

An Archaeological Approach to Dating Polities and Architectural Ingenuity in Ijebu, South Western Nigeria

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Abstract : The position of Ijebu-Ode, the historical capital of the Ijebu Kingdom, at the center of gravity of Ijebu land is enclosed by the 180-km-long earthwork and suggests a centrally controlled project. This paper reflects on the first stratigraphic drawing of the banks and ditches of this earthwork, and place its construction mechanism in a chronological framework. Nine radiocarbon dates obtained at the site suggest that the earthwork was built in the late 14th or early 15th century. This suggests a relationship with the Ijebu Kingdom, which pre-existed the opening of the Atlantic trade but first became visible only in the Portuguese records in the 1480s. In June 2017, more earthworks were found but within the core of Ijebu Land. This most recent finding points to an extension of territory from the center to the outlying villages. One central question about this discovery of monumental architectures that was functional around the 14th century or before is in its mode of construction. Apparently, iron tools must have been used in the construction of 'a 20m deep ditch that runs 180km in circumference.' Thus, the discovery of iron-working sites around the vicinity of the earthwork is a pointer to this building process that is up till now shrouded in mystery. By comparing the chronology of Ijebu earthworks with the evidence of Iron working in south western Nigeria around the first half of the first millennium AD, it can be thought that the rise in polity triggered the knowledge of metallurgy in the region.

Keywords : archaeology, earthworks, Ijebu, metallurgy

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