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## REVISIT TO THE URBAN SITE OF OLD OYO: A PRELIMINARY REPORT

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### INTRODUCTION

Oyo Ile, the capital of the Old Oyo Empire (Fig. 2.1) located on latitude 80° N and longitude 40° 19' E in the extreme northwest of present-day Yorubaland of Nigeria, flourished in the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries as an important urban centre. Europeans visited the town in the nineteenth century: Clapperton in 1826 (Clapperton 1829) and the Landers in 1830 (Lander 1832). By then the town was reported to be vibrant. The town was abandoned following the fall of the Oyo Kingdom. However, the date for its final abandonment has so far not been fully established. The site has been the subject of archaeological investigations since 1938 (see Clarke 1938a & b, 1939; Walters 1954; Willett 1960, 1962; Smith and Williams 1966; Soper 1978; Soper and Darling 1980; and Agbaje-Williams 1981, 1983, 1986, 1989, 1990). The first person to excavate on the site was Frank Willett in 1950-59. Robert Soper conducted field schools for students of the Archaeology Department at the University of Ibadan in the 1970s, while Agbaje-Williams carried out fieldwork for his *Ph.D.* dissertation during the late 1970s and early 1980s. The present work is therefore a re-visit of the site, using more modern techniques. It is also more interdisciplinary in nature, involving archaeology, environmental archaeology, anthropology and history. The aim is to provide a fuller picture of life in the urban centre of Old Oyo (economy, social and political structure, etc) and also to clarify some issues that have arisen from earlier archaeological works on the site. These issues include the nature, extent and courses of the defensive structures, the number of gates, the classification of pottery and the final date of abandonment of Old Oyo. The research activities carried out during the planning phase of our work being reported here include environmental studies, general mapping, soil sampling and excavations.