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The Monoliths and Societies Awareness

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ABSTRACT

The subject matter monoliths have its place in history especially in Nigeria, Africa and the world at large. In Nigeria, especially at Alok and Nkarasi, all in Ikom local government area, the beauty of the monoliths is outstanding. This is so because people come from far and near, including foreigners to catch glims of the beautiful stones which are all efficacious in solving human numerous social and health problems. It is also pertinent to state that the monoliths cannot be removed from their original context even at night hours because of their mystical potentials. The exits design on them indicates a natural object that calls for attention and enquiry.

Keywords: Monoliths, history, Ikom, stone, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

According to [1] who is the chief of Alok village said, Nnam people among the Bakors have the greatest number of monoliths. He stated that presently, there are twenty seven of the monoliths carried with different characters. He observes that the Alok monoliths are characterized by tattoo-like marks while the emanghabe monoliths had staff of offices etched into the carving [2]. Similarly, Akong noted that, dates however were not the chief strong point, he explains, the first archaeologist to study the monoliths in a neighboring village used carbon dating and have estimated the age of the monoliths at Alok at 450, 000 years that is roughly as old as the Egyptians pyramids [2].

[3], noted that monoliths are single isolated stones or columns, usually standing and of varying sizes. They are beautifully carried stones of between one and two or more metres high, and properly design. [4] stated that the carried stones represents male and females including chiefs, Soothsayers, brave persons, warriors, deities etc. in some cases, stones are thought to represent a group of people, such as an age grade. [5]

observed that, the aesthetically carried stone sculptures have existed among the Bakor (meaning come and take) for many hundred of years, the stone monoliths were created in conjunction with their current locations which is believed to have taken place between 1500-1650.

[6], believes the uncarved stones to contain ancestral spirits, while the carved stones actually represent the ancestors. Similarly, [3] believes that the occurrence of uncarved monoliths suggest that the selection of stones were part of the aesthetic criteria. Also [3] believes that the contemporary narrators surrounding the stones provided insight into the values and concerns of the culture that created the works. It provides a better understanding of the people who use the stones today as opposed to their ancestors. [7] maintained that the first westerner to document the stones, recognized the several stones at Alok had been moved between two of his visits in 1903. Weir [8], reported that one informant suggested the stones might be the work of their northern neighbors, the TIVS because the people used a similar facial marking that appears on the stones. [9] states that the tradition of migrating with stones occurred in other Ejagham group, such as among the Ekparabong clan near Ikom local government area in a community where researcher has resided in before.

Subsequently, Talbot [10] suggested that the blacksmiths near the upper Cross River held the knowledge of carrying stones [5] concluded that blacksmith among the Bakor lost their tradition when Aro traders flooded the market with iron tools in the 19th century. According to [6] through oral sources, he was told that the stones from the ground like trees.

Nevertheless,[4] acknowledged that, the Ikom monoliths are group of some three hundred mystery own sculptures located in an area northeast of the village Ikom occupied by five subgroups of northern Ekoi, these anthropomorphic stone pillars ranged in height from a little under one metre to a little over one point five metres.

THE PERCEPTION OF THE MONOLITHS IN THE ALOK SOCIETY

The perception of the monoliths is reflected in the Alok culture, especially in their festivals, marriages, birthday celebrations church services, farming, politics and youth get-together etc. At the open air Museum” where the monoliths is located, the place is always kept clean by youths and museum attendance. Though there is some tomb stones there designed to give meaning to socio-cultural and natural events like celebration and mourning, within the circle, there are some trees, including palm trees, Iroko tree, orange, mango and other economic trees providing shade and comfort both to the monoliths and people within. Children and adolescence are not seen playing around the monoliths site, this may be due to its significance to the Alok community. The monoliths is seen to be a watch dog” of the community.

PURPOSE OF THE MONOLITHS; KING ABENGAMBUA AS A CASE STUDY

The monoliths were purely artistic work, with drawing and designs all over them indicating great men and women who had contributed in no small measure to the growth and development of that community. For instance, king Abengambua, was a very brave man, a hero, among his contemporary. He died due to old age. Initially, to be crown a king the person must wear a human skull and must possess several titles to indicate that he/she is brave. Several kings in the Alok society and that environs were immortalize through the monoliths. King Abengambua of the Alok community had a long face, with facial marks and long beard that went down his chin. He happened to be the first king and from him the generations of other kings were documented. These kings are referred to as the ancestors.

THE TYPES OF MONOLITHS AMONG THE ALOK SOCIETY

The attributes or better still types of monoliths with be subsumed under the following; the children monoliths, the peace monoliths, the wisdom or fertility monoliths as well as the defence or crying monoliths.

THE CHILDREN MONOLITHS

The children monoliths (ataleabon) remain to be very significant especially since it involves the welfare of the children and their subsequent growth and development in the society. The children monoliths are mostly decanted with several beautiful colours of white, blue, yellow and red, all having their symbolic value. This is done especially at the end of the new yam festival in order to commemorate the rich cultural event which occurs annually on the 15th of September. The children monolith is mostly consulted when there is an epidemic out break of a disease in the community. Ailments such as polio, chicken pox, small pox, convulsion, Ogbanje spirit, high fever (Otuoyin) and high infant mortality rate or high material mortality rate. These factors could prompt the community members to summon the chief or high priest to mediate between the gods/ancestors and the community. Some rituals will be carried out, after which the land is clean and normalcy will return. It is also important to note that it is the sample of the children monoliths that is used in decorating and beautifying the calar roundabout which remains to be a master piece in architectural design. It is also used as the logo of the Cross River States tourism bureau.

THE PEACE MONOLITHS

The peace monoliths (atalegomo) are unique. The precious stone is left blank with no design reflecting an individual that has no blemish or grudges (a peaceful person). It is always painted white signifying peace. In times of crisis and conflict this stones in consulted for peace to be returned back.

THE WISDOM/FERTILITY MONOLITHS

The wisdom monoliths atalngbere symbolizes fertility. The blue colour is mostly associated with wisdom. It is beautifully designed and consulted by people who are barren and are in need of children. People come from far and near to see this monolith.

THE DIFFERENCE/CRYING MONOLITHS

This monolith is locally referred to as “mama akpamyang” also known as ataleabi or inforatale meaning the crying monoliths. This monolith is so named because, she led the Alok subject to victory in warfare and she acted as watch dog of the community. Her staff was just the mysterious broom. Which she used in her leadership and this tell us that she was a brave and powerful warrior. The monolith can reveal pre-monition and disasters that are about to happen to the community through high priest.

SIGNIFICANCE AND SYMBOLISM OF THE MONOLITHS

The monoliths were carried and implanted only on play grounds in the past, however, Alok has a giant tree on her play ground, the tree is locally called Ekpokpo (cotton like tree). It is within this play ground, every other activities including youth meetings, and that of the elders take place. But today one cannot see any monoliths there again because of possible theft. For security reasons, a new site was created within the community and fence by the national board for museum and monuments. Another area was also fence within the Victoria area of Alok community.

The new yam festival at Alok, in Nnam clan of Bakor Ethnic, bring about the beautification of the monoliths using colours and by so doing, it is belief that their ancestors are being clothed and reminded of their duties. Even though all the monoliths are to be pointed but the children monoliths is often single out for this annual ritual celebration of colours.

Nevertheless, these colours are made from natural substances gotten locally from plants, roots, trees and soil, the colours that are used include white which symbolizes peace in the community. Blue colour symbolizes fertility, the yellow colour administer to them is for bravery, the blue colour symbolizes fertility, while the red colour indicate the blood flow that existed (in the past) as a result of intertribal/interethnic conflicts and congruent. There is an annual sacrificial food which

is carried out on the 14th and 15th of September, however another sacrificial ritual could be conducted in time of crisis especially for instance, if a son of the soil dies mysteriously or if he/she is killed by a neighbouring community.

The chief priest will be surrounded to consult the gods/ancestor through the monoliths to perform their duties. If such a death is intentional or motivated, the crying monolith known as mama Akpauryanga will cry aloud to the hearing of all and finding in Alok, then people will know and prepare to go and avenge.

TIME, VENUE AND ITEMS USED FOR SACRIFICE TO THE MONOLITHS

There is no specific time allotted for the sacrifice, though an annual sacrifice is always carried out between the fourteen and fifteen of September in the event of a crisis like infant mortality deaths, material mortality deaths, influx of diseases, an emergency ritual could be conducted to appease the gods or ancestors. The sacrifice does not involve blood shed, but food, such as palm oil, palm wine and yam. Those who are expected to carry out the sacrifice include the chief priest, elderly men, post menopausal women and a virgin girl. The men and women are expected to pull their shirts and blouses as well as shoes before entering the shrine/museum besides road junctions used for major streets in the community are venues for the sacrifices. A special song is always sang at the ritual venue during the sacrifice "Farabeng Abenbeng" meaning (let there be peace in the community).

THE MONOLITHS AND PLACE OF ORIGIN

The place where these monoliths were originally gotten has been an issue which has generated a lot of controversy. However, findings revealed that the stones were gotten from a stream at Nkrigom forest at Nnato, near Alok community. It was laid on pegs and pulled by the Monkom age grade (Monkom means people who came together) to the various sites where the carving took place. After the carving the monoliths were implanted in their play grounds to be seen by all and sundry. The stones were carefully

designed to represent their great men (Hero's and Heroine) or ancestors who actually contributed immensely to the defence and protection of the Alok community. It is revealed that the monoliths was been worshiped by all except nowadays that Christianity is in vogue.

As it stands, the monoliths cannot be removed from their original context by anybody except under approval from the high priest. The monoliths place is a secret ground where people are not expected to touch or walk across the site. The families that have full access into the site include the Mbalakulus and the Eshamajo families. These families are permitted by the ancestors/god to go in there and perform any ritual they are perceived to be clean.

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