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Ethnoarchaeological Investigations In Okigwe and Its Environ

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Introduction

Okigwe and its environs had since been designated by colonial anthropologists and other scholars as part of the Igbo “core area or heart land” (Daryll and Jones 1950, Talbot and Muhall 1962, Jones 1963, Uchendu 1966, Barry 1969, Isichei 1976 and Ifemesia 1978, 1979) (Fig. 1). Consequently, it is seen as one of the Igbo ancestral homes from where some recent Igbo communities were believed to have emigrated (Afigbo 1978). These views were informed by two sets of observations, namely: (i) high population densities and (ii) the open nature of the forest, which was believed to be indicative of prolonged human activities in the area.

It should be noted, however, that the study of Igboland at the time was informed by the need to understand local political structures (Green 1964) and very little attention, if any, was paid to the study of the rich material culture. Indeed, at that time, the need to search for structures that would effectively support the mobilization of much needed revenue for the colonial government commanded greater attention. This led to the designation of parts of Igboland such as the Awka – Okigwe – Orlu axis as ancestral homeland of the Igbo. It was assumed that from here other parts of Igboland were later settled upon. This assumption held sway in spite of the glaring lack of any documentation and comparative studies of Igbo cultural materials. The paucity of our knowledge of the Igbo civilization was clearly...
demonstrated with Shaw’s (1970) excavation of Igbo Ulùwu. The difficulties of the interpretation of these archaeological materials due to lack of ethnographic data fuelled the study of Nri by Onwuejeogwu (1981). However, in studying aspects of the Igbo culture history, Onwuejeogwu (1981) adopted the Nri perspective. Consequently, he was able to identify other ‘mini civilizations’ in Igbo culture area (Onwuejeogwu, 1987). He also believed that a careful study of each of these mini civilizations, both in time and space would give a clear picture of Igbo culture history.

Our research endeavour therefore was geared towards the study of the Okigwe area in both time and space (Fig. 1). The early civilization of this area was seen to be based on some aspects of indigenous technology such as stone tool manufacture (Plate 1), iron working, pottery-making and cloth and mat weaving, amongst others. It is hoped that this and similar studies in parts of Igbo land, which should be multidisciplinary in nature, will enable the identification of high points of Igbo civilizations.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this research included, amongst others, the following: to

i) collect and study relevant oral traditional and ethnographic data in an attempt at understanding and interpreting archaeological sites and features in Okigwe area;

ii) locate and study relevant archaeological sites that would help in the reconstruction of the culture history of the past inhabitants of these areas to as far back in time as possible; and finally,

iii) see how far ethnographic data will enhance our interpretation of excavated archaeological materials with the hope of understanding the continuity of human occupation and the nature of inter-group relations in the same or related people through time.

As stated earlier, Okigwe area is believed or claimed to be one of the early centres of human settlement in Igbo land. Be that as it may, this is only an assumption, which serves as a working hypothesis to be tested by emerging ethnographic and archaeological data collected from Okigwe and related areas, (Plates I - VI).
Plate I: Ugwuele Uturu, Okigwe. Early stone tool factory site. The mound is made up of flakes, tools and broken pieces.

Plate II: Overview of Uhuchukwu cave complex located at a low-lying hill of Ahaba Imenyi – Isuikwuato.
Plate III: Chief and Mrs. Osbudu of Alakia Inyanyi; they were found in the vicinity of the cave as landowners. He gave information on the use(s) of the cave and its vicinity (cooking spots, manports) which threw some light on the possible use(s) of the cave in the past.

Plate IV: Traditional building with egg blocks mixed with slag aggregates located on the smelting site of Agodi in Ilube. The house has been plastered with cement.
Plate VI: Chief Edward Okorie of Agiji village Ihube, welcomes his visitors and offers kolanut to his ancestors before agreeing to any interview.

Plate VII: Weaving of raffia palm leaves into roofing mats (atani) used in traditional architecture.
Research Design

The research method adopted in this study is ethnoarchaeological. Researchers have defined ethnoarchaeology as the collection of ethnographic data by archaeologists, rather than the use or dependence on data collected by ethnographers or other professionals, who in most cases, have research objectives different from those of the archaeologists. This makes it necessary for the ethnoarchaeologist to conduct his/her own ethnographic studies to better understand the cultural materials he/she studies. Consequently, every archaeologist engaged in ethnoarchaeological research tends to define ethnno-archaeology from the point of view of his objectives (Stanislawski, 1974, Stiles 1977, Gould 1978, Schiffer 1978, Orme 1974, Hodder 1983 and Okpoko 1984).

However, the various definitions notwithstanding, researchers are agreed that ethnoarchaeology is a conscious attempt by archaeologists to link material culture remains (both ethnographic and archaeologi-

ca) to human behavioural patterns. For instance, ethnoarchaeology, as pointed out by Adams (1982) is the ethnographic observation of a modern society or culture, as it would appear in an archaeological context. In this case, the emphasis is placed on three major areas, i.e. technological, cognitive and distributional aspects of the material culture of a given society. Stanislawski (1974) defines ethnoarchaeology as the direct observation, through field study, of the form, manufacture, distribution, meaning and the use of artefacts and their institutional setting and social units correlated among living, non-industrial peoples, for the purpose of constructing better explanatory models to aid archaeologi-

cal analogy and inference.

In carrying out ethnoarchaeological research, Agorsah (1990) pointed out the need for a systematic approach, which is capable of explaining observed archaeological remains beyond mere collection of data. In this case, ethnoarchaeological research is only a tool that can help generate a better use of analogy capable of linking the past and the present. Adertton (1985) on his own part, has given very useful hints on how to conduct systematic ethnoarchaeological research in Africa. This includes, among others, the collection of oral traditions from knowl-
edgable elders of the society. In this way, the archaeologist would be informed of changes in artefact manufacture, uses or disposal of re-
mains during their lifetime and even beyond, as learnt from their deceased ancestors.

Given our research objectives therefore, we define ethnoarchaeology as the study of the present inhabitants of Okigwe and its environs in an attempt to obtain data which will enhance our understanding and interpretation of archaeological remains/features. The latter would throw light on early human occupation, resource base(s) and migrations through time in these areas.

Ethnographic Data

Ethnographic information was obtained on aspects of the people’s material culture with the view to understanding the manufacturing processes, use(s) and the meanings attached to these material culture by the people. To this end, traditional “industries” studied include pottery making in Isuochi and Ishiagu, iron working in Ihube and Ugwuogu, hunting techniques in Isukwuato and food preservation methods, amongst others, in Okigwe and its environs.

During the study, craftsmen and hunters’ guild, as the case may be, were observed at work and relevant questions asked on both specific and general aspects of their chosen professions. In most cases, however, knowledgeable elders who have either retired or are still active in their professions and are regarded by the people as repository of knowledge were interviewed.

Oral Traditional Data

Oral traditions are invaluable in the writing and understanding of the cultural history of any human society. As Kassam (1986) rightly pointed out, oral tradition among the Gabra of Kenya, symbolises “the fertility of long ago,” which, when properly studied, would enhance the understanding of the society’s worldview.

In Okigwe area, therefore, we collected oral traditions from the present inhabitants to aid our understanding of the following:

i) The meaning and uses of material cultural items in the society;

ii) The people’s traditions of origin with respect to possible migrations either within or outside Okigwe area. Through the use of oral traditions also, we were able to locate and document the
various uses of caves and rock shelters as well as the sacred place often regarded by the people as their ancestral home, that is, the place where their progenitor first lived. Examples were found at Uturu, Ihube and Ahaba Imenyi. It has been observed, and rightly too, by Ray (1988) that oral traditions would make for better interpretations and understanding of the socio-cultural contexts and symbolization of excavated cultural materials.

Traditions of Origin and Migration
In order to guide our choice of archaeological sites and enhance our interpretation of cultural materials excavated from these sites, we collected oral traditions relating to people’s origin and migrations in the two clans of Otanchara and Otanzu as well as other communities in Okigwe area. In doing so, we took due cognizance of Alagou’s (1978) observations that such traditions, like other forms of oral traditions, represent merely the raw material for the use of historians, which if carefully and properly explored can help a great deal in reconstructing the history of the people. Afiofo (1983) has on his own part suggested that it is better for us to see traditions of origin not as “beginning” but rather dealing with the complex of causes and inter-relationships which helped to bring about the cultural traits for which a group of people is known. Again, in his study of the Umueri traditions of origin, Okpoko (1988) maintained that such traditions, if properly understood and interpreted in the socio-cultural settings of the people concerned, constitute significant sources of historical reconstructions.

Archaeological Data
Archaeological reconnaissance of Okigwe area has yielded very interesting and relevant sites (Okpoko and Iokechukwu 1993). These include caves, rock shelters, iron smelting sites, a stone tool factory site and abandoned settlement sites. Some of these sites have been investigated. They include the iron smelting sites in Amaikpa village of Ihube, the Ogba-Nicoto cave also at Ihube, the Otamkpa and Ahaba Imenyi caves in Isukuato.
Background Information

As mentioned earlier, the Oikigwe area is said to be part of Igbó heartland (Isichei 1976, Talbot and Muhall 1962, Uchendu 1966). In dealing with the problems of Igbó origins, three documented categories of traditions of origin readily come to mind (Afigbo 1983). These are: oriental origin, traditions claiming relationships with influential neighboring states and finally, those claiming autochthony, that is, an independent Igbó homeland. In the oriental option, attempts are made to link the Igbó ancestry with either Israel or Egypt. This has little relevance, if any, in understanding the origin of the Igbó origin and migrations. Furthermore, available archaeological and linguistic data do not support such a view. Afigbo (1983) has pointed out that the spread of this idea amongst the educated Igbó in the twentieth century could be explained partly as a result of the influence of Christian religion and missionaries and partly due to the popularity of the Hamitic hypothesis during the colonial period.

It is however, interesting to know, that we came across the oriental traditional origin at Ugwuogu where a local historian - Chie(j 11 Maduka - a retired school headmaster, opined that the people of Ugwuogu came from the East. He compared the Obiahu - a pyramidal structure at Ugwuogu market square with the Egyptian pyramids. Apart from this tradition recorded at Ugwuogu, it should be noted that at no where else in Oikigwe area did we come across this oriental tradition. The traditions of origin so far recorded in communities in Oikigwe area maintain that the people had settled in their present locations from antiquity. Their positions were succinctly put thus: 'Anyi n' ahu n’ala' meaning, "we (the people) sprouted from the ground," thus emphasizing the antiquity of their occupation of their present settlements. Their traditions of origin do not support the Eastern origin claim, instead they seem to point to very short distant migrations within and outside the Oikigwe area.

The traditions of origin of Otutu clan in Oikigwe recorded at Uturu - the ancestral home of the clan - did not mention any movement along the Nsukka-Oikigwe-Cuesta. Instead, their progenitor, Ena was said to have emigrated from a location in Afikpo Division (east of Oikigwe) ahead of other emigrants who came from Anaa in the Cross River basin. There exists today a sacred grove at Eke Ukwe
market square in Uturu where Ena—the founding father—and his wife were believed to have settled. This sacred grove is known as the Eri-m'afor shrine, that is, umbilical cord shrine. The usual annual offering of sacrifice to this shrine at Ike Ukwu by all the communities that make up the Otazu clan did sustain the socio-political unity as well as a tradition of solidarity among the village groups. This practice, Udumeze (1994) believed re-affirms the people's kinship ties.

In Ihube, the ancestral home of the Onuchara clan, we recorded different versions of traditions of origin. However, the traditions point to a common progenitor known as Uram. But they differ on where Uram came from. For instance, the tradition recorded by a colonial officer in the early thirties states that the founder of Ihube was a certain Uram from Aigu (Ubah 1978). Some traditions in Ihube deny an Aigu ancestry; instead they see Ikpa Ora as the place from where Uram came. What these traditions of origin from both clans in Okigwe seem to suggest is that the people of Ihube moved into Okigwe area from different directions and most probably at the same time period. Our limited studies of the two clans, seem to suggest a marked cultural difference. For instance, the Ihube have iho marks on their face, which led the Uturu people to refer to them as mba ichi. This suggests a strong cultural link between the Onunchara and Nri anato Umudioka communities in Awka area, a cultural trait not seen among the people of Otazu. Again a close look at the cult practices (masquerades) and dietary behaviours revealed some differences between the two clans that inhabit the Okigwe area. The people of Onunchara, on the one hand, for example, make use of ogili itii as a local delicacy in traditional food seasoning. This is made from the cooked and fermented seeds of Ricinus communis, which is also believed to serve medicinal functions, such as the cure of stomach ache. The Otazu clan, on the other hand, shunned the use of ogili, and instead made use of fermented roasted insects and seeds to add flavour to their food in the past. Presently, however, the use of modern food seasoning is very popular among the people of Otazu clan while ogili still maintains the lead in the traditional menu in Onunchara clan.

It is pertinent to point out here that Afgbo (1986) opined that Igbo migrations seem to have started from the Niger-Benue Confluence, where the Kwa language family (Igbo, Edo, Yoruba, etc) was believed to have separated some 6000 years ago (Armstrong
From here, the Igbo appear to have spread along the Nsukka-Osigwe highlands and on reaching the southern tip of the cuesta, the migrants formed such Igbo communities like Urrha, Ikwerre and Ndoki. There is yet very little archaeological and linguistic evidence to sustain Afigbo’s migratory route along the Nsukka-Osigwe Cuesta. Again, since the movement was from the north to the south (where Osigwe is located) one would expect that human settlements in the north would date earlier than those in the south.

**Osigwe Iron Smelting Sites**

Iron smelting residues were found in homes, farmlands and along pathways in Ijube, Isuochi and Uguavo communities, which undoubtedly showed that extensive iron smelting was carried out in these areas. This perhaps led to Kitson’s (1913) suggestion that as far back as 1911 Osigwe was among the oldest settlements where ironstone deposits were worked, to the extent that it gave rise to home-based industries in iron tools. However, it was only at Uguavo that we were given a vivid account of iron smelting by elders who witnessed the smelting of iron as small children. In other communities where slag was observed, the present inhabitants are ignorant of iron smelting (Opoko and Ibeanu 1994).

The Ijube elders, including blacksmiths, regarded iron slag as a type of stone, which sprouts and gradually grows from the ground. In our attempt to locate smelting sites, with perhaps evidence of smelting (especially remains of furnaces) our informants at Ijube directed us to a place known as Ikpa uthu. Our search for Ikpa uthu, however, proved abortive. It may well be that the colonial headquarters of Osigwe, where Kitson (1913) observed extensive iron slag and blacksmithing, was part of the Ikpa uthu, which has now been forgotten by the present-day Ijube people, most probably due to colonial impact, or we are yet to locate the actual site. According to Amanwunne (1981), Osigwe is situated on a piece of farmland which formerly belonged to Ijube, Ubahu and Ope. It was the high elevation of this area that informed its choice by the colonial administration for strategic reasons (Floyd 1969).

It should be recalled that in most Igbo settlements where iron smelting was practised, the smelting furnace is known as Uthu. There-
fore, the name Ika 'atu is suggestive of a smelting site. The loss of memory of iron smelting in Ìhube and Ìhùachi is suggestive of the antiquity of iron smelting in these places. Iron smelting might have been done not necessarily by the progenitors of the present inhabitants. In Ìhube, for example, iron-smelting sites are now found in homes and in farmlands within residential quarters. It is therefore very likely that iron smelting predated the present settlement of Ìhube. Consequently iron-working sites have been adversely affected by human activities. Thus, the cultural materials are no longer in situ. For instance, in one of the smelting sites in Ìguji village, Ìhube, pieces of iron slag were found incorporated in the walls of mud houses. Our observations showed that these houses were built on a piece of land formerly used for iron smelting. The adjacent farmland was covered with slag and broken furnace walls. In most farmlands, the farmers over the years collected iron slag, which were used as boundary markers or heaped around some trees (such as palm trees), in the farmland to reclaim enough land for farming activities.

Field reconnaissance and oral traditions directed the location and choice of these sites for excavation as well as the study and interpretation of finds.

**EXCAVATIONS**

1. Ṣotanchara clan, Ìhube

Our archaeological surveys revealed evidence of extensive iron smelting with pieces of slag littering most roads and foot paths in the area. In the Amáiíka village of Ìhube, two slag heaps, designated Amáiíka sites I and II, were investigated archaeologically. Amáiíka I is a small parcel of land some 20 metres from the workshop of a blacksmith - Mr. Òlùluwé. This piece of land is still used as a refuse dump by people living in adjoining compounds, including the blacksmith. Apart from potsherds and pieces of smelting slag, smithing tuyeres and slag were also found scattered on the mound.

The other iron smelting site - Amáiíka II - is located beneath the canopy of Brachystegia nigèra (Achi tree), in what is believed to be the Okpara ugo shrine some 30 metres from Amáiíka I. At this site, it seems likely that the slag was heaped around the base of the
tree to reclaim enough land for farming activities. Cocoyam (Xanthosoma sagittifolium) was planted on the reclaimed piece of land. The slag mound measures 8 metres in length and 4 metres in width. Surface collections included potsherds and one bronze bangle.

2. Ogba Nkoto Cave
This cave is located at the outskirts of Ihube settlement. It represents the remnants of the ferruginous sandstone of Okigwe escarpments, which have been greatly worn by weathering and erosion. Our Ihube informants believe that the cave was used in the past to link some places within the vicinity. The cave interior has a height of one metre and an internal diameter of 7.5 metres. The cave floor is wet and damp. This is as a result of the overflow of a shallow stream, Orimana, located some 3 metres from the mouth of the cave. These factors combine to make the human use/occupation of this cave very unlikely. However, there is evidence of human activity around the cave, such as, hunting and trapping of animals.

3. Otanzu Clan: Ugwuogu Uturu
In this part of Okigwe, extensive caves, smelting sites and numerous springs were documented including the stone tool factory site of Ugwuale. At Ugwuogu ethnographic data were collected on iron smelting and smithing processes from knowledgeable elders who either witnessed or participated in these activities.

4. Okpu Chukwu Cave
This cave is located on a sandstone outcrop in the Akoha village of Otamkpa. The sandstone outcrop trends in an east – west direction and the cave cavities open northwards facing a slope, which terminates in a valley some 30 metres down the slope. This valley contains spring water, which serves as source of drinking water for the community.

The slope is under intensive cassava cultivation and is subjected to annual bush burning as a result of hunting and trapping activities. We observed within the vicinity of the cave, traditional traps with wire noose as well as farm implements and cassava stem cuttings stored in the cave by present day farmers. The cave floor was found
littered with palm kernels eaten by rodents, burnt leaves and charcoal specks brought into the cave both by human activities and wind action. There were no postholes on the cave floor. The cave is 7.8 m wide and 2.5 m high, while the thickness of the rock overhang is 2.6 m. The two main cavities of the cave were archaeologically investigated.

5. Uchuchukwu Cave

This is the biggest cave so far excavated in Okigwe area. It is located in the Amliyi village of Abula (Imenyi) in Isuokwuato. The sandstone outcrop is part of the Nsukka-Okigwe escarpment that trends eastwards to Aruchukwu. Oral traditions collected amongst the inhabitants suggest that the cave was regarded as the house of God – Chukwu – and served the same function as the long jija ibisi Ukpa of the Aruchukwu and other Igbo oracles (Achepo 1969; Ottenberg 1958, Nwala 1982). We were informed that some inhabitants of the area took refuge in the vicinity of the cave during the Nigerian civil war. Hunters still enter the cave to hunt. Spring water, locally known as Gwowy, is located some 40 metres down the talus slope, which is now under yam cultivation. We observed in the open shelter, fireplace made by farmers who took some rest in the cool vicinity of the cave. Stones were found littered on the open shelter used both as manuports and tripods for cooking.

Excavation Techniques

The main aims of our excavations are to delineate cultural units, obtain datable samples (charcoal, furnace wall and note possible cultural changes through time. Consequently, test trench excavation was used at most sites, except in Nkoto and Okwuokpa caves where available space made test pit excavations possible.

Procedure

At aminaka Buwe iron smelting sites, a test trench of 1 x 2m was dug in each of the sites at an initial arbitrary spit level of 10 cm, which was later increased to 20 cm after spit 2. As a slag mound, spit level and stratigraphic controls were very problematic, more so as the mounds most likely have been impacted by human activities. There-
fore, all efforts were geared towards the retrieving of cultural and datable materials. In Amaiakpa I, sterile layer was reached at spit 4 while that of Amaiakpa II was reached at spit level 6. The sterile layer represents the original floor level before the slag debris was dumped there. This layer is often identified by a marked reduction of slag aggregates, if any (as in the case of slag mounds), or by a marked change in soil colour and lack of cultural materials.

Test pit excavations of 1 x 1 metre were dug in Nkoto and Okpu-chukwu caves at an arbitrary spit level of 10 cm. Unlike in the exca-
vation of iron smelting sites, hand trowels were used because of the nature of the cave deposits. In Nkoto cave, the bedrock was reached at 76 cm and was found to dip inwards. A hand pick was used to knock round the bedrock and it gave a very dull sound suggesting very compact bedrock. The cave deposit is wet and well sorted, which suggests water action.

Okpuchukwu cave deposit is dry and shallow. The bedrock was reached at spit 3. The cave deposit which is dark brown (7.5YR 3/3 Munsell) showed a very clear soil colour change from the cave bed-
rock. It was noted that very limited use seemed to have been made of the Okpuchukwu cave by man. This view was informed by the dearth of cultural materials and the fact that no myths or folktales were as-
associated with the cave by the inhabitants of the area.

Uhuchukwu cave is the biggest and has the richest deposit of all the caves so far excavated in Okigwe area (Plates II & III). In this cave complex, two locations were selected for archaeological inves-
tigations. One is the main chamber, which oral tradition said was the 'court' of Chukwu oracle. A test trench of 1 x 2 m was dug on the dripline of the cave. A second test pit of 1 x 1 m was dug at the open shelter. It is in this part of the cave that Chief Okotue (an informant) and his wife usually take some rest and cook/roast their food when farming on the piece of land around the cave. Our preliminary sound-
ings and probes with iron hammers and pins showed that the cave chamber has an enormous deposit unlike the open shelter. There were no cultural materials on the cave surface. The top deposit seems to represent the weathering of the cave roof ever time. This deposit is dull brown in colour (7.5YR 5/3, Munsell).
Excavation Results - Stratigraphy

It was possible to divide the excavated sites (especially the caves) into natural stratigraphic layers based on the colour and texture of the soil, and the organic and inorganic materials, and into cultural stratigraphical layers on the basis of artefacts and/or contexts contained in each stratum.

In Armaipuka iron-smelting site, there were profuse slag agglomerations which made stratigraphic control very problematic. As a result, both vertical and horizontal measurements were heavily relied on in the location of finds in the trench and pits. For instance, at a depth of 15 cm in spit 2 of Armaipuka site II, a green polyhedral glass bead was located. This site also yielded lots of potsherds and charcoal samples at the lower spit compared with the upper spit levels, which may or may not be related to the smelting process at the site.

The Nikoto cave, at the first spit level yielded one red flat bead known as Jigida, as well as one cowrie shell. Charcoal samples and very few potsherds were got from spits 2 to 5 and there was evidence of rootlets. These cultural materials most probably were swept into the cave by flood water. The Olongchukwa cave did not yield cultural materials, except two potsherds. These were found at the first spit level.

The excavation of Uhuchukwa cave showed that the first three spit levels, which represented sandstone particles from the cave roof, yielded no artefacts. There is a visible change in soil colour midway at spit 4, where charcoal samples and potsherds were first noted. From this point, material culture and implements brought into the cave by man were found in stratigraphic contexts down to the sterile layer at spit level 15. Beyond this level there was a marked soil colour change and an absence of cultural materials. Since we did not strike the underlyng bedrock of the cave two additional spit levels were dug but no cultural materials were observed.

Uhuchukwa cave had 16 arbitrary spit levels in the big cave chamber, which were correlated to seven stratigraphic layers. The open shelter, with a maximum depth of 70 cm, had only three natural stratigraphic layers. The main cultural materials from Uhuchukwa cave are charcoal and pottery. In the cave chamber, potsherds were concentrated at spit 11, at a level more than one metre deep in the
cave. There were no cultural materials from spit levels 1 to 3. Quartz flake cores as well as unworked sand stones were found in spit levels 11 to 12 which also had concentration of potsherds. An ash lens was noted between spit levels 6 and 7, stretching from the northern to the west walls. Cultural materials reduced considerably from spit level 13 to 14 until they peter out at spit 15.

Chronology

The charcoal samples collected from the excavated sites in Okigwe area were submitted for radiocarbon dating in the Radiocarbon Laboratory of the University of Köln, Germany. And given the cost implications only a very limited number of samples could be dated. We were therefore compelled, based on our priority, to select only one sample from each of the sites investigated, i.e. the deepest layers except for the Uhuchukwu cave for which three samples one each from the middle, bottom and top layers were submitted. So far, only the date for the lowest occupation level of the cave has been received. This sample was collected at a depth of 1.4 metres and gave a radiocarbon date of 4691±78 BP (calibrated date of 3464±104 BC). This represents the earliest radiocarbon date from the cave sites so far excavated from the Okigwe area. However, being a single date, very little, if any, meaningful archaeological interpretation can be attempted.

This single date can be compared with those from the Afikpo rock shelter located within the same geographical area and 60 km east of the location of Uhuchukwu cave. The longest occupation level in the Afikpo rock shelter (Afikpo II) has a cultural sequence of mixed microliths and pottery artefacts. The upper layer of this cultural sequence is dated to between 2500 and 3000 BP (550-1050 BC) while the lower layer is dated to between 3000 and 5000 BP (1050-3050 BC). The earliest occupation level (Afikpo I), which has microlithic tools without pottery, is said to have not been properly dated (Andah and Anozie 1980). This cultural level was however not recognized by Hartle (1966) in his excavation of the same Ukpa rock shelter. At Ughuo site, some 7 km from Ukpa rock shelter, Chikwendu (1977) got a radiocarbon date of 2970±90 BP (1020 BC) for the upper level of an aceramic layer.
From the above discussions and comparison of radiocarbon dates from Afikpo rock shelter and Uhuchukwu cave, it seems likely that the early cultural level at Uhuchukwu cave might be contemporaneous with, if not earlier than, the Afikpo sites. In any case unlike the Afikpo sites, we are yet to come in contact with the aceramic level in the cave sites already excavated in Okigwe area. Instead, the early cultural level of Uhuchukwu has yielded only one microlith and few quartz flakes and sandstone implements found together with a concentration of postholes. Furthermore, the quantity of recovered postholes when compared with that of Afikpo sites is extremely low. It is most likely we have not yet located the Late Stone Age tools and this calls for further archaeological research at Uhuchukwu cave.

Our present results, therefore, have put us in a difficult position to interpret the modus vivendi of the occupants of Anaba Imenyi cave. It may well be argued, based on the material cultural evidence, that we are yet to locate the Late Stone Age cultural tools, in contrast to the case in Afikpo. At Ugwangwa, Chikwendu (1977) noted the occurrence of an aceramic layer in one of his two trenches. Be that as it may, the radiocarbon date from Anaba Imenyi cave falls within the Late Stone Age cultural phase during which the inhabitants most probably depended on the gathering economy for subsistence. It is likely therefore that the early occupants of Afikpo rock shelters and the Uhuchukwu cave some 60 km apart were engaged in different subsistence strategies. While the former engaged in hunting and gathering the latter probably embarked on intensive food collecting, (on limited range) such as plant food resources, by exploiting the unique ecological niches offered by the numerous springs in Okigwe area. It is worth noting that charred seeds of Carinaria schwencfurthii, pollen of Elaeis guineensis, Dialium guineense (ichicu) Solanum macrocarpon (Afiafa oku) Trichilia roka (ubenwebe) and Irvingia (Ugili) were among the pollen spectra of Okamka and Uhuchukwu caves (Ibeanu and Umeh, in press). Some of these food plants are still being exploited by the present inhabitants of Okigwe.

We have noted already that the caves excavated so far yielded very few lithic artefacts when compared with other Later Stone Age sites. However, it has been observed that the raw materials for these tools are all available locally in Okigwe area (Umeh, O.P. pers. com.). The paucity of stone tool artefacts seems to suggest a de-emphasis on
hunting as a way of life and an expansion of the subsistence base. This suggestion seems to be supported by the evidence of the exploitation of snails and fruits by the occupants of Uhuchikwu Cave (Table 1).

POTTERY ANALYSIS

I. Ethnographic Information

Our observation in the field showed that the functions of some of the bowls used are not mutually exclusive, except perhaps in the case of ceremonial and serving bowls, which are elaborately decorated and specially reserved for use during festivals. Eating bowls are usually burnished and are mainly used by women and children. The head of the family, who, in most cases is a titled man, is usually served with bowls that befit his status, such as, Oku Ogodo, Okaoma and Okwese as the case may be. In most traditional homes, the woman and her children sitting in a circle clockwise, eat from the same bowl positioned at the centre. In this way, a bowl of cooked yam with vegetables or abacha ncha prepared and served in uja nchichi and oku ncha are consumed with mba relish in family units and gatherings. It is likely, therefore, that this eating habit may have influenced the shapes or forms of bowls, oku, in use in Okigwe area. (See Table II)

It is important, therefore, that the socio-cultural contexts of the use of pottery wares in Igbo societies should be rigorously investigated. This type of studies will show, among other things, that pottery, like other material cultural items, is a status symbol and reflects societal values. Its attributes should not be treated in isolation from functions, as both are difficult to separate. Pottery classification, based on functions, will be more relevant and meaningful to the people being studied. Finally, that with exceptional, commissioned pottery wares, the potters' motives are sometimes at variance with those of the consumers. People normally buy pots that would better serve their needs regardless of what the potter has in mind while making the pots. This may explain, in part, why, for instance, the same type of pot or bowl assumed different functional names based on their uses in different communities.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cave site</th>
<th>Spit level (cm)</th>
<th>Worked stone</th>
<th>Unworked stone</th>
<th>flakes</th>
<th>Cores</th>
<th>Raw materials</th>
<th>Other finds</th>
<th>Tool type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oghankoto</td>
<td>0 – 10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Haematite (red ochre)</td>
<td>Cowry shells</td>
<td>- point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60 – 70</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Sandstone quartz</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>small river pebbles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uhusukwu B, Open Shelter</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Senin shell</td>
<td>Scraper</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>J</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>&quot;Vannarius schenfsirth ii&quot;</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uhusukwu A, Main Chamber</td>
<td>110 – 120</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Haematite quartz</td>
<td>scraper</td>
<td>point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>J</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>quartz</td>
<td>scraper</td>
<td>point pebble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locality</td>
<td>Bowl Types</td>
<td>Positions</td>
<td>Rim Diameter range (cm)</td>
<td>Height range (cm)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ottun 8</td>
<td>Uwa (styles)</td>
<td>Uwa (styles)</td>
<td>7.25 - 8.10</td>
<td>17.40 - 17.90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ede (styles)</td>
<td>Ede (styles)</td>
<td>8.10 - 8.80</td>
<td>17.90 - 18.20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ottun 10</td>
<td>Uwa (styles)</td>
<td>Uwa (styles)</td>
<td>7.25 - 8.10</td>
<td>17.40 - 17.90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ede (styles)</td>
<td>Ede (styles)</td>
<td>8.10 - 8.80</td>
<td>17.90 - 18.20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ottun 9</td>
<td>Uwa (styles)</td>
<td>Uwa (styles)</td>
<td>7.25 - 8.10</td>
<td>17.40 - 17.90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ede (styles)</td>
<td>Ede (styles)</td>
<td>8.10 - 8.80</td>
<td>17.90 - 18.20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ottun 7</td>
<td>Uwa (styles)</td>
<td>Uwa (styles)</td>
<td>7.25 - 8.10</td>
<td>17.40 - 17.90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ede (styles)</td>
<td>Ede (styles)</td>
<td>8.10 - 8.80</td>
<td>17.90 - 18.20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table II: Functional Classification of Bowls in Ottun, Area

- **Otun**: Located on the outskirts of the modern town of Ottun.
- **RIMACE**: Located in the RIMACE region.
- **KHOCHE**: Located in the KHOCHE region.
- **DIAMACE**: Located in the DIAMACE region.

Note: The table details the functional classification of bowls found in Ottun, with specifications for the rim diameter and height ranges.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spot levels</th>
<th>Decorated Sherd</th>
<th>Plain Sherd</th>
<th>Rim Sherd</th>
<th>Undiagnostic</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Other finds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surface collection</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Iron slag, blade, pottery, stone, broken bone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Iron slag, charcoal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Iron slag, slag from pieces of furnace walls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Aamaipu II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spot levels</th>
<th>Decorated Sherd</th>
<th>Plain Sherd</th>
<th>Rim Sherd</th>
<th>Undiagnostic</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Other finds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surface collection</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Polythene pipe, bead, slag, slag from pieces of furnace walls, broken limestone implement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Broken limestone implement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Slag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
II. Pottery Analysis

Relatively large numbers of potsherds were collected from iron smelting sites at Ihehe, both from the excavations and surface. This contrasts sharply with very low number of potsherds from the cave sites investigated in Okigwe area.

The first step in the analysis of pottery was the grouping of the potsherds into two: rim and body sherds. The rim sherds were further classified into diagnostic (when the size and rim profile could be reconstructed) and undiagnostic (if they were very small or broken, rendering the reconstruction of rim profiles impossible). In our context, only the diagnostic rim sherds were considered relevant for the reconstruction of pottery forms or shapes. The reconstruction of the rim sherds enabled us to know the various pottery types represented. The body sherds were classified into decorated and plain. The decorated body sherds were further divided into different decorative motifs and/or techniques (Table III).

The data generated from these analyses of potsherds from archaeological contexts in Okigwe area were compared with ethnographic data from both pottery-making centres and user communities in Okigwe and environs. It is hoped this approach would throw light on continuity and change in pottery traditions in Okigwe through time. Again, the analysis of pottery fabrics beyond the traditional pottery decorative motifs and types has shed valuable light on the understanding of pottery distribution routes from their clay sources and/or pottery centres. To this end, potsherds from both ethnographic and archaeological contexts as well as raw materials, clay and tempering materials collected from pottery centres within and around Okigwe area were subjected to petrographic studies. This study has the potential of linking potsherds from sites to their probable source(s) of production. And this would shed some light on prehistoric culture contacts and possible migrations.

From Table II we can observe the apparent similarity of functional names of bowls among the Ihehe, Izoochi and Ishiagha whilst the Uturu pottery nomenclature is quite different. This similarity in pottery nomenclature may be suggestive of culture contacts and possible routes of migrations in Okigwe and environs in the distant past. It seems that the Otanchara and Otanza communities in Okigwe area, notwithstanding their
long history of inter-group relations over the years, still maintained certain
culture traits that set them apart. A comprehensive study and analysis of
these culture traits and comparisons of such trait complexes would no
doubt shed some light on the culture history as well as the origins and
migrations of the people that did occupy and/or are still occupying Okigwe and
environs.

The pottery analysis of excavated sites in Ihube seems to throw some light
on the people's behaviour patterns. For instance, in Amakpala I, there
is a high concentration of potsherds in Spits 1. This resulted as a result of
the continued use of the site as a refuse dump. On the other hand, Amakpala
II, being a sacred grove, showed a marked reduction in the number of
potsherds in Spits 1 and 2, and a very high concentration in Spits 3 and 4.
This seems to suggest an abandonment of the site for refuse disposal as
soon as the place was used as a ritual site. (Table III).

When we compared the pottery decorative motifs from both Amakpala
and Uhuchakwu caves, they shed some light on our understanding of
continuity and change in pottery tradition in and around Okigwe. For
example, the dominant decorative motifs at Uhuchakwu cave were either
burnishing or unburnishing. These potsherds were found in the early
occupation level (Spits 10-12). However, twisted string roulette was
observed from the middle occupation level upwards. Twisted string roulette
is the predominant decorative motif in Amakpala iron smelting sites.
Ethnographic study of pottery centres, such as Uhuchakwu, showed that both
twisted palm frond and string roulette are in vogue. The burning of
pottery wares, especially the bowls, is still practiced.

Discussion
It was observed that Ihube iron slag was in aggregates, with evidence of
slag flow. This is suggestive of the use of slag-trapping furnace for
iron smelting in the area. Similar slag types were found at Ugwuotu
where the use of shaft furnaces has been inferred through oral informa-
tion from knowledgeable elders who either participated in or wit-
nessed iron smelting. It is possible therefore to make use of the eth-
nographic data from Ugwuotu to attempt the reconstruction of an-
cient iron smelting practices in Ihube and Isuochi. In these places,
ethnographic data is at variance with the archaeological data with respect to iron smelting. This situation can be explained in terms of later migration into these areas or perhaps by the secrecy associated with iron working. In the past, iron smelting was known to have been practiced away from residential areas. Iron ores collected from the smelting sites at Amaitika village and Ugwuogu have been identified as ilmenite and hematite ores by Professor Urban of Geology Department, University of Frankfurt. The charcoal sample from Amaitika II collected at a depth of 1.17 m in spilt level 6 was said to be "modern" by the radiocarbon laboratory of the University of Cologne. One plausible explanation is that the charcoal sample is intrusive given the level of modern-day human activities over the years at these sites. It is possible that this does not reflect the date for iron smelting at Ihube, which is believed to be very early. As a result, we still need to do more work at Ihube iron smelting sites, which will be geared towards the location of relatively undisturbed sites and the collection of good quality, datable material, such as charcoal encased in slag or cinder as was the case at Opi (Okafor 1993). At Ugwuogu iron smelting is radiocarbon dated to 200 ± 200BP (1750 ± 200AD) (Anozie pers. com.). It is our belief that iron smelting at Ihube might date much earlier than the Ugwuogu site since there seems to be no link between ethnographic and archaeological data from Ihube.

The cultural remains in stratigraphic sequence and evidence of ash lens within the cave deposit strongly suggest the use of the cave by man in the distant past. The Uhuchukwu cave seems not to have been disturbed by human activities. Consequently, the recovered artefacts and ecofacts are assumed to be in situ. The recovered ecofacts from the cave- charcoal and soil samples — were subjected to further analyses that would throw some light on possible changes in the environment and in human behavioural patterns. These include, sedimentological study of the cave deposits, palynological analysis of soil samples, petrographic study of steind and dating of charcoal samples from the cave (Ibeanu, 2000).

The palynological studies of both the Uhuchukwu and Osotikpa cave have shed some light on the vegetation cover of the area. For instance, pollen grains of trees dominated the lower deposits while those of grasses, shrubs and ferns were mostly found at the upper level (Ibeanu and Umeji, in press). This result, Agwu (pers. com.)
(2000) believes is suggestive of a change from closed to open forest condition. This view is further buttressed by the evidence of pollen from Elaeis guineensis (palm tree) from surface soil layers in Uhuchukwu cave. The preponderance of palm trees in the forest is believed to be as a result of forest clearing by man for agricultural purposes (Sowumi, 1985). This study also showed that the ash lens is very rich in plant fragments, mostly xylem and sclerenchyma cells. This indicates that plant materials were burnt inside the cave, perhaps for generating some heat during comparatively cold conditions.

Diagnostic potsherds were selected from different spit levels of Uhuchukwu cave for petrographic studies, which are still in progress. This study would throw light on both the natural and cultural inclusions of pottery as well as the clay mineral components of potsherds. With this study, we can attempt to link potsherds to their probable raw material sources or production centres. This will no doubt enhance our understanding of trade routes and intergroup relations in Okigwe and its environs in the past.

Summary and Conclusion
There is enough evidence which suggests that the Okigwe area was inhabited by man in prehistoric times. The main attraction for the human occupation of this area seems to have been the environment with its diverse and rich material resources. For instance, its location at the forest/savanna ecotone, the numerous springs from the cuesta and gallery forests, which were fertile grounds for hunting activities (cf. Plate VIII). Furthermore, the dolerite igneous rocks and ironstones in Okigwe highland were extensively exploited by man in the manufacture of basic tools for both hunting and agriculture.

It is not yet clear how far back in time man occupied the Okigwe area. Even though a radiocarbon date of 3464 ± 104 BC was obtained from a cave site at Ahaba Imenyi, human occupation of Okigwe might be much earlier. This is supported by the evidence of a stone tool factory site at Uguwue, which is still generating some controversies. However, Atocie et al. (1978) are of the view that Uguwue is Upper Acheulian, based on correlation with other Acheulian sites in parts of Africa and Europe. The discovery of some of these stone tools along the Udi-Okigwe highland by Kitson (1913) is a further indication of
the antiquity of human occupation of this area. Kitson (1913) affirmed that: "But while surveying the Udo-Okuma coalfield in 1911, I found numbers of rough and polished stone implements of this departed race, and thus made the first discovery in the colony of pre-historic stone working sites and of stone implements in large numbers" (Kitson 1913).

Even though most communities in Okigwe area claim autochthony, their traditions of origin do not seem to date as early as the period of iron smelting in the area. This may be a result of loss of memory of iron smelting due to the antiquity of occupation or waves of migrations by different professional groups in and around Okigwe area. In search of raw material resources and sustainable subsistence base(s) (Plates VI & VIII). The pottery evidence from both archaeological and ethnographic sources seems to support this view. Different pottery decorative motifs seem to have reached their way into Okigwe as a result of continued human interactions within and outside the area. The earliest pottery decorative motifs, as noted at Uwhセルblukwu Cave of Abha Imenyi, were either burnished or unburnished. Roulette, especially the ring and twisted palm frond (#ghali) were found from the middle to the upper layers of the cave. It is important to note that these pottery traditions have not changed much in most of the pottery centres that supplied and still supply pottery wares in Okigwe area.

In conclusion, this research endeavour has succeeded in throwing some light on the complex nature of Igbo culture history, but much is yet to be done. The importance of the Okigwe research project in the understanding of early human settlements, migrations and aspects of the Igbo culture history can only be realized in the context of a multidisciplinary research endeavour. For instance, the palynological studies of pollens from both the Orakpia and Uwhセルblukwu caves suggest a change from closed to open forest environment, which, according to Agwu (2000 pers. com.) was as a result of human activities such as agricultural practices. Analytical studies of raw materials, artefacts and ecofacts would help in the understanding of the human behavioural patterns that resulted in the production, use and distribution of cultural materials in Okigwe and its environs. They would, at the same time, produce better analogies that would enhance our knowledge of past cultural activities in Okigwe and its environs.
Plate VII: Children are actively involved in the indigenous knowledge of the society. Here they are engaged in traditional roofing with atani roofing mats.

Plate VIII: Women washing at the female section of ihuku stream. It is a taboo to fish in this stream. This taboo is still in vogue in Uturu today.
Acknowledgements

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