

Memory, Discontinuity and Sustainable Knowledge Forms: Recasting Museum Practice in Postcolonial Nigeria

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Abstract

The visible history of our past is best preserved in museums. In addition to this, the museum represents a place of study; a resort of the learned, an institution or repository for the collection of exhibition and study of objects or artistic, scientific, historic or educational interest. In contemporary Nigeria, Museums serve as a repository for preserving and conserving objects that were hitherto kept in shrines, homes and palaces. The paper recasts this discontinuity for its contemporary utility. It locates the genealogy of museums in their relation to secular and immaterial expressions of power. This is shown in the symbiotic relationship between the palaces as representations of power and history and museums as expressions of the image history of the people in some parts of Nigeria. It also reviews the problems involved in the contemporary management of these museums. Suggestions, recommendations and ways of improvement are also expressed in the discourse. This is done with particular reference to the Museum of National Unity located in Akure, Ondo State of Nigeria, which has under its auspices, the petroglyph at Igbara-Oke and the Deji's palace at Akure declared national monuments in 1963 and 1990 respectively.

Keywords: African architectural conservation; historic building; intangible and tangible cultural heritage; Nigeria; palace-museum; petroglyphs.

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1. Introduction

The visible history of the past is best preserved in museums. Museums therefore ought to represent the history and memory cast in images. On a dual view of culture as an inseparable relation of the material and immaterial in a community's enactment of their material life and interaction with nature, museums symbolize partly the immaterial and spiritual components of peoples' culture. As spiritual and immaterial expressions in a given culture are embodied in a museum, it goes to say that museums preserve the epistemological history of a people. The immaterial culture of a group of people is thus impoverished or rich by their museums. Additionally, the museum represents a place of study; a resort of the learned, an institution or repository for the collection, exhibition and study of objects of artistic, scientific, historic or educational interest. In contemporary Nigeria, museums serve as a repository for preserving and conserving objects that were hitherto kept in shrines, homes and palaces. As with the case of African peoples and peoples of African descent globally, given the traumatic experience of slavery and colonialism, their museums display a form of discontinuity, stagnation of memory and knowledge forms. The paper privileges in its discussion the Igbara-Oke petroglyph and Deji's palace as two instances of discontinuity and stagnation. This paper recasts this discontinuity for its contemporary utility. It locates the genealogy of museums in their relation to secular and immaterial expressions of power. This is shown in the symbiotic relationship between the palaces as representations of power and history and museums as expressions of the image history of the people in some parts of Nigeria. It also reviews the problems involved in the contemporary management of these museums. Suggestions, recommendations and ways of improvement are also expressed in the discourse.

This is done with particular reference to the Museum of National Unity located in Akure, Ondo State of Nigeria, which has under its auspices, the petroglyph at Igbara-Oke and the Deji's palace at Akure declared national monuments in 1963 and 1990 respectively. The paper further makes a case for the funding and development of Nigerian museums to enable them to properly execute the objectives for which they were established, as this would ensure their optimal performance.

2. The Genealogy of African Museums

Museums serve as custody of the visible history of our past (Giebelhausen, 2003; Sandell, 2002; Ortiz, 2015). Conceptually, the word ‘museum’ was originally used for a temple, home or resort of the muses - Greek Goddess (Macleod, 2005; Lumley, 1988). However, in its contemporary adaptation, it represents a place of study; a resort of the learned; an institution or repository for the collection, exhibition, and study of objects or artistic, scientific, historical or educational interest (Davidson, 2012; American Alliance of Museums, 2014; 2017; 2018). From this understanding, the numerous auxiliary roles of a museum can be observed. Preservation of cultural heritage is an important way of linking the past with the present and also the present with the future. Heritage preservation involves the protection of cultural properties whether concrete or non-concrete, past or present, written or oral, philosophical or relating to facts of history (Giebelhausen, 2003; Jennings, 2017; Acuff & Evans, 2014). Cultural heritages are material and immaterial facts in determining the identity of a society or group of people. Some human-created cultural heritages are craft, villages, monuments, amusement parks, theatres, halls of fame, galleries, museums and other repositories (Aig Imhokhuede, 1998; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Anderson, 2006; Burns, 2013).

In some traditional cultures in Nigeria, the museums are located in such a way that they are very close to the king’s palace, therefore helping in the conservation of artefacts and antiquities that were hitherto kept in such palaces. Historically, this locus of museums is not accidental. Where it is argued that the ruling ideas in a society are the ideas of the ruling class, it is thus not fortuitous that the history of a people is cast in the image of the ruling class. While it is the case that the material and immaterial in a people’s culture express class and social stratification and tensions, the dominant class in any epoch still manages to construct social history and culture after its image. Therefore, the location of museums in traditional societies at the fringes of palaces expresses this relation between power and culture. This claim helps to understand the discontinuity and stagnation of knowledge forms, which the museums ought to preserve (Hein, 2012; DiCindio & Steinmann, 2019).

3. Emergence of Museum in Nigeria

The idea of a formal public museum came into being during the colonial period through the efforts of individuals who were mainly expatriates of British nationality (Afigbo and Okita, 1985; Levitt, 1998; Dewhurst & Hendrick, 2018). Foremost among them were Kenneth Crosthwaite Murray, E. H. Duckworth and Bernard Fagg (Biobaku, 1972; Onuzulike, 2013). K.C. Murray could be epitomized in the appellation of "Father of Nigerian Antiquities" (Afigbo and Okita, 1985; National Commission for Museums and Monuments, 2022). Even though he came to Nigeria as a teacher, his love for art collection saw him pioneering the efforts to safeguard the arbitrary collection and exportation of Nigerian antiquities abroad (Udok, Udofia, and Eyo, 2023). Murray’s collection of Nigerian art objects grew as he traversed the country to survey Nigerian antiquities. It was also recorded that his earnest appeals to officialdom to come to the rescue of Nigerian traditional art before it disappeared altogether amidst the corrupt influences of Western imported goods first fell upon deaf ears, but later they were grudgingly heeded. Murray was appointed Surveyor of Nigerian antiquities in the 1940s and by 1953 Murray succeeded in promoting legislation, which established the Antiquities Commission. The legislation was aimed at preserving Nigerian monuments and antiquities and ensuring the efficient running of Nigerian museums. Kenneth Murray subsequently became the first director of the Department of Antiquities and the founder of the Nigerian National Museum at Onikan Lagos. Murray did not stop at the establishment of the Lagos Museum, after the establishment of the Lagos Museum, Murray, despite the constraints posed by inadequate funding and strict government policies still showed his love for collecting the best in Nigerian art. He identified worthy national monuments for preservation and established a museum of archaeology at Jos. He was also saddled with the responsibility of supervising the small museum of Ife antiquities while building the house of images at Esie and housing the famous masks at Oron (Afigbo and Okita, 1985).

Some examples of palace museums are Benin Museum, Ife Museum, Owo Museum and Museum of National Unity-Akure. The outgrowth or coinage of the name Palace-Museum, (the acronyms of these museums) meaning a museum in the service of a palace represents a “symbiotic” relationship in the palace’s physical heritage, conservation and preservation. The Palace-Museum as used in this article is a coinage that is the author’s idea. Most museums in Nigeria from the pre-colonial period originated in the form described in this article. Given that these museums are seen through the lenses of the palaces with which they maintain some contiguous relationship most of the museums still maintain this form despite the transition from a pre-colonial situation to a post-colonial one. Conceptually, therefore most artifact museums in Nigeria still exhibit the form and perhaps substance of a palace museum. It seems to follow therefore that where the influence and power of palaces as symbols of authority have regressed in a post-colonial setting, the museums so constructed after such symbols of authority would follow

the same pattern of regress and discontinuity. This accounts for the sense of discontinuity that some of these museums suffer from. What is required would be a re-conceptualization of the idea of a museum in Nigeria's postcolonial situation.

In a post-colonial state and in a more democratic setting where the cultural and intellectual energy of the people are released, the pertinent question is to what extent will the notion of a palace museum apprehend the museum as a space of a people's history? In other words, if a thing in a substantive sense is a palace museum and if a museum is a space of history, such a palace museum will be substantively a space of the king's or queen's history. This seems to be the point. The problems of museums can only be the results of their conception. If a thing is a palace museum and it is appropriated by the present ruling elites, then in a general sense the lack of growth the museums suffer from, can be a product of either or both of two things- (i) a museum ought to be a space of peoples' history, the ruling elites suffer from a lack of sense of history hence the museums stagnate. Or (ii) a museum exemplifies a space of the ideas of the ruling elites, the Nigerian ruling elites lack a sense of enlightened self-interest historically, hence the museums stagnate.

3.1 Akure Museum: The Legacy of a Genealogy

The motivation for focusing on the Museum of National Unity Akure could be seen from the perspective of turning inheritances of memory in images into a pedagogical purpose for our contemporary society. In this instance, for example, the unexamined and perhaps neglected petroglyph in the museum becomes pertinent. The combination of the pedagogical and the historical in museum discourse allows us not only to retrieve memories in image form, but also relieve and rethink them while offering a critique of the neglect of this memory and drawing attention to the consequences of this neglect. This is underscored by Kenneth Hudson's observation on museums generally:

Those in charge of museums should ask themselves, with some frequency, such questions as "Why does this museum exist? How relevant is it to the needs and conditions of the society in which it exists? What is its main taste? How do I measure its success?" (Afigbo and Okita, 1985:97).

On the world map, Akure (see figure 1) can be found on latitude 7°15' East of the Greenwich Meridian. Akure, in the present dispensation, is the capital of Ondo State, Nigeria. It is situated 204 kilometres east of Ibadan, 168 kilometres west of Benin – City and 311 kilometres North-East of Lagos¹³, and it is also regarded as one of the North-Eastern Yoruba districts (Akintoye 1971, Weir 1993). Lagos was the former capital town of Nigeria and Ibadan is a major and notable town in West Africa. On the other hand, Akure doubles as the Local Government headquarters and was made the provincial headquarters of Ondo province in 1920 (Odeyale 2009, Weir, 1993). The residences of the Obas palaces of the Yoruba are regarded as the matrices of Yoruba culture, which in essence implies that everything around the palace symbolizes the cultural ebullience of the Yoruba people. The Akure king's palace is popularly referred to as the Aafin Oba. The Federal Government of Nigeria declared the Akure King's palace a national monument on 2nd November 1990. It was intended that the Museum of National Unity situated in the expanse compound of the palace would oversee the preservation and maintenance of the palace. Palace has in addition to its architectural, historical and aesthetic importance, a traditional role as the custodian of values, artefacts, relics and objects; this formed its vital link to the Museum (Al-Hassan, 1995).



Figure 1. Present-day Nigeria, showing Akure. Adapted from Odeyale (2023).

The palace is one of the most significant material cultures of most African setups, and it has remained a tool for tracing the origin and way of life of many African people. Thus, it can be said that, as the palace is embedded in African cultures, the cultures (oral and materials) are preserved in the palaces. The palace was a temple of temples in the sense that it contained many temples, shrines and sacred pots (Olaoba 1995; Babayemi, 1992; Park, 2004; Roitman, 2003). The Oba is the Patron of the heritage preserved in the Palace. In Yoruba mythology, he is also regarded as the personification of his people's culture. For example, the best of Yoruba culture is manifested in the Oba's Palace. Usually situated in the heart of the town, the palace is usually the biggest, most significant architecturally distinct building in the community. The palace belongs to the community; it is believed that no one individual can build a palace. The builders, craftsmen, and carpenters were drawn from the entire community. The Oba lives inside the palace, from where he rules; historical artefacts are part of his accoutrements. Hence, the palace serves as a repository and custodian of the community's heritage and history (Babayemi, 1992). The palaces perform the dual functions of physical dwelling place of the earthly kings and spiritual dwelling place of deities, and, thus, palaces were seen as sacred places. From the ancient period, artworks and other antiquities were kept in the palace. The traditional palaces perform the function of the modern-day museum. It could be postulated that should the contributions of palaces to many modern-day artefact museums in Nigeria be withdrawn, many of the museums will be mere empty buildings. The palaces are the feeders of many of the modern-day museums in terms of physical donations of artefacts and the provision of oral history. Without the palace's oral sources (the palace drummers, praise singers, chanters of family ancestry or oriki (Yoruba genealogical and praise poetry), many artefacts found in Ife, Benin and Owo would not be linked with the past (Alma, 1977; Ogunduyile, Kayode, & Ojo, 2008). The archaeological dating was made meaningful by the palace's oral sources and interpretation.

The colonialists knew that most African palaces were places held in high esteem for the physical and spiritual power they were believed to embrace. For example in Benin Kingdom, certain artworks were exclusive for the preservation and use of the king. Even though some museum systems in Africa have acquired sizeable collections of their national art, the Europeans harvested much of the best and the oldest examples of African culture at the advent of the colonial period. Much of the remnants of African antiquities are sometimes found in the core of private families, often at shrines and mostly royal palaces; for instance, the bronze heads of Ife, Nigeria, remain on the palace grounds in a museum having narrowly escaped a raid by the notorious German Leo Frebonius, in 1910. The Benin tradition was not as lucky as the Ife tradition; most antiquities in the Benin Kingdom were looted and vandalized in 1897 in the Benin Expedition. This trend persists even now. Balogun (1997) remarked, '... when you talk about art culture, repository at home and abroad, you find that in the last three years, we have lost about 200 artefacts that were removed from the museums'. By implication, it means that the museums are not free from pilfering.

3.2 Typology of Nigerian Museums

Two types of museums have been identified in Nigeria, namely: the Artifacts Museum and the War Museum. However, Onyejebu (2014) further breaks down the artefact museums in Nigeria into three major types of museums namely ethnographic, archaeological and colonial museums. The war museum was necessitated as a result of the Civil War. Incidentally, the museum under study emanated from the context of a war museum, but in reality, there are no war relics to be kept there. Its establishment (in some states' capital of Nigeria) was rather political and it soon embraced the keeping of artefacts. Eventually, like many other museums in the South and Midwest of Nigeria, it was located around the king's palace, assuming the function of overseeing the palace. The war museum in Umuahia started as a result of the Federal Military Government of Gen. Yakubu Gowon, which set out to implement the "No Victor, No Vanquished" slogan. The war museum in Umuahia, Abia State, Nigeria, was set up 'to preserve the relics of war and to extend lessons of the evils of war to all mankind' (Aig-Imoukhuede 1991). This museum also serves as the repository of the modest scientific achievements of the hard-pressed Biafran scientists, who produced a wide range of weapons from locally sourced materials. The museum provided a forum for the documentation, display and analysis of indigenous weaponry made locally during the war. It further demonstrates the dual nature of the war the positive ingenuity and the negative utility of such tools, weapons and techniques used by humans to destroy one another. This particular war museum in Umuahia was mandated to collect, document, preserve and display documents, objects and weapons related to the Nigerian Civil War (7 July 1967 – 15 January 1970). The mandate was later expanded to encompass relics of traditional weaponry preceding the civil war as far as the primitive era and pre-colonial era within the geographical border of Nigeria (Dike, 1988; Adejuwon, 2019).

The objective of the establishment of a museum in Nigeria was to have a formal way of preserving artefacts since it was discovered that the palaces themselves were porous and had been infiltrated by the imperialists who either paid peanuts on artefacts or exchanged cheap gifts for artefacts. The unsuspecting kings and craftsmen succumbed

to this bait and gave away their treasures cheaply. It is on record that in 1924, the Ogoga of Ikere, Nigeria took a set of doors carved by a distinguished artist to the Wembley Exhibition in London. After the show, the official from the British museum asked if they could buy the doors, he declined, only to agree later to exchange the doors for a not-too-distinguished wooden throne carved in Britain. Events like this necessitated the setting up of a formal repository such as a museum and National gallery where formal registration and documentation of artifacts are done. The story of uneven bargaining such as the one stated above could symbolize thousands of similar transactions, which had taken place since the transatlantic slave trade and the awakening of European interest in African Arts (Harper & Hendrick, 2017). Alma, (1977) stated that Africans who do not know their family heirlooms or religious images might find themselves victimized by thieves. These remarks even hold sway these days, as there were cases of stolen artefacts from the palace. Worse still were several cases of stolen ancestral crowns from palaces. When this happens, it is obvious that the poverty-stricken locals are engaged by cartels of international crooks that go about in the graceful names of connoisseurs or art collectors to perpetrate the evil deed. The postcolonial era, however, sees the palaces as potent tools of culture-historical reconstructions and thus efforts were made to preserve the palaces. Given the centrality of palaces in the genealogy of Nigerian museums, it is obvious that were palaces movable objects many of them would have adorned the Western museum today.

3.4 Contemporary Issues in Nigerian Museums

Nigerian museums are owned by the Nigerian government and controlled by the National Commission for Museums and Monuments. Nigerian museums have suffered much neglect resulting mainly from poor funding; the omnibus problem of inadequate funding has affected various other factors such as personnel development, acquisition of antiquities, security of antiquities, art promotion, research, updating of records and publication (Balogun et al, 1998: 28; The Guardian, 2002). Consequently, the performance of the museums across the nation could not be optimized (Afigbo and Okita, 1985; Weisberg, 2006; Udok, Udofia, and Eyo, 2023). After seven decades of museum culture, Nigeria has yet to boast of adequate facilities and funding to perform its conservatory and preservatory roles effectively (Oyigbenu, 2015). The state of many museums in the country is characterized by extreme dilapidation, obsolete structures and facilities left in perennial neglect (Afigbo and Okita, 1985; Idegu, 2022). The crucial issue now is to understand these problems and get to the nitty-gritty of the problems. The problem with the state of anomie of the museums seems to stem from a sense of poverty in museum discourse and the failure to link pertinent extant cultural and knowledge forms and practices to more contemporary existential lives of the people (Arinze, 1999; Ekpo, 2004; Fasakin, 2021). Burdened by the asphyxiation of the modern in the cultural evolution of the lives of the people by factors of colonialism and lack of vision coupled with the failure of the postcolonial elites to reinvent the modern in indigenous cultures; museum and museum practices take on the flawed form of the representation and preservation of the static in the cultural lives of the people. The consequence is a break in the link between the past, present and future. Having been restricted to the zone of the relics of the pre-colonial power elites, museum discourse and practices thus fail to make a transition from the residue of modernity before its termination by the colonial factor (AlSayyad and Guvenc, 2015; Acuff, & Evans, 2014).

4. The Igbara-Oke Petroglyph and the Unexamined Historical Sources of Traditional Philosophical Memories

At this point, the focus is on two museum artifacts petroglyph and the Deji of Akure palace. A critical and more interpretative approach to museum discourse and practice ought to locate the archaeological and philosophical significance of the petroglyph in the history of Yoruba thought. The petroglyph was discovered in 1959 and declared a monument in March 1963 at Igbara-Oke. Igbara-Oke is a small town located about 15 kilometres away from Akure. Igbara Oke petroglyph is a rock with 'incised un-deciphered writing seemingly representing a telegraphic mast, and dots likely representing Ifa Corpus signs. An-Oke man, who was clearing a plot of land for his building, discovered it. The nature of the stone is such that the petroglyph has not been adversely affected by the vagaries of weather despite its exposure to the elements. Situation Report on Scheduled Monuments, Memo (AKM/AF.31/Vol.1 40, 16th October 2000) from Museum of National Unity Akure to the Director-General, National Commission Museums and Monuments Garki Abuja highlight some of these points.

The petroglyph comprises three separate designs, although the early claim by the Museum of National Unity source, that the images are un-deciphered may have been borne out of superficial analysis (figures 2 and 3). A very close look at the image reveals that they are representations of old traditions and the new. Old in the sense that two out of the images are symbols of traditional authority. These are the middle image, which represents a sceptre of honour and majesty, and the Ifa corpus-like writing. This sceptre is usually a staff with a handle at the bottom and is usually made of precious metals and it is usually one of the paraphernalia of the Yoruba and Bini Obas. Whenever an Oba

was to attend a function and could not, such sceptre was sent and full respects were accorded the representation. This sceptre, which represents the paraphernalia of Yoruba and Bini Obas further, adds to the close linkages of the cultural history of the Yorubas and Binis. Moreover, given the formal qualities and features of Ifa and the place of Ifa in Yoruba's ancient philosophical thought, the point deserving of archaeological and philosophical investigation is the hermeneutic meanings of the petroglyph. Additionally, while the historical linkages of the Binis and Yorubas are well documented, there is a philosophical gap in their thought systems, which closer research among philosophers and museum archaeologists may unearth. This suggests an unrestricted, connected and collaborative speculation among traditional thinkers in this part of Africa.



Figure 2. The petroglyph comprises three separate designs. Source: Researcher's Fieldwork

The other image to the left of the image at the centre is the one (see Figure 2), which could be said to be un-deciphered. However, just like the comments of a curator in the Museum of National Unity, Akure the image looks much like Ifa corpus. The Ifa corpus-related patterns could be seen as another symbol of authority. Ifa corpus is used in Ifa divination and epistemological speculation among the Yoruba in Nigeria. Kings were selected through Ifa divination and epistemological speculation. This clearly shows that the Ifa corpus-like pattern could be interpreted to represent traditional power and authority. There had been some peculiar ways of writing in Nigeria, notable among them are the Uli pattern and decorations found among the Ibos, in eastern Nigeria and the Insibidi writings also found in eastern Nigeria. The two petroglyph images discussed above were the ancient connection observed. The third petroglyph's image, has a semblance of a communication mast thus representing a modern connection to power and authority; this must have been a new dimension of peoples' assumption of what power and authority stood for during the pre-colonial period. Such mast was found among a few urban towns of Nigeria then. The petroglyph in the care of the Akure Museum represents one of the unexamined sources of epistemological speculations in ancient philosophy in Africa. The incised un-deciphered writing, which closely mirrors the Ifa epistemological corpus, illustrates the philosophical linkages among secular thinkers and mystics in traditional African philosophy.

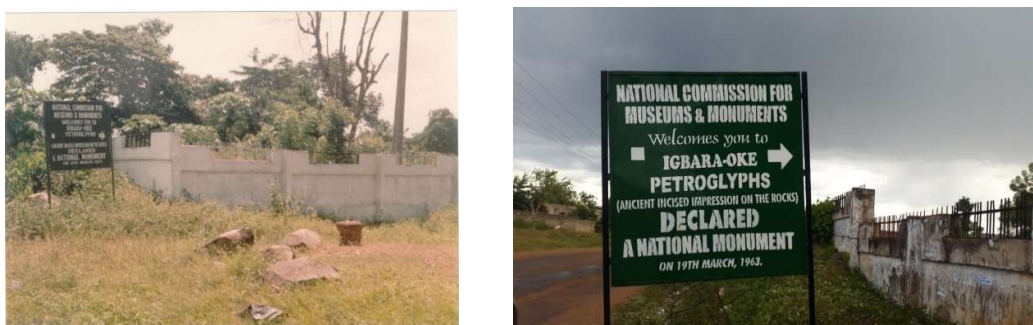


Figure 3: Approach to the petroglyphs. Source: Researcher's Fieldwork

This demonstrates some commonalities in the philosophical traditions dominant in the ancient period. But given the theoretical poverty of museum discourse, such possible speculation is not only arrested, there is a disconnection between museum artefacts such as the petroglyph and the sources of traditional philosophical speculation. The consequence of this is the conception of the museum as a static discourse, which has no bearing on the

contemporary attempts to reconstruct the history of speculative thought in traditional African philosophy. Our point is that given the arrest of the modern African intellectual traditions museum discourse and practices are an area, which ought to offer the intellectual space for the necessary reconstruction and linkages with more contemporary thought and intellectual traditions.



Figure 4: Ancient King Palace at Akure – declared a National Monument – over 900 years old. Source: Researcher’s Fieldwork

4.1 Traditional Palace and the State of the City

The unexamined Deji’s Palace as a museum artefact offers a different illustration of the reading of museums in Nigeria. Given the virtual absence of city and town life; the social and physical crisis of urban development due to a non-reflective apprehension of the demands of a transition from serene small-town life to a more complex urban and city life the location of the Deji’s palace in the city of Akure offers an archaeological template on the organization of town life dated to the ancient period. The Deji of Akure palace is the residence of the Deji (King of Akure) (see Figures 4, 5 and 6).



Figure 5. Akure king’s palace is referred to as the Aafin Oba. Source: Researcher’s Fieldwork

Deji is the traditional title or appellation of the ‘Oba’ (King) or paramount ruler of Akure. Different Oba in Yoruba land have different titles in which they are called; for instance, the paramount ruler of Oyo is called Alaafin, and

that of Abeokuta is Alake to mention a few. Deji is an acronym coined from ‘Ade ji o’ or ‘Fadeji’ meaning – I passed the crown to you.

The king’s palace is found at the central hub of Akure City. Mostly in Yoruba towns, the king’s palace forms the beginning or source of growth, with other developments spreading out or surrounding it in a radial formation. Louis Kahn refers to the city core area as ‘the cathedral of the city’ and an essential part of the urban movement (Khan, 1998:182). Looking at the contemporary status of Akure as the present capital town of Ondo State, the king’s palace at the present state represents an archival jewel or antiquity rather than the contemporary status of a modern town.



Figure 6. Inside view of the Palace. Source: Researcher’s Fieldwork

This is because though it fitted the demographic status and pull of a small civil and serene pre-colonial Akure town, no necessary preservation efforts were made to bridge the palace from the new demographic pull of a more complex urban life.

Historically, local builders from the villages under the Akure domain constructed the palace building in its present state over 900 years ago (Atandare, 1975: 105). However, for the value of its antiquity status, it would have been demolished to give way to a new one. The indigenes of the town have enough resources to build a more imposing palace to befit their king. Construction of a new palace is almost at the completion stage, which embraces architectural design borrowed from the Western world, richly flavoured with Yoruba architectural pedigree. Yorubas are elite town dwellers found in the West African region. They are predominantly arable farmers, with high social outlooks and a penchant for trade and commerce. There was an ancient palace occupied by the first king of Akure called ‘Asodeboyede’ (Note 1). The earliest ancient palace was also sited at the present location of the old palace under discussion.

The old palace building was declared a national monument in 1990 by the Federal Government of Nigeria offers a panorama of the past heritage of the Akure people and indeed the Yoruba race (figure 7). It also gives an insight into the tradition of Akure, their level of artistry, the manner and treatment of their walls, the type of building materials used in the past (notably mud from clay called ‘ilepa’ and thatched leaves for the roof), and the method of construction (local technology, skill and craftsmanship).

4.2 The Symbolic Architectural Heritage of the Akure Palace

The entire terrain of the site of the palace reveals a good architectural choice on the part of the local builders of hundreds of years past. The creative effort of the traditional craftsmen is showcased in the Afin. Afin Akure is the

traditional abode of the traditional ruler of Akure. Akure concentrated on the three-dimensional composition of the palace. The many levelled surface of the site was exploited with true virtuosity and perfect judgment in the composition of every courtyard of the Afin". The builder of the palace made use of the spatial possibilities offered by the undulating nature of the terrain contour to achieve changes in the level of the buildings that constitute the palace. The making of the individual components of the palace (the courtyards and the traditional offices, chambers and grottos) was done with a pure sense of adventure on the part of the designers. The designers made use of the different levels of the terrain to create interesting stepped entrances into adjoining parts of the palace.

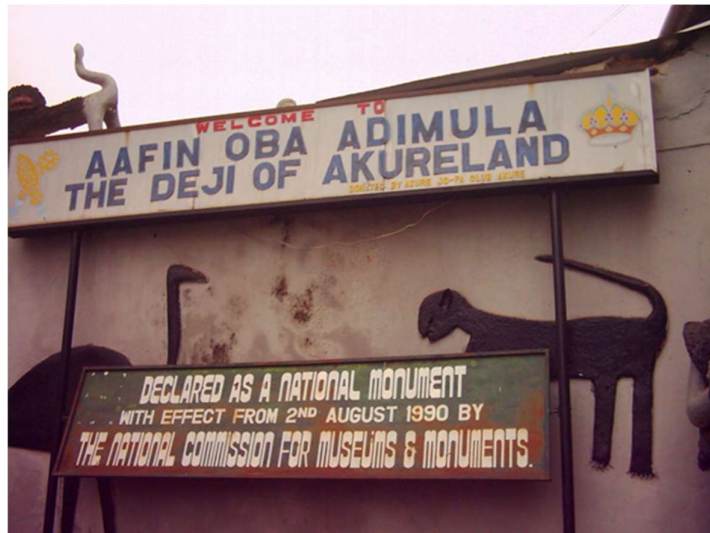


Figure 7. Part of the decorative motifs at the front of the Palace. Source: Researcher's Fieldwork

4.2.1 Traditional drainage of the Impluvium (Courtyard)

Another feature of the king's palace in Akure that is of architectural significance is the treatment of the water that collects or gathers as a result of rainfall in the open courtyards. The palace has twenty-eight different courtyards or impluviums called 'Uwa' (Note 2). The traditional method employed in draining these large collections of courtyards was an architectural feat (Figures 8 and 9). No noticeable water collects after any rainfall but is filtered off immediately through special drainage outlets provided along 'Omi Ayaba' or 'Omi Aladundun' – (Queen's Bath). Refers to a special bathing pool located in the interior of Deji's palace. Reported by oral history to have been magically created by Queen Adeke, wife of Deji Omoremiosuan, using 'ado-ide'- a local charm given to her by her father Oba Alaye of Efon (another Yoruba town) the courtyards, that lead to the pool called 'Omi Ayaba' or 'Omi Aladundun' (Queen's Bath) inside the palace. In a more reflexive museum practice, which places architectural inheritances in the service of a more complex urban planning system, this drainage system could be worked into the needs of the present. Not only would this fit into the aesthetic needs and values of the people, but it also has an economic cost advantage. Entrances into the palace are separated based on gender. There is an entrance called '*ona-obirin*', and the male entrance is called '*ona-okunrin*'. The third one is a special entrance called *ona-oba*, it is reserved for the king and only used during special occasions. It is only opened and used during such occasions.



Figure 8. The plans view the Deji's (King's) Palace showing part of the twenty-eight different courtyards and its precinct. Source: Dmochowski (1990).

4.2.2 The Orientation of the Palace

The palace is deliberately oriented east–west along the cardinal points 41. This shows the understanding of climatic factors and elements by the local architect who designed and constructed the building 900 years ago. The calculation and positioning of the throne area is called Kobi. “Kobi” is the traditional throne or seat of the Deji in the palace. It is placed in a deep recess with flights of steps leading to it. The “Kobi” is decorated with different traditional colours for beauty and grandiose. The design was done such that it places Kobi in a deep recess with a flight of steps that adjoins a large courtyard, which faces the direction of the rising sun. This provides a rich panoramic view of the throne area and underscores the sensibilities and ingenuity of the traditional builders and architects. It calls to mind; similar ingenuity exhibited by the primitive builder of the Stonehenge–megalithic ruin in the Salisbury Plain, near Wiltshire, South England. Stonehenge Megalithic Ruin is a huge stone structure of prehistoric origin. Stonehenge is the Salisbury Plain of South England and is an example of a megalithic structure dating back to the Neolithic era (Circa 2950-2900 BCE). The structure dates back to the Neolithic age 2950 – 2900 B.C.E. The Stonehenge monument was oriented to face the mid-summer rising sun, which implied a ritualistic connotation of sun worship and was used as an astronomical calculator to predict the solstice. In the same vein, the builders of the palace in Akure, with their primal idea, watched out for the best position that could offer a good view of the throne room and celebrate the grandeur of their king. Similarly, a casual calculation of the geographical direction to any part of the Akure land can be made regarding the King's Palace. This arguably suggests that the ancient Yoruba vernacular builders had an understanding of elementary astronomy, climatology and geography.



Figure 9. Ancient Palace showing the main courtyard (compare with the architectural sketch in Figure 8). Source: Researcher's Fieldwork

4.2.3 Ornamentation, Renderings and Relics on Walls and Columns:

The treatment of the wall built with earth mud was done once a year. Craftsmen and women were selected from the suburban villages to come to the palace and render the walls with special local leaves called 'ewe-gbodogi' and repair the thatched roof coverings (Atandare, 1975). Ewe Gbodogi is a special local leaf used in the rendering and preservation of mud walls. Each courtyard is flanked by beautiful columns forming a rich ensemble of colonnades. Even though the technology and artistry employed in the execution of the columns is far simpler than that used in ancient Greek Doric columns, however, ideologically it bears a rudimentary resemblance to Greek Doric columns as expressed in the famous Parthenon temple on the Acropolis in Athens.

5. Problems Associated with the Museum

The museum is bedevilled with many problems, among which are; a lack of sufficient space and buildings, a lack of field collectors and scanty acquisition. It could be summarized that the museum had no permanent structure of its own. Although a block of buildings was donated to the museum in its inception, there are other buildings within the premises, which house some local government agencies and commercial ventures. The museum itself can be assumed to be squatting, as it is lost to the ever-busy commercial environment. Thus, the least patronized venture within the premises is the museum. The museum offices were created from a big room partitioned into about four rooms and another reserved as the gallery as earlier mentioned. The building and the facilities are a far cry from what can enhance the optimum performance of a museum.

As it is, there is no display of antiquities. The few antiquities acquired by the museum are stockpiled in the museum store. Artefacts are only displayed in the reserved room when visitors are expected. They are taken back to the store after such an exercise. The system seems very odd in the dispensation of museum function. Ideally, a museum is supposed to have a building specifically designed to suit many requirements. Expectedly, the architectural design of a museum should be in harmony with the lighting system in the museum to control the climate within the interior so that objects do not grow mould. The control of natural light as it is, may pose some problems due to the many makeshift structures around the building. Security precautions are also expected planned along with the

architectural design of museums so that antiquities are not easily removed from the museums.

The supposed gallery of the Museum of National Unity Akure is very porous security-wise, this is one of the reasons why artefacts could not be on permanent display. The problem of space is one problem too many for the museum, without adequate space, one cannot be talking of other movable items and facilities that are required for the smooth operation of a museum. Such items and facilities are; gallery furniture and accessories, plant and adequate lighting facilities. Museums all over the world are becoming exemplary in the area of unique architecture, furniture and spectacular accessories used in the display of artefacts. Discussing the antiquities acquired so far by the Akure Museum gives room for guesswork as no display is made permanently. Discussing the antiquities acquired so far by the Akure Museum gives room for guesswork as no display is made permanently. The seemingly long administrative bureaucracy that a curious museum visitor would encounter in the bid to have access to the artefacts stocked in the museum store is enough to discourage visitors. As it is, the museum needs to acquire more antiquities. It was observed that field personnel such as ethnographers and archaeologists are conspicuously absent in the museum. Without ethnographers and archaeologists, the probability of random excavation that can provide some clues towards discoveries of artefacts will be low.

Poor funding was blamed for not having the required professionals and not being able to carry out exploration and excavation exercises. This same problem of funding is responsible for not being able to make enough purchases of antiquities. Owners of antiquities are said to be reluctant to part with their antiquities with tokens, which the museum can afford. Therefore, more often than not, antiquities are sold to higher bidders who are usually private collectors. Many of these private art collectors are surrogates of expatriate art connoisseurs, who can pay higher prices for antiquity. Although cases of theft of antiquities had been reported in the past on the State radio and television, the museum has not handled any of such claims officially, as such cases were not reported to them.

6. Conclusion

Given the richness museum artefacts offer and the lessons to be drawn for the present museum discourse and practices need to be re-conceptualized. For, the present retrogressive situation of Nigerian Museums which the museum understudied is an example that was not in the patriarchs' vision. It appears the government is not sincere about pursuing her cultural policies. It has become a common phenomenon for the Nigerian Government at all levels to treat levity, as things that have to do with culture. More funds need to be committed to our museums to upgrade them to the international standard.

The Museums of National Unity across the country, while seen as a positive development, should however be restructured to have a clearer and sharper focus. They should be made to embrace the collection of peculiar and valuable contemporary objects; Granted the fact that antiquities are not easily come by these days, many contemporary objects of significant events can be collected and preserved. For, it is just a matter of a couple of decades after collection that such contemporary objects would automatically attract more value. The Nigerian Museums cling to the past, showing little motivation and no clear vision of what they should do or how to respond to contemporary society. Balogun (1997) opined that Nigerian Museums should promote new ideas and strategies that are not oblivious to current events in society.

One such significant area where the Museum of National Unity Akure can focus is the numerous Oba palaces in Ondo State. Many of the palaces are being redesigned without any regard for the historical significance of the old structures that are being pulled down. A good example is the new facelift that has been given to the Osemowe of Ondo's palace. Osemowe is the King of Ondo town. His palace is located at the centre of the town, which is about 40km away from Akure, the capital of Ondo state. While this paper does not condemn such development, it prefers that should it be expedient to tamper with the ancient palace structures, the museum should be brought in for a consultation on how to embark on such development without jeopardizing the historical value of such structures. For example, where it becomes inevitable to demolish old building structures, the museum can be made to take photographic and audio/visual documentation of such buildings before they are pulled down.

For our museum to be relevant in the 21st century there is a dire need for their immediate reactivation. The architectural structures, as well as other facilities, should be put in shape and constantly maintained. The National Commission for Museums and Monuments should actively dispense its ethnographers' and archaeologists' responsibilities as stipulated in the National Commission for Museums and Monuments Decree 77 of 1977 (Aig-Imoukhuede, 1991; National Council of Art and Culture, 1998). The decree stipulated the main function of the commission thus:

- (1) to administer national museums, antiquities and monuments;

(2) to establish and maintain national museums in connection with, (but not restricted to) antiquities, science and technology, warfare, African, Black and other antiquities, arts and crafts, architecture, natural history and education service etc.

Museum personnel should be well-trained and managed for efficiency. An acute shortage of qualified personnel is plaguing African Museums today (Balogun, 1998). Adequate funds should be provided to expose museum personnel to overseas training, while the Jos International Training Centre, initially funded by UNESCO should be revived.

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Notes

- Note 1. Asodeboyede - the first Oba (King) in Akure. His reign was dated back to circa 1150-1180 AD, he ruled for thirty years according to oral traditions. He is the only child of Ekun the first son of Oduduwa- progenitor of Yoruba race.
- Note 2. Uwa (courtyards) is a traditional impluvium- a large enclosed/ interior space that opens to the sky. It has significant architectural value it introduces daylight and air into the interior parts of the palace. It also serves as the point of collection of rainwater in a traditional Yoruba house design (an equivalent of the modern system for rainwater harvesting). The Deji palace has twenty-eight (28) numbers such as “ Uwa” of different sizes and functions