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Changing Cultural Landscapes and Heritage Tourism Potentials of Ijaiye-Orile Archaeological Sites in Nigeria

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Abstract

This article examines archaeological perspectives on the changing cultural landscapes in Ijaiye-Orile, located within Akinyele local government area of Oyo State, in southwestern Nigeria. Surface, ethnographic and reconnaissance surveys with information from excavated materials of the study area were used to assess the past and present landscape uses within this area. The land use changes in the area were influenced by such factors as political power conflicts, climatic variations, urbanization, and colonialism, resulting in the development and later loss of metallurgy, a major craft occupation within past social groups in the area. Features of tourism potentials in the area include abandoned settlements of historical significance to the Yoruba people and the traditional industrial sites of Ijaiye-Orile. Harnessing and preserving the archaeological features of these sites would be of tremendous benefit in the development of Nigeria's cultural heritage tourism. Information on these sites of past Yoruba cultural occupations and iron-working technologies will also be valuable in African diaspora studies.

Introduction

The location, conservation and preservation of cultural and natural resources of archaeological sites are of paramount importance to the level of success for a given area in attracting cultural heritage tourism (Olukole, 2007). Such stewardship of sites is accomplished through archaeological research, which entails the scientific search and study of evidence of past activities of human populations and their impacts on the landscape. Archaeology thus provides a means for understanding the cultural behaviour of past and present populations within their environment (Folorunso, 2001).

Tourism involves the "sum of phenomena and relationships arising from the travel and stay of non-residents in so far as they do not lead to permanent residence and are not connected with any earning activity to meet their bill" (Marguba, 2001). Basically, there are three types of tourism in Nigeria: cultural tourism, religious tourism, and ecotourism. Changes in cultural landscapes in the Ijaiye-Orile area over time provide a subject for cultural tourism, which

includes such activities as organized visits to historical sites, visiting other cultures and peoples (Marguba, 2001).

Several reports on historical sites have shown that they serve as places of recreation, tourism, leisure, education, culture and religious activities depending on the perspective of the investigators (Falade, 1985; Obayemi, 1987). Such sites reveal evidence of past lifeways and architectural styles of area cultures over time (Murray, 1967; Fabunmi, 1969). Studies on historical sites have been reported by Olukole and Aremu (2001); Olukole (2007); Agbaje-Williams (1981, 1983, 1986, 1989 and 1990); Clarke (1938 and 1939); Smith and Williams (1996); Walters (1954); Soper (1978); Soper and Darling (1980) and Willett (1960 and 1962). Reports from these archaeological sites have helped in the development and conservation of the tourism resources of historical sites. Effective management of tourism resources focuses on a spectrum of subjects, from archaeology and heritage sites to resorts and places of natural beauty. Accurate and detailed information on the characteristics and status of these resources is very important for policy makers, local administrators, specialists and interested parties in the process of planning, execution and evaluation (Kim *et.al.*, 2005). Studies to date include Olukole's (2007) analysis in which a Geographical Information Systems (GIS) database was used to predict the location of archaeological sites within the Ijaiye-Orile area. In addition, Inawole (1999) chemically analysed excavated materials from an iron-working site located in Ijaiye-Orile.

This article assesses the factors that influenced changes in cultural landscape uses over time in Ijaiye-Orile archaeological sites, and the tourism potentials for those locations, using surface, ethnographic, and reconnaissance surveys.

The Study Area

The study area is located within Akinyele local government area of Oyo State, in southwestern Nigeria, and lies on geographical coordinates of 30⁰ 45'N and 70⁰ 50'E. It is about 20km northwest of Ibadan with an elevation of about 120m above sea level (Olukole, 2007). The area experiences seasonal variation characterized by the West African monsoon climate, marked by distinct seasonal shift in the wind pattern. The seasons of the year are rainy and dry, with the former between March and October, and the latter between November and February. The mean annual temperature at Ijaiye-Orile (Ibadan) for the period of 1953 to 1988 was 26.6⁰C;

however, variations occur each year in consonance with seasonal variations in sunshine, cloud cover, and precipitation.

Background Data

In Nigeria, the body of existing literature on significant historical sites is sparse. Most studies are limited to archaeological excavations (Frobenius, 1910; Eluyemi, 1986; Okpoko, 1990). Available analyses of the history of Ijaiye-Orile reveal that the early settlers of the area were the Egbas from Ogun State, Nigeria (Figure 1).

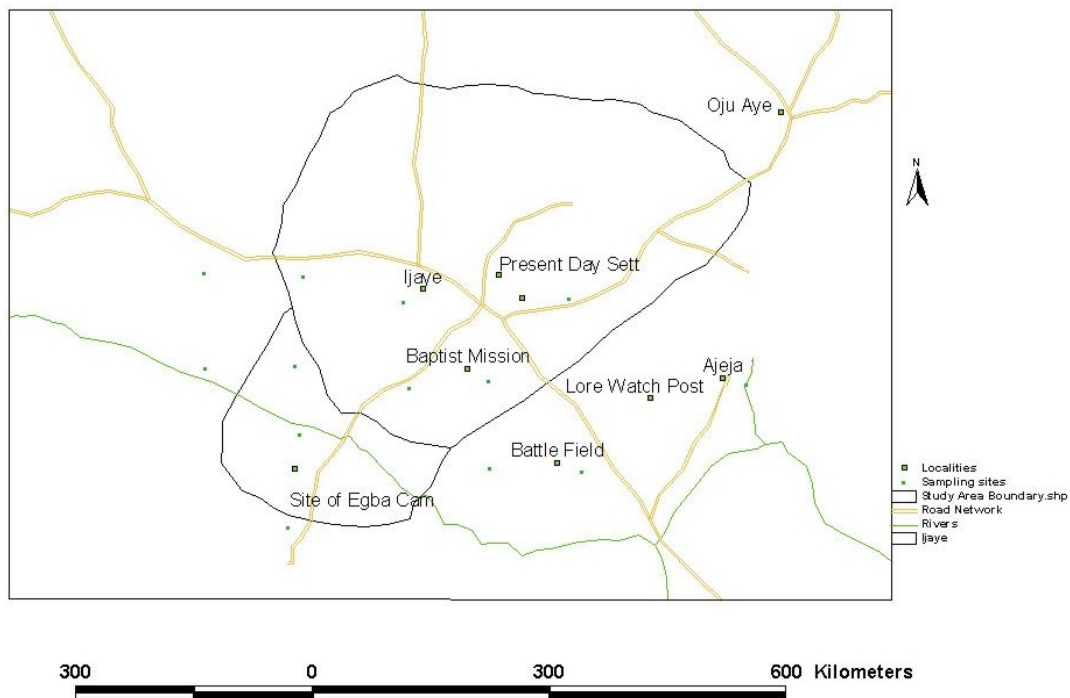


Figure 1. Map of Ijaiye Orile showing the location of early settlers (Source: Olukole, 2006).

Oral history accounts and ethnographic studies indicate that the head of the Old Ijaiye-Orile culture group was a warrior chief of the Alaafin of Oyo, named Kurunmi, who was said to have driven the early settlers of Ijaiye-Orile away due to his power, position, and affluence (Opadeji, 2000). The settlers driven away were the Egbas who now occupy the Ijaiye area of

Egbaland in Abeokuta, Ogun State. The history of Kurunmi's leadership was one of accumulated political power, which he exercised through periods of warfare (Ayodele, 2000).

Recently, archaeologists have unearthed material remains of this culture. Hence, the study of the Ijaiye people's past ways of life is no longer restricted to their political dynamics, but now includes evidence of other aspects of their culture. This has been a very important development and has been used to formulate inferences about other aspects of the culture, both tangible and intangible.

Surface Survey

The Ijaiye-Orile archaeological sites were explored through a surface survey during which the cultural features of the area were identified and classified. An unsystematic, "random walk" type of surface survey method was employed. The investigators traversed the area of study for the collection and examination of artifacts and the recording of their respective locations. This method gave a panoramic view of the cultural features of the area and paved the way for the subsequent classification of the observed cultural features.

Ethnographic Survey

An ethnographic survey focused on informants who were known to have substantial knowledge of the activities of the communities within the study area. Such informants were asked to identify other knowledgeable informants representative of the local communities, using a "chain sampling" to obtain a saturation of informants in all empirical areas of investigation. Informants were interviewed multiple times, using information from previous informants to elicit clarification and more detailed responses upon re-interview.

Reconnaissance Surveys

Archaeological reconnaissance surveys entail systematic attempts to identify archaeological sites, including their precise geographical locations (Ashmore & Sharer, 1996). Often archaeological reconnaissance surveys are carried out with a view of locating sites with promising evidence of human settlement and occupation for further archaeological survey and excavation. Archaeological reconnaissance surveys of the Ijaiye-Orile archaeological sites were

carried out to compile an inventory of cultural remains, assess changes in land uses over time, and to evaluate the level of preservation and the condition of each site.

Integration of Results and Discussion

The past uses of the cultural landscapes within the Ijaiye-Orile area are evident from archaeological surveys, excavations, and ethnographic surveys. Those uses included (among others) farming, iron working, cloth dyeing, and soap production. The evidence of past metallurgy activities were suggestive of a later age than that of the dyeing and soap making industries. The low level of familiarity of the present residents of the new Ijaiye-Orile area with the history of the older Ijaiye culture also indicates this. The present land uses of the area consists mainly in farming, with practices involving bush burning. Such burning methods contributed to the transformation of a landscape of earlier rain forests to savanna over time. The natural vegetation resources of Ijaiye-Orile also included resources for the exploitation of the oil palm.

According to Inawole (1999), the chemical analysis carried out on the iron slag collected at Ijaiye-Orile iron working site showed that the work on the site was of high grade, utilizing ore from a primary source (Figures 2 and 3). These findings indicate that the ore was mined directly from natural deposits in nearby sources.



Figure 2. Iron slag mound of Ijaiye Orile.

The changes in land uses over time in Ijaiye-Orile could be attributed to three major factors: past political conflicts, transformation of the environment, and impacts of more recent colonial regimes and urbanization.



Figure 3. Ijaiye Orile iron working site and furnace.

Past Political Conflicts

The history of Ijaiye-Orile, as indicated in oral history accounts and documentary records, was shaped by power conflicts among political leaders such as Kurunmi, Bashorun Gaa, Balogun Ogunmola, and other powerful warriors of their time, battling for the post of the Aare-Onakakanfo of the Oyo Empire, either in favour of an individual of their choice or for themselves (Majiyagbe, 2000). Historical accounts as well as current evidence reveal the Alaafin of Oyo was the traditional head of the Oyo Kingdom, while other clan leaders were his subordinates who paid tribute to him. These clan leaders were referred to as “Baales.” Competing clan leaders engaged in warfare with one another, which led to the death or migration of many people. This resulted in the exodus of the early settlers of Ijaiye-Orile (Samuel, 1921). This could account for the loss of a transition in cultures from the early settlers to later occupants, contributing to a rapid change of occupational activities and attitudes concerning land

uses in the area. It was during one of these wars that the early settlers of Ijaiye-Orile, now the Ijaiye Egbas of Abeokuta, migrated from Ijaiye-Orile to where they are presently located.

This movement of early settlers consequently brought a change in the culture of the people. Thus, the later settlers appear to have had very little or no contact with the earlier occupants due to the hasty and unplanned departure of those earlier social groups as a result of regional conflicts. The excavated materials from the study area included pottery of the early settlers and the material culture of cloth dyeing practices. Archaeological evidence of the earlier culture also included the remains of an iron slag mound (Figure 2) and iron working furnace (Figure 3). Significantly, the mining activities in which the Old Ijaiye-Orile culture had engaged became a relic of history, as the later settlers were basically farmers and did not undertake comparable metallurgy practices. Land uses in Ijaiye-Orile today consist mainly of agriculture and residential sites (Ayodele, 2000).

Environmental Changes

The vegetation of the study area is that of guinea savanna woodland. The present-day savanna woodland ecological zone of Nigeria is characterized by species of “derived savanna” (Clayton, 1961). The concept of “derived savanna” was first applied by Jones (1945) to the type of vegetation belt that stretches across West Africa, between the rain forest to the south and the fire-swept guinea savanna to the north (Tubosun et al., 2006). Several research workers have proposed different causative factors for the creation of the derived savanna typified in Ijaiye-Orile. Goude (2000) suggested a large number of interrelated factors such as shifts in climate, soils, and aspects of geomorphology, hydrology, and distributions of fires, as contributing to the creation of derived savanna.

The climatic changes experienced over the years in Ijaiye-Orile influenced the land uses of the area in no small measure. Anthropogenic factors like bush burning, a major activity of farmers and hunters who form the largest population of Ijaiye-Orile, contributed immensely to land use changes in the area. In addition, waste disposal in unsuitable locations resulted in flooding and consequently erosion of the greater part of the residential areas of Ijaiye-Orile. These factors, among others, have turned most of the Nigeria’s forest regions to savanna, including parts the Oyo state in southwestern Nigeria. The resultant change in the ecosystem of

the study area had affected Ijaiye-Orile's land uses, and various aspects of the local occupants' social practices and material culture likewise changed over time.

Urbanization, Colonialism, and Divisions of Labor

Since the development and spread of European colonial regimes in West Africa, local residents have been impacted by European cultures at the expense of their own. West Africans have tended to abandon their own rich cultural values that could have aided the development of beneficial social practices. In the Ijaiye-Orile area, the loss of cultural heritage from the early to late settlers could have been as a result of urbanization and the impacts of European colonialism. A good number of the rural dwellers, mostly youths, had migrated to nearby cities and towns in search of recreation and relaxation centres like club houses and hotels; and basic infrastructures like electricity, pipe-borne water, to mention but a few. This accounts for the increase in the population of the urban centres at the expense of the rural areas and a change in occupational activities of rural areas. This migration from such rural areas to the cities affects the culture of local residents and hence the change in land uses in the area. The excavations of the iron working sites of Ijaiye-Orile now serve as monuments to a rich cultural heritage no longer in active use. If such monuments are properly preserved, they can form a basis for cultural heritage commemoration and for attracting the economic benefits of tourism to the area.

Interesting features of these heritage sites for both tourists and archaeologists include abandoned settlements of historical significance to Yoruba history, evidence of migrations and cultural changes, and defensive walls surrounding the abandoned sites, which are also relevant to Yoruba history. In addition, other sites present the traditional industrial heritage of past metallurgy work within the area of Ijaiye-Orile.

Recommendations

Due to the loss of certain aspects of culture resulting from colonialism and urbanization, a "rescue" or "salvage" program of archaeological, oral history, and ethnographic investigations should be initiated in advance of any new construction or landscape-altering projects within the study area. This would help in conserving the area's valuable cultural heritage and in developing potential tourism sites for economic benefit of the region.

Interested archaeologists could carry out further studies by probing the occurrence of iron working sites in Ijaiye-Orile using GIS mapping programs and data sets. This would be of tremendous benefit in predicting suitable locations of archaeological sites and tourism centres in the area.

Laws of environmental conservation and preservation should be enforced. Hence, the unlawful excavation of archaeological sites by relic hunters should be dealt with in accordance with the law. Excavated materials need be kept in a safe facility and environment to avoid damage and thereby promote cultural heritage conservation and public exhibitions within appropriate standards of care.

Note

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