

Abstract #: 1193

FLUID FORTRESSES IN CHANGING STATES: TATA IN SOUTHERN SENEGAL (13TH-19TH C AD)

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The term tata is a Western Malinke word designating a fortified political and military centre. In southern Senegal, tata have been a key element in the articulation and conceptualization of political landscapes since at least the 13th C and through multiple polities. These tata fulfilled both practical and symbolic functions: they were often large defensive structures, capable of resisting sieges and attacks but their very presence also indicated the existence of a state-controlled territory linked to Manding political traditions as opposed to a no-man's land suitable for raiding. While varied in size and construction, some of these fortresses were very substantial, reaching up to 12m in height and featuring multiple rings of walls. However, despite their sturdy appearance, tata were often relatively ephemeral structures whose existence was limited to the reign of a particular ruler. In this paper I will explore the network of tata associated with the states of Kaabu and Fulaadu in southern Senegal and what variations in their location over time can tell us about the articulation of power in the region.

Keywords

Kaabu, Fulaadu, Mali Empire, Casamance, Landscape Archaeology

Note/comment