



A Preliminary Report on the Archaeology of Ashehu Abandoned Settlement, Igabi Local Government Area of Kaduna State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This article reports an archaeological study of the Ashehu abandoned settlement in Igabi Local Government Area of Kaduna State. The exercise which took place in February 2009 was conducted in the accomplishment of a Bachelor of Archaeology in the Department of Archaeology, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria. This preliminary investigation adopted archaeological survey and oral tradition collection and documentation as methods of carrying out the research, it revealed proven evidence of a sedentary way of life by the people due to the availability of house foundation, visible massive defensive wall which suggests and symbolizes power and authority. Hence the need for further and more detailed study for a better understanding of the nature, and evolution of the site is Recommended.

Keywords: Archaeological Reconnaissance, House Foundation, Defensive wall, Ashehu.

Introduction

Ashehu lies between latitude $10^{\circ} 53' 17''\text{N}$ and longitude $07^{\circ} 45' 50''\text{E}$. The old Ashehu settlement is about 15km northwest of the famous Turunku settlement in Igabi Local Government of Kaduna State (see fig. 1, 2 and 3). It is bordered by Sarwani villages to the West, Birnin Barwa to the South, Sheka to the North and river Galma to the East. The archaeological investigation aims to document and report the archaeological finds and features identified on the Ashehu site. The research was carried out in February 2009 as a requirement for a Bachelor of Arts in Archaeology, in the Department of Archaeology, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria.

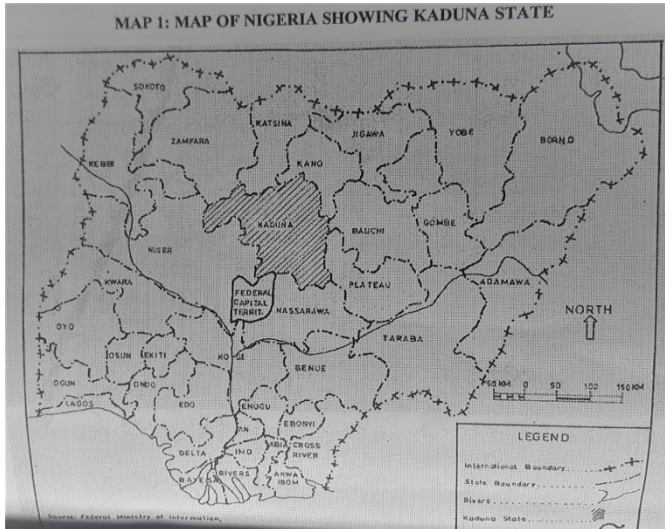


Fig. 1 Map of Nigeria showing Kaduna State.

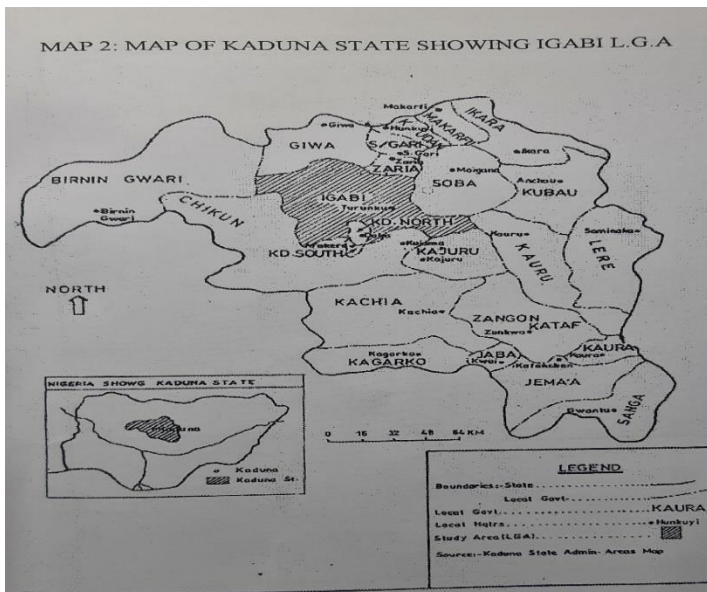


Fig.2: Igabi Local Government Area in Kaduna State

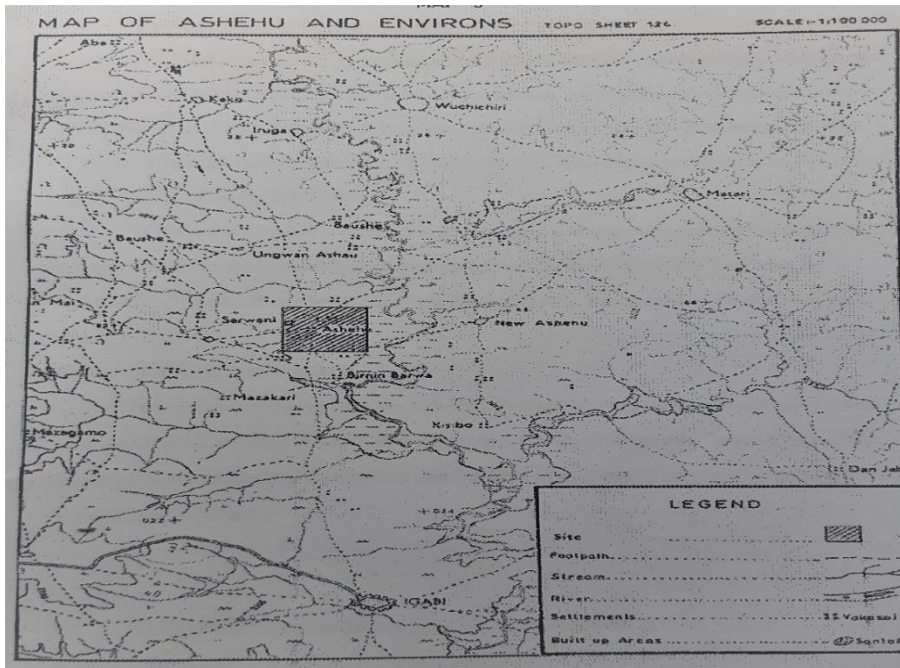


Fig.3: Ashehu in Igabi Local Government Area

Research Methods

This investigation was conducted by adopting two methods: Oral tradition and Archaeological Reconnaissance.

Oral Tradition

Cooper (2005) describes oral tradition to mean stories about the past that local populations produce and reproduce orally to preserve their own history. Interviews were conducted with people of different ages and statuses. The interviews were conducted individually, and questions asked were targeted around the origin of settlements, rulership, indigenous craft and industries as well as the relationship of *Ashehu* with other settlements in the neighbourhood. A total of six people were interviewed.

Oral information says that Ashehu was founded in the mid or late 18th century by a group of migrants from *Kabi* valley in present day Kebbi State, under the leadership of a prominent Islamic scholar then by name Abubakar Shehu, he was popularly called “*Shehu*” which meant an elder in Islam and a well-respected personality in Sufism (a sect within the Muslim Society).

He (Shehu) was said to have left the Kabi valley with his family and disciples; this included his friends and majorly his students *Almajirai* in search of a strategic place to hide from the colonial masters who at then had conquered the Sokoto Caliphate, and a place they could continue there farming and religious activities which they were known for. This pursuit led them to the settlement. The migrants acclimatized to the environment and built small huts with thatched grasses and also



engaged in agriculture practice along the *Kogin Galma* which is predominantly the eastern part of the site. The *Kogin Galma* (River Galma) was probably the major pull factor that attracted Shehu and his disciple's attention to settle in the area.

Oral informant (Abdulkareem, 2009) said the site was said to be very secured from external attacks and even from internal disputes as the Shehu was said to have been a very spiritual person, people from neighbouring places kept migrating to the site where they said “a *Ashehu akwai tsaro*” meaning in the Shehu's place there is exist serenity. Hence the name of the site got its root from the leader Shehu and they said Ashehu.

The population of the people kept increasing due to reproduction and emigration, this led to the construction of a defensive wall that surrounded the settlement which was a defensive strategy organized in the past to prevent the settlement from raiders. The people of Ashehu were great farmers and hunters, they fought several battles in the past and were never defeated. They also helped most of the neighbouring communities and secured them from external attack, especially during the *Tawaye* (uprising) raids.

According to oral tradition, the earlier inhabitants of Ashehu were known for their craft of weaving by the women and dyeing by the men. The men dye the end products using local dye substances such as indigo and other leaves. They also practice agriculture and cultivated crops like maize, potatoes, millet, and cocoa yam, among others.

After the demise of Abubakar Shehu, the people of the community agreed that “Ashehu” be given as the title of anyone who ascends to the throne. The following Ashehu's continued leading the community: Ashehu Kembo, Ashehu Tukur, Ashehu Gani, Ashehu Danpati, Ashehu Idris, Ashehu Lawal and Ashehu Haruna, it was during the reign of Ashehu Haruna that the old site was abandoned for a new settlement where they moved eastward across River Galma. Ashehu Haruna was succeeded by his nephew Ashehu Muhammad Haruna Commander who had been on the throne for over thirty-five years.

Archaeological Reconnaissance Survey

Archaeological reconnaissance is generally referred to as the systematic recording and identification of archaeological features and finds, in other words, it is the careful observation of a landscape using a broad range of techniques by the archaeologist in locating archaeological sites (Renfrew and Bahn, 1996)

An archaeological survey carried out in this investigation involved foot walking by crew and guides. A Traverse survey was conducted, prismatic compass, measuring tapes, digital camera, ranging pole and photographic scale were carried along during the exercise, with the focus of identifying the material evidence on the surface of the site and properly documenting them.

Results

Defensive Wall: Defensive wall is the first visible feature to be seen on the site, called in Hausa (*Ganuwar Ashehu*) the wall has four gates namely *Kofar Arewa*, *Kudu*, *Yamma*, and *Gabas* (North, South, East and West) which serves as the major entrance of the village in the past. It has the following measurement, a thickness of 3.40m, and an average height of the wall of 1.95m.

Noteworthy, to say that the eastern part of the site has no visible defensive wall as the whole of the eastern side is bordered by the River Galma.



Plate 1: Ruin of Defensive wall

Dyeing Industry: it is situated at the southern part of the site, very close to the southern wall. The area is now been farmed on but the soil which is grey in colour suggests it was used for dying as corroborated by oral information. The diameter of the covered dye area is 7.24cm.



Plate 2: Dye Area identified by the colour of the soil

House Foundations: remains of different sizes of house foundations were identified on the site, the foundation was made of stones which are arranged in a circular form, and the stone were of various sizes. The various sizes of the house foundation were identified at the centre of the site, eastern and western parts of the site respectively. The diameter of these house foundations ranges between 1.5m and 2,9m.



Plate 3: Remains House Foundation

Discussions

Dye Industry: Dyeing is the process of colouring woven textile materials or fabric. Dye pits are holes dug into the ground for the purpose of dyeing activities. According to oral information, dyeing was among the traditional industries that flourished in the old community. The people constructed the dyeing pits using raw materials obtained from their immediate environment and the surroundings.

Presently there do not exist dyeing activities in the area so no ethnographic parallels to the dyeing tradition in the area of our study. In the past dyeing is one of the major crafts, it confirms their passion for aesthetic material. Ashehu community were known for their unique indigo dyed fabrics, which were traded in various commercial markets within the Zaria area, and other places like Kano, Sokoto and Katsina. At present, dyeing industries in Ashehu are no more, this is a result of modern textile industries and chemical dyeing which are cheaper and easier to obtain than the traditional ones.

Defensive wall (*Ganuwa*): This is one of the most prominent features that still stand in its ruins state on the site, oral tradition has it that it was built during the reign of Ashehu Abubakar Shehu the founder of the community, the walls appeared to have been constructed with lumps of dark mud laid in coarse form (*Turbaya*).



The ruins of the defensive wall can be used to establish the significance of this settlement in terms of size, wealth, authority and classification of labour among the people of Ashehu. The town walls symbolized power and authority.

The extensive nature of the walls shows that the society was a complex one, probably with a complex socio-economic system and a social stratification comprising of the “freemen” and “slaves” from whom the labour for the construction of the wall must have been obtained through forced labour.

Inferences could be made from the defensive walls that the area must have experienced a complex economy with natural resources attractive to other neighbouring areas, for instance, the area has fertile soil for agriculture which attract human settlement. The walls were built not only as a defensive mechanism but also as a protective measure for the peaceful development of the community.

House Foundations: Stone structures were identified, and arranged in a circular form on the site. The nature and arrangement of these stones suggest a sedentary settlement and the fact that the site was once inhabited by humans in the past. The difference in the sizes of the house foundation suggests that some of the foundations with smaller diameters were used as storage facilities while those with larger diameters were used for shelter. Similarly, it could also be inferred that perhaps the differences in diameter may suggest social stratification as found in many complex societies in the past. Stratification is also visible in the new Ashehu community suggesting a cultural continuity from the past community.

Conclusion

The availability of these features in Ashehu shows a high degree of technical innovation and prowess in harnessing the physical environment at its disposal for productivity among the past inhabitant of the site. This is manifest in their ability to build and fortify their defensive wall for security purposes from the available soil in the environment which symbolizes power and authority and the use of plants in their environment for dying of textile to suit their atheistic taste. Ashehu most probably could have been a well-organized, stratified complex society in the past.

Recommendations

Our study area, Ashehu, has a lot of historical significance; this research has been able to figure out the importance of this area. Further research on this historical site is imperative and is expected to cover dating and other scientific laboratory analysis as this will provide answers to the sequence of occupation, dates and other aspects of the site.

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ORAL INFORMANTS

| S/N | NAME | AGE | OCCUPATION | DATE OF INTERVIEW |
|-----|--------------------|-----|----------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | Muhammad Haruna | 65 | Village head | 07 – 02- 2009 |
| 2 | Abdulkareem Haruna | 40 | Tafidan Ashehu and Civil servant | 07 – 02 – 2009 |
| 3 | Usman Ishaq | 52 | Imam of Ashehu | 12 – 02 – 2009 |
| 4 | Abdullahi Idris | 60 | Farmer | 12 – 02 – 2009 |
| 5 | Umar Magaji | 41 | Farmer | 21 – 02 – 2009 |
| 6 | Shuaibu Yahya | 50 | Tailor | 21 – 02 – 2009 |