

ANTHROPOLOGICAL-ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDY OF A LATE STONE AGE SITE IN OGIDI-IJUMU NORTHEAST YORUBA LAND

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Abstract

This anthropological-archaeological paper examines the evidence of early human habitation in the northeast of Yorubaland. It aims to authenticate data on human settlements in the area, and to unearth, examine and document evidence of continuous human settlement in Northeast Yorubaland, inhabited by the Okun speaking people, from the past to the present. This study focuses on Ogidi-Ijumu community. Methodologically, it involves anthropological survey and archaeological field work, excavation and analysis. Findings from the research indicate evidence of human presence on several sites. Open sites, rock shelters, and features present evidence of human activities in the area. One of the rock shelters was excavated and artefacts retrieved from the site include potteries and microliths. The paper concludes that the data retrieved from the excavated rock shelter confirms the existence of early human settlements in Northeast Yoruba land. The research extends archaeological knowledge of early human settlements in Northeast Yoruba land. The study concludes by advocating for further multidisciplinary research of the site.

Key words: Anthropology, Archaeology, Late Stone Age, Excavation, Ogidi

Introduction

This paper examines the evidence of early human habitation in the northeast of Yorubaland. The researcher is licensed by the Nigeria's National Commission for Museum and Monuments (NCMM) to execute archaeological works in the western part of Kogi State which is coordinate with North-East Yorubaland. This author coordinates the North-East Yoruba Archaeological Research Project Team as the principal researcher. From 2016, intense archaeological investigations have been carried out in Lokoja (Kogi State Capital) and Ogidi-Ela in Ijumu Local Government of Kogi State by the team. The preliminary report on aspects of the archaeological potentials of Lokoja has been published by Tubi (2017).

Archaeologists are pointing to Northeast Yorubaland, peopled by the Okun-Yoruba speaking people, as an ancient land for human habitation (Obayemi,

1985; Oyelaran, 1996, 1998; Allsworth-Jones et al, 2012, Allsworth-Jones and Oyelaran, 1991; Asakitipi, 2001; Bakinde, 2006, 2009; Fiki-George, 2019; Tubi, 2017). Detailed archaeological works within the area have revealed evidence of ancient human activities. Though, the whole area portends great archaeological potential, it is envisaged that future explorations by researchers will extend the frontiers of research in the area to other parts of Okun land.

Archaeological studies in Ogidi carried out by Otetubi (1989, 1991) and Bakinde (2009) have revealed evidence of early human habitation. Their efforts revealed several archaeological sites such as open sites, rock shelters, smithing sites, and habitation sites. The focus of the paper is Ebere where both scholars have conducted recent excavations. While Bakinde focuses on open settlement/habitation studies, Tubi focuses on rockshelters.

Research Objectives

This paper focuses on three main research objectives;

- (1) to examine rock shelters as suitable archaeological locales for the study of early human habitation in North East Yoruba land.
- (2) to ascertain the veracity of Late Stone Age sites in North East Yoruba land.
- (3) to further examine and build on the archaeological data obtained in Ogidi in previous researches.

Geography and Location

Ogidi-Ijumu is one of the original traditional settlements of the Okun speaking people, who occupy the Northeasternmost part of Yoruba land. It is located 14 kilometres from Kabba in the North, 4 kilometres from Ayere in the South and 3 kilometres from Iyara in the West and 20 kilometres from Ogale/Aduge in the East. The climate has two marked seasons of wet/raining season from April/May to September and dry season from September/October to April. The area is covered by deciduous forests especially along river/stream courses like ohe, opaku and ojawiri. The general soil is characterised with varieties of grass, shrubs and trees.

The area is marked with massifs and has various ranges of about 23,000 metres above sea level. Some of the prominent hills are Ipowu, Agira, Ayin oro and Ebere complex hills. The types of noticeable rocks are quartzs and granites. Ogidi also has good arable land for agriculture. The people are good yam cultivators

for subsistence and few are taken to the local market for sales. They also produce beans, groundnuts, maize, and cassava, amongst others. The people are involved in major cashew production and the community has a cashew processing factory.

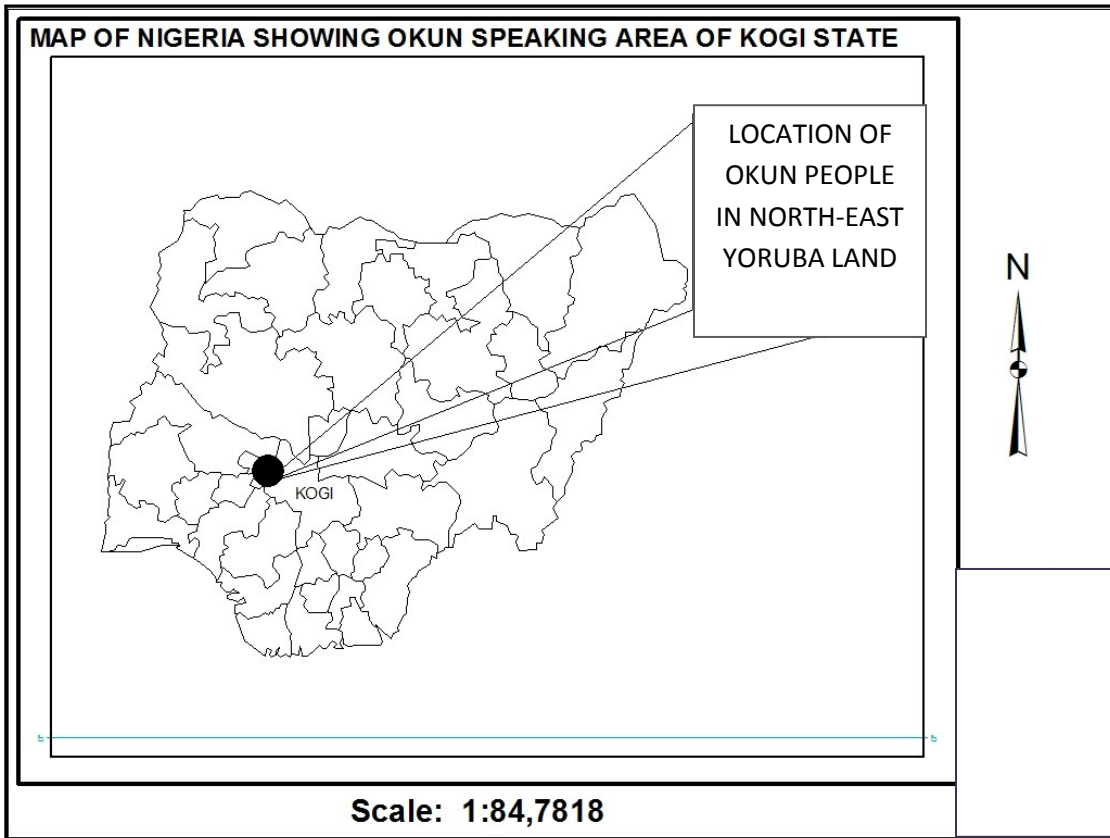


Fig. 1: Map of Nigeria showing Okunland
Source: Original to the researcher

Ethno-Historical Background

Popular traditional orature of the people asserts that the Okun speaking people were migrants from Ile-Ife, with few citing old Oyo and few other ancient cities as their ancestral homes. This group of people occupy the Northeasternmost part of Yoruba land. They migrated for reasons not clearly stated but could be as a result of adventurism, conflicts, hunting and famine. The Okun-Yoruba form six ethnolinguistic clusters; these are Bunu, Ijumu, Kiri, Owe, Oworo and Yagba. They are found in Ekiti, Ondo, Kwara and Kogi states of Nigeria.

Ogidi, the focus of this research is considered as the youngest of the three migrants from Ile-Ife who founded the triadic traditional settlements of Ijumu namely Gbedde (*ona*), Ijumu Arin (*otun*) and Ijumu Oke (*ohi*). These three sired other children who founded over 20 settlements in Ijumu. This popular tradition of the Okun-Yoruba has been critiqued by Tubi (2015) as failing to account for the archaeological and anthropological data of the people. Ogidi is composed of lineages who considered themselves as coeval siblings. They lived in patrilineal and evolved a traditional form of monarchical system which can be classified as mini-kingdom. The peoples' political system is the monarchical system in which there is absence of ruling houses, thus, all lineages are of coordinate powers. The town's traditional political system is a triadic set up where power rotates among the *otun*, *ohi* and *ona*. Traditionally, their religion is a diffused monotheism in which *Olodumare* (Supreme Being) is acknowledged but lives far away in heaven. *Olodumare* is said to have delegated the daily affairs on earth to deities (*ebora*, *egun*). The prime deities in Ogidi include Oluwo, Agira, Ayi, Ogun and spiritual entities called *iwin*.

Rock shelters as Archaeological Locales

A natural rock overhang of geologic formation is called "rock shelter" in Archaeology. The term conveys a cultural definition on it because of its association with human beings. Rock overhangs are called rock-houses or rock-shelters in archaeological treatises because of their cultural relevance. Archaeological data indicate that natural environmental niches like rock overhangs and rock concavities have acquired cultural relevance because humans have used them consistently for sundry purposes such as shelter from inclement weather, rest, ritual, burial, religion and industries (Andah and Tubosun, 1983; Shaw and Daniels, 1984; Allsworth-Jones, 2012; Oyelaran, 1998; Otetubi, 1991).

The rich archaeological potentialities of rock shelters have long been acknowledged by scholars across the world. Rock shelters which have provided tremendous archaeological data include Shanidar Cave, Iraq (Solecki, 1985), Abeke and Shum Laka, Cameroon, (Lavachery, 2001), Bosumpra and Kintampo, Ghana (Anquandah, 1993; Watson, 2005), Thandwe and Makwe, Zambia (Clark, 1982), and in Nigeria the rich data will include Iwo eleru (Shaw and Daniel, 1984), Uffe-Ijumu (Asakitipi, 2001; Oyelaran, 1998), Rop (Eyo, 1972), Tse-Dura (Andah and Tubosun, 1983), and Ogidi-Ijumu (Otetubi, 1991). The entire Ogidi-Ijumu is marked by residual mountainous ranges with porphyritic massive

granite gneiss separated by undulating plains, which have several rock-overhangs. This makes Ogidi suitable for archaeological fieldworks which focuses on rockshelters.

Archaeological Fieldworks at Ogidi-Ela

The archaeological potentials of Ogidi-Ijumu were first brought to light by the preliminary efforts of this writer who studied an open abandoned settlement site in 1989. He equally investigated several rock shelters in 1991. In general terms, fieldworks by archaeologists in the Okun area (North-East Yoruba land) began with Obayemi who excavated two sites at Iffe-Ijumu. Archaeological data indicate that human beings have been living in the area since circa the Late Stone Age (Allsworth-Jones et. al., 2012; Asakitipi, 2001; Oyelaran, 1998).

Further detailed archaeological studies by Bakinde (2009), Otetubi (1989, 1991) and Tubi (2016, 2017) have substantiated the evidence of continuous human settlements in Ogidi-Ijumu for millennia. This paper is a report of field works carried out in Ebere, Ogidi-Ijumu by the researcher in 2018. The first archaeological work in Ebere was carried out by Bakinde (2009), who conducted two test excavations. He concentrated on open habitation sites in Ebere. This researcher conducted extensive reconnaissance and sank two test pits near Bakinde's previous sites. The first was on a plane table while the second was a mound. The researcher also employed some of the field assistants who worked with Bakinde in the earlier fieldworks. This decision was taken so as to make the research a continuum. To extend data of the research, it was imperative to conduct further test on available rock shelters in the area. A reconnaissance of Ebere complex hills was undertaken to search for rock shelters since such a locale will be capable of providing the needed data on early human habitation in the area. A rock overhang was discovered which is the object of this study. The locals call it *iwo abuke* (abuke cave/rock shelter)

Excavation of Abuke Rock shelter

Detailed archaeological physical survey was conducted on the rock shelter so as to discern its cultural remains. The picture below shows the abuke rock shelter.



Fig. 2: Abuke rock shelter
Source: Original to the researcher

The site is a rock overhang formed at the base of Ebere hill. It faces the North and forms a natural curvature. The area of the rock shelter which was considered to be of archaeological relevance (habitable or useful for human activities) was measured. Its measurement is 6m by 6m. The site was marked as Ogidi Ebere Rock shelter 1 (OG/EB.RS 1) for archaeological coordinator. Random surface collection supplied few potsherds of different sizes and textures, few quartz stones of different sizes and quartz flakes.

A single test excavation was sunk at the middle of the overhang. It measured 5m x 2m. The actual excavation proceeded by arbitrary 10cm spit levels. The final depth/sterile level was reached at 80cm. Stratigraphical data indicate 8 layers.

Layer 1, Top Soil: The top soil has a thickness of 10cm. The topsoil was very loose and contained few potsherds, quartz, dry leaves, dry grasses, and ashes. It was darkish and loose.

Layer 2, 10-20cm: This layer was darkish brown, loose and sandy. It contained lots of roots, small stones and a few potsherds.

Layer 3, 20-30cm: This had the same characteristics as the above (10-20cm). Few potsherds were unearthed.

Layer 4, 30-40cm: The texture was compacted with stones. The stones were whitish in colour, while the soil was light darkish. There was complete absence of potsherds. Lithic tools were found.

Layer 5, 40-50cm: The soil was compacted with stones. More lithic tools were unearthed

Layer 6, 50-60cm: The soil was compacted. Few lithic tools were found.

Layer 7, 60-70cm: This was marked by stony soil. There was absence of cultural materials. Layer 8, 70-80cm: At 80cm, the excavation hit the sterile layer.

Cultural Sequence

The data of the site revealed three cultural phases.

1. Ceramic phase: This phase is clearly portrayed in the top most soil of the excavated pit. The ceramic phase is found from 20-30cm, which corresponds to layer 2 of the excavation.
2. Lithic Phase: This is found at 30-59cm of the excavation. This corresponds to layer 3. All the stone tools were retrieved from this section. There was total absence of pottery wares.
3. Sterile Phase: This phase is a ceramic phrase and lacked lithic tools. This is found at 60-80cm at which there was total absence of cultural materials.

Cultural Analysis

The rock shelter revealed only two cultural materials namely potteries and lithic tools. The analysis of these artefacts now follows:

(1) Potsherds

49 potsherds were dug from the top soil to 59 cm of the excavated pit. All the sherds were broken into bits and as such are not good for reconstruction. The potsherds at the rock shelter were well-worn out compared with the ones retrieved on the open sites, which were relatively well-preserved. All the potsherds unearthed were gotten from layers 1 and 2 of the excavated pit. Two

possible interpretations are possible for these heavy weathered potteries: they are indicators of antiquity or they indicate weathering/climatic condition.

- (i) As indicators of antiquity: It is possible to assert that the level of weathering of the potsherds might be an indicator of antiquity having been buried for several years and therefore affected by environmental factors. This is itself useful for chronological ordering, whereby the well-worn potsherds were considered as older than the well-preserved ones.
- (ii) As indicators of weathering condition: It is suggested here that the weathered potsherds were simply the result of constant exposure to wind, sunlight and the annual heavy rainfall from the top of the rock shelter, and not conclusively due to age. Thus, being constantly exposed to vagaries of nature, the potsherds rapidly experienced depreciation.

Surface collections include potsherds with some identifiable decorations. Close physical examination of the potsherds reveals some features. The potsherds have inclusions of mica. They are dark-brownish in colour. The potsherds unearthed are also of the same texture and colouration. They were all handmade wares and unburnished except one classified as burnished. The morphologies identified for potsherds are: Rims (4), rim and neck (8) and body parts (37). The various decorations on the potsherds include: Grooving (4), roulette (8), burnished (1), punctuates (1), grooving and punctuates (1), while 33 of the potsherds were classified as unidentified due to excessive weathering.

(2) Stone/Lithic tools

Several core stones, flakes and few microliths were unearthed. Lithic identification of the stone retrieved from Ebere was carried out in the Department of Geology of Federal University Lokoja. The stones were identified as quartz, and 100% of the stone tools were made from quartz. Field survey of Ebere by the Research Team revealed several collections of quartz and quartzite in various sizes that were heaped together. The clearer picture before the researcher is that these collections were deliberate acts of human beings and did not occur naturally.

Stone tools in African archaeological records basically consist of flint and cherts and grained rocks as first choice. Quartz, quartzite, chalcedony and basalts were used in the absence of the latter or used as supplementary tools (Shaw and

Daniels, 1984). However, majority of stone tools were made from quartz because of its availability. The research at Ogidi Ijumu has confirmed the use of quartz as stone tools in Northeast Yorubaland. By archaeological classificatory analysis, it is the concluded opinion of the research that these stone tools consist of irregular cores, flints, blades and chips.

Chronology

It is expedient to give chronology to the artefacts retrieved *in situ*, so as to situate the site within the context obtained for Northeast Yorubaland at Iffe-Ijumu. This site under investigation is the second in Okunland after Iffe to produce potteries and stone tools within excavated context.

There are two phases within the excavated pit, which are pre-pottery phase (80-60 cm) and pottery phase (top soil -59 cm). These classificatory terminologies were used by Fatunsin (1993) in analysing finds at Kagoro which has a similar provenance. According to Fatunsin (1993: 254) "it is evident that almost all the Late Stone Age sites in Nigeria, with the exception of Mejiro recorded two phases in the Late Stone Age period- the pre-pottery and the pottery phases". The excavated stone tools in Ogidi are identifiable microliths. The terminology in archaeology covers a wide range of complexes which refers to the period in human history when people have made advancement in discarding heavy stone tools (macroliths) and instead have invented the use of smaller stone tools called microliths. The stone tools assembled from the excavated pit clearly indicate marked characteristics of the Late Stone Age technological complexes of West Africa, (Asakitipi, 2001; Oyelaran, 1978; Fatunsin 1993). At this site, within the particular context of the excavation, data reveal a mixture of ceramics and stone tools. The overall data leads inescapably to the conclusion that the rockshelter is a Late Stone age site that possessed the use of ceramics. Based on comparative dating method, the paper concludes that artefacts of the site belong to tool kits of the Ceramic Late Stone Age established at Iffe Ijumu by researchers like Obayemi (1985), Allsworth-Jones et al (2012) and Oyelaran (1998). The ceramic Late Stone Age has been dated to circa 300-400 BC at Iffe, (Asakitipi, 2001; Oyelaran, 1996, 1998).

Conclusion

Rockshelters of Ogidi Ijumu must be examined within the general outline of the archaeological data of West Africa. In Nigeria, Andah and Tubosun (1983) at Dutse Dura, Shaw (1965) at Iwo Eleru and Fatunsin (1993) at Kagoro; in Ghana, Anquandah (1993) and Watson (2005), and in Cameroon Lavachery (2001) have

conclusively demonstrated that rock shelters have provided earliest evidence of human habitations in West Africa. Importantly too, Allsworth-Jones (2012), Obayemi (1985), Oyelaran and Allworth-Jones (1991), Oyelaran (1996, 1998) and Asakitipi (2001) have unearthed clear evidence of human habitation in Okun area (Northeast Yorubaland) by their studies of rock shelters. This report is interpreted in line with the general picture that is emerging of the relevance of rock shelters in the archaeology of Nigeria and West Africa.

This research has produced pottery and lithic data on early humans in Northeast Yorubaland. This study has also provided data on activities and culture complexes of Late Stone Age in the area. Importantly, the study reveals direct evidence of ancient human activities in forms of potteries and microliths in an excavated context. The data lead us to make preliminary conclusion on the archaeology of the area as belonging to the era known in archaeology as the ceramic Late Stone Age. Furthermore, archaeological reconnaissance has been carried out in several parts of Ogidi-Ijumu, which point conclusively to human activities in ancient time.

For this research, the rock shelter site and the hill are abandoned and devoid of human activities, which is very advantageous to Archaeology. This enables archaeologists to have massive land for research. However, the area is not totally devoid of human activities. The locals are subsistence farmers, who cultivate staples like yams, cassava, maize and vegetables. These farming activities pose potential dangers to the sites in future. The resultant effects are felt at nearby open field where farming activity is going on, as such cultural data within the farm area are vulnerable to destruction.

The area has great potentials for full archaeological exploration. For example, two monoliths were found on the hilltop site; one was on the ground while the other was in a slanting position. The study needs further multidisciplinary approach so as to cover other aspects of archaeological research that might shed light on paleoecology, chronology, technology, subsistence, and migration and settlement pattern. Finally, the site is dated to a ceramic Late Stone period of West Africa (circa 2000 BC) based on the composition of the excavated artefacts from the rock shelter.

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