

Excavation of Amaovoko: A Further Study of the Lejja Iron Smelting Culture

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Introduction

Earlier excavations carried out in Lejja uncovered materials which were discovered in association with iron smelting debris dating to over 4000 years ago. As a result of the dates received from previous excavations, further excavations are now being carried out to verify or refute the dates already received from Lejja. A new set of dates were received from this present excavation which also confirmed the antiquity of iron smelting in Lejja. This paper is therefore a report of the recent excavations carried out in Lejja Trench 4 in Amaovoko, Lejja. The details of findings from earlier trenches have already been reported in a previous publication (Eze-Uzomaka 2007; 2008) and a complete analysis of all the pottery recovered from Lejja will be published together in a future publication.

Review of excavations in Lejja thus far

Lejja is a town located near Nsukka in Enugu State, Nigeria (For location see map in Eze-Uzomaka 2007). It occupies the northern sector of a north-south dry valley of the Nsukka Plateau. It is surrounded by steep-sided grassy hills and was formerly more thickly forested than it is at present. The soil is rocky in nature and the ground is littered with stones some of which have been identified as haematite and there are many iron smelting sites in and around Lejja (Eze-Uzomaka 2007). Preliminary excavation was conducted in 1980. 3 test pits were sunk and a number of finds were recovered from these investigations (Anozie 1979, 1983). Recent excavations were conducted in Lejja (from April 2007 to July 2008) and charcoal samples from Lejja were dated for the first time.

Radiocarbon dates were received from the site ranging from 4005 ± 40 B.P to 1715 ± 35 B.P in trenches 1 and 2. Seven tuyeres were loaded inside the furnace in trench 1. Four were intact (unbroken) and three of them were broken but the broken pieces were still in the furnace and were reconstructed into three almost complete tuyeres. There were 7 tuyere ports in the furnace. 5 of them were opened during the excavation of the trench and the outlines of the other two were clearly