Introduction

The study of history allows us to know how the men who existed before us lived. It allows us to check man's progress and draw lessons from past experiences. So, the story is very useful. The aim of history is to allow us to know human societies better; it is not only a study of the lives of kings and emperors that should interest us in history but, above all, the lives of the peoples, the problems, and difficulties they have had to face in daily life. For thousands of years, the peoples were kept in ignorance by those who lived from their work, who exploited them: the colonialists took this procedure to the extreme. Thus, Portuguese colonialists, for example, kept the populations of Guinea and Cape Verde in ignorance; they tried to make them believe that they did not have a history of their own, had not passed and that the story began only from the moment of arrival of the first Portuguese navigators, on the shores of Africa. But nowadays, all over the world, people refuse to let themselves be exploited and cheated any longer. In Guinea and Cape Verde, under the direction of the African Independence Party of Guinea and Cape Verde [PAIGC], the people took their own direction, their own destiny, into their hands. With the guns in hand, he fights against the barbarity of the colonialists. He struggles to put an end to the slavery and ignorance in which they had kept the colonialists. Therefore, the people must know their own past.

(African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde, *Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde,* PAIGC, 1974, p. 13) .

The narrative of Guinea underwent a shift in power, moving from one dominated by the Portuguese 'navigators', 'administrators', and 'colonialists' to one that prioritized the 'people' of Guinea. If during the colonial period the history of Guinea was focused on European sources, with the purpose of glorifying the epic of conquest and 'civilization' of Guinea by the Portuguese, the focus after Guinean independence would shift to everyday life, the simplicity of life in the villages, and primarily, the various, constant movements of resistance to colonial oppression. In this epigraph, we see that the first history book, *History of Guinea and Cape Verde*, written for the new country that gained its independence in 1973, would have a strong Marxist, anti-imperialist bias, and would indirectly place archaeology as central to the understanding of the past of the people of Guinea. The book emphasizes the need to know the past before the arrival of the Portuguese and in societies without writing. Strikingly, then, independence aimed not only for a political rupture but also a cultural and historical one.

In *History of Guinea and Cape Verde*, a new narrative, one that connects the past of Guinea-Bissau with the rest of the African continent, particularly West Africa, is inaugurated. It starts from the classical conception of the three ages, the Stone Age, the Bronze Age, and the Iron Age, and the emergence of agriculture and social classes. The history of Guinea-Bissau is then shared in this Marxist teleological movement of different stages. Specifically for the region before the advent of Islamism, the book mentions that in the 'lack of written documents, we know little about Africa south of the Sahara before the 7th century, that is before the Arab conquest and the spread of Islamism (PAIGC, 1974, p. 23).' And with this phrase, the information about the remote past of the region ends. It is interesting to note that at the time, there was no shortage of archaeological information about Senegal, Mali, and other regions of West Africa for the period before the 7th century. However, there seems to be an interest on the part of the authors in guiding and focusing on the past based on information from written documents during this period. Thus, the so-called Empire of Ghana is prominently featured, which, according to the authors, territorially occupied the vicinity of Guinea-Bissau.

The narrative about Ghana, as well as the Empire of Mali, is presented, in contradiction with the epigraph, as a succession of kings and empires; a classic political narrative of the ruling elite that valorises productive wealth and military conquests. The different emperors and governments of Mali are described meticulously, extolling their achievements. The authors comment on the Kingdom of Gabu and its connection to the Empire of Mali. Speaking specifically of the coastal populations of Guinea:

> Little is known about the peoples of the coast of Guinea, who remained primarily faithful to a patriarchal organization in independent family groups. In the 15th century, at the time of the arrival of the Portuguese, they already lived in these regions and, with minor differences, in the same places as today. At this time, the entire region recognized the authority of the Emperor (Mansa) of Mali. Certain peoples had constituted kingdoms or social organizations commanded by Chiefs according to the Manding model. After the fall of the Mali empire, these small kingdoms became independent and disappeared (PAIGC, 1974, p. 62).

The history of populations prior to the arrival of the Portuguese can thus be summarized as a succession of kingdoms, empires, and conquests, in other words, a history of the State and the elites that governed them. For populations that were not under state control, i.e. the groups referred to as 'coastal', little is known, because

they lack documents, assuming a social immutability in space-time. Although they represent the majority of the population of the country today, the 'coastal' societies are marginalized, facing the prominence and development of State entities in the region's history. This, dangerously, is associated with colonial discourse (Mota, 1954).

This book seeks to contribute to an African history of one of the coastal peoples, called the Diola, who are subdivided into different subgroups among the Gambia, Senegal, and Guinea-Bissau. They, together with the Serer, Niominka, Baynouk, Manjakos, Brames, Balantas, Nalus, Bijagós, Pepéis, Bagas, Soussou, Bullom, Temne, and Mande, form the so-called Southern Rivers peoples (Cormier-Salem, 1999a), who share various similar cultural traits, primarily the environment characterized by mangroves, lack of political hierarchy, similar historical trajectory, and the cultivation of *Oryza glaberrima* rice. The Diola are one of the most ethnographically studied groups in Senegal, as will be shown in the following chapters, yet they have been overlooked in archaeological contexts, with the reference work until today dating back to the 1970s when the American author, Olga Linares, conducted research on shell mounds in the Lower Casamance region. It is from her work that we draw inspiration to study and research the shell mounds of the Diola, albeit those of their Guinea-Bissauan compatriots.

This study aims to present the archaeological potential of the region by mapping the shell mounds in the area, documenting shell and processing collection practices, recording the construction of new shell mounds, identifying different functions and uses of shell mounds, and, ultimately, seeking to understand their composition, chronological depth, and the role of shell mounds within the amphibious landscape, or maritime *terroir*. This work seeks to be a first attempt in the study of these shell mounds, given the near absence of other archaeological research in the region, and even the country. During the writing of this book, some other research projects are underway in Guinea-Bissau, such as the Ecologies of Freedom project, coordinated by Rui Gomes Coelho and his students, as well as the research by Sírio Canòs-Donnay on Kaabu. However, since these projects have not yet published their results, it was not possible to read and incorporate them into this research.

The reality of archaeological research in Guinea-Bissau must be contextualized to situate this work. The process for Portuguese colonies obtaining independence was not peaceful or negotiated. Given the intransigence of the Salazar dictatorship, weapons were the adopted way to gain independence. Also, unlike Angola and Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau did not 'inherit' any university center from the colonizer and had to build an entire policy and infrastructure of scientific research and higher education from scratch (Tamba, 2016).

Regarding archaeological research in the Colonial period (1888-1973), only one initiative was conducted by Amílcar Mateus in 1947. Mateus managed to identify an archaeological site, Nhampassaré cave, and conducted the first archaeological excavation in the history of the territory of Guinea-Bissau. Nhampassaré cave site is located 12km southwest of Gabu city, in a quartzite formation. The excavation was done in two cross-shaped test excavations, one north-south direction and the other east-west. The artefacts found at 80 cm depth consisted of ceramic fragments and lithic instruments of different materials (dolerite, quartz, and stoneware) (Mateus, 1954). The excavation lacked technical rigour (Rodrigues 2012, p. 9). Moreover, the scientific community and government ignored this work and its contributions, as few resources and time were invested, and the limited focus on archaeology remained trapped in a diffusionist paradigm. As such, this research did not continue.

Independence in 1973, however, did not alter this state of ignorance. With meagre resources, due to the lack of tax revenue and technical expertise, difficulties continued to abound. From an institutional standpoint, in the field of humanities, it was only in 1984 that an institution dedicated to research, the National Institute of Studies and Research (INEP), was established. Among its responsibilities was indirectly overseeing archaeological research, which fell under its purview, alongside other humanities disciplines.

In an attempt to establish the first cadre in the field, which lacked any professionals post-independence, the government sent students to the University of Moscow in the former USSR, of whom three decided to pursue degrees in archaeology. The trajectory of these three archaeologists vividly illustrates the challenges of archaeology in Guinea-Bissau. Lacking resources, they were compelled to seek livelihoods outside of archaeology, against their wishes. To this day, the country does not have any archaeologists working in the field within the country, contributing to this general lack of awareness. To date, the country has only one published work in the Post-Colonial period on archaeology, an article by Guinea-Bissauan archaeologist Leonardo Cardoso, which provided an overview of research conducted during the Colonial period and some of his initiatives from the 1980s (Cardoso, 1992). In this crucial text, Cardoso pointed to the need for further studies and research:

> In fact, more than ever the interest of people in science is felt in the sense of knowing their historical past and, I think, we cannot attribute to this a mere chance. ... Today, in Guinea-Bissau, there is an urgent need for some [archaeology] work to be resumed, but of course, at a qualitatively more developed level, which means that excavations must be designed and carried out according to the methodological principles of archaeology as a science. ... Assuming that these are periods thousands of years before us, it is essential to carry out archaeological studies in order to complement other disciplines (Cardoso, 1992; p. 48).

This neglect of archaeology is also reflected in the lack of legislation. To this day, there are no regulations governing

the practice of professionals or the management of archaeological heritage. For a historical overview of the cultural policy situation in Guinea-Bissau, it is worth consulting Sara Santana's master's thesis (2015). According to the author, the creation of archaeological legislation was planned by the 9th government. Archaeology is cited with emphasis:

> In the III National Conference on Culture, the prioritized objectives for research work in the cultural area include funding for "in-depth studies on Slavery and Archaeology in the City of Cacheu and other historical cities, as well as the archaeological mapping of Guinea-Bissau", and the mapping of "cultural and artistic actors for the constitution of a database" (III National Conference on Culture, 2015: 3-4). (Santana, 2015, p. 42) (emphasis my own)

The mention of the city of Cacheu is not without reason. As the first trading post founded by the Portuguese in Guinea-Bissauan territory, in the sixteenth century, it served as a commercial port for the entire region and as a point of embarkation for thousands of enslaved people to the Americas. The Portuguese slave trade along the West African coast during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries focused on other locations, primarily with the establishment of forts on the coast of present-day Ghana, such as the most iconic and famous, São Jorge da Mina, in 1482. It was only in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that the region that would become Guinea-Bissau was profoundly affected by the slave trade. From 1751 to 1842, a total of 73,842 enslaved people were taken solely to the Amazon, the main destination for enslaved people from this area to Portuguese America, where they formed the dominant ethnic groups in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Hawthorne 2010; p. 52).

In line with a movement to valorise this Afro-Atlantic history (e.g. Araujo, 2014, 2020; De Jong & Rowlands, 2016), a project to create a slavery memorial in Cacheu was initiated in 2013 by the NGO, Action for Development (AD).

> The aim of this project is to include Cacheu in international itineraries related to the theme of slavery and to constitute a solid basis for the involvement and valorisation of the local population, while simultaneously being a form of national and international recognition of an impoverished and weakened city and region (Barreto & Santos, 2014, p. 411).

The memorial was built and is operational, now serving as the country's only museum. In a new initiative, the NGO financed an archaeology project, coordinated by a group of Portuguese researchers, led by Rui Gomes Coelho, with the aim of conducting survey and excavation. Given the city's enormous potential, we can expect promising results that will undoubtedly help us better understand the materiality of Cacheu and its regional dynamics.

The project and its execution of the Memorial, however, did not garner consensus among Guinea-Bissauan researchers. Various Guinea-Bissauan researchers maintain that the project was conceived and executed with no consultation with local professionals, representing a completely external idealization devoid of regional social ties.

The work presented herein, like that of so many historians (Cadango, 2018; Esteves, 1988; Green, 2019; Hawthorne, 1999, 2010; Kelley, 2020; Klein, 2001; Lopes, 1993; Mark, 1985, 2002; and Santos, 2012, among others), is part of a quest to understand the dynamics of European presence, especially Portuguese presence, in Guinea-Bissau, even if it is not the main objective. It deviates from the latent objective outlined by the PAIGC in 1974, to study the *history of their own past*, that is, the Pre-Colonial history and/or the history of different peoples outside of the colonial prism, with which we agree. Archaeology, as stated by Cardoso, also has the role of supporting separation from a history based on colonial sources, and more than that, from colonial perspectives and explanations. It is worth mentioning, however, one exception: the work of Carlos Lopes (1999), *Kaabunké: space, territory, and power in pre-colonial Guinea-Bissau, the Gambia, and Casamance*, in which the author seeks to understand the Pre-Colonial past linked to the State of Kaabu mainly through historical documents and oral traditions.

This research, therefore, although chronologically situated in the Colonial and Modern periods (16th to 20th centuries), aims primarily to understand the history of the Diola people through local village dynamics, as well as the study of shell mounds and their associated material culture.

Today, we know that shell mounds are one of the most recurrent types of archaeological sites worldwide. The history of research on shell mounds is intertwined with the emergence of archaeology itself in the mid-19th century (Trigger, 1989; Waselkov, 1987). One of the first issues raised by researchers was whether shell mounds were anthropogenic or not. While it is now obvious to us that the majority of shell mounds are the result of human activity in all its complexity, in the early days of archaeological research, there was no consensus on the artificiality of some shell mounds. Some of these debates have occurred in the United States (Waselkov, 1987; p. 139), Brazil (Calazans, 2016), and Senegal.

In the case of Senegal, this discussion persisted until the 1950s (Dieng, 1980; Kantoussan, 2006). This question was primarily championed by Joire, who conducted the first systematic research in the 1930s, with a pioneering excavation taking place in the Saloum Delta region in 1939 (Dieng, 1980). In this excavation, he not only identified the anthropogenic nature of the shell mounds but also pointed out the presence of funerary contexts within the shell mounds. In 1947, he published the most relevant work on shell mounds up to that point, focusing on the

Saint-Louis region at the mouth of the Senegal River (Joire, 1947). Despite the excavations and analysis of the material and sites, he was challenged in the 1950s by Tricart, who rejected the idea of the artificiality of the shell mounds and interpreted the sites as having formed during marine transgression (Tricart apud Mauny, 1957). Mauny reviewed the literature on shell mounds and supported Joire's position, which became accepted by archaeologists working with shell mounds, thereby settling the issue (1957).

Defining the artificiality of shell mounds was an important step for archaeology and brought many other questions into scientific debate. To this day, these questions guide our study of shell mounds. Questions such as: to which period do shell mounds belong? What can we understand from their shapes? What does the stratigraphy reveal about the past? Which molluscs compose the shell mounds, and what do these species tell us about the paleoenvironment? Also, absences, as noted, are significant. The absence of artefacts and remains of domesticated animals may indicate an earlier stage of cultural patterns and chronology. Laing's (1865) conclusion, following the proposal that shell mounds were anthropogenic, was to place the shell mounds within a chronological framework governed by technology, including the famous Stone, Bronze, and Iron Ages (1865). According to Andersen (2000), who works on shell mounds in Scandinavia like Laing, while these sites were fundamental in the development of archaeology as a field, they also reflected changes in research issues and continued to attract significant interest from researchers.

Recent studies have consolidated the importance of shell mound research and have incorporated new possibilities for study (Gutiérrez-Zugasti et al., 2011) and have highlighted how the collection of molluscs has been part of human evolution (De Vynck et al., 2016; Klein & Bird, 2016). The oldest recorded shell mounds to date are found in South Africa, with very ancient dates ranging from 130,000 to 30,000 years BP. Found within caves, these shell mounds represent the earliest systematic human examples of mollusc collection and consumption (De Vynck et al., 2016; Klein & Bird, 2016; Volman, 1978) there has been a debate over the general productivity of intertidal foraging, leading to studies that directly measure productivity in some regions, but there have been no such studies in South Africa. Here we present energetic return rate estimates for intertidal foraging along the southern coast of South Africa from Blombos Cave to Pinnacle Point. Foraging experiments were conducted with Khoi-San descendants of the region, and hourly caloric return rates for experienced foragers were measured on 41 days near low tide and through three seasons over two study years. On-site return rates varied as a function of sex, tidal level, marine habitat type and weather conditions. The overall energetic return rate from the entire sample (1492 kcal h-1. However, this case is isolated, and except for other locations (Klein & Bird, 2016), shell mounds only became a more prominent part of the human landscape in the Holocene, emerging in many parts of the world with different dimensions and complexities.

On the African continent, archaeological research, and particularly that on shell mounds, has developed unevenly among countries. While Senegal boasts a long-standing tradition of research, substantial portions of West Africa and the Central African coast remain underexplored, with either minimal studies or a complete lack thereof. In 1987, Waselkov sought to systematize publications up to that point, and even then, the predominance of studies in Southern Africa was noted (Waselkov, 1987). Beyond the countries mentioned at that time, other areas have recently become the focus of research, such as Egypt (Vermeersch et al., 2005), Eritrea (Mayer & Beyin, 2009), Tanzania (Ichumbaki, 2014; Walz, 2017), and Angola (Da Silva Domingos, 2009). Observing these works, it is possible to ascertain that shell mounds are the subject of two perspectives: understanding ancient human occupations on the coast and how the ethnography of contemporary populations helps us understand the phenomenon. Particularly, Ichumbaki's work in Tanzania resonates with the research presented here by examining the context of recent shell mounds and an approach that combines archaeological interventions and ethnography (2014).

Present on all inhabited continents and in large quantities, the ubiquity of shell mounds raises questions that go beyond a local and regional context, allowing researchers to draw parallels in different parts of the world. As Waselkov aptly pointed out, shell mounds are much more than a place of shell accumulation, as the ubiquity of shells conceals other less visible elements. He states, 'In fact, these other activities may have consumed more time, provided more food, or been considerably more socially significant than shell collection, even though they contribute only a fraction of the archaeological residues' (1987; p. 145). Within the intricacies of their composition lie important information that can reveal key elements, such as their function and meaning in society.

Shell mounds, locally known as '*monti di kaska*' in Kriol, are ubiquitous in the landscape of the Diola *tchon* (traditional territory). Composed mainly of oyster and combé (*Arca senilis* mollusc) shells, they stand out in the landscape and are easily identifiable, whether in villages, mangroves, or estuaries. In virtually every village we visited, people live near or alongside the shell mounds. Therefore, the 'discovery' of these sites by our team consisted in questioning the population about their location (see Chapter 6).

Contrary to what was observed by Meehan (1975) and Bird & Bird (2002; 2000, 1997), which indicate that shellfish processing usually occurred near the collection site, almost all Diola shell mounds (except for Coladje) are located in residential areas, where people carried and processed the shellfish in their own homes. Collection and processing have a marked gender division, in that women's labour dominate the entire journey of the shells until they

reach the shell mounds. Although the importance of this relationship between women and shellfish is recognized both here and in other works (Cormier-Salem, 1987b, 1987a, 1992), for various reasons discussed in Chapter 4, we were unable to fully access this sphere of knowledge, as evidenced in the narrative presented in Chapter 10.

It is important to note that, despite their ubiquity, there is no specific name for shell mounds in the Diola languages (Felupe and Bayot). Therefore, the initial approach when conversing with the people represented a real challenge to try to explain what we were looking for in the area. On many occasions, although the interpretations were not entirely clear, something became evident: except for a few shell mounds, the others do not have any ritual significance for the local populations. For those that have a '*baloba*' or shrine on their surface, I believe that the sacrality is limited to the altar itself, not extending to the entirety of the shell mound, although this does not diminish the importance of the site.

When explaining the existence of large shell mounds in Brazil, which would, in most of the cases, essentially be large funerary mounds made of shells, the Diola were surprised and did not believe that such a phenomenon could occur among them. This was because shell mounds in Guinea-Bissau are primarily produced from the discard of shells and other debris, and their subsequent reuse for other purposes. In other words, shell mounds do not possess an intrinsic mystical symbolism, and thus those who I spoke with were surprised that foreign, white individuals would come from the other side of the world to see these 'mounds of shells/thrash', in the vast majority of cases

I sought to explain what could be discovered in the shell mounds and thus presented the main hypotheses to the populations: Are these shell mounds ancient? Who built them? What is inside them? What is their significance for the contemporary populations?

After posing these questions, in almost all cases, people decided to show us the nearby shell mounds where they lived. During the presentation of the shell mounds, the person accompanying us provided some information, which was recorded in the field. However, the vast majority of shell mounds had no information, and statements such as 'it is old' or 'it is new' were relative to each individuals' experiences and parameters, making generalization difficult. It is also worth noting that only after visiting the shell mounds with the locals, were we able to identify patterns and characteristics that allowed us to generalize, and these were discussed with the villagers to confirm our hypotheses. From these observations, the existence of at least five functions for the shell mounds was identified. These functions are characteristics that allow us to infer some use or significance within society, and by no means limit multiple interpretations or even a confluence of functions under certain circumstances. Meanings are interchangeable in all shell mounds, with each function sharing elements of others. However, when proposing this classification, the most evident social function of the respective shell mounds is proposed, but by no means do I suggest that this function is the only one it fulfils. The five functions identified among the shell mounds found were: midden, barrier, harbour, path/embankment, monument or landmark.

This work then proposes to discuss and, potentially, answer the following questions:

- What things make up the shell mounds, and what do they tell us about the society that made them?
- What functions do the shell mounds have in Diola society today?
- What is the relationship between the shell mounds and the landscape?
- What do shell mounds tell us about the history of the region and Diola society?

To answer these questions, this book is divided into 10 chapters, including different aspects of people's relationships with shells and the construction of shell mounds today and in the past.

In the first chapter, the study area is presented. The concept of *terroir*, so present in and used by Francophone Africanist geography, frames and articulates with the research objectives. To understand *terroir* is to understand the Diola people, and vice versa. Both are builders and built from interaction with each other. In this way, I believe that shell mounds can be privileged places to understand *terroir* in all its complexity and consequently understand the Diola people and their occupation in the territory.

In the second chapter, I aim to present the history of occupation of the Diola territory, using first archaeology and then historiography. The area was occupied uninterrupted occupation for at least 2,000 years and many elements are similar to what we currently find among the Diola. This does not mean that the same group inhabited this territory. Over the centuries, different peoples migrated to the region, often as a result of conflicts. We now understand that Diola populations are an amalgam of peoples who have merged into a common identity, built mainly from an external classification.

In the third chapter, the theoretical bases of archaeological analysis of the shell mounds' function are discussed. By employing the concept of life history and the analysis of archaeological formation processes, examples and theoretical references of other shell mounds in the world are presented to serve as a reference for analysis and comparison. The goal here is to make evident the multifunctional character of the shell mounds and their different meanings during their life trajectory as an artefact.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 present the research methodology employed. In chapter 4, the theoretical basis in the

ethnoarchaeological literature is discussed. Also, I report on how I got into the field: from the choice of theme and the study area, to the difficulties and dilemmas of conducting research among Diola populations. The goal here is to introduce the reader to the world of research construction, something quite distant from the reality of most Western archaeologists, especially Brazilians. Furthermore, it is pertinent to elucidate the foundational framework of this research, that is, research rooted in the principles of ethnoarchaeology. This framework emerges from my engagement with the individuals who are intimately acquainted with the shell mounds, serving as repositories of Indigenous knowledge. The methodological decisions made here emanate from these dialogues and the reception I received. Chapter 5 expands upon the survey endeavours undertaken, delineating the methodology anchored in village-based surveys, deemed most apt for this effort. Additionally, I include a comprehensive inventory of identified sites along with the procedures employed for their identification and documentation.

Finally, closing the methodological portion of the book, chapter 6 deals with the excavations and analysis of the material culture conducted in the shell mounds and the artefacts encountered. The decision-making process regarding shell mounds to be test-excavated and what was found within them, including the stratigraphy and artefacts, are described.

The seventh chapter explains mollusc collection and processing dynamics. From direct ethnographic observation and reports of other authors, I describe which activities occur in the different component places of the *terroir* and how they structure the landscape, creating the Diola identity. Particular attention is paid to the trajectory of shells within Diola society, besides commenting on other central activities in the relationship of people in the domestication of the landscape.

The final chapters, 8, 9, and 10, contain the bulk of the analyses of the shell mounds. Chapter 8 deals with the midden shell mounds. Through ethnographic observation and surveys, different components that sustain their function as a showcase were identified. However, the meanings of middens and garbage among the Diola were also reflected upon and questioned. Chapter 9 deals with the other functions of the shell mounds identified: barrier, port, and paths or causeways, which I believe to be a transformation of the midden shell mounds, a new stage of their lives as an artefact. These different functions show how shell mounds are essential for populations, being fundamental in daily life and allowing a long-term view of why they are built. Finally, to conclude this book, chapter 10 focuses specifically on the shell mounds of the village of Coladje. This area merits particular research focus given the uniqueness of the quantity of shell mounds and their dimensions. Here, hypotheses that explain the construction of the monumental shell mounds of the Icun complex and how they relate to the turbulent historical moment occurring regionally are explored. As pioneering research in the area, there are many more doubts than answers, but this research aims to highlight new possibilities and paths to follow in shell mound archaeology and Africanist ethnoarchaeology.

*

Since independence, there has been an outcry in Guinea-Bissau and other African countries for a history not guided by chronology and sources from the European presence in the region. I believe that the Diola shell mounds allow us to enter this discussion as stakeholders because they are, as will be defended here, a proper synthesis of the Diola *terroir*. Or, stated otherwise, the history of the process of domestication of the landscape. It is listening to human voices in the shells. With all the difficulties of conducting research in an area with limited references, without funding, little time for fieldwork, and, no less challenging, a pandemic, I invite readers to hold the trowel and the field notebook and join this journey through the Diola *terroir*, and to experience how the shell mounds can be so simple but at the same time, so complex. After all, the Brazilian evangelical missionary's question about our presence and research in Guinea-Bissau (chapter 10) does not seem so mistaken: *Who could imagine that shells, something so simple in their daily lives, would be so important?* I hope the reader, like the missionary, will feel convinced of the importance of shells and shell mounds for Diola history and that these shells can open new perspectives for the archaeology and history of Guinea-Bissau.