (according to Roesse et al., “Benin City Before 1897”) (Figure 5). The approximate location of his excavations shown in Figure 4 was determined through analysis of a number of published and unpublished sources.⁷³

⁷¹ Thaddeus was one of the Nigerian archaeologists who collaborated with Goodwin. He had been trained by Bernard Fagg at the Jos Museum, which had opened in 1952.

⁷² See Roesse et al., “Benin City Before 1897,” 561.

⁷³ These sources include Goodwin’s own published written descriptions (from 1957 and 1963), his unpublished sketch map and Wenner-Gren report, a sketch map by Graham Connah showing the locations of his and other excavations (approximations only) in the area (Connah, *Archaeology of Benin*, 8), an aerial photograph of the area by Bernard Fagg from 1963 (Connah, “Archaeology in Benin,” Plate 1), and an unpublished photograph of Goodwin’s showing the location of his first

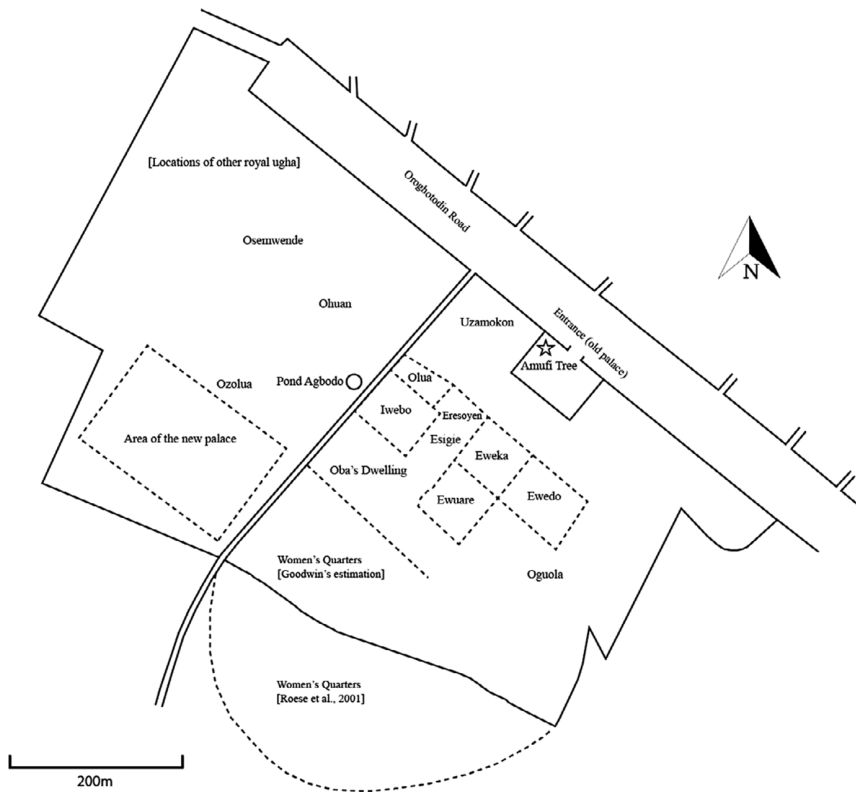


Figure 5. A map of part of the old palace (based on Roese et al., “Benin City Before 1897”) with features from Goodwin’s sketch map superimposed upon it. One area of discrepancy is the positioning of the Erie (“Women’s Quarters”) – Goodwin’s sketch map is vague on this, but places it closer to the main area of the Oba’s dwelling. Other information suggests it to have been farther south than this (see Roese et al., “Benin City Before 1897”). Note that some modern features are shown here, such as the area of the new palace and the line of the Ogba (Airport) Road that bisects the palace landscape.

Assuming that Goodwin’s sketches are accurate to what he was told, Figures 4 and 5 suggest that his excavations occurred largely in the area recalled as the *ugba* of Esigie, as well as part of the location recalled as a compound or area of the Iwebo.⁷⁴ Ciroma was excavating in an area identified on Goodwin’s sketch map as being the area of the *ugba* of Olua and the Iwebo structure. Connah’s “Clerks’ Quarters” excavations occurred largely between those of Goodwin and Ciroma, so in the area marked as the Iwebo structure and the *ugba* of Esigie (Clerks’ Quarters (CQ) excavations I, II, and III) though he also opened an excavation (CQ IV) southwest

excavation relative to the European cemetery that is still in the landscape today (see Figure 7). Ciroma’s, Willett’s, and Connah’s excavation locations are also shown, based on information from Connah’s published sketch map.

⁷⁴ Note that the Iwebo are also identified with other areas of Benin’s urban landscape, such as present-day Ebo Street – see Victor Osaro Edo, “Hierarchy and Organization of the Benin Kingdom and the Palace,” in Plankensteiner, *Benin Kings and Rituals*, 96.

of here in what would have been the main living area of the Oba and his Iweguae courtiers according to Roesse et al.'s map. His Benin Museum Site excavations occurred in the area identified as the Uzamokon. Of course, it is not clear how far back in time the spatial arrangement of the palace recorded by Goodwin extended, and so its interpretive value may be specific only to the late phase (i.e., the first few feet) of these multiple excavations, and not to the older deposits excavated by Connah (such as those of his middle and early phases – see below). The significant amount of evidence of copper alloy metallurgy that Connah observed at CQ I, II, and III connects well with this revelation, given that the Iwebo traditionally had affiliations with the Igun-Eronmwon brass casters. Similarly, this novel identification of Goodwin's excavations as being in or near this Iwebo area may also help further contextualize his finds of possible brass casting discard (see above), and lends more support to the alternative hypothesis that he was looking at metallurgical refuse rather than evidence of repeated destructive fires.

Goodwin's sketch map reveals the location of a place where "many bronzes" were found, apparently in an area identified to him as the "Iwebo Court." Such "hoards" of copper alloy objects were relatively common finds in this landscape, with other such discoveries/rediscovers made following the British invasion of 1897 by both colonial occupiers and local inhabitants.⁷⁵ Notable examples reported include British military looting of "hidden bronzes" at what became the Public Works Department grounds and Benin Museum Site (the Uzamokon on Goodwin's map) and elsewhere during their occupation of the area, a set of "bronzes" found during the removal of an area of wall in the new palace as reported by Eva Meyerowitz in 1943, and another "hoard" accidentally discovered at the Clerks' Quarters Site in 1962 (opposite the new palace) which led Connah to open the CQ IV excavation nearby.⁷⁶ Goodwin's map suggests that the bronze finds that he reported, and perhaps also those reported by Meyerowitz and Connah, were associated with the Iwebo area of the palace, and these spatial relationships make sense given that one of the Iwebo's duties was to protect and preserve valuable arts connected to the royal family.⁷⁷

Photographs of excavations and material culture

Complementing these maps are some of Goodwin's unpublished images, which allow us to better visualize and understand aspects of the location, nature, and discoveries of his excavations, as well as important historical features of the city.⁷⁸ The photographs include images of Benin architecture (including palace walls and the inner earthwork), festival activities with the Oba present, art objects, contemporary shrines, sacred trees, areas of the landscape of the old palace site, and excavations

⁷⁵ Dennett, *In the Back*, 188.

⁷⁶ See Goodwin, "Architecture," 71–72; "Walls," 50; Eva L. R. Meyerowitz, "Ancient Bronzes in the Royal Palace at Benin," *The Burlington Magazine* 83, no. 487 (1943): 248–253, 249; Connah, "Archaeological Research", 475; *Archaeology of Benin*, 35.

⁷⁷ Joe Eboreime, "Nigerian Museums and the Presentation of the National Heritage in Perspective," *Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 18, no. 1 (1995): 62–72, 65.

⁷⁸ See UCT BP_A2 - BC 290: Goodwin Collection Photographs.



Figure 6. Photographs of Benin City architecture, including the inner earthwork, probably at Sakpoba Road where he excavated (left, centre) and the palace (right). The palace doorway shown here may be the one marked on his sketch map (above).



Figure 7. Goodwin's initial excavation trench during his first field season, opposite the European cemetery.

here (see sample images in Figures 6–9). One image (see Figure 7) clearly shows the location of his first trench in 1954 opposite the European Cemetery. This is notable as it appears to be the most precise information we have regarding where Goodwin began his excavations, and helped situate his excavations on the map in Figure 4. The pictures also show some of the stratigraphy and finds that he excavated from this initial excavation (labeled “1955 TEST PIT” on the map in Figure 3), which offers additional material for comparison with that uncovered by later archaeologists, by ongoing archaeological excavations in this landscape in the 2020s, and with Goodwin’s own published (written) descriptions and interpretations.



Figure 8. Images of ceramic discoveries, made during the first field season. Note the letters which represent Goodwin's alphabetical grid system. The feature being defined in these images appears to be what Goodwin initially interpreted as a "step," which he suggested "may later prove to have been the edge of a wall-trench or of a house platform, or the lip of an old borrow-pit of irregular shape filled with rubble." In the past, "domestic and ceremonial" pottery, suggested Goodwin, had been crushed by fallen architecture "sending them skipping and shattering down steps to the sumps of rooms or into compound yards and wells," which was how he interpreted this specific context (Goodwin, "Architecture," 72, 75, Fig. 3).



Figure 9. Further images of Goodwin's first excavation. As Goodwin published no stratigraphic drawings, and few photographs, these are useful in gaining a better sense of the layers described in his published work. This image depicts Goodwin's southernmost excavation trench (this can be determined based on comparison of the shape of the trench in the left image with the excavation sketch map in Figure 3 – the unit labelled "I 955 TEST PIT"). The middle and right images show more clearly the Y-shaped profile of a wall feature that Goodwin described but did not illustrate in his published work, as well as the associated stratigraphy – it is shown here to be in the southeastern section of this southern trench.

Interpreting stratigraphy in Goodwin's photographs

A comparison of some of these photographs with Goodwin's published work allows us to better understand the site stratigraphy that he was describing in writing. As previously mentioned, Goodwin's publications describe a sequence of four red clay floors (typically approximately three or four inches thick), each overlain with dark layers of carbon and fine debris (approximately an inch or less in thickness) that he interpreted as evidence of destructive fires, as well as a couple of thicker layers (of a foot or more) representing fallen walls, where structures had collapsed following the purported fires. Goodwin observed the first of these supposed layers of collapsed wall immediately above the second of the four "fire" layers, which he estimated to

be about one foot in thickness. Above this, he observed a new wall (approximately eleven inches in thickness) which, after a supposed third fire, was thickened on both faces into a Y-shaped section. This was then overlain by the fourth and final “fire” layer, which Goodwin interpreted as that of 1897, and above this was over a foot of collapsed wall debris and humus.⁷⁹ Goodwin’s unpublished photographs show more clearly this Y-shaped section (representing a thinner older wall, and its later thickened version), the third and fourth “fire” layers associated with these wall features, and the thick layer of collapsed wall and soil overlaying this (see Figure 9). Unfortunately, the nature of the stratigraphy below these features (including the first two floor and “fire” layers and the earlier wall) is not clear in these photographs. Nevertheless, the upper two to three feet of stratigraphy (including the Y-shaped section and above collapsed wall and humic layers) are rendered slightly more clear, making comparisons more feasible.

Broadly, we see some similar features here to what Connah would later observe in the late phase of Cuttings [Units] I–III of the Clerks’ Quarters site (approximately the first five feet of material, thus corresponding to Goodwin’s stratigraphy) – opened very near Goodwin’s initial excavation. Notably, and like Goodwin, Connah observed abundant structural evidence: the mud wall features, mud-walling debris, and floors. However, Connah wrote that Goodwin’s “four structural phases” could not be applied to the stratigraphic evidence that he observed in this late phase of his three excavation units, and that these “contained no particular evidence of any destruction by fire.”⁸⁰ This latter observation suggests that, if Goodwin’s interpretation of the stratigraphy is accurate (which it may not be), the fires may have been relatively localized, and perhaps not related to the 1897 destruction. Alternatively, much of the evidence that Goodwin assumed to be reflective of past fires may have instead been debris from copper alloy casting (see discussion above of Goodwin’s letters), which further challenges his published suggestion that there were multiple fires here in the past.

Conclusion

This article reiterates the importance of revisiting the archives of archaeologists given the novel evidence pertaining to both modern and early history that is often present, and which can be used to address new questions about the African past. As shown, Goodwin’s archive on Benin City, although relatively limited, provides important insights into the history and landscape of the old palace, and on his excavations there. With the erosion and covering of these sites due to urban development since Goodwin’s work, and the renewal of archaeological work in the area, material such as this is especially beneficial for uncovering information otherwise lost and providing comparative data for subsequent fieldwork (of Ciroma, Will-ett, Connah, and others), as well as current ongoing research. It is the author’s aim that the analysis undertaken for this article proves useful for this continuing work.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Goodwin, “Architecture,” 73.

⁸⁰ Connah, *Archaeology of Benin*, 72.

⁸¹ The author has shown scans of Goodwin’s maps to Charles Le Quesne of the Museum of West African Art (MOWAA) in Benin City, to support the project’s important ongoing archaeological

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