

Ceramics of Power and Identity: The Ìjẹ̀bú Palace Assemblage in the Context of Yoruba Regional Networks

Olanrewaju Lasisi¹, Robin Garcia²

¹Anthropology/ Ohio State University

²University of Virginia, Global Studies Program

Abstract:

This study examines the ceramic assemblage from the Ìjẹ̀bú royal palace, a key archaeological dataset for understanding material culture, identity, and regional interaction at a Yorùbá frontier polity. Drawing on the analysis of over 22,000 ceramic sherds recovered from controlled excavations at the palace's sacred precinct, the paper situates Ìjẹ̀bú ceramics within the broader framework of Yorùbá ceramic spheres while highlighting their distinctive characteristics. Quantitative analysis reveals a marked dominance of bowls (approximately 88%) over jars (12%), underscoring the palace's functional emphasis on feasting, ritual consumption, and sacred hospitality rather than storage or redistribution. While vessel forms and decorative motifs – including applied bosses, cordons, grooves, punctates, and striations – reflect participation in regional ceramic traditions linked to Ife and Oyo, Ìjẹ̀bú ceramics are distinguished by their frequent integration of multiple motifs on single vessels, the use of carved wooden roulettes rather than twisted-string variants, and the unique presence of bronze-sheeted pottery. These features suggest a locally distinctive material tradition that creatively recombined regional styles and introduced technological and symbolic innovations. The Ìjẹ̀bú assemblage is best understood as a regionally distinctive variant or sub-complex within the Yorùbá ceramic sphere system, reflecting the kingdom's political autonomy, cultural hybridity, and negotiated identity at the intersection of major regional networks. The findings invite a reconsideration of ceramic sphere theory and foreground the dynamic role of frontier polities in shaping the material landscape of precolonial Yorùbáland.

Keywords:

Power and Identity; the Ìjẹ̀bú Palace; Yoruba Regional

I. Introduction

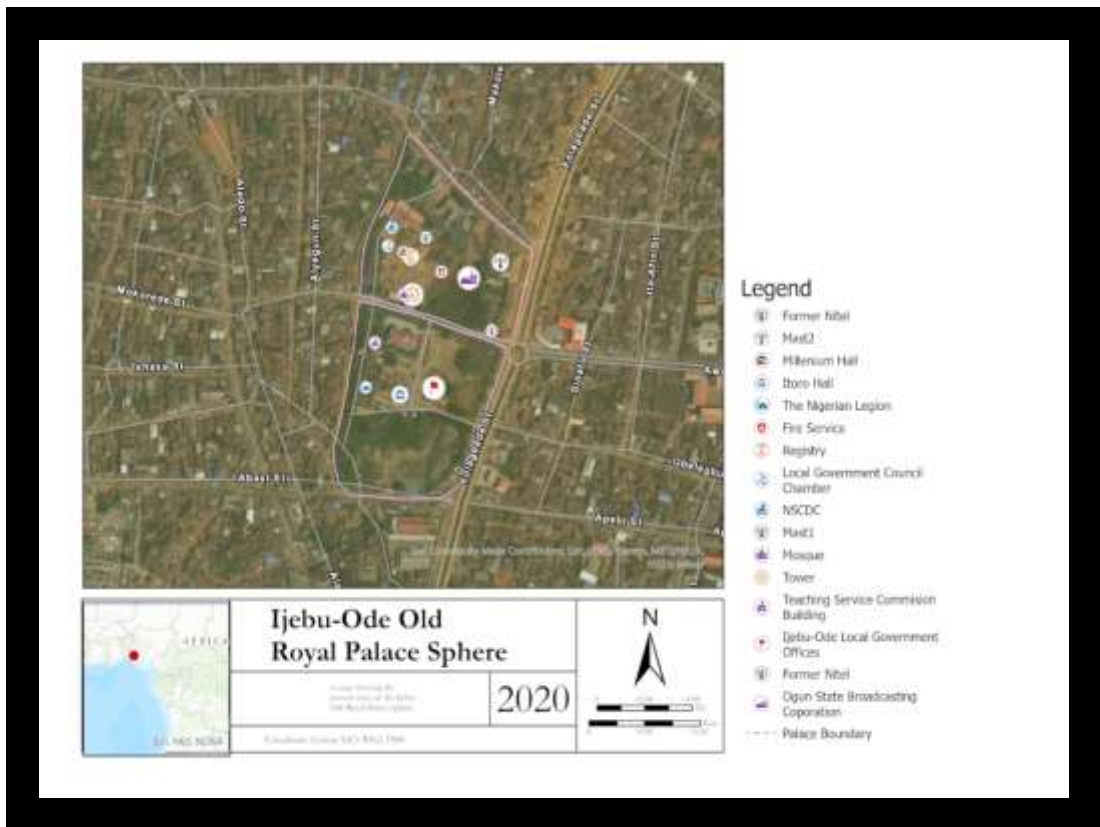
Ceramics occupy a foundational place in West African archaeology, providing some of the most durable and informative material traces of ancient societies. In Yorùbáland, pottery has served not only functional roles in cooking, storage, and serving but also symbolic roles in expressing cultural identity, political authority, and ritual ideology (Ogundiran and Ogunfolakan 2017). The study of ceramic sherds — fragments of these once-complete vessels — offers archaeologists critical evidence for understanding technological traditions, stylistic preferences, economic networks, and regional interactions. Sherds, in their diversity of forms, motifs, and manufacturing techniques, constitute a material language through which communities articulated their identities and negotiated their place within wider cultural landscapes.

In Yorùbáland, scholarship has long recognized the significance of ceramics in mapping regional spheres of influence. Two major ceramic spheres dominate existing models: the Ife ceramic sphere, characterized by refined vessel forms, applied bosses, cordons, cross-hatched and rosette incisions, and associations with sacred kingship and ritual performance; and the Oyo ceramic sphere, defined by robust jars and bowls, burnished surfaces, dot punctuates, scalloped

rims, and roulette or brush-decorated motifs, reflecting the material culture of an expansive imperial polity. These spheres have provided archaeologists with powerful tools for tracing stylistic diffusion, trade connections, and political transformations across the region (Ogundiran 2001; Usman 2003).

However, these models, while valuable, risk oversimplifying the complex material realities at regional frontiers and autonomous polities. The Ìjẹ̀bù kingdom, strategically located between the forest and the savanna, and at the crossroads of inland and coastal trade routes, offers a critical case for rethinking ceramic sphere theory. Ìjẹ̀bù was a powerful and independent polity with its own political, spiritual, and economic structures (Law 1986). The ceramic assemblage from its royal palace complex, particularly at the sacred precinct of Ìtorò, provides a rich dataset for understanding how frontier societies engaged with, adapted, and innovated upon regional material traditions.

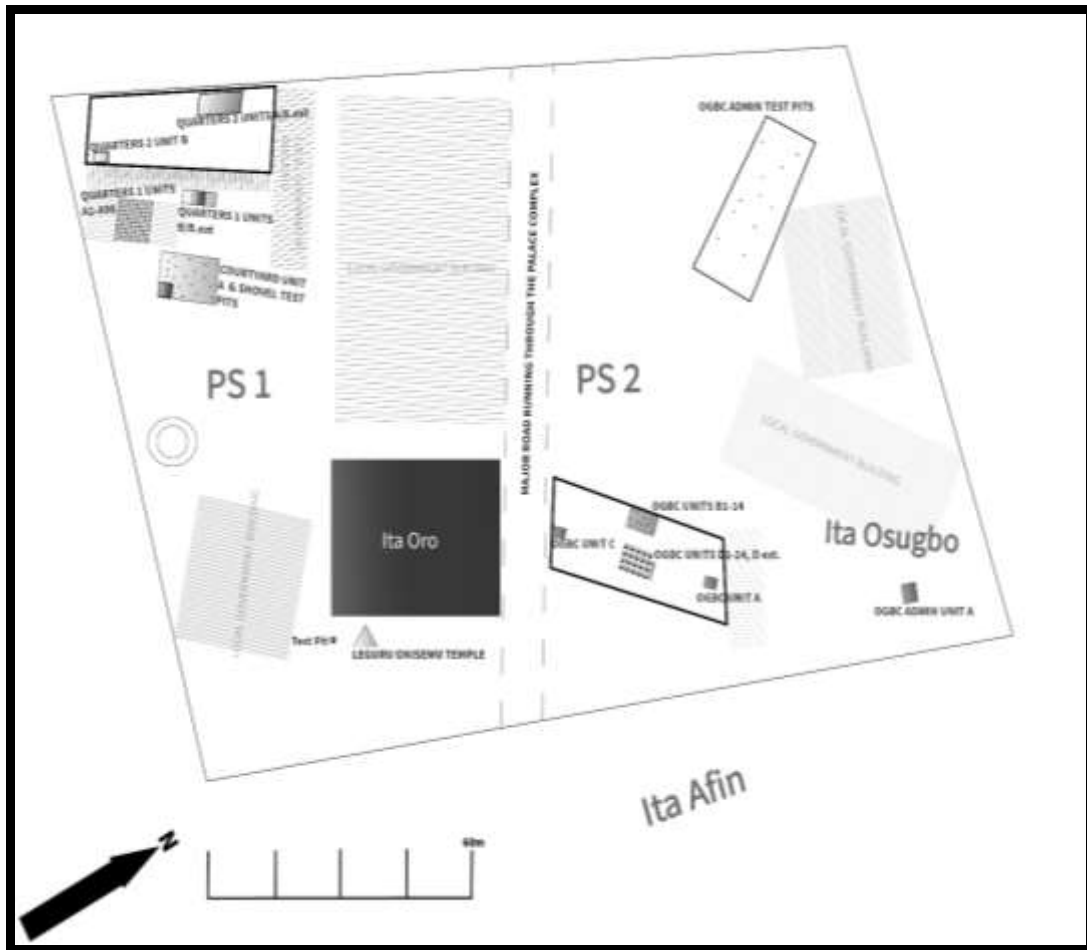
Excavations at the Ìjẹ̀bù royal palace have produced an assemblage of over 22,000 ceramic sherds, offering an exceptionally rich dataset for understanding the kingdom's material culture, regional affiliations, and assertions of identity. This assemblage encompasses a broad range of vessel types, decorative motifs, and manufacturing choices, with quantitative analysis revealing a marked predominance of bowls (approximately 88%) over jars (12%), a distribution that underscores the functional emphasis on feasting, ritual consumption, and hospitality within the palace context. The corpus is further characterized by a high proportion of undecorated utilitarian wares (67%), alongside a significant minority of decorated vessels (33%) that feature a diverse repertoire of motifs, including striations, grooves, applied bosses, hyphenated incisions, punctates, geometric patterns, and floral designs. While these elements reflect engagement with the established ceramic traditions of Yorùbáland, particularly those associated with the Ife and Oyo spheres, the Ìjẹ̀bù assemblage introduces unique innovations into the regional record—notably the presence of bronze-sheeted pottery, where vessels were adorned with thin, decorated metal cladding, a technological and symbolic feature not paralleled in the known ceramic traditions of either Ife or Oyo. This study examines the Ìjẹ̀bù palace ceramic assemblage as a lens into the kingdom's material strategies for negotiating regional interactions, expressing political autonomy, and articulating cultural hybridity. It critically investigates the extent to which the forms, motifs, and manufacturing techniques of Ìjẹ̀bù ceramics align with or diverge from established conventions in the Ife and Oyo ceramic spheres, considers whether the Ìjẹ̀bù assemblage constitutes a distinctive ceramic complex deserving formal recognition within regional typologies, and explores how the observed material patterns illuminate Ìjẹ̀bù's role as a creative frontier polity within the wider networks of precolonial Yorùbáland.



a



b



c.

Figure 1. (a, b, c). Map of Ìtorò showing contemporary local government authority buildings within the defunct Palace spheres. b. Satellite Imagery of Ìtorò showing the excavated areas. C. Afin Ìtorò Excavation Site Map.

In addressing these questions, this paper contributes to the broader archaeology of Yorùbáland and West Africa, offering new insights into how material culture functioned as both a marker of identity and an instrument of innovation at the dynamic frontiers of precolonial states.

II. Review of Literatures

Ceramic Complexes and Ceramic Spheres

Central to the study of Yorùbá ceramics is the concept of ceramic complexes and ceramic spheres, as articulated by Ogundiran (2001) and Usman (2003). A ceramic complex refers to the stylistically and technologically coherent traditions within a specific community or polity, while a ceramic sphere encompasses shared material styles across a broader region, often linked by political alliances, trade, or cultural affiliation. Two primary ceramic spheres have dominated discussions of Yorùbáland's material culture. The Ife ceramic sphere is associated with finely made open bowls, applied bosses, cordons, and intricate incised or stamped motifs such as cross-hatching and rosette patterns. These vessels are often interpreted as having ritual or courtly functions, reflecting Ile-Ife's role as a religious and political center during the second millennium CE (Ogundiran 2001). In contrast, the Oyo ceramic sphere is characterized by more robust vessel forms, burnished or blackened surfaces, dot punctuates, roulette and brush

striation decoration, and thick-walled jars, traits that align with the material needs of an expanding imperial polity engaged in long-distance trade (Usman 2003).

Recent scholarship, however, has highlighted the limitations of these models, especially when applied to frontier regions where material cultures are shaped as much by hybridity and negotiation as by core-periphery diffusion (Ogundiran 2014; Ogiogwa 2017). Sites like Oke-Eri, associated with Sungbo's Eredo in Ìjẹ̀bù territory, have revealed ceramic assemblages that combine elements of Oyo-style black wares with local forms and decorations, suggesting active processes of adaptation and synthesis rather than passive adoption of metropolitan styles (Ogiogwa 2017). Similarly, work at Ilorin and Igbomina has shown how communities at the margins of imperial influence forged distinctive ceramic traditions that blend internal and external elements (Usman 2003; Owoseni 2023).

It is within this context that the Ìjẹ̀bù ceramic assemblage assumes particular significance. Excavations at the royal palace precinct of Ìtórò have yielded ceramic sherds that challenge existing ceramic sphere frameworks (Lasisi 2023). The assemblage is dominated by bowls (approximately 88% of identifiable forms), with jars accounting for only 12%—a distribution determined by standardized thickness and rim diameter criteria. While undecorated utilitarian wares predominate (about 67% of the corpus), decorated sherds feature a diverse array of motifs, including striation, applied bosses, grooves, hyphenated incisions, punctates, geometric and floral patterns, and innovative combinations of these elements. Particularly striking are rare examples of vessels adorned with bronze sheeting—a feature without clear parallels in the ceramic traditions of Ife or Oyo. This corpus suggests that Ìjẹ̀bù ceramics represent not merely a synthesis of external influences, but a material expression of local innovation and identity, shaped by the kingdom's political autonomy and position at the crossroads of regional networks.

III. Research Methods

The ceramic assemblage analyzed in this study derives from systematic excavations conducted at the Ìjẹ̀bù royal palace complex, with a focus on the sacred core of Ìtórò. Excavation units were strategically placed in areas associated with royal and domestic activity, including refuse middens and features interpreted as kitchen or feasting contexts (Lasisi 2023). Contextual integrity was maintained through stratigraphic excavation and detailed recording of associations between ceramic material, faunal remains, charcoal layers, and architectural features such as post holes.

Ceramic analysis was guided by established typological frameworks for Yorùbá pottery (Ogundiran 2001; Usman 2003). Sherds were classified into bowls and jars based on wall thickness and rim diameter: sherds measuring 10 mm or less were identified as parts of bowls, while those exceeding 10 mm were considered jar fragments. Rim diameter measurements provided supplementary confirmation, with bowls generally having diameters of 34 cm or less, and jars exceeding this threshold. This classification aligns with ethnographic and archaeological data on vessel function and form in the region.

Decorative analysis focused on recording the presence, technique, and motif of ornamentation. Incised, applied, stamped, and carved decorations were identified, with particular attention given to striation, bosses, grooves, punctates, hyphenated incisions, and complex motif combinations. Each decorated sherd was documented for motif type, location on the vessel (rim, shoulder, or body), and technique of application. The frequency and distribution of decorative

types were quantified across excavation units to identify spatial patterns and potential functional or symbolic distinctions.

Comparative analysis drew on published typologies of Ife and Oyo ceramics (Ogundiran 2001; Usman 2003) as well as motif catalogues from other Yorùbá frontier sites such as Oke-Eri and Ilorin (Ogiogwa 2017; Usman 2003). This enabled the identification of shared and distinctive elements within the Ìjẹ̀bú assemblage, situating it within broader regional material traditions while highlighting local innovations. Particular emphasis was placed on interpreting the significance of unique features such as bronze-sheeted sherds, considering their potential roles in expressing elite status or ritual symbolism.

The Ìjẹ̀bú ceramic assemblage reveals a complex interplay of alignment and divergence relative to the Ife and Oyo ceramic spheres. In terms of forms, Ìjẹ̀bú is dominated by bowls (88%) and jars (12%) — proportions that echo the bowl-heavy assemblages of Ife, where open forms with everted rims and cordons are common in ritual and elite contexts (Ogundiran 2001). Ìjẹ̀bú's Isaasun bowls, described as having a greater diameter than depth and often equipped with lids (as seen in PS1 Q2 finds), closely parallel Ife's B9 type bowls, featuring everted rims and carinated shoulders. The presence of vessels with vertical rims and cordon reliefs also aligns with Ife forms such as B4a bowls.

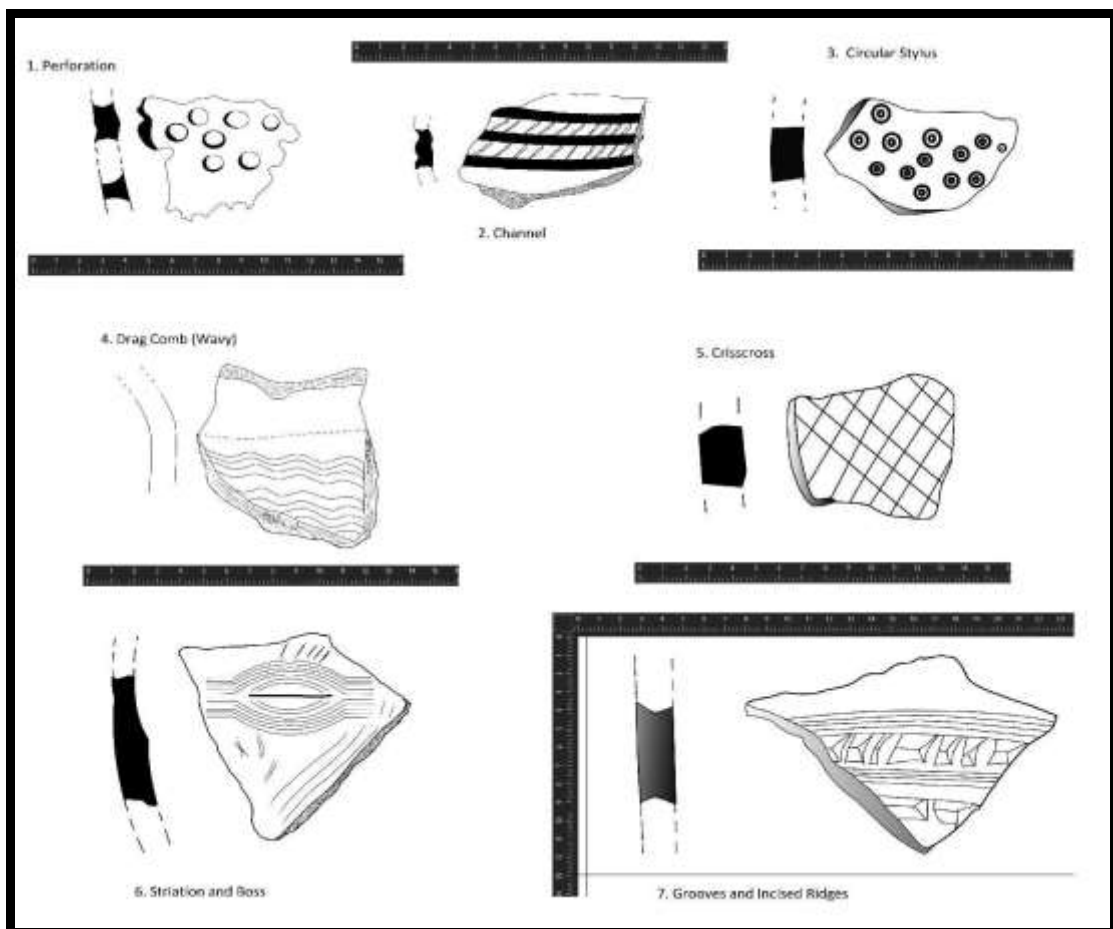


Figure 2. Pottery decorative motifs from Ìjẹ̀bú palace complex. Drawn to exact scale.



Figure 3. *Decorative motifs from PS1, adjusted to a generalized scale for clarity.*

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1 The Ìjẹ̀bù Ceramic Assemblage: Summary of Findings

The ceramic assemblage from the Ìjẹ̀bù palace features a remarkable variety of decorative motifs and vessel forms, revealing both continuity with regional Yorùbá traditions and locally distinctive innovations. Motifs recorded in Figure 3 include ridges with incised channels, crotchet with cordon relief, geometric patterns, hypenated incisions, grooves paired with rectangular geometry, and striation combined with bosses. The prevalence of composite motifs—such as grooves with incisions or zigzags and ridges—attests to a complex visual syntax unique to the Ìjẹ̀bù corpus. Vessel forms are equally diverse. The majority of pottery vessels are *Isaasun*—shallow bowls with greater diameter than depth and often featuring lids, as documented by Fatunsin (1992) and Willett (1960). Some of these bowls exhibit carinated shoulders and everted rims, aligning with Ogundiran’s (2001) B9 and B3 categories found in Ife and Oyo contexts. Other vessel forms correspond to types such as *Òbẹ̀rẹ̀*, characterized by an inverted rim and round base—sometimes modeled after military helmets and popular in Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode. Notably, several pottery fragments were found with thin bronze sheets intricately decorated and sometimes pinned to the vessel surface, including rims and body sherds. These bronze-clad ceramics, which have no parallel in traditional Yorùbá ceramic typologies, likely served as prestige objects. Their decorative syntax mirrors patterns seen on undecorated pottery, indicating shared aesthetic conventions. Comparable bronze sheets were also documented by Connah (1972) in Benin’s Clerk’s Quarters, where similar fragmentation and pinhole technology were noted. These parallels suggest a broader, elite ceramic tradition involving metal-sheet enhancement across

high-status contexts in southern Nigeria, with the Ìjẹ̀bú examples standing out for their formal integration of bronze ornamentation directly into ceramic vessels.

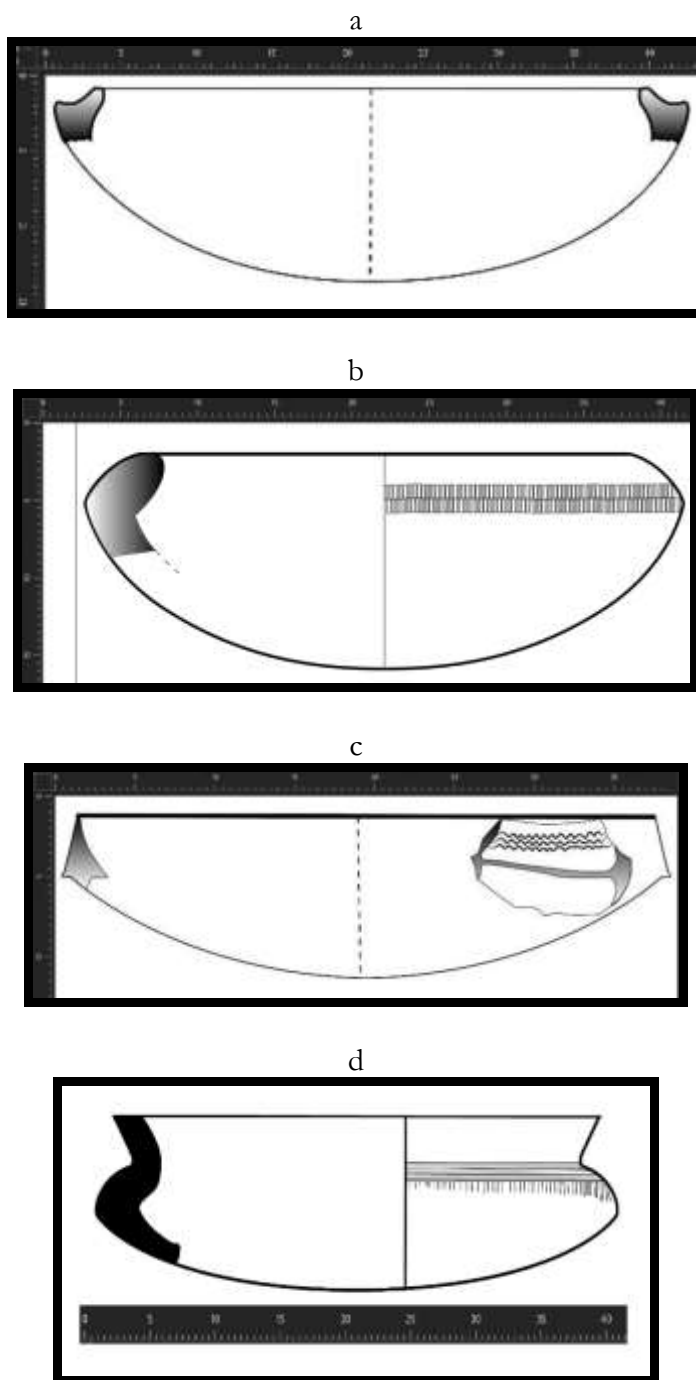


Figure 4. a-d. Isaasun from PS1

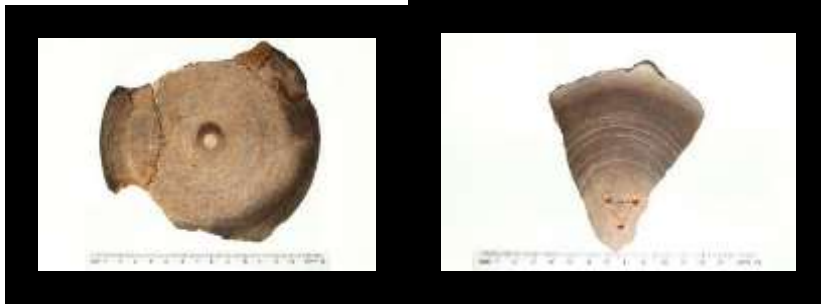


Figure 5. Ori Isaasun (Lid of Isaasun) with Potter's mark (right)

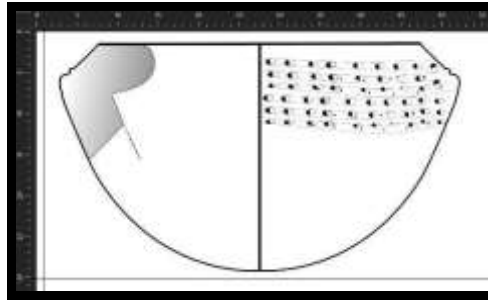


Figure 6. Bowl with Inverted Rim and a round base similar to Ogundiran 2001's B3 (also found at Ife)

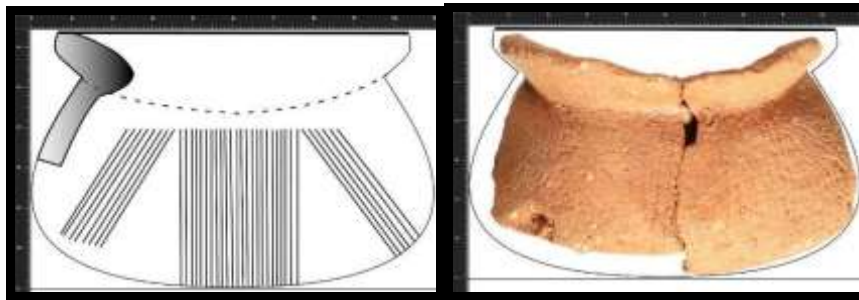


Figure 7. Vessels with short, everted rim similar to Ogundiran 2001's B12 (found also at Ife and Oṣṣó)

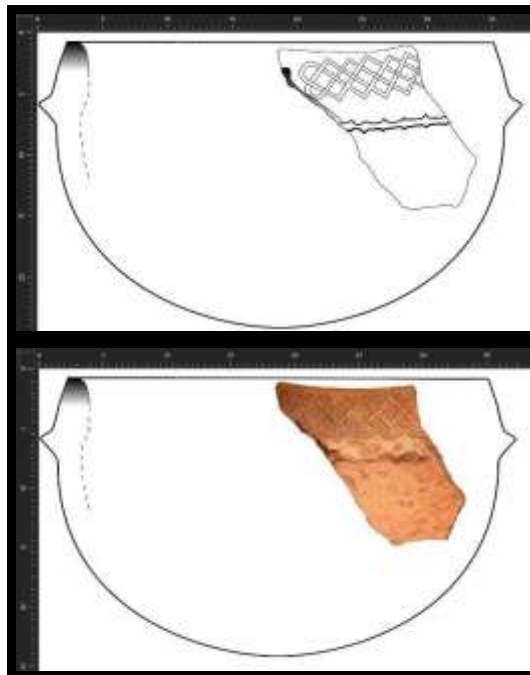


Figure Error! No text of specified style in document.. Vessel with a vertical rim and a cordon relief on its shoulder similar to Ogundiran's B4a (also found at Ife)

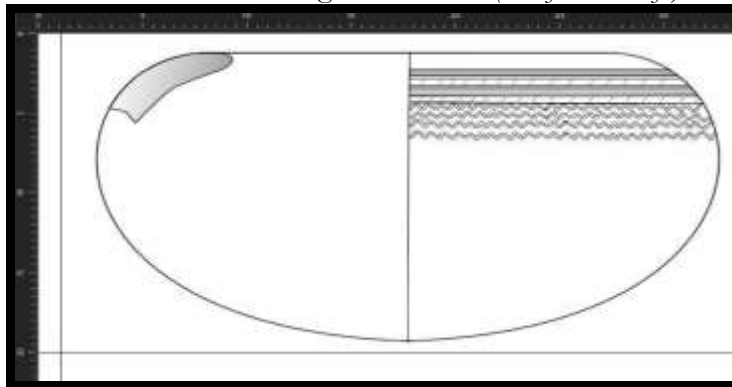


Figure 8. Vessel with inverted rim, globular body, and a round base



Figure 9. A Bronze Sheet with similar potsherd decoration

4.2 Ceramic Complexes and Spheres: Regional Context

In Yorùbá archaeology, a ceramic complex refers to the distinctive ceramic style of a particular community or polity, while a ceramic sphere encompasses several such complexes that share hallmark features over a broader region. Ogundiran (2001) and others have identified two major spheres in the second millennium AD. Ife Ceramic Sphere: Originating from the city of Ile-Ife (ca. 11th–15th centuries), this sphere is marked by refined decorative techniques and sacred symbolism. Diagnostic motifs include applied clay bosses, clay cordons (raised bands), decorations resembling keloid scarification, cowry-shell motifs, hyphenated cross-hatched incisions (a “dashed” crosshatch pattern), various stamped geometric impressions, and relief designs like guilloches (interlaced bands) and rosettes. A distinctive feature is the use of colored slips (e.g., red ochre on rims) and extremely fine modeling, reflecting Ife’s artistic leadership in the region. Vessels in this sphere include elegant open bowls and pots often associated with ritual (e.g., libation bowls, shrine vessels), some bearing figurative motifs and sculpted attachments that tie into Ife’s iconography of kingship and fertility.

Oyo Ceramic Sphere: Emerging with the Oyo Empire (ca. 16th–19th centuries) in the savanna to the north, this sphere’s ceramics emphasized sturdiness and bold, utilitarian decorations. Hallmarks of Old Oyo pottery include burnished black surfaces, evidence of

basting/brush marks from smoothing or slipping, and distinctive rim treatments such as shell-edge or scalloped rims. Common decorations are rows of dot punctates, incised linear motifs, and simple geometric incisions — notably crosses, triangles, and squares arranged in bands. Potters often employed a twisted string roulette to impress wavy or scallop patterns around a vessel, a quick way to cover surfaces. Large, thick-walled jars and ollas were prevalent, alongside serving bowls for food and ritual offerings. The Oyo sphere pottery, spread through trade and political hegemony, became an “imperial style” found in Oyo’s provinces and trading partners. It symbolized Oyo influence; for instance, excavations at Ede-Ile and Osogbo show local adoption of Oyo-style ceramics as a material sign of Oyo imperial presence.

These two spheres were not isolated. They overlapped in time (Ife’s influence peak was earlier, Oyo’s later) and space (some areas, like Owo or northern Yorubaland, show mixes of both styles as political fortunes shifted). Pottery style change can thus signal historical transitions: for example, Ilare (Ijesaland) pottery shifted from Ife-type motifs in the 14th century to Oyo-type by the 18th century as Oyo’s power grew.

4.3 Positioning Ìjẹ̀bù Ceramics in the Regional Framework

How do the Ìjẹ̀bù palace ceramics compare? The data suggest that Ìjẹ̀bù was not passively copying a core area’s style but rather selectively integrating elements from both the Ife and Oyo spheres while also developing its own innovations. In essence, the Ìjẹ̀bù assemblage constitutes a hybrid ceramic complex that interacted with multiple spheres. Many motifs and forms in Ìjẹ̀bù pottery align with those of the Ife sphere. For example, we find abundant applied bosses and relief cordons on vessel shoulders, both hallmark Ife techniques. Some Ìjẹ̀bù bowl fragments have the carinated profile and everted rims similar to Ife-type ritual bowls (e.g., the *Isaasun* bowl form with a lid, or the angular shoulder bowl akin to Ogundiran’s B4a category) as described by Willett and Fatunsin. Decoratively, hyphenated incisions and complex carved geometric patterns appear on Ìjẹ̀bù sherds, closely paralleling the cross-hatched and stamped motifs of Ife origin. Notably, one Ìjẹ̀bù sherd bears a floral motif, and others a crisscross or “rectangular geometry” pattern, which echo the rosette and rectilinear designs of classical Ife art. These similarities indicate that Ìjẹ̀bù, perhaps by the 15th–16th centuries, participated in the Ife-linked cultural sphere or was influenced by its legacy.

At the same time, Ìjẹ̀bù pottery shares traits with the Oyo sphere. The prevalence of grey, burnished surfaces on many Ìjẹ̀bù vessels suggests a firing and finishing style comparable to Oyo’s black burnished wares. Indeed, Oyo and Ìjẹ̀bù wares have been found side-by-side at sites like Oke-Eri (associated with Sungbo’s Eredo in Ìjẹ̀bù territory): archaeologists there identified black, burnished, punctate-decorated sherds as Oyo imports and distinguished them from local brown Ìjẹ̀bù pottery. Certain Ìjẹ̀bù motifs also match Oyo’s repertoire – for instance, rows of punctate dots on Ìjẹ̀bù sherds are identical to Oyo’s dot punctuation (see Table 1 below). Ìjẹ̀bù examples of zigzag and wavy comb decorations likely relate to the use of a roulette tool; while Oyo potters favored twisted-string roulettes for scalloped bands, Ìjẹ̀bù potters employed carved wooden roulettes or combs to achieve similar zigzag patterns. Additionally, both Ìjẹ̀bù and Oyo assemblages show evidence of brush striation (sets of fine parallel lines as a decorative texture or from smoothing), a technique not prominent in Ife’s corpus but noted in Oyo contexts.

Beyond these overlaps, the Ìjẹ̀bù assemblage exhibits unique features that neither the Ife nor Oyo sphere fully encompass. Foremost is the incorporation of bronze as a decorative element on pottery – a practice thus far unattested in Ile-Ife or Oyo-Ile excavations. The presence of bronze-clad pottery in Ìjẹ̀bù suggests an indigenous innovation, potentially

signifying vessels used in royal or ancestral rituals (the metal adding prestige and symbolic power) (Figure 10). This might represent an Ìjẹ̀bù-specific ceramic complex hallmark. Furthermore, the sheer combination of multiple motifs on single vessels (e.g., a sherd showing grooves, zigzags, and incised ridges in one composition, or another with striation alongside boss and punctates) is noteworthy. While Ife and Oyo ceramics each had numerous motifs, Ìjẹ̀bù pottery seems to deliberately combine them in novel ways, perhaps to create a visual complexity befitting a royal palace setting. Also distinctive is the “crotchet” motif mentioned in the Ìjẹ̀bù assemblage — possibly a curved, hook-like design — which does not readily appear in published descriptions of other Yoruba pottery traditions. These idiosyncrasies point to a localized aesthetic development.

To quantify these comparisons, **Table 1** presents a selection of key decorative motifs found in the Ìjẹ̀bù palace assemblage and notes their presence or absence in the Ife and Oyo spheres (based on diagnostic trait lists from Ogundiran and others). This highlights which Ìjẹ̀bù designs fall under previously known categories and which might represent a new category of their own:

Table 1. Selected decorative motifs in Ìjẹ̀bù ceramics compared to Ile-Ife and Old Oyo ceramic spheres. (✓ = present; ✗ = not attested)

Motif/Feature	Ife Ceramic Sphere	Oyo Ceramic Sphere	Ìjẹ̀bù Palace Assemblage
Applied clay bosses	✓ <i>Diagnostic</i>	✗ (not common)	✓ <i>Present</i> (on elite bowls)
Relief cordon (raised band)	✓ <i>Diagnostic</i>	✗ (rarely used)	✓ <i>Present</i> (e.g. shoulder of large bowls)
Burnished (polished) finish	✓ (often slipped red)	✓ <i>Diagnostic</i> <small>(ogundiran.org)</small>	✓ <i>Common</i> (grey burnish)
Brush striation (fine lines)	✗ (minimal)	✓ <i>Diagnostic</i> <small>(ogundiran.org)</small>	✓ <i>Present</i> (noted on some sherds)
Hyphenated incisions (dashed lines)	✓ <i>Diagnostic</i>	✗ (not typical)	✓ <i>Present</i> (common motif)
Cross-hatch incised pattern	✓ <i>Common</i>	(rare = simple crosses instead)	✓ <i>Common</i> (often with striation)
Dot punctate impressions	✓ <i>Yes</i>	✓ <i>Diagnostic</i> <small>(ogundiran.org)</small>	✓ <i>Common</i> (rows of punctures)
Incised geometric shapes	✓ <i>Stamped motifs</i>	✓ <i>Diagnostic</i> <small>(ogundiran.org)</small>	✓ <i>Present</i> (rectangles, etc.)
Zigzag/chevron motif	✓ (e.g. herringbone)	✓ (shell/scallop edge) <small>(ogundiran.org)</small>	✓ <i>Present</i> (comb-drag wavy lines)
Twisted-string roulette	✗ (not used; used carved stamps)	✓ <i>Diagnostic</i> <small>(ogundiran.org)</small>	✗ (used carved roulette instead)
Carved roulette impressions	✓ (e.g. carved stamp)	✗ (not documented)	✓ <i>Present</i> (notably in PS2)
Floral/rosette motif	✓ <i>Diagnostic</i>	✗ (absent)	✓ <i>Present</i> (incised floral)
Anthropomorphic (figurative) designs	✓ <i>Yes</i> (faces, etc.)	✗ (absent)	✗ (absent in assemblage)
Bronze-sheet decoration	✗ (absent)	✗ (absent)	✓ <i>Unique</i> (royal/ritual vessels)

V. Conclusion

In light of the above, this paper proposes that the Ìjẹ̀bù assemblage represents a distinct ceramic complex that drew from multiple influences. Historically, Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode was a powerful kingdom with ties to the forest and coastal trade, maintaining a degree of autonomy from Oyo. Its material culture likely absorbed ideas from the Ife-Ijebu-Oyo interaction sphere but was curated to serve local needs and identities. The palace ceramics, in particular, were instruments of royal ideology – used in palatial feasting, rituals of kingship, and architectural display (such as potsherd pavements and shrine assemblages). They needed to balance familiarity (to communicate legitimacy in Yoruba terms) with innovation (to express Ìjẹ̀bù's own prestige). The result is what we see archaeologically: a ceramic signature that is recognizably Yorùbá yet distinctly Ìjẹ̀bù.

By comparing Ìjẹ̀bù pottery with regional ceramic data, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of Yoruba ceramic spheres:

1. Extending Ceramic Spheres: The evidence suggests that the existing definitions of the Ife and Oyo spheres are not sufficient to encompass Ìjẹ̀bù ceramics. We may be witnessing the footprint of an “Ìjẹ̀bù ceramic sphere” or sub-sphere, one that overlapped with its neighbors but maintained unique identifiers (much as Owo and Benin did within the Ife sphere). This calls for expanding regional ceramic typologies to include Ìjẹ̀bù as a center of stylistic production in its own right.
2. Hybridization Models: Ìjẹ̀bù ceramics serve as a case study in how peripheral or autonomous polities can hybridize styles. Rather than a one-way diffusion from “core” to “periphery,” the material record of Ìjẹ̀bù shows a dialogical process: adopting select traits from Ife (perhaps during the height of Ife's influence) and later from Oyo, blending them with local innovations. Such hybridization reflects broader patterns of cultural resilience and adaptation in West African history.
3. Elite Material Culture: The discovery of bronze-adorned pottery in a palace context underscores the role of elite innovation. It raises new questions about craft specialization and ceremonial object production in the Yoruba coastland. Were these metal-clad vessels produced by local artisans under royal patronage? Do they indicate a previously unknown workshop tradition at Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode? Their existence also strengthens parallels between Yoruba and Edo (Benin) royal material culture, suggesting avenues for comparative research on how West African courts embellished everyday objects to create ritual paraphernalia.
4. Archaeological Visibility of Spheres: Finally, this study highlights that ceramic spheres were not monolithic blocks but mosaics of local practices. Archaeologists should be cautious about attributing a site wholly to “Ife sphere” or “Oyo sphere” based solely on a few motifs. Assemblages like Ìjẹ̀bù's demonstrate that localized identities persisted and that people could selectively align with or resist wider trends. Recognizing an Ìjẹ̀bù ceramic complex invites a re-examination of ceramics from nearby regions (Ijebu-Remo, Egba, Ilaje, etc.) to see if they too participated in this sphere or had their own signatures.

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