TOURISM POTENTIALS OF SELECTED HERITAGE SITES AND RESOURCES IN AGULERI, ANAMBRA STATE:

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Abstract
Tourism is undoubtedly an integral economy spinning industry in the contemporary global system; and still holds great potential to the progression of socioeconomic derive in the twenty-first century and beyond. Heritage tourism occupies a broad spectrum in tourism discourse. Heritage tourism is a broad field of specialty adventure based on nostalgia for the past and the desire to experience various cultural landscapes and forms. Travel to festivals and other cultural events, visit to sites and monuments, folklore or art or pilgrimages are all examples. Because of people's proclivity for novelty, particularly of traditional cultures; heritage tourism has emerged as a significant new sector of tourism demand. Aguleri is a semi-urban area in Anambra State, southeastern Nigeria. The area is endowed with heritage sites and resources which are largely unexplored and the locations of the sites have not been documented. The research aimed at studying Aguleri with a view to identifying the striking heritage sites and resources that may be developed into cultural heritage tourism in Nigeria. The study adopted archaeological reconnaissance, ethnographic and geographic methods of data collection to identify heritage sites and resources; the development of the heritage sites and resources could provide a great opportunity for improving tourism in the area.
Keywords: Aguleri, Heritage, Tourism, Potential, Development

Introduction
For too long, the Nigerian government's strategic and developmental planning has prioritized urban regions above rural communities. As a result, the divide between urban and rural environments is becoming increasingly visible. While the rural areas appear coarse and medieval, the urban areas are marbled in a great aesthetic and exotic splash of social amenities and infrastructures which attract people to the urban areas. Whereas the rural areas where most of Nigeria's tourist resources are found and with abundant resources and potential to diversify the economy are deserted thereby distorting our tourism drive and foregoing the revenue accruable from tourism activities.

The most compelling reason for adopting tourism as a development strategy across the world is its beneficial impact to the local and national economies. A large number of developing countries today are aware of the potential economic benefits of tourism. The economic value of tourism to an economy is measured by its contribution to the national income, foreign

exchange profits, state revenues & the generation of jobs both skilled and unskilled workers. It has the potential to create more jobs per unit of investment than any other industry. Earnings are, nevertheless, far more important in developing nations than in developed countries (Surabhi, 2011).

Most of the heritage sites and resources with great potential for tourism development are located in Aguleri, Anambra State. The sites are virtually lying fallow but need to be transformed into tourism products to boost tourism and the accruing fortune to be used for the development and provision of goods and services, particularly in the area where they are located. Harnessing the resources will translate to socio-economic empowerment and an improved standard of living in the area. Poverty, a potent threat would be eradicated or significantly reduced through economic stimuli. Articulated and well-planned cultural heritage tourism development can translate to providing economic needs of the people through job creation and other economic opportunities. The economic value can inspire the local community towards the preservation of the heritage resources and sites and as well an increase community pride regarding heritage. Furthermore, the development of the area would also checkmate rural-urban migration and curb the pressure on already over-stretched amenities in the cities, and in turn, reduce the fund used in maintaining and servicing the amenities in the cities. Money saved from the course is ploughed back into the economy for other uses. Undoubtedly, tourism is key to the development of any economy.

Background Information on the Study Area

Aguleri is the largest town in Anambra East Local Government Area, situated along the bank of the Anambra River, about a 32km drive to Onitsha. It is traversed by the lines 6° 20N latitude and 6° 53E longitude of the equator. Aguleri is flanked on the north by Igala in Kogi State, on the south by Anam, Igbariam and Nando towns, on the east by Anaku and Omor towns, and on the west by Umuleri and Nsugbe towns (Idigo 1990, p. 1).

Aguleri was founded on the banks of River Anambra, which is a tributary of the great River Niger, the inhabitants of Aguleri trace their ancestry back to Eri, a descendant of Gad (in the holy bible, the 7th son of Jacob) who migrated to the area that became Aguleri several centuries ago. He arrived with about 34 men and 18 women and his wife, and they initially stopped at the confluence of the Omambala and Ezu Rivers (Agbanabo Ezu na Omambala). Afterwards, Eri and his group travelled uphill into the hinterland stopping at Ugwu-Omumonwu en route Eri Aka, where they stayed for a while before continuing his journey to Eri Aka where they pitched their tent. Eri lived and died at Eri Aka and was buried there.

During Eri's reign, he was known as the Eze-Eri, he had five sons and a daughter who were named Agulu, Menri, Ntemeje, Ogbodudu, Onogu and Adamgbo in order of seniority. His offspring married the daughters of his disciples. Agulu, the first son appended his father's name Eri to his name

(Agulu-Eri); from which Aguleri derived her name. As the first son, he settled in his father's homestead, while his other brothers departed and founded other places. Aguleri married Ekemma and the couple had seven children: Anumogali (Ivite), Ezunukwu (Igboezunu), Ezi (Enugu and Eziagulu both known as Ugwuna-adegbe), Odeke, Ada, Ogiso and Omala.

Odeke had a disagreement with his brothers, which caused him to leave their house, joined by his two sisters Ada and Omala; after a while, Ogiso also departed. Agulu was irritated, to forestall further separation amongst his offsrings, he gathered them and gave an injuction against disunity amongst them. He perceived that there might be misdeeds among them as they lived, hence he established three temples: The Temple of Purity, known as Ajana-Ukwu Aguleri and instructed his sons that whoever transgressed should go to the temple to confess and Igboezunu was appointed as the custodian of Ajana Ukwu. The Temple of Truth and Honesty was established in Ama-Okpu with Ivite as custodian, while the Temple of Peace was established at Ama-Obuga with Ezi as the custodian. He instructed his children to bury him at Ama-Obuga when he died, and it was so. As time passed, three trees with a shared root sprouted on top of his grave, a presage for his children to always live-in harmony.

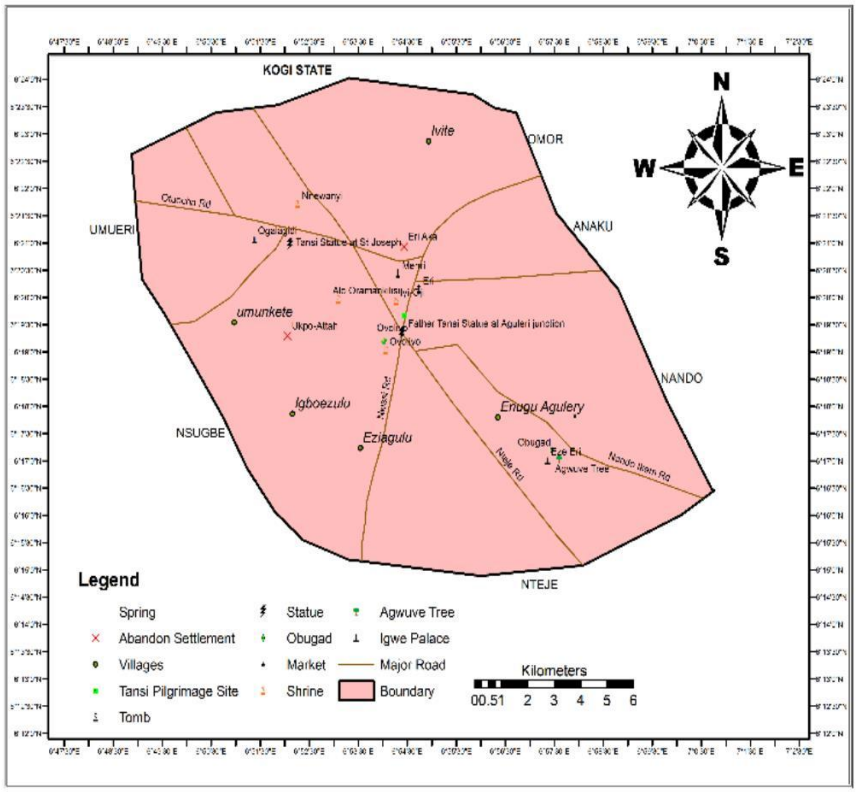


Figure 1 shows an Aguleri map with mapped features and their coordinates. Source: Oguamanam (2017).

Research Methods

Archaeological reconnaissance, ethnographic and geographical methods of data collection were employed. The archaeological reconnaissance of Aguleri involves surface collection of potsherds, while traditions of origin of the people were collected from selected elders and traditional rulers who are knowledgeable in the oral tradition as well as human activities, shrines and other practices associated with them. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were also employed to collect data relevant to the topic.

We employed resource person due to local dialect. A tape recorder was used for detailed documentation, which was later translated into English by the resource person; photographs were also taken. A Geographic Positioning System was also used to take the coordinates of features and sites identified. However, insights from documented materials were used to validate and strengthen data collected through in-depth interview.

Literature Review

Tourism is dynamic and its interaction with heritage often results in a reinterpretation of heritage. In essence, "*the relationship between heritage and tourism parallels the debate that takes place within a society's culture between tradition and modernity*" (Nuryanti, 1996, p. 250). During the past three decades, heritage and tourism have become inextricably linked throughout the world. Tourism is used as an economic justification for heritage preservation. Tourism also serves to preserve artefacts found in many parts of the world; indeed, historical artefacts and their associations have always been one of the tourism industry's most marketable commodities (Timothy, 1997).

Heritage tourism is referred to as experiential tourism because visitors often wish to immerse themselves in the historical environment and experience. In studying the connection between heritage and tourism, Peterson (1994), reveals three major reasons for visiting historic sites: to experience a different time or place, to learn to enjoy a cerebral experience and to share with others or teach children the history of the site.

Historic cities and built heritage are important resources in the less-developed parts of the world. Archaeological sites and ancient monuments are important elements of cultural heritage in Less Developed Counties. Often, they are the primary draw for international tourists, and their resources, if grandiose enough, can become international icons. Ruins and ancient sites are important components of indigenous culture in locations where material culture was a part of the tangible past.

These heritage or cultural resources are varied and include performances, museums, displays, archaeological sites and the like. Tourists travel to specific sites to see a famous museum or to hear a special musical performance (Evangelos 2005; Masberg and Silverman1996).

Heritage Sites and Resources

Heritage resources are those resources handed down to us by our forebears. They consist of crafts, traditional festivals, traditional architecture, shrines and monuments, sacred groves, cuisine, mills, historical sites, archaeological data among others (Oguamanam 2017).

Archaeological Reconnaissance

Archaeological resources include all materials of the primordial era, included among them are artefacts, features, sites, chronofacts, ecofacts etc. Some of these resources were identified during our archaeological reconnaissance. From oral traditions, two abandoned settlements: Eri-Aka and Ukpo-Attah were identified as well as the surface collection of potsherds. The topography of the study area is so revealing, indicating that man might have settled there for a long time. Also, the availability of rivers enabled them to carry out their farming and fishing activities successfully.

Abandoned Settlements

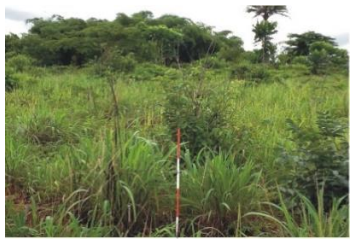
Eri Aka and the Mausoleum of Eri: Eri Aka is located in Okpu village in Ivite Aguleri, with coordinates of 06° 19′ 27. 3N and 006° 52′ 43. 2E. Eri Aka will remain a pivotal tourist attraction as it is one of the most historically relevant locations or points to Aguleri people. This is because Eri-Aka is believed to be the final resting place of Eri, the progenitor of Aguleri. Tradition has it that Eri migrated south from the Nile; he first stopped and rested at the confluence of Ezu and Omambala Rivers in Aguleri (Agbanabo-Ezu na Omambala). He and his group later moved upwards into the hinterland, stayed briefly at Ugwu-omumonwu and finally settled and died at Eri-Aka in Okpu village in Ivite Aguleri. Menri, the second son of Eri, who left for hunting and settled at Agu-Ukwu Nri in Njikoka Local Government of Anambra State, told his children to take him back to his hometown lest he dies outside his father's compound; so, it was when he died, was buried at his compound within Eri-Aka in Okpu Village. Today, two tombs were erected on the supposed graves of Eri and Menri respectively by the people of Aguleri (see plates 1a-f). A surface collection of potsherds was made at the site.



Plate 1(a) Eri Settlement site



1(b) Eri Grave site



1(c) Menri settlement site *Ama Menri*



1(d) Menri Grave site



1(e) Evidence of the presence of River in the past

B. Ukpo-Attah: Ukpo-Attah is situated in Umuekete in Aguleri with a coordinate of 06° 20′ 29. 70″N and 006° 52′ 47. 24″E . In ancient times, the people of Aguleri made use of Ukpo, a type of bed made of mud that was cast some centimetres above the ground usually positioned at a corner of the room. Ukpo Attah was used by Attah the apical father of Idah people in Kogi State. Attah's father, Onoja-Nwa-Oboli, was said to be a nuisance who was banished from Aguleri by the community.

According to Chief Edward Okoye, the Ona-Nze Aguleri, Attah whose father was expelled by the community was afraid of his fate and in a bid to protect himself sought the services of a native medicine man who prepared a charm for him to protect him from his father's enemies. Attah built a mud basement where he kept the charm and this basement is what is referred to, today, as Ukpo-Attah in Aguleri. A spectacular feature of Ukpo-Attah is that it has not been destroyed or burnt down by fire over the centuries. Thus, the people believed that this might be due to the efficacy of the charm he kept under it. After a long while, Attah left Aguleri in search of his father and in the process, he settled in Idah in Kogi State.

Ukpo-Attah is currently in the form of a mound measuring 14.2 metres at the angle of elevation and 10.2 metres at the angle of depression. This measurement was obtained using GPS. Today, a small shrine has been built

beside Ukpo-Atta to prevent people from getting closer to the spot. The people revere the mound, thus the people see it as a taboo to go close to the Ukpo (plate 2a-b).



Plate 2a. Ukop-Atta site covered by grasses



2b. A Shrine was built beside Ukpo-Attah

Sacred Sites

Agwuve Sacred Trees: Agwuve trees are tripartite trees *Akpula* (see plate 3) conjoined by roots. The sacred trees are located in Enugu Aguleri with coordinates of 06° 19′ 43. 86 N and 006° 52′ 45.80 E. There are two versions of the myths surrounding Agwuve sacred trees. According to Edward Okafor, the trees sprouted on top of the grave of Agulu, the ancestral father of Aguleri, months after his burial, as a reminder to his remaining three sons that they should unite since his other three sons and one daughter left their ancestral home.

Another version recounted by Eze Chukwuemeka Eri, the Eze Enugu-Aguleri, upholds that the Agwuve trees were named after Eze Agwuve, Ezeora II who reigned between 1033BC-958BC in Aguleri. Twenty-one (21) days after the burial of Ezeora II, three trees adjoined by their roots sprouted on top of his grave. Eze Chukwuemeka Eri affirmed that Agwuve trees are over 2960 years old (probably calculating from 1033BC to date), and that, on several occasions, they had cut the roots to separate the trees, but the roots regenerated. The people of Aguleri believe that the "trinity tree" signifies the three quarters that makeup Aguleri community – Ivite, Igboezunu and Ezi (Enugu and Eziagulu both known as Ugwuna-adegbe).



Plate 3. Agwuve Sacred Trees

Obugad: This is located in Enugu Aguleri at 06° 19′ 45. 69N and 006° 52′ 45. 69E. There are two versions of the origin of Obugad, one of which has it that Obugad is a palace erected by Eri in honour of his father, Gad, hence the name Obugad (plate 4a). While the other version claims that it is one of the three temples instituted by Agulu, the son of the Eri. Whatever be the case, the palace serves as a place where the council of elders meet to discuss matters that concern the community. Prayers are offered in the temple for God's continued guidance and peace in the community. Inside the palace is a temple (plate 4b), the temple is the most revered place in Enugu Aguleri and a bastion of Ezeora. Eze Chukwuemeka Eri said that the palace hosted the most ancient dynasty in Igbo land. The palace is built with mud and is said to have lasted for so many centuries. However, some modifications have been made to the structure.



Plate 4(a) Obugad



4(b) Interior of Obugad

Ama-Okpu temple: Ama-Okpu is located in Okpu village in Ivite Aguleri, it was said to have been instituted by Agulu, the ancestral father of Aguleri. The temple is the only place in Aguleri where war-related cases are discussed. According to chief Okoye, Aguleri people cannot go to war without first consulting the spirit that dwells in the temple and once this is done, victory is assured. At the temple, nobody dares tell a lie, it is said that the penalty for lying at the temple is instant death. Other features within the Okpu temple are Oye shrine, mace and Isi-Ato na Ogbo-Ogu; the latter is a shrine that signifies victory for Aguleri people during wars. Before the people embark on any war, the first gunshot must be fired at Isi-Ato na Ogbo-Ogu (Plates 5a-d).



Plate 5(a) Ama-Okpu Temple



5(b) Oye Shrine



5(c) Mace



5(d) Isi-Ato na Ogbo-Ogu

Artefacts: At the palace of Igwe Ogalagidi II of Aguleri, are some of the remains of the royal paraphernalia such as scepter *alo* (plate 6a) and a big wooden drum *Ikolo* (plate 6b), the drum made and used by Onyekomeli Idigo, the founder of Idigo dynasty, who achieved fame as a result of his courage. Although he was not coronated Igwe, he ruled Aguleri. He died in 1900. The sceptre signifies kingship while the sound of the wooden drum sends a signal to the community as a summon to the relevant persons including elders in council to the palace. At Eze Chukwuemeka Eri's palace is a collection of cultural objects of royal paraphernalia such as sceptres, an amulet (the amulet screens people that enter the palace), stools and effigies as well as photographs of past kings (plate 6c-e).



Plate 6(a) Eze C. N. Idigo IV



6(b) Wooden drum *Ikolo* holding the sceptre *alo*



6(c) Sceptre



6(d) An amulet



6(e) Interior of Eze Chukwuemeka's palace

Potsherds: Potsherds abound in Eri Aka, a scenario which stimulated our inquest about pottery production in the area. We saw a proliferation of potsherds in Erie Aka, which encouraged us to enquire about pottery production in the area. Sources revealed that Aguleri women practised pottery at the same time their counterparts did. Pots made during the time had distinct designs that could only be credited to the Aguleri people. Pots were made for domestic and commercial purposes. The produce was sold on market days and other neighbouring settlements, money realized from sales were used to purchase other necessities. Okpoko (1982) aptly recognized the resemblance in pottery shapes, decoration, and thickness between Idah and Aguleri, implying a type of common tradition and some connection between the inhabitants of these two areas. Samples of potsherds were collected for analysis.

Analysis of Potsherds

The importance of pottery to an archaeologist working in tropical Africa cannot be over emphasized. Pottery is not easily destroyed by the vagaries of weather condition when compared to other organic materials (Nze, 2006). A total of twenty (20) potsherds were collected, thirteen (13) of which were body sherds and seven (7) were rim sherds, (see table 1 & figure 2).

Table 1: Classification of Potsherds

Objects	Colour	Techniques of Decorations	Motif of Decorations	Thickness (cm)
Rim Sherds				
1	Brown	Incision and Roulette	Parallel lines & Twisted cord	1.2
2	Brown	Groves and Impression	Parallel lines & Net	1.2
3	Black	Incision	Horizontal lines	1.1
4	Brown	Groove	Parallel lines and depression	0.6

5	Brown	Unburnished	Rough	1.2
6	Grey	Impression	Net	0.5
7	Brown	Impression	Net	0.5
Body Sherds				
8	Brown	Incision	Parallel lines	0.7
9	Brown	Incision	Parallel lines	0.5
10	Brown	Impression & Incision	Net & Parallel lines	0.6
11	Brown	Impression & Incision	Net & Parallel lines	0.9
12	Brown	Groves	Concentric Cycle	0.9
13	Reddish brown	Unburnished	Rough	0.5
14	Grey	Roulette	twisted cord	0.5
15	Grey	Roulette	Maize	0.4
16	Brown	Incision	Parallel lines	0.6
17	Brown	Roulette	Twisted cord	0.5
18	Brown	unburnished	Rough	0.9
19	Brown	unburnished	Rough	1.0
20	Black	Burnished	Smooth	0.8

An examination of the potsherds collected revealed that, 16 were decorated while 4 were undecorated. We analysed them based on identifiable textual features and colours of the potsherds. A calliper was used to measure the thickness of the potsherds, and eye examination was utilized to identify their colours. A large proportion of the potsherds were revealed to have net and parallel line decorative motifs and were brown in colour. Two potsherds had dark patches that might have been generated by poor oxidation, which is commonly associated with open firing of pots.

Five of the rims are pots, while the other two are bowls. Three of the seven rims were turned out, two were straight, and two were inverted. The pots had a visible internal rim/neck joint but were curvilinear on the outside, but the bowls had no neck. Most of the potsherds were relatively thin, with only a few exceptions being substantial.

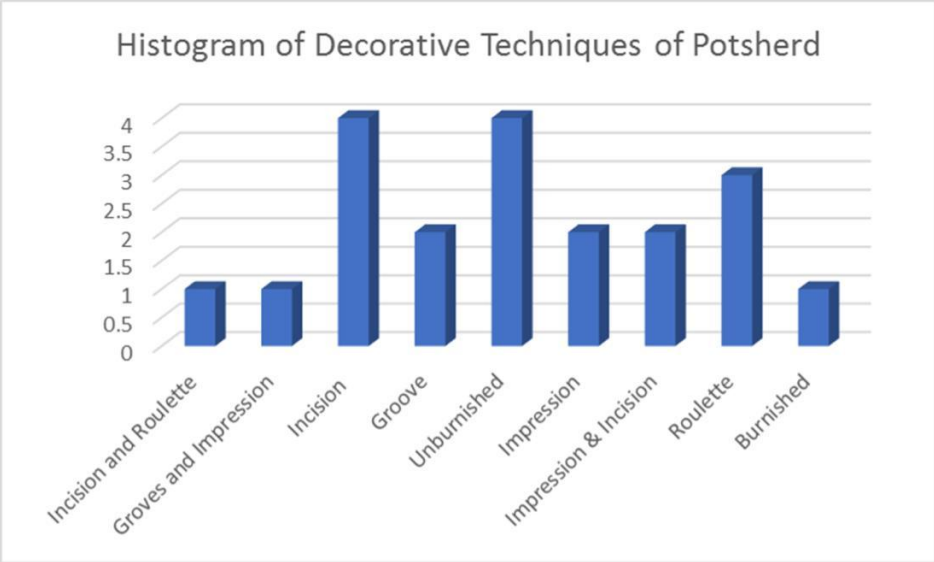


Figure 2: Histogram of Decorative Techniques of Potsherd

We analysed them based on identifiable textual features and colour of the potsherds. We used ruler to measure the thickness and visual examination to determine the colour of the potsherds. It was discovered that a good number of the potsherds had roulette and impression decorative techniques and were brown in colour. Two potsherds had dark patches which could be caused by poor oxidation, which often indicates open firing. Three rims fall under the category of pots, while two were bowls. Out of the five rims, two were everted, two were straight and one was inverted and the lips were tampered. The pots had visible internal rim/neck joint but curvilinear at the exterior while the ones identified as bowls had no neck. From observation, most of the potsherds were very thin while only a few were thick.

Discussion

According to Okoye (2009), Ukpo-Attah in Aguleri, Anambra State was the first settlement site of Attah, the ancestral father of the Idah people in Kogi State before he relocated to the present-day site of Idah. Ukpo-Attah was apparently part of the mound excavated in 1977 by Anozie, Okpoko, and Nzewunwa (Anozi 1977, Nzewunwa 1983). The site was surrounded by a wall, and in the centre of the enclosure stood a mound about 1m high and 30m broad, which the inhabitants of Umuekete referred to as Ukpo-Eze - the king's dial. Glass, bones, clay nozzle tuyere, iron slags, polished stone axes, and potsherds were among the materials unearthed. Five radiocarbon dating placed the site between the 13th and 17th centuries A.D. Other than the mound known as Ukpo-Attah at the time of this inquiry, there was no indication that the area was formerly populated.

Eri lived, died, and was buried in another abandoned hamlet called

Eri-Aka. Two tombs have been constructed on the site to memorialize Eri and his second son, Menri, the founders of the Agu-Ukwu Nri community in Njikoka Local Government Area of Anambra State. African Border Trees (*Newbouldia laevis*) are planted at one end of the graves, which the locals claim were planted at the time of their funerals. Only agricultural activities are visible at the moment, although the residents of Aguleri still reverence the two village sites.

Though Ukpo-Atta has been excavated, Eri Aka is yet to be excavated; however, both sites should be developed into heritage tourism destinations because the sites were key to the history of the Igbo people and Idah in Kogi State. According to Ekechukwu (2002), the authenticity of sites is the foundation for instilling in the modern spectator, such as a tourist, the subjective understanding that he has had a direct and actual encounter with the past, no matter how inadequate that experience may be. The preceding argument has amply demonstrated that a visitor is constantly enthralled by a contact with archaeological remains discovered in a place, which evolves an image of the past. For example, the experience of visiting and seeing Eri-aka and Ukpo-Attah sites will have a profound influence on the tourist, enhancing his awareness of these places and their historical significance.

Ama Obugad and Ama Okpu temples were among the three temples established by Agulu, Eri's first son, who gave his three sons instructions that culminated in the creation of three temples, with each son in charge of one of the temples. Sacred sites may be great cultural attractions if their tourism potential is fully realized. In the words of Okpoko (1990, p. 94) "*religious centres have been very important cultural resource centres in the history of man. Among them are the temples and shrines of ancient Greek and Rome which have attracted worshippers from different parts of their empires*". He also included the Omo Ukwu temple in Ohaofia and the Osun shrine in Oshogbo, both in Nigeria, as places of worship for believers and fans.

There were cultural objects in the two palaces visited, which is a means of preserving cultural heritage and materials of the people. Archaeological sites and materials are items that extinct man created, modified, used, and discarded. The artifacts displayed in palaces connote information about the individuals who created and used them. As noted by Cleere (1984), the importance of archaeological sites as tourist attractions stems from their capacity to serve as physical ties to the past from which they have survived, in a way that written or narrated history cannot. Also, Olukole (2010) emphasized the importance of artefacts when he examined how pottery, adire textiles, clay figurines, sculptures, and wood carvings, among other artifacts, were presented and interpreted in the palace of the New Oyo Empire.

Finally, developing heritage sites into tourist resorts would thus not only broaden the scope of knowledge of the heritage of the community or group that owns them, but would also provide additional information to the

tourist's curiosity and help to promote sustainable tourism that is beneficial to the economy.

Conclusion

Heritage resources have been influential to the tourism structure of some communities where they are located. The study revealed that Aguleri is a virgin area with tourism potentials for exploration and that if harnessed, the communities would be transformed into a tourist haven.

Unfortunately, tourism in Nigeria has mostly remained an anthropological topic with little archaeological contribution. Despite the country's extensive archaeological sites and resources, which, if adequately harnessed or exploited, would boost and promote cultural heritage tourism. No focus has been placed on archaeological contributions to heritage tourism development. Archaeology should be given its deserved recognition and attention in order to attain the laudable goals of national growth and development.

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