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Slag Heaps in a Silent Landscape: Archaeological Evidence for Early Iron Smelting at Owerre-Elu and the Urgency of Heritage Intervention

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Abstract

This report presents the findings of an archaeological field investigation conducted at Owerre-Elu between 4 and 15 December 2025, undertaken as a rigorous field-school training exercise for third-year students of the Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The exercise was designed not merely to instruct, but to immerse students in the fundamental disciplines of archaeological fieldwork while simultaneously generating critical data for reconstructing the early history and archaeometallurgical heritage of the community. The investigation employed a multi-method approach comprising oral interviews, systematic reconnaissance survey, and controlled excavation. Oral testimonies revealed a community with a profoundly rich cultural heritage – expressed through vibrant festivals, elaborate rituals, sacred objects, and venerated sites – yet one whose technological memory bears a striking lacuna. Massive heaps of slag littering the landscape provide unequivocal evidence that iron was once smelted on an industrial scale. Paradoxically, the current inhabitants possess no knowledge of this metallurgical past, raising urgent questions about cultural discontinuity and the erasure of technological memory. Reconnaissance survey and excavation were specifically targeted to interrogate the problem of early iron smelting – a task made critically urgent by the accelerating transformation of the landscape into farmland, commercial premises, and residential housing. Each passing season threatens to obliterate the archaeological record before it can be documented. This study argues with pressing conviction that the early iron smelting site at Owerre-Elu demands immediate preservation – not merely as an academic curiosity, but as a vital heritage resource, a reservoir of untapped archaeological data, and a foundation for sustainable tourism development. The window for intervention is narrowing.

Keywords: Archaeological, Excavation, Reconnaissance, Owerre-Elu, Nsukka

Introduction

Archaeological investigation was conducted at Owerre-Elu Nsukka from the 4th to the 15th of December 2025, by a group of third-year students of the Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka (Plate 1). The research was part of the field teaching and training school embarked upon by the department to bridge the gap between theory and practice. It is part of the fulfillment of the academic requirement, which stipulates that the exercise is not just an experiential but a practical component deliberately designed to align with and complement the theoretical facets of the course. Through hands-on engagement, students are expected to apply the knowledge gained in the classroom setting to real-world scenarios, thereby enhancing their understanding and proficiency in the subject matter.

Owerre-Elu early iron smelting site is among the numerous iron sites in the Nsukka area. Other sites include Opi, Lejja, Orba, Obimo, Aku, Nru, Ekwegbe, Onyohor and Umundu



(Okafor & Philips 1992, Anozie 1979, Okpoko 2006, Eze-Uzomaka 2009, Itanyi 2013 and Uzuegbu, 2020). Okafor (1995) used charcoal samples from some of these sites to determine the chronological sequence of the sites. He delineated three phases of early iron smelting in the Nsukka area, with Opi, Lejja, and Aku belonging to the earliest group, dated about the 8th century B.C; Owerre-Elu, Nru-Ishiakpu axis (800-1450 A. D.), belonging to the middle period, and Umundu, Orba, and Ehandiagu (1430-1950) grouped into the late period. Similarly, at Lejja, Eze-Uzomaka (2009) obtained dates of 4805Bp - 200Bp and 3445Bp-144 Bp. Arguably, these dates suggest that iron smelting in the Nsukka area spanned over a long period of time, with Owerre-Elu belonging to the last phase of iron smelting. In another breath, archaeologists like Anozie (1979), Ekechukwu (1989), and Okpoko (2006) suggested that bowl, dome, and shaft furnaces were earlier used by Nsukka iron smelters, while Okafor (1995) suggested that forced draught shaft furnaces were instead used by early iron smelters in the Nsukka area. In addition, Okafor (1995) noted that among the materials collected from Owerre-Elu, there were no physical remnants of furnaces and tuyeres; it became difficult to determine with certainty whether smithing and smelting took place at the site.

Owerre-Elu village has been impacted differently in many ways by modernization due largely to its location in the center of Nsukka Urban. Of interest, the land where iron was smelted has largely been used for other purposes, including the establishment of the Nsukka Modern Timber market, farming, construction of houses, and roads. These activities of land grabbing negatively impact the preservation of relics associated with early iron smelting, thereby obliterating basic information about iron smelting in the area. This is coupled with the fact that the locals do not know about the iron smelting in the area, and they are less concerned about it. The fieldwork was designed to document the cultural history and materiality of the people of Owerre-Elu in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State.

Methodology

The study was carried out through an ethno-archaeological research method involving oral interviews, reconnaissance, excavation, and photographic documentation. The interview was to enable those who are knowledgeable about the culture of the people to talk freely and give all the information they have on the subject matter. The key respondents included the *Onyishi*-spiritual head of Owerre-Elu and keepers of the tradition of the people. With the help of the *Onowu*-king maker, who acted as the interpreter, all the answers to our questions were provided. Archaeological reconnaissance was carried out at the timber market and adjoining farm lands, while a portion of the slag heap was excavated. Secondary sources, including reviews of published archaeological studies and unpublished materials like books, journals, theses, monographs, and magazines, were used to complement the primary sources. The data collected were analyzed using tables, pie charts, and descriptive statistics.

The Study Area

Nsukka Igbo community is originally made up of three quarters, namely Nkpunano, Nru, and Ihe/Owerre. Ihe/Owerre quarter is further divided into Ihe and Owerre communities, while Nru is further divided into Ihe-agu, Umu-Oyo, and Ezema n'Edem. Nkpunano was

split into Ngwuru, Isiakpu, Echara, and Umakashi, thereby bringing Igbo Nsukka to nine autonomous communities. Our study area, Owerre-Elu, is a village in the Owerre autonomous community. (Fig.1). Owerre-Elu village is made up of two families, namely Umu-Ugwuoke and Umuoma.

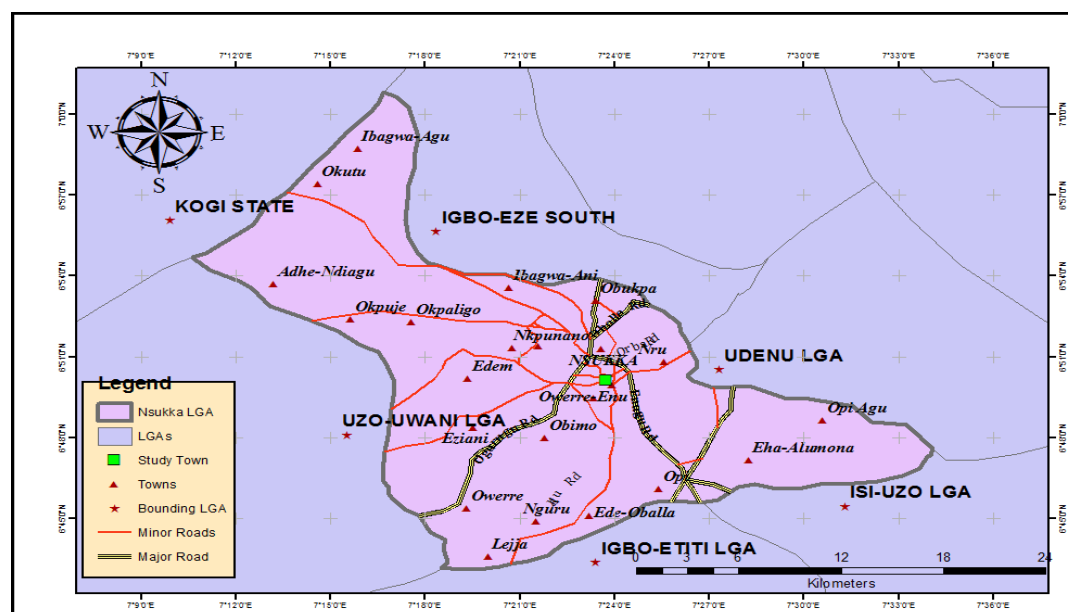


Fig 1: Map of Nsukka showing Owerre-Elu



Plate 1: Archaeology Project Team with respondents at Owerre-Elu

Data Presentation

Presentation of data in this section is centered on ethnographic and archaeological data collected during the study.

Ethnographic survey: The ethnography of the people is presented to cover the political, socio-economic, and religious life of the people. At the apex of the political structure of the Owerre autonomous community is the traditional ruler, *Igwe*. There is the *Onyishi*, typically the eldest man who holds the authority to oversee the activities of the Owerre-Elu community while Attama is the chief priest of each particular village. Further

enriching the leadership spectrum is the traditional Prime Minister-*Asogwa-Owerre*, Chief Ozioko Paulinus, who also doubles as the cultural chairman of Owerre town.

Agriculture is one of the economic activities through which people sustain themselves. The agricultural landscape is a diverse venture featuring the cultivation of crops that include staples like banana, cassava, palm fruit, plantain, cocoa-yam, pepper, and animal husbandry. Beyond the fields, a notable percentage of villagers embrace alternative occupations that add a layer of diversity to the community's economic landscape. Among these occupations are skilled artisans, such as basket weavers, and local orthopedic doctors, who contribute to the well-being of fellow villagers. Some herbalists are armed with extensive knowledge of local herbs, as they provide remedies for snake and dog bites. In Owerre-Elu, there is interplay between traditional religious adherents and Christianity. While a considerable majority has gravitated toward the tenets of the Christian faith, a minority of traditionalists persists, their commitment to ancient rituals and ceremonies serving as living monuments to the enduring legacy of African customs. This coexistence, characterized by a delicate dance between modernity and tradition, creates a captivating mosaic that unfolds within the heart of the village. There is a collection of water bodies, such as *Ishi-iyi*, *Ujele*, *Ala*, and *Ukwu-Echikara*, which serve both drinking water and spiritual purposes. From the interactions with the locals, it became clear that they have no idea how the several iron slags scattered around the community came about. Some postulated that the slags grew from the ground because they dig them up during cultivation, while others note that they are a type of stone that occurs ordinarily. The people also have no cultural festival associated with iron smelting, as there is no blacksmith in the community after the death of the last one many years ago.

In Owerre-Elu, just like in many Igbo communities, kolanut has a deep spiritual and cultural value. It represents life, truth, unity, acceptance, and it carries so much weight in Igbo tradition that people often say, "*onye wetara oji wetara ndu*" – whoever brings kolanut brings life. In the study area, the process of presenting and breaking kolanut is treated with a kind of reverence, often carried out by male elders who are seen as guardians of tradition. Still, it is not like women are completely excluded, as they have their own space and roles, like during women-only gatherings where they are allowed to break kolanut too.

Before prayers are offered, the kolanut is carefully broken, and the number of lobes it reveals is not just random; it is meaningful. One lobe kola is considered sacred, often called *oji ogbi* or *oji mmuo*, not meant for general acceptance but for special figures like titled men or priests. Two lobe kolanut is not useful in the Igbo tradition. Three-lobed kolanuts are known as *oji Ikenga*, usually linked to people of significant achievements, such as warriors and other accomplished people. There is the four-lobed kolanut, which is kind of the ideal, representing the four traditional Igbo market days: *Eke*, *Orie*, *Afor*, and *Nkwo*. It is seen as a blessing and a symbol of peace. If it has five lobes, it is believed to bring fertility *oji omumu*; something families looking to grow would cherish. Six lobes suggest a spiritual bridge between the living and ancestors, and seven lobes are viewed as extremely powerful, bringing double blessings, wealth, children, and general well-being.

In Owerre-Elu and Nsukka in general, the tallow tree *Ofor Datarium microcarpum* a sacred with deep respected for its ties to truth and fairness. It is especially central in the selection

of the *Onyishi*, the oldest man in a village who becomes the community's spiritual and traditional head. The branch that will be used for this process must fall naturally, and its head must point east towards the rising sun. That direction is believed to guard the new *Onyishi* from untimely death. Once a suitable *Ofor* is found, it is tied to the hand of the chosen elder. Other rituals follow to confirm his new role. It is also important to know that the *Ofor* is not something that gets passed down. When a leader dies, a new one is found and blessed with a new *Ofor*. Traditionally, the *Ofor*, along with another sacred item called the buffalo tail *Odu-Atu*, was used to settle disputes, call on the gods, and deliver justice. People took it seriously. But now, things have changed. Modern religions and new values have led many people to see the *Ofor* as a relic of the past, something fetishistic or too traditional. These days, some elders, even newly selected *Onyishi*, refuse to swear in with the *Ofor*. They would rather take their oaths with the Christian cross, believing it aligns more with their faith. Still, among many, the power of the *Ofor* has not faded.

Egba Onunu: One of the most exciting and widely celebrated cultural events in Nsukka is the *Egba Onunu* Festival. It is an annual event which lasts about 28 days, usually sometime between late March and early April. This period is heralded by Mgburu-Ahua, a solemn period to dislodge the wounding year. What makes it so special is that it brings together every village in Nsukka. It is vibrant, spiritual, and a huge social affair. The festival is held in honor of Nkwo, a legendary woman who is believed to be the ancestral mother of the people. She lived a life of great sacrifice, helping and feeding the community, and when she died, the people were so moved that they deified her. She became *Nkwo Nsukka*, also lovingly called *Lolo Anyi* or *Nne Muru Oha*, meaning "Our Queen" or "Mother of All." A square named after her eventually grew into the famous *Nkwo Market*.

Omabe Festival: This is another deeply spiritual celebration in Nsukka land. This one is all about reconnecting with the spirits of the ancestors. It lasts differently for each quarter; about three months for Nru and Mkpunano, and for six months for Ihe/Owerre. The festival commences with Mgbahuete *Omabe*, which signals that the spirits are on their way. Night after night, the sound of *Omabe* music fills the air, and the voice of the masquerade can be heard echoing through the village. Youths get busy rebuilding the *Ulo Okiti*, or masquerade house, while women prepare food. On the eve of the festival *Eke-Ma*, a special dish made from cocoyam, *Echicha*, is prepared and eaten. This marks the end of the work of the mysterious nocturnal spirit called *Onyekurunye*, which comes ahead of the main masquerade. The arrival (*Uda-Ma*) happens on an *Orie* day, which is chosen by the high priest after sighting the moon and other considerations. Then comes *Ututu Ahor*, a kind of public holiday filled with celebration, though the masquerades still stay hidden. Four days later, the *Omabe* finally appears at the *Orie Nsukka* market in a grand entrance known as *Imaji n'Onu Okachi*. From then on, the masquerades come out at intervals until the final phase, *Ashua Ula*- the big exit.

There is also the *Ashua Mgboto*, which features the *Oriokpa* masquerade, a playful and powerful figure that warns everyone that the *Omabe* is nearing its end. As the festival wraps up, rituals are done to send the spirits back peacefully. Elders lead prayers and offer sacrifices, guiding the *Omabe* to return to the spirit world. During this time, all uninitiated adults have to stay indoors because it is a sacred moment. Throughout the *Omabe* Festival,

no other masquerades are allowed. Each of Nsukka's three quarters celebrates separately, with its own unique masquerades. Some are fierce and commanding, like *Ori Okpa*, who enforces discipline with a cane. Others are more mysterious or playful, like *Onye Kurunye*, which just shows up asking "Who called me?" and then disappears. Then there is *Echaricha Ma*, known for its beauty and energy, and *Edi Ogbene*, the leader of all the Omabe masquerades, wrapped in animal skin and followed by crowds. The calmest and wisest is *Ishi Ma*, while the most magical is *Nwa Di Arua*, a masquerade that starts tiny and grows to the height of a palm tree right before your eyes.

Cultural activities in Owerre-Elu are regulated by the traditional calendar of the Owerre autonomous community, as adopted by the people of Nsukka, Asadu Ideke Alumona. The calendar encompasses 12 native months and an additional month (Onwa Ehukehu ebo) in a leap year. Each month is significant and guides the community through a cyclical journey of festivals, ceremonies, and events. The calendar, as enunciated by Nsukka Asadu Town Union (2022) and recounted by the *Onowu Owerre/Asogwa Owerre*, guides the following festivities:

- Onwa Mbu (spanning from April to May): During this period, the community observes the festival of *Ito Oji /NzuAhua*, an exclusive tradition presided over by the esteemed Attama Ezeogda, accompanied by his distinguished cabinet. The celebration unfolds over a span of 24 days, commencing on Orie after the sighting of the moon.
- Onwa Ebo (May to June): This period signifies the return/coming of Omabe of any of the three quarters unfolding over 12 days of Orie after the moon makes its appearance. Concurrently, various agricultural activities take center stage, contributing to the socio-economic activities of the people.
- Onwa Eto (stretching from June to July): The focal point of this month is the *Shuajioku* festival, the spirit of agriculture and soil fertility. The celebration unfolds over 12 days of Orie subsequent to the moon's sighting. Following this cultural spectacle, the cultivation of crops draws to a close, signifying a period of respite for the diligent farmers as they prepare to conclude their agricultural endeavors for the year.
- Onwa Eno (July to August): This period of the year is utilized by the farmers to weed their farm and rest while waiting for the harvest time.
- Onwa Ise (August to September): This particular month holds the enchantment of the *Iri-Ji Ohuu*, also known as the new yam festival. Festivities span over eight days of Orie, set into motion after the moon graces the night sky. It is time when diligent farmers proudly gather the fruits of their labor, the bountiful yams, and indulge in joyous celebrations with kith and kin, adhering to time-honored customs. Adding to the vibrant tapestry of Onwa Ise is the *Ichuaaja Ohogori* festival, celebrated over an exuberant 12 days of Orie, following the moon's celestial cue.
- Onwa Ishii (September to October): This period marks the end of weeding and no prominent cultural event takes place during this time.
- Onwa Esaa (October to November): Within this timeframe, the community reverently observes the *Egba-Nkashi-Ahua* festival, an ode to the cocoyam. This cultural celebration unfolds over a comprehensive 24 days of Eke, kicking off after the moon's resplendent appearance. The festival is a rich tapestry of tradition, with participants partaking in ceremonies and rituals that pay homage to the significance of the cocoyam in their agricultural and culinary heritage. It is a period when the community comes together to celebrate abundance and express gratitude for the blessings of the harvest season.

- OnwaEsato (November-December): Also known as *Onwa Ehukehu* or *Onwa Nne-Eze-Oba*, meaning barren month when the festival is held.
- Onwa Iteгна (December-January): This period is used to celebrate the Egba Chukwu festival, which signifies the importance of the Gods in the life of the people. It is the only celebration that takes place on Eke day.
- Onwa Iri (within January-February): In the months of January to February, Onwa Iri is celebrated in Nsukka as a whole, featuring the traditional lent marked by the Mgburu-Ahua feast, a period which heralds the Onunu festival. This solemn event begins on the first Nkwo day after the moon sighting and prohibits gunshot and music at one's death. Additionally, the *Okama* music, a satiric music meant to ease off tension after Mgburu Ahua, follows 12 days later, contributing a vibrant and joyous dimension to the Nsukka cultural landscape.
- Onwa Nezeoba (February-March): This time marks the commencement of the Omabe festival, which takes place in 12 days (Izu eto) of Orie after the appearance of the moon.
- Onwa Ehukehu (March-April): It is the time for the cultivation of yams, water yams, and three-leaf yams.

Archaeological Investigation

We undertook a meticulously systematic survey (reconnaissance) aimed at unraveling Owerre-Elu. This methodological approach was strategically designed to not only comprehend but also identify the spatial distribution of artifacts, archaeological sites, and the abundance of natural resources that are intricately woven into the historical fabric of this vibrant community. As our survey unfolded, the landscape yielded its secrets, revealing numerous archaeological sites that bore witness to the rich history embedded in the soil. This fact was also confirmed by our oral interviewees. Foremost among these sites was the Nsukka Timber shade, an area of particular significance that had once served as the ancient industrial iron smelting site. Upon arriving at the timber shade, we noticed heaps and a collection of slag over the landscape, probably accumulated during the clearing of land before shops and buildings were erected. The slags were predominantly in aggregate form. The surveyed area is represented in Figure 3 below.

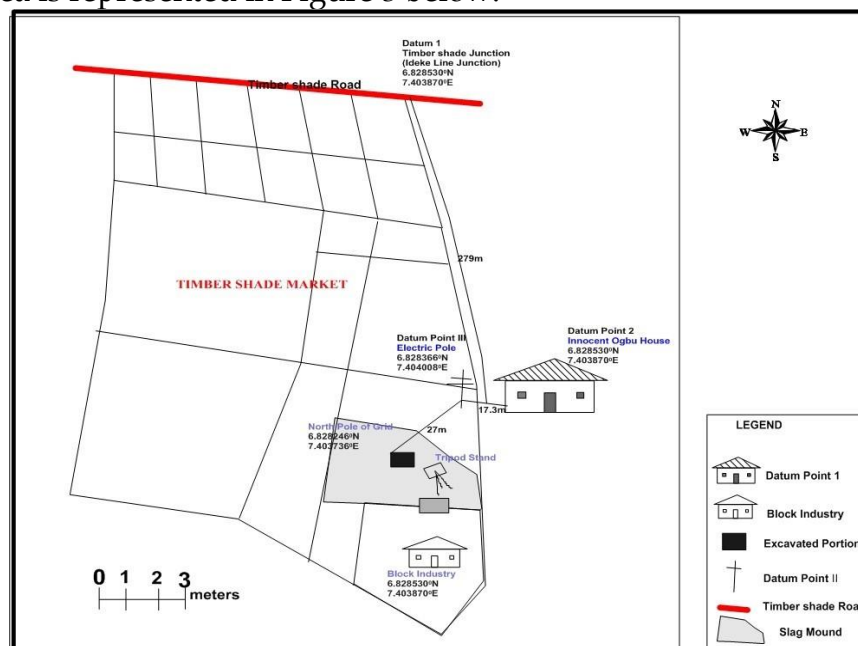


Fig. 2: Site plan

Excavation: The datum point was taken as Timber Shade Road, from which we have the sub-datum point as Mr. Innocent Ogbu's residence. (Fig.2). Taking a methodical approach to grid formation, we applied the Pythagorean Theorem utilizing a 3, 4, 5 ratio to create a grid structure. The resulting grids, consisting of 12 units (2 by 2m), served as the framework within which we conducted our archaeological investigations. (Fig.3). The calculated and intentional grid system not only facilitated accurate measurements but also provided a structured layout for the subsequent excavation process. Having established our grid, our attention then turned to identifying the specific point within this matrix that exhibited the highest concentration of accumulated slag. Thus, grids 1, 2, 5, and 6 presented options for possible excavation because they have a preponderance of cultural materials. Subsequently, grid 2 was chosen as the portion for excavation. Starting at the North Pole, we methodically progressed with the excavation at an interval of 0-20cm, in a spit. Spit 1 unfolded a large quantity of slag with a greyish-black hue soil colour. Spit 2, spanning the depths from 20cm to 40cm, a sense of continuity prevailed. It unveils numerous slag and iron ore. In a delightful twist of discovery, our excavation efforts at 30cm unveiled a fragment of tuyere. (Plates: 2-6). Transitioning to spit 3, spanning 40cm to 60cm, the excavation unearthed dark brown clay, introducing a new layer of complexity to the subterranean table, while more slags and iron ores continued to be unearthed. At spit 4, we unearthed more pieces of tuyere and slags encrusted with tuyere. Notably, the soil retained the same dark brown hue observed. At spits 5 and 6, slag and baked clay were recovered. At this juncture, the soil became reddish-brown in hue with a smooth and fine texture.

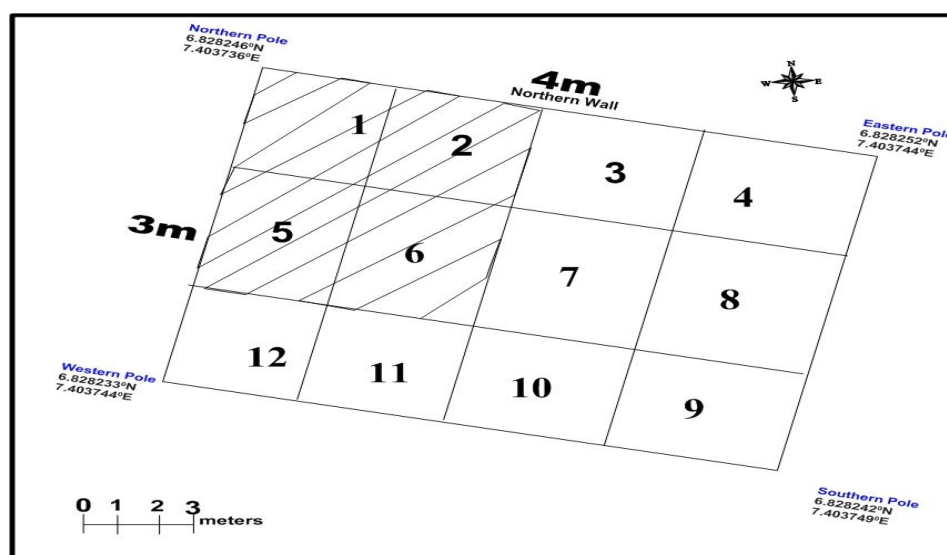


Fig. 3: Site grid



Plate 2: Surface level



Plate 3: Spit Three



Plate 4: Spit Four



Plate 5: Spit Five

Stratigraphy: The stratigraphy of the north and east walls was drawn based on the soil characteristics observed on the walls. For the north wall, three soil colors were identified. The first layer is brownish gray, the second layer is dark gray, and the third layer is brown in color. Also, three layers were identified from the east wall. The first layer is grayish brown with an intrusion identified at the extreme right corner second layer is light brown with slag, while the third is dark brown. These are represented in Figure 2.

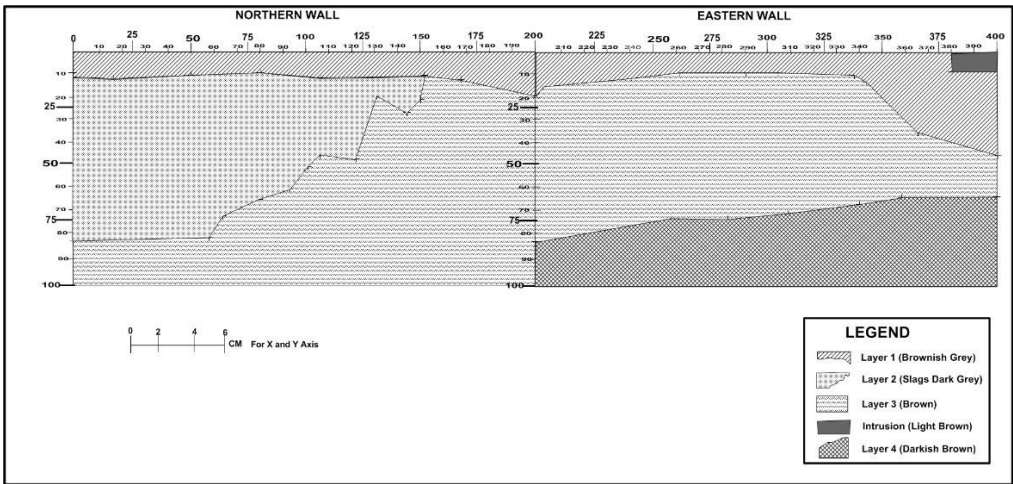


Figure 2: Stratigraphy of the north and east wall

Analysis of the Findings

The percentage distribution of cultural materials excavated is shown in Table 1 and Figure 3.

Table (1): Summary of cultural materials:

Objects	Surface Collection	0-20cm	20-40cm	40-60cm	60-80cm	80-1m	1-1.2m	Total	Percent
Slag	123	145	113	143	89	101	62	776	90.97303
Baked clay	-	12	2	21	8	11	2	56	6.565064
Pot sherds	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	0.468933
Bones	5	-	3	-	-	-	-	8	0.937866
Metal	3	2	-	-	-	-	-	5	0.586166
Hematite			2	2	-	-	-	4	0.468933
TOTAL								853	100%

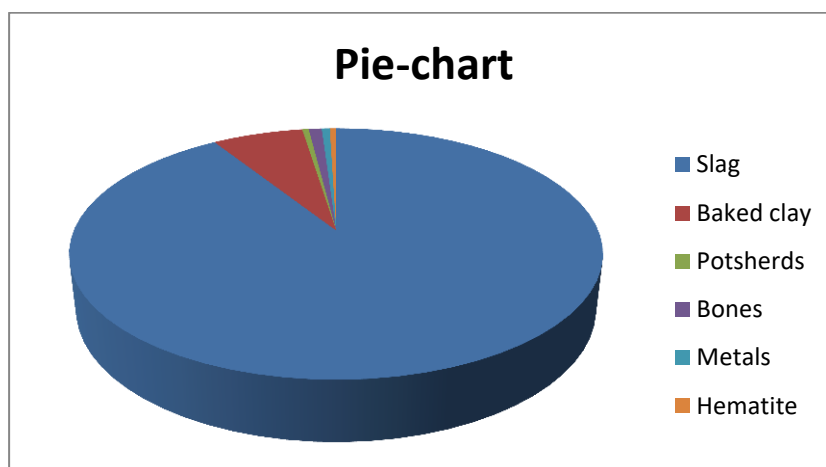


Fig. 3: Excavated materials

Discussion

The aim of the field school was met because the students were able to apply the theoretical knowledge gained in the classroom into practicality while carrying out archaeological and ethnographic investigation at Owerre-Elu. Also, the archaeology and cultural heritage of Owerre-Elu were documented. From the investigation, there were indications of early human occupation, activities, and interaction within the environment.

Owerre-Elu community has a political structure that attends to the needs of its people. There is a division of responsibilities among the various tiers of administration, starting from the traditional ruler, *Igwe*, *Onyishi*, *Attamah*, *Asogwa Owerre*, and Title holders. As a village under Nsukka Town Union, the study area maintains a similar traditional calendar and dating system to other Nsukka communities, which allows smooth celebration of events such as festivals, ceremonies, and farming activities. Festivals like *Onunu*, *Egba-Chukwu*, *Omabe*, *Ogo-Nna*, *Shuajioku*, and *Iri-Ji Ohuu* are performed as stipulated in the calendar. Sacred objects like *Odu-Atu* and *Ofor* play important roles in the administration of equity and justice in the community. These objects serve as a link between the people and their

gods/ancestors, and thus must be guarded jealously. The following native months are encapsulated in the calendar: *Onwa Mbu*, *Onwa Ebo*, *Onwa Eto*, *Onwa Eno*, *Onwa Ise*, *Onwa Ishii*, *Onwa Esaa*, *Onwa Esato*, *Onwa Iteгна*, *Onwa Iri*, *Onwa Nezeoba*, *Onwa Ehukehu*, and *Onwa Ehukehu Ebo* observed during a leap year. All the festivals mentioned above serve as an avenue for entertainment, social control, and respect for culture.

Iyi Nsukka, a collection of water bodies such as *Ishiyi*, *Ujele*, *Ala*, and *Ukwu-Echikara*, serves as both a source of potable water and as a spiritual entity. These water bodies are believed to possess healing (Spa) powers and are guarded by a benevolent feminine goddess. With the advent of Christianity and modernity, a transformative shift occurred in the practices associated with *Iyi Nsukka*. The villagers, under the influence of this evolving religious landscape, ceased the tradition of fetching water from the once-venerated stream. They prefer to source water mostly from the commercial water vendors, boreholes, and rainwater. This change not only reflects the dynamic interplay between cultural traditions and evolving belief systems but also underscores the adaptive nature of communities in the face of shifting cultural paradigms.

Owerre-Elu early iron smelting site is among the numerous iron sites in the Nsukka area that have revealed valuable information about past human activities. Charcoal samples from two floors of iron smelting furnaces at Owerre-Elu were obtained and analyzed through the radiocarbon method to get two dates of the 9th and 5th centuries AD between 895 and 1435 CE (Okafor and Philips 1992). Artifacts recovered from the excavation are mainly slag, pieces of tuyere, and iron ore (Hematite). They were collected from the first to the last spit in appreciable quantities, which supports the assertion made by Okafor (1995) that the area was probably an industrial site. Moreover, the unearthing of iron ore (Hematite) between 20cm and 40cm added depth to the narrative, offering a glimpse into past iron smelting activities that once animated this archaeological landscape. However, with the passage of time, there is a transformation in the landscape, primarily driven by the evolving needs of agricultural and infrastructural pursuits. Evidence of iron smelting, such as slag, furnace wall, and tuyere fragment, was excavated from the site. Presently, much of the site excavated by Professor Edwin Eme Okafor has been sold and converted to farmland, residential, and commercial buildings. See plates 3-5. Relics of early iron smelting, such as slag, furnace, and tuyere, were destroyed in the wake of constructing shops and stalls under the timber shade. The once early iron smelting site became intertwined with the fabric of farming and housing activities, and in response to the intricacies of modern cultivation, a practice emerged. Unknowingly, the local farmers began to gather hematite from their farms and heap it in designated spots. This conscientious act aimed for easy farming. Stratigraphically, there is a continuous recovery of cultural material from layer 3 to the topmost layer. Though this could be attributed to the fact that the area has been altered during site clearance for the construction of the timber market. It is also important to note that most of the excavated materials are associated with iron smelting.

Much of the area previously used as an iron smelting site in Owerre-Elu village has been turned into farmland, sold by the locals, and acquired by the Nsukka Local Government Authority for the establishment of a timber shade. These actions negatively impact the preservation of the site because some of the evidence of early iron smelting has been

altered and destroyed, thereby making it difficult to be preserved as a heritage and tourist site. The study notes that the inhabitants of Owerre-Elu do not have cultural continuity with the iron smelters who inhabited the area centuries ago. This is exemplified by the fact that the people have no knowledge about iron smelting in their locality. They believe that slag heaps and those scattered grow from the ground over a period of time, which in some cases diminishes the value of their farmlands because it obstructs cultivation. Also, there is a weak link between the ethnographic and archaeological data to suggest a cultural continuity within the area. This is based on the fact that all the excavated items, like slag, furnace wall, and tuyere, bear no cultural significance to the present people. In the same way, the ethnographic data do not have much relevance to the interpretation of excavated materials.

Conclusion

As we engaged in the field school, a fascinating journey unfolded, revealing profound insights into the cultural heritage of the people. The layers of history uncovered provided a deep understanding of their beliefs, intricate ways of life, religious practices, and myriad other aspects that collectively painted a vivid picture of the community's identity. The excavation process evolved into a captivating exploration of not just archaeological artifacts but also the living legacy of the people of Owerre-Elu. The excavation process served as a bridge between classroom knowledge and real-world application, bridging the gap between theory and practice. The immersive nature of our fieldwork allowed us to transcend the mere physical excavation of artifacts; it became a gateway to the cultural narrative of the study area. Every unearthed relic seemed to tell a story, offering glimpses into the past and connecting us to the lived experiences of generations gone by. This multifaceted learning experience added a layer of depth to our academic endeavors, reinforcing the notion that fieldwork is not merely a practical component but a transformative journey of discovery.

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