NOK AND POST-NOK ERA TERRACOTTA SCULPTURES IN PUBLIC PLACES IN KADUNA STATE: PEDIGREE AND EVOLUTION

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Abstract
The geographical area covered by Kaduna State forms a substantial part of what makes up the archaeological area known as Nok Culture. The group of sculptures found to have been produced by the people who inhabited this region were terra cotta sculptures that possessed common stylistic similarities. About two thousand years later, a rich and vibrant sculpture tradition still exists within the region. What is missing, however, is the rich ceramic content of the contemporary sculptures. Modernisation with its attendant urbanisation and migrations has changed the cultural, religious and social outlook of the inhabitants of this region. Newer and more durable materials have grown to replace terracotta which was hitherto the most viable material in the classical era. This paper shall attempt to identify similarities in style, technique and materiality if any.

The Classical Nok Era

The present day Kaduna State forms a fraction of what is known as the Nok culture. Nok culture is a term that describes the terra cotta sculptures that are found in the geographical area in northern Nigeria that is habited today by the Ham, Jaba, Hausa, Jukun, Gwari, Birom, Kanuri Nupe and other smaller ethnic groups. Archibong, (2010) reports that, Professor Peter Breunig acknowledges that Nok Culture was named according to "an internationally accepted scientific model of taxonomy, which is either hierarchical classification of things or the principle underlying the classification". The choice of Nok was made not because the sculptures were found only in the Ham town called Nok but because the first figurines were discovered in the vicinity of the Nok site and that the specific origins are not known.

The terra cotta figures through Radiocarbon and thermo-luminescence tests are dated between 2000 and 2500 years ago. Although there appears to be non-specificity in the dating, Archibong, (2010) also states that "Archaeologists cited furnaces found at Taruga, which are older than 5,000 years, as proof that the Nok were the first known workers of iron in this part of the world". In the year 1923 a number of artefacts were accidentally unearthed by tin miners led by Lt. Col. John Dent-Young an Englishman in the village of Nok. He later deposited these finds at the Jos Museum. Four year later, eleven more statuettes were discovered in Kwatarkwashi near Sokoto in the present day Zamfara State, this also brought terracotta sculptures of almost identical characteristics from Katsina into the lime light (Halloway, 2013; Archibong, 2010; http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/nok/hd_nok.htm, 2000, and Willet, 1971).

The mystery surrounding the Nok terracotta sculptures is described by Memoire d'Afrique which has a galley of statues as "extraordinary, astonishing, ageless, timeless and almost extraterrestrial" (Halloway, 2013). The open manner which the sculptures show

human feelings according to Speight and Toki, (1999) "suggests a rich artistic heritage, and the sculptures exhibit a sophisticated simplification of form". It would also be pertinent to add that the ageing nature of the finds and the texture realized as its result gave a near-life feeling to the sculptures. In most places where they were discovered, the sculptures were found in fragments, most times the heads were found intact with the other body parts broken because of the manner of their excavation. The figures were a representation of people with large and mostly elongated heads with almond or triangular shaped eyes and some with parted lips. Encyclopaedia Britannica in Archibong, (2010) and Eyo, (1977) reports that "Distinctive features of Nok Art include naturalism; stylizes treatment of the mouth and eyes; relative proportions of the human head, body, and feet; distortions of the human facial features; and the treatment of animal forms." Inasmuch as every Nok head is unique, there is a stylist leaning in the representation of the eyes with perforated pupils, nose and mouth that sums up into a bold abstracted style. Notable also is the detailed hairstyles and elaborate jewellery that adored the figures. The hairstyles that the figures wore were as elaborate as the jewelleries that are displayed on them. These showed that the Nok were also master craftsmen in other areas like bead work (http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/nok/hd_nok.htm, 2000).

Authors seem to agree that the Nok terracotta were produced through the coil method of modelling and later, a subtractive method was used in a manner similar to wood-carving in bringing out the forms. The sculptures were then fired in open furnaces as is still practiced by traditional potters within the same geographical area till date (Speight and Toki, 1999). The proportion of the heads to the body was of the popular typical African style. According to Kleiner, (2009) and Oyelola, (2004) there is also a speculation that the Nok sculptures were produced by women, since till the recent, the art of pottery is still practiced by women in the area that the Nok terracotta were found.

Sculptures in the traditional epoch in Africa served various functions ranging from social, religious, judicial, utilitarian etc. Archaeologists have not been able to pin any specific functions of the Nok sculptures, rather, what exists are speculations of judicial functions as opined by Halloway, (2013) who described the Nok society as having a complex judicial system. Other assumptions include the portrayal of ancestral figures which was common to most sculptures of the classical African era. They could have been also used to mark graves or represent gods that regulate success in farming and hunting.

The culture started witnessing a sharp drop in the production of sculptures and pottery at about 200 AD according to Halloway, (2013), this was revealed by the dating of the products of Nok. One can speculate that the fall in production could have been as a result of a conquest by another group with stronger military might that discouraged the production of the terracotta and pottery. A famine could have also kept the people busy with looking for food than the production of sculptures. Today, there are no indications of the production of such sculpture as a modern practice.

The Post-Nok Era

Sculptural activities are evident to today within Kaduna State where the Nok culture thrived about 2500 years ago. Three towns are selected for the purpose of this paper based on their level of urbanisation. They are Kaduna, Zaria and Kafanchan. The choice of these urban centres is also based on their tolerance for sculptures in public spaces.

Zaria

Zaria has a history that is glorified to have blossomed in the Islamic era, but not much is known about its pre Islamic epoch apart from legends of the renowned Queen Amina, which if placed in proper historical perspectives would not survive because of the position of women in Islam. However, Zaria falls within the geographical ambit of the area covered by the Nok culture. Zaria today houses the Department of Fine Arts and the Department of Industrial Design, Ahmadu Bello University, which is popularly known as the Zaria Art School. The Department of Fine Arts was founded in 1953 at the former Ibadan campus of the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology NCAST to the Zaria campus in 1955. The college metamorphosed to the University of

Northern Nigeria and later to Ahmadu Bello University. The Department of Industrial Design was carved out of the Department of Fine Arts thereby separating the fine arts from the applied arts. The school being the premier art school in Nigeria produced graduates who moved out to found other art schools in Nigeria. The location of the art school in the predominantly Muslim north poses a paradox because of the abhorrence of sculptures in Islam.

However, the Zaria Art School has grown to be the repository of the highest number of public sculptures in northern Nigeria and arguably the whole of Nigeria. Interestingly, inasmuch as Sculpture Ceramics and Ceramic Sculpture are offered as courses in the Departments of Fine Arts and Industrial Design respectively, it appears that it is only Abass Ahuwan a professor of Ceramics who has continued in the terracotta culture that was akin to the Nok culture.

The sculpture garden of the Zaria Art School, (Plates III and IV) contains sculptures that are dated from the early days of the school to recent times. The stylistic tendencies that are inherent in the sculptures portray a reaffirmation of the freedom of stylistic expression that the school is known for. The materiality of the collection is dominated by concrete sculptures while a handful of mild steel and other mixed media dilute the collection. The sculptures can be grouped into realism, semi realism, abstractions that include biomorphic and geomorphic sculpture. The population of the sculpture adds up to more than three hundred pieces. This is possible because final year sculpture students produce an outdoor piece as part of the requirements for graduation.

Worthy of mention is that Abass Ahuwan appears to be the major exponent of the Zaria Art School who has attempted to remain within the terracotta culture as medium for artistic production. Being an indigene of Kaduna State and a professor of Ceramics at The Zaria Art School, he has stuck to terracotta for the production of his ornamental musical pots.

Kaduna

As the capital city of Kaduna State, Kaduna is the abode of a handful of public sculptures. Kaduna stands out as a paradox being the capital of the predominantly Muslim old Northern Region. It is expected that the position of Islam on sculptural production would affect the presence of sculptures in public places. On the contrary, sculptures are found at roundabouts and in the premises of some public buildings. Okoli (2012) posits that sculptures in public spaces in Kaduna appeared at the advent of Christianity in the few *Gbagyi* settlements that metamorphosed into the present day Kaduna town. He goes on to aver that:

> The Roman Catholic Churches provided a safe haven for these religious sculptures that formed some kind of teaching aids for the new religion. Though the sculptures and their roles in the churches were misunderstood by the local population at the onset, they soon grew to accept them as a part of their religious growth. The sculptures in the churches were primarily viewed by the adherents but were not available to their Muslim neighbours.

The National Library also houses a figurative sculpture, making it the only site where non-religious figurative sculpture is displayed publicly in Kaduna apart from the Catholic churches.

Sculptures started appearing at roundabouts in the metropolis by second half of 1980s. Geomorphics seems to be the predominant style of all roundabout sculptures in Kaduna. One suspects that there may be a hidden policy by successive governments to maintain this approach in respect of the religious sensitivity of the town. Of interest too is that the residents of the town appear to be at peace with the sculptures, no wonder why the sculptures have survived the several sectarian riots that had engulfed the town in the last three decades.

These public sculptures have by no doubt enhanced the beauty of the Kaduna metropolis and also serve as landmarks to the ever growing city. It is hoped that successive governments would continue in the culture of erecting sculptures as public monuments for the aesthetic enhancement of the city.

Kafanchan

The southern region of Kaduna State is predominantly Christian; it geographically hosts the Nok village where the initial finds of what constitutes Nok Culture were made. Kafanchan is chosen as a representative population for the region not only because of its tolerance for not only naturalistic sculptures but because it is the most urbanised of the towns in Southern Kaduna State. This is not strange because of the Christian tolerance for realistic sculptures. Kafanchan is composed of the Kaninkon also known as Nikyop, the Fanstuwam and the Jama'a people who are Hausa.

Kafanchan sits on the railway line connecting Port Harcourt, Enugu, Kafanchan, Kuru, Bauchi, and Maiduguri. The town also is a host to the Kaduna State College of Education, Gidan Waya which houses the Department of Fine and Applied Arts. The department does not have a space designated as a sculpture garden, but several figurative concrete sculptures are displayed in front of the department and its surroundings.

The sculptures located within the space are mostly reinforced concrete depicting people who are posed as carrying out one activity or the other. Most are realistically rendered although a weak mastery and rendition of human anatomy and drapery is prevalent among the sculptures. Like the sculptures that are in the Department of Fine Arts, Ahmadu Bello University garden, the sculptures are produced by final year students who have a preference for sculpture. Inasmuch as Kafanchan is a Christian dominated town, one expects more of the sculptures to be used for the punctuation of the landscapes of the compounds of private homes, but this is not the case. It is the thinking of this researcher that the initial condemnation of sculptures from the traditional era by the early Christian missionaries could have been the cause of this apathy by the indigenes.

Comparisons and Conclusions

A comparative analysis of the products from the traditional era and the modern era will be attempted below, based on technique and media, practitioners, and functions. The findings from the Nok era are dominated by terracotta sculptures and evidence of iron smelting. There exists suspicion that the pieces were carved out of blocks of wet workable clay while they could have also been achieved through the coil technique. If the carving approach was used by the Nok sculptors, then it could be assumed that a wood carving culture existed alongside the terracotta types. It can also be hypothetical that the wooden sculptures from Nok could not have survived the weather and termites.

In the modern times, concrete appears to be the more popular medium. This choice of material is not unconnected with its strength and the scale of sculptures that it can be used to produce. That most public sculptures are rendered in this medium does not mean that it is the only material available to the modern sculptor; there are also other materials like bronze, steel, aluminium, fibre glass etc.

Women are most likely to be the sculptors of the Nok era as opined by Oyelola (2004). She is of the opinion that since the art of pottery and its firing has been practiced by women in the Nok region till date, there exists a high probability that the terracotta were produced by women. Okoli (2007) posits that today, art schools all over the globe are producing both female and male sculptors. So, the sculptures that populate the Ahmadu Bello University Sculpture Garden, Kaduna Metropolis and the Kaduna State College of Education in Gidan Waya, Kafanchan are produced by both male and female sculptors. Although the documentation of the sculptures that are located within the two high institutions did not pose much challenge to this study a few were not signed as such the artists could not be identified. However, artists that produced the geomorphic sculptures that are located within the Kaduna Metropolis were difficult to be identified, because most of the sculptures were not signed except the figurative figure at the National Library which was produced by Isiaka Osunde. Attempts made to identify the artist through Kaduna State Urban Property Development Authority (KASUPDA) failed as the commissions were awarded to contractors and not individual sculptors.

The sculptures of the traditional era served several functions ranging from aesthetic,

social, religious and utilitarian roles. The Nok terracotta appears to fulfil the aforementioned roles, which helped maintain its relevance during its classical period. Today, public sculptures within Kaduna State serve mainly aesthetic functions. The ones in roundabouts serve as beacons and land marks for the complex urban areas. There are also sculptures within the Catholic Churches which are not open for public viewing but available to the adherents of the religion. This, as mentioned earlier, helped in the teachings and illustrations of biblical stories.

Conclusively, it can be stated that sculptures have come a long way within this geo-political enclave known as Kaduna State starting with the Nok terracotta. The pain of the discourse is that Christianity and Islam have completely demonised the traditional arts, such that there is no known traditional sculptor that practices the Nok culture style and technique. Rather, modern materials and foreign and ever changing styles have take over sculpture practice in the state.



Plate 1: Male head, unidentified Nok culture artist, 550-50BCE Kaduna



Plate II: Equestrian form; Katsina Ala H. 32cm x L. 25 cm x W. 10cm Dating: 1,400 - 2000



Plate III: Bird's Eye view of the Zaria Art School Sculpture Garden



Plate IV: "Dance" Chinedu Obi, 1990, Life size, Department of Fine Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria



Plate V: Kim-Kim; Abass Ahuwan, 1989, Terracotta, the Metropolitan Museum of Art



Plate VI: NEPA Roundabout Sculpture, Kaduna; artist: unknown; Reinforced concrete and mild steel; 8m ht. 13m wdt



Plate VII: LEVENTIS Roundabout Sculpture, Kaduna; artist: unknown; Reinforced concrete and mild steel; 6.4m ht. 21m wdt



Plate VIII: War victim, concrete ¾ Life size, Kaduna State College of Education, Gidan Waya, Kafanchan



Plate IX: Approach of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts College of Education, Gidan Waya, Kafanchan

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