

ADAPTATION PROSPECTS OF TRADITIONAL POTTERY PRACTICE IN CONTEMPORARY ERUSU AKOKO

KASHIM ISAH BOLAJI^{*}, SHADO ADENIYI SAMUEL^{}**

ABSTRACT

This paper presents the traditional processes, production techniques and contemporary relevance of pottery practices in Erusu Akoko, Akoko North-West Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria in the 21st century. Pottery is an age long tradition in this community practised mostly by women, with a technique of clay preparation and forms peculiar to them. Their method of pottery production is through moulding, coiling and pinching or the combination of the three. They produce a range of ceramic forms that can be adapted into contemporary crafts.

INTRODUCTION

Akokoland is located in north-eastern part of the frontier zone of Yoruba land (Olukoju, 2003). The exact date of the founding of Akoko mini-states was not known in history, but oral sources and traditions suggested that it had grown to a moderately large size with enormous strength from about 12th century when migration started at Ife in pre-colonial period (Oguntomisin, 2003). The Akoko region is made up of multiple independent mini-states (Akinjogbin, 1994) that have no centralised system of government in place.

According to oral traditions, the people developed indigenous industrial technology in the area of pottery, soap making; in addition to weaving production, which produced the major economic activities. Craft and manufacture shaped a crucial economic foundation among the people of Akokoland.

Erusu Akoko is one of the communities under the Benin-Akoko sub group in Akokoland. Other communities in this group include Arigidi, Ojo, Oyin, Afin, Oge, Igasi, Aje, Uro and Oso. This group evidently has mixed origins of variations of Benin language.

Erusu Akoko has three quarters namely Aga, Okesan and Okega. The people are majorly Christians and traditional worshippers. The town is ruled by the Osunla of Erusu Akoko.

The major craft that Erusu Akoko is known for is pottery and peasant farming. Traditionally, pottery is mainly practiced by Erusu women; their men assist in the mining and digging of the clay and gathering of woods for fuel needed during firing.

^{*} Department of Industrial Design, School of Environmental Technology, Federal University of Technology, P. M. B. 704, Akure, Nigeria.

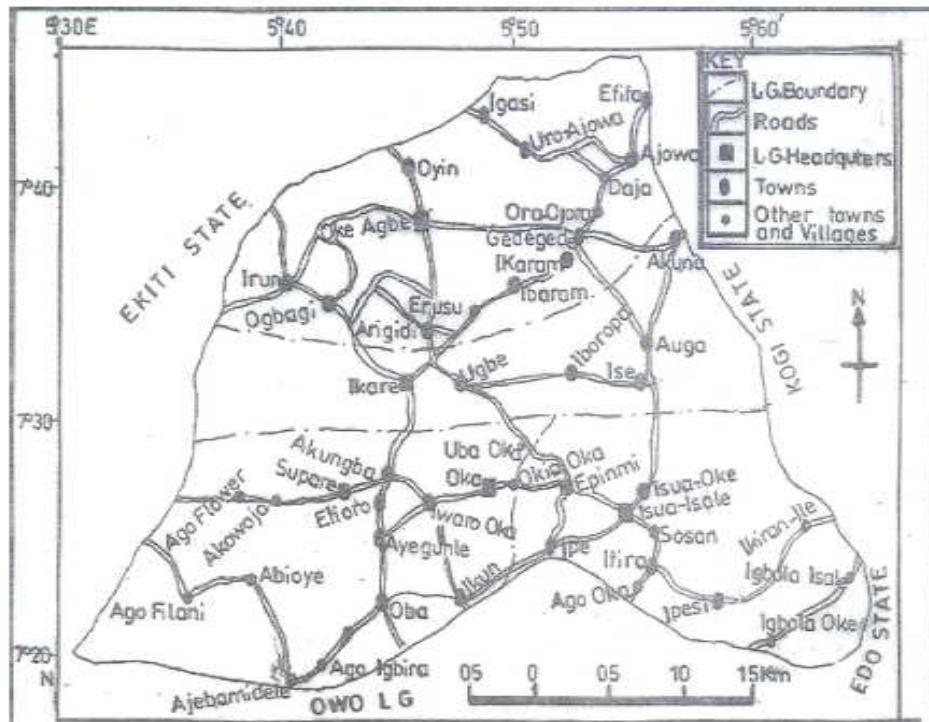
^{**} Department of Glass and Ceramic Technology, School of Science and Computer Studies, Federal Polytechnic Ado Ekiti, P.M.B 5351 Ado Ekiti, Nigeria.

Correspondence E-mail Id: editor@eurekajournals.com

Pottery practice in Erusu Akoko is traditionally family or lineage incline; this is a scenario where all information concerning the nitty-gritty of the vocation is concealed or sacredly kept and passed on only to members of the lineage from generation to generations and not by apprenticeship.

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION

Erusu Akoko is located on longitude 7° 35'11.3"N and latitude 5° 48'50.0"E in Akoko North-West Local Government Area in Ondo state, Nigeria. Its headquarters is in the town of Okeagbe Akoko.



Map of Akoko Region of Ondo State
Source: Ondo State Ministry of Works, Survey Division

METHOD OF PRODUCTION

It is no longer news, that hand built technique is the sole method of producing indigenous wares in Yoruba land; thus is the method practiced by the potters in Erusu Akoko, its end product is often achieved through mould, coil and pinch or the combination of the three. The implication is that throwing technique which is on potter's wheel as an alternative practise is foreign to the people. According to the potters, to make a successful hand built pottery however, three major steps or stages must be considerably explored; they are widely and generally considered as rim forming, body building and base forming.

The process begins with digging of clay. It was however noticed that Erusu potters use three different type of clay namely, red clay, black clay and white (gray) clay. These clays are mixed together and allowed to aged before it is used.

RIM FORMING (IGBATI) which is the first stage in the method of pottery making by the potters in Erusu Akoko. The *rim* because of its placement is formed first by kneading the clay, the potter makes a circular turning around the clay lump to open it up and consequently smoothen it using a damped rag or leaf (*ewe bombom*). It is then left for 20-30 minute to become leather hard before building up the body of the pot.



Plate 1. Mixtures of dug clay



Plate 2. Aged workable clay



Plate 3. Opening up clay lump to form the rim



Plate 4. Formed rim

The second stage is **MIMO** which literarily means to build the body wall; it is the continuation of the rim forming by joining coils of clay at the inverse side of the rim depending on the circumference and the height of the rim. These coils will be blended together and pinched by

both hands to maintain even thickness of the wall as the potter moves round the pot until the desired height is achieved. The body will then be scrapped and smoothed with *owa and* damped corn cob as the potter move round the pot. The built pot is then sun dried for 20 minute.



Plate 5. Formed rough blended body



Plate 6. Smoothened blended body



Plate 7. Smoothened round base formed

BASE FORMING is the last stage; according to the potters, it is a process whereby the left hand of the potter is inserted into the pot to further push out the flat base and the right hand is used to mould and shape the base into a round shape. After getting a desirable base; a damp corn cub is rolled over the base in order to create an aesthetic design, allowing for good frictional grip

and further create a harmonious and compact union on the pot. The base of the pot will then be turned upward and left for some minutes in order for it to become leather hard.

At this stage, the inner part of the pot is scrapped and polished with pebble stones before proceeding to decorate the pot (plate 5 above).



Plate 8. Pots are then left to dry till they are ready for firing



Plate 9.Firewood and straws used as fuel for firing



Plate 10.Dried pots are then fired in the open



Plate 11.Cool fired pots



Plate 12. Finished pot ready for market after firing

Some of the applications of traditional pots in Erusu Akoko include:

- Flower pots
- Cooking pots
- Fetching and storage of water
- Boiling local concoction
- Traditional ritual rites

CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

ADAPTATION OF ERUSU AKOKO POTTERY TOOLS AND DECORATIVE TECHNIQUES

The tools include smooth pebble of stones or string of baobab seed (Arin) used to draw lines

and geometric shapes on a pot or vessel that is about to dry thus, giving it a polished drawing (burnish). Maize cob, wool cord as well as carved wood are used to impressed decorative motif on wet pot. It is usually employed on the base of the pot.

Broomstick, wooden stick and any other sharp object are used to incise, engrave and texture the surface of the wares when it is leather hard.

These are tools and materials that are used for decorative purposes in Erusu pottery and can serve as alternative materials and tools in the decoration of modern wares.



Plate 13. Smooth pebble stones



Plate 14. Owa and corncob

ADAPTATION OF ERUSU POTTERY FORMS

Erusu pottery is characterized by forms of various sizes and shapes, most of which are no longer in production according to the potters because of the introduction of modern containers. In order to ensure their continuity, they can be adapted for modern use when properly finished and modified with the application of glaze.

The unique nature of Erusu traditional pottery, in its traditional setting is unique in the sense that it is manually-made and so, no duplicate of it can be made or found elsewhere except by the potter himself or herself.

SHORT COMINGS

Traditional potters in Erusu Akoko have very much decreased because of the prevailing contemporary, economic, social, political, educational and religious factors that have contributed to the reluctance of the younger generation to develop interest in traditional pottery. Although these changes are inevitable because of the dynamism of culture, there is the need to preserve some aspects of our culture for educational purposes.

RECOMMENDATION

The art of traditional pottery should be encouraged by parents at home and the skill should be taught at all levels of our educational system. The use of techniques and tools that can be adapted into contemporary ceramic production should be encouraged to improve on indigenous technology. The state and federal governments should support setting up of community museums as a means of encouraging tourism.

CONCLUSION

This survey has helped to document Erusu Akoko traditional pottery form, tools and functions for posterity. This has become necessary because of the increasing negative influence of modernity on the pottery tradition of the people. With this, future generations will be able to learn and appreciate the role of traditional pottery in our social and economic development.

REFERENCE

- [1]. Akinjogbin, I. A. & Ayandele, E. A.. Yorubaland up to 1800. In Obaro, I. (ed.),

- Groundwork of Nigerian history*. Ibadan: Heinemann. 1980.
- [2]. Faboyede, O. *Trade and markets among the Akoko communities in the pre-colonial*. Journal of law and international security, Vol. 1, no. 4, Department of Public Law, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma. 2010.
- [3]. Faboyede, O. "Akokoland before colonial rule: Earliest times to 1900". International journal of Arts and Humanities (IJAH) Bahir Dar-Ethiopia, Vol. 4 (1), S/No 13, January, 2015;46-65.
- [4]. Hopkins, A.G. *An economic history of West Africa*. London: Longman. Information Brochure on Akoko Northwest Local Government Okeagbe (1992), 1-3.
- [5]. Oguntomisin, G.O. (2003). Yoruba towns in perspective. In Oguntomisin, G. O. (ed.) *Yoruba towns and cities*.
- [6]. Okajare, S.T. *A survey of the traditional socio-political organisation and economic structure of Akoko sub-ethnic division of Yorubaland*. Ph.D Seminar Paper presented at the Department of History and International Studies, Ekiti State University. 2001.
- [7]. Olukoju, A. The siege of Oka, ca.1878-1884: A study in the resistance to Nupe in Northeastern Yorubaland. In Falola, T. & Law, R. (eds.), *Warfare and diplomacy in pre-colonial Nigeria: Essays in honour of Robert Smith*. Madison: African Studies Program, University of Wisconsin-Madison. 2003.
- [8]. Thurstan, S. *Art of Traditional Pottery in Nigeria*. Accessed from <http://www.vanguardngr.com>. Retrieved on 2016-07-27. 2011.

APPENDIX I



APPENDIX II

