

## ARCHAEOLOGY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

### INTRODUCTION - MEANING OF ARCHAEOLOGY

Archaeology seeks to describe and explain the events which happened in the past through the study of material remains namely artifacts and ecofacts left behind by ancient man. Artifacts are "humanly made or modified portable objects, such as stone tools, pottery, and metal weapons" (Renfrew and Bahn 1996:45). Ecofacts on the other hand are non-artifactual organic and environmental residue which have cultural significance. Ecofacts discovered usually include flora (plants and vegetation), fauna (living creatures e.g. mammals), soils and sediments. Basically, archaeology depends on evidence from the past. Archaeology uncovers these remains of man primarily through excavations.

"It is the study of the social and cultural past through material remains - a study that seeks to order and describe the events of the past and to explain the meaning of those events" (Sharer and Ashmore 1979: 11)

Archaeologists study all aspects of the human past. From the study of buried cities and ancient civilizations, to the study of the origins of man and other lower animals, archaeology seeks to present a systematic process to the past existence of man. Some questions generally addressed by archaeologists include:-

- the origins of life;
- how man lived and survived in the past including how cultures were formed;
- the rise and fall of past civilizations; and
- how the past can help interpret the present.

All too often, archaeologists present themselves as "managers" of a "petrified past which is constantly in the need of preservation; a decaying corpse in need of embalming before the smell becomes too strong" (Shanks and Tilley 1987:25). Shanks and Tilley (1987:12) portray the archaeologist as someone who breathes life into dusty relics. The archaeologist is also capable of breathing inspiration, affective affinity and imaginative reconstruction into dead materials. No cultural artifact can be separated from the conditions or context of its production and use. A cultural tool

always speaks more than itself. It brings together images of people, culture and life. It stretches the imagination far beyond the recesses of time to another society, another existence, different from the present (Eze-Uzomaka 2000: 7).

To study the past, archaeologists seek evidence through a series of techniques and procedures. A methodology is used to determine, salvage, safeguard, illustrate, and analyze the evidence. This evidence is analyzed, using theory and thereafter the archaeological evidence is subjected to interpretation. Diagrammatically, this can be represented thus:

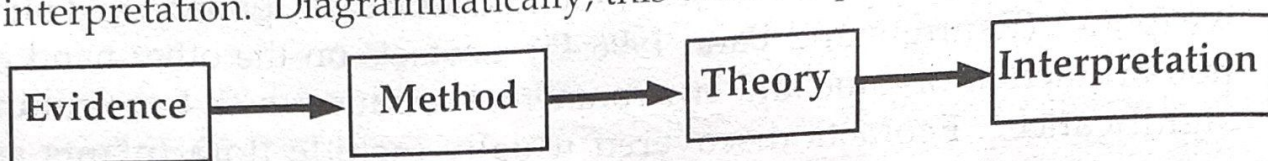


Fig 1: A simplified model of the Archaeological process.

In Nigeria, as in other parts of the world, archaeologists sometimes have to depend on, and work closely with other disciplines. History complements the practice of archaeology in Nigeria, by providing written documents where there are missing links. Geology provides a time scale for the history of the soil (Ofomata, 1983: 1-11); geomorphologists and geographers help archaeologists to study the form of the surface of the earth and its environment. Anthropologists harmonize the practice of archaeology, especially in the study of the evolution of man. Architecture enables the study of settlement patterns and house forms (Ogundele S.O. 2000: 187-190), while Zoology and Botany make it possible for archaeologists to understand the beginnings and evolution of the animal and plant kingdom (Sowunmi, 1999). Philosophy helps explain the thought pattern and behaviour of ancient man (Mbiti, 1969) while Medicine and Dentistry shed light on the composition of man's internal organs as well as his diet in the past. A microscopic study of the surface of ancient man's teeth, can establish the diet of ancient man, whether it was rich in fish, grains and legumes, or in roots, tubers and bones of animals.

### Uses of Archaeology in Nigeria

"Archaeology is the child of developed countries, originating in the curiosity of the elite classes of pre-industrial Europe. It developed its modern methodology and theoretical axis under the stimulation of scientific revolution of this century" (Miller 1980: 707). In spite of the above, Nigerian archaeologists have harnessed the practice of archaeology and it has produced results of immense value to the country. One of the

most important uses of archaeology to Nigerians has been in the area of stretching back the existence of man in this part of the world. In the western world, Darwin's theory of evolution for the first time in the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought to light, speculations that mankind evolved from lower animals. During the middle ages, the chief protagonist of the spontaneous creation of man was the church but in 1859 Charles Darwin published his book, *The Origin of Species* and it was that year that the theory of evolution started a life long challenge to the theological opposition to prehistoric human development in the world. In Nigeria, their worldview is quite different from that of the western world.

The past of preliterate societies can be reconstructed using Archaeology. Many communities in Nigeria, especially those located in the hinterland, did not have their histories written down by early explorers. In such cases, archaeology has helped push their histories further away and has even shed more pre-historical light in those places which had their histories recorded. A well known case in Nigeria is Ugwuele in Uturu-Okigwe, South Eastern Nigeria. The site in Ugwuele is an Early Stone Age site. It is a stone quarry from which thousands of stone tools were recovered including hundreds of hand axes, cleavers, scrapers, stone picks, flakes and different sizes of stone (Anozie 1978: 171) that are peculiar to the late Acheulian culture. One of the most important features of this site is the fact that there are two cultures, the late Acheulian (Early Stone Age) and the Late Stone Age, on different levels at the same site. Ugwuele was dated to about half a million years ago (based on materials recovered at the site (Anozie 1978). In East Africa for instance, the Acheulian dates to approximately 1.5 million years ago (Walker & Thorp 1997:12).

In places where archaeological researches have been applied in Nigeria, some members of the public have become more conscious of the importance of archaeological materials, more "patriotic" and supposedly more history conscious than they were before (Eze-Uzomaka 1996). To those who are aware of it, archaeology has proved, through the use of many dating methods including radiocarbon dating and Palynology that the local people in Nigeria had a very extensive and rich history, before the coming of the Europeans and that artifacts are important and have to be taken care of.

Archaeology has also facilitated the rebirth of forgotten technologies and has revealed technological developments which have been lost and forgotten through many generations. One of the best known examples in Nigeria took place in 1987, in a place known as Dufuna in Yobe state,

where a cattle rearer encountered a waterlogged canoe at a depth of 5.6 metres while he was sinking a well. The canoe at Yobe is 8.4 metres long and 0.5 metres wide (Izuakor 1998:23). It has been radiocarbon dated to  $7700 \pm 110$  BP and  $7670 \pm 110$  BP. It is the oldest canoe in Africa and the third oldest in the whole world (Hambolu 1996:9). The oldest canoe in the world dates to  $8265 \pm 275$  BP and was found at Pesse in the Netherlands. The second oldest was found at Moyeu Sur Seine in France and dates to  $7960 \pm 100$  BP (*Museums Newsletter*, Vol. 3, No. 1).

The Dufuna canoe was first excavated in 1994 but it was too big to fit into the existing laboratory. Samples were taken for scientific analysis and the canoe was reburied, to be re-excavated and finally removed in 1998. In the meantime, a laboratory was built for the canoe in 1996 with a concrete tank constructed in the building to house the canoe. Although it was stabilised when it was first discovered, when it was finally removed from the site it was already disintegrating. The canoe attracted national and international attention. The discovery, excavation and conservation involved many academic institutions especially the University of Maiduguri as well as the University of Frankfurt, Germany. The media were involved on a large scale and articles about it featured in many Nigerian and foreign newspapers, and on radio and television. The excavation fascinated the people living in that vicinity and in neighbouring areas and was widely aired on the national media in Nigeria. Archaeologists also reconstructed the canoe.

Where the climate is conducive for the preservation of archaeological materials, and funding is available, entire cities can be resurrected using archaeological methods. In Nigeria, this is not yet the case due to lack of funding and general apathy towards the discipline and all it entails. However, archaeologists have unearthed evidence which could help to settle socio-political matters like first occupancy of piece of land. At Ogbodu-Aba, the people that live there at present do not have any record of the burial practices which were carried out by their forefathers. Some underground burial chambers were accidentally uncovered in Ogbodu Aba by an engineering company during road construction in 1979. Bulldozers cut through the burial chambers revealing human skulls lying in some pots. Burial goods were laid out in the chambers and some human skeletons. Altogether, about seven burial chambers were excavated showing traces of soot and charcoal suggesting that the chambers were intensively smoked probably to preserve the contents of the burial chambers. A typical chamber consists of a cone-shaped shaft at the base

which is ovoid in shape. It measures 2.6 m in length, with an orifice of about 1.3 m and the ovoid base is 1.8 m x 1.5 m. A stone slab measuring 1.3 m in circumference was lying at the base and could have been the slab used to close the opening (Chikwendu 1981). There was an assortment of iron implements including a barbed spearhead, axe blades, primitive shaving blades and agricultural implements (Chikwendu 1981). Interviews conducted in Ogbodu Aba revealed that the people of Ogbodu Aba do not bury their dead in this way and have no oral traditions relating to such burials in the past. Where land ownership depends on the right of first occupancy, a judgement can depend on archaeological investigations and reports. The relevance of archaeology to contemporary Nigerian society cannot be overemphasized.

### Archaeology and Development in Nigeria

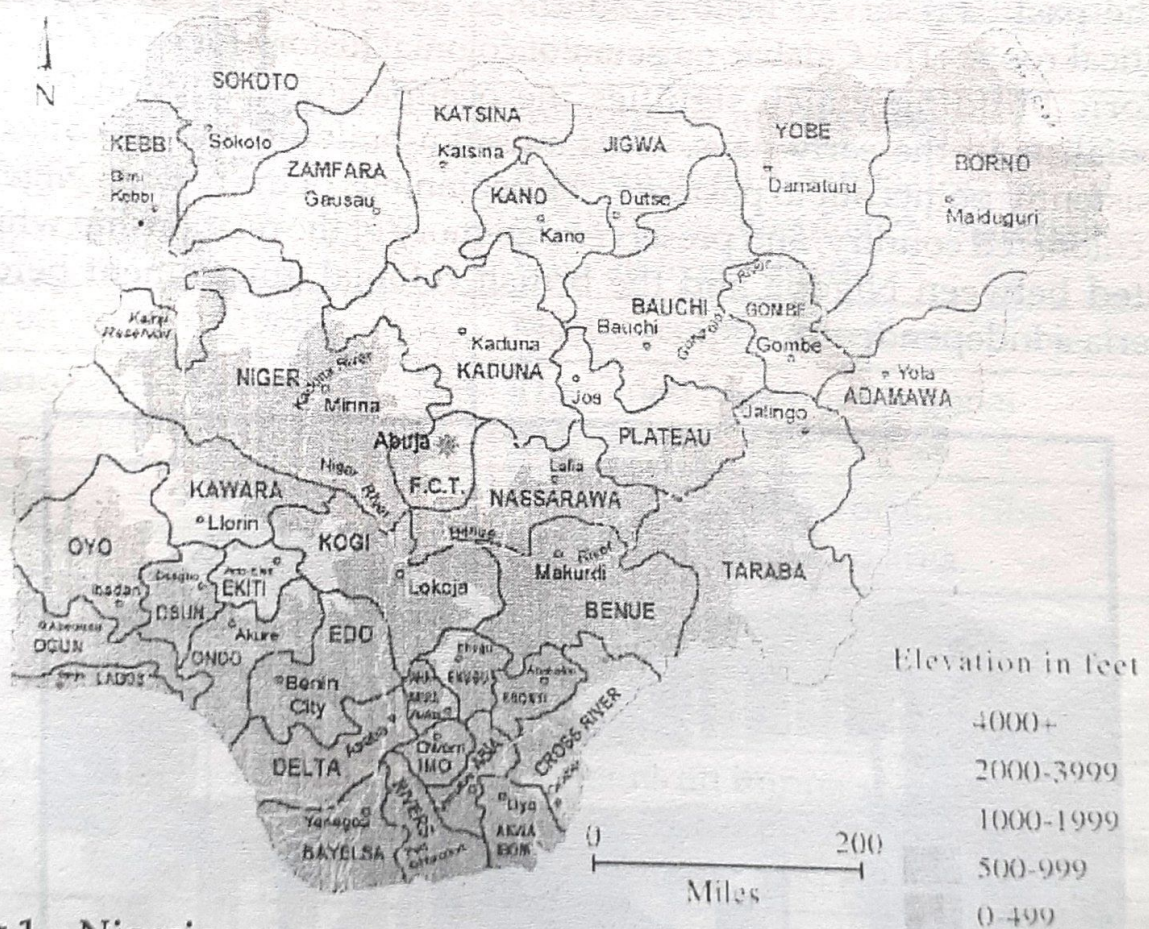


Fig 1. Nigeria

Nigeria is the largest most populated country in West Africa with its capital at Abuja. It covers an area of about 923,768 sq km, and has a population of 129,934,910 (2002 estimate). In 2002 population growth rate

was projected at about 2.54 percent with an estimated population projection growth in 2025 of 204,453,333. Population density rates about 141 persons per sq km. Nigeria has both urban and rural population in the average of about 44 percent urban and 56 percent rural dwelling. Nigeria is made up of about 400 ethno-linguistic groups (Gella and Eboime 1998: 150).

Although Nigeria was declared a protectorate in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Nigeria's history (though not as a nation) goes back to over a half a million years ago. The practice of archaeology is, I believe, an invaluable factor in the celebration of Nigeria's past and has given an interpretative insight to its present. Artifacts which have been uncovered through the scientific procedures in archaeology reveal the development of early technology, politics, social interactions, religious practices, and trade. Monuments help to promote and sustain national identities acting as an amalgam, blending cultural and ethnic diversities which had bitterly divided people in the past. Preserved historic buildings are a reminder of Nigeria's political roots. The Calabar museum of colonial history for example, is a historic building which signifies the occupancy of Nigeria by the colonialists in the early days. This museum building and its contents consistently points out to posterity, the beginnings of the nation. Nigeria as a colonized country, and preserves a memory of the relationship which existed between Nigeria and the British colonial government before Nigeria's independence.

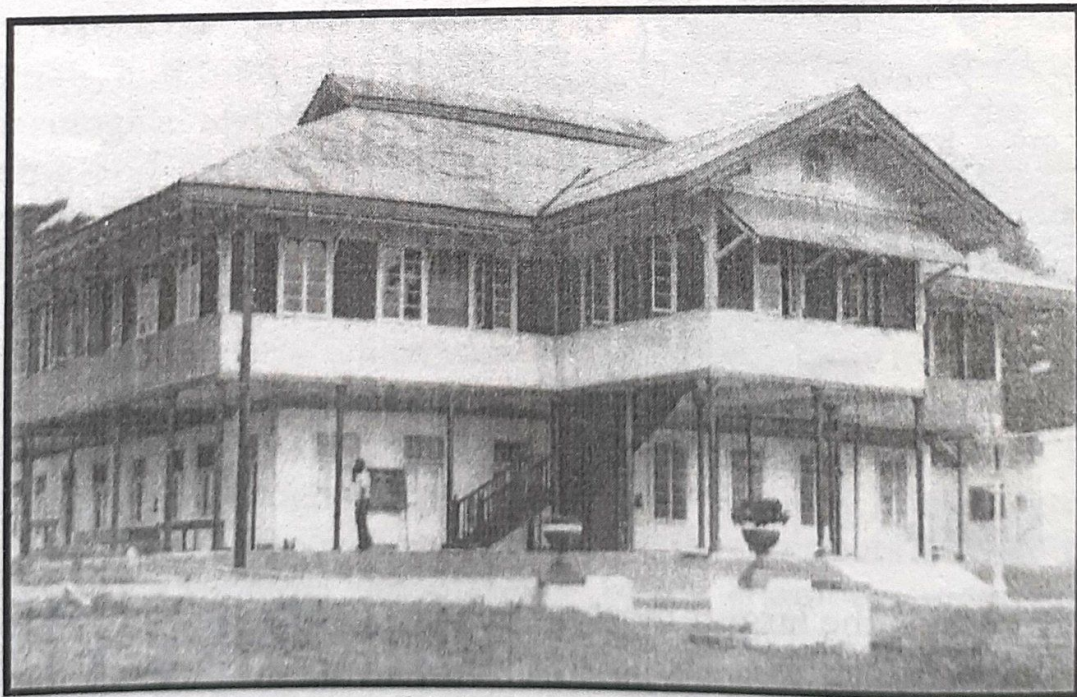


Fig 2: *The Calabar museum of Colonial History.*

Traditional houses also complement Nigeria's artistic heritage and represent some of the finest examples of Nigeria's cultural heritage. In Nigeria today, there is at least one museum in every state of the federation. Not all the museums have galleries for the purposes of public education. Some of them have museum offices while the others have offices as well as stores. Some of the important museums in Nigeria, i.e. those with galleries and others that influence the public in a number of ways, such as regular museum visits, are listed below:-

Location of Museum	Year Established	Type of collections
Esie	1945	Esie stone images
Jos	1952	Archaeological materials Ethnographic collections Museum of Traditional architecture, Zoo.
Ile Ife	1954	Antiquity of the Yorubas.
Lagos	1957	Antiquities on a national scale including archaeological materials from all over Nigeria.
Oron	1958	Mostly sculptures and other objects.
Kano	1960	The Gidan Makama National Monument.
Owo	1968	Antiquities of the Yoruba tribes especially from Owo area..
Benin	1973	Objects from all parts of Nigeria. There is a special gallery for Benin bronzes and other Benin objects.
Kaduna	1974	Contains an impressive number of Nok terra-cotta figurines and a mini 2000 years of Nigerian Art display.
Enugu	1974	Mostly ethnographic materials from all over Nigeria especially from the Igbo area.
Umuahia	1985	Museum of traditional and modern warfare.

Location of Museum	Year Established	Type of collections
Calabar	1986	Old residency building which is a national monument itself. History of old Calabar in pictures.
Aba	1987	Museum of colonial history. Pictorial records of pre-colonial and post colonial periods in Nigeria.
Maiduguri	1988	Mostly ethnographic collections of the Kanuri tribe and other objects.
Oshogbo	1988	Museum of Antiquities and Natural History.
Ibadan		National objects as well as Yoruba cultural objects especially pottery.
Abuja	1996	New headquarters of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments in Nigeria.

**Table 1:** *List of some museums in Nigeria.*

The ancient past can be regarded as a panorama of development towards civilization where both national character and national identities are fashioned. Archaeology has been a tool for gradually replacing superstition with scientific discoveries. Archaeologists in Nigeria are faced with the gigantic task of methodical discovery as well as making the practice of archaeology relevant to the needs of the people in Nigeria. Archaeology as a practice was a completely foreign pursuit replete with foreign archaeological names of sites and findings which were completely unknown to the people as well as irrelevant to their immediate needs. In addition, early archaeological investigations in Nigeria were implemented following the pattern which was laid down by western archaeologists, who first conducted excavations in Nigeria during the colonial era. Incidentally, this was also the case in other formerly colonised countries in Africa (Holl 1986). When indigenous archaeologists took over from the foreign archaeologists they inadvertently continued to base the practice of archaeology in Nigeria on the west oriented models and paradigms which had been introduced earlier into the practice. Many of the



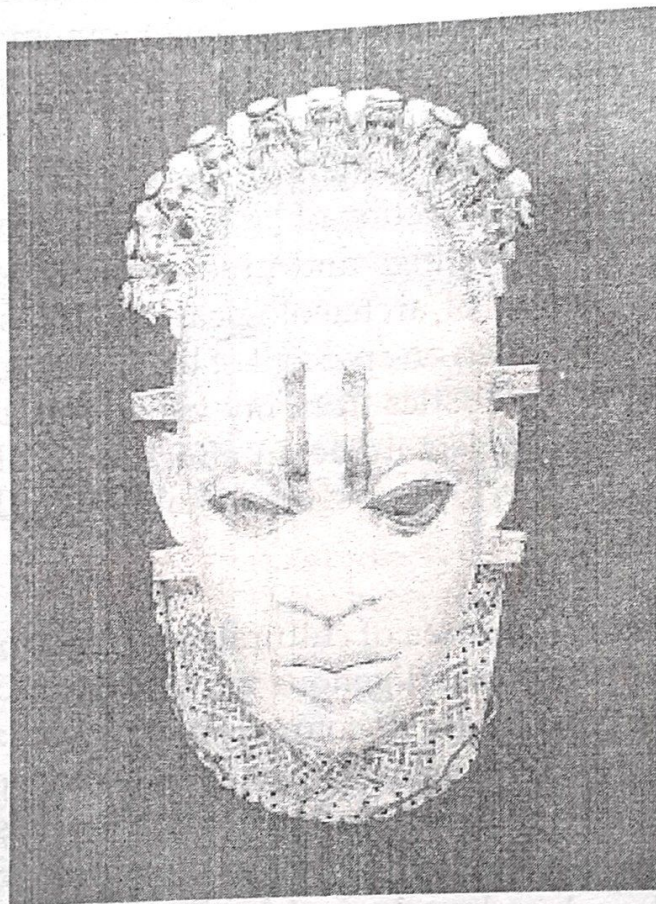
terminologies which were used at this initial stage were irrelevant, did not relate with the Nigerian cultural dynamics, and could not therefore be properly referred to as Nigerian. These foreign terminologies alienated indigenous peoples from archaeology, in much the same manner as colonialist archaeology did. This process is now changing as indigenous archaeologists are changing some of these terminologies.

Archaeology has made an impact on development in Nigeria which would never have been achieved outside the implementation of the archaeological practice. I must point out at this instance that this "impact" on development has not been widely recognised by many people in Nigeria. Thus only a minute fraction of Nigeria's population can claim to be aware of some of the findings and involvements of archaeology in Nigeria. The preservation of archaeological materials in museums in Nigeria has impacted less than one percent of the nation's population (Eze-Uzomaka 2000) and this statistics from my viewpoint, is a pity. During fieldwork, some archaeologists made an effort to involve the public in their investigations, (Ezike 1998 *pers. comm.*) although the result has not been very encouraging.

**Cultural Awareness:** In the area of cultural awareness of the past as well as the ethnographic present, indigenous technology and early mining of metals, national identity, origin of communities, urbanization, trade and economy, politics, early linguistic ties, promotion of tourism, etc., archaeology has made an irrefutable impact in Nigeria's development in many ways. During the Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) in 1977, Nigeria's cultural and archaeological heritage became a world wide phenomenon. For the period of that festival, many people in different parts of the world became aware of the fact that although Nigeria became a protectorate only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the cultural history and pre-history of man in the area known as Nigeria could have stretched to as far back as half a million years ago. The general belief among the colonists had been that Nigeria was a creation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but archaeology suggests otherwise. For instance in the British museum today, there lies a mask which has put Nigeria in the World heritage limelight. That ivory mask in the British museum was discovered in 1897 in the room of Oba Ovoramwen (King Ovoramwen) measuring 23 cm in height and it dates to the 15<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

At present the many stores of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments in Nigeria contain literally, hundreds of thousands of

archaeological and cultural materials. Some of these are exquisite antiques which are so delicate and priceless that they are sometimes left in the strong room unless there is a special exhibition going on. Examples are the Igboukwu roped bronze pot, the bronze equestrian figure from Benin, Edo state, the bronze bust of the Oni of Ife (king of Ife) in Osun State, usually referred to as Lafogido, and dated to the 12<sup>th</sup> century.



**Fig 3:** Ivory mask discovered in 1897 now in the British museum (Photo courtesy of the NCMM).

**Early technology in Nigeria:** Man has been a tool maker in the area known as Nigeria from as far back as half a million years ago. In the area of technological advancement, excavations also uncovered evidence which pointed to the fact that metal implements of iron, copper and tin have been forged in Nigeria since 900B.C. in Taruga, Plateau state and 520 B.C. in Opi, Enugu State. Many other iron working sites and settlements have also been discovered in Nigeria. For a long period of time, the best known and best studied evidence of the earliest iron technology in West Africa came from the Nok culture site of Taruga. The Taruga site yielded a large series of both radiocarbon and thermoluminescence which place the site

to between 900B.C. and A.D. 200. Evidence from Iron Age sites in Nigeria show that the antiquity of iron preceded any contact with Europeans, although the extent and degree of metallurgical undertaking was modified by subsequent European influence. In fact, if the date 900 B.C. for Nok is shown to apply ultimately then the possibility of indigenous development becomes much stronger since such a date would be older than dates obtained for first evidence of iron working either at Jenne (2nd century B.C.), Daima (5th century A.D.), Matara (Ethiopia - 5th century B.C.) or Meroe (5th century B.C.) (Andah, 1979: 148).

In addition to the early iron technology which was uncovered in Taruga, in 1944, a tin miner, found a terracotta figurine at a farm near Jos also in Plateau state. Several years later, Benard Fagg, an archaeologist working in Jos museum, discovered many more of them. Eventually, an entire area of land measuring about 500 x 150 kilometres was excavated containing hundreds of these terracotta figurines dating from between 900 B.C. to 200 A. D. Some of them were large, measuring up to 120cm. in height like the Nok terracotta head from Rafin Kura. Other terracotta was found in many other parts of Nigeria. In Ife, terracotta head of a woman with a head gear (12 cm. high) and another head with a crown measuring 22.8 cm. in height were both dated to between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. A number of the terracotta and bronzes were also recovered including the bronze head of the queen mother found in the south western part of the country with scarification marks and wearing a high pointed hairstyle. This tradition is dying out in that part of the country but the archaeological finds will be preserved for posterity.

**Archaeology and Trade:** Some of the discoveries from archaeological research have been used led to postulate about the early trade routes that may have existed in prehistoric times. There is a broad based hypothesis that urban settlements started as a result of farming, metal, working and trade. The finds at Igbo-ukwu in Anambra state, Nigeria opened up a whole new area of discussion on the issue of possible early trade routes to the interior of Nigeria. The site at Igbo-ukwu was accidentally discovered in 1938 when a retired coal miner, Isaiah Anozie, was digging a cistern in his compound and found many bronze and iron objects (Anozie 1981). Earlier on in 1922, a number of bronzes had been discovered in another compound. Thurstan Shaw excavated the sites focussing on the burial chamber, a cistern and a rubbish dump. Bronze artifacts which were recovered include a roped pot, known as the "Igbo pot", an altar stand, a

tusk holder, hemispherical bowls including 11 small crescentic bowls, one small pear-shaped bowl, and a bowl on an open work pedestal stand. Also made of bronze were an elephant's head pendant, bronze shells, bronze crotals, bronze canine tooth pendants, 12 large ornaments, 13 small pendants, three bells, one large chain, one composite belt, 28 anklets, 10 wristlets and a large quantity of "jingle ornaments" (Shaw 1970). An analysis of the bronze objects revealed that "the objects made by smithing and chasing techniques are of copper, those cast by the *cire perdue* process are of bronze, an alloy of copper and tin, with varying small amounts of lead" (Shaw 1970: 289-295). The treasures also include more than 165,000 beads (mostly glass beads) which according to Isichei (1976:14) may have been brought from India or Venice, thus suggesting extensive international trade links between the Igbo and other parts of the world by the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD. One of the bronze sword hilts had the image of a horse and its rider cast on it. This also suggests trade relationships since horses were not one of the animals domesticated locally in Igboland.

Archaeology has improved the development of Nigeria to an extent that its contributions cannot be ignored. Nigeria's heritage is one of the highly acclaimed national heritages in the world. The tourism potentials of archaeological sites are quite extensive.

**Tourism:** Many major monuments and thousands of minor ones have been preserved for posterity in Nigeria with the help of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments. The major objective of monument conservation in Nigeria is to impede decay as well as preserve the monument *in situ*. In many cases conjectural restorations and reconstructions might be imperative to preserve the former state of the monument. So many sites have been designated in Nigeria as areas with good tourism potentials. Some of them have already been harnessed as tourist attractions. The Sukur cultural landscape with the palace of the *Hidi* (chief) on a hill was marked as a world heritage site by UNESCO in the year 2000. But the site had been discovered by archaeologists earlier on in the 1980's. The site dominates the villages below, its terraced fields and their sacred symbols, as well as the extensive remains of a former flourishing iron industry are also well preserved. It is noteworthy that tourism affects the environment in the sense that the tourist attraction when properly taken care of will contribute to its maintenance and rehabilitation. There could also be some negative effects particularly if visitors are allowed to trample on archaeological sites and features.

In the developed countries, tourism has become a major source of expenditure because of the revenue that is derived from the industry. The United States alone spends about 65 billion dollars on tourism and has the second largest international world tourist arrivals, averaging over 50 million tourists, with France as the largest with 75 million international tourist arrivals (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopaedia 2003.) Below is a chart showing the world's largest spenders on tourism in 1999 and 2000.

Country	Total expenditure (in billions of dollars)
United States	65.0
Germany	47.6
United Kingdom	36.6
Japan	31.5
France	17.2
Italy	15.5
Canada	12.4
The Netherlands	11.8
China	10.9*
Belgium/Luxembourg	10.1*
Austria	9.3
weden	7.6*
Russia	7.4*
South Korea	6.4
Switzerland	6.3
* 1999	

**Table 2:** *Developed countries spending most on Tourism.*

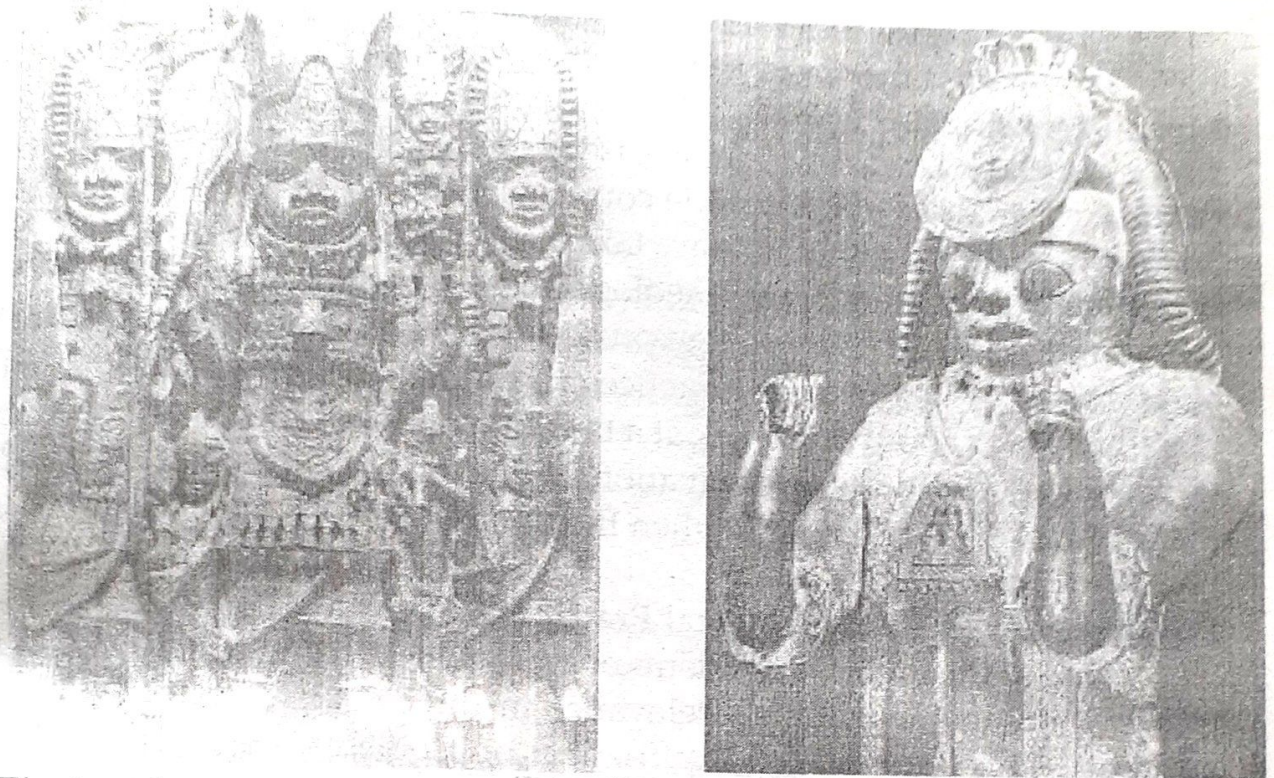
**Source:** *World Tourism Organization. Adapted from Microsoft Encarta Encyclopaedia 2003.*

The economic benefits of tourism are very important to the government in Nigeria. However, given the situation in Nigeria, where corruption,

lack of personal safety and poor sense of accountability are upper most in the series of events taking place at present in the country, it is not surprising that the tourism industry has failed to flourish. Could it be surprising that the tourism industry fails to flourish in Nigeria when an occasion like the "Miss World Beauty Contest" was disrupted by religious riots and the beauty queens had to leave Nigeria hurriedly back to their countries?

**Nation building:** Archaeology has played a part in the development of Nigeria in its function as a tool for nation building. The practice of archaeology has aided the interpretation of the past. Archaeology has contributed to discoveries that should help to promote mutual understanding and respect among the people concerning their past and their resultant present. Some aspects of Nigeria's recorded past were somewhat warped. Some of the early writings on Nigeria portrayed the customs and traditions of the Nigerian people at the time as barbaric and lacking in finesse. This brought a disorientation to the value people placed on their past which the practice of archaeology is helping to restore. One of the major goals of archaeological research in Nigeria has been an attempt to foster a dialogue with Nigeria's public to distinguish between the goals and objectives of public interpretation of the past as it belongs to people and the past as discovered by pure research.

A number of archaeological finds serve as tools that enhance national identities. For example, in Nigeria the importance of sculpture not restricted to aesthetics but extends to a reconciliation of the human life with their environment. The ancestors are supposed to stay with those sculptures where their presence is invoked. Many other sculptures or plaques are symbols depicting nationally recognised identities of different tribal groups in Nigeria, like the bronze plate of a king or war chief with full regalia and attendants, or a bronze Tada figure wearing a complex head dress and a disc which is a horned face with snakes coming out of the nose. Dated from the 12<sup>th</sup> century to the 15<sup>th</sup> century A.D., such fearsome regalia are now a thing of the past in most parts of the country, but the preservation of Nigeria's heritage, helps posterity to identify with Nigeria's rich cultural past.



**Fig 4 and 5:** *Bronze plate of a king or war chief with full regalia and attendants; Bronze Tada figure wearing a complex head dress and a disc which is a horned face with snakes coming out of the nose. (Adapted from Eyo, 1997.).*

In the past, archaeology as a course of study/profession was not a very popular course for university students as a result of lack of job opportunities and only a few could get jobs as professional archaeologists or museologists. Today, the reverse is gradually becoming the case. Graduates of archaeology are found in many professions in Nigeria. They work as professional archaeologists and consultants for contract archaeology. Archaeologists are teachers or lecturers, cultural resource managers in museums, art centres, culture houses, galleries, and curators in the National Theatre. Archaeologists work in tourism outfits as travel agents and with the Immigrations Department as police detectives or custom officers in monitoring illegal transfer of antiquities in and outside the country. Many of them work in international agencies, like the International Council of Museums (ICOMs). Archaeologists work with the news media as column writers in newspapers and magazines or programme producers in television and film production. A number of them work in the Ministry of Information and Culture as information officers on culture and heritage.

Archaeology is studied in the University of Ibadan, the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. In some other universities, archaeology is still studied as part of other courses like history, social sciences etc. At the University of Nigeria, the responsibility of training archaeologists for the country lies on ten lecturers, nine male and one female. The students are taken on field trips and are expected to learn the rudiments of the archaeological practice. Members of the public are also involved in observing excavations as much as their curiosity can be engaged by the strange practices of the archaeologists. Field trips usually last for about one week at a time and all the students are required to participate fully in the excavation, acquiring skills that would enable them practice the profession when they graduate from the university.

### **Problems of the Archaeological Practice in Nigeria**

One of the greatest problems of archaeology in Nigeria is the lack of public knowledge about its relevance in the construction of Nigerian heritage. This has resulted in a number of problems namely the lack of finances for archaeological investigations; the looting of artifacts; and wanton destruction of irreplaceable heritage. Furthermore the legislation on the management of Nigeria's archaeological heritage are not always effective. Lack of public education means that people do not always recognize artifacts when they come across them. If a non archaeologist comes across a site in any part of Nigeria, how could he/she identify it in the absence of a professional? How could someone who is being enticed to sell some important antiquity in their possession, be able to resist the offer?

There are also several constraints on museum visits. From a research conducted in the past (Eze-Uzomaka 2000) many people do not actually believe that their past is in the museum. Museums do not seem to have much to do with their daily lives. Ongoing manufacture of bronzes for instance in Benin, make some of these important cultural materials appear closer to the people's daily interests than the museum. In Nigeria at present, ethnographic materials are being made in their thousands in some parts of the country. People are smug in their belief that their past is safe with them. The archaeologist/anthropologist is often seen as an outsider to whom any information given is a favour by the community who see themselves as the custodians of that knowledge.

Non-proximity of museums is also a problem for museum visits. Many museums are located far away from local communities. Furthermore,



people do not seem to have the time to visit museums. They are also discouraged by the fact that they have to pay museum charges to get into the galleries as well as pay transportation costs to get to the museums, etc. However, for primary school pupils and secondary school students, there is no charge.

Furthermore, without sources of finance for archaeology in Nigeria, the profession may continue on a downhill course. I believe that exposing people to the methods which the professionals use when searching for sites could be an introduction to answering this question. Finally, another handicap that faces the archaeological practice in Nigeria, is the fact that the preservation of some types of archaeological findings like well preserved humans, insects and fauna, is hindered as a result of excessive heat and humidity prevalent in the tropics. Some types of archaeological evidence tend to rot and do not preserve as materials found in temperate zones of the world.

### **Archaeology and Nigeria's future development**

"The success of development lies to a large extent in the manner in which perceived traditional forms of society end up relating to the new modern structure that has overlain them. Many of the dichotomies that plague them are based upon this conceptual structural dichotomy. In countries where history is basically oral traditions and archaeological investigations, archaeology has a role to play that is perhaps larger than its apparent subject matter; it may occupy an important position in the interrelationship between traditional and contemporary structures" (Miller 1980: 715). In Nigeria, oral tradition has been a major way of preserving history, especially prehistory. Archaeology has therefore contributed immensely to the merging of long-established and modern-day framework obtainable in the country's development. An invaluable way of preserving Nigeria's heritage has been through archaeological research. Many of the precious materials which gave Nigeria its past could have been destroyed if not for the timely work of archaeologists through rescue excavation. Many times, construction work has been carried out in Nigeria without first inviting archaeologists to survey the sites.

In Nigeria, the active management of archaeological sites and artifacts rests with the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM). The NCMM has played a very important role in the preservation of archaeological and cultural materials which would otherwise have been lost. It manages major and minor monuments; exhibits thousands of

museum objects in Nigeria; trains manpower for the management of the Nigerian heritage; encourages the implementation of legislation for heritage management; raises funds for the practice of archaeology and heritage management; retrieves some of Nigeria's lost heritage from other countries and educates the public through publications, films, symposia, excavations, public visits, school visits etc. The problem though, is that the public are yet to be fully aware of the values of visiting museums. This is an area that the NCMMA should make more effort. More and more, archaeology should be taken to the people where they are and presented to them in a package that they will understand and appreciate.

A Contract Archaeology Act should be enacted to give Nigerian archaeologists the right to excavate whenever a construction company wants to develop a site. Developers should be required to set aside a certain percentage of the cost of their development/construction, for excavation, before any destruction can take place on any piece of land in Nigeria. Failure to do this should be punishable by paying a fine, legal prosecution of the construction company, or suspension of work until a proper reconnaissance/excavation has been carried out.

Archaeologists themselves need to understand the importance of the practice of their profession as a tool for national development. The onus lies on them to present the past to the public and enable the public to empower them to improve the quality of their findings. Archaeologists may sometimes act as though public archaeology is a minor or at worst, an unnecessary part of the archaeological practice, not realising that public archaeology is absolutely imperative in the pursuit of our goal. Archaeologists in Nigeria should not just retreat to the classroom to teach and publish. Those publications should be made understandable by the public and given wide circulation.

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