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CAVES AND ROCK SHELTERS IN MMAKU AND ACHI ON NSUKKA-OKIGWE CUESTA: A PRELIMINARY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY

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Introduction

The limited archaeological studies in parts of the cuesta have shown copious evidence of human activities and material remains of past populations. These include stone tools, smelting sites and abandoned occupation sites such as caves and rock shelters (Kitson 1913; Okafor 1993; Anozie 1979; Ibeanu 2000). The present archaeological survey of Mmaku and Achi settlements is an attempt at further documentation of sites, land-use patterns as well as technological developments of the present inhabitants of these settlements with the view to understanding the dynamics of human migration and settlement patterns in and around the cuesta. Mmaku and Achi are located almost on the Centre of Nsukka-Okigwe cuesta and have high concentration of archaeological sites such as caves (Fig.1).
Methodology

Our research methods are archaeological reconnaissance and ethnographic studies aimed at data collection for the understanding of human behavioural pattern in and around the cuesta.

The archaeological reconnaissance of the two communities under study involves surface collection of potsherds, slag and other material remains in the sites surveyed. Photographs and measurements of the sites were taken in the course of the survey.

Traditions of origin of the present inhabitants were collected from selected elders of the communities who are knowledgeable in the oral tradition as well as human activities and use of caves and rock shelters, shrines and other practices associated
with them. An In-depth interview was used to collect data relevant to the subject of study, interview questions were properly structured and well administered orally, which attracted appropriate responses.

We equally employed the services of resource persons from the two communities due to local dialect. These resource persons as well provided useful information on the nature of the sites, and features. Tape recorder was used for detailed documentation, which was later translated into English by the resource persons. Photographs were also taken. In the end we were able to interview eighteen knowledgeable persons from the two communities; ten from Mmaku and eight from Achi. Out of the eighteen people interviewed five were women while the rest were men. Our respondents included six chief priests, elders of the villages and two women leaders.

**Archaeological reconnaissance findings**

An attempt is made to present and discuss the archaeological and ethnographic features/attractions identified during the course of the research. Based on oral traditions collected, most caves were merely said to have been discovered in the course of hunting activities. Only one of the caves located within the residential area has some myths surrounding its origin and use. The caves and rock shelters played very important roles to the people of the area in ancient times and during the Nigerian Civil War. Some of these caves have festivals and deities associated with them. The deities include Igbo Achii deity, Isiogbo deity etc.

The survey carried out was based on surface collections. It also involved the collection of surface finds that are suggestive of past human activities. Mmaku and Achi are surrounded by hills and valleys, which attracted the people to settle there. The topography of the area is so conducive that man might have settled there for a long time. The chains of hills served as a barrier from external attacks coupled with the availability of spring water which enabled them to occupy this part of the country for a long period.
We visited the Omeo spring and made some surface collections of potsherds from the Omeo shrine and on our way to Opia Echeta waterfall some potsherds were also picked. In Auchi, potsherds were found both at the shrine of Achiyi and along the way leading to the Achiyi cave. Information revealed that both communities do not and did not practice pottery technology; rather they acquired and still acquire their pots from Ishinga and Inyi. Another material picked was slag from Ezioha in Mmakuu. In this village, there were pieces of slag scattered along the paths to check erosion. However, the present inhabitants know nothing about the slag and iron smelling. At the Agu-Ukwa cave still in Ezioha, we found tripod stands and big stones probably used for sitting down.

**Mmakuu and Auchi Caves**

**Inyikwe cave of Mmakuu**

Located in Eungwu Affam, this cave is associated with a goddess named Nnechukwu whose function was basically to help the people find their stolen properties. Due to the nature of her functions, the people did not give her respite as they always disturb her; hence at a stage she got tired and left to Ama-Owelli.

Another version has it that people from other villages started coming to Nnechokwu to help them find their stolen properties and this made the Mmakuu people to be annoyed, their reason was that Nnechukwu should have asked those people to come to her through the Mmakuu people and Nnechukwu seeing their selfishness left the cave and went to live at Ama-Owelli.

By the side of this cave is a rock which is the source of spring water for the people. An informant told me that a lion also lived in the cave and as a result before anyone enters the water early in the morning, the person has to throw sand into the water from a distance to alert the lion of the presence of human beings so that the lion will leave. Oral tradition has it that a hunter and his dog got lost inside the cave and till date no body has seen them. The cave
has two cavities. The cave opens to the north overlooking the valleys and hills. No surface collection was made at this very site. Measurements were taken from the base to the roof thus cavity A - height 1.15m, width 1.48m and cavity B - height 1.1m and width 2.58m. (see Plates 1 & 2).

Plate 1: Iyiyikwe Cave (Cavity A)

Plate 2: Iyiyikwe Cave (Cavity B)
Ogba Agu Ukwa of Mmakwu

This is located in Agu ukwa Eziolu Mmakwu. It is the biggest cave in Mmakwu. There was evidence of human activities around the cave, such as manholes, tripod stands used in cooking and stones for sitting down. About 10 meters away from the Agu Ukwa cave is an other smaller cave from where spring water flows out, which made living in the cave very attractive for both man and animals in the past. The two caves are facing north. Relevant measurements of this cave were taken such as height, width and depth of the cave as follows: the bigger Cave has the following measurements: height 2.8m, width 4.95, the smaller cave measures as follows: height 0.97m and width 2.38m (see Plate 3).

Data on cave deposits was taken at 50 cm interval across the width in front of the drip line and the results are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERVAL (M)</th>
<th>DEPTH (CM)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.5m</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1m</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Measurements of Cave Deposits

Fig 2: Histogram of Cave Deposits
Isiogba cave of Achi

This cave is found in Mkpam in Egwa Achi. It is the biggest cave in Achi and links to Achiyi and Ohaudum caves. There is no information about this cave; however, the rules guiding the cave were handed to them by their fore-fathers. The people believe that an animal Obara lives inside the cave and this animal is believed to be the spirit of the cave. Other animals that live in the cave include python, bats, etc. This cave is revered because of a powerful deity associated with the cave. People are not allowed to go to the cave without performing some rituals and with the death of the chief priest last year (2006) nobody is allowed to visit the cave. It is the responsibility of the deity to select her own chief priest and until that happen no indigene would agree to take any visitor to the cave.

Achiyi cave of Achi

This cave has two cavities. The openings are facing north of the cuesta. The measurement for one of the cavities is as follows: height, 1.48m and width 1.70m.
Rock shelters

It should be noted that the difference between rock shelters and caves is that rock shelters are openings with rock overhangs while caves are openings with tunnels.

Ogba Umude Nworji of Mmaku

This rock shelter is located in Eziama Mmaku. According to oral tradition this rock shelter houses a big python that is harmless to the indigenes of Mmaku. The Ogba Umude Nworji is facing northwest and the measurements are as follows height 2.14 m and width 2.55m. (see Plate 5)

Plate 5: Ogba Umude Nworji
Plate 6: Ogba Ngala Agu

Ogba Ngala Agu of Mmakwe:

This Ogba is some few kilometres away from Ogba Umude Nworji and it is facing northwest. The measurements are as follows; height 1.60m and width 3.85m (see Plate 1).

Opia Essoba rock shelter

This rock shelter has a water fall. It is located in Essoba. This rock shelter is facing southeast. The measurement of this rock shelter was not taken because of the pool of water around it.

4.2. Analysis of cultural materials collected

During the reconnaissance, a surface collection of potsherds and slag were made and below is the summary of the finds.
Table 3: Analysis of Potsherds from Mmaku

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objects</th>
<th>Colour</th>
<th>Techniques of Decoration</th>
<th>Decorative motif</th>
<th>Thickness</th>
<th>Diameter</th>
<th>Rim Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rim 1</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Unburnished</td>
<td>Rough</td>
<td>1.6cm</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Everted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rim 2</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Grooved neck with stamping</td>
<td>Parallel lines and depressions</td>
<td>1cm</td>
<td>8cm</td>
<td>Straight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rim 3</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Grooved lip and Roulette</td>
<td>Parallel lines and twisted cord</td>
<td>1cm</td>
<td>14cm</td>
<td>Straight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nect</td>
<td>Reddish Brown</td>
<td>Grooving</td>
<td>Parallel lines</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body 1</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Burnished</td>
<td>Smooth</td>
<td>6mm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body 2</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Roulette</td>
<td>Twisted cord</td>
<td>9mm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body 3</td>
<td>Grey</td>
<td>Grooving</td>
<td>Parallel lines</td>
<td>5mm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body 4</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Net Impression</td>
<td>Net</td>
<td>6mm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body 5</td>
<td>Grey</td>
<td>Net Impression</td>
<td>Net</td>
<td>8mm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Analyses of potsherds

In this analysis, there was no attempt to go beyond visual identification of the material objects such as motif, techniques, rim profile, thickness, and colours.

A total number of 19 potsherds were collected, out of this 14 were diagnosed to belong to body sherds, 2 undisguised rims, 2 rim sherds and 1 neck. All the potsherds recovered have one form of decoration, 13 sherds are decorated, 1, undecorated and 1, undiagnosed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Mmaku</th>
<th>Achi</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Potsherds</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>82.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slags</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We found out that all the potsherds from Achi are burnished and reddish in colour while the ones from Mmaku are mixed; some are reddish while others are ash in colour; some are burnished and some unburnished. Textural changes were due to the type of function such vessels were put to. Two potsherds have dark patches caused by poor oxidation which is indicative of open firing.
Out of the 4 rims, 3 were collected at the Omeo site in Mnaku and 1 in Achi. 2 falls under the category of pots (ritual pots), while 2 are bowls. Out of the four rims, 1 is inverted, 1 everted, and 1 straight and the lips are tampered, while 1 is undiagnosed. The two that belong to ritual pots have visible internal rim/neck joint. 2 rims have decoration of banded horizontal grooves, and burnished below the grooves. One is unburnished and rough, while one has a twisted cord decoration. From our observation, the potsherds from Mnaku are thick while the ones from Achi are thin.

Oral tradition

Oral traditions suggest that Mnaku people fought many wars with her neighbours such as Nzi-na-Ama, Mgbowo, Mgbudi, Ogbuowu and Nkwe and the hills helped them in war times. The people are pot-potters rather than got their pottery from Ishia and Irey.

Anikpo (2005) has highlighted the factors that aided the Mnaku ancestors in their struggle for existence such as the topography of Mnaku land. ‘Anybody familiar with battle drills will know the strategic importance of highly elevated landscape, hills, natural barriers, which any invading force will find extremely difficult to break through’.

Presently only hunting activities are carried out inside and around the caves in Mnaku while in Achi the caves are still revered and lots of rituals are carried out inside and around them. All the caves in Achi have their gods and places of worship unlike in Mnaku where the people have no regard for the caves. All these are made possible through oral tradition.

From the oral traditions collected, most caves and rock shelters have one myth or the other woven around it. This suggests the kind of relationship or activities with the caves. For example, the caves are seen as sacred places. In order to preserve them the people built a kind of mysteries to surround these caves, thus they are cherished, revered and held in awe.
Dieties associated with caves

_Egbo Achiyi deity_

The shrine of this deity is located at the Egbo Market and by the side of the cave there is another small shrine: a river called Achiyi flows through the cave. According to oral tradition, this deity is said to be a woman and people always see her on Eke market days going to market well dressed with two bangles on her wrist. This explains why the shrine or the cave is not visited on Eke days.

_Taboo_

Women don't visit the shrine during their menstruation

The Achiyi tortoise which the people believed is the father of the community is never killed or eaten by anybody.

It is not visited on Eke market days.

It abhors any reflecting object or lights. this account for the reason why I was not allowed to take photographs of both the cave and the shrine. (Ude 2007; Personal Communication)

_Isiogba deity/shrine:_

Isiogba Cave and Isiogba stream are said to be owned by the same deity. The stream was said to have been discovered accidentally by a dog. The owner informed the chief and his council members of the discovery. An oracle was consulted to inquire about the river and the people were told by the oracle that the river is the Oviri Isiogba River, that they should perform some sacrifices with yam, fowl and wine, which they did. After sacri-
fices, the oracle selected a family from Umuaku in Egwu village to be the custodian of the Isiogba River. This sacrifice is done every three years. (Nwanorun 2007: Personal Communication).

The festival in honour of this deity comes up every three years and it is celebrated only by the Egwu village. Any death that occurs in the year of this festival is regarded as bad omen and the deceased will be buried without any funeral rites because to die in that particular year of Isi Ogba Festival, the person is believed to have defied the gods of Isiogba cave/stream.

Functions

This deity is a female and does not like any thing bad. She brings back lost sons and daughters of Achi back home. For instance she brought back a son who left Achi at a very young age with the help of an Achi man, Mr. Albert Emejue from Npokokoro village, in Achi, living at Onitsha.

Pregnant women seek for her protection during childbirth which she always grants.

This deity gives name to some chosen sons of Achi and all the names start with Ude such as Ude-isiogba, Udeoma etc.

Taboos

Women do not visit the shrine during their menstruation.

Women do not visit the shrine wearing pants similar to loin cloth, which women are forbidden to wear in Igbo land.

People fetch water with pots made of clay only.

Evil people dare not go near the river because if they do an animal called Obi will kill them.
It does not want any other river to flow inside it which earned her the name "Achiy i eji gwa nwayi ihe ya agba obi". Achiy i deity does not need a neighbor. This was why she requested for her own location.

Summary and Conclusion
This is an ongoing, research and will continue to document more archaeological sites as well as embark on further ethnographic studies of human settlement on the cuesta. Efforts should be geared towards the excavation and artefact studies derived from habitable caves and rock shelters already identified. The results as well as radiocarbon dates would enhance our interpretation and chronology of human occupation and use of the caves and rock shelters on the cuesta. The analysis of cave deposits would throw light on human subsistence (diet) cave formations and past vegetational changes (Ibenne et al. 2001; Sowummi et al 1991; Tubosun et al 1983; Umeji 1995).

The rich oral traditions of the people coupled with their cultural resources are suggestive of prolonged human occupation of our area of study. For example, there are myths surrounding some of the caves and deities associated with them. These deities have observed taboo and their chief priest who abstain from any cassava meals, have established initiation rites of their successors.

References