

THE DIFFERENTIATION IN SPACE, LOCATION AND TIME OF NOK TERRACOTTA OBJECTS, NIGERIAN

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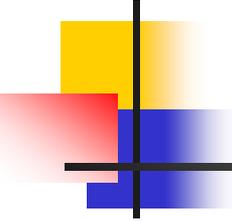
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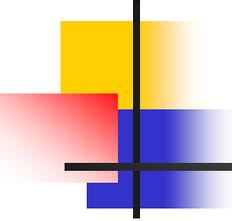


Abstract

The paper considers the differences in the nature and existence of conventional Terracotta objects in the Nok Culture Area and outside the area.

The author presents reports on the recent fieldwork in the region outside the presumed Culture Area. The summary of the findings and the attendant comparative attributes of the objects are highlighted.

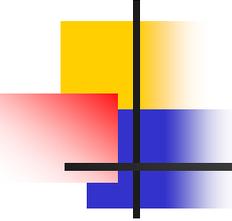
The paper posits that there is need for a rethink of the generally held view about the terracotta objects, and the spatial spread of the culture. The findings from current researches reveal that the entire Nok Culture phenomena are yet to be unraveled.



Introduction

It is axiomatic that the Nigerian cultural heritage is incomplete without the Nok artworks. There are indications that Nok village witnessed some cultural manifestations of the activities of Homo erectus and the Middle Stone Age. However, the preponderance of the Nok terracotta objects, their diverse spatial spread and considerable antiquity make Nok Culture Area to be world acclaimed. There are so many attributes of the Culture that generate research interests. The terracotta objects are in very plain terms cultural phenomena.

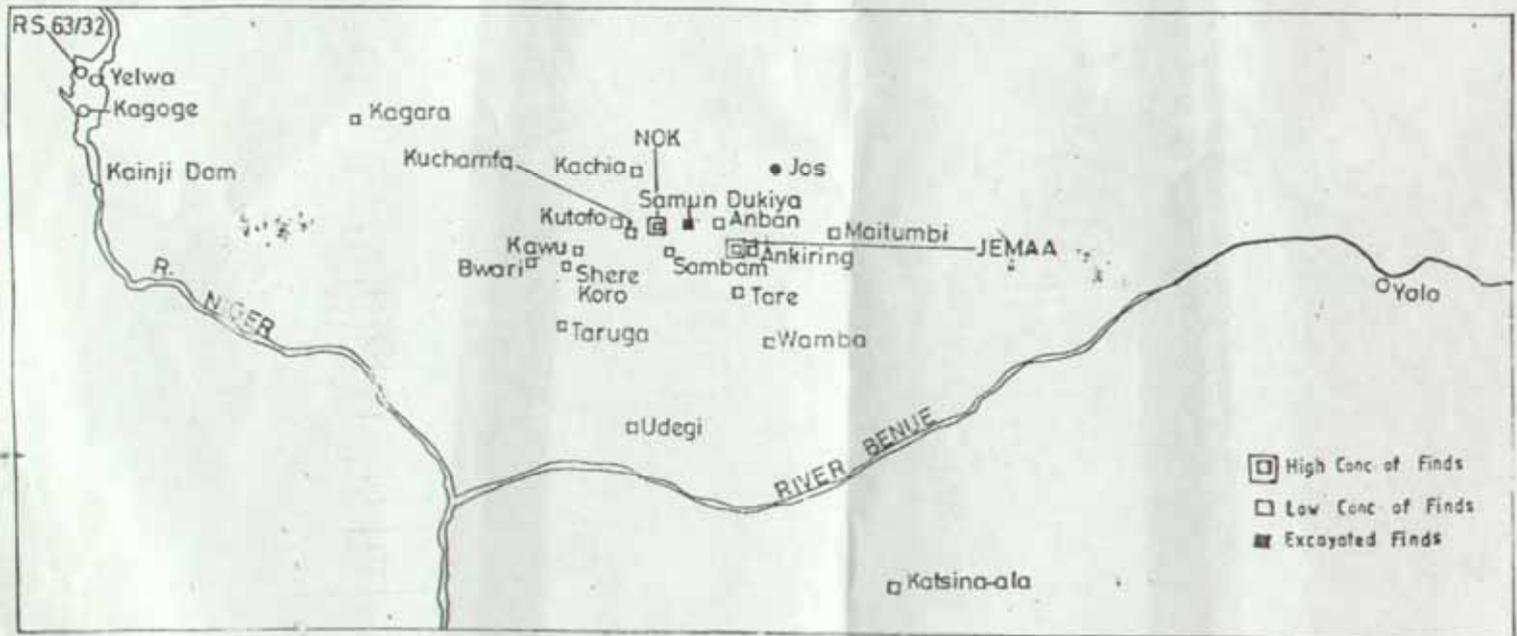
The paper focuses attention on the salient features of the terracotta sculptures, their similarities and dissimilarities in the various areas where they were discovered. The archaeological fieldwork experience in archaeological sites that are found outside the delineated Nok Culture Area is discussed.



Nok Culture Perspective

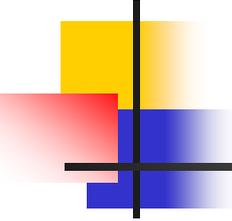
The word “culture” in this context connotes the ways of life of the people, their behavioural activities, such as domestic, religious (?), economic and implicit political activities. The culture extends from Dawu in the Federal Capital Territory, passes through Kubacha, Kachia, Nok etc in Kaduna State, Katsina Ala in Benue State and Kagara in Niger State etc (fig.1).

DISCOVERY SITES OF NOK STYLE FIGURINE.



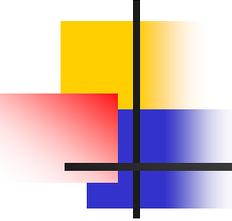
Source: Shaw, T. 1981.

Figure 1.

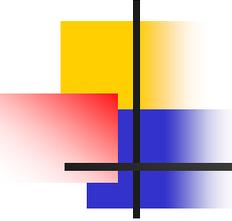


The characteristic features of the Nok Culture include:

- (i) The production of unique artistic works in the form of terracotta objects of human heads, figures, torso, double-faced (janus), etc.
The objects also depict animals, adornments, hairstyles, use of body decorations e.g. nose plugs, bangles, and other representations on environment and events.
- (ii) Domestic pottery production, iron smelting and smiting.
- (iii) Production of stone tools (polished axes) and other aspects of material culture.



The culture was dated by means of geomorphological work which initially dated the deposits at Nok village and the Jemaa area to the second half of the first millennium B.C. The dating of the archaeological materials by C-14 (radio-carbon) method confirmed that this initial estimate was correct. In a similar vein, relevant materials of the culture were dated by thermoluminescence method. The dates that were obtained were similar to the C-14 (radio-carbon) dates. What the dates (900 B.C. to 200 A.D.) suggest is that there was a cultural evolution/artistic tradition that portrayed the people in the area as possessing a unique political and religious hegemony so as to enhance their means of survival.



Salient Features of the Terracotta Objects

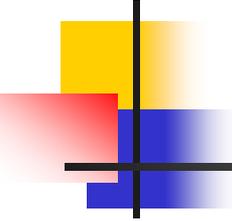
In a broad perspective, the sculptures provide the earliest evidence so far of plastic art in terracotta in Africa and aesthetic quality accompanies the objects (Eyo, 1977:62). In terms of style, the terracotta heads from Nok, Jemaa and Wamba are classified as:

- Classical examples of the terracotta sculptures. They are, the most naturalistic, as portrayed in their proportion which is near human as opposed to the more romantic sculptures that are found further South in the Culture Area.
- The second classification is the South-East sub-style, typified by the Katsina Ala head.
- The South-West sub-style represented by the Koro-Shere heads from around Abuja.

- Reference:
- Eyo, E. 1977. *Thousand Years of Nigerian Art*
- Lagos: Federal Department of Antiquities.

Nok Terracotta Heads



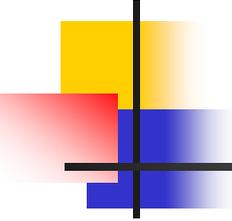


In terms of archaeological contexts in which the terracotta heads were found, they were mostly found in tin-bearing gravels or alluvial deposits. Those found in this type of context include, the terracotta monkey head found on the Nassarawa tableland at Ham village of Nok and the Jemaa terracotta head (found 25 feet of alluvial deposits at Tsauni). Others include terracotta figure of a seated monkey, a complete terracotta head found at the Nok village, a small terracotta head found at Gwongwon near Wamba and a fist-sized head recovered from a mine, south of Tsauni. The objects found in non-alluvial deposits include a figurine that was found on the top of a hill farther away from Nok sites and a figurine found on a shrine in a remote village in Abuja Emirate etc. (Fagg: 1977:16).

Reference:

Fagg, B. 1977. *Nok Terracotta*

Lagos: National Commission for Museums and Monuments.

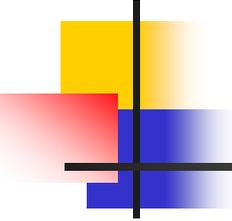


A unique characteristic feature of the terracotta collections is the type of clay used to make them. The type is a clay-mix which is usually one of the local clays mixed with a gritty material such as decomposed rock gravel incorporating small pieces of quartz and mica. This type of clay-mix or body has an extraordinary tenacity that is suitable for building and coiling (method of production). Fagg (1977: 21) also asserts that all the Nok sculptures except the smallest pieces of sculptures are modeled into hollow shapes, with a generous supply of access holes. The pupils of the eyes in all the terracotta human and animal heads were pierced through to the interior and in most cases, the nostrils, mouths and ears were treated in the same way. The interior of the objects is seldom finished smooth like a domestic pot, thereby allowing finger-marks to survive. A variety of techniques was also used by the terracotta sculptors to show the details in the figurines.

Reference.

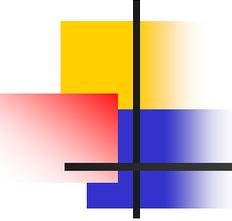
Fagg, B. 1977. *Nok Terracotta*

Lagos: National Commission for Museums and Monuments.



Current Archaeological Fieldwork in Katsina, Kaduna and Sokoto States

The National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria had organized series of archaeological reconnaissance and excavation for its archaeologists. This was due to the repeated cases of pillage and plundering of archaeological sites through illegal excavations in Kaduna, Katsina and Nassarawa States. The illegal excavation was for the purpose of stealing terracotta objects from archaeological contexts. This clandestine activity has led to the theft of many outstanding terracotta objects and by implication repeated loss of irreplaceable treasures of ancient Nigeria. The activity was done with equanimity and recklessness by marauders, who connived with international art dealers.

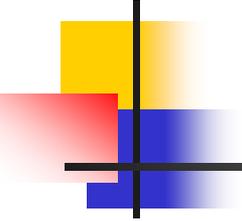


The archaeologists of the National Museum, Jos, Nigeria carried a series of surveillance and reconnaissance in the 1990s. The fieldwork led to the documentation of some archaeological sites and seizure of some terracotta objects. Akinade (1995) posits that the destruction of archaeological sites through illegal excavations is at a desperate and alarming rate. The illegal excavation took place in Kubacha, Ramidop near Kwoi and Kawu in the Federal Capital Territory.

The destruction of archaeological sites in Katsina State was reported to the management of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments and prompt action was taken. A team of four archaeologists was in Katsina State in 1998 to carry out archaeological reconnaissance. In 2000, the management of the Commission directed all the archaeologists to carry out archaeological reconnaissance and excavation in four Local Government Areas of Katsina State, namely Kankara, Subwa, Funtua and Faskari.

Reference

Akinade, L. 1995. Illegal Excavations *Newsletter* of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria.



In Funtua Local Government Area, five archaeological sites were visited: Old Burma, Dankumasai, Gurda, Goya and Gwangwari. Illegal excavations took place in all the sites. A test pit of 2 metres by 2 metres was sunk at one of the sites, Gurda. Some of the illegally excavated terracotta objects were retrieved through purchase from the villagers.

Nature of Finds from Funtua Local Government Area

The terracotta objects were in the form of fragments, human heads, and figures. Terracotta fragments, potsherds and iron bangles were found on the surface of some of the archaeological sites, Old Burma, Dankumsai and Gwangwari. The excavation at Gurda also revealed potsherds and few terracotta fragments mainly. The terracotta fragments that were collected on the surface of archaeological sites were studied. The diagnostic ones are as follows:

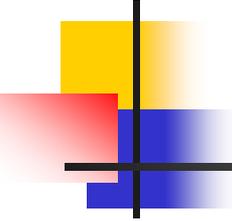
Burma: 3 broken off human hands

Gurda: 2 human fists, 1 foot, a male organ,

Dankumsai: 3 human hands, 2 human feet, one torso and one human body depicting body adornment.

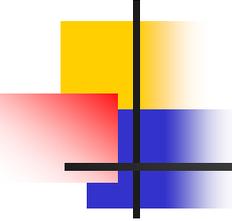
Gurda: 2 human feet, one human leg, a human fist resting on an object and human hand showing body adornment.

The terracotta figures and heads that were purchased from the villagers were also studied.



Gwangwari

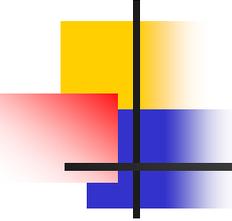
- A terracotta figure of a man sitting on a pedestal, with interlocking arms. The object depicts beard and a headdress. The mouth is large. The man sits besides another human figure that has broken off; but the right leg and the left hand are still in place. The pedestal on which the man sits looks like a (face-down) big basin. There is a crack at the back of the figure. The pedestal is also partly broken at the back. The clay used for modeling the object has a coarse paste. The object is in the National Museum, Katsina.
- A terracotta human head with its back and part of the forehead chipped off when it was being dug up. The object depicts an old man with pronounced eye lashes and a bald-head. The height is 13cm and the base is 13cm wide. The object is akin to a variant of the Nok tradition. It is semi-naturalistic.



Angwa Randa

- A stylized terracotta head of man with mouth agape. The object depicts beards and one eye only. There is a decoration on its head that suggests body adornment. The lower back of the head and base have broken off. The height is 13.5cm and its base is 9cm wide.

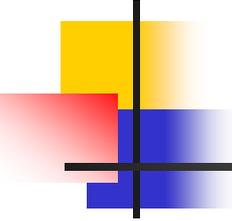
A terracotta head of a man with the mouth and jaws broke off. The height is 12cm and its base is 7.5cm wide.



Angwa Tongwe

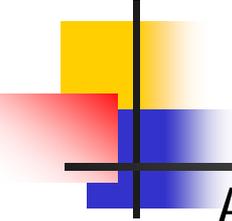
- A terracotta head of a man in an almost naturalistic manner. It has a projecting jaw and a broad face. Part of the forehead was damaged. The height and base are 14cm and 8cm respectively.

All the terracotta objects are in the custody of National Museum, Katsina.



Nassarawa State

In another setting a team of six archaeologists carried out archaeological fieldwork in Akwanga Local Government Area of Nassarawa State in 2006. Archaeological reconnaissance was carried out at Numa and Ngambre. The exercise at Numa revealed a rock-shelter and evidence of human habitation on hill-top settlements. The Ngambre reconnaissance led to some test excavation. Three test pits of varying sizes were sunk. The excavation at one of the pits (Test Pit 1, 2.5 meters by 2 meters) uncovered a terracotta torso and other terracotta fragments. Ngambre is one of the places where illegal excavation was carried out in the past.



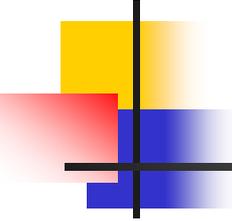
At the point the terracotta torso was exposed, some observations were made. The first observation was in soil colour variation between the deposit that overlay the terracotta and the deposit on which it was found. The deposit that was uncovered before the object was exposed was dark grey while the thick deposit of 40-70 cm in which the object was found, was partly clay and yellowish brown. A stone arrangement was encountered at 30cm before the terracotta was exposed at 40cm. The partly broken terracotta torso was found to be in association with potsherds, upper grinding stone and charcoal samples (Plate 6).

In 2008, more test pits were sunk at Ngambre. The excavation uncovered terracotta fragments and another terracotta torso. All the terracotta objects have the peculiar clay-mix showing mica and quartz inclusion. The terracotta torsos (of 2006 and 2008) have affinities with the Nok terracotta corpus. This is more in the area of body adornment and naturalistic disposition. (Plates 8-10).

Terracotta Torsos

(Excavated in 2006 & 2008)

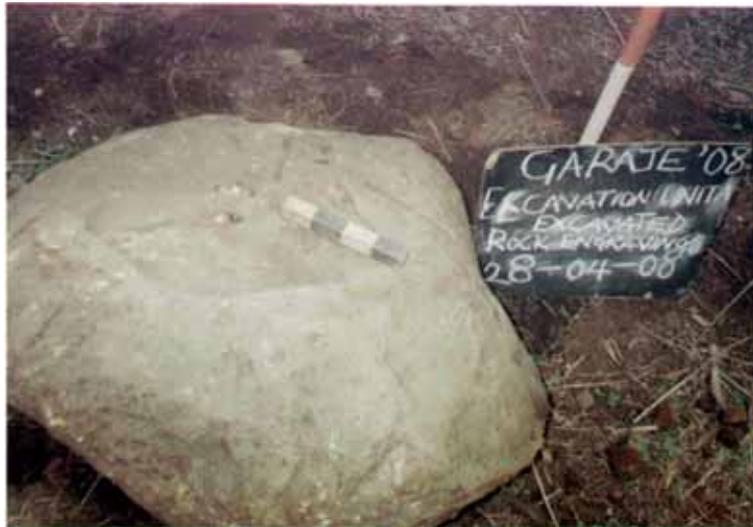




Kaduna State

In the course of digging a burial place at a compound in Garaje Kagoro in 2007, many terracotta objects were uncovered and retrieved. In 2008 archaeological excavations were carried out at Utak Kamauan village in Garaje Kagoro. Terracotta fragments, a terracotta foot and a terracotta hand were excavated in one of the test pits that were sunk (Plate 11, 12, 13). In another test pit rock boulders with rock engravings were excavated at the same site (Plate 14-17). The terracotta objects have affinity with the Nok tradition, in the area of the type of clay used and the nature of depiction.

A Terracotta Foot & Rock Engravings

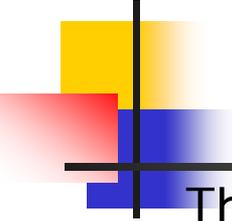




Rock Engravings

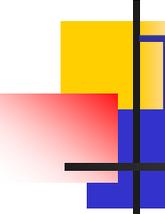


Joint Research Project on Nok Culture



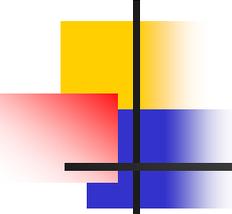
The joint project that was instituted by the University of Frankfurt, Germany is in collaboration with the National Commission for Museums and Monuments and University of Jos, Nigeria. The project started in 2006 and since then unparalleled information about the Nok Culture has been revealed through archaeological excavations and prospecting. The investigations revealed that in the whole Culture Area hundreds or thousands of sites are available. The research revealed that terracotta objects are available at Anzah Gida, Ungwa Kura, Iddah, Janjala, Janruwa and Akura (Rupp,2007).

The findings of the research include the chronological framework of between 2,700 and 2,300 years old for the terracotta finds with stylistic differences. It is asserted that the Nok terracotta heads have stylistic differences, but they all belong to one culture that is associated with iron smelting activities. Two terracotta fragments were found in a furnace, thus confirming that it was the culture that produced iron in the area.



The highlights of the findings are:

- “Nok sties are rich in terracotta finds. They have characteristic features. Especially visible is the coarse texture of the clay with large quartz and feldspar fragments. Originally covered with a thin layer of fine-grained clay, this smooth surface has mostly disappeared. Typical are the exotic hair styles or covers, as well as the triangular eyes with a hole as pupil and prominent brow ridges. Depicted are human beings and animals, sometimes in life size”.
- “Nok sites are rich in pottery that allows the chronological and regional site classification. In most cases the pottery is made of the same material as the terracotta. Like them, they are fired at low temperatures. Therefore, the differentiation between broken pots and terracotta parts is not easy, especially, since the decoration of both is often similar”.
- Reference.
- Rupp, N. 2007. *Beyond Art* Archaeological Studies on the Nok Culture Central Nigeria .Frankfurt/Main: Hans Kock.



Conclusion

The paper considers the salient features of the Nok terracotta objects (or sculptures) as unique. The objects have been found beyond the initial three-pronged area coverage of Nok-Katsina Ala and Kagara. More areas have been located as part of the Nok Culture Area, namely, Janjala, Iddah, Ungwa Kura, Utak Kamuan Ngambre etc. Katsina State and Nassarawa State also have many Nok archaeological sites. They have both experienced illegal excavation of archaeological sites. Reports also indicate that Zamfara State (Kworkortoshi) and Guluba have the tendency to also reveal terracotta sculptures of comparable affinity to the Nok culture corpus.

The key to the study of the Nok culture phenomena or the Nok terracotta objects and the actual area coverage is an intensive and systematic archaeological field work. The already known conventional traits of the Nok terracotta objects have been used as premise to confirm the nature or characteristic features of the terracotta objects found outside the traditional Nok Culture Area. It seems the initial area coverage of the Nok Culture was arrived at in a hurry. The scholarly work done so far is still at its modest level, but sufficient facts are provided to suggest the need for an extension of the area coverage.

It is observed that the Nok village and its environs have many archaeological sites hitherto unknown. There are so many other Nok sites that are yet to be located. The existence of terracotta objects in archaeological contexts in Katsina and Nassarawa States is another matter worthy of consideration. If more archaeological fieldwork is carried out in Kaduna State, Katsina State and Nassarawa State, then a clearer picture of the Nok culture phenomena would be revealed. A provision of comprehensive chronological framework and detailed analysis of the terracotta objects from all the archaeological sites would enhance proper distillation of facts about the terracotta objects. Radio-carbon dating, thermoluminescence, petrological and chemical analyses of the excavated terracotta objects would contribute more to our knowledge of the phenomena attributable to the Nok terracotta objects. The art historians may also need to make some contributions by assessing the terracotta objects already excavated and those that will be excavated in the future. The contributions of the German archaeologists to the unraveling of the Nok Culture phenomena are outstanding and highly commendable.

The Nok art as constituted by the terracotta sculptures is somehow homogenous in nature and production but is spatially diversified. There is need to provide adequate dates for each archaeological site. Attention should be focused on the technique and styles of production and the respective diversity and the causes of technological variants of the Nok terracotta corpus.