

2002 – 2005 ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS IN OKIGWE AREA: A PRELIMINARY REPORT

Abstract

There has been an age-long puzzle on the probable place that the progenitors of the Igbo people settled and from there spread to other areas. The answer to this issue has been sought for in the realms of many disciplines ranging from the arts, humanities, social sciences, and pure sciences. Geologists have used the geomorphologic distribution and sloping of hills in an attempt to answer the question. In the same manner, linguists have applied lexico-linguistic interpretations in an attempt to unravel this issue. Historians are at war using oral traditional and ethnographic data from knowledgeable elders as their weapon for tackling this problem. Consequent upon the above issue, the Department of Archaeology and Tourism, University of Nigeria, Nsukka decided to pull the bull by the horn. This culminated in their embarking on a copious work in most parts of eastern Nigeria, Igbo land in particular. Sequel to this, Okigwe area, which is presently divided into two groups viz: the 'Otanzu' and 'Otanchara' with one group in Abia and the other in Imo States of Nigeria was mapped out for the departmental 2002/2003 field work. The research work involved both ethnographic and archaeological approaches. There is much hope that the research result would not only help in throwing more light on the issue at stake, but would also expose the rich cultural and technological ingenuity of the progenitors of the Ibo people of south-eastern Nigeria as regards early lithic industry and metallurgy as found in our study area.

Introduction

The disparity in view of the origin of Igbo people has led to a conceptualized issue such as culture areas and/or core area (Ibeanu 2000; Kroebe 1939; Clark 1917; Onwuejeogwu 1977; Arkell and Weko 1965). Scholars such as Green (1964) believes that Awka – Okigwe – Orlu axis were ancestral or point of origin from where the rest of the Igbo people later settled by waves of migration, while others (Afigbo 1976, 1981; Henderson 1972) are of the view that Niger – Benue confluence are the most probable homeland of the ancestors of the Igbo people. Nevertheless, scholars like Ntukidem (1976), Ijeoma (1989) has dismissed the later view with a claim that it lacks linguistic evidence.

Nevertheless, the study of Nri civilization by Onwuejeogwu (1987) pointed towards Nsukka – Okigwe – Afikpo triangle. Ibeanu (2000) is of the view that the core and major dispersal centres in the Igbo culture area as pointed by Onwuejeogwu (1987) relied mainly on aspect of technological developments such as stone tools, iron technology, pottery, among others. In addition, copious archaeological sites/materials in Okigwe must have informed Ibeanu (2000) to opine that Okigwe, an ancient town in Isiukwuato local government area of Abia State is perhaps “a part of the Igbo heartland”.

Presently, several research works have been done at Okigwe (Ibeanu 2000; Shaw 1970; Anozie, et. al. 1978; Nzewunwa 1983; Gove 1951; Farrington 1952; Umeji 1995; etc.) to fill the yawning gap in the understanding of Igbo culture history (Afigbo 1991). It is also believed that the colonial anthropologists created this gap as a result of their paying little or no attention to the study of Igbo material culture (Ibeanu 2000).

Based on the above, the department of Archaeology and Tourism, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, conducted an excavation at Owerre-Isunabo (a hamlet in Uturu) to elicit

information useful for the understanding of early settlement within the area under study. This paper is therefore aimed at examining archaeological materials in Okigwe for our understanding of early human settlement in Okigwe and its environs as well as the socio-cultural dynamics of the Igbo people in both time and space.

Background Information of Okigwe

The Okigwe area is located within Latitude $5^{\circ} 40'$ – $60^{\circ} 03'$ N, (Ibeanu 2000). Okigwe area belonged to the rainforest zone and lies in the transition zone between the tropical grasslands of northern Nigeria and the forest zone of the south (Monanu 1975). One outstanding geomorphologic feature is the Nsukka – Okigwe – Awgwu cuesta, which trends from north to south towards Okigwe. Alternating layers of sandstones and shale's characterize the escarpment. As a result, differential erosions have carved out the shale's into valleys living the sandstones as ridges and scarps. This in-turn gave rise to the series of caves and rock shelters stretching from the northern end of Benue state to its southern end around Arochukwu (Umeji 1992 cited in Ibeanu 2000).

The Okigwe area comprises two main groups of Igbo speaking people identified and known as Otanchara and Otanzu clans; thus:

Much of what used to be known as the Okigwe area under one administrative headquarters at Okigwe is now divided between Imo and Abia state. While the Otanchara communities are still in Imo state with Okigwe as the administrative headquarters, the Otanzu on the other hand, have been carved into Abia state with Isiukwuato as the administrative headquarters, (Ibeanu 2000).

Early geological and mineralogical surveys have shown that the Okigwe area has very rich mineral deposits (Kitson 1913; Bain 1924; Wilson and Bain 1928; Simpson 1955 and Reyment 1965). Among the mineral resources are coal and shale's with high clay content in some locations.

Data Collection/Reconnaissance

An Ethnoarchaeological method was employed during the fieldwork. For long, archaeologists use ethnographic methods and field reconnaissance to interpret and explain material remains. This method is what Stile (1977) defined as a sub-discipline of anthropology, encompassing all the theoretical and methodological aspects of comparing ethnographic and archaeological data including the use of the ethnographic analogy and archaeological ethnography. In our study area, we collected original ethnographic data from aged knowledgeable elders believed to have relevant information of the past, which aided in our archaeological interpretations. Simultaneously, full-fledged archaeological reconnaissance was conducted in the study area and through that, many evidences, which can give clue to early human settlement in our study area were collected.

Among such evidences were both natural and cultural sites that are of great relevance to our study. Among some of these natural and cultural sites, which would help us in the reconstruction of early human settlement in our study area are:

1. Ugwuele Stone Tool Factory Site:

Ugwuele is one of the villages in Uturu town in Isiukwuato local government area of Abia State. The site is about 7km north of the Hope-Ville Rehabilitation Centre which is found immediately one enters Uturu from Okigwe. Uturu is 10km. east of Okigwe on the Okigwe/Afikpo road (Anozie, et. al. 1978). The site is on a dolerite ridge at the scarp-foot of the "Awgu" Escarpment (see fig. 1). The dominant grasses are *Pennisetum purpureum* and *Andropogon spp.* etc. (Grove 1951; Farrington 1952).

So far, three excavations have been done on this site. However, the main tool types found in this large-scale industrial site are mainly Acheulian tool types, which includes *hand axes, cleavers, and some Sangouan cultural tools like the picks.*

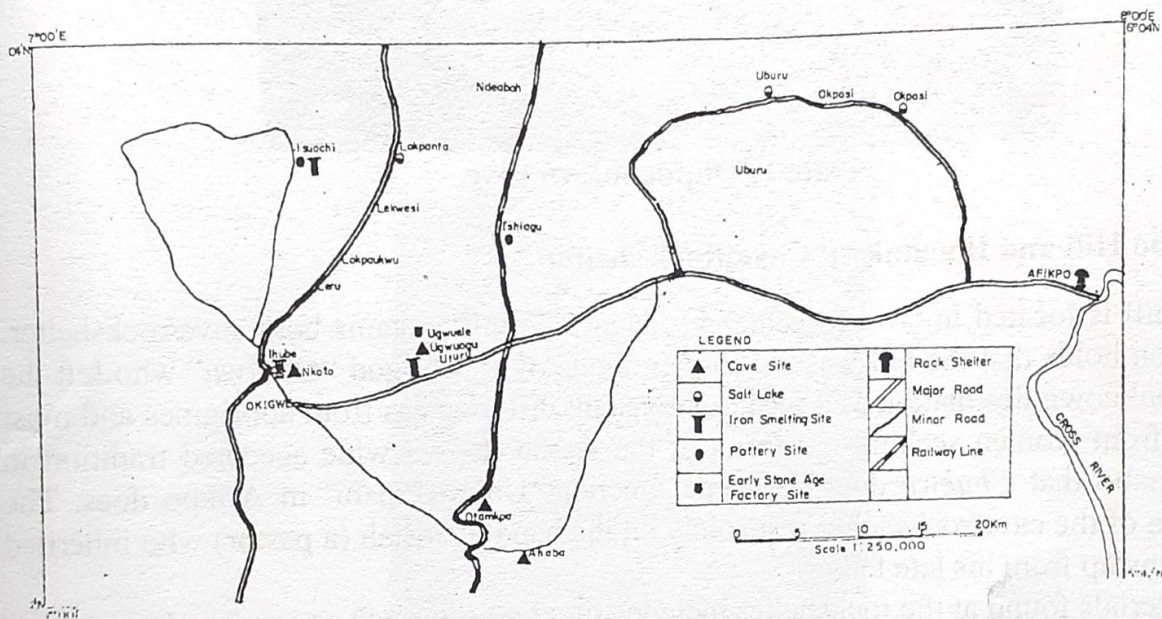


Figure 1: Map Showing Various Archaeological Sites in the Study Area
Source: Ibeanu (2000)

2. Okpuchukwu Cave:

The cave is located on a sand stone out-crop behind the Isiukwuato Boys High School, Akoba village of Otamkpa. The outcrop trends from east to west direction and the cave cavities face northwards (Ibeanu 2000). Ibeanu's work on the site revealed that the cave slope undergoes annual bush burning because of hunting activities. In his words, "various traditional traps were observed within the vicinity of the caves". He also maintained that the farmers stored farming implements and bundles of cassava sticks for planting inside the cave. In the words of Ibeanu (2000):

The cave floor was seen to be littered with palm kernel, burnt leaves and charcoal specks brought into the cave by rodents, human activities, and wind actions.

The current occupant of the cave as at the time of visiting was the honey bees (see plate 1).



Plate 1: Okpuchukwu cave

3. Ogu-Agbo Hill and Ihuchukwu Cave/Rock shelter

Ogu-agbo hill is located in Owerre-Isunabo village. The hill contains both cave/rockshelter. Oral tradition holds that the hill was the former abode of a local god “*Chukwu*” who left the hill for an unknown destination as a result of constant disturbances from aborigines and most especially, from women seeking the fruits of the womb. It is a wide accepted tradition in Owerre-Isunabo that *Chukwu* does the same function ‘Ubini-Ukpabi’ in Afikpo does. The conservation of the cave/rockshelter rest solely on the hand of Josiah (a pastor) who inherited the custodianship from his late father.

Materials found at the rockshelter includes ritual objects such as candles, big wooden cross, ritual pots, long benches, local iron bell, among others. These materials apart from stone tools are indicative of a spiritual church; while on top of the hill, we observed materials such as iron cross (short one), ritual pot filled with ashes, and evidence of dried water-logged area, which is an indicative of spiritual bathing. Based on our findings, the place might be termed “holy of holies”, as depicted by an extension of the spiritual church at the rockshelter below. One of the caves at the top contains water, which is very cool with hive of bees at the entrance.

The two entrances leading into the cave was under lock and key. Ethnographic research conducted there revealed that Josiah as a conservative measure to restrain unauthorized visit into the cave built the doors. However, attempts to get him open the doors proved abortive as he was out of town as of the time we visited the cave. More importantly, materials observed at the doors of the cave are bowel clay pot, potsherds, a local hunting trap, a grindstone – mortar and a hand axe. In addition was a miniature wasted stone axe.

Our archaeological reconnaissance latter took us to Owerre-Isunabo where we collected some ethnographic information about the people before embarking on an excavation in two identified mounds found in the area.

The hamlet according to oral information is made up of three major clans viz: Agba-Owere, Ihengwu and Elu-ama. Their main occupation is farming. Hence, they are mainly engaged in subsistence agricultural practices. The women among them are also engaged in palm produce and production of certain local crafts like weaving of mats as there are abundant raw materials for this within the vicinity. This can be evidenced by the abundance of *Pandanus* palm within the vicinity.

Religiously, they believe in the existence of 'Supreme Being' known as *Chukwu* and are mainly traditional religious worshipers until the introduction of Christianity (see plate: 2).

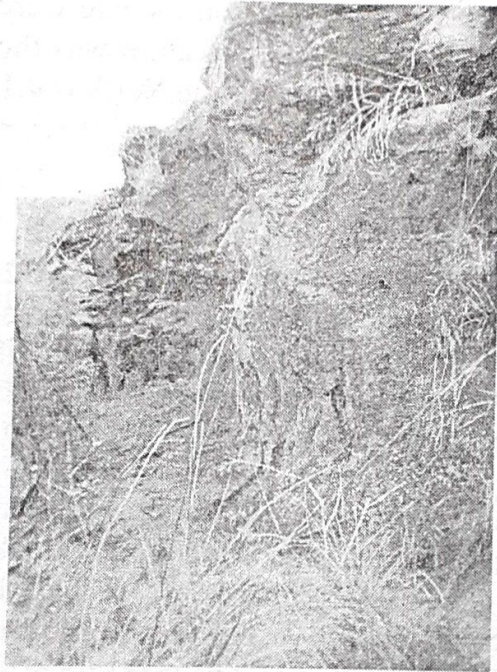


Plate 2: Ogu-agbo Cave/Rock-shelter

Excavation at Owerre-Isunabo

Archaeological excavation can be defined as a systematic recovery and study of material evidence such as buildings, tools, and pottery that remains from past human life and culture; (Hester, et. al. 1975). Andah and Okpoko (1994) sees it as the principal (but not the only) means by which the archaeologist gather data about the past, mainly from beneath the ground surface. With reference to our objectives to gather materials relevant for our explanation and/or for the support of earliest settlement of man in Okigwe, we first sought for where to conduct our excavation. Our search includes areas of concentration of material remains like heaps of potsherds, slags, any material culture in sight, abandoned settlement, among others.

With the help of other fieldwork coordinators (Prof. A. I. Okpoko, and Dr. A. M. Ibeanu), two mounds were identified. One was very close to the house of Mr. Ebi while the other was within a plantain plantation. After a thorough examination of the two mounds, the mound within the plantain plantation was mapped out for excavation. This was because, the area is a mound which has accumulated for a long period and positioned within the centre of

the village. It is our belief that it would contain more residues of the early and present occupants of the study area, which would help us in the reconstruction of the history and early settlement of people in the study area.

Mapping of the Site

We made use of our plane table with tripod stand to which a sheet of coordinated paper was affixed with a drafting tape.

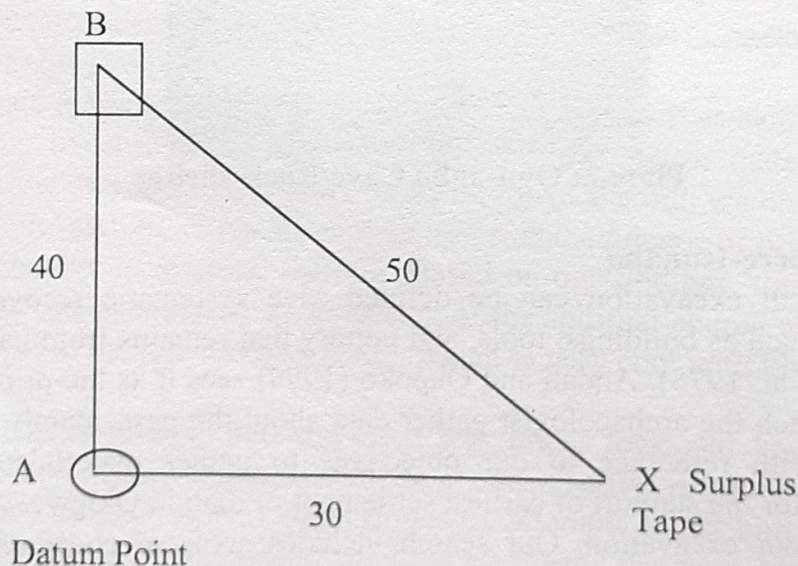
Establishment of Datum Point

A control point, from which all measurements on the site were made, was a terrain feature very close to the area to be grided. The terrain feature was the Northern wall of Mr. Ebi's house. From our tripod stand, the datum point to the North is 4.17m. From the datum point to the test pit is 5m northeast with the degree of 60° NE.

Laying of the Grids

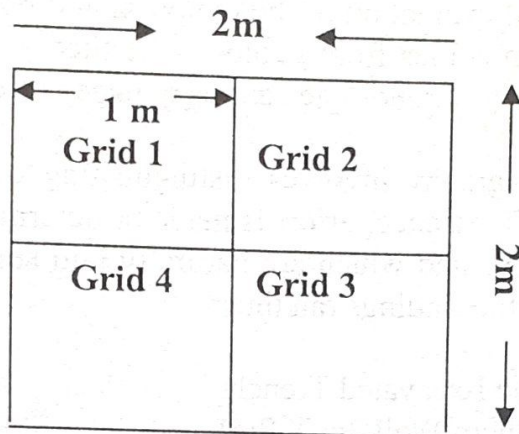
We ran a tape along the site meridian from the initial point of 12m, at which point a reference stake was placed, and a hub tack was set on the top of the stake. Another tape was laid from the stake at the 12m point on the meridian to the 9m-point on the base line. The intervening diagonal was measured exactly 15m to achieve the right angle. In addition, we adjusted the base in other to establish the right angle.

Figure 2: Pythagorean Theorem



It is also pertinent to point out here that in the course of gridding the mapped area for excavation, we grided an area of **2m X 2m**. Below is a diagrammatic representation of our grids

Figure 3: Trench 1 in Grids

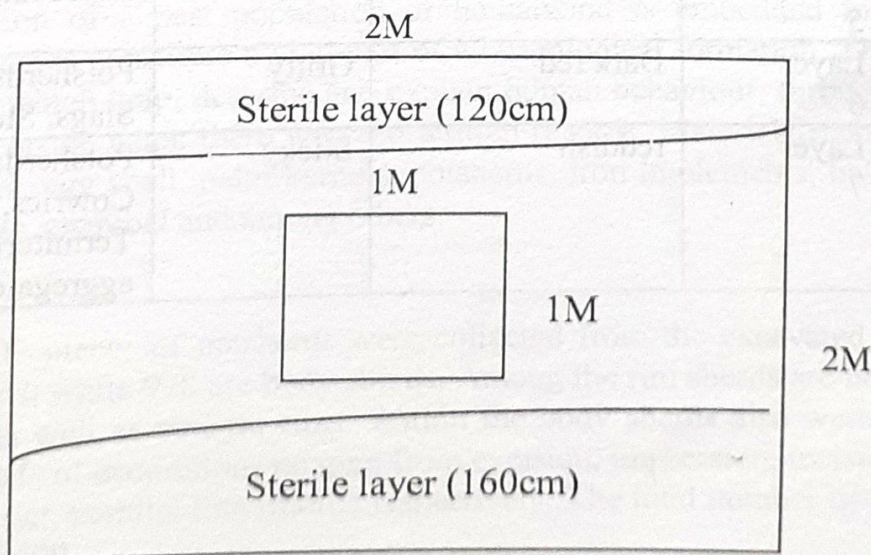


The Excavation Proper

The excavation of this site started in 2002/2003 and terminated in 2004/2005. According to Hester, et. al. (1975), once an area of a site has been chosen for excavation, the archaeologist must choose the appropriate excavation method. The choice will depend on the type of site being investigated and on the specific goals of the expedition. The ‘Arbitrary’ level method was used during the excavation. Excavation began with the removal of the “Over burden” consisting mainly of stones, iron cast slags, potsherds, beads, roots and rootlets. Excavation was done at 10cm arbitrary level.

It is pertinent to state that during the excavation, the southern part of the trench reached its sterile layer at 120cm. In the same vein, the northern part got to its sterile layer at 160cm, leaving the center of the trench with ashes. This action necessitated our mapping out of 1m by 1m from the excavating trench of 2m by 2m. The excavation was completed on getting to the sterile layer of 1m by 1m at spit 23 (230cm depth). This depth was gotten at our second trip in 2004.

Figure 4: A Diagrammatic Representation of our Excavated Trench



Stratigraphy of our Excavated Trench

The interpreted significance of Stratification is called Stratigraphy. That is, Stratigraphy refers to the archaeological evaluation of the temporal and positional meaning of the observed strata. "Although the term comes from geology, the theory of Stratigraphy is a basic tools in archaeology without which chronologies and sequences of events could not be constructed" (Encarta 2004).

Functional dimension of Stratigraphy involves distinguishing evidences of natural activity from that of cultural activity –in essence, effort is made to determine which layers in the stratified deposit are cultural features and which are naturally laid sorts, (Encarta 2004). At the end, the stratigraphic layers and the findings ran thus:

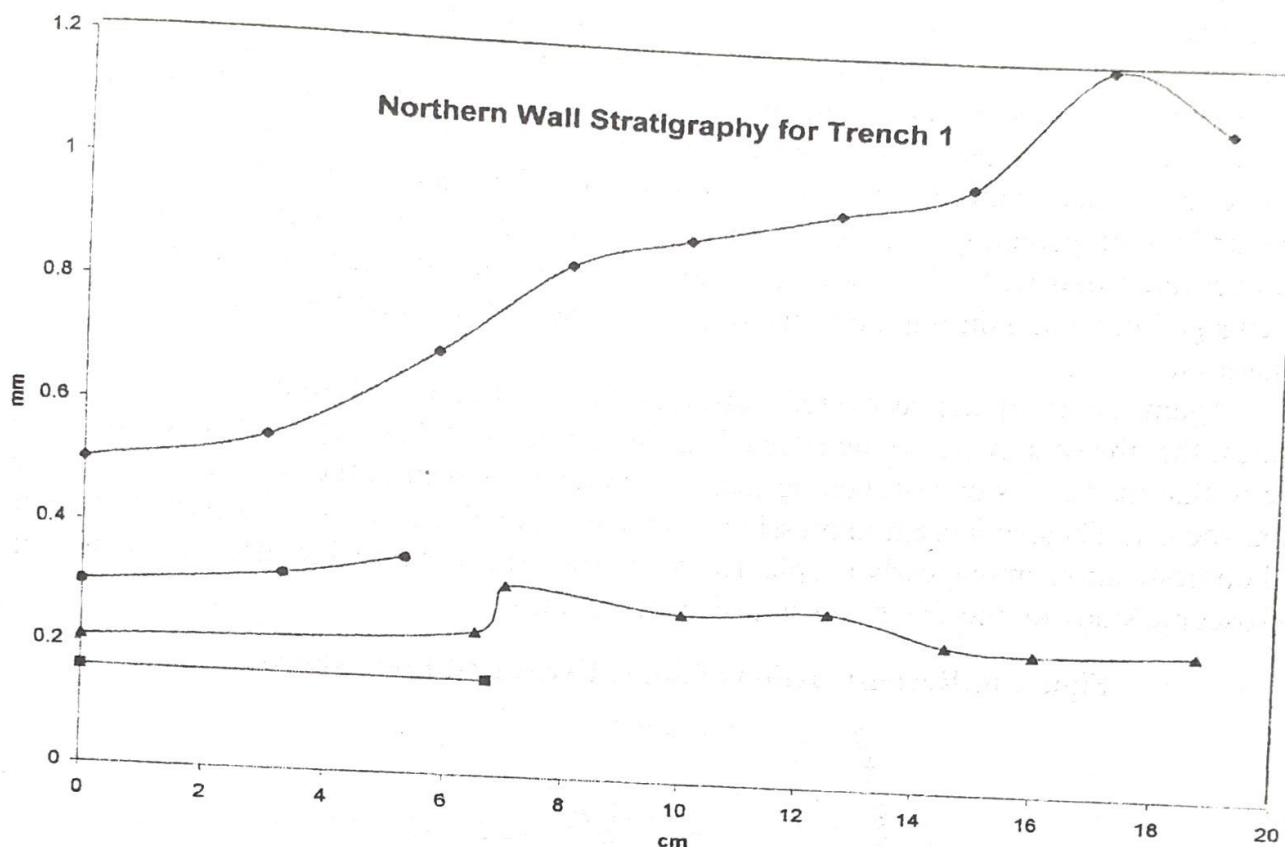
Table 1: The Stratigraphic Layers of the Excavated Trench
(Northern Wall 2m X 2m)

S/No	Layers	Colour	Texture	Findings/artifacts
1	Top soil	humus	Gritty	Stone
2	Layer 1	brown	Gritty	Potsherds, Rootlets, Slags, Stones, Beads
3	Layer 2	Reddish brow	Sticky	Potsherds, Iron slags, Cowries, Snail Shell, Termiterian aggregates
4	Layer 3	Reddish brow	Sticky	Potsherds and slags
5	Layer 4	reddish	Sticky	-----

(Northern Wall 1m X 1m in 2m X 2m)

S/No	Layers	Colour	Texture	Findings/artifacts
6	Layer 5	reddish	Gritty	Charcoal, Potsherds
7	Layer 6	Dark red	Gritty	Potsherds, Rootlets, Slags, Stones, Beads
8	Layer 7	reddish	Sticky	Potsherds, Iron slags, Cowries, Snail Shell, Termiterian aggregates

Fig: 5 Stratigraphy of the Northern wall of the excavated site.



The layers were formed using the colours that appeared on the sectioned wall. In the absence of Munson colour chart, we sprinkled water on the sectioned wall to demarcate the different colours. The texture of the soil was identified by feeling of the soil with the fingers.

Archaeological Analysis and Interpretation of Finds

The remains of the past inhabitants are among the key concerns of archaeologists. Valuable information of a past population of humankind is embedded in their material remains. These remains constitute a vital part of archaeological formation. These formations are those artifacts, which help, describe and explain human behaviour; throughout these vast riches of time and space when there were no written records. Materials recovered from the site include cowries, egg shell, palm kernels, potsherds, iron implements, baked clay, upper grinding stone, slags, charcoal and among others.

1. Potsherds

About 1,409 pieces of potsherds were collected from the excavated trench. 431 of which are rim sherds; while 978 are body sherds. Among the rim sherds are both the inverted and everted rims as well as straight rims. Within the body sherds also were differences in techniques and motifs of decorations ranging from excision, impression, incision (techniques) to smooth surface, net, parallel line (motif) respectively. The total number of potsherds from both trenches was 1,409.

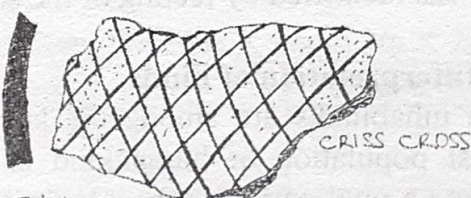
The discovery of potsherds in any archaeological site is of a great importance because of the enormous information to glean from its in-depth study. Most of the colours of the various potsherds were black, brown, light brown, reddish, etc. but the one in greater number is black, which indicates its production through slipping (especially the burnished ones). Some of the motifs include smooth surface, criss-cross line and parallel lines (see fig. 6). This shows the various skills involved in pot making in this society. Through this study, also one can trace culture diffusion. Motif study of potsherds can also lead to our understanding of people's subsistence characteristics. Thus, from observable features on these excavated potsherds, there was net impression, which indicates that the society must have engaged in fishing during their time or that the idea was imported through trade contact, marriage, etc.

Again, some of the recovered potsherds have maize cob designs on them, which indicates: that the society has knowledge of maize in time past; that they may have cultivated maize or that maize was one of their agricultural products as seen in the economic life of the present society. Thus, any grain impressions on the pot can also lead to our understanding of cereal domestication among early people. However, such study is possible through the help of a microscopic study on the shape and size of ancient grains.

Figure 6: Reconstruction of Some Excavated Body-sherds



Thickness: 0.4 cm
Motif: Smooth
Technique: Burnishing



Thickness: 0.7 cm
Motif: criss cross
Technique: Incision



Thickness: 0.5 cm
Motif: Parallel lines
Technique: Excision

Iron Slags

The proliferation and/or existence of smelted iron slags in our finds indicated actually that the people smelted iron. The presence of unused iron ore (O_2 Limonite) indicates the availability of raw materials for iron smelting. During our excavation, 422 pieces of big fragments of slags were discovered.

Baked Clay Pieces

These include both tuyere fragments and pieces of furnace walls. A number of these were discovered in the course of the excavation indicating the existence of iron smelting in Owerre-Isunabo. The total number of baked clay excavated was 86.

Summary and Conclusion

A thorough study of the ethnographic and archaeological work in our area of research showed that Okigwe area has all the conducive atmosphere and necessities required by man for survival. These necessities, which attracted man to inhabit an area usually comes in three folds viz: food, shelter, and water. Under food, we have abundance of game animals.

From our study, it was discovered that all these necessities are found in our area of study. The Okigwe area or rather the inhabitants of the area are surrounded by hills and hence, live in valley, there by using the hills as fortification mechanism from external invaders. The ubiquitous rock shelters and caves as found there provide shelters to the early inhabitants in the olden days. There was also ethnographic information that people ran into the caves during sanguinary war with their neighbours. Further, more, the area is located in a tropical savannah environment where there are abundant supplies of wild animals. From our archaeological reconnaissance, we discovered that the area has many streams and springs among which is the *Nwogba* spring. These springs and streams supply them water for their daily chores. Thus, from the above analysis, these necessities and their availability in the study area must have attracted the early settlers there.

From our excavation, the area excavated as earlier mentioned is a mound. This mound through ethnographic information was formed because of the inhabitants of Owerre-Isunabo dumping their refuse in a large hole where the ward members dug up clay for constructing their architectural buildings. More evidence on this was found following the chronological sequence/occurrence of material remains found in the site.

The materials found attest to one aspect of the people's culture or the other. The cowry shells are indicative of the barter system of trade or what we can call the pre-coinage currency period in the area. The snail shells and bones of different animals found there are indicative of their dietary habits. The potsherds with their techniques of decoration and motifs resemble the present pots used by the people there by establishing cultural continuity between the early settlers and the present inhabitants. The presence of iron slags is indicative of large-scale iron production especially with the people of Ugwu-Ogwu also in Uturu Okigwe. Finally and most importantly, the *Ugwuele* industrial lithic tool production site, which has been ascribed to belong to the *Acheulian* culture, is an indicative that man inhabited the eastern part of Nigeria during that time; a period, which was dated to have lasted as far back as 1.6 - .095my ago – a geologic time period referred to as the middle Pleistocene. Whether

the makers of these 'hand axes' and 'cleavers' have any connotation with the Iwo-Eleru man found with the upper Paleolithic tools is a matter of scholarly debate.

It is therefore our contention here that from the above research and evidences accruing from it, one can be justified to conclude that the Okigwe area had an early settlement in the discussion of Igbo settlement and dispersal. This can be adduced from the environmental and geomorphologic factors available in the area. Archaeological and ethnographic evidences from the study area add more evidence to this fact.

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Introductory Overview

Essentially, the law of contempt is designed to regulate the press in exercise of freedom without scandalizing the court or its officers. The emphasis is on self-control in reporting freedom with a sense of duty of care. McQuinn (2000:132) put it succinctly thus: "The power (of the press) comes with its responsibility to exercise it with great caution and respect for others". All the institutions of the society are expected to demonstrate and exhibit mutual respect for each other as they all perform for the betterment of the society. In Poynter's (1945) A.C. the court explained the purpose of the law of contempt of court as follows:

The purpose of the discipline enforced by the court in the case of contempt is the need to protect the dignity of the court or the person of the judge and to prevent public interference with the administration of justice but not to bolster up the power and dignity of the judge as an individual. To maintain law and order judges have and must have power at once to deal with those who offend against it.

Even in the United States where the First Amendment enjoins the Congress to "make no law abridging the freedom of speech or of the press", the court is given sweeping powers to punish those who disobey or act contemptuously to its orders. In *United States v. Poynter*, the associate editor of the *Miami Herald*, a newspaper of general circulation was charged with contempt for publishing two editorials that were considered "unlawfully critical of the administration of