

OGORI POTTERY TRADITION: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

IDOKO A. E.

Department of Archaeology
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

Abstract

Pottery is one of man's material cultures that can give insight about how man lived in the past. Pottery is made from clay like other ceramics and can be manufactured in many ways that includes hand moulding and wheel moulding. Pottery function in the past also varied ranging from serving as containers for a wide range of solid to liquid substances and used to transport, cook and store a wide range of food. Pottery also assumed other specialized functions such as use in rituals and burials. Pottery is one of the most commonly analysed artefacts available to the archaeologist because of its extreme durability and common occurrence in archaeological sites coupled with its great variety of forms and decorations which are of immense importance in archaeological investigation. The work therefore looked at pottery tradition among the people of Ogori in the past and present especially as represented in the archaeological record and as revealed in available ethnographic data. The paper presented the analysis of potsherds collected from Okesi site, one of the abandoned settlements in Ogori to have an insight into how the people of Ogori used pottery in the past and the place of pottery among the people presently. The study revealed that pottery was of diverse purpose to the people in the past but presently hardly assessable in the ethnographic context. It was further revealed that pottery was produced locally in Ogori but later became a common commodity of trade obtained from neighbouring settlements in Edo State and there is presently no surviving art of pottery in Ogori.

Introduction

Archaeology is a set of scientific procedures and methods for investigating the past particularly as it is revealed through material remains for the purpose of reconstructing past life ways of man. Thus, archaeology deals with all aspects of man's past from the objects he made and used, his dwelling places, defensive structures, tools, weapons, the remains of food, skeletons and burial places. Through the study of material remains, it is possible to deduce how man lived in the past (Renfrew, 1992).

Pottery is one of the material remains that is of core interest to archaeology in the reconstruction of man's past, because of its varied functions in the past. Most importantly pottery is one of the readily preserved artefacts or material remains found on archaeological sites due to its durability and ability to survive for several years after use

and deposition. As such, pottery is the commonest artefacts easily collected from archaeological sites for analysis. It is also important to note that pottery found on archaeological sites is hardly found in their complete form. They are mostly broken into sherds due to their fragility. But there are few cases where they are found in their complete preserved form. Pottery when found in broken pieces on archaeological sites is referred to as potsherds.

Pottery as past cultural remains preserves aspects of extinct people's activities over time. Therefore, the study of pottery can provide relevant information on man's early history, technological development and to some extent, aspects of the environment in which he lived. Therefore, in archaeological research, pottery is studied and analysed on the basis of inherent attributes from where

deductions on their source, technique of manufacture, use and function can be made.

Ogori pottery tradition as revealed from the potsherds collected and analysed from Okesi site (one of the archaeological sites in Ogori) shows that pottery is one of the material cultures of the people and featured prominently in the everyday lives of the people who lived on Okesi site. Okesi site is an abandoned hill settlement from where the Ogori people moved to their present settlement. Pottery in Ogori served diverse functions; such as cooking, eating, storage, and brewing as well as for rituals such as presentation of offerings and sacrifices to gods, preparation of medicinal herbs and concoctions and used as shrine and groove goods/items to gods and goddesses.

The Location of Ogori

Ogori is located approximately on longitude 6⁰⁷" E and latitude 7⁰³⁰" N in Ogori-Magongo Local Government Area of Kogi state, Nigeria. It lies on an altitude of between 372-428 metres above sea level. Ogori is located at the extreme south-western part of Kogi state. The town is a distance of about five(5) kilometres from the boundary of Edo and Kwara states. It is bounded in the north by Okene on the West by the Magongo and on the east and south by Akoko-Edo (Olagboye, 2002).

Historical Background of Ogori People

The name 'Ogori' connotes the people as a cultural entity and as a geographical entity. The name itself was derived from divination. It is said to mean wealth. But literally, it means exhibition of success, bright future or the head of honour (Osheidu, 1990). The people traced their origin to Ile-Ife, the Yoruba ancestral home. According to oral tradition, the people arrived their present location through series of migration from Ile-Ife. They were said to have settled intermittently in places like Ilesha, Owo, Benin, Idoma land and Ajaokuta before arriving their present location.

Oral tradition has it that the cause of migration was due to the irreconcilable differences in Ife Royal court which forced one of the princes, Akinbiyi to leave Ife with his family and loyals to found his own settlement (Osheidu, 1990). Another version says that it was a band of

hunters who missed their way in a hunting expedition that wandered to this area (Akerejola, 1970). Yet, another version says that it was an age group who could not bring home alive the traditionally prescribed 'hare' or 'patridge' for a certain festival and was banished that came to this region (Oyedele, 1982).

Ogori as it is today is a confederation of Adu'bane, Osho'bane, Okibo and Eni clans. The Adu'bane, Osho'bane and Okibo are collectively known as ONU. The Onus were said to be the earliest arrival to the area and had their second settlement on Okesi site.

Location of Okesi Site

Okesi site is located at the northern part of Ogori town on the lower level of Agada hill (one of the hills that enclaved Ogori). Okesi site was the last settlements of the people of Ogori before their present settlement, a name that is still associated with the people in their present settlement.

Ogori Pottery Tradition

The art of pottery making is currently not obtainable in Ogori. Although, oral tradition has it that there use to be potters in Ogori in the past but this has long ceased. Hence, it was not possible to observe pottery making processes/ techniques in the present. However, Pottery products in use today in Ogori are obtained from neighbouring communities such as Ibillo, Oroso and Oja in Edo State and Obehira and Okene in Kogi State. The ethnographic study thus focused on pottery types and functions in the present in order to gain an insight into the probable use of pottery in the past with particular attention to pottery forms from Okesi site.

Four pottery types are presently in use in Ogori. The first is the large globular pot called *Otele*, medium sized globular pot, small narrow neck pot and small carinated bowl. The large globular pot (*Otele*) is mostly used for the fermentation of indigenous beer (*pito*) and for diverse storage purposes ranging from storage of water, grains, yam and cassava flour, plates and other valued items. In the past, the large pots were also used for brewing (cooking) beer but this no longer hold due to the popularity of metal pots.

The medium sized globular pot and small narrow neck pot are used for the storage of drinking water especially for their cooling effect. The small carinated bowl is used for the preparation /administration of herbs particularly for newborns and other related ailment. It was observed that pottery in use presently as compared to the past ones, have less elaborate decorations and the major decorations on them are mostly groove and incision. There is also other pottery products observed in use as flower pots and modified broken vessels as candle stands and coal trays for different uses.

Although, there is no present pottery making industry in Ogori, oral tradition has it that there is a long history of pottery tradition in Ogori. This is supported by the abundant presence of potsherds on Okesi site. The presence of potsherds on the site which is peculiar to all habitation sites, confirms the information that the site was a past settlement. Therefore pottery from Okesi site revealed a unique pottery tradition of the Ogori people.

Potsherds are predominantly the finds on Okesi site and they are found scattered all over the site and on the present settlement. Samples of these potsherds were collected using random sampling technique. The pottery from Okesi site was analysed to throw light on some aspects of the people's material culture. This was solely achieved through visual observation and identification without the use of scientific methods like microscopic analysis, thin section, mineralogy analysis, petrological analysis or other X-ray analysis etc. But these methods are very important in pottery studies in archaeology where they are available.

A total number of seventy-seven (77) potsherds were collected for the study and the potsherds were classified on the basis of the following attributes: Paste Characteristic, Vessel part, Vessel form, Surface finish and Decorative motif.

Classification Based on Paste Characteristics

The visual observation of the potsherds based on their colour showed that the source material for producing these pots came from two impure clay type of reddish and dark brown colour. The potsherds from the red clay contain small white stones known as

quartz, traces of mica and reddish sand. While, those from the dark brown clay contain mainly of quartz, mica and laterite; with few without mica and quartz. Some of the potsherds appear different from others but on a close examination, they are of the same clay but with difference in colour. The difference in appearance is based on the different firing conditions and not necessarily difference in ware

Classification into Vessel Parts

Vessel part refers to the various segments that made up a pot. Among the potsherds collected from the site, three of these parts were identified. Out of the seventy-seven (77) potsherds collected and classified, forty (40) are rims, seven (7) are Necks and thirty (30) are body parts.

Classification into Vessel Forms

Vessel form refers to different designs in the finishing of pottery vessels that determine their sizes. Different shapes and sizes determine the uses of pottery. The rim plays an important role in the shaping and determination of the size of a pot. Different cultures may have their own shapes to suit their needs. Some pottery wares served ritual purposes, while others are for domestic use depending on their shapes and sizes.

Rimsherds collected from Okesi were analysed based on their rim forms and on the basis of their function as recorded from oral information and as observed ethnographically. This becomes imperative based on the fact that the function of a pot would probably also influence the type of pot the maker(s) are likely to make. Based on functional analysis therefore, Okesi rim-sherds were classified into two basic categories. The first category is those termed pots. These are pots having their rim diameter shorter than the probable length of the pots. The height of these pots is inferred from the curvature of their rim-sherds. Therefore, pot is being used in this analysis to refer to those pots that have their overall diameter shorter than their height.

The second category is those referred to as bowls. These are vessels with their rim diameter larger than their height (Bakinde, 1990). A total of forty (40) potsherds collected falls under rim category, out of which eight (8) vessel forms were identified. Three forms fall

under the pot category, while five are under bowl.

Pots

Twenty four (24) rimsherds were recognised as belonging to the pot category out of the forty (40) rims. These rims are grouped into five (5) diagnostic forms.

Form 1

These are straight neck vessel with tapered lip and a sharp internal rim neck joint, but with a gentle external curvature. They have rim thickness of 5mm to 10mm with rim diameter of between 18 - 30 cm. There are ten (10) potsherds in this group constituting 41.6% of the total rimsherd under pot category. (See Fig. 5).

Form 2

These are inverted rims with no visible rim neck joints both internally and externally. They have a rim thickness of 6-12 mm with a rim diameter of 22 – 36cm. There are six (6) rimsherds in this group forming 25% of the total rims under this category. (See Fig. 6)

Form 3

These are everted rims with an internal angle of curvature of about 45° and a gentle outward curving. They have a rim diameter of 18-34cm with a rim thickness of 8-10mm. Three of the rims have flat lip two have tapered lip. There are five (5) samples in this group accounting for 20.8% of total rims under pot form. (See Fig. 7).

Form 4

These are rims without neck joint with tapered lips. They have a rim thickness of between 10 and 14 mm with a diameter of about 46cm. There are two (2) samples in this group constituting about 8.4% of the total rims under pot form. (See Fig. 8).

Form 5

This is everted rim with a tapered lip and a sharp internal rim neck joint. It has an additional carination externally about 4cm from the lip of the rim. The rim diameter is 34 cm, while the thickness is 5mm. There is only one rimsherd in this group constituting 4.2% of the total rims under pot form. (See Fig. 9).

BOWLS

Sixteen (16) of the diagnostic rimsherds identified belong to the Bowl category. Three (3) forms were identified under bowls.

Form 1

These are inverted rims. They have no visible rim neck joint. Their rim diameter ranges from 22-46cm with rim thickness ranging from 5mm-12mm. Most of the rim lips are round, only one with tapered lip. There are nine (9) potsherds in this group. These account for 56.25% of the total rims under bowl category. (See Fig. 10).

Form 2

These are straight necked vessels with tapered lips. Externally, they have angle of curvature of about 45° while inwardly there is no clearly discernable angle of curvature. They have rim diameter of between 24cm and 40cm and a thickness of between 5mm and 9mm. There are five (5) potsherds in this group constituting 31.25% of the total rims under bowl form. (See Fig. 11).

Form 3

These are everted rim internally; they have an angle of curvature of about 30°-45°. They have flat lip and a thickness of 6mm. The rim diameter is between 20 and 30cm. There are two (2) potsherds in this group and they account for 12.5% of rims under bowl category. (See Fig. 12).

Classification into Surface Finish

A total of 77 potsherds were randomly collected to represent the numerous potsherds scattered on the Okesi abandoned settlement. Surface finish in pottery study refers to the final application on the pot before they are fired or used in case of unfired pots. Most of the potsherds collected are unburnished or plain decorated and unburnished undecorated with only two (2) burnished ones.

Classification based on Decorative Motif

Sixty-one (61) out of the seventy – seven (77) potsherds collected are decorated, while the remaining sixteen (16) are undecorated. The decorations on most of the potsherds are multiple. Six types of decoration were identified on all the decorated potsherds. These decorations type are incision, groove, stamping, notching, wavy-line and roulette.

Some of the potsherds have multiple of these decoration types. The potsherds under this basis were classified into thirteen (13) decorative motifs. Both single and multiple decorations were identified under the classified potsherds. The potsherds with single decoration were further classified into category A, B and C while the ones with multiple decoration falls under category D. Different decorative motifs were also classified under each category.

Single Decoration Groove

Motif 1

This is a single horizontal groove. There are two (2) potsherds with this decorative motif. These constitute 9.52% of the total potsherds under this category. (See Fig. 13).

Motif 2

This is made up of multiple banded horizontal groove with wavy horizontal groove. One (1) potsherd was identified under this motif constituting 4.76% of the total potsherds with groove decoration. (See Fig. 14).

Motif 3

This is multiple banded horizontal groove. Fifteen (15) potsherds are with this decorative motif. These form 71.42% of the total number of potsherds under this category. (See Fig. 15).

Motif 4

This decorative motif is of banded horizontal groove with banded oblique groove. Three (3) potsherds were identified with this decorative motif forming 14.3% of the total potsherds with groove decoration. (See Fig. 16).

Incision

Motif 1

This is banded horizontal incision. There are six (6) potsherds with this decorative motif constituting 85.7% of the total potsherds with incision decoration. (See Fig. 17).

Motif 2

This is horizontal incision bordering vertical incision. One (1) potsherd was identified with this category making 14.3% of the total number of potsherds under this category. (See Fig. 18).

ROULETTE

Motif 1

This is fine string roulette. There are six (6) potsherds with this decorative motif forming 46.15% of the total potsherds with roulette decoration. (See Fig. 19).

Motif 2

This is a cord roulette decorative motif. The potsherds with this motif are seven (7) accounting for 53.85% of the total decorated potsherds under this category. (See Fig. 20).

Multiple Decorations

Motif 1

These are banded horizontal groove with wavy-line horizontal groove and cord roulette. There are four (4) potsherds with this motif constituting 20% of the total number of multiple decorated potsherds. (See Fig. 21).

Motif 2

This decoration is banded horizontal groove with cord roulette. Four (4) potsherds were identified with this decorative motif, constituting 20% of the total decorated potsherds under this category. (See Fig. 22).

Motif 3

This decorative motif is made up of banded horizontal groove with cord roulette and horizontal notching. There are four (4) potsherds with this motif, forming 20% of the potsherds with multiple decorations. (See Fig. 23).

Motif 4

This is a banded horizontal incision with cord roulette. Only One (1) potsherds falls within this motif, comprising 5% of the total number of potsherds in this category. (See Fig. 24).

Motif 5

This decorative motif is banded horizontal groove with cord roulette and semi-circular stamping. There are two (2) potsherds with this motif accounting 10% of the total potsherds with multiple decorations. (See Fig. 25).

Motif 6

This is banded horizontal incision with multiple horizontal cuneiform stamping. Only one (1) potsherd was classified with this decorative motif, forming 5% of the total potsherds under this category. (See Fig. 26).

Motif 7

This is banded horizontal groove bordering banded horizontal incision. There is only a potsherd with this decorative motif constituting 5% of the total potsherds with multiple decorations. (See Fig. 27).

Motif 8

This is multiple horizontal groove with multiple oblique groove and single line vertical pinching. One (1) potsherd was identified with this decorative motif, making 5% of the total number of potsherds under this category. (See Fig. 28).

Motif 9

This is a decorative motif of single horizontal groove and fine string roulette with super imposed single line notching. There is only one (1) potsherd with this motif forming 5% of total potsherds with multiple decorations. (See Fig. 29).

Motif 10

This decorative motif consists of multiple horizontal groove with single line pinching. One (1) potsherd was classified under this motif accounting for 5% of the total decorated potsherds under this category. (See Fig. 30).

Discussion

Even though, pottery is still used by the present people of Ogori, however, pottery making as an indigenous technology is no longer practised in Ogori. It is not certain what led to the extinction of pottery making in Ogori, but it is speculated that pottery making existed in the past but declined as a result of influx of cheaper pottery wares from neighbouring communities.

The visual study and analysis of Okesi pottery and present pottery wares in use in the area showed observable changes between past and present pottery tradition. These changes were only noticeable in the areas of usage, decoration and composition. But changes in techniques and processes of manufacture could not be observed because of the non-availability of pottery industry in the area presently. In the past, different sizes of pots were made and used as depicted in the rim diameter of pottery analysed which are between 18 and 46cm. It was revealed that Okesi pottery consisted of large, medium and small pots and medium and small bowls that

served various purposes. Large globular pots were used for the brewing and fermentation of indigenous beer called *Adeh* (Pito) and for storage purposes. Those of medium and small sizes were used for cooking food (depending on the number of people in question). They could have also used these pots for other purposes like boiling and mixing herbs and the bowls used as serving plates or containers. Small pots and bowls were used for medicinal preparations. Oral tradition indicated that some of these small pots and bowls such as those depicted in Pot form 3 and Bowl form 2 accompany certain rituals especially for sacrificial offerings to the gods (See Fig.7 and 11). However, presently their uses have reduced considerably as pottery wares are now rare in most homes. They are hardly used these days, only few people still use them for cooking herbs and storing water. Pottery is still used in the indigenous brewing industry for fermenting and storing the beer (*Adeh*) produced. But its use for cooking the beer has stopped. The usage of pottery has become modernised as people now use them as ornamental objects such as flower pots, vases and candle stands.

In the analysis of the decorations of Okesi pottery, eight single decorative motifs and ten multiple decorative motifs were identified. Basically, the decorations were mostly combination of roulette (achieved with fine string or corncob) with incision, groove, stamping and notching. (See Fig. 13-30). These various decorations showed that pottery was elaborately decorated in the past and depicted the people's aesthetic value. There is also a slight change in the past decorations and those of the present, decorations on present pottery are less elaborate as compared to past pottery.

Visual observation of the potsherds from Okesi based on colour revealed two clay type of reddish brown and dark brown. It is the dark brown pottery that is observable in Ogori presently. The clay type of the area is reddish brown, the possibility is that the reddish brown clay were produced in Ogori since oral tradition has it that pottery were produced locally in the past. Perhaps the dark brown pottery that also featured archaeologically were obtained from outside. More so, the present pottery in use in Ogori is obtained mostly from neighbouring communities in Edo State.

Conclusion

Pottery is usually associated with settlement sites. The presence of potsherds on any given site indicates past human activities. Thus, pottery making as a craft is very important in archaeological analysis. This is because the art of pottery making is linked to the evolution of settled and food producing societies.

According to oral tradition, there is a long history of pottery tradition in Ogori. Pottery tradition among the people of Ogori is an enduring one as deduced from the study of their pottery. The study revealed pottery as a characteristic feature of the material culture of the people. Pottery was and is still one of the tangible cultures of the people of Ogori as item of daily use and religious use. Information derived based on the rim sizes which are between 18 and 46cm shows that the pots and bowls used by the people in the past were of small, medium and large sizes used for different purposes. The small and medium ones was used for cooking food. They could have also used these pots for other purposes like boiling and mixing herbs and the bowls used as serving plates or containers. While the large ones were used for brewing local beer and for storage purposes. The various decorative motifs on the pottery such as corncob roulette depicts that the people were agriculturalist who produced maize. Other decorations like incision, stamping, grooving and notching expressed the people's aesthetic taste.

The presence of two coloured clay of red and dark brown might suggest two sources of clay for the pottery. These sources might be local or foreign, which support oral tradition that states that pottery was produced in Ogori in the past and were equally brought in to Ogori from neighbouring communities in Edo State. Ethnographic study showed that pottery today is still obtained from the Oja people in Edo state. As such the dark brown clay pots which also featured in the archaeological context are

still the ones found and used in the present Ogori settlement, though with slight changes in sizes, form and decoration. This shows a line of continuity in the people's trading relations. Presently, pottery making in Ogori has gone into extinction. However, based on the visual study of the potsherds collected, it is evident that the pottery technology that existed in the past was highly developed. This is indicated by the elaborate designs and decorative motifs on the potsherds as well as the uniqueness of their paste characteristics that depict the people's knowledge of combining the various available natural resources in their technological development. The decorative motifs range from roulette, wavy line groove, incision, groove to stamping, pinching and notching.

Oral information revealed that pottery was of multiple purposes in the past. However, the present use of pottery differs from what it used to be in the past. Pottery presently is mainly used as ornamental objects such as flower vase with only few people still using pottery for cooking herbs. In terms of the uses of pottery, there are significant changes in the function of pottery in the past. There were large pots used for brewing local beer "*Adeh*" (Pito) and storage purposes. Those of medium and small sizes were used for cooking food and herbs. Presently, their uses have reduced considerably as pottery wares are hardly used these days.

There is also a slight change between the past decorations and those of the present. As compared to past ones, the decorations on present day pottery in use are less elaborate. The major decorations on present day pottery wares are groove and incision. Unlike in the past where most of the pottery was locally made, presently, pottery wares are now obtained from Oja and Ibillo in Edo State and occasionally from Okene and Obehira in Kogi State.

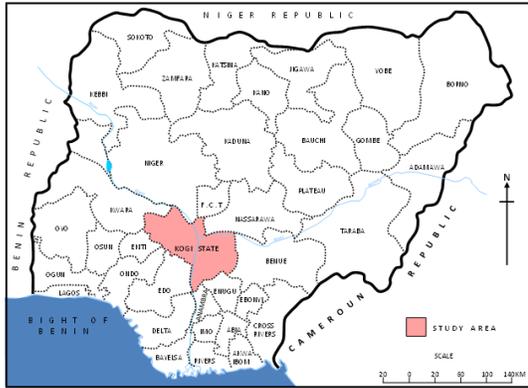


Fig.1: Kogi state on map of Nigeria

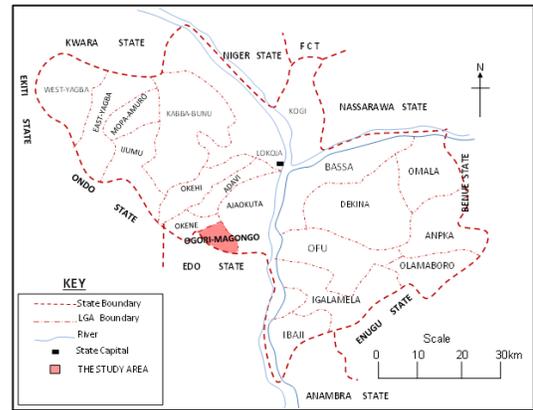


Fig.2: Local government areas of Kogi state

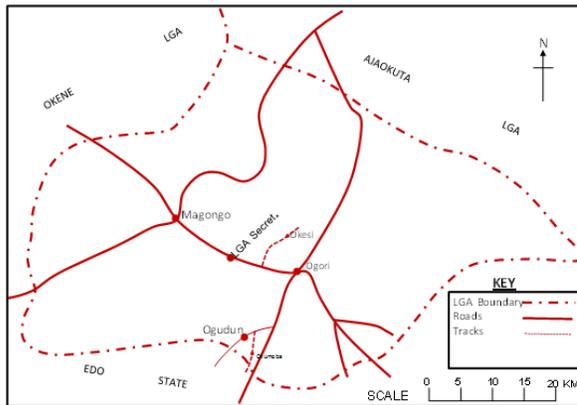


Fig.3: Ogori Magongo LGA

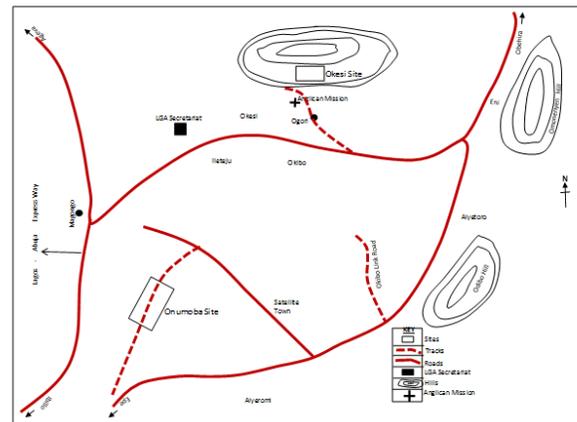
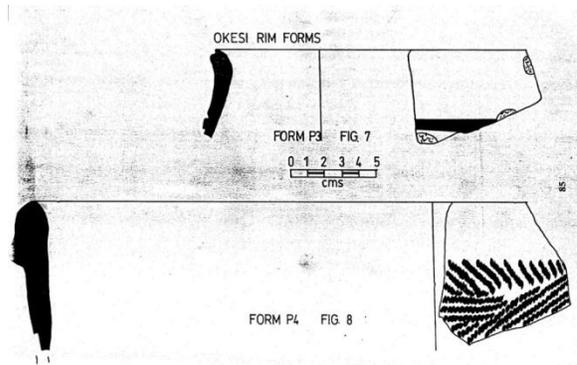
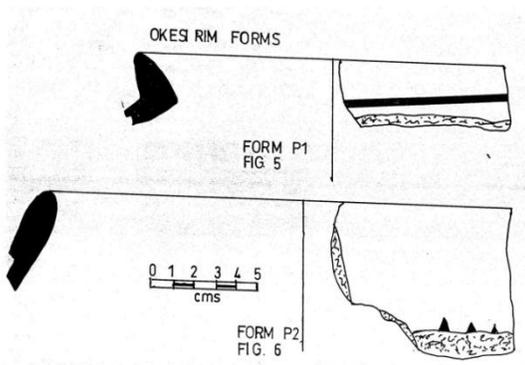
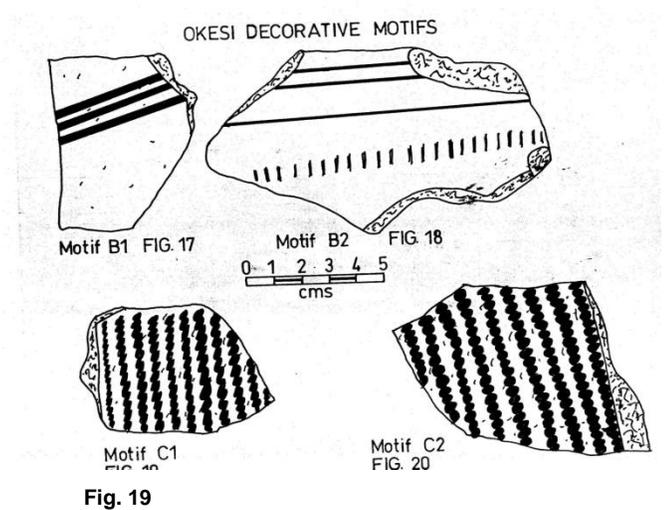
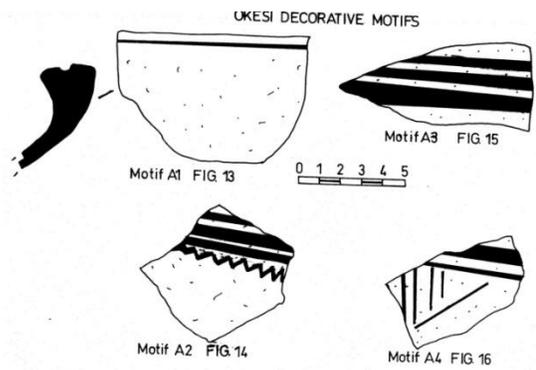
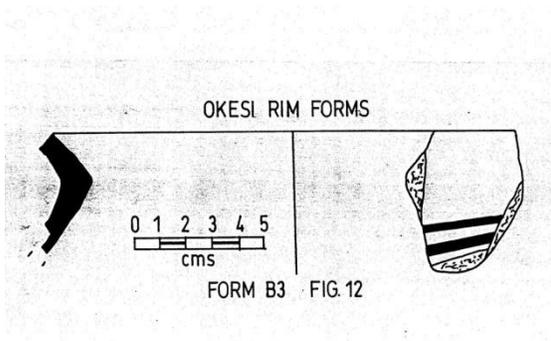
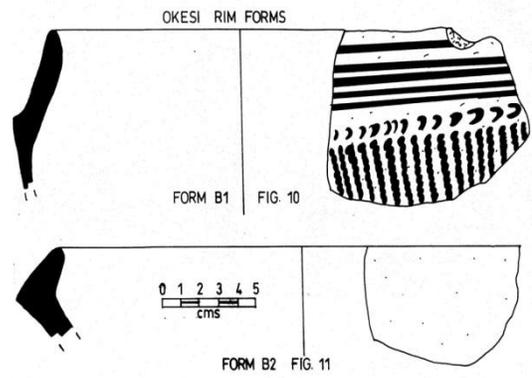
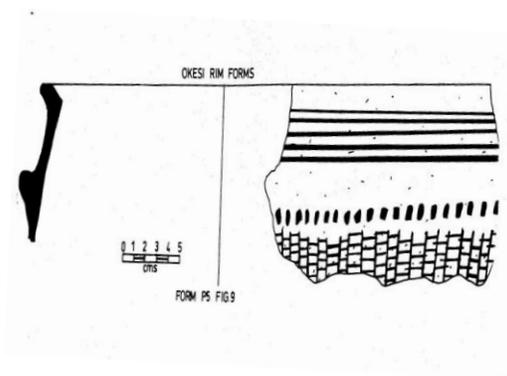
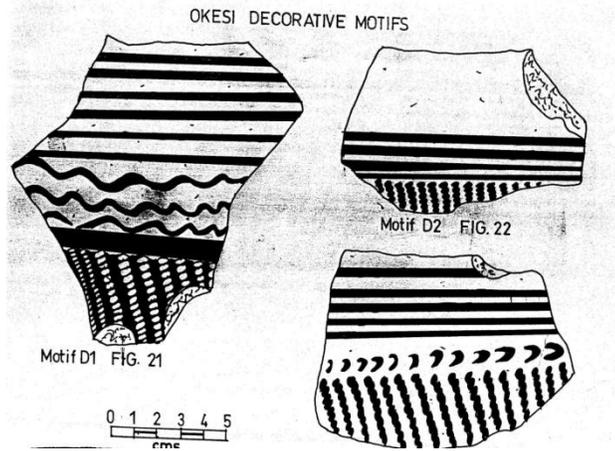


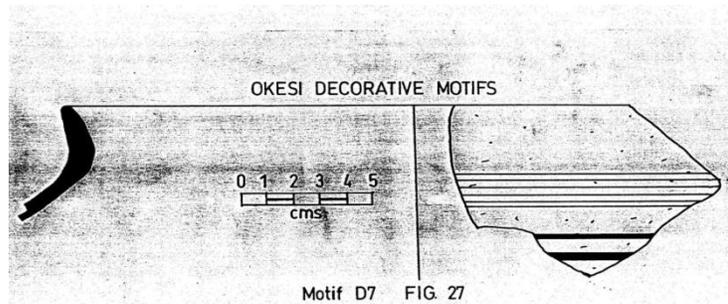
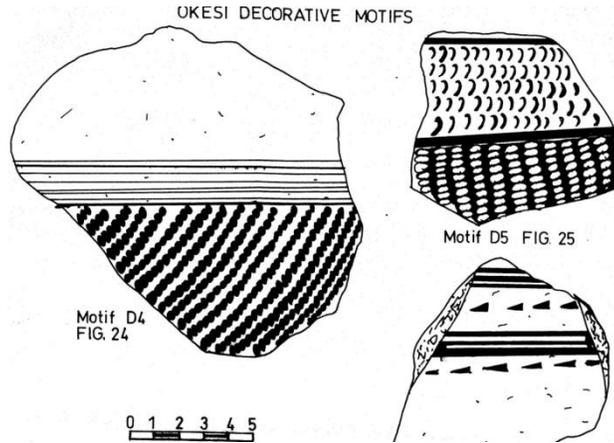
Fig.4: Sketch map of Ogori showing Okesi site







Motif D3 FIG. 23



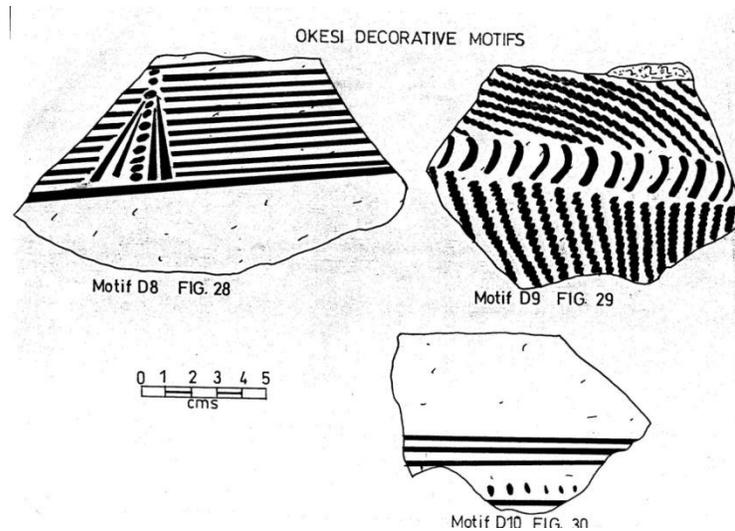


Table 1: Summary of Vessel Parts

S/No	Vessel part	Quantity	Percentage
1	Rim	40	52
2	Neck	7	10
3	Body	30	38
	Total	77	100

Table 2: Summary of Vessel Forms under Pot Category

S/N	Pot forms	Quantity	Percentage
1.	Form 1	10	41.6
2.	Form 2	6	25
3.	Form 3	5	20.8
4.	Form 4	2	8.4
5.	Form 5	1	4.2
	Total	24	100

Table 3: Summary of Vessel forms under Bowl Category

S/N	Bowl form	Quantity	Percentage
1.	Form 1	9	56.25
2.	Form 2	5	31.25
3.	Form 3	2	12.5
	Total	16	100

Table 4 – Summary of Surface Finish

S/No	Surface finish	Quantity	Percentage
1	Unburnished decorated	60	78
2	Unburnished undecorated	13	16.9
3	Burnished decorated	1	1.3
4	Burnished undecorated	1	1.3
5	Eroded	2	2.5
Total		77	100

Table 5: Summary of Single Decorative Motif

S/No.	Type of Decoration	Quantity	Percentage
A GROOVE			
1.	Motif 1	2	9.52
2.	Motif 2	1	4.76
3.	Motif 3	15	71.42
4.	Motif 4	3	14.3
Total		21	100
B INCISION			
1.	Motif 1	6	85.7
2.	Motif 2	1	14.3
Total		7	100
C ROULETTE			
1.	Motif 1	7	46.15
2.	Motif 2	6	53.85
Total		13	100

Table 6: Summary of Multiple Decorative Motifs

S/N	Multiple Decoration	Quantity	Percentage
1.	Motif 1	4	20
2.	Motif 2	4	20
3.	Motif 3	4	20
4.	Motif 4	1	5
5.	Motif 5	2	10
6.	Motif 6	1	5
7.	Motif 7	1	5
8.	Motif 8	1	5
9.	Motif 9	1	5
10.	Motif 10	1	5
Total		20	100

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