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A History of Togo

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Introduction

Togo, officially known as the Togolese Republic, is a narrow strip of land in West Africa, stretching from the Gulf of Guinea in the south to the borders of Burkina Faso in the north. Despite its relatively small size, Togo's history is remarkably intricate and layered, marked by a succession of migrations, kingdoms, colonial powers, and evolving political identities. Understanding Togo's past offers insights not only into the story of its people but also into the broader patterns of change in West Africa.

From the earliest days, Togo's territory has served as a meeting ground for diverse ethnic groups. The Ewe, Mina, Guin, Kabyé, and others each brought their unique cultures, languages, and social structures, collectively forming a mosaic of societies long before the arrival of Europeans. The region's location between the precolonial states of Asante and Dahomey made it a buffer zone and a crossroads, but also left its communities vulnerable to external influences, including violent conflicts and the devastating transatlantic slave trade. For centuries, the coastal area earned the moniker "Slave Coast," forever shaping the destinies of generations.

The late 19th and early 20th centuries ushered in a transformative period as colonial ambitions swept through Africa. Germany's brief reign saw heavy investment in infrastructure, agricultural exploitation, and ambitious modernization—alongside the harsh realities of forced labor, economic extraction, and cultural suppression. The subsequent French and British administrative division following World War I set the stage for continuing complexity, further fragmenting communities and entrenching new systems of governance. Each colonial administrator left an indelible mark, from forced assimilation policies to infrastructure initiatives and new political boundaries.

The post-World War II era witnessed the rise of nationalism and vibrant independence movements throughout Africa, and Togo was no exception. The voices and efforts of leaders like Sylvanus Olympio and Nicolas Grunitzky reflected the determination of the Togolese people to reclaim their future. Togo's subsequent journey through independence in 1960 was both hopeful and turbulent. The assassination of its first president, the frequent military coups, and the onset of authoritarian rule under Gnassingbé Eyadéma highlighted both the opportunities and perils that faced the fledgling nation.

As Togo entered the 21st century, it remained under the long shadow of a single ruling family and faced complex challenges in governance, economic development, and social cohesion. Yet, the resilience of its people consistently shines through periods of hardship and transition. From ancient pottery makers and kingdom-builders to modern reformers and activists, Togolese history is a testament to adaptability, strength, and

a persistent quest for dignity and self-determination.

This book, "A History of Togo," traces the nation's evolution across millennia. Its goal is to illuminate key moments, figures, and forces that have shaped Togo's identity, while also honoring the diversity and dynamism of its people. It invites readers to explore a country whose struggles and triumphs echo far beyond its borders and to appreciate the rich cultural heritage that endures at its heart.

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CHAPTER ONE: Early Human Settlements and Archaeology

Before the borders of modern Togo were ever conceived, before the arrival of migrating peoples who would shape its cultural landscape for centuries, this land along the Gulf of Guinea was simply a stage for the unfolding drama of early human existence in West Africa. The deep history of Togo is not written in ancient scrolls or monumental inscriptions, but etched into the earth itself, revealed through the patient work of archaeologists who unearth the silent stories of the earliest inhabitants. These stories, pieced together from fragments of pottery, discarded tools, and the remnants of ancient hearths, push the narrative of human presence back through millennia, far beyond the reach of oral traditions or written records.

Archaeological findings serve as the primary key to unlocking this distant past. They offer tangible proof that the region was inhabited by ancient local tribes capable of impressive skills for their time. Among the most compelling pieces of evidence are the remnants of early pottery and the signs of tin processing. These seemingly simple artifacts speak volumes about the technological capabilities and daily lives of people who lived here when much of the world was a very different place.

Pottery, in particular, is a treasure trove for archaeologists. Its presence indicates a degree of sedentism, or at least repeated use of certain sites, as pottery is fragile and heavy, not easily carried by highly mobile groups. The styles, materials, and decoration of pottery shards can also provide clues about cultural practices, connections with other groups, and even dating the sites where they are found. In Togo, the discovery of ancient pottery highlights the deep historical roots of the country and the early human settlements that thrived in the region.

Beyond the presence of fired clay, archaeological surveys in the interior of the country have uncovered further testaments to various forms of human settlement. These include not just pottery shards but also the remains of earth walls, which suggest more organized or settled communities. Such structures, even in their ruined state, hint at early forms of architecture and community planning, moving beyond purely transient lifestyles.

Evidence of early metallurgical activities is another significant discovery. Findings indicating both iron smelting and tin mining in the interior point to a sophisticated understanding of materials and processes among these early populations. The ability to extract and work metals represents a major leap in human technological development, allowing for the creation of more durable tools and weapons, which in

turn could impact everything from agriculture to social organization.

The processing of tin, specifically mentioned in early archaeological accounts, is particularly noteworthy. While iron working often dominates discussions of early African metallurgy, the presence of tin suggests other metalworking traditions or perhaps the creation of alloys like bronze, although direct evidence of bronze production in the earliest periods of Togo is less clear from the available information. Nevertheless, the mention of tin processing alongside pottery speaks to a developing technological landscape among these ancient communities.

Geographically, archaeological research has begun to illuminate specific areas within Togo that hold particular significance for understanding these early periods. The interior regions, away from the later-developing coastal trade centers, appear to be crucial for evidence of the earliest settlements and technological advancements like metal processing. This suggests that the initial layers of Togo's history were forged in its heartland.

In the northern reaches of Togo, cave sites such as those in Nook and Mamproug have been recognized as important locations for uncovering the history of human settlement over millennia. These natural shelters would have provided ideal dwelling places, offering protection from the elements and potential vantage points. The ongoing recognition of their significance is leading to consideration for their inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage list, underscoring their importance on a global scale.

Further south, archaeological surveys conducted near the historically significant city of Notsé in the 1980s and early 1990s revealed evidence of potsherd floorings. These findings indicate structured living spaces and contribute to the understanding of early settlements in this central part of the country, an area that would later play a role in the migrations of the Ewe people.

Delving deeper into the metallurgical past, research in the Bassar region of northern Togo has provided significant insights into the antiquity of iron production. This area has been identified as a major center for ironworking over a considerable span of time. Archaeological investigation here suggests that iron production commenced as early as the 5th century BCE.

This early phase of ironworking in Bassar is documented at sites like Dekpassanware, which is identified as a large ironworking center. Evidence from Dekpassanware and its associated smaller settlements points to an Early Iron Age society that existed from approximately 420 BCE to 130 CE. The presence of ironworking at this relatively early date in Togo is significant in the broader context of the spread of metallurgy across Africa.

The development of iron metallurgy in West Africa is a complex topic, with ongoing

debate about its origins. Some evidence unearthed through archaeological research suggests the possibility of an independent invention of iron metallurgy in sub-Saharan Africa. Findings from sites like Dekpassanware contribute to this larger picture, highlighting the independent technological trajectories developing within the continent.

The archaeological record in Togo also connects to broader prehistoric cultural complexes in West Africa. The Kintampo Complex, dating to the Late Stone Age between 2500 and 1400 BCE, is one such example. While primarily associated with Ghana, evidence of this complex, characterized by distinctive pottery styles (often decorated with comb-stamped designs), ground stone axes, and other artifacts, extends into eastern Ivory Coast and Togo.

The Kintampo Complex is seen as representing a transitional period in West African prehistory, moving from more mobile hunter-gatherer lifestyles towards increased sedentism and the adoption of agropastoralism. The presence of Kintampo-related artifacts in Togo suggests that the region was part of these broader cultural and technological shifts occurring across West Africa during this time.

The term "Stone Age" itself encompasses vast periods of human history, typically divided into the Earlier, Middle, and Later Stone Age, based on the types and technologies of stone tools used. While detailed accounts of specific Stone Age sites across all of Togo are still emerging, the discovery of Stone Age tools and pottery generally underscores the great antiquity of human presence in the area. These findings provide a foundation for understanding the deep historical roots embedded in the Togolese soil.

Research into the Stone Age archaeology of West Africa, including areas that fall within modern Togo, involves studying the different types of stone tool assemblages found in various ecological zones, from open savannas to more forested regions. These tool types can provide clues about the activities of the people who made and used them, such as hunting, gathering, or processing plant materials.

The West African Neolithic period, generally considered to have begun around 6000 years before present (approximately 4000 BCE) in some areas, marks a significant shift with the gradual adoption of domesticated plants and animals, increased reliance on pottery, and the use of ground stone tools. This period saw a move towards more settled lifestyles and the development of new technologies, and Togo was part of this regional transformation.

The archaeological work undertaken by researchers such as Josef Eiwanger has been instrumental in conducting targeted excavations specifically focused on the Neolithic period and the Iron Age in Togo. Such dedicated research helps to build a more detailed picture of these crucial periods in the region's prehistory and early history.

The evidence gathered from these archaeological endeavors, from the earliest pottery fragments to the remains of ancient iron furnaces, collectively paints a picture of a region inhabited by resourceful and adaptable people for thousands of years. These early inhabitants were not merely surviving but developing technologies, establishing settlements, and laying the groundwork for the diverse societies that would later populate the landscape of Togo. The land itself holds the oldest chapters of this history, waiting to be fully uncovered and understood.

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