

POTTERY IN EKPENE UKIM, AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Pottery making had been one of the major trades of the people of EkpeneUkim. Women and Men helped in some aspects like the digging of clay from the deposits, either from the stream or where, it is deposited naturally. The traditional Ibibio pottery culture flourished in Ibibio land in the centuries linked with the other pottery of the ancient times, such as the Chinese, Ashanti pottery in Ghana etc. Nevertheless the EkpeneUkim pottery, which is Ibibio's, is still regarded as one of the superb arts with experienced craftsmen and women.

1.0 Introduction

Pottery started as far back as many centuries ago in EkpeneUkim, in short as old as the village. Pottery making had been one of the major trades of the people of EkpeneUkim. Women and Men helped in some aspects like the digging of clay from the deposits, either from the stream or where, it is deposited naturally. EkpeneUkim clay was being dug in special days, on these days all the people concerned moved to the deposit for digging and some to carry the clay out from the digging areas to the storage place, before it finally shared to individuals to take home. When it was brought home, it will be kept in one place where plantain and cocoyam leaves are being used in covering it in order to prevent it from impurities and other rough particles. Though the profession is not common, among the men in EkpeneUkim, but husbands give support to their wives.

1.1. Pottery in Ibibio Land

Historical studies of southeastern Nigeria tends virtually to ignore the Ibibio having concentrated upon the coastal zone especially the trading settlement of the Niger Delta. However, the appearance of other works of arts, signal a new awareness of complexity of the socio-economic system of the inter-land of which Ibibio land is an important part.

The traditional Ibibio pottery culture flourished in Ibibio land in the centuries linked with the other pottery of the ancient times, such as the Chinese, Ashanti pottery in Ghana etc. Nevertheless the EkpeneUkim pottery, which is Ibibio's, is still regarded as one of the superb arts with experienced craftsmen and women. Ibibio pottery making traditions is fairly uniform with minor variations between different areas in materials, techniques, tools and forms. In general, methods are similar to those of the Eastern Igbo, clay is dug from the pit and carried back on the head or truck to the potter's home or workshop which is usually walking distance.

1.2. EkpeneUkim

EkpeneUkim is one of the major towns in Ibibio land as a tribe as well as in Akwa Ibom as a state, incidentally is one of the main known pottery towns and centres in the state. EkpeneUkim is in Etoi local government Area of Akwa Ibom and has a population of about 30,209 now the population has grown exceedingly, however because of unreliable and misleading nature of census result in Nigeria, the right figures may not be quoted.

One of the overwhelming characteristic features of the people of EkpeneUkim is its apparent social unity among the members of the community and the surrounding villages, such as Nden Ebon, Oron, Okopedi, EkpeneUkpa, ItiamMbak, Uruan. The neighbor villages are closely packed, none is more than 600 metres away from each other.

It is located between latitude 7.01 feet East and Longitude 60°20 East and is defined at the Eastern zone by the Cross River, which serves as a boundary between Akwa Ibom State and Cross River State. EkpeneUkim is a level region/area, which was in the trough of syncline of undulating sandstone ridges in an elevation of between 52-30-60-10 metres above sea level. The undulating feature of the area which gave rise to many streams flowing from the North East to the Cross River resulted to intense erosional activities. The streams and

rivers with its tributaries from the main drainage system. The drainage system helped to expose the underlying clay deposit that form the resources for early pottery making and which has contributed to encourage the pottery tradition in the area.

EkpeneUkim like other communities in Ibibio land falls within the forest belt of the Southern Nigeria part of the vegetation cut into the Savannah or Grassland. These natural endowments (rivers, streams, clays, forest and grassland) resulted to an economic system predominated by farming, pottery making, fishing and trading of agriculture surplus, fishes and pots. The Colonial Masters were greatly impressed by the quality of Ibibio pottery, and described as “richly ornamented bowls and giant jars, which in beauty of line and decoration rival those which were made by some other women potters” and are “surely as fine as any in Africa” More recently, Leith-Ross commented that much of their pottery is for export as its good quality is widely recognized. Pottery-making centers in Ibibio-Land at present include the following villages; IkotIkwerretam (Itu), ItakIkotObioisi, Mbiafon, EkpeneUkim and NkoNkono (IkotEkpene) and several villages in the Southern part of Eastern Ibibio land. In addition to these main centres, there are numerous smaller villages where these pots are made, dotted throughout many of the Ibibioland. There was general tendency for smaller production centres to decline, while some of the larger once may also extinct. In southern Ibibioland, for example, some of the centres are extinct or moribund. Most Ibibio pots are sold in local markets within a few kilometres of the place where they were made, having been carried there in head loads by the potters themselves. However, a great many pots are carried further afield in a complex system of secondary distribution. Petty traders take them by bicycle or on foot to more distant markets. For example, pots made at EkpeneUkim village and nearby villages are sold in EkpeneUkim market to women who convey them for sale some 20km away to other places/villages. In contemporary pottery making, wares must by definition, undergo at least one firing which converts the shape irreversible into hard products, resistant to water and chemicals. Unglazed wares are fired only once or as the case maybe. Glazed wares are traditionally fired twice, firstly, the biscuit firing in which all the bodies except hard porcelain are finally

matured. The biscuit wares are then glazed and glost fired at a desired temperature. In the case of porcelain, the biscuit firing does not mature the body, a porous article is produced. The glost firing is then at a higher temperature, body and glaze mature together. Modern tendency is to eliminate the second firing; such wares are termed once fired. Both body and glazed composition must be suitably adjusted for this method to undergo even more heating process. Under-glaze decoration is frequently applied with oils which must be burnt off in the hardening on fire at about 700 -800°C before the glaze is applied. On glaze decoration is fixed on wares by firing between 600-900°C usually between 750-850°C in a decorating kiln (Enamel Kiln). Different colours requiring, different decorating temperature necessitates a number of such firing. The firing of pottery bodies are generally more complex as they are mixture of materials which involves both complex and incomplete reactions, fast and slow ones etc. The firing of pottery wares does not merely involve bringing them to a desired temperature, the rates of heating and cooling are also important. The best firing schedule for a body is governed by a number of different types of reactions, which occurs in a successive change. These in turn, are affected by the factors like, the body composition, the body preparation and firing method.

1.3. Conclusion

However, the appearance of other works of arts, signal a new awareness of complexity of the socio-economic system of the inter-land of which Ibibio land is an important part.

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