

## A REPORT OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD SCHOOL AT IHEAKPU-AWKA, IGBO-EZE SOUTH LGA, ENUGU.

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### ABSTRACT

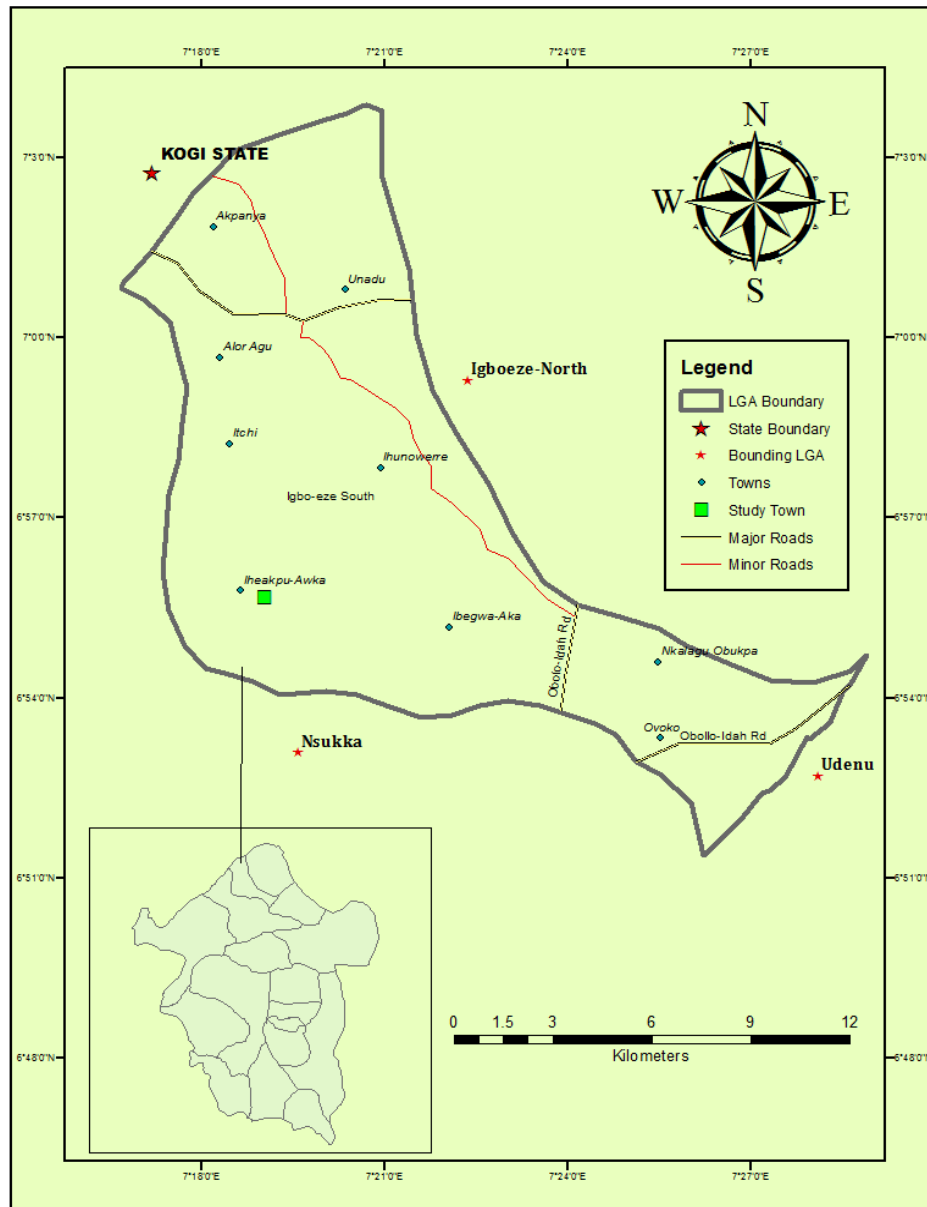
*Archaeological fieldwork is a prerequisite for students of archaeology in the Department of Archaeology and Tourism University of Nigeria, Nsukka to graduate. Hence, to meet these requirements, the third (3<sup>rd</sup>) year students of the department embarked on an archaeological field school at Iheakpu-Awka in Igbo-Eze South LGA of Enugu State. The field school, which ran for three days, was aimed at giving students basic hands-on training on archaeological investigations. The methods used were ethnography, reconnaissance, and excavations. The early history and indigenous technology such as basketry and apiculture of the people were identified through ethnographic study. Through a reconnaissance survey, an abandoned habitation site, shrines were identified. Data collected from the field was descriptively analyzed thematically. Pictures were used to make illustrations, artifacts were illustrated in a table and diagrammatically presented in a pie chart. In the end, it was established using both the ethnographic data and archaeological materials excavated that the area was formally occupied and later abandoned when new structures were set up in the vicinity.*

**Keywords:** *archaeology, excavation, field school, Iheakpu-Awka, reconnaissance*

### Introduction

Archaeological investigations seek to study past lives for insights into what the people did and how they did it from the synthesis of recovered material remains. One way in which archaeological investigation is carried out is through fieldwork. This fieldwork called field school is meant to give students basic hands-on training in the discipline. Hirst (2019) submitted that archaeological field school is an archaeological dig that is planned in part to educate the upcoming generation of archaeologists. They are designed specifically to instruct students in the principles and practices of archaeology. Thus, field schools form part of the mandatory training given to students of the Department of Archaeology and Tourism to equip them to become professionals. Recent archaeological fieldwork conducted by the Department of Archaeology and Tourism University of Nigeria Nsukka; for instance Daraojimba, Uzuegbu, Halilu, and Yunusa (2021); Daniel, Anyanwu, Oji, and Itanyi, (2021); Itanyi and Okonkwo (2009). Also, archaeological investigation in Igboland include Ngonadi (2023), Odum, Onyemechalu and Oji, (2020); Okonkwo and Ikegwu (2020) but none has been carried out in the study area. Besides, the previous field schools have focused on industrial sites of iron metallurgy. Consequently, this paper reports the results of the archaeological field schools at a habitation site in Iheakpu-Awka Igbo-Eze LGA of Enugu State (fig. 1) with the aim of giving the third (3<sup>rd</sup>) year students of the Department of Archaeology and Tourism

basic hands-on training on archaeological investigation. The study was carried out over a period of three (3) days (25th- 27th) and involved seventy-five (75) undergraduate students, one (1) postgraduate student, one (1) staff member of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM), eight (8) academic staff members of the department, two (2) non-academic staff members, and a cartographer.



**Figure 1:** Map of Igbo-Eze south LGA showing Iheakpu-Awka.

**Source:** Modification from Google earth by Archaeology and Tourism Cartographic Unit.

The people of Iheakpu-Awka believe that they are migrants from Awka, a town in present-day Anambra State. Historically, their forebear, known as OkaraObara, who was a hunter, traveled to and fro Awka on hunting expeditions. But after a while of the back-and-forth journey, he decided to settle at what is now known as Iheakpu-Awka, which prior to settlement had a large expanse of unoccupied land, although they

met some aborigines known as the Ngwani. However, these people are said to have reduced in population as a result of the effect of a curse laid on them by a Dibia (native doctor). Presently, the people of Iheakpu-Awka have thus spread in such a way that the aborigines have been overshadowed, such that over time, the former have become autochthonous.

Geographically, the town is located at Latitude 6°27'09"N and Longitude 7°30'37"E. It shares a boundary with Ibagwa-Aka in the west, Obukpa in the south, Onicha Enugu-Ezike in the Northeast, Ishieguibagwa in the Northwest, Ihunowere and Ovoko in the East (Arinze, 2021). Iheakpu-Awka is made up of twelve (12) villages- Ngwani, Umuorio, Ikolo, Oruku, Umudiaba, Edem, Umuaka, AmemijeUmuaroji, Umuokwu, Umujeja, and Achiebule. The language of the inhabitants of the area is Igbo, (Iheakpu-Awka dialect). They live communally in nucleated settlement pattern of rectangular-shaped houses built from either concrete blocks or fired clay, usually plastered with cement, and roofed with corrugated iron sheets. Their domestic spaces are often located behind and/or beside the buildings and cooking is done using stone tripods. Ogirisi-*Newbouldialaavis* trees are used as boundary markers, and houses are enclosed using blocks or thatch.

Socio-economically, the people of Iheakpu-Awka are mostly farmers who cultivate food crops like maize (oka) *Zea mays*, Yam (ji)-*Discorea sp.*, Cassava (akpu)-*Manihot esculenta*, and groundnut(okpape)-*Arachis hypogea*. They also possess economic trees like coconut (akioyinbo)-*coco nucifera*, mango (mangoro)- *magnifera indica*, orange (oroma)-*Citrus spp.*, Oil palm tree (ukwuakwu)- *Elaeisguineensis*, star apple (udara)-*Chrysophyllum albidum*, kola nut (oji)- *cola nitida*, pepper fruit(mmimi)-*Dennettia tripetala* and bush mango (ugiri)- *Irvingia gabonensis*. Aside from farming, some of the people earn a living through trading and artisanship. Socio-politically, the Igwe sits atop the decision-making body in the community. He is assisted by his council of chiefs, made up of the Onowu, the Onyishi, and the Ndi Ichies of the twelve villages that constitute Iheakpu-Awka. Women are not left out in decision-making; hence, the Lolo (the Igwe's wife) coordinates and regulates the activities of the women in the town.

In addition, as religion forms a vital part of civilization, despite the heavy presence of Christianity, the people of the area still hold tenaciously to African Traditional Religion (ATR). This is evident in their worship of some deities such as 'Aja Uruku' and other spiritual rituals performed at OnuOmabe masquerade shrine. Socio-culturally, the people are ardent believers in ATR and they showcase this through masquerading, which usually makes an appearance during their cultural festivals such as Omabe, Onwa-Esaa, and Uke. Moreso, as a means of checks and balances and to maintain social sanctity, it is a taboo in Iheakpu-Awka to pre-harvest yam, kill and slander people, and commit adultery. Similarly, Iheakpu-Awka has a totem, which is a species of short python locally known as 'Ajuala'. This snake is revered by the people, as it is generally believed in all the quarters of the village that during the incessant internecine wars resulting from the struggle for dominance and expansion, the snake proved itself a useful ally, which made it a duty to clean the footprints of Iheakpu-Awka's warriors so that it became difficult for the enemies to trace them. Hence, as a means of appreciation, it became taboo to kill Ajuala. However, if the snake is mistakenly killed, it is given a befitting burial by the killer, and in furtherance of their display of respect for it, there is a depiction of the snake and a fowl, which is its food as murals on the walls of their village squares. Till the present, the snake is said to be harmless except in cases where it is stepped on and, as a defense mechanism, it bites. In such situations, the Onyishi provides the antidote.

## Research Method

The fieldwork made use of three (3) basic methods to acquire primary data from the field, they are- ethnographic survey, archaeological reconnaissance, and excavation.

### Ethnographic Survey

Under this, oral traditions of the study area were collected here from the Igwe and his cabinet members and the acting attamah and his council members. In addition, a study of the indigenous knowledge and technology of apiculture and basketry were carried out by some selected students who were assigned some roles under Mrs. Halilu's watch to ensure their active participation. Findings from this are presented below:

**Oral tradition:** Oral traditions were collected from the people comprising of both genders who were carefully selected for their cultural education. These people were interviewed by students and members of staff (fig. 2).



**Figure 2:** The field school team and respondents at the Igwe's house in Umuorio.

**Source:** Fieldwork, 2023.

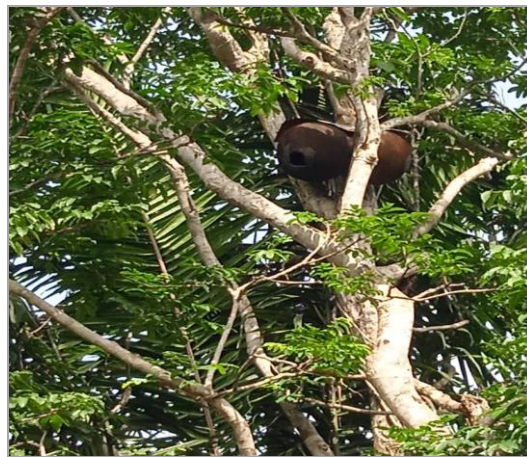
The oral tradition collected centers on the origin of the people of Iheakpu-Awka, their migration history, indigenous knowledge and technology, crafts, taboos, and belief systems. The history of the town was traced to a man called Okara Obara, who was said to have migrated with his family from Awka in present-day Anambra State. Through hunting expedition the sojourner, Okara discovered the land and decided to settle there for reasons such as infertility of the land in their previous location, insecurity caused by kidnappings, and warfare. The migration of Okara and his people was said to have occurred in two phases. The first was from Awka to Agba-Ibeje, where they stopped at Ogurugu. They were, however, forced to leave this location as a result of the hostility of the people of Ezima who they met in the area. Hence, they had to move on in the second phase of the journey, which saw them settle at their present location. On getting to their present location, they still encountered some aborigines known as the Ngwani, but the population of these people had reduced as a result of the death curse that greatly plagued them. As history has it, they were cursed by adibia who they mocked.

**Basketry:** In Iheakpu-Awka, as a way of passing time, especially during the waiting period between planting and harvesting seasons, people engage in basketry, but mostly younger people. From the information collected, the material (palm frond) and tool (knife) of basketry are easy to source, but require a great deal of skill. This craft involves the weaving of palm fronds cut into thin strips (fig. 3) into various forms of containers used for carrying things or for domestic use.



**Figure 3:** Basket weaving  
**Source:** Fieldwork, 2023

**Apiculture:** This is an indigenous technology used to lure bees into a confined place, using pottery vessels or calabashes as shown in fig. 4 to harvest honey from them. Materials used are simple: two calabashes and a sweetener, which is usually palm wine. One of the calabashes is perforated on the bottom, as shown in figure 4 while the other is fastened to it with the aid of a rope tied around the rims. Bees are attracted to the calabash by the sweetener, which they try to consume, and in the course of feeding, they will stay there permanently, and continuously deposit honey into the calabash.



**Figure 4:** Apiculture  
**Source:** Fieldwork, 2023

### Archaeological Reconnaissance

In the course of reconnaissance, the following sites were identified:

**The village square** (Otobo): Typical of most communities in Igbo land, the villages that make up Iheakpu-Awka each have their own village square (fig. 5), where the inhabitants meet to interact. From



observations made, the village squares are all built in similar patterns: rectangular-shape, low walls, iron gates, three entrances, and a storeroom of artifacts. On the walls of the village squares are pictures of the first village head, the onyishi, both sitting on seats, with the village head holding his ofo (a symbol of authority), and that of their totem snake and a chicken.



**Figure 5:** Village square

**Source:** Fieldwork, 2023

**Umuada Hall:** This rectangular-shaped hall, built with concrete blocks but without a roof, used to be the meeting place of the village women. However, the place has succumbed to environmental caprices that led to the removal of the thatched roof which has also made the place bushy.

**Abandoned shrines:** These were delineated by the presence of *Newbouldialaavis* (Ogirisi) and different shapes and sizes of ritual pots scattered around the area (fig. 6).



**Figure 6:** Extinct shrine

**Source:** Fieldwork, 2023

**Abandoned settlement:** Not far from the Onowu's house and the Umuorio village square is an expanse of consecrated land that was said to have been the habitation of two powerful Onyishi. Archaeological evidence around this site are the visible outposts of their *obu*, pottery vessels in their full form, and the rims of buried pots. After the death of the owners, the place was deserted, and over time, it became sacred. It is now covered with bushes given that the land has not been in use. The area would have proved a very useful area for our archaeological dig, but the landowners, refused to grant us permission to use it as to the owners, it has through time and space been consecrated and any form of desecration is frowned upon.

**Achiebule abandoned house:** This house, which was built with mud but reinforced with cement (fig. 7a), was said to belong to a man who, after his demise, the family members sold the portion to the present owners. The sale of the land by family members was because the man had, in his lifetime, lost his only son to untimely death, and as female children do not have the right to inheritance in the area, it became a family property. The house, succumbing to the vagaries of nature, has collapsed and is in ruins. It is characterized by scatters of potsherds and large pottery vessels in their complete form (fig. 7b), as well as its rectangular-shaped foundations.



**Figure 7a:** Abandoned house  
**Source:** Fieldwork, 2023



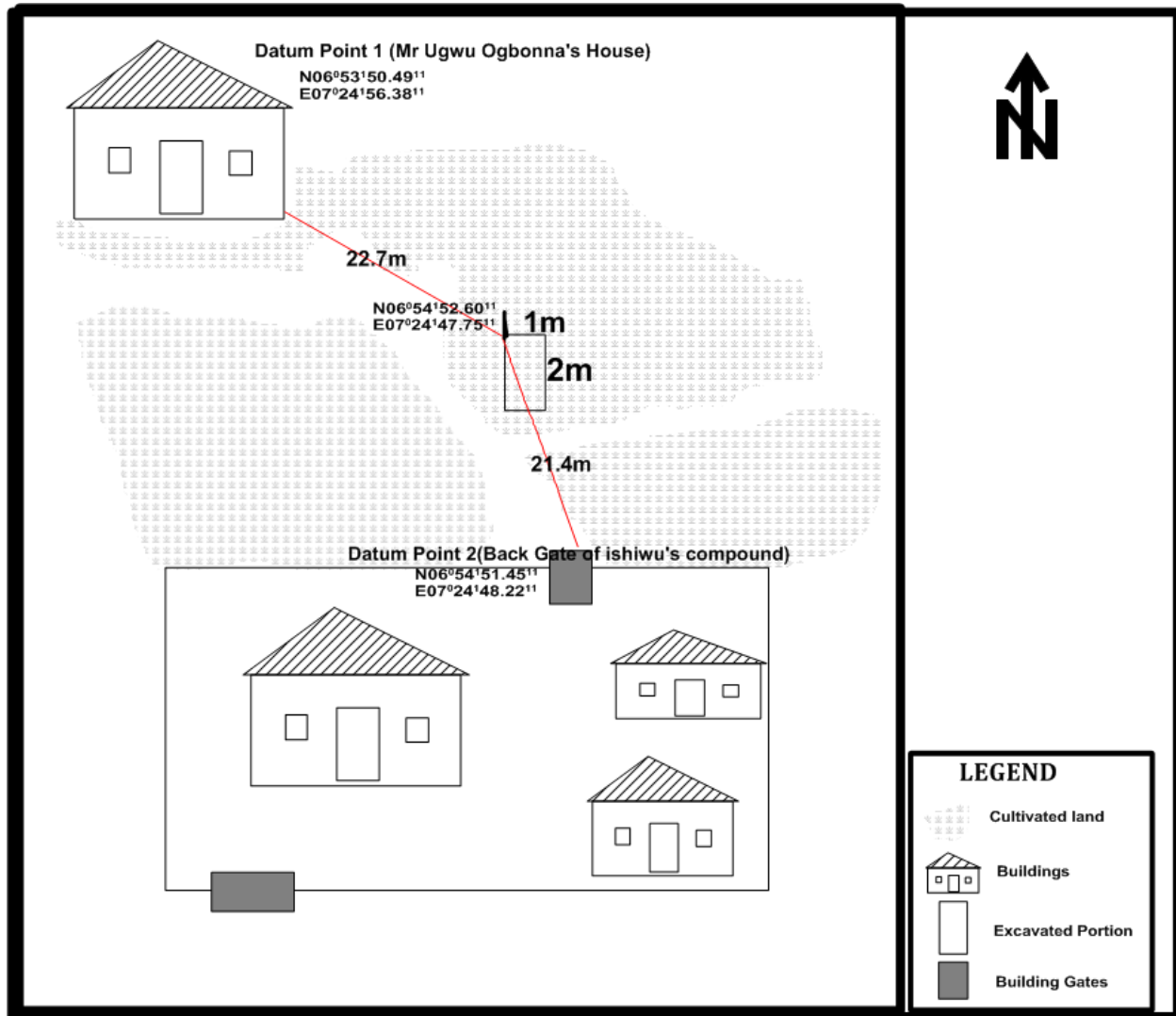
**Figure 7b:** Pottery vessel  
**Source:** Fieldwork, 2023

**Aja uruku:** Despite the strong presence of Christianity in Iheakpu-Awka and the extinction of some other deities and shrines, the Aja uruku deity in the study area still stands tall. The deity is believed to have freed the people of Uruku village, where it is domiciled, from incessant kidnaps and the trafficking of able-bodied men by the neighboring village, Umuorio.

### Excavation and Finds

For the 2023 archaeological field school, excavation methods formed part of the training the students were expected to get. Correspondingly, on April 26, 2023, an archaeological dig was conducted at Ishiwu's compound in Achiebule village in Iheakpu-Awka. Permission to excavate the area was sought and obtained from Rev. Canon Emmanuel UgwuIshiwu. The site of the excavation tagged IshiwuAchiebule (ISW/Achiebule) 2023 is the kitchen area of an abandoned house. This place was selected for the dig because the kitchen is a significant domestic place where cooking and eating take place which bring back memories of physically experienced moments that can be shared, altered, and extended into standardized symbolisms. A trench of 1m by 2m was set up in the area, which has a sloppy top, a surface scatter of potsherds, and is partly disturbed by farming activities. Two landmarks were used

as datum points (fig. 8); the first was an uncompleted building belonging to Mr. Ugwu Ogbonna on the Northwestern axis, located on earth coordinates N06°53'50.49" and E07°24'56.38" and at a distance of 22.7m from the trench. The second datum point is the gate of Ishiwu's compound, which serves as the entry and exit point to the excavated area. It is on the southwestern axis, on Latitude N06°54'51.45", E07°24'48.22", and 21.4m away from the north of the trench.



**Figure 8:** Site Plan

**Source:** ISW/Achiebule, 2023

Excavation started by clearing the site. The color of the top soil [overburden] was brown (fig. 9), and an arbitrary spit of 20cm was chosen for controlled digging. At spit 1, which is 0–20 cm (fig. 10), the color of the soil was still brown and very loose. Most of the finds were potsherds, which were more like rims. Other finds were palm nuts, palm kernel shells, charcoal, bones, and slag (table 1). At spit two (20–40 cm) (fig. 11), the brownish color of the soil had changed to red in contrast to the previous spit and overburden. The soil was still loose, and the spit contained palm nuts, palm kernel shells, lithic, charcoal, a bone, and two glass pieces (table 1). At this point, digging was terminated for the first day. We resumed the second phase of the excavation on April 27, 2023, and we commenced digging of the third spit at 40–



60 cm (figure 12). The color of the soil here was a dark brown, and the soil at this point was compacted and hard enough that we had to use a hand pick to loosen the soil. Finds dwindled in this spit as it contained few potsherds, charcoals, and lithic (table 1), such that we began to suspect a sterile layer. However, in order to assuage our suspicion, we dug another spit of 60–80 cm (fig. 13). This spit proved productive as it contained charcoal, potsherds, and lithic (table 1), the quantity of which was more than we had in spit 3. As a result of the increased quantity of finds in spit 4, we had to dig another spit, this time 80–100 cm [1m] (fig 14). This spit had very compacted soil; finds were very few (table 1), and it was therefore concluded that we had attained the sterile layer.



**Figure 9: Overburden**  
Source: Fieldwork, 2023



**Figure 10: Spit 1 (0 – 20cm)**  
Source: Fieldwork, 2023



**Figure 11: spit 2 (20-40cm)**  
Source: Fieldwork, 2023



**Figure 12: spit 3 (40-60cm)**  
Source: Fieldwork, 2023



**Figure 13:** Spit 4 (60-0cm)  
**Source:** Fieldwork, 2023

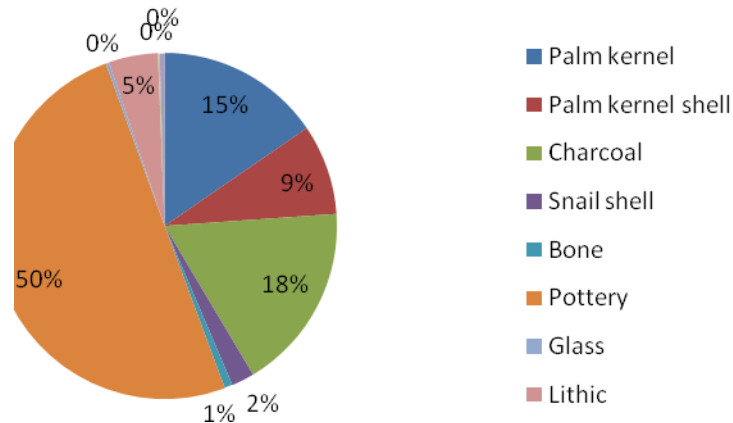
**Figure 14:** Spit 5 (80 – 100cm)  
**Source:** Fieldwork, 2023

**Table 1:** Analysis and Interpretation of Finds

S/N	Items	Reconnaissance	Surface Collection	Spit 1 (0-20cm)	Spit2 (20-40cm)	Spit 3 (40-60cm)	Spit 4 (60 -80cm)	Spit 5 (80 -100cm)	Total
	<b>Organic materials</b>								
1	Palm kernel	9	18	54	16	2	-	-	99
2	Palm kernel shell	13	7	28	5	2	-	-	55
3	Charcoal	11	24	9	31	6	30	3	114
	Snail shell	10	4	-	-	-	-	-	14
5	Bone	2	-	2	1	-	-	-	5
	<b>Inorganic materials</b>								
6	Pottery	61	22	65	70	41	61	5	325
7	Glass	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	2
8	Lithic	-	-	-	15	12	2	1	30
9	Slag	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
10	Others	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>648</b>

The above table, which is the bag inventory of finds from the archaeological dig, shows that pottery accounted for a significant proportion of the finds. Charcoal samples contained the next highest concentration of artifacts; this was followed by palm kernels, palm kernel shells, lithic, snail shell bone, and a material that could only be grouped as others. These finds are further represented below (fig. 15) in a pie chart., the potsherds were further classified into decorated and undecorated (see table 2), illustrated in a pie chart (see fig 16) and then grouped according to parts (see table 3) and illustrated (see fig 17).

### Distribution of Finds

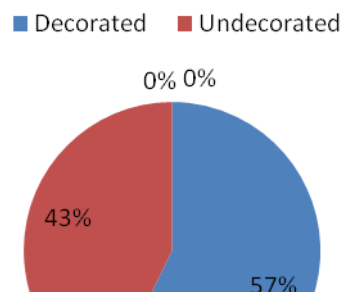


**Figure 15:** Pie chart showing the distribution of finds.

**Table 2:** Distribution of potsherds

S/N	Items	Quantity
1	Decorated potsherds	186
2	Undecorated potsherds	139
	Total	325

### Distribution of Sherds



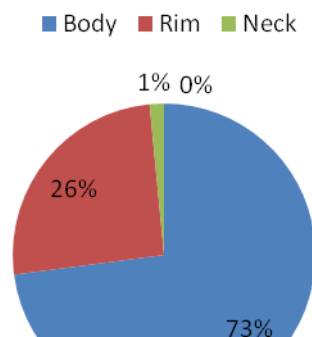
**Figure 16:** Distribution of sherds



**Table 3: Representation of parts**

S/N	Items	Quantity
1	Body sherd	237
2	Rim sherd	83
3	Neck	5
	Total	325

### Representation of parts

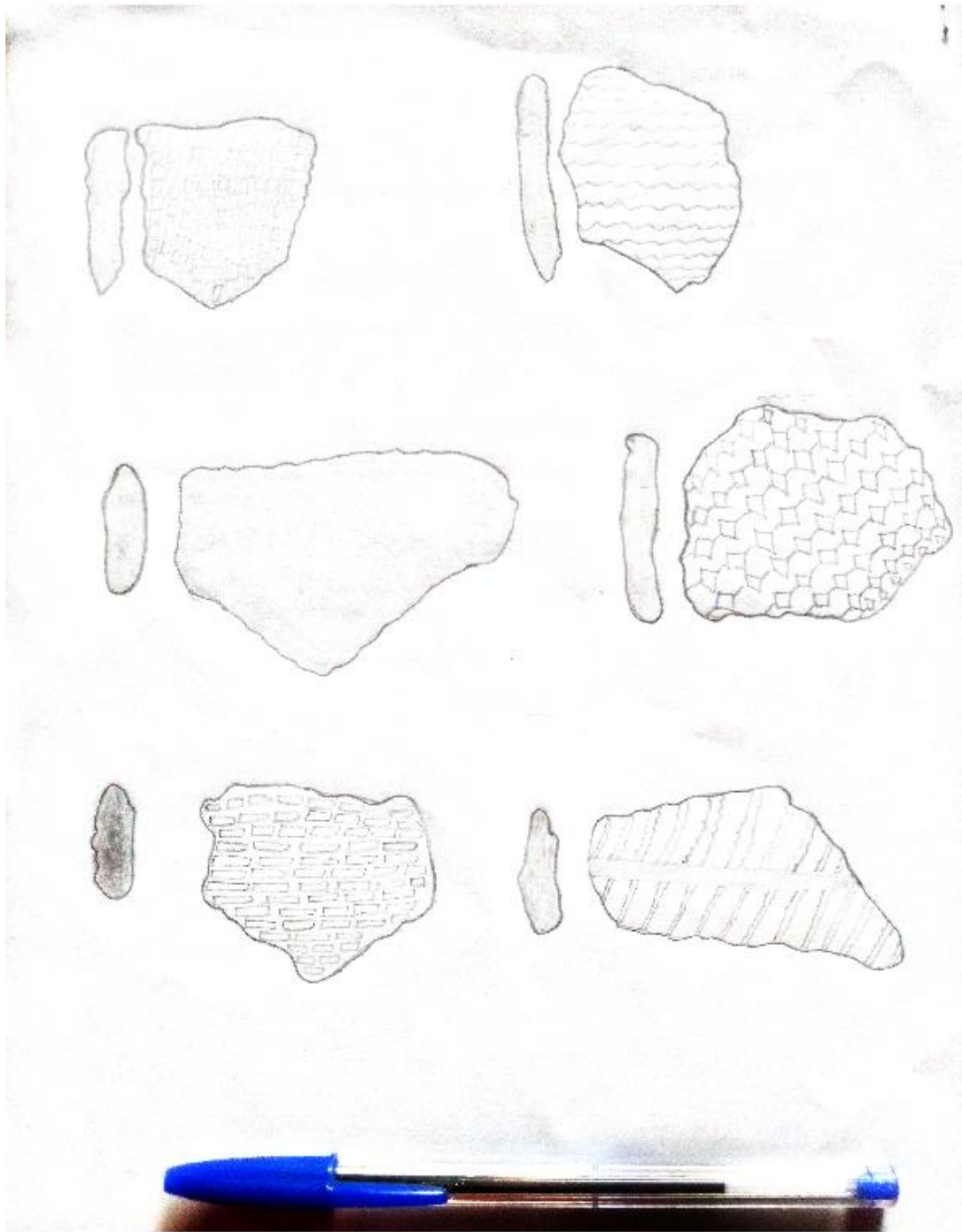
**Figure 17: Representation of parts**

### Interpretation

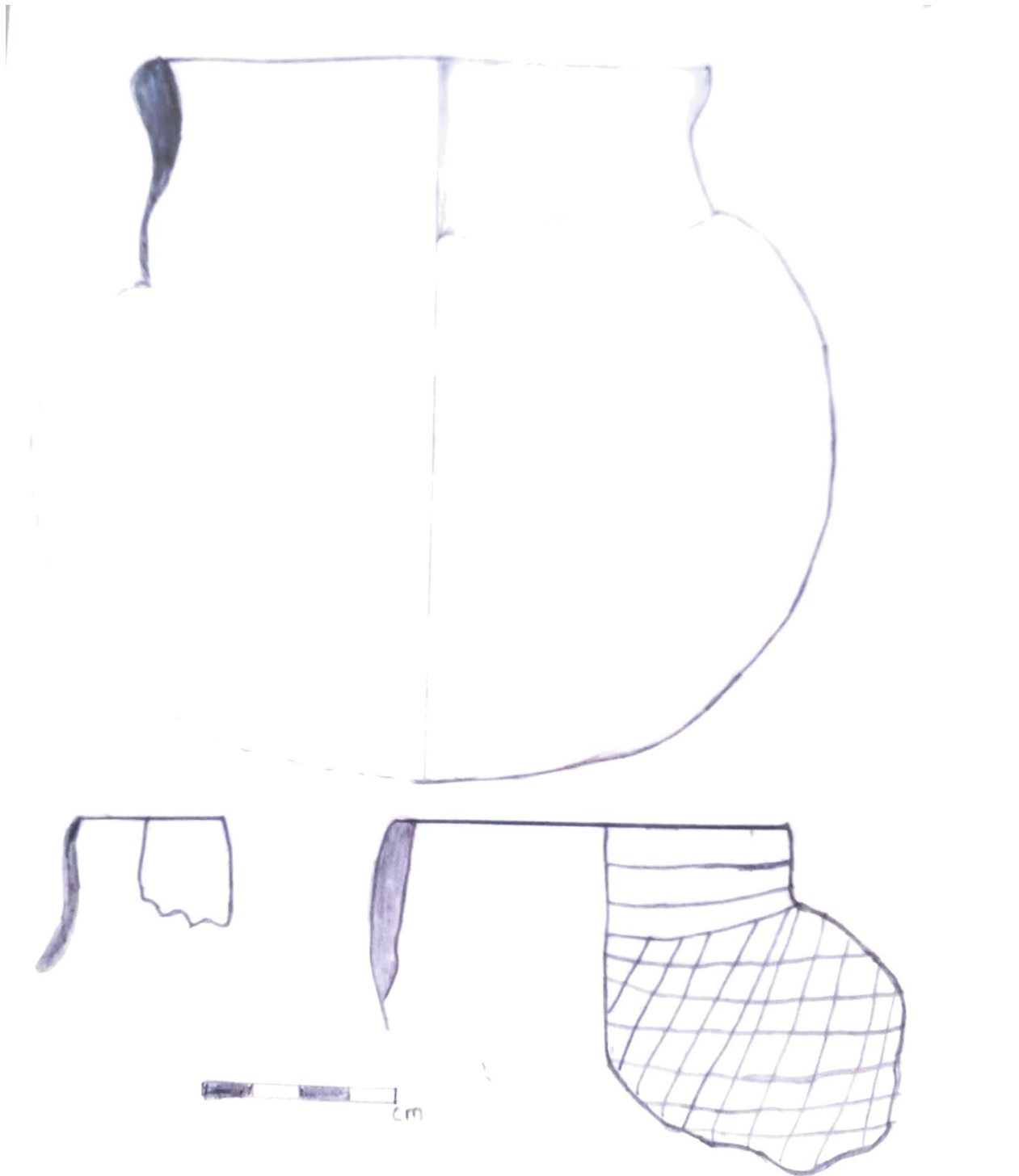
From the above finds, it could be established that the occupants of the study area used pottery materials for domestic purposes, ranging from cooking to storage. Some of the recovered potsherds were pictorially illustrated (see fig 18) and reconstructed (see fig 19a & b). Also, table 2 shows that most of the recovered potsherds are decorated while table 3 shows that body sherds are in abundance followed by the rim with little quantity of neck part. The snail shells are evidence of their dietary life. The palm kernel nuts depict the vegetation, indigenous tree/plants domesticated in the area as well as the economic trees found there. The palm kernel shells are evidence of palm produce, while the charcoal depicts kitchen or cooking area and archaeologically, they can be used for C<sup>14</sup> of the area.



**Figure 18:** Pictures of potsherd



**Figure 19a:** Reconstructed body parts

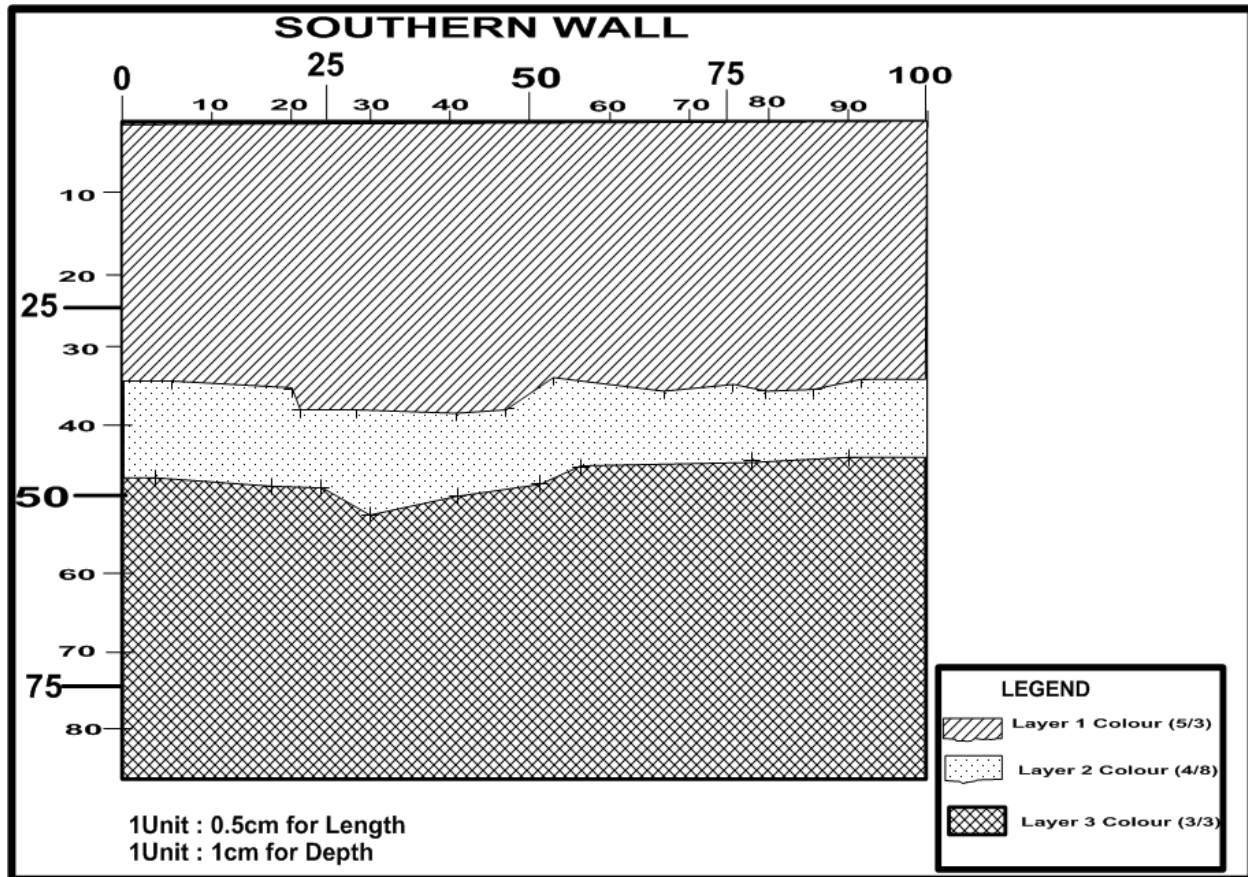


**Figure 19b:** Reconstructed Rims



### Stratigraphy

The stratification of the site was in three layers, and the southern wall was used for this. The first was a brownish colour [5/3] (Munsell colour chart, 2013) that later became red [4/8] (Munsell colour chart, 2013) the second layer, and the third layer had a dark brown hue [3/3] (Munsell colour chart, 2013). The texture of the sand was at first loosely packed and smooth to the touch. But by the time it got to a part of the second layer and throughout the third layer, it had become compacted but was still smooth and finely grained. Pins were used to outline the layering and measurements were also taken and recorded. The measured values were plotted on a graph sheet and later computerized (Fig 20).



**Figure 20:** Graphical representation of the stratigraphy

### Discussion

The archeological investigation of Iheakpu-Awka has revealed a great deal about the way of life of the people. Oral tradition posits that Awka was the homeland of the people before migration; however, to validate this, there should be further archaeological investigation of both places. An ethnographic survey revealed that human interaction with the environment leaves imprints on the landscape. Finds from the reconnaissance and excavated trench showed pots and potsherds of different sizes, motifs, and shapes that could have been bought from pottery-producing areas, as the people clearly stated that they did not produce pottery but are extensive users of pottery wares. The forms of pottery found in the area are simple both in form and in motif of decorations, which were more of an impression of nets, ropes, and wavy lines. These decorations were done on the rim and body of the pots, and the undecorated sherds were worn. However, since the people of Iheakpu-Awka stated that they do not have a history of pottery production; it could mean that the potteries used by them and found in the site were sourced from pottery

producing areas like Nrobo and Ugwuogo Nike. Thus, showing trade relationship between the study area and her neighbours. Considering that the people said they did not smelt iron and smiting had phased out, metal evidence was scarce except for one tiny slag piece found in Spit 1. This could have been picked from somewhere around or away from Iheakpu-Awka and may have, in one way or another, found its way into the dug area. Stones were found in some spits of the trench, but they are not artifacts. Bones recovered from the dig could be those of domesticated animals, either goats or sheep thereby indicating their dietary systems. Other finds were palm kernels and palm kernel shells, which may have made their way into the trench area either by human or animal action, although there was no evidence of burrowing around the area.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of the archaeological course was to give students basic hands-on training on archaeological investigations. The students greatly commended themselves and showed eagerness to learn during the few days that the study lasted. The first day of the fieldwork was dedicated to ethnographic research, while the second and third days were for excavation. Findings were expository, as the investigation revealed that Iheakpu-Awka has cultural ties that go way back into their ancestry with the people of Awka in Anambra State, a claim that can be corroborated using archaeological and linguistic investigations. In addition, the large number of pottery assemblages in the excavated trench shows the wide acceptability of pottery in the past and that, though not all communities produced pottery, its usage was widespread. It should also be noted at this juncture that the fieldwork was not without its challenges. The most prominent of which was an averted fracas between the youths of the village and the fieldwork team. Hence, there is a need to intensify efforts in public archaeology so that people can have widespread knowledge of the discipline, and subsequently, there will be no acceptance difficulty in villages during archaeological field schools.

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