Ethnoarchaeology at IITA Ibadan

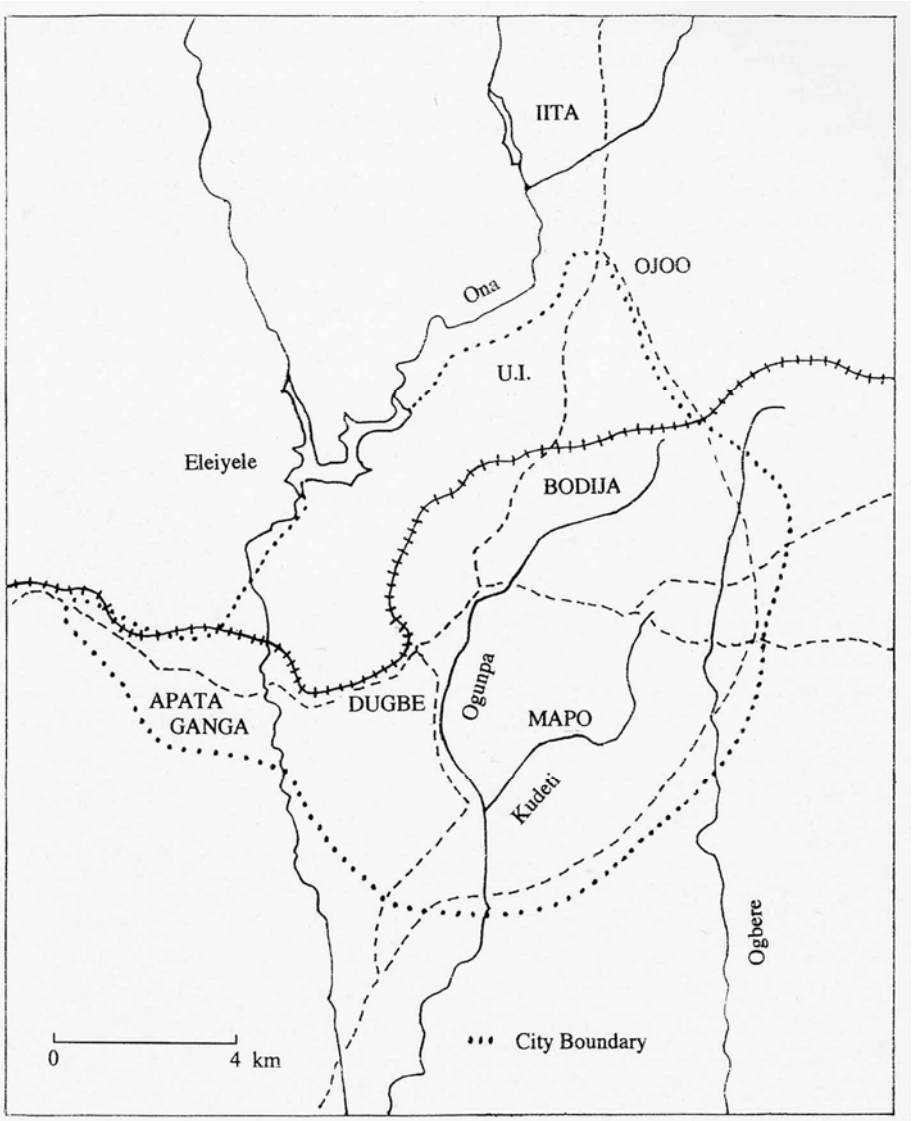
Excavation of the mound at Adesina Oja in the Archaeological Reserve

Preliminary version

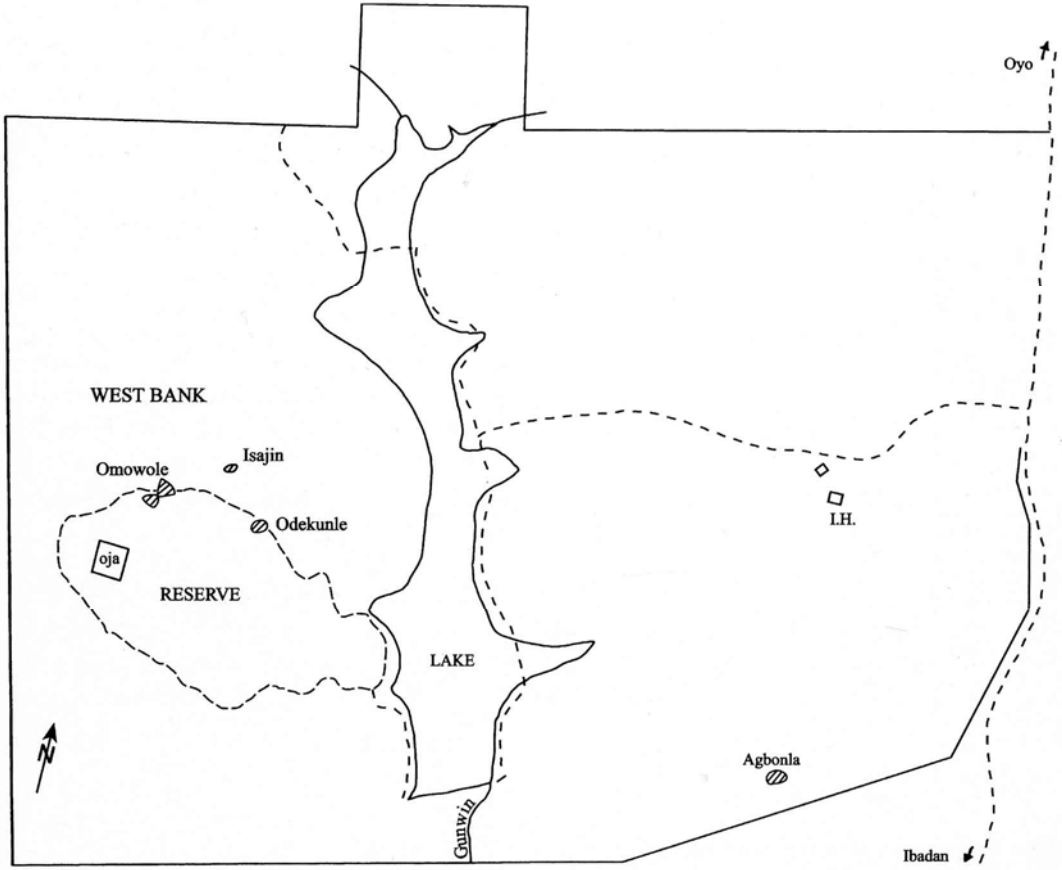
Philip Allsworth-Jones

The International Institute of Tropical Agriculture was founded in 1970, north of Ibadan, in south-western Nigeria. At the same time an Archaeological Reserve was established in the western part of its territory, thanks to an initiative of Professor Thurstan Shaw. The former village of Adesina Oja, containing the remains of seven houses, was incorporated into the Reserve. Four long-term experiments were set up, including one concerned with structural decay. Excavations were conducted in the Reserve in 1980-1986, by the Department of Archaeology of the University of Ibadan, as a training exercise for students. In the course of this work, house no. 2 was completely excavated. The results were published in "Azania" in 2004. In addition, a 12 metre long trench was excavated in a mound near to the gate on the eastern side of the Reserve. The maximum depth of deposit was about 1.75 metres.

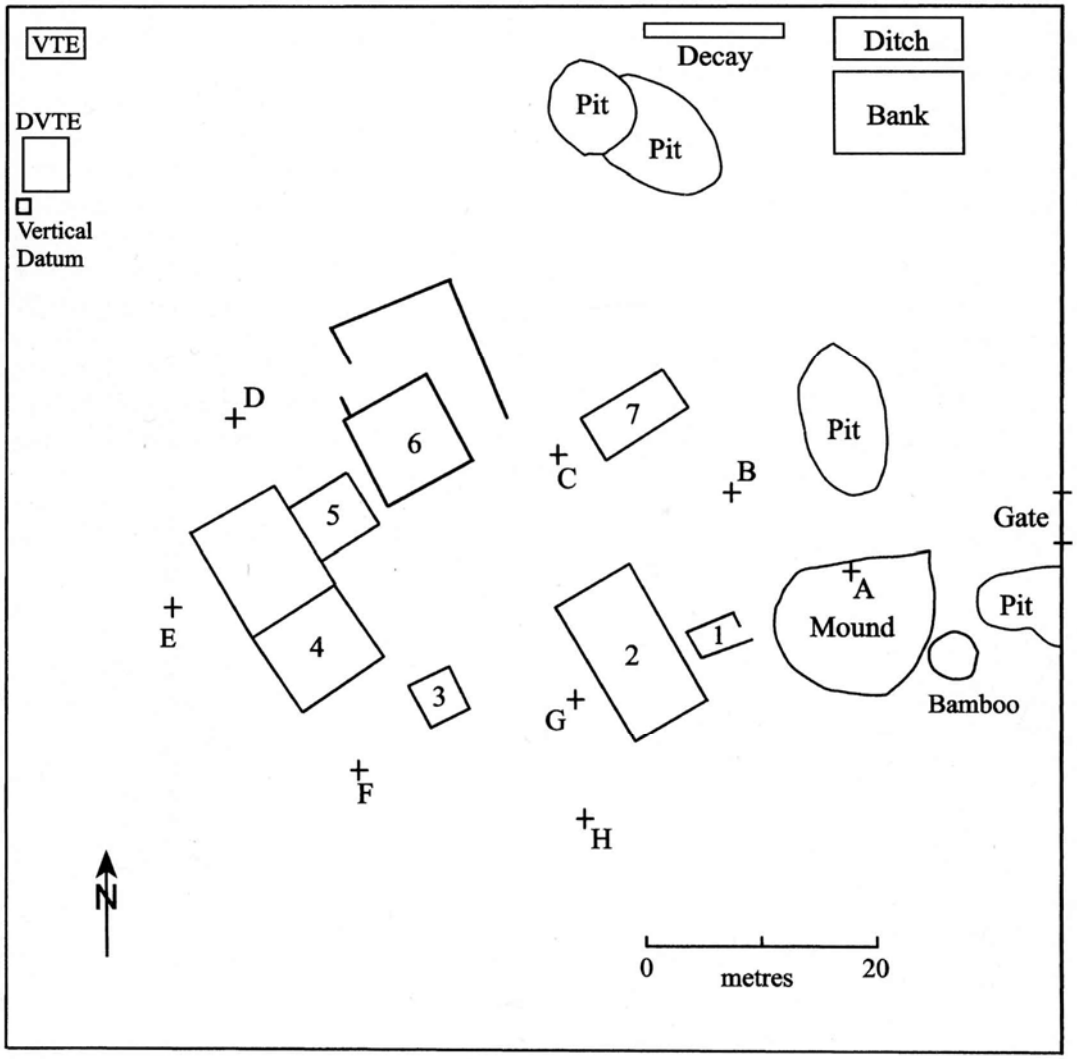
A number of reports on the material remains recovered were prepared by students of the University, under the supervision of the author, and some of the results are summarized here. On the basis of coin evidence, among other things, it is likely that the occupation of the village extended throughout the early part of the 20th century, up to the establishment of IITA. It therefore witnessed the growth of colonial and early post-colonial Ibadan, a city which by 1973 had more than a million inhabitants, and it is instructive to ask what light the material remains recovered can throw on the life of the people at that time. In the course of the investigation, much light was shed on the significance of the remains by means of ethnographic enquiry.



Ibadan: extent of built up area, 1981.

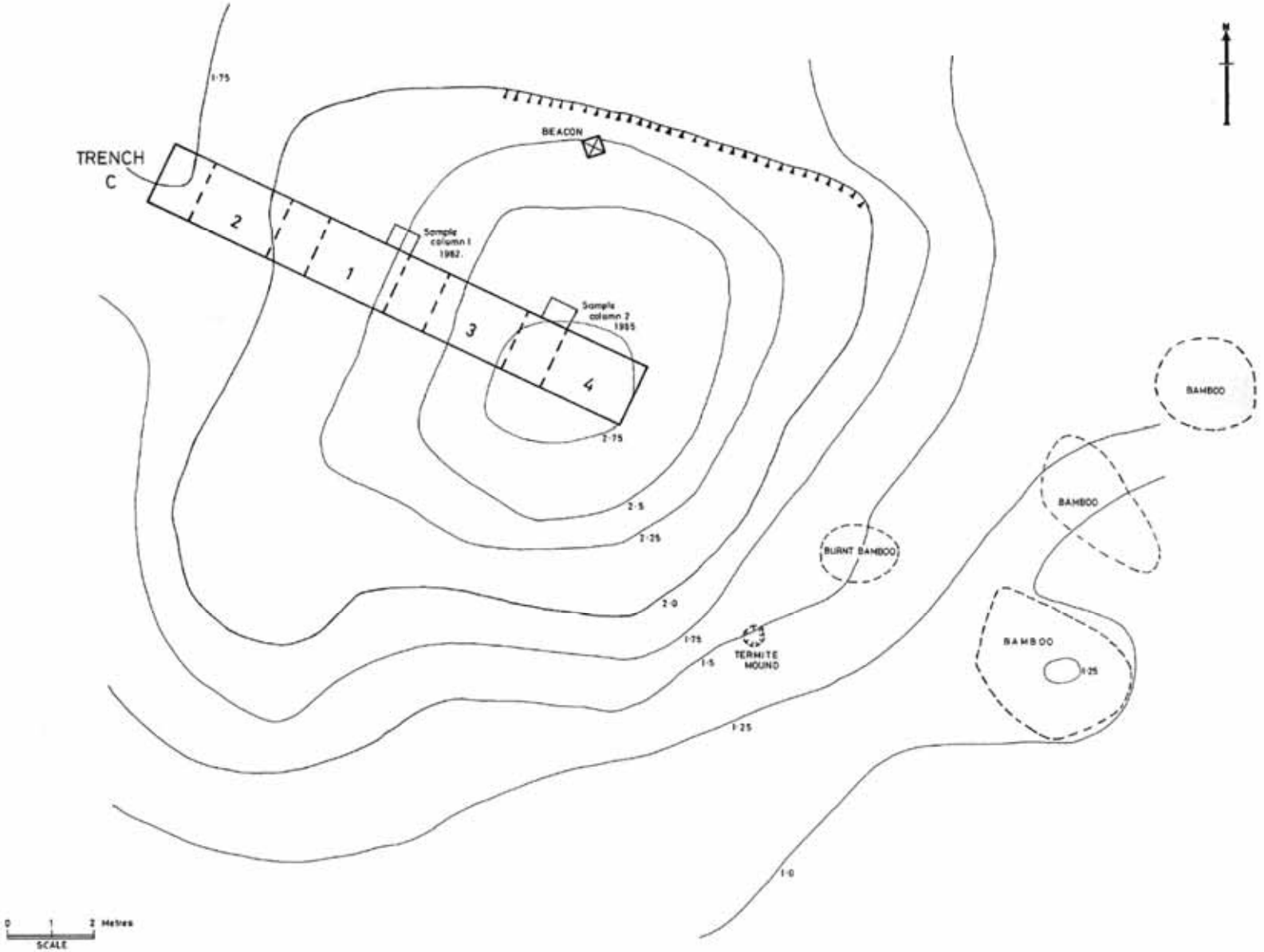


The International Institute of Tropical Agriculture



The Archaeological Reserve, IITA, Ibadan.

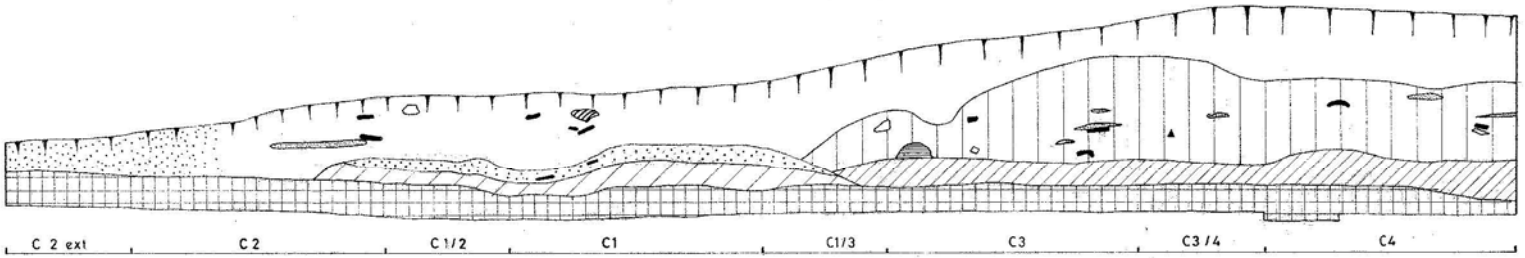
IITA MOUND SURVEY (FEB. 1986).



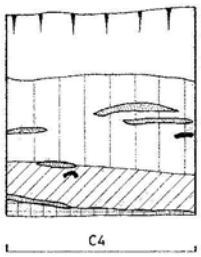
FIELD DRAWING PAJ. 14-2-1986.
CARTOGRAPHY MOD. 18.6.1987.

I.I.T.A. MIDDEN MOUND

NORTH



EAST



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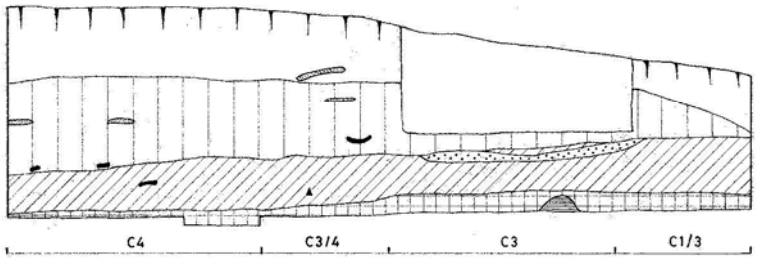


ASHY / CHARCOAL LENSES
STONES
SNAILS
POTSHERDS
TERMITE TUNNELS
IRON OBJECTS
BONES

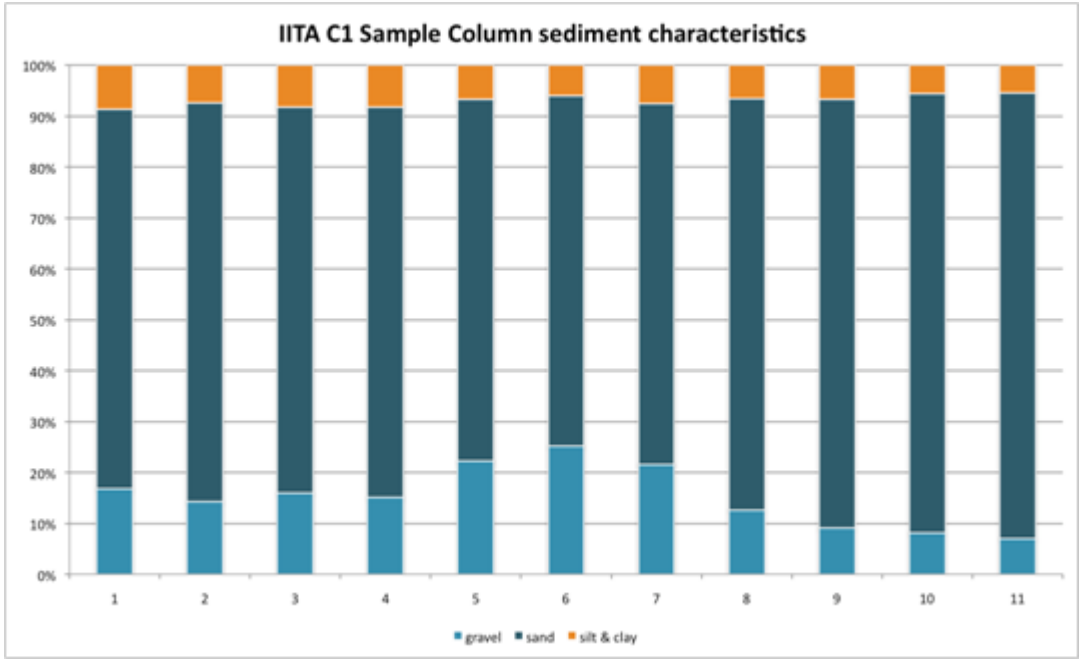
SURFACE LAYER		5 YR 3/3 DARK REDDISH BROWN 5 YR 3/4 DARK REDDISH BROWN
UPPER UNIT		5 YR 5/6 YELLOWISH RED
ASHY BAND		10 R 2·5/1 REDDISH BLACK
LOWER UNIT		5 YR 4/4 REDDISH BROWN 5 YR 4/3 REDDISH BROWN
SUBSOIL		2·5 YR 4/6 RED

0 2 4
METRES

IITA C1 sample column

Layer 1	5 YR 3/3	dark reddish brown
Layer 2	10 R 2.5/1	reddish black
Layer 3	5 YR 4/3	reddish brown
Layer 4	2.5 YR 4/6	red subsoil

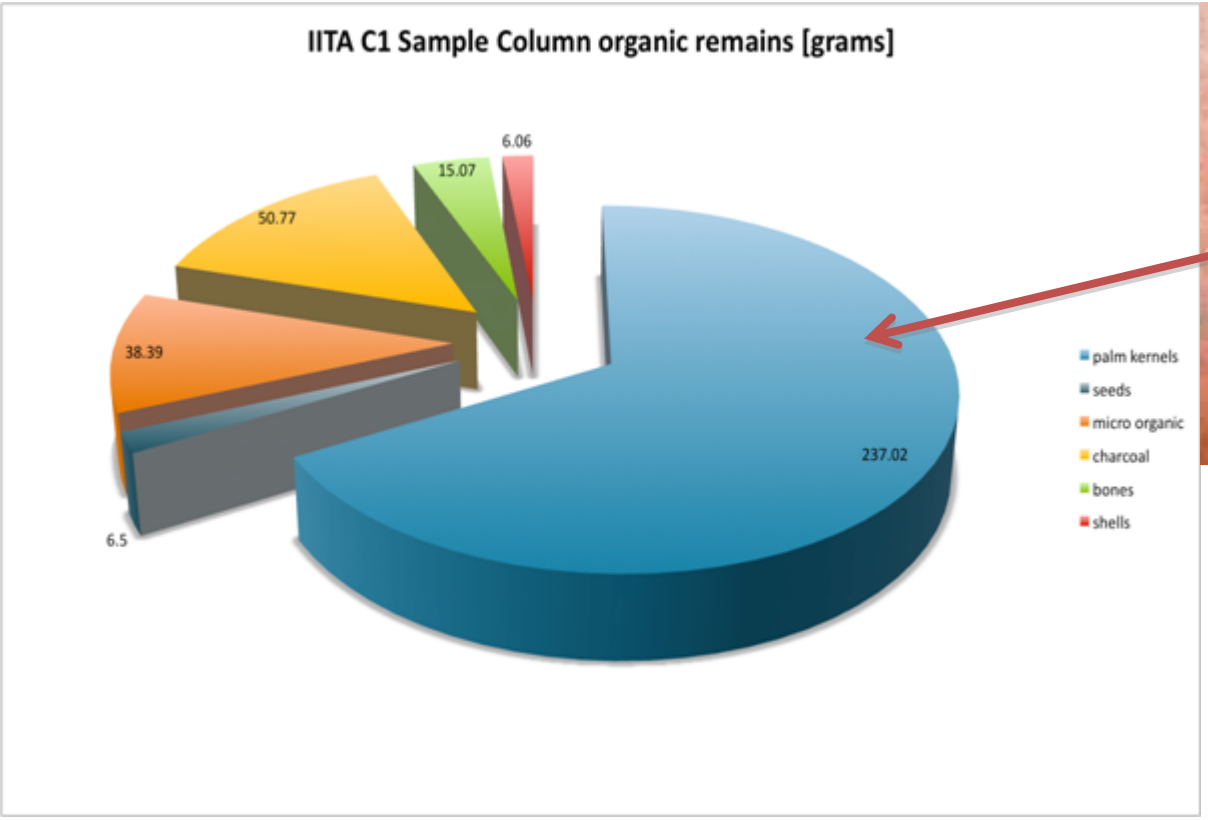
Two complete sample columns were excavated along the northern edge of the C trench, at the north-east corners of squares C1 (1982) and C3-4 (1985). The contents of the C1 sample column were analyzed by O.E. Eguaroje, thanks to the co-operation of Drs J. Pleysier and R. Lal (Analytical Services and Physics Laboratories, IITA) and Mr J. Omotosho (Palynological Laboratory, University of Ibadan). The samples were each 10 cm thick, except for the first (5 cm). All the layers, except for the subsoil, are anthropogenic in origin.



Principal characteristics

- Four groups in terms of sediment characteristics:
  A samples 1-4, B samples 5-7, C samples 8-10, D sample 11.
- Coarsest sample 6 : gravel 25.2%, sand 68.8%, silt & clay 6%.
- pH values vary from 7.3 to 7.8, neutral to alkaline.
- Total depth of deposit 105 cm.

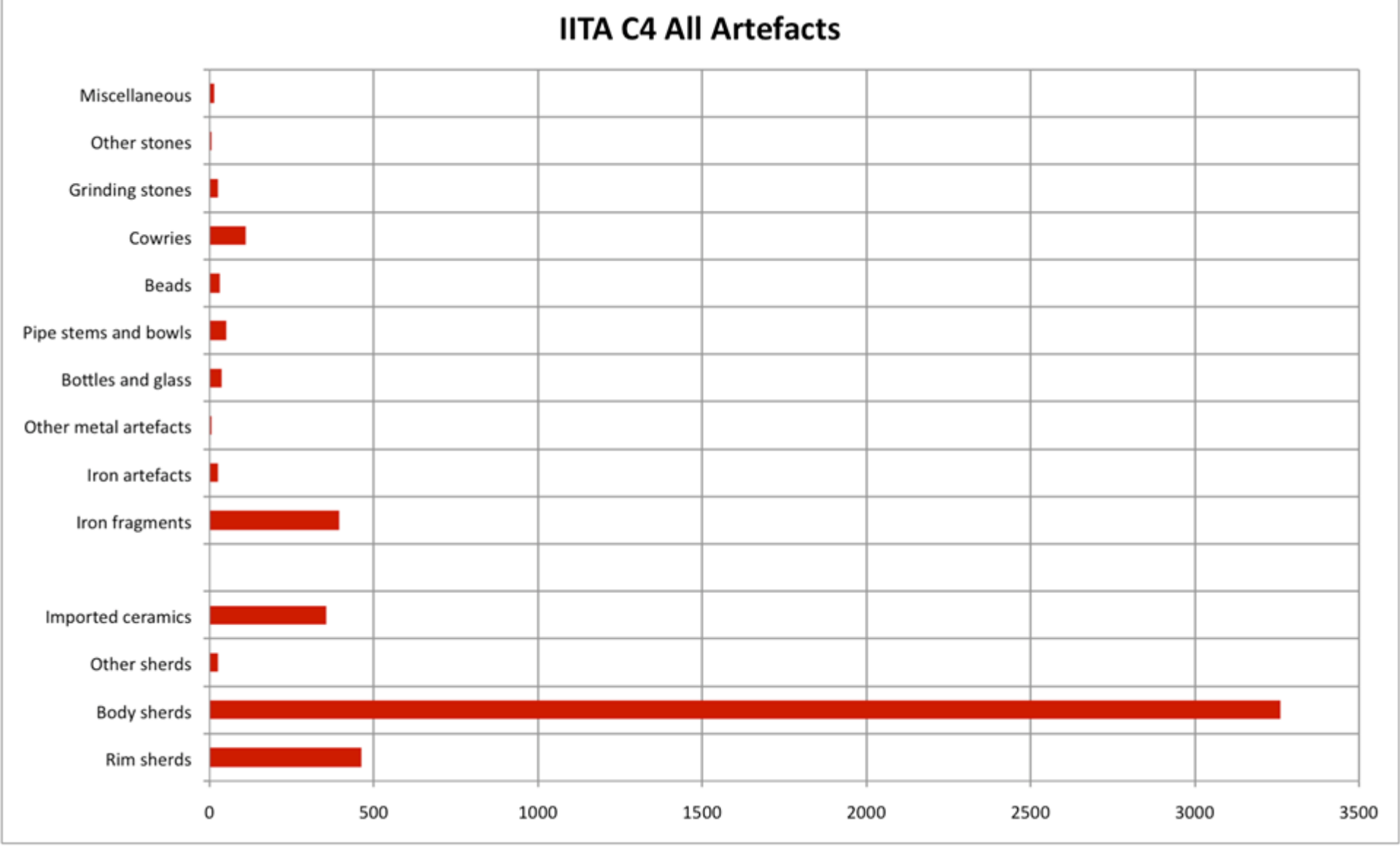
IITA C1 Sample Column



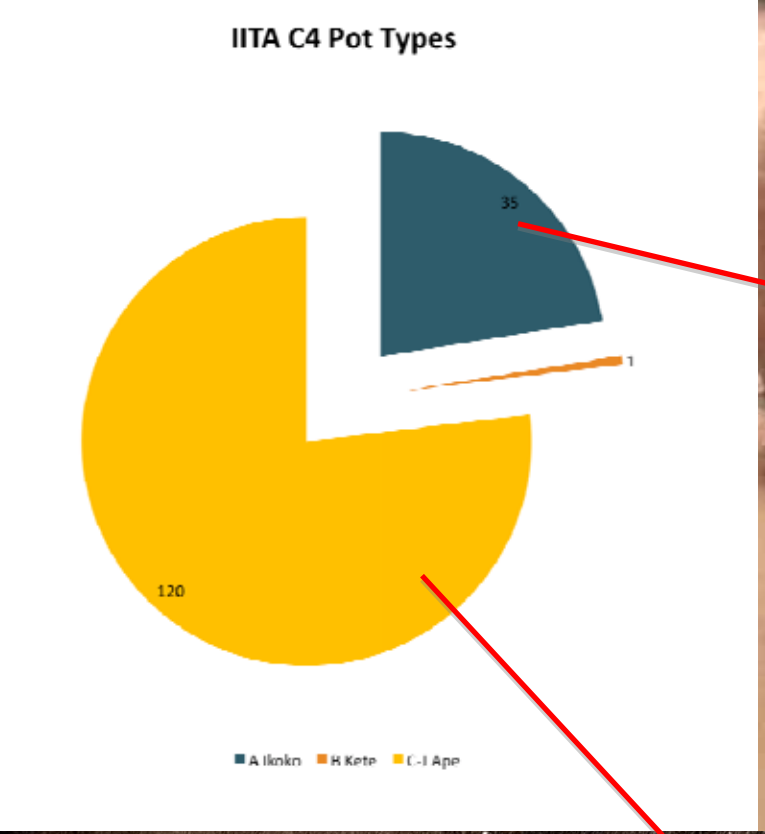
1. Total weight of organic remains from sample column 353.81 grams.
2. Palm kernels make up 70%.
3. Remaining categories: seeds, micro organic remains, charcoal, bone and shell fragments.
4. Micro organic remains consist mainly of rootlets.

In addition to organic remains, several fragmentary artefacts were recovered, with a total weight of 1767 grams. There were 172 small potsherds, making up more than 90% of the total weight, as well as two pieces of imported ceramic, two iron nails, and 164 beads. The beads were all found together in sample levels 8 and 9.

They may be compared with these examples from C4

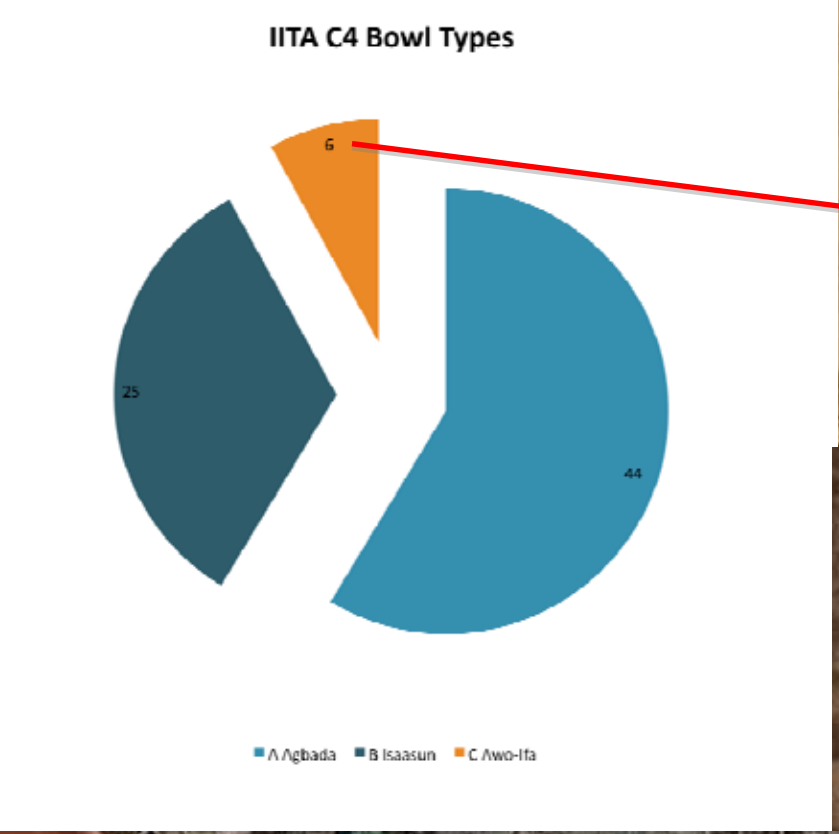


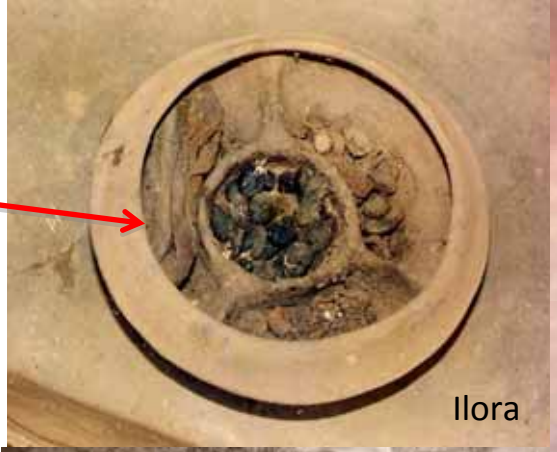
The complete artefact inventory for square C4 (max depth 170 cm) consists of 4798 pieces, of which 3720 or 85.45% are potsherds of local manufacture. A detailed study of this pottery was undertaken by J.O. Aleru, with the assistance of P.G. Ajekigbe. The determination of what vessel types were present was carried out primarily by reference to the rim forms, and also by comparison to the wares currently being manufactured at four pottery centres not far from Ibadan: Fiditi, Oyo, Awe, and Ilora. The basic division into pots (depth>width) and bowls (width>depth) is metrical, but corresponds to Yoruba usage.

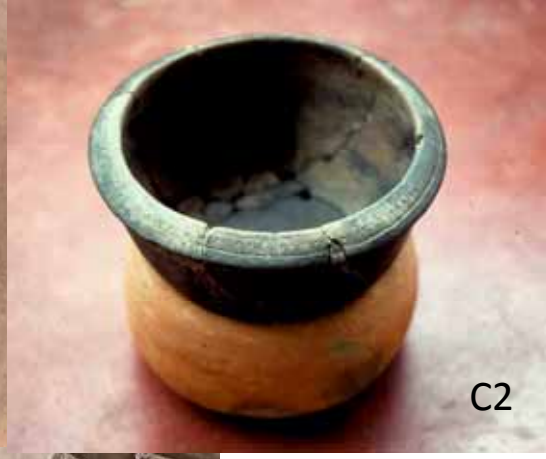


Boss indicative of a dye pot Ikòkòaro

Ape okà or àmàlà (left) Ape isu (right) *after* Fatunsin (1992). Used for cooking yam or cassava flour, and yams. Ape (kokoti) used for making bean soup gbègìrì

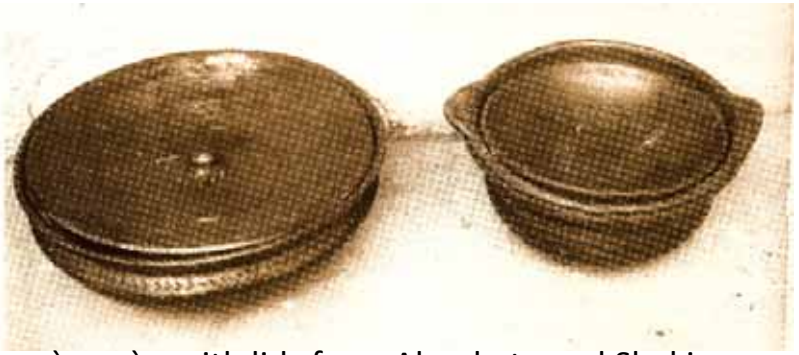




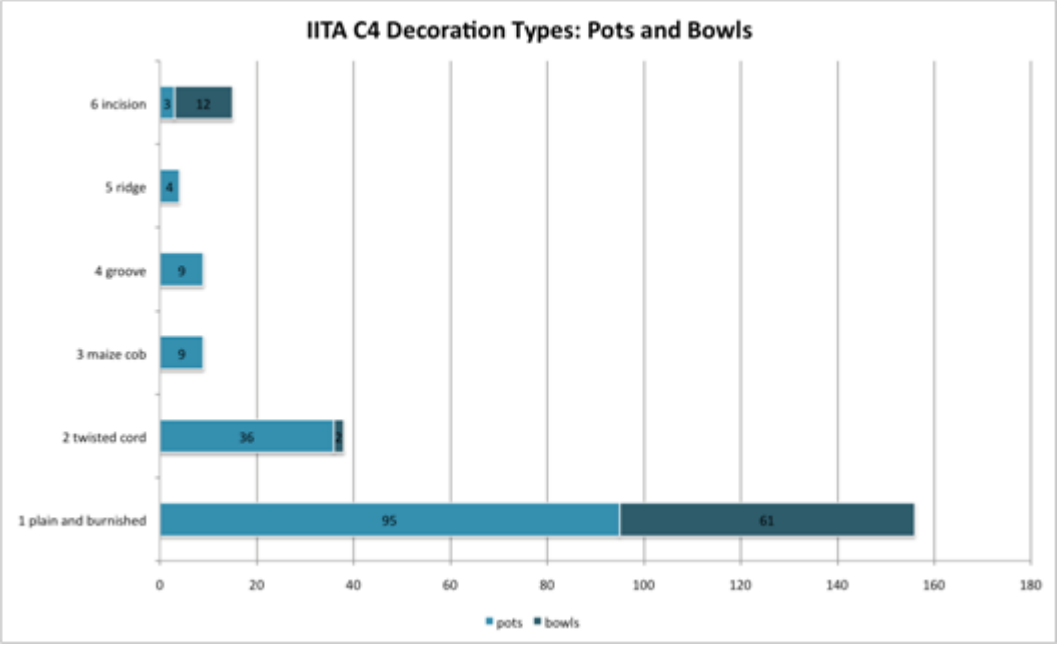


Ile Malubi, Okelele, Ilorin February 1985.

Young potter at work burnishing the interior of an ìsaasùn.



ìsaasùn with lids from Abeokuta and Shaki *after* Fatunsin (1992)



6 principal decoration types were established for 231 pots and bowls. 156 or 67.5% were plain & burnished only. Means and standard deviations for thickness were calculated for 147 pots and 68 bowls as follows.

Pots 1.69 ± 0.59 cm Bowls 0.99 ± 0.38 cm

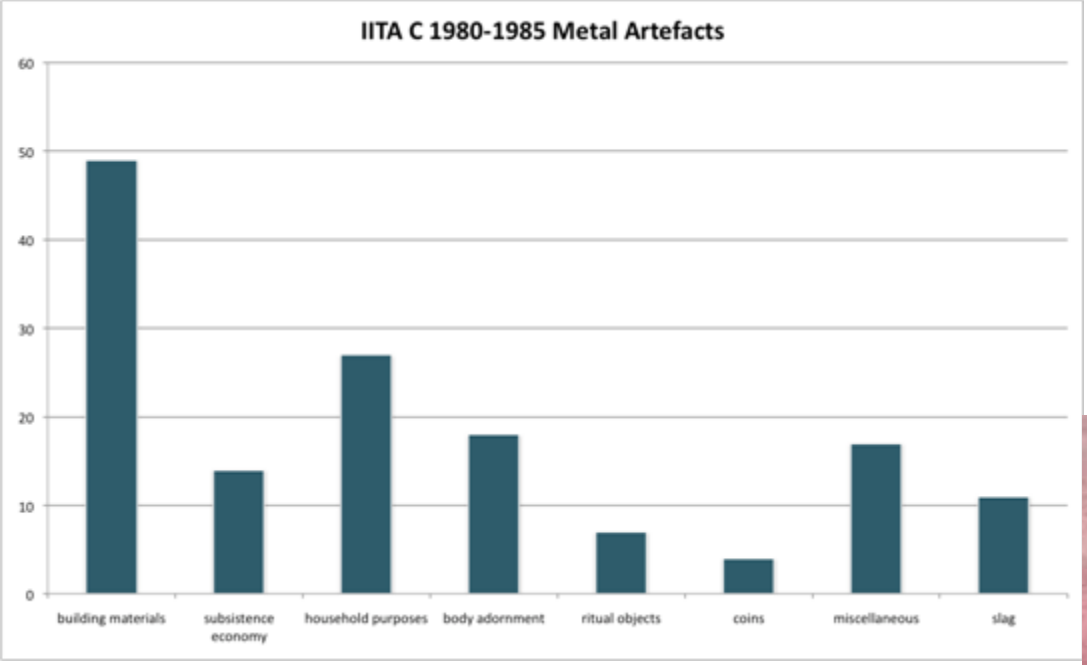
These values are significantly different, but in general it was considered that neither decoration types nor metrical data were decisive for classification purposes.

Aleru's conclusion was that "without the advantage of ethnographic information it would have been difficult to attribute accurate or meaningful significance to the archaeologically analyzed vessel forms"

C4 bush lamp fìtílà
included in "other sherds"

Pottery workshop Ebu-Oke at Fiditi *after* J.O. Aleru

Pottery on sale at Oje market in Ibadan *after* O.C. Aina



The metal artefacts from the entire C trench were studied by Aminat Audu, and conservation measures were applied to them in the Archaeology Laboratory at UI. An inventory of 147 objects, divided into eight functional categories, was established. Not included were unidentified fragments, of which there were a large number, as noted in the complete inventory of all artefacts from C4. It is likely that these objects were for the most part fragments of metal roofing sheets. Other building materials, principally nails and some window hooks, are the most frequent kind of object found.

Objects put into the class of subsistence economy are indicative of both agricultural pursuits and hunting. There are hoes and cutlasses, but also parts of traps and two pieces from a gun (a barrel and a trigger) found in C1/2.

nails window hook washer

Household purposes

A variety of objects are included under the title of household purposes and body adornment. In the first category are fragments of enamel plated bowls, knives, spoons, and forks. The forks illustrated are used for picking out yams from the cooking pot. Items of body adornment include buckles, bangles, ear-rings, and rings used for decorative purposes, as well as fragments of tìróò containers. There were also several pieces of slag.

Body adornment

Tìróò is galena used as a cosmetic. Silvery black in colour, it is ground into a smooth powder on a special grinding stone, and applied using cotton wool on a stick to darken the eyelids.

Coins. One Federation of Nigeria penny level one 1959 (top right). Three British West Africa 1/10th pennies levels 2-4 1934, 1931, 1928 (remainder).

110 cowries and 52 pipe stems and bowls were found in situ.

Other items of body adornment include beads (ìlèkè and bèbè) customarily worn by women as well as non-traditional items such plastic collar studs and brass buttons.

Ritual rings

Seven or eight rings were recognized by Audu as different from the others and were termed ritual rings. The thin dark ones are spirally twisted and are said to be constantly worn as a protection against evil spirits. The thick light non-ferrous ones are put on as needed, for the alleviation of pain, caused by such things as snake bites or scorpion stings.

Ritual Sacrifice

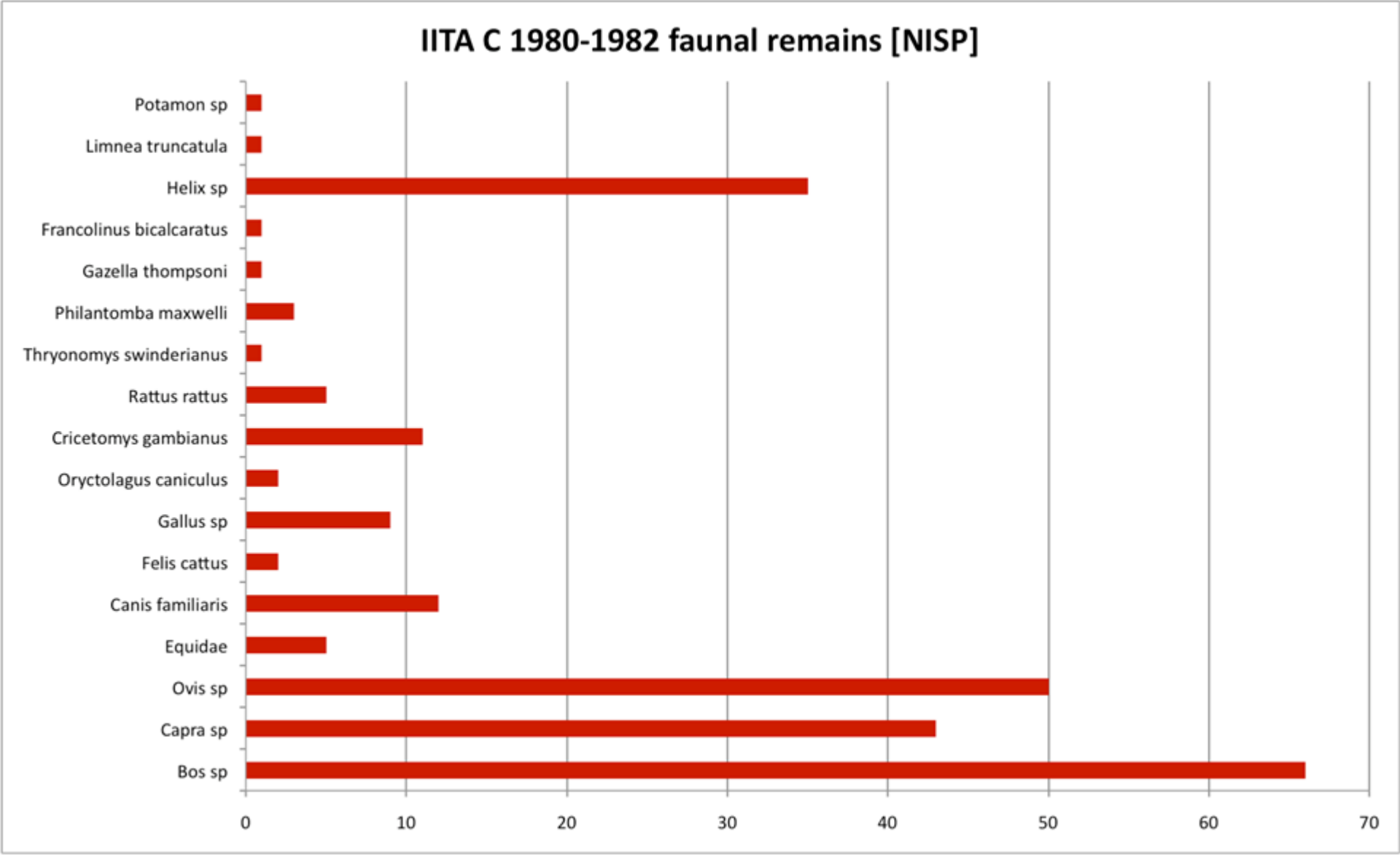
At the beginning of the excavation, on 5 April 1980, a discovery was made in C1 level 2 of several objects placed together
the significance of which was instantly recognized by the students.
This an ebo, or sacrificial offering, made to the gods (òrìsà).
It consists of two ground stone axes and the remains of two pots, including one ìsaasùn.

Imported ceramics C4 painted whiteware

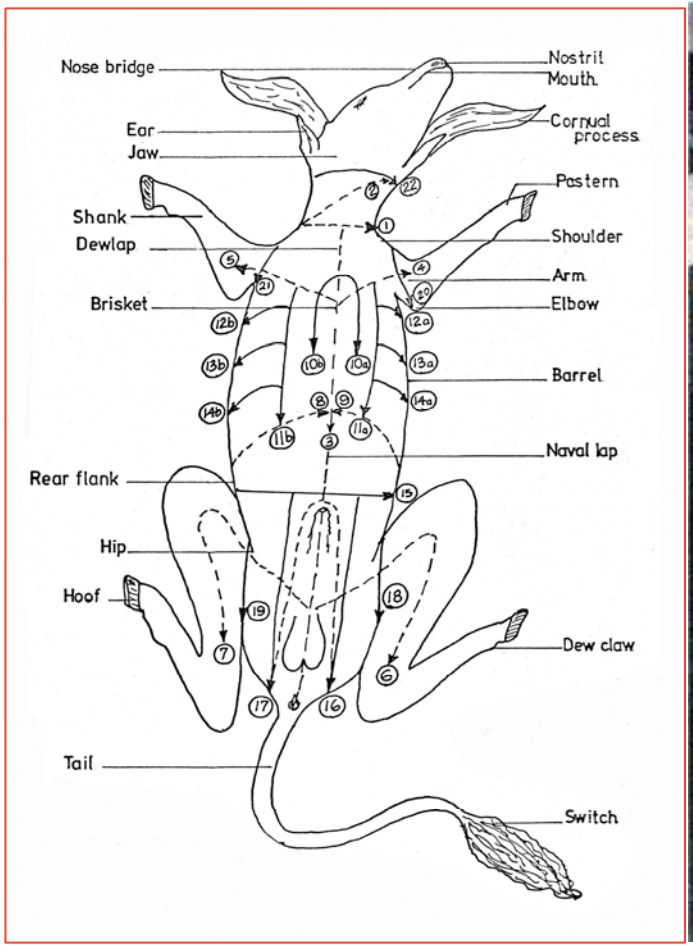
Glass fragments C2 a bottle and a decorated bowl

Upper and lower grinding stones C1/C2

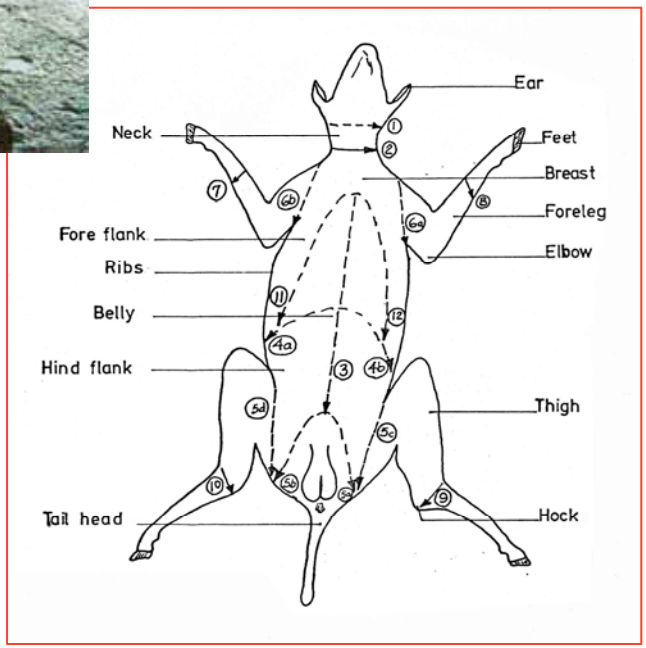
Snail shells C3/C4 used both for food and medicine



The fauna from C trench as excavated in 1980-1982 (squares C1, C2, C1/C2, and C2 extension) was studied by B.B. Adekoya, with assistance from staff members of the Zoology and Veterinary Departments UI and the Ministry of Agriculture in Ijebu-Ode. NISP including snails is 248; excluding them, the vertebrate total is 211. Of these 90% can be classified as domestic, dominated by cow goat and sheep, which make up 75% of the total. The relatively few wild animals will have been caught mainly by means of traps, although as noted already the inhabitants did have dane guns. Freshwater crab is also present.



An examination of the bones of the cows sheep and goats revealed that they had very likely been slaughtered according to systematic procedures. The diagrams indicate the sequential pattern adopted for slaughtering and flaying of cows (left) and sheep and goats (below) as observed at the local abattoir in Ijebu-Ode in 1983. The slaughter man is shown cutting up the hind legs of a cow with an axe, the metacarpus and phalanges being left intact. By contrast the butchering signs on the dog bones recovered are consistent with the indiscriminate use of a matchet, such as would have been employed when preparing a sacrifice for Ogun. Thus, there is "a relationship between what was recovered and present day Yoruba practices".



The large number of cattle, sheep and goats, conform to what is historically known about the importance of these animals in Yorubaland at least from the 1930's onwards. Horses and donkeys were used mainly as beasts of burden, and horses usually signified wealth. Domestic fowls are and were also important. Adekoya remarks that their remains are likely to be under-represented because of the Yoruba habit of "bone-chewing", a habit which may bias the collection in other ways. It is obvious also that the more easily recovered animal remains presented here do not tell the whole story about the inhabitants' diet, in which vegetable items will have been equally important. The numbers of cooking pots recovered, and also the grinding stones, are an indirect indication of that. Cooking will have been largely women's work, as will the practice of gathering, for example, the gathering of snails.

Summary and Conclusion

✧This work is based on the study of the excavated material from a 12 metre long trench dug into a refuse mound in the Archaeological Reserve at IITA Ibadan. It was within the area of Adesina Oja village. The neutral to alkaline environment was favourable to the preservation of organic remains, especially palm kernels. On the basis of the coin evidence, among other things, the deposition of the mound took place during the early part of the 20th century, up to 1970. Building material found, notably fragments of metal roofing sheets and hooks indicative of wooden windows, confirm the evidence from house no. 2 with regard to the nature of the dwellings in the village. The walls were of laterite and their layout was traditional, but a number of modern constructional materials were employed. Such houses these days are common, for example, next to the pottery making centre in Fiditi.

✧The people here were mainly farmers and only to a lesser extent hunters. 75% of the bones recovered in 1980-1982 belonged to cows, goats, and sheep, and a comparison to the ways in which these animals are slaughtered at the abattoir in Ijebu-Ode shows that they were systematically butchered according to Yoruba norms. Metal objects recovered are indicative of both agricultural pursuits (hoes, cutlasses) and of hunting (traps, dane guns).

✧A complete artefact inventory of 4798 pieces has been established for square C4. Of these, 3720 or 85.45% are potsherds of local manufacture. A determination as to what vessel types were present was carried out primarily by reference to the rim forms (and not by decoration type or metrical characteristics). The two main categories are pots and bowls, chief among them being ape and ikòkò, and agbada and ìsaasùn, respectively. The potsherds were directly compared to vessels currently being made at Fiditi, Oyo, Awe, and Ilora. It is likely that the pottery was obtained from markets in Ibadan, such as Oje, but only about 10% of such pottery these days is actually manufactured in Ibadan (at a small potting centre in the south-east called Odi-Odeyale). It was observed by one of the potters at Fiditi that the ìsaasùn found at the site were of a type that must have been made at Ilorin or Shaki.

✧A mixture of old and new is indicated by the presence of imported ceramics along with those of local manufacture. The same mixture is apparent in for example items of body adornment, which include both traditional elements (beads) and new ones (collar studs and brass buttons).

✧It is known that Adesina Oja was a Moslem village. This was confirmed by the finding of a Moslem prayer board (wàla) in house no. 2. But there are abundant signs that traditional religion was alive and well. This is indicated by the presence of ritual rings, pottery used for such purposes (Awo-Ifá), butchered dog bones, and the sacrificial offering (ebo) found at the beginning of the dig, the significance of which was instantly apparent to the students.

Adesina Oja in a broader context

The analysis of the finds from the site is not complete. The total inventory needs to be examined, taking into account all the evidence from the excavation notebooks and the often valuable reports made by the students each year, although I believe the essence of the situation will not change. More importantly, this evidence needs to be integrated into what is known of the general history of Ibadan during the period in question. There is no shortage of information on the subject, for example the books by Lloyd Mabogunje and Awe (1967), Vagale and Adekoya (1974), Filani (1982), and Falola (1989). How did a small agricultural village on the outskirts of Ibadan fit into the general pattern of change and development of a colonial and post-colonial metropolis during the early 20th century? This question will be addressed.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to all the staff and students who took part in the excavations and who helped to analyze the finds, particularly the authors of the reports mentioned, O.E. Eguaroje, J.O. Aleru, Aminat Audu, B.B. Adekoya, and O.C. Aina. Philip Oyelaran worked with me most of the time at IITA, and as always my right hand man was the late Mallam Umaru Garba Gol.

Comments and Discussion are welcome

A more comprehensive report is in course of preparation

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