



4912

Special Release

21 May, 2025

OBITUARY

PROFESSOR MARGARET ADEBISI SOWUNMI (1939-2025)

The Vice-Chancellor, Professor K.O. Adebawale, mni, FAS, fspsp, announces the transition of Professor Margaret Adebisi Sowunmi, a distinguished retired staff of the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, Faculty of Science, University of Ibadan. The sad event occurred on Monday, 28 April, 2025. She was aged 85 years.

Late Professor Margaret Adebisi Sowunmi was born on 24 September, 1939 in Kano, Kano State, in northern Nigeria. She was the daughter of late Bishop I.G.A. Jadesimi and Yeye D.A. Jadesimi (nee Adesina-Seyin). She gained admission into the University College, Ibadan in 1959 and graduated in June, 1962 with the University of London's B.Sc. (Hons) degree (Second Class Upper Division) in Botany. In 1964, she began her doctoral studies under the late Professor Gunnar Erdtman, the father of modern palynology, in Stockholm, Sweden, and obtained the Ph.D. (Botany) degree of the University of Ibadan in November, 1967. She was also trained under well-known palynologists including Professor K. Faegri at Bergen, Norway (1971); Mme M. van Campo in France (1971) and Professor Dan Livingstone, Durham, North Carolina, USA. In 1979, Adebisi Sowunmi trained under G.W. Dimbleby, a renowned Professor of Environmental Archaeology, Institute of Archaeology, University College, London, United Kingdom.

She was appointed a Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Archaeology Section, Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan from 01 December, 1967 to 30 September, 1970. Professor M. Adebisi Sowunmi was appointed a Lecturer, Department of Archaeology, University of Ibadan with effect from 01 October, 1970 and was promoted to Senior Lecturer effective 01 October 1975. She was promoted to the grade of Professor, Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Ibadan with effect from 01 October, 1982. She was Visiting Professor, Department of African Archaeology, Uppsala University, Sweden (01 October – 23 December, 1997); Visiting Professor, Institute of Archaeology, University College London, England (04 January – 23 March, 1998) and Visiting Professor, Department of African Archaeology and African Archaeobotany, Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universitat Frankfurt am Main, Germany (April – 29 June, 1998).

She retired from the services of the University of Ibadan on 24 September, 2004 after a total of 37 years of active academic service, of which she was full professor for 22 years. She also served the University on contract appointment and voluntary service (2006-2023). During her period of active service, late Professor M. Adebisi Sowunmi served the University meritoriously as Head, Department of Archaeology and Anthropology (1985-1989 and 1992-1995); Hall Mistress, Queen Elizabeth II Hall; and Chairperson, General Studies Programme. Late Professor M. Adebisi Sowunmi was an erudite and highly respected scholar within and outside Nigeria. Her research interests were in palynology and pollen morphology, pollination biology, mellisopalynology, environmental archaeology and palaeoecology. She is regarded as the Matriarch of Palynology and Palaeoethnobotany in Nigeria. She had about 70 peer-review journal articles and book chapters.

Professor M. Adebisi pioneered palynological and palaeo-ethnobotanical researches, and the teaching of Environmental Archaeology (Ecological Anthropology) in Nigeria. She set up the first University Palynology Laboratory in Nigeria in 1968 at the Archaeology Unit of the Institute of African Studies. Subsequently, it was moved to the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Ibadan. The laboratory has close to 4000 reference pollen slides of present-day Nigerian and some other West African plants. Professor M. Adebisi Sowunmi had major contributions to scientific research in Nigerian environmental archaeology, African Mesozoic and Cenozoic and Quaternary palynological and environmental studies. She conducted research on the late Quaternary vegetational and environmental history of Nigeria; the environments of equatorial Africa during the Last Arid Maximum (called Last Glacial Maximum in Europe, Asia and the Americas), pollen morphology of extant Nigerian plants, including ecological indicators. She and some colleagues at the University of Frankfurt, am Main were awarded the Volkswagen grant for the study of the Dahomey Gap between 1999 and 2002. She made the: first description of some Eocene pollen of the Ogwashi-Asaba Formation, South-Eastern Nigeria; first analysis of honey pollen from the forest and savanna zones of Nigeria; first palynological indication of the beginning of agriculture in Nigeria; first pollen analysis of an archaeological site (Iwo Eleru) in Nigeria; first study of modern pollen rain in the forest complexes of southern Nigeria, the pollen productivity of some Nigerian ecological indicator species and the relevance of environmental archaeology to National development.

She supervised nine PhD students in the field of Palynology and Environmental Archaeology in Nigeria and Benin Republic as well as two PhD students in African Archaeology, Uppsala, Sweden. In January, 2003, Adebisi Sowunmi was awarded an honorary Doctor of Philosophy degree by Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden.

Adebisi Sowunmi belonged to several associations namely the Archaeological Association of Nigeria; Science Association of Nigeria; Stratigraphic Committee on the Niger Delta (member, advisory board), West African Archaeological Association (one-time president), World Archaeological Congress, International Association of African Palynology, International Bee Research Association, Systematics Association of Britain, Nigerian Environmental Study/Action

Team and the Nigerian Field Society. She was the founder and foundation president of the Palynological Association of Nigeria.

Professor M. Adebisi Sowunmi was married to late Professor C.O.A. Sowunmi, a retired professor of Mathematics, University of Ibadan, and she is survived by three children and family.

May her gentle soul rest in perfect peace. Amen.

Burial Arrangements:

The family has scheduled her funeral programme as follows:

Service of Christian wake at Chapel of The Resurrection Hall: Monday, 23 June, 2025;
Time: 4pm

Lying-in-state at Trenchard Hall, UI: Tuesday, 24 June, 2025; Time: 8:00am

Final burial service at Chapel of The Resurrection: Tuesday, 24 June, 2025; Time: 10.00am

Venue: Chapel of The Resurrection, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.

●●● END ●●●