

## THE EMERGENCE OF MUSEUM IN NIGERIA: SUSTENANCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE CHALLENGES

UREKWERE JOE-MGBAKIRI

Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Faculty of Humanities

Ignatius Ajuru University of Education

Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt

### Abstract

*The paper examined the pre-colonial and colonial efforts in the collection of cultural objectives towards the emergence of museum. The contributions made by three important British Nationals such as K. C. Murray, E. H. Duckworth and B. E. B. Fagg to the establishment of museums in Nigeria were highlighted. The work espoused the role of political leaders, traditional rulers, academic lecturers and researchers for the emergence of museums in Nigeria. The discourse also analysed museum operations in Nigeria. Among the recommendations, the paper developments within the country with a view to enriching their collections and information based in order to suit contemporary society.*

**Key words:** Museum, Cultural, Objects, Sustenance, Emergence.

### Introduction

The collection of cultural objects existed in different parts of Nigeria before the emergence of public museums. The various religious shrines found among the communities acted as repositories for religious and cultural objects. The deified ancestral worship and belief in a communion between the living and the dead encouraged the gathering of the religio-cultural objects which later formed the basic objects or materials for the emergence of public museum. For instance, in some of our museum today can be found object used for religious worship in the pre-colonial era and stood as a replica of our worship system are seen today in the public museum (Okita, 1985:1).

The heads of each family or village gathered these objects, kept them in a save place and presented those that could rot away in a small section built within the family hall especially in the Niger Delta. Museum at this period was seen by the people as a temple and a meeting place where issues were discussed, tested and put into practice. Thus, the idea of a prototype museum had existed in Nigeria which has remained a driving force to the emergence and development of public museums.

British Nationals such as K. C. Murray, E. H. Duckworth and B. E. B. Fagg made significant contributions towards the emergence of museum. Some of them donated their personal collections in order to bring to success the good project of "museum" in Nigeria.

### Conceptual Clarification

The word "museum" is of Greek derivation from the Greek word *mouseion*. It was applied to a sanctuary dedicated to the muses of Greek mythology believed to be the nine virgin daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne whose temples later served for the gathering of religious and educational objects (Okita, 1985:64). Derefaka (2002:250) defines a museum as "a permanent institution in the service of society and its development, and open to the public which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits for the purpose of study, education and enjoyment, the material evidence of man and his environment".

Okita (1985) defines museum as "a non-profit making permanent institution in the service of society and its development, and open to the public for purposes of study, education and enjoyment". The International Council of Museums (ICOM) cited in Okita (1985) defines museum as "any permanent institution which conserves and displays for purposes of

study, education and enjoyment collections of objects of cultural or scientific significance". Thus, museum could be seen as a place open to the general public for entertainment, educational enquiries and collections of useful objects.

### **The Pre-Colonial Collection of Objects**

In the earliest time, Nigerians collected many objects through our religious worships and cultural practices established by the ancestors of the different groups. Alagoa (2000:31-32) posits that various Niger Delta roots existed and formed positive ideas towards the establishment of public museums in Nigeria. He argued that the ancestral shrines of the Niger Delta house the memorabilia of ancestors, kings and founders of lineages and communities. Thus, the ancestral shrines by implication came close to the western idea of public museum.

The royal collections of the emirs, obas, paramount rulers and chiefs also constituted a major form of gathering objects for the public museum. The collections which emanated from them include hereditary objects, ceremonial objects, war booties, gift items and items received from vassal states to express political subordination.

Royal patronage of works of art contributed to the accumulation of cultural objects. Nigerian kingdoms are blessed with cultural works of arts. Although, in Benin, as one of the cultural kingdoms in Nigeria, the European in 1897 carted away different works of arts that must have taken centuries to accumulate. Those charged with the custodianship of the collections were mandated to preserve them successfully. The techniques of preservation were by hanging and smoking. The objects were hanged under the roof to be safe from insects attacks while some were preserved with smoke in the kitchen. From the above discussion, it seems to me that prototype of any museum (collections) and other important functions of museum today (preservation and conservation) existed in different parts of the area now called Nigeria in the pre-colonial era.

### **Emergence of Public Museum in Nigeria**

The idea of a public museum emerged during the colonial era which resulted to the actual establishment. The individuals who championed this work were mainly expatriates of British nationals and were teachers, political officers and miners. Their main aim was to preserve the material cultural heritage of Nigerian people wrought in clay, wood and metal which depict Nigeria's artistic creativity.

In discussing the role played by the British nationals to the emergence of museum in Nigeria, three British national such as K. C. Murray, E. H. Duckworth and B. E. B. Fagg stand out as they played the main part in laying a solid foundation for the development of Nigerian museum.

#### **K. C. Murray**

K. C. Murray is seen as the founder of the public museums in Nigeria. His name first mentioned in connection with Nigerian art was in reference to one Chief Aina Onabolu, who, after obtaining a Diploma in Fine Arts in London returned to Lagos and began to introduce art teaching at the secondary school level. Okita (1985:2) notes that a more significant achievement of Onabolu was that he succeeded in persuading the then Director of Education to employ Art teachers from the United Kingdom to take teaching appointments in the secondary and teacher training schools in Nigeria. Consequently, Kenneth C. Murray, an outstanding Art teacher came to Nigeria in 1927 and was assigned to teach Art in government schools.

He spent quite some time studying pottery and its methods of production in Nigeria and was convinced that there was an urgent need to collect traditional art objects and record

the context of their manufacture and uses before these traditions disappeared under the influence of European culture (Eyo and Willet, 1980:1). In an address read by Murray who was then surveyor of Antiquities at the opening of the Antiquities Commission, on September 10, 1954, he recalled that in 1930's there was a group of officials in the Education Department who were interested in starting museums. They include Mr. E. H. Duckworth, M. J. D. Clarke, Mr. Huntcooke, Mr. S. Mulburn and himself, Murray. These people especially Murray believed that contemporary Nigerian art should develop from the traditional art of Nigeria. But there was no collection of traditional art which the students could examine and thus deemed it necessary to avail the students of some art work.

Murray did not limit himself to collecting art objects for teaching purposes alone, but wrote series of articles for publications in Nigeria and England about the state of arts and crafts in Nigeria and demanded an urgent action for the establishment of museums in Nigeria. In an article entitled "*Art in Nigeria: The Need for Museum*", Murray commended the French, Germans, Belgians and Americans in their efforts towards the recognition and appreciation of African Art especially on sculpture and noted that much work has not been done by the British and the art work in African countries under British control was in a bad condition. He sincerely lamented over the state of artifacts in Nigeria.

At this time also was the period when Igbo Ukwu and Ife bronzes were excavated and Murray got involved with those finds and his interest was appreciated. Murray sounded a warning by noting that a tale of destruction awaits art work in every province in Nigeria such as the ancestral figures in Oron, Anang, Ibo, Benin, Ife, among others. Moreover, he was the preservation of Old works of arts as principally the work of a museum. Such a museum would collect and display art works and works illustrating the history, natural history and geology of the country. In an appeal to his British audience he noted that a museum was necessary to be established since museum gathered together the evidence of past civilization and achievements in art that can help a Nigerian have pride and confidence.

It should be recalled that while he was a teacher, he produced a number of art objects for teaching since there were no collections of art works as at then. These teaching materials in art became the nucleus of the National Museum, Lagos in its early years (Okita, 1985:3). Apart from publication of papers in journals in England to seek support for museums in Nigeria, he organized an exhibition in July 6 and August 7, 1937 entitled *The Exhibition of Wood-Carvings, Terracottas and Water-colours*. From the sales of some of the works and more importantly, the press interest the exhibition generated, the approval for art education in Nigeria started to be looked upon. The presence of the secretary of state for colonies, Mr. Ormsby-Gore and Sir William Rothenstein added colour to the exhibition.

Other exhibitions held in England include: an exhibition of Benin Art held in Berkeley Galleries in 1947. In the opening remark by Lord Milverton he appealed to owners of specimens of Nigeria art in Britain to make arrangements for the return of such works to Nigeria. There was also the exhibition of *Masks and Head-Dress of Nigeria* in London in 1947. These exhibitions helped in getting a general support for cultural collections and activities in Nigeria. As a result, Murray was invited by the government to undertake a survey of Nigeria antiquities and make recommendations on the practical steps for the preservation of our antiquities and the establishment of museums. He became the First Director of the Survey of Antiquities and retained the headship throughout the period when the name was changed, first, to the Antiquities Service and later, to the Antiquities Department. K. C. Murray rightly deserves to be called the founder of Nigerian museum while also acknowledging the contributions of other individuals and groups to the emergence of public museum in Nigeria.

### E. H. Duckworth

E. H. Duckworth is rightly known with the campaign for establishing museums in Nigeria. K. C. Murray mentioned his name as one of the officials in the Education Department interested in establishing museums in the country. In an opening address to the Antiquities commission in 1954, Duckworth's name was mentioned as Murray's greatest helper in the early days of Antiquities Service. Duckworth became very interested on preserving the old crafts of Nigeria and lamented that many of the old crafts, especially those made from wood and brass were in danger of dying out due to lack of support. As the first editor of "The Nigerian Teacher" first published in 1933, he was able to use this forum to campaign for the establishment of museums in Nigeria when he wrote in Okita (1985:7) that;

*...the craft works, the customs of the country can help to create in the mass of the people an appreciation of Nigerian art and culture. The museums of Europe and America contain great and valuable collections of Nigerian craftwork. Some of these treasures were sold by the original owners to foreigners for a mere pittance. ...Do not be afraid, Respect the past, Record its history... Help to build museums in Nigeria. The day may come when people will voyage from all parts of the world to see the museums and exhibition rooms of Lagos, Abeokuta, Ife and Benin City.*

Duckworth was an indefatigable champion in preserving under ideal conditions, all that is best of traditional and historic interest in Nigeria. Series of legislative measures to prevent illegal export of Nigerian arts abroad and to preserve the known ones at home came about largely due to his efforts. He championed the call for the construction of a proper museum to ensure the safety of Ife treasures and the stone figures discovered at Esie.

As consequence for his agitation, the government summoned a meeting and invited Murray to undertake a survey of Nigerian antiquities and make recommendation on what should be done. Duckworth exerted pressure on government which finally resulted to the passing of the Antiquities Ordinance in 1952. On his retirement from government, he was applauded as the Editor of "Nigerian Teacher", organizer of exhibitions who cannot be allowed to pass unnoticed especially on his campaign for the establishment of museums in Nigeria.

### B. E. B. Fagg

Bernard Fagg was one of the three individuals who contributed to the emergence of museums in Nigeria. He came to Nigeria in 1939 as a cadet in the Administrative Service. As an Assistant Administrative Officer, he had contacts with the Bauchi Plateau miners and used his spare time for archeological fieldwork. The Jos miners started around 1909 where stone implements and pottery were discovered which were found in the alluvial deposits where tin-ore is usually found. Fagg recorded the contributions of the miners to what later became the Jos Museum. Thus, Fagg became associated with the Nok Culture in academic cycle and was in touch with the miners whose accidental discoveries dictated the direction and pattern of his excavations. He compared the various finds and established similarities in styles and similarities which were identified later with Nok Culture. Through his careful study, he was able to date the Nok Culture to about 500 B.C.

He carried out a number of scholarly and scientific publications which began to throw a new light on the understanding of man and his activities in the Nigerian area before European contact. Fagg contributed to the use of archaeological objects in reconstructing the pre-colonial history of Nigeria which is the essence of the role of museums in Nigeria where

written sources do not exist prior to contact. Fagg succeeded Murray as the Director of the Nigerian Antiquities (Okita, 1985:15).

A number of other British nationals, among who were colonial administrators contributed to the emergence of museums by donating their private collections or by making publications in journals on the need to establish museums in Nigeria. Some members of the Nigerian Field Society equally used the "Nigerian Field" as a forum for enlightenment about different aspects of Nigerian culture.

### **Contributions by Nigerians**

Nigerians contributed a lot for the emergence of public museums. The richness of the cultures of the people necessitated the overwhelming interest which the various British nationals took in the establishment of museums to house such antiquities or recover those looted from the country. As earlier noted, traditional rulers, chiefs, *Emires*, *Oba of Benin* and *Oni of Ife* did a lot for the emergence of public museums in Nigeria. It was the collection from the Oba's palace which formed the nucleus of Benin Museum when it started. The Sokoto and Argungu museums are not exceptions.

The role played by political leaders such as Alhaji Tafawa Balewa is to be remembered. The Late Prime Minister was known for his keen interest in museums and museum activities received support and attention when he was in charge of the Ministry of Works which in those days had the responsibility of the museum as under their umbrella. The late Prime Minister used his ministerial platform to argue for the establishment of museum in the parliament. Nnamdi Azikiwe (Former President of Nigeria) supported Murray's work and offered constant encouragement to him.

Another important group who supported museum development were people from the Universities mainly lecturers, research fellows, archaeologists and anthropologists. Thus, we find Professor K. O. Dike, a specialist on African History and later Vice Chancellor of the University of Ibadan. He was appointed as the first Chairman of the Antiquities Commission. Other members of the commission include Biobaku, Wangboje and Ogbayemi. The establishment of Institutes of African Studies or Centres for Cultural Studies in Nigerian Universities significantly aided the development of museums (Dike 1954: iv). These research institutions has continued to avail themselves with cultural or African Studies in order to establish and develop their own museums which will give a lead in demonstrating the research role of museum, using their resources to fill the gap that exists in our knowledge of man and his past in Nigerian area. this will enable us have a better understanding of the present and a greater awareness of our responsibility towards the future (Okita, 1985:21).

### **Sustenance**

To sustain the public museums a number of legislations have been made by the government. In 1953, an ordinance to provide for the preservation of antiquities and for any purpose connected therewith was established. This marked the most important stage in the history of Nigerian museums. This document made provisions for the preservation and export restrictions of antiquities and formed the basis for the development of museums in Nigeria. A section of the ordinance provided for a chairman and a deputy chairman to be appointed by the minister. The Antiquities Commission became the policy making body responsible for museum development in Nigeria. It was introduced to the House of Representatives by the first prime Minister of Nigeria, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, who noted the relevance of Nigerian arts and crafts and past history. Through the Federal Department of Antiquities, the

Commission carried out their responsibility of discovering, preserving and studying the material culture of the diverse peoples of Nigeria in all aspects and manifestations.

Thus, at its first meeting on September 10, 1954 the commission drew up requirements for the recognition of a museum which include that its existence is in the public interest and that its collections will be protected against loss or damage and will be open to the public. The antiquities (Export Permits) Regulations were passed to regulate the movement of antiquities out of Nigeria in 1957 was one of the measures taken for the sustenance of museums in Nigeria. Also, in 1974, the military government passed Decree 9 which banned the buying or selling of antiquities except through accredited agents. This Decree conferred on the police and customs the powers to search and of seizure and as well imposed strict penalties on offenders. Decree 9 of 1974 was enacted due to the fact that Nigeria had lost much of its cultural heritage through official and un-official transfers in pre-independence and illegal transfers in post-independence periods (Nzewunwa 1983:118).

Again, in 1979, a comprehensive review of legislation in cultural resources management was carried out which led to Decree 77 of 1979. The explanatory notes stated that "The Decree provides for the dissolution of both the Antiquities Commission and the Federal Department of Antiquities and their merger to form the National Commission for Museums and Monuments..." It also introduced some modifications such as creating the office of a Director General who controls the entire operations of the commission. An Executive Administrative Secretary also was created in charge of research and training.

Still in sustenance of public museum, the government carried out the training of two categories of personnel concerned with culture, resource management which fall under two categories – professionals and non-professionals. The non-professionals are found mainly in the administrative, accounts, maintenance and general duty. Numerically, these groups of workers account for over 80% of the personnel of the commission. Their recruitment as well as training is internally organized within the departments. Personnel of the professional cadre are recruited by the Federal Civil Service Commission and are assigned to the Commission as curators, ethnographers and archaeologists. Even though shortage of staff has hindered the performance of the commission, nevertheless, the commission is sustained over the years with few available personnel and has remained operational.

### **Administrative Challenges**

The major problems facing museums in Nigeria are lack of inadequate finance, space, personnel, government prejudice and lack of devotion to duty arising from the absence of job satisfaction. Inadequate finance has been a major administrative challenge of museums in Nigeria. The acute problems of lack of means (money) have prevented the public museums from recording some relevant periodic events such as cultural festivals and from putting on temporary exhibitions on the occasion of such events or festivals. Indeed, financial inadequacy is also a problem to the government as most of the museums are still the colonial-type museum generally situated in the administrative district of the capital. This must change and make way for new models. The concept of a park museum should be given adequate consideration for play and relaxation and funds should be provided by the government to carry out such plans (Adande, 2002:3).

In support of the economic challenges facing museum as a factor, Deborah (2002:115) posits that poverty of the local people and the often selfish desire of collectors, in economic terms form an inconsiderate force to be reckoned with. Dealers often persuade the indigenous people to part with cultural objects which could have been collected by museum officials if the museums were financially buoyant. The museum professionals have laid the blame of their

work style of making museums to be docile, uninviting and very cold to be a problem of funding. This has trickled down the inability to research on past and contemporary cultures of the Nigerian people as well as organizing exhibitions and public outreach programmes (Arinze, 2002:102).

There are also challenges facing museum in terms of its personnel. The number of staff is inadequate and the training received are insufficient especially for the curator who needs to be trained and retrained every year to meet the current challenges of a contemporary museums. Lack of such training hampers their ability to deliver on the job area for the people to experience the new innovations brought in by museums in Nigeria. However, all other levels of staff such as museum librarian and tour guide need to be retrained every year for maximum delivery and effective output. Learning on the job experience through attendance of lectures, seminars, workshops or training by professional bodies are very inadequate and as such do not yield maximum results. With expansion in cultural resource management, there is the need for more staff. A seminar on Museum and Archeology in Nigeria passed eleven resolutions, some of which dealt with shortage of professionals for administrative and planning projects. Nzewunwa (1983:121) notes that the problem of acute shortage of personnel led to the summoning of a meeting at Ilorin to consider strategies to combat the acute shortage of highly skilled museum curators and technicians in Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

The emergence of museum in Nigeria started from the pre-colonial period and passed many stages with progressive improvements in the colonial era leading to the establishment of public museums. The three British Nationals whose roles cannot be forgotten are; K. C. Murray, E. H. Duckworth and B. E. B. Fagg in the emergence of public museums. These men donated their personal collections and through publications in journal drew the attention of the British government towards the development or emergence of museums in Nigeria. Museum operations in Nigeria have been sustained through several legislations geared towards protecting the past history of Nigeria in the form of artifacts and cultural art objects.

The administrative challenges which the public museums experienced are multi-faceted. They include inadequate finance, personnel, space, lack of devotion to duty arising from the absence of job satisfaction.

### **Recommendations**

- Government should adequately fund the various state and national museums.
- Recruitment and training of staff should be guaranteed. They should engage in training and retraining programme for their personnel so that they can function in a volatile and changing society and develop the capacity to embrace change.
- Museums should make their programmes more public and community-centred and they should involve the public in their activities.
- They should monitor and evaluate developments in society with a view to enriching their collections and information base.
- Museums should document traditional festivals and other forms of events in films, videos, slides and photographs and present them to the wider public. They should aim at bringing excitement and some “noise” into their activities so that the society will feel the impact of museum and appreciate the fact that the museum is for them. It is only by doing this that museums can be seen as institutions relevant to society.
- There should be public orientation about the relevance and uses of museum in the country through the National Orientation Agency.

- The staff should be adequately motivated by the government by providing incentives to enhance their commitment to duty.

### References

- Adande, B. A. (2002). "Origin of the urban phenomenon in Africa" in Adande, B. A. and Arinze, E. (eds). *Museums and urban culture in West Africa*. Oxford: James Currey.
- Alagoa, E. J. (2000). "Museums and history in the Niger Delta" in Ardoium, C. D. and Arinze, E. (eds). *Museums and history in West Africa*. Oxford: James Currey.
- Andah, B. W. (1993). *A celebration of Africa's roots and legacy*. Ibadan: Jajee Publications Ltd.
- Arinze, E. (2003). "The urban culture phenomenon" in Adande, B. A. and Arinze, E. (eds). *Museums and urban culture in West Africa*. Oxford: James Currey.
- Debrah, I. (2002). "The impact of urban culture on museums" in Adande, B. A. and Arinze, E. (eds). *Museums and urban culture in West Africa*. Oxford: James Currey.
- Derefaka, A. A. (2002). "Cultural heritage management" in Alagoa, E. J. and Derefaka, A. A. (eds). *The land and people of Rivers State: Eastern Niger Delta*. Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publication.
- Dike, K. O. (1954). "Chairman's opening address" Appendix A of the minutes of the first meeting of the Antiquities Commission.
- Ekpo, E. & Willet, F. (1980). *Treasure of ancient Nigeria*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc.
- Nzenwunwa, N. (1983). *A source book in Nigerian archeology*. Nigeria: Standard Printing and Publication Co. Ltd.
- Okita, S. I. O. (1985). "The development of public museum in Nigeria" in Afigbo, A. E. and Okita, S. I. O. (eds). *The museum and nation building*. Owerri: New Africa Publishing Co. Ltd.