

**BRIEF REPORT ON THE FIRST PHASE CROSS RIVER MONOLITH  
HERITAGE RESEARCH PROJECT  
OCTOBER, 2016**

**INTRODUCTION**

The monolith heritage project is to help provide conservation and protection to monoliths and sites, an important evidence of early human artistic expression in Africa. It is about creating value in a way that benefits the communities, our stakeholders and society. The historical study of the sites and their sustainability is viewed in four dimensions – cultural, social, environmental and economic strive to find the right balance, to help create long-term value for monolith communities and society. This project presents dramatic recent discoveries from the sites early history, as well as the first phase research results, and scholars who have brought them to light. The research team comprising Dr. David Coulson Head of the research team, Alex Peck, and Ferdinand Smith – Photogrammetry and drone experts, Dr. Frank Enor Head of Department of History and International Studies, Mr. Joshua Bako Cartographer, and Dr. Abu Edet Archaeologist and Coordinator of the project, arrived in Ikom on October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2016. Dr. Ivor Miller who is unavoidably absent was involved in the preliminary research work that gave birth to the project.

A meeting with the Bako community leaders took place at Edortown (Akumabal Abanyom Community Hall) on October 15<sup>th</sup> 2016. We had engagements to explain the aim and purpose of the research, using illustrative posters produced by Dr. Coulson to promote the significance of preservation and protection of the monoliths and the need for collaboration with the local communities. The outcome was cordial and the community leaders agreed to remain in partnership with us in order to benefit from the

preservation and historical study of their heritage which they realized was already in danger.

Field work commenced immediately after the meeting. Selected sites from the six sub-ethnic groups were covered within 10 days of intensive research. Thanks to the Vice Chancellor, University of Calabar for the provision of one 18-seater bus and a Ford 4-wheel drive vehicles. The monoliths and sites describe the treasures known by the natives as 'AtalAwanshi' meaning 'the stones of the dead one in the ground' that were once erected in circles and concentric formations. The present occupants of the area are six sub-ethnic groups known today as Bakor, including the Nde, the Nselle, the Nta, the Nnam, the Ekajuk and the Abanyom.

## **METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH**

The use of a drone – unmanned aerial aircraft vehicles (UAVs)

The method comprised one drone craft that revealed considerable aerial insight into monoliths location in-situ, sites identification and geographical connection with adjacent villages, other monolith sites and features. The high tech methods included reconnaissance survey using drone technology to video and photograph aerial footages of monoliths and sites, geographic features, adjacent farmlands and villages. Drone was lunched specifically to identify the true monolith circles and possible extensions, and to study both the archeology and environmental conditions of sites, future tourism path construction, facility locations and interactive maps for tourism excursions. Information about preserved or destroyed sites will be derived from drone aerial analysis. And ground photographic documentation of the various sites will be compared with sky images acquired by drone overfly.

## **PHOTOGRAMMETRY**

Making 3 D measurements from photographs

It was possible to create 3dimensional photographic measurements of selected monoliths based on their deteriorated conditions and/or involvement in incidence of theft and/or violent destruction. The high resolution cameras were used to measure their heights, widths and depths and to produce effects that enhance illusion of depth for every monolith documented. This will help in the study of deterioration, conservation, forensic examination, documentation and registration of the monoliths.

### **High resolution cameras**

High resolution cameras were also used to photograph, document, evaluate and assess monolith conditions and sites preservation in-situ. Great success was achieved with vivid illustrations and revealing research that will enhance further research on the art history, future rescue conservation work on the damage monolith and sites, and aid archaeological excavations in the second phase of the project. I-pad and phone cameras of high dynamic range (HRD) were also in use to simplify sites and detailed monolith surface documentation.

## **CARTOGRAPHY**

### **Production of site maps**

To solve the perplexing mystery of monolith and sites, it required using vivid map illustrations to explain numerous sites that once stood in the sharps of the forest. Exposing them required GPS instrument to locate monoliths and map sites. 10 new reconnaissance survey and mapping were made. Kunkunda Nnam newly recovered, is a single site containing more than

10 monoliths in broken conditions located in a mixed-crop farmland. At NtitogoNnam site, described by Allison (1964) as Ntetakor, the lower buried section of a monolith was also identified in-situ. And a 3D forensic documentation was taken to assist in the assessment of the missing top which has been found at American Metropolitan Museum NY. What does monolith sites mappings tell us about the monolith world? There is need to explore what life was like in the ancient world from broad monolith cultural trends to daily habits. No place in Africa has enjoyed ancestral carved religions monoliths and sacred place or groove like the Cross River region.

### **Search for the Legendary Treasures**

The archaeology of stone culture in ancient Cross River region, the atalawanshi of the cross river region, from its construction by those long forgotten until its recovery had only one purpose. What was it? How did one of history's most significant artifacts serve the people of the upper Cross River region? How did Geometry of circles relate to their site orientation and use, leading to the acclaimed book by Philip Allison 1964? Today more is revealed about the world of ancient upper Cross River region and the origins of ancestral traditional religion. Constructing a history of Bakor region is a monumental task. Bakor's story takes place in countless sites developed over the millennia and each of the site's historical puzzle pieces carries with it myriad interpretation and yet to be debated. The Mbembemigrants assault on the monoliths habitat. We were informed about the infamous Mbembe siege between the Bakor people - Nta, Nde, Nselle and Nnam and Abanyom. The rebels chose to destroy and steal the monoliths as an informant from Njimetop tells us. The siege has been celebrated as an act of heroic

resistance on the part of the Nselle, Nde and Nnam people. But we are yet to study more about the siege itself.

### **The Monolith and Archaeology**

From what we saw, we must develop interest in learning about the monoliths, archaeology and new reconstructions of monolith past. We must revive and create memories while learning about the important role that monolith material plays in our understanding of the monolith culture. Archaeologist will work with everything from a tractor, jack, to a handpick, to a spade, and even a toothbrush and conservation materials such as bonding materials to erect, mend and restore thermal and physically damaged monoliths. Archaeologists will located the elusive remains on the monolith sites, along with remnants of broken monoliths, slags, and pottery. Stone fragments observed in different locations are evidence relating to rituals, secret clubs andfraternity. Although they are monolith sites, pottery and other artifacts offer a glimpse of daily life. An archaeological excavations will allows us to sift through the archaeology and history of this ancient land through archaeological lens. Where was the ancient monolith ancestors buried? Where they buried beneath the standing monolith ruins? What do monolith sites tell us about sacrifices and worship in ancient monolith religion. According to oral belief, sacred cult was common through the ancient world of the Cross River region, particularly associated with war, heroism, manhood, fertility of the inhabitants of the Cross River region. Recent monolith festivals at Alok sitebecome a pointer to the significance of monoliths ritual meals.

### **Symbolism and inscriptions**

For the first time ancient monolith displaying nsibidi symbols and inscription have been discovered. Inscriptions on monolith stones, record the thoughts of ancient monolith people in writing and communication. The symbols reveal much about the aspirations and values of ancient monolith people, about what was deemed honourable, fair and beautiful. The monolith bas relief inscriptions become the earliest nsibidi symbols ever found in the Cross River region. What can it tell us about literacy during the monolith ancient time? The new discovery of monolith inscriptions during the preliminary and the first phase research at Njimetop, Kunkunda and Agba sites furnished the first historical evidence of nsibidi symbolism and inscriptions on the monoliths. Their interpretations are yet to be deciphered.

### **Questions begging for answers**

Archaeologists will take close observation of what is occurring on the surface and try to coordinate the remains as they appear. The big picture is the circle and the position of the monoliths in the circle.

We have started monitoring using drone and GPS to determine the individual location of the monoliths in their circle formation and how other stone fragments are positioned around in the aftermath of events on the sites. We will be looking at the site expression of the monolith as well because this can tell a lot about site activities in general and about event at monolith locations within sites. It is very important research to do. We still do not really know enough about these monolith circles activities and we mean to get better at determining them. Site surface evidence may be sparse because farm cultivation is repeatedly occurring on most of the sites.

### **Site Deterioration**

## Conclusion

The research will distill over one thousand five hundred years of history and over 50 years of intensive research into a definitive book on the AtalAwanshi Monoliths, people and cultures in the landscape of the upper Cross River region. The stoned habitat of Bakor has been continuously inhabited for thousands of years. Historians and Archaeologists will shine spotlight on the present communities and chosen sites containing more than a thousand years of the habitat dynamic history from the monolithic structures to stone fragment and miniature carvings.

The first phase of the project has opened the door:

- Guiding future team research by showing gaps in knowledge of the treasures and posing new questions
- Encouraging the communities to decide for themselves what they value in their historic landscape by raising awareness among them.
- The first phase of the project would provide strategic information for development plans that can sustain the communities.
- Inform the communities on preservation of monolith and potential archaeology sites, farming and land-use against ecological disaster by fire.

It is our intention to hold a conference at the end of the research to invite historians and archaeologist and a dozen of the biggest names in the field to talk about what they know best about the monoliths. Then people will have the chance to debate and ask the scholars questions.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **1. Project Proposal**

Using preliminary research results, a plan was produced and a clear vision for the field recording plan was produced and a clear vision for the monolith project developed. Selected sites from six sub-ethnic groups was covered using drone -unmanned aerial aircraft vehicles (UAVs) to study the sites. Photogrammetry measurements of selected monoliths with the history of damage and theft were investigated. Cartographic mapping of ten sites were conducted. Detailed documentation of sites and monoliths conditions and preliminary archaeological investigation were undertaken in order to understand their history and development and the significance of the sites and the potential risks of conservation.

### **2. The Project Team**

There was determination on all sides to achieve a high quality results within 10 days. In particular we wanted to ensure that the project organization allowed all the necessary expertise and skills for such a multi-faceted project to play their part. Reconnaissance survey was carried out by the drone and photogrammetry experts. High resolution cameras were used to study monolith rock arts, while site mapping and archaeological assessment of sites was equally undertaken. The team enjoyed all consultants drew in for the research. Dr. David Coulson, Alex Peck, Ferdinand Smith, Joshua Bako and Dr. Frank and Enor and Dr. Abu Edet brought in all this information together covering each feature in turn.



### **3. Campaign for Community Participation**

The prime role of the research was to identify threats to the monoliths, develop best practice, help to set standards, provide advice and guidance to the local people, and also advice on preservation and promotion of their heritage and entrepreneurial activities for sustainable development of their heritage and communities.

### **4. Research**

The project team had a rich variety of historical sources, artifact and cultural materials to draw on. The Clan Heads and Village leaders gave their support in oral history which is highly needed to compliment the artifacts found all over the archaeological sites. Besides the sites maps showing the overall development of the various sites, there are surviving herbs and antique trees valued because of their age and traditional importance, they make up the forest galleries. Land use changes pose a serious threat for monolith sites and wildlife habitats.

### **5. Progress and Plans**

Ten monoliths sites now have Monolith Site Characterisation (MSC) documents that will enhance plans for the conservation, repair and restoration of deteriorated monoliths. MSC are computerized on highly sophisticated GIS and drone analysis, this can be used in many different ways for monolith sites management. Research will continue in the next phase on MSC until over 350 sites are documented. Every community is now calling for MSC to be conducted on their sites, a good sign that communities are reacting favourably towards the research. A website has been created on-line via the internet.

## **6. Second Phase**

The second phase will involve archaeological excavations on potential sites, and oral history documentation across Bakor communities. Conservation of sites will follow the second phase development plan and the main focus will be on the repair and restoration of deteriorated monoliths. Consideration for tree planting and creation of buffer zones will be decided in agreement with the communities.

## **7. Third Phase**

Monitoring of sites and creation of community museum and entrepreneurial activities will be decided along with the communities. The intention is to engage all the communities in managing their heritage sites for sustainable development including tourism and education.

## **Conclusion**

This research is to raise awareness for the protection of the monoliths. It was designed to bring together existing information to increase both as a whole and in terms of its individual sites and places. This understanding will facilitate the conservation, preservation and appreciation of monolith heritage.

## **Acknowledgements**

The project is financed by Trust for African Rock Arts (TARA) and Prince Claus Fund (PCF). While the University of Calabar provided research vehicles and drivers. Ahmadu Bello University Zaria provided archaeological survey equipment and an expert cartographer for the first phase of the project. Security was adequately provided with four mobile policemen throughout the ten days research work in the Cross River region. I am very grateful to our research partners for doing an extraordinary amount of high-

quality work within such a short period of ten days. I appreciate all the institutions that supported the First Phase of this project.

Thank you all with my highest esteem.

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October 2, 2016

The Vice Chancellor,  
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Sir,

**Brief Report on the First Phase Monolith Research Project**

I wish to inform you on the outcome of the first phase Monolith Research in the Cross River region.

Field work commenced immediately after the collaborative meeting with Bakor leaders. Selected sites from the six sub-ethnic groups were covered within 10 days of intensive research.

Thanks to the Vice Chancellor, University of Calabar for the provision of one 18-Seater Bus and a Ford 4-wheel drive vehicles, and to the Directorate of Research for prompt actions and preparations for the arrival of our foreign research partners.

Attached herewith, is a brief report for your information please.

Thank you with my highest esteem.



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