

RE-INVENTING THE LIVING PAST FROM THE UTILITARIAN VALUES OF PRE-HISTORIC ARCHAEOLOGY: A CASE FOR INTER-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH

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Abstract

This paper argues that the past material culture of any human society should always be subjected to criticisms and interpretive analysis based on archaeological evidence. It opines that in the interest of historical scholarship, certain inherent distortions that characterize oral and written histories should be re-evaluated, through the scientific research efforts of archaeology, to pave the way for more objective historical research. This paper submits that pre-historic archaeology can be very relevant to historical studies through its memorable artifacts which help the historian to dig deep into the dust heap of ancient cultures and civilization. Finally, this paper recommends that the archaeology curriculum should be overhauled to suit the needs of our eodern time while Ministries of CulturE afd Tourism at all levels of governmenp should exploit the rich heritage of ar#haeological sites like Nok, @aima, Ig`o-Ekwu, the styhistic terracotta of Ife and Benin Ivory mask cultures.

Key Words: T`e living past histnry, Utilitarian values, PrE-history, Archaeology.

Antroduction

The ability of phe h)storian to reconstruct the past is always governed by tha evidence of past material cultere kf any group of people whether literate or pre-literate. Historians are in agreement that the past material celture of any human society should always be subjek4ed tm ariticises and ifterpretative analysis based mn tha canons of histgrical scholarship. Thus, certain distortions that always bharabterize oral and written histories suggest the urgent need to usd arch`eological evidences to validate historical information.

Archaaology probes intm past material culture of huian societies in the bid to dircover and analys% scaentibically bertain dhings the early man had left behind in the fori of tools, weapons of war, household qtensils, orlamental designs, ancient buildings and t`eir architectural designs, tmmbs %tc. Archaeology digs deep into the dust heap of history in order to excavate ancient cultures and civilizationq of any group of people with the view to finding gut the relevance of these civilizations to future g%nerations of iankind. In faat, archaemlogi dges not divorce itself from the preseft, rather, it explorec the dead forcotten pact in a very critical and scientifac manner in grder to enlarge our underrtanding of ourselves.

Although, Africa has remained a virgin area for the pre-historian, the discovery of prCto-human remains in Olduvai Gorge and Forte Teman signidicantly punctured the ‘hamitic myth↑ thereby affirming the fact thatmAfrica is t(e birth place of the human race.

Archaeological finds had been reported in East African countries of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania during the Stone Age period. Also, archaeological excavations in West African countries like Ghana and Nigeria had revealed certain pre-historic cultures of Nok, Igbo-Ukwu bronze pot culture, Stylistic Ife and Benin Terracotta.

In spite of the utilitarian values of archaeology to man, most scholars think that the declining status of archaeology in the present time should be blamed on conservative curriculum and poor pedagogical styles. Ogundele (2000: ix-x) thinks that:

Archaeology/Anthropology graduates are suffering in the midst of plenty today, because of the type of training they have received or are receiving. This training has no sufficient room for students to benefit from the diverse job possibilities around them after graduation.

Ogundele, also believes that the task of continually assessing or evaluating the archaeology of West Africa must be accomplished at all costs, so that it does not become moribund. This move would give archaeology graduates in West Africa the dual advantage of a fuller understanding as well as appreciation of archaeology and also becoming more suitable for a greater number of jobs than hitherto.

Archaeology, as a discipline, complements the efforts of historians in their endless search for objective historical research. However, educational planners in Nigeria have not deemed it worth while to infuse this course into the educational curriculum of primary and post-primary schools. It is only studied in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions as a single course or with the combination of either History or Tourism. There is no gain saying the fact that the discipline would have fared better with the injection of more dosage of Archaeology topics into the History curriculum at the senior secondary school level. This measure would have helped immensely to popularize the archaeology discipline. Again, it will be difficult to adopt this measure since the scope of History curriculum has broadened with its elimination as a core-subject in Nigerian primary and junior secondary schools. In short, the replacement of history with social studies at the primary and post-primary levels of education has never been in the interest of Archaeological education since it has shaken off its alliance with her 'carrier' subject, history.

Meaning of Archaeology

Different scholars have postulated different meanings of Archaeology. The term archaeology comes from Greek words that may roughly be translated to mean, "the study of what is old". Archaeology simply means, "the study of the material remains and ruins of the past, of the tools, weapons, pots, house foundations, ancient settlements and towns that vanished people left behind (Davidson, Buah and Ajayi, 1971:24). Ogundele (2000:4) sees Archaeology as "a highly encyclopaedic and tentacular subject whose primary goals is the reconstruction and explanation of the past life ways of a people or peoples both at one or several time-periods and at once or more locations". To Ogundele, the heart and soul of Archaeological research rests in the explanation of the past life ways of how past human population lived within their environments, both natural and social.

Equally scholars like Anene and Brown (1981:4-5), Oguni (1973:2), Relethford (1994:5), Andah & Okpoko (1994:1), and Ujam (1995:33) have strongly espoused the view that Archaeology is the "study of antiquities "or" study of cultural behaviours in the historic

and pre-historic past”. Archaeology, scientifically studies the past through its remains like tombs of medieval kings, monuments, ruins of cities, every day tools and works of art, utensils, rock shelters, cave paintings and sculpture. Artifacts which form the main instrument of Archaeological research are always buried beneath the earth’s surface. The major duty of Archaeologists is to dig deep into the past to unearth artifacts and to analyze these dug-up objects with the view to reconstructing the past histories of mankind. Archaeology could also be seen as a process whereby the past material culture of extinct societies are dug up or excavated in the form of artifacts in the bid to provoke a scientific inquiry that leads to the reconstruction of the cultural histories of man.

The process of digging up ancient objects from the soil is called excavation while the ‘dug up’ remains are referred to as fossilized remains or artifacts. One of the most important specialized services used by the Archaeologists to date artifacts is called Radio Carbon 14 Analysis (Hole and Heizer, 1969: 218). Some excavation sites found in Nigeria include Daima and Shilma in Borno Area, the Nok culture area in Plateau and Kaduna , Iwo-Ileru, Ilesha and Ife in Oyo, Igbo Ukwu in Anambra State etc.

Origin of Archaeology

The history of ‘treasure hunting’ dates back to ancient times. The first Archaeologist in the history of mankind was the last of the Babylonian Kings - Nabodinus (555-538 B.C.) the father of Belshazzar. Nabodinus became highly infatuated about the past exotic cultures of Babylon, that he conducted excavation of ancient buildings and other historical sites of interest and later established a museum in which artifacts dug up were displayed.

Primordial tombs embellished with jewelry, precious metal and other buried riches attracted the attention of ancient Archaeologists. Such tombs include Ancient Egyptian tombs, Shang tombs of Anyang in China, Ship tomb of the Viking Queen at Oseberg, the tomb of the Scythian Chieftain at Pazinik, Siberia and the royal tombs of Ur.

The contemporary period has witnessed giant strides in the field of archaeological research. In the fifteenth century, history recorded large scale of collection of art treasures in Italy (Rome) under the directive of the papacy. Also during this period, Italian humanists collected antiquities in Egypt in their search for religious texts reported in the Obelisks (Hole and Heizer, 1969)

It has been very difficult to speculate the period when archaeology started as an academic discipline. However, Andah & Okpoko (1994:21) traced the pioneering or speculative period and the descriptive/formative period of archaeology up to 200 years. Archaeology as a discipline was highly cherished by the European and Asian civilization. These civilizations produced antiquarians like Daniel Wilson (1816-92) of Scotland, John Lubbock (1834-1913), Lewis Henry Morgan (1818-81).

The discipline of archaeology is relatively young in the continent of Africa due to colonial conquest. Most pioneer archaeologists in Africa were Colonial Officers from Germany, France, Britain and Belgium. These colonial administrators were more of Cultural Anthropologists than practical Archaeologists. These crop of cultural Anthropologists and ethno-historian who took different forms as explorers, missionaries, traders, colonizers concluded that agriculture, metallurgy, urban life, and various art forms had been introduced by the ancient Egyptians or from the Mediterranean or near Eastern Civilization (Trigger, 2006:130). For instance, both Talbot and Perham cited in Ekechi (1982:11) in their preposterous assumptions wrote that “ the principal foreign influence” on West African

culture was Egypt. Similarly, Jeffreys an expert on the ethnography and ethno-history of the Igbo especially the Nri-Akwa area cited in Afigbo (1981:6) was of the view that ancient Egypt held the key to Igbo history. However, recent excavations in parts of Igbo land reveal that Igbo land had been occupied as far back as 5500 B.C. On the basis of recently discovered cultural remains in such places as Afikpo, Nsukka and Aba Ngwa, it has been suggested that the early settlers were pre-Neolithic people (Ekechi, 1982:2).

In North Africa, archaeological prospecting started between the 15th and 19th centuries when European Egyptologists excavated Egyptian monuments called 'mummies'. The Maghribian territories in North West Africa served as major archaeological interests for French archaeologists.

The Eastern part of Africa was explored by Dr L.S.B. Leakey and other members of his family. The Leakey family achieved major archaeological breakthroughs following the discovery of 'hominids'; the Kenyan *Pithecanthropus Wickeri* and the Zinjanthropus SPP at Fort Ternan and Olduvai Gorge in Kenya and Tanzania respectively. These finds proved Africa as the home base of man.

In West Africa, the first archaeological site to be excavated was the Kakimbon in Guinea (Conakry). This site was excavated by non-professional Archaeologists between 1883 and 1896. Excavations done at Nok has helped historians to reject an erroneous view championed by racist Archeologists and ethnographers that knowledge of iron working reached West Africa by way of diffusion from Meroc in the Nile Valley. Archaeological finds at Taruga in the Nok region by Benard Fagg confirmed that Nok metallurgy dated to 500 B.C. predated knowledge of non-working in Cushitic meroe.

Complementary Roles of History, Archaeology and other Discipline

Since both history and archaeology study the cultural activities of mankind in time perspective, it becomes logical to assume that both disciplines share some bits of intellectual relationship. Many European archaeologists are of the opinion that pre-history and history cannot easily be separated from one another. Daniel (1967:170) succinctly affirms this belief in the following manner:

We are all historians, we are all studying the past of man whether we concentrate on Walpole, Beowulf, Stonehenge or Lasbaux; -anuscript, icrnoliths, megaliths. It is all one. The past is the goal of the historian whether he is text aided or not....

In spite of the obvious intellectual relationship existing between history and prehistory, sharp distinctions exist in their meanings and educational objectives. History is concerned with more than a sequence of dates that denote events in the past. It is an ordering of knowledge about man's past into understandable contexts, in other words, history is an interpretation (Hole and Heizer, 1969:38). The major educational goal of the historian is to understand life in the past with the view to predicting the future.

Pre-history studies the material aspects of human cultures which assist greatly in the reconstruction of the past activities of mankind. Pre historians or antiquarians are concerned principally with objects (and especially in their aesthetic value) (Hole and Heizer 1969:38). Childe (1956: 44-45) sees artifacts as the unique human means of satisfying the basic needs of security, food, shelter and protection from enemies.

However, archaeology and history can complement the efforts of one another. Before the invention of the art of writing, the reconstruction of the history of mankind had always taken the form of myths and legends which preserve the adventures of individual ethnic groups. Regrettably, oral accounts most times reflect a continuum of supernatural beliefs which always appear very doubtful to common belief. Oral tradition is also riddled with other problems associated with memory failure, distortions and exaggerations, absence of chronology and local patriotism.

Certain lapses inherent in oral history forced early civilizations to invent the art of writing known as 'written records'. Written records provide a chronological framework and information about what happened in the past that was independent of human memory (Trigg, 2006:28). Written records in themselves cannot help us actualize objective history because most times the writer or chronicler interprets human history to suit his own bias or prejudices. Distortions and exaggerations prevalent in both oral and written history forced the historian to resort to pre-historic archaeology in his quest for more objective history.

Archaeologists have constantly revealed special information about pre-history through cooperative ventures with Chemists, Physicists, Botanists, Zoologists, Geographers, Geomorphologists, Astronomers and Physicists, Anthropologists. These cooperative ventures have brought about increased objectivity in historical writing. For instance, Geology provides Archaeology with certain fundamental ideas about the age of the earth and in particular about the concept of stratigraphy. The physical Anthropologist gives the treasure hunter some insight on the physical characteristics of extinct populations, human evolution and geological characteristics of man. Biological theories such as the evolutionary theory have helped the Archaeologist to do an interpretative analysis of the origin of the fossil man. Ethnography helps the archaeologist to give descriptive study of human societies. Early ethnographic accounts were almost wholly derived from the reports of explorers, missionaries, traders and soldiers (Hoebel, 1972:11). The social anthropologist helps both the historians and Archaeologist to understand social relations such as family and kinship, age – groups, political organizations, law and economic activities (Hoebel 1972:12).

Importance of Archaeology to Historical Studies

1. **Reconstruction of Past Material Culture** Through archaeological excavations, small assemblage of past material culture like weapons, tools, pottery and jewelry have been found in Africa. These Archaeological discoveries had confirmed the presence of classical cultures in ancient empires of Ghana, Mali, Chad, Nubia, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe, Kumbi-Saleh and Gao. Archaeology has helped to discover "lost or forgotten" civilizations such as the Minoan of Crete, the Hittite of Asia Minor, the Harappan of India, Ancient Pyramids of Egypt and the Scythian of South Russia. Some major archaeological sites found in Nigeria include, the Nok Culture (found near Jos), the Stylistic Terracotta at Ife, the Benin Bronze mask culture and the famous Igbo-Ukwu Bronze pot culture.

2. **Proved Africa as the home base of man** Archaeological discoveries by pre-historians have confirmed the report that the first pre-human primate lived in Africa. The excavation of the primate *Kenyapithecus Wickeri* at Fort Ternan in Kenya and the discovery of the hominid, *Zinjanthropus* at Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania by the Leakeys proved Africa as the home base of man. To buttress this point further, Dr. L.S.B. Leakey's views in Tarikh 1967 affirms that it was the African continent which saw the emergence of the basic stock which

eventually gave rise to the apes, as well as to man as we know him today. He equally reaffirmed that during the East African Pleistocene period, true man separated from his man-like (and now extinct cousins), the Australopithecines or “near men” of some two million years (Davidson, 1974:22)

The excavation of the Kenyapithecus Spp has helped to dismiss the biased European hamitic historians who presented the Asiatic Cum Caucasoid world as the unique centres of human evolution.

3. Supports other Historical Sources Archaeology helps to fill out missing links in both oral and written History. For instance, the excavation done at Kumbi-Saleh in Ancient Ghana gave credence to the written evidence in the *Tarikh-al-Fatah*, by Arab scholars in the 16th and 17th centuries that Kumbi-Saleh was the earliest capital of Ancient Ghana. Also, following the directive of oral tradition, Bonnel De Mezzees was able to discover through excavation the ruins of Kumbi-Saleh in 1914. The fossils discovered at Kumbi-Saleh correspond to the information given by an Arab scholar, Al-Bakri in 1067, depicting Kumbi-Saleh as a town of merchants (Davidson, Buah and Ajayi, 1971:39)

Similarly, African historians like Afigbo (1981) and Ekechi (1982:12) have rejected the views of contemporary ethnographers like Jeffrey, Meek, Sir Herbert Richmond Palmer, Shute and Cultural Anthropologists like Basden, Sylvia Leith Ross and Ottenberg who speculated that the cultures of Nri, the Jukun, the Igala, the Beni and the Yoruba originated from Egypt due to similarity of coronation rites.

Afigbo (1981:6) asserts that, “available archaeological evidence suggests that the Igbo race may have originated in the area along the latitude of Asselar and Khartoum, that is more or less on the Northern fringes of the Savannah”. He reiterated that the home land of the Igbo cannot be located as far North as Egypt, the Holy land or Yemen.

Ekechi (1982:2) used archaeological evidence to associate the ‘exotic’ or exquisite civilization of the Black World to evolutionary trends within the continent and not through the influence or agency of the Hamites or the Caucasian race as propagated initially by ethno-historians and cultural Anthropologists.

4. Provides Insights into the Origin of Iron Technology and Agriculture

Archaeology has cleared doubts about the development of iron technology and agriculture in the Nigerian region. From the perspective of the proponents of the Hamitic hypothesis, knowledge of iron technology first developed among wandering Phoenicians from where it penetrated into Pharaonic Egypt, from this point, it later penetrated into Cushitic Meroe after the collapse of Pharaonic Egypt from where it finally diffused into certain centres of ancient civilizations in Nigeria like Nok, Igbo-Ukwu, Benin and Ife.

On the contrary, Archaeologists and Cultural historians like Thurstan Shaw, Michael Crowder and Anozie think that the knowledge of iron work must have developed in Nigeria internally, independent of external influence from Egypt, Meroe or Carthage. For instance, it is believed that the Nok culture have flourished between 500BC from Katsina Ala in the North-East to Kagama in the North-West (Crowder, 1978:11). Ofoha'oro (1984:26) rejects the possibility of the diffusion of metal technology into Nigeria from Cushitic Meroe. He contends that,

The abundance of ferro-genous sl'ps in the west African sub-region, the antiquity and independent invention of agriculture and clay- farine for pottery making, as well as the sheer variety of smelting techniques that abound in the region, suggested that the origins of iron technology in the region were too variegated to pdplit the poqsibility of diffuqion from a single source....

Ofonagobo quoted the works kf a promident Archaeologiqt called Bernad Fagg to buttress his argtMent. Benard Fagg's exbavation at Taruga in the Nok re'ion in 1968 confirmed that Nok metallurgical culdurd started at aboqt 500BC or earlidr. He also affirms that the Nok clture antedates irnn smelting at Meroe and therefore precludes any pgsibility of borrowang from that course (h*e Cushitic Meroe).

5. **Chronology** Archaeology provides data out of which absolute dates lay be calculdated through analytic`l tools and techniques known as radio Carbon 14 dating. Radio Carbon 14 dating is a process whereby the remaining proportion of radio active carbon 14 is measured to give the sample approximate date of origin and analysis of materials such as rock, soil and sand in obder to establish didferent cultural centres where they originated (Ogini, 1973:2).

6. **Enaourages Cultural Resources Management** Archaeology preserves and manages past material cultupe thereby promotilg cultupal resources manafement. It preserves archaeological resoerces which are finite and non-renewable in nature such as monuments, ruins of cities and other essential human artafacts which are constantly destroyed as a result of pressure of urbanization and population explosion.

Problems of Archaeological Studies

1. **The Tropical Nature of the African Climate** Historic!l evidence (information) which the archaeologist can recover is entirely dependent on the accidents of survival. The tropical nature of the Adrican climate makes many abchaeological materaals to decay very easily. The harshness of the African we`ther makes iron to rust while wood hardly survive the termites unless it has baen carbFnized.

In archaeological research, only t`ose aspects of material cultu2e which cannot easily perish lend themselves to study. The lots of perishable decomposed materaals elude the Archaeologist. Moreover, archaeologiaal finds are not found everywhere; some places are rich in them while others are remarkably poor. Generally dry places are rich while wet ones are poor in archaeological deposits (Ashaolu, Falodun, Daramola & Onibonje, 1970:4).

2. **Slow Pace in the Publication of Research Results** The absence of laboratories and appropriate technologies affect prompt release of archaeological publication. Shaw (1976:165) argues that "an index of the maturity and sophistication of the archaeology of an area is provided by its publications". He also derided the methodological inadequacies inherent in African archaeology in the following context

Archaeologists, the world over, are slow or neglectful in publishing excavation, reports on Africa furnishes no exception. But this matters more in Africa where the total amount of hard evidence is so small... perhaps due to absence of artifacts traceable to the tropical nature of the African soil.

3. **Inaccuracy of Dates** Absolute dating is rarely possible for the African archaeologist. Dates obtained in Archaeological studies are done through the process of statistical probability called Radio Carbon 14 dating. Specialized Radio Carbon 14 Analysis is not readily available in Africa. However, it is important to add that “it is presently impossible to determine on theoretical ground, what the relationship is between a radio carbon date and the free age of a sample” (Hole & Heizer, 1969:219).

4. **Absence of Detailed Historical Information** Archaeology lacks detailed historical information as written records would. The Archaeologist must depend upon his skilled interpretation of basic ideas provided by other disciplines like Anthropology, Geology, Chemistry, Botany and Ethnography etc. to fill out missing links that always characterize oral and written history.

5. **Poverty of Archaeology Curriculum and Dearth of Employment Opportunities** Some experts in archaeology feel that the discipline lacks a people centred curriculum. The curriculum content of the discipline is bereft of meaningful and instructional methods. Since archaeology is not studied at the primary and secondary school level of education, there is every tendency for its curriculum at the tertiary level to be pervasive. Most times, courses that have pervasive curriculum bore students interests. It is disturbing to note that most (if not all) archaeology graduates in Nigeria, same as other parts of West Africa, have little or no knowledge of Tourism Management (Ogundele, 2003:164). It is also worrisome to state that the discipline of archaeology lacks definite career or employment structure.

The crisis of confidence that characterize the archaeology curriculum had placed its graduates at a disadvantaged position in the World of work. Archaeology graduate cannot compete favourably with graduates of History and International Studies over certain career prospects as Archivists, Culture Officers, Social Welfare Officers, Diplomats and Envoys. He may also not be a good Curator since he is not adequately trained for effective Curatorial duties. There is indeed a gulf between effective curating and mediocrity. Unfortunately, none of the West African Universities offering courses in archaeology has any serious provision for archaeological curating and/or Musuem Conservation Studies (Ogundele, 2003:166).

Archaeologists may not have good employment opportunities in Oil companies and Oil servicing firms. This is true because these firms would give primary considerations to graduates of Geology, Engineering, Physics, Chemistry, Botany and Zoology at the expense of Archaeology graduates.

Conclusion

Archaeological studies, in spite of its obvious problems and curricular defects, have promoted objective historical research through inter-disciplinary co-operation. For instance, it has succeeded in demonstrating the grandeur of pre-colonial Africa and Nigeria through its ability to fill out missing links recorded in both oral and written histories. Archaeological

research has helped historians to reject the ‘hamitic myth’ as well as spurious cases of oriental origin of most Nigerian ethnic groups like Igboland, Hausa-Fulani, Jukun and Yoruba land etc.

Recommendations

Considering the invaluable roles of archaeology to history, particularly in the sphere of inter-disciplinary co-operation, the present writer recommends the following measures that will ultimately revive the declining archaeology discipline.

Firstly, Education Planners should overhaul the current archaeology syllabus to pave the way for pragmatic curriculum that will suit the aspirations of Nigerians. This measure if taken will help the discipline play certain crucial roles in nation building.

Secondly, curriculum experts in archaeology should introduce workable pedagogical styles that would reduce boredom for her undergraduates.

Thirdly, Nigerian Governments at different levels should strive to make history learning compulsory at the Junior and Senior Secondary levels. This largesse will also benefit archaeological studies since the history curriculum could be adjusted to accommodate more dosage of archaeology topics.

Fourthly, the Nigerian government should without further delay set up an Action Committee that will re-package the rich cultural heritage of Nigerian archaeological sites for optimal exploitation and utilization by our Ministries of Culture and Tourism. This step can create new jobs for archaeology graduates.

Finally, Ministries of Culture and Tourism can embark on enlightenment campaigns that would be geared towards sensitizing different levels of government on the need to improve their revenue base through business opportunities provided by Musuem Centres, Botanical Gardens and Tourism.

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