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## Reviewed Article:

# Expanding Horizons: Contemporary Dynamics and Challenges in Public Archaeology in Nigeria

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The purpose of this essay is to assess the situation of public archaeology in Nigeria. Public archaeology is the practice of sharing archaeological knowledge with the public. It is a branch of archaeology that focuses on engaging the public and making archaeological practices and

findings accessible to non-professionals. Its approach involves community outreach, education, and collaborative projects, aimed at fostering awareness creation for the preservation of cultural heritage. A review of existing works formed the data avenue for conducting the research. The research has identified eight major challenges for Archaeology in Nigeria. In this paper, we discuss these and propose suggestions for how archaeology and heritage education can be fully integrated into all levels of education in Nigeria.



Since the early part of the 20th century, archaeology and its place of unravelling the hidden phases of Nigerian history has been incontestable. This is attested by the fascinating discoveries made in different parts of the country (...) Such discoveries have aroused the consciousness of many relevant stakeholders concerning the hidden aspects of Nigeria's story, thereby, stimulating lots of archaeological investigation in the country.

## Introduction

Archaeology, as a discipline, began in Nigeria around the early 20th Century and so, it is seen as a recent discipline compared to others (Nzewunma, 1984; Andah, 1997; Ogundiran, 2002, 2015; Folorunso, 2011). For Ogundiran (2002) Archaeological practice in Nigeria can be delineated into four phases, beginning from 1940-60, 1961-70, 1971- 78 and 1978-2000, noting that each phase examines how the shifting paradigms and methods gave rise to major landmarks, trends and changes. Consequently, we can extend these phases to include phase five, which began in 2001 to date. These periods saw committed and dedicated archaeologists (both within and outside the country) carry out archaeological research in different parts of Nigeria, with fascinating discoveries, that attracted the attention of scholars from different parts of the world. The archaeological research conducted during the periods under review produced fascinating results from historical sites such as the Nok Valley, *Igbo-Ukwu*, Ancient Ile-Ife, Ancient Benin Empire, Old Oyo Kingdom, *Ropp Rock Shelter*, *Da'ama*, *Mai-idon Taro*, *Kwatarkwashi*, *Kabitu Hills*, *Katsina-Ala Basin*, *Ibinda*, *Bako* and *Kpe Hills*, *Birnin-Kudu Rock Painting*, *Iwo-Eleru Rock Shelter*, *Erijiyan Potsherd Pavements*, *Olumo Rock*, *Idanre Hills*, *Akwanshi Stone Figurines*, *Dustsen Kongba*, *Surami*, *Turunku* and *Nsukka Area*, among others (See Figure 1).

Archaeological research in Nigeria took a step forward with the introduction of archaeology as a discipline of study in different Nigerian universities. The course was first introduced at the University of Ibadan in 1962 as a Unit within the Institute of African Studies and in 1971 as a department. This was followed by the University of Nigeria Nsukka in 1963 also as a Unit under the Department of History and as a separate department in 1981. This was the same with the Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, where archaeology also started as a Unit under the Department of History in 1977 and became an independent department in 2006. See Table 1

below for details about the establishment, progress, and present status of archaeology departments in Nigeria.

Some of these departments have collapsed or closed down following the "unpopularity of archaeology within and outside the campus (as many students come into the university without the knowledge of archaeology, since it is not taught at primary and secondary school levels), and the movement of students from the department (to other disciplines)" (Gundu, 2008, p.3). This is in addition to the lack of adequate professionals in the field of archaeology to handle its affairs. The last point is particularly true in the case of Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University Lapai, and Taraba State University Jalingo, and is presently affecting a section of Heritage Studies in the Department of Religions, History and Heritage Studies at Kwara State University Malete. Moreover, nearly all the public universities in the country offer archaeology courses as part of the history degree programme. These courses are meant to give history students introductory knowledge about archaeology and what constitutes the archaeology of Nigeria.

S/N	University	Name at Establishment	Modified Name	Year of Establishment	Present Status
1	University of Ibadan	Archaeology	Archaeology & Anthropology	1971	Operating
2	University of Nigeria Nsukka	Archaeology	Archaeology & Tourism	1981	Operating
3	Ahmadu Bello University Zaria	Archaeology	Archaeology & Heritage Studies	2006	Operating
4	University of Jos	Archaeology & Heritage Studies	None	2013	Operating
5	Kwara State University	History & Heritage Studies	Religion, History & Heritage Studies	2010	Operating
6	Federal University Lokoja	Archaeology & Museum Studies	None	2019	Operating
7	Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University (formerly Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi)	History & Archaeology	None	2024	Starting
8	Obafemi Awolowo University (formerly University of Ife)	Archaeology	None	1983	Closed
8	Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University Lapai	History & Archaeology	History & Diplomatic Studies	2006	Collapsed

9	Taraba State University Jalingo	History & Archaeology	History & Diplomatic Studies	2008	Collapsed
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TABLE 1: ESTABLISHMENT, PROGRESS, AND PRESENT STATUS OF ARCHAEOLOGY DEPARTMENTS IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES.

Thus, with the introduction of archaeology in Nigerian universities, both its lecturers and students have since engaged in rigorous field research that has been of great significance to the discovery, conservation, preservation, and protection of the cultural heritage of the Nigerian people. This effort has aided some kind of public awareness about the importance of archaeological sites and the need for the protection of the general cultural heritage of the indigenous people of Nigeria. The major challenges faced by archaeologists in the country, however, lie in how cultural materials can be properly preserved and protected against destruction by natural and human-induced threats. This is because most Nigerian citizens are ignorant of the importance of their material culture and what archaeology seeks to achieve (Okpoko, 1986).

In light of this, public archaeology has become a useful tool for public education and enlightenment of the Nigerian people about archaeology and the significance of its cultural heritage. This is because, with the seeming expansion of archaeological research in the country, the public must know the importance of this activity to all the relevant stakeholders. This would ensure adequate creation of awareness so that these efforts are not rendered worthless. The need for this advocacy stems from the fact that public archaeology has not yet met its goals in this part of the world because it has not received the necessary attention from the government, relevant agencies, and those in positions of authority who view archaeology as a profession reserved for the elites and do not see the need to engage with the general public in archaeological research.

## Literature Review

### Public Archaeology

Public Archaeology is a branch of archaeology that works to preserve and protect cultural resources against destruction (either by natural or human activities) by educating the public about the importance of their cultural heritage (Sutton and Yohe, 2006). It is also seen as any aspect of archaeological activity that interacts or has the potential to interact with the public, the vast majority of whom for a variety of reasons, know little about archaeology as an academic subject (Schadla-Hall, 1999). It also "studies the processes and outcomes whereby the discipline of archaeology becomes part of a wider public culture, where contestation and dissonance are inevitable" (Merriman, 2004, p.5). There is no doubt that cultural resources in different countries are witnessing serious threats due to natural disasters, such as earthquakes, mass weathering and erosion, as well as human factors such as construction

works, farming, and belief systems. These have, therefore, called for conscious efforts to preserve and protect these threatened cultural resources for posterity and national development. Thus, there is an urgent need for a serious application of public archaeology to deal with the creation of awareness, education, and stewardship of the public towards proper management of cultural resources (Wesler, 1990).

The relationship here stems from the fact that the public is a major factor in creating cultural heritage and is the body of taxpayers whose money is being used in financing archaeological research or heritage management. Activities such as surveys, excavations, conservation, preservation, and promotion of this cultural heritage are also facilitated with the use of public funds. Generally, archaeological research is conducted for the benefit of the public as the sites being investigated also belong to the public. Thus, the public deserves to be given proper education or awareness on the significance of these cultural heritage resources (Cleere, 1989). To this end, consultation with the public at different stages of archaeological investigation becomes critical. This is because the activity will help to save the cultural heritage in question from amateur/unscientific research, the illicit activities of private collectors, and the effect of development pressures. Enlightenment efforts improve the attitudes of the public towards the activities of archaeologists and make them contribute in different ways towards promoting archaeological investigations.

More so, this exercise can only be appreciated when people consciously understand what cultural heritage stands for. The essence of public archaeology should, therefore, be to engage with the public and make archaeological practices and findings accessible to non-professionals (Flood, 1989). Priority should be given to the recognition of the rights of the people in decisions regarding the cultural heritage of their communities. The results of archaeological research should increasingly be made public for the consumption of all the parties. In most cases, the people are also concerned about the preservation and protection of their cultural heritage. This is seen in the way that they guard jealously their traditions for posterity. These traditions are also transmitted to younger generations through oral traditions, poems, folklore, and songs among others. Ugwuanyi and Schofield (2018) note that in Igboland, significant knowledge about past cultures or traditions is transmitted to younger generations through activities that take place at the village arena. They maintain that the landscape is a space where the intergenerational behaviour of the Igbo, from ancient times, through the present to the future manifest. Ingold (1993, p.152, cited from Ugwuanyi and Schofield, 2018, p.20) "noted that landscape tells, or rather is a story. It enfolds the lives and times of predecessors who, over the generations, have moved around in it and played their part in its formation". They further explain that "landscape-human entanglements express indigeneity and confer rights to heritage control".

This, therefore, calls for collaborative efforts between archaeologists, government, relevant stakeholders, and the public to bring about better ways for the preservation and protection of

cultural heritage. This can be achieved through the teaching and learning of archaeology at all levels of education, an exhibition of cultural heritage in museums open spaces, publications, and promotion of publicity through radios, televisions, magazines, etcetera. Thus, the essence of public archaeology can be achieved, as the public becomes consciously aware of the activities of archaeologists, acceptable attitudes will be imbibed among the people (Edet, 1990).

## **Public Archaeology in Nigeria**

Since the early part of the 20th century, archaeology and its place of unravelling the hidden phases of Nigerian history has been incontestable. This is attested by the fascinating discoveries made in different parts of the country by both colonial administrators and indigenous archaeologists as noted earlier. Such discoveries have aroused the consciousness of many relevant stakeholders concerning the hidden aspects of Nigeria's story, thereby, stimulating lots of archaeological investigation in the country (Okpoko, 1986; Momin and Okpoko, 1990; Andah, 1990). Consequent to the above, the desire to identify, collect, conserve, and preserve these valuable heritage resources led to the establishment of The Antiquities Ordinance No. 17 in 1953 (Nzewunwa, 1984). The Ordinance established the National Department of Antiquities and provided for the establishment of museums, archaeological excavations, protection of monuments and handling of antiques" in Nigeria (Eze-Uzomaka, 2014, p.140). More so, sustained looting, illicit trade, trafficking, and other theft of antiques led to the passage of Decree No. 9 of 1974 to Prohibit Transfers of Antiquities by the Nigerian military government.

With the continued activities of theft in antiquities, there was an urgent need to review legislation protecting the cultural heritage of the country. This led to the promulgation of Decree No. 77 of 1979, which:

*"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. While repealing various enactments relating to Antiquities, the Decree consolidates most of the provisions thereof and makes fresh provisions in connection with the declaration of National monuments. The penalties for the destruction or unauthorised alteration or removal of monuments have been considerably stiffened up"*

(Eze-Uzomaka, 2014, p.141).

The creation of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) was an attempt to publicise archaeological work/research in Nigeria. This promoted the display of cultural antiquities discovered in the early days, most of which were through accidental discoveries. The establishment of the archaeology department in Nigerian universities, beginning with the University of Ibadan, followed by the University of Nigeria Nsukka,

Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, University of Jos, and, most recently, Federal University Lokoja (Nomishan, 2024), as well as a unit of heritage studies in the Department of Religion, History, and Heritage Studies, Kwara State University Malete, has continued to boost archaeological research in the country. Furthermore, Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University, Makurdi (formerly Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi) has also created the Department of History and Archaeology, which was launched during the 2023/2024 academic session. Graduates of these archaeology departments are trained to engage in archaeological-related activities in different sectors of the public and private services in the country to promote cultural heritage discovery, conservation, and preservation (See Figure 2).

Research carried out at both undergraduate and graduate levels in these departments has continued to provide valuable information about the pre-history and cultural heritage of various communities in the country. Recent archaeological investigations in Nigeria are helping to bring archaeologists closer to the public, fostering increasing advocacy for public involvement in archaeological activities (See Figures 1 and 3).

## Challenges of Public Archaeology in Nigeria

According to Nomishan *et al.* (2021), there are several problems attributed to the challenges confronting archaeology and archaeological practice in Nigeria. The challenges outlined in their publication are similar or in some cases the same as those facing public archaeology in Nigeria. Therefore, we do not intend to duplicate their detailed findings here. This research outlines the main challenges specific to public archaeology as follows:

1. Public Ignorance
2. Limited Funding and Resources
3. Political Instability and Insecurity
4. Corruption
5. Insufficient Training and Education
6. Insufficient Community Engagement
7. Globalisation and Modernisation
8. Job Racketeering

### 1. Public Ignorance

In some Nigerian communities, there is a prevailing belief that archaeology contradicts their religious or cultural principles. This perception often leads these communities to actively resist and hinder the work of public archaeologists and university research teams. An example is the contemplation of members of the Dandume communities to cooperate with a team of researchers and students from the Department of Archaeology at Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, who visited the community in 2013 to carry out an archaeological

investigation. The community members expressed a seeming fear that the aim of the visit contradicted their religious beliefs and could mislead their children. The discipline is sometimes viewed as fetishistic, due to its focus on past material culture. This misconception arises from a lack of awareness, illiteracy, and the slowness of effective archaeological education and involvement of local populations in archaeological research (Ugwuanyi, 2018).

As a result, the public often undervalues the importance of preserving their cultural heritage, leading to its neglect or even intentional destruction. More so, colonial influences and the indoctrination that caused even the educated members of African societies to disdain their own culture have further perpetuated public ignorance about archaeology in Nigeria. This is exacerbated by the lack of funding for archaeologists to massively promote public education about the significance of cultural heritage and the need for its preservation in the country. As a result, many Nigerians view these so-called "archaic, fetish, and uncivilised objects" (Nomishan, *et al.*, 2021, p.143) as incompatible with their modern religious beliefs and level of modernisation and globalisation. In some instances, community leaders alongside religious people openly encourage their subjects and followers to neglect or even destroy culturally significant objects as a way of rejecting their own traditional practices (Soyinka, 2006). A direct example of this is the open rejection and denial of the *Swem*, an ancient symbol of the traditional justice system, and other cultural heritage practices of the Tiv people by the present Tor Tiv, the paramount ruler of the Tiv nation (Ajijah, 2017; Yapii, 2024; Nomishan, 2025).

For example, attacks on traditional religious shrines began in the Niger Delta between 1888 and 1890 (Strother, 2016/2017). Between 1915 and 1918, the Kalabari prophet Garrick Sokari Braide led his followers in the destruction of tens of thousands of cultural and religious objects (Strother, 2016/2017). In 1930/31, another Christian leader, Apostle Joseph Ayo Babalola, instructed his Yoruba followers to surrender masks, shrine figures, ceramic objects, and wooden containers for burning during mass revival gatherings. Similarly, in 1950, a spiritual movement in West Africa ordered those accused of anti-social behaviour to surrender their ritual objects for destruction (Strother, 2016/2017). A more recent example is the destruction of over one hundred shrines in Mbaise, Imo State, by the United Congress of Mbaise Christians during a restoration crusade in 2005, an event that occurred without any intervention by archaeologists (Mbachu, 2007; Codewit, 2009). During the early stages of such actions, particularly before independence, colonial masters and foreign traders took advantage of the situation to loot Nigeria's cultural heritage, which was then transported to Europe, America, and Asia (Strother, 2016/2017). Although the Nigerian government initiated rescue efforts after independence, these attempts were insufficient to prevent the widespread destruction and looting of antiques, which occurred simultaneously across different parts of Southern Nigeria.

## **2. Limited Funding and Resources**



Insufficient funding has severely hampered the ability of cultural heritage institutions and experts to effectively fulfil their responsibilities. Numerous cultural heritage sites across the country are undergoing various levels of deterioration without any scientific intervention, while those located in urban areas are being destroyed due to development projects (Ogundele, 1995). Construction activities such as roads, houses, and bridges have become major contributors to the destruction of cultural heritage sites nationwide. The chronic underfunding of cultural heritage institutions and departments in Nigeria has also led to the absence of dating facilities for archaeological materials. Currently, no country in West Africa can boast a functional or well-equipped dating laboratory capable of processing archaeological research samples. The only such laboratory is the Dakar Cheikh Anta Diop Radiocarbon Laboratory operating within the Institut Francophone d'Afrique Noire (IFAN) in Dakar, Senegal. This laboratory is no longer operating as it was during Cheikh Anta Diop's lifetime. After he died in 1986, it fell into disuse but has since been renovated and is now occasionally utilised for research with new equipment following a rehabilitation period (Ndeye, *et al.*, 2004). As a result, most of the archaeological samples collected in Nigeria are sent to laboratories in America, Asia, or Europe for processing.

The above process not only causes significant delays in accessing these laboratories, but the cost of obtaining results is prohibitively expensive for the average researcher without sufficient funding. As a result, many researchers are unable to date their samples. The lack of adequate funding for archaeological research in Nigeria has severely impacted the efficiency of public archaeological practices, leaving the public with limited knowledge of their archaeological heritage resources. This also limits their enthusiasm towards the protection of archaeological heritage around them, creating avenues for destruction and illegal exportation to foreign countries. Moreover, this funding challenge prevents archaeology departments in Nigerian universities from conducting rigorous scientific investigations involving public archaeology across the country. This situation is particularly concerning because field archaeology and public engagement are fundamental requirements for bringing the knowledge of cultural heritage to the public.

### **3. Political Instability and Insecurity**

In recent years, instability and insecurity have posed significant threats to cultural heritage resources and public archaeological practices in Nigeria. This pervasive issue has led to the loss of countless lives and properties across the country. Individuals face dangers in transit, at home, workplaces, schools, farmlands, churches, and hospitals. Kidnapping for ransom has become alarmingly widespread, with victims often suffering further atrocities, such as rape or even murder, despite ransom payments (Nomishan, *et al.*, 2021). The abduction of school children, particularly those in boarding schools, has become a distressing trend, beginning with the infamous Chibok school girls in Borno State and followed by abductions at Dapchi, Kankara, Greenfield University, and Joseph Sawuan Tarka University.

This ugly trend started in 2014 with the kidnapping of 276 Chibok school girls and has continued unabated to this day (Oriola, 2024). As recently as 15th August 2024, about 20 medical students of the Universities of Jos and Maiduguri were kidnapped while travelling for an annual convention in Benue State (Aljazeera, 2024). The security situation across Nigeria is deteriorating daily, with various regions grappling with unique challenges. In the North-East, Boko Haram's insurgency has displaced over 2 million people and claimed over 30,000 lives. The North-West suffers from rampant banditry, particularly in states such as Kaduna, Katsina, and Zamfara, where armed groups rob and kidnap for ransom, with over 1,126 fatalities reported in 2020 alone. In the Middle Belt, violent clashes between herders and local communities, especially in states such as Benue, Nassarawa, and Plateau, have led to significant unrest. The southern regions face issues such as piracy, vandalism, and theft in the Niger Delta, and violence from separatist groups such as the Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) in the South-East (Nomishan, *et al.*, 2021).

These pervasive security challenges have severely impacted archaeologists, whose work necessitates field research and public engagement in often remote areas. Archaeologists such as Prof. Peter Breunij and his associate, Johannes Buringer were kidnapped in Jenjela, a village near Kaduna in 2017 (Guardian, 2017). Archaeology relies on gathering primary data from heritage sites and interacting with the relevant public in their investigations, however, this current insecurity makes fieldwork perilous, as researchers are as vulnerable as any other civilians. To mitigate these risks, archaeologists sometimes require security personnel during their research, but this approach is fraught with complications. The presence of security forces can attract retaliation from bandits or insurgents, endangering the local communities where research is conducted. Furthermore, archaeological sites themselves have become targets; notable examples include the destruction of artefacts at the National Council for Cultural Orientation in Jos and the repeated attacks on the Sukur Kingdom, a World Heritage Site in Adamawa State by Boko Haram (Nomishan, *et al.*, 2021).

Another concerning trend is the forceful renaming of locations to alter historical narratives. Migrants settling in new areas often change place names for political or dominance-driven reasons, leading to conflicts and further destabilising the region. For instance, in Southern Taraba, attempts to rename locations originally named in the Tiv language have sparked opposition and unrest. Similar incidents have occurred in the Northern parts of Nigeria, particularly on the Jos Plateau, where Hausa/Fulani migrants have replaced indigenous place names, exacerbating tensions (Nomishan, *et al.*, 2021). The cumulative impact of these security challenges is a significant hindrance to archaeological research, public archaeological engagements, and the preservation of Nigeria's rich cultural heritage, threatening both the safety of researchers, host communities and the integrity of the sites they study.

#### **4. Corruption**

Corruption, a pervasive issue in Nigeria (Adagbabiri, 2018), is also deeply entrenched in the cultural heritage sector. The most concerning culprits are often political appointees overseeing cultural heritage institutions. These institutions, such as the NCMM, federal and state ministries of culture, and national and state councils for arts and culture, are tasked with the critical responsibilities of collecting, conserving, preserving, protecting, managing, and promoting cultural heritage resources in the country. They are specifically established to safeguard cultural sites and heritage resources from criminal activities, including looting and illegal trade and trafficking in antiquities. Due to the high level of corruption within these institutions, however, Nigeria's cultural heritage resources have continued to be vulnerable to systematic looting, mismanagement, and destruction (Adekola, 2015). The impact of this situation is notable in the limited capacity of these institutions, especially the NCMM and its museum, to effectively involve the public by sponsoring and promoting public archaeological initiatives.

To further illustrate the above, allegations have surfaced against NCMM staff accused of colluding with expatriates and foreign professionals to conduct unethical archaeological practices in parts of the country under the pretext of scientific research, often without the knowledge, consent, contribution of relevant stakeholders (Gundu, 2012). In 2012, the Archaeological Association of Nigeria, led by then-President Prof. Zacharys Anger Gundu, accused Professor Peter Breunig, the project director of the Nok Cultural Landscape Archaeological Research, and his team of exporting several excavated objects, including terracotta figurines, to Germany without any inventory being filed with the NCMM or thorough public engagement. Although Professor Breunig denied these allegations, he provided no evidence to substantiate his team's innocence (Nomishan, *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, the administrative and structural weaknesses of the NCMM and the insecure conditions of its museums have facilitated numerous thefts of valuable cultural heritage objects over time. These stolen items include masks, bronze sculptures, ivory pieces, ancestral drums, Esie soap stones, Oron monoliths, Igbo Ukwu artefacts, and Benin bronzes. Other stolen artefacts include Nok terracotta figurines, traditional door posts from Awka, Ife sculptures, and various antiquities from the Jos Museum (Gundu, 2014, 2020). These examples represent just a fraction of the widespread problem militating against the practice of public archaeology in Nigeria.

## **5. Insufficient Training and Education**

The number of active archaeologists in Nigeria is remarkably low (below 500), compared to other professionals or occupations in the country. Being a large and diverse country with numerous ethnic groups, Nigeria should have produced over 5,000 active archaeologists by now. For example, in 2020, the UK had around 6,300 archaeologists of which 250 were working with public archaeology, while in 2014 the USA, with more than 11,000 archaeologists, still faced concerns about meeting their research needs (Rocks-Macqueen,

2014; Aitchison and Dore, 2022). The shortage of expert archaeologists in Nigeria has left many cultural heritage sites unexplored and limited public archaeological initiatives in the country. Many students who enrol in archaeology programs at Nigerian universities later change their majors, and those who finish their degrees in archaeology frequently go on to graduate studies in related fields that are thought to provide better job opportunities. Because of this, very few people are still committed to pursuing Master's and PhD degrees in archaeology. This limited pool of scholars is insufficient to fully explore the vast archaeological potential and community engagement needs in Nigeria.

## **6. Insufficient Community Engagement**

In Nigeria, the involvement of local communities in archaeological research has not yet received the attention it deserves. Nigerian archaeologists have yet to fully integrate local populations into their research activities (Ugwuanyi, 2018). This delay is particularly concerning because the archaeological records, which form the primary source of information for researchers, originate from these communities. The knowledge needed to fully understand these cultural heritage resources often resides with the indigenous people, whose historical connections to the artefacts are sometimes deeply rooted. In many cases, this information has been preserved and transmitted through generations by their ancestors (Nomishan, *et al.*, 2021). Without meaningful inclusion of these communities, vital information about their heritage and history may be withheld, preventing researchers from drawing accurate conclusions.

In some Nigerian communities, archaeologists have encountered resistance due to their approach towards local populations. When these communities are involved and treated with respect, however, they are more likely to share crucial information willingly. Moreover, the local people play a significant role in safeguarding cultural materials within their communities. Their involvement in the preservation and protection of such cultural heritage resources is essential, as they are key stakeholders in these efforts (Nomishan, *et al.*, 2021). Archaeologists have a responsibility to educate and raise awareness among host communities about the significance of the archaeological materials in their vicinity. This education can inspire a commitment to protecting their cultural heritage from potential threats (Zimmerman, 2006). The need to safeguard archaeological materials and cultural heritage from destruction led to the emergence of a specialised sub-field known as Cultural Resource Management (CRM).

## **7. Globalisation and Modernisation**

Globalisation and modernisation have significantly impacted public archaeology initiatives in Nigeria, often in ways that undermine the preservation and appreciation of the country's rich cultural heritage. One of the most notable effects is the erosion of traditional knowledge and practices (Gubam and Nomishan, 2021). As global cultural norms and modern lifestyles

become more pervasive, younger generations are increasingly disconnected from their cultural roots. This detachment leads to a diminished interest in preserving local archaeological sites and cultural practices, as the values and histories that these sites represent are perceived as less relevant in a rapidly modernising world (Nomishan and Sani, 2023). Consequent upon this, public archaeology initiatives, which rely heavily on community engagement and the transmission of indigenous knowledge, face significant challenges in garnering the support and participation of local community members. Modernisation has also brought about rapid urbanisation and infrastructural development, which pose direct threats to archaeological sites. In many parts of Nigeria, particularly Abuja, Lagos, Port Harcourt, Kano, and Onitsha among many others, urbanisation through the construction of new infrastructure has led to the destruction or degradation of important archaeological sites, as these areas are often viewed as obstacles to development rather than as valuable cultural resources. The pressure to modernise has left little room for the careful consideration and protection of archaeological sites, making it difficult for public archaeology initiatives to succeed. Without adequate legal frameworks and public awareness, these sites are vulnerable to being irreparably damaged or lost, depriving future generations of knowledge about their cultural heritage.

## **8. Job Racketeering**

Job racketeering in Nigeria's public and private sectors substantially hinders the success of public archaeology based on the fact that positions meant for professional archaeologists and heritage experts are given out to non-archaeologists without the expertise to handle them. For instance, the Federal and State Ministries of Culture, National and State Councils for Arts and Culture, and the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, along with its museums and associated institutions frequently employ personnel who lack the requisite qualification in archaeology or heritage management. This, in turn, jeopardises efforts to conduct adequate research, conservation, and promotion of Nigeria's cultural heritage, while also creating awareness to the public. Instead of engaging experts to lead archaeological and heritage-related institutions, there are many unqualified staff employed in such institutions who cause mismanagement, stagnation of innovations, and weak policy implementation (Nomishan *et al.*, 2023).

Besides the problem of the lack of strong laws that can ensure the employment of archaeology and heritage professionals within relevant institutions mandatory, consequent issues, such as neglect or rather mismanagement, as a result of wrongful staffing have led to cultural heritage resource deterioration and public ignorance. This non-prioritisation of the employment of those with expertise in the management of heritage resources within the country, guarantees the continued lack of knowledge of the significance of cultural heritage by the public.

This systemic problem reflects on events like the smuggling of the Ikom Monoliths from Cross River State to the USA in 2020 (Nomishan *et al.*, 2023). The fact that this theft could escape the eyes of Nigerian Customs and Immigration officers remarkably highlights the absence or lack of adequately trained personnel in archaeology and heritage. In addition to providing expert assistance to real security checks and helping significantly to protect Nigeria's heritage from illicit trade and trafficking, archaeologists and heritage professionals can also create awareness among service men and women on how to recognise heritage objects, particularly antiquities. Moreover, strengthening laws and enforcing regulations that mandate the employment of archaeologists and heritage experts in relevant agencies, departments, and institutions, is an essential parameter to curbing the loss of Nigeria's past and also creating the needed awareness about archaeology to the public.

## Discussion

The above challenges have continued to surface and overshadow the efforts made by archaeologists for several other reasons. One of them is that the archaeological education curriculum in Nigeria does not yet align with current technical or emerging trends that require archaeologists to appreciate the public arena fully, and the need to collaborate with the different stakeholders in the study of the past and the promotion of heritage knowledge (Gundu, 2008). In addition, the lack of inclusion of archaeology and heritage studies in the primary and secondary education curriculum in Nigeria (Okpoko, 1986; Agbelusi, 2015) has brought serious negligence of archaeology by prospective students seeking admission into higher education institutions in the country. Prospective students are usually more interested in other courses such as law, medical sciences, engineering, architecture, management, and other science and social science courses, which have been popular with them from the primary and secondary levels of education. Some students who have over time found their way into archaeology at tertiary institutions get conveniently adjusted to pursue it with vigour.

Even though archaeology is still trying to grasp its space in Nigeria, it has contributed immensely to the identity construction, historical reconstruction and socio-economic development of the country. Archaeological research in Nigeria has produced results of renowned historic sites, ancient cities, and empires as noted above (see Nomishan, *et al.*, 2023). It is unfortunate, however, that many communities in Nigeria have not yet witnessed an archaeological investigation. More so, many Nigerians including several elites are presently unaware of any archaeological site or discoveries around them. By implication, they do not know anything about archaeological discoveries in the country and when they do, archaeology is perceived as the study of useless ancient things. Most Nigerians are ignorant of the discipline and its impact on the nation.

The problem (of lack of public awareness and education about archaeology in Nigeria) has continued to this day because of different causative factors as presented above. The

government as one of the major stakeholders in cultural heritage, does not bother to pay attention to long-term matters. They like to invest in contracts and other projects that will pay off right away. As a result, the government's funding for archaeological-related agencies and institutions, as well as its support for archaeological study in general, is incredibly inadequate. Due to this lack of funding, the majority of archaeological research findings are not made public. Also, due to the government's indifferent attitude towards archaeological study, foreign organisations fund the majority of these studies; as a result, materials discovered are frequently transported to other countries, either with or without the knowledge of relevant stakeholders.

Another factor is the lack of inclusion of archaeology in the primary and secondary school curriculum, which has helped to maintain archaeological ignorance among the public and even among some educated citizens in the country. In addition, the Nigerian public is not given the desired awareness and education about archaeology through the mass media, like television, radio, newspaper/magazines and even in adult education programmes. This means that the place of both formal and informal education in creating public awareness and education about archaeological achievements in Nigeria is yet to be exploited.

Furthermore, most graduates of archaeology turn to take other jobs not related to the discipline. This is because, at the moment, jobs associated with the discipline are not remunerated favourably. Therefore, many archaeology graduates in the country consciously abandon the training acquired as professional archaeologists to take other better-remunerated jobs. The above dilemma negates the basic aim of training professionals to recruit more archaeologists for research work and public education about cultural heritage in various parts of the country. This position does not mean that archaeology graduates are not sufficiently equipped to work in other government agencies or positions, but that they have a duty as professional archaeologists in different ways and even to help publicise archaeology to other Nigerians.

Public archaeology in Nigeria is also hampered by job racketeering in both the public and private sectors, where non-archaeologists and heritage experts are employed in positions of great relevance to archaeology and heritage management. This has continued to guarantee poor policy execution, innovation stagnation, and mismanagement of already inadequate resources. Public ignorance and the degradation of cultural heritage in the country is being promoted by the lack of laws and their enforcement, requiring the authorities to employ archaeology and heritage professionals in relevant agencies, parastate, ministries, institutions, and departments among others. Events such as the 2020 smuggling of *Ikom* Monoliths from Nigeria to the USA, which brought attention to the shortage of qualified archaeology and heritage staff in the Police, and Customs, Immigration, are indicative of these systematic issues. Reducing the loss of Nigeria's heritage and increasing public knowledge of archaeology can be achieved by enacting laws and making regulations that

require the hiring of archaeologists and heritage professionals in relevant positions in both the public and private sectors.

Finally, illicit trafficking of Nigerian cultural antiquities has been another serious factor confronting public archaeology in Nigeria (Ojedokun, 2012). This is because most of the cultural objects supposed to be exhibited at museum galleries for public education and to serve as agents of public appreciation have continued to find their way to different parts of the world like Europe, America, and Asia. The actions of looters targeting Nigeria's cultural heritage have led some community members, aware of the value of cultural heritage, to refrain from sharing vital information about their heritage even with archaeologists conducting legitimate research work. This is due to the fear that they, too, might be looters.

## Recommendations

With the mass ignorance of the public in the activities of archaeologists in Nigeria, a lot still needs to be done by experts, relevant stakeholders (including individuals, groups, or organisations), and the associated institutions to promote public awareness about archaeology in the country. There should be continuous and increasing calls to different quarters for the involvement of the public in the management of cultural resources. Most importantly, Decree No. 77 of 1979 which established the National Commission for Museums and Monuments should be amended to address the improper exclusiveness of non-professionals in archaeological investigations in Nigeria. The Decree fails to create room for amateur archaeologists, who are, most often, highly interested in archaeological research and, if given the opportunity, can mobilise people at the grassroots towards the promotion and publicising of archaeological discoveries. It is worthy of note that some of these amateur archaeologists have the potential to become professional archaeologists if given the room to participate.

It is also important to note that most people are usually very conscious of their past. This is evident in their ability to memorise the past as reflected in their oral traditions, poems, folklore, songs, legends, and proverbs among others. With the application of archaeological expertise, therefore, this knowledge stored in their memories can be put into proper documentation for posterity. This can also help people to understand fully the benefits of cultural antiquities and the special role the past can play to positively shape the present. As the number of trained archaeologists has kept increasing because of the increase in the institutions providing the training, professionalism should be given priority. The Federal and States Civil Service Commissions in Nigeria should encourage professionalism in all sectors to give archaeologists their rightful place in the Civil Service. At the moment, it is very discouraging that most of the positions meant for archaeologists in the Civil Service are given to non-archaeologists. In addition, archaeology should be incorporated into the curriculum of primary and secondary levels of education in Nigeria to create familiarity and awareness about the discipline among members of the public. Moreover, as individuals get familiar with



their cultural heritage, there will be an awakening for the patriotic citizenry to pave the way for national unity, social stability, and economic development.

Finally, archaeologists have a duty to publicise their research work. It is also very important to train archaeologists from Nigeria and make them understand the necessity of writing for different genres such as professional and public audiences. It is incumbent on them to get the public and the press interested in what they do. The government and other relevant stakeholders should, therefore, join hands to support the archaeologists in their effort to research and disseminate the results of such investigations in Nigeria. Information (they say) is knowledge and power, therefore putting all efforts to woo the press and other publishers to archaeological research in the country will help bridge its gap with the public.

Archaeologists are also encouraged to utilise social media, which has increasingly confirmed the notion that the world is a global village, in their efforts to get their work public. Museums in the country should also begin a periodic open exhibition of cultural objects in both cities and villages to promote cultural heritage education in Nigeria.

## Conclusion

Public archaeology is a fundamental tool in cultural resource management worldwide. This involves consultation with the public who are perceived as the custodians of this cultural heritage and doubles as part of the audience that consumes the report of every archaeological investigation (including researchers, heritage experts, cultural specialists, other archaeologists, anthropologists, historians, etcetera). As noted earlier, public archaeology is yet to take its rightful place in Nigeria, as most people are unaware of any archaeological achievement in the country. This is probably one of the reasons why patronage of Nigerian museums has been exceedingly low over the years compared to other countries.

The government and other relevant stakeholders, including archaeologists, have not done enough to make archaeological discoveries and activities in the country known to the public. Hence, many Nigerians perceive archaeology as the profession of elites. Most Nigerians do not embark on archaeological research because of passion, but the fact that they simply must do that to fulfil the requirements for a particular certificate. All these have been sufficient in continuously keeping archaeology at a distance from the public. Thus, it is obvious that this can be corrected. This is because if all the relevant stakeholders wake up from the unexpectedly long doze, archaeology will assume its rightful place in Nigeria within a short time. The government, relevant stakeholders, individuals, and non-governmental organisations have a role in correcting this menace.

📖 **Keywords** public archaeology  
heritage  
education

📖 **Country** Nigeria

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## Gallery Image



FIG 1. KPE HILL, ONE OF THE NUMEROUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES IN THE SOUTHERN PART OF TIVLAND. PHOTO BY TERNGU SYLVANUS NOMISHAN.



FIG 2. CONSULTATION VISIT TO THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF COLONIAL HISTORY IN LOKOJA. PHOTO BY TERNGU SYLVANUS NOMISHAN.



FIG 3. ARCHAEOLOGISTS, STUDENTS, AND VISITORS ON SITE IN THE ANCIENT CITY OF LOKOJA. PHOTO BY TERNGU SYLVANUS NOMISHAN.