



## WHAT IS THE FACTUM FOUNDATION?

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Factum Foundation for Digital Technology in Conservation is a not-for-profit organisation founded in 2009. The Foundation and its sister company, Factum Arte, apply digital technologies and scientific innovations to art and heritage.

The Foundation's main focus is to digitally record cultural heritage. It uses and develops new recording technologies to document heritage sites and objects all over the world. Digital recordings have many exciting applications, such as the creation of three-dimensional facsimiles. Facsimiles can play a very important role in research and conservation because they can be easily shared, exhibited and analysed. They are particularly important when the original is exposed to threats of theft, environmental damage or conflict.

Factum Foundation is a pioneer and leader in this field. It democratises access to heritage and makes sure that local communities receive training, equipment and long-term support. This impact can be felt across the African continent



through collaborative projects led by the Foundation, for example in the Cross River region in south-eastern Nigeria.

This article is the first in a series exploring the Factum Foundation's innovative research in Nigeria. Through this case study, we will examine the value of heritage in contemporary life. We will also look at how digital technologies and collaborative projects could be the future of conservation.

## The Bakor Monoliths Project

Factum Foundation is working in partnership with the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria (NCMM), Trust for African Rock Art (TARA), the University of Calabar (UniCal) and the Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) to digitally record anthropomorphic (having human form or human attributes) monoliths in the Middle Cross River region of Nigeria. These monoliths are a rare link to the past. They had an active role in the lives of previous people who lived in the region, and remain important to cultural identity to this day. They are also impressive works of craftsmanship and an important part of African art history.

The monoliths are blocks of stone, mostly basalt or limestone, that have been carved and stand in the ground. The carvings often include human features such as eyes, mouths and navels. Their exact age is not known, but since they represent ancestral leaders and are found in groups of up to 30, the tradition probably continued for hundreds of years. These monoliths are known internationally by the names the Cross-River Monoliths and the Ikom Monoliths, but this project has renamed them the Bakor Monoliths in respect of the people who produced them. In local languages they are referred to as 'akwanshi' or 'atal'.

The project began in October 2016. Since then, the collaborative research team has recorded a total of 215 monoliths over 4 periods of fieldwork. Factum Foundation records monoliths through a combination of technologies including photography, aerial photography, GPS and photogrammetry (the science of making measurements from photographs). They can then create an exact copy in the form of a 3D model. These can be viewed and studied online ([see examples](#)). It is also possible to print new physical copies using this data.

## What Happens Next?

Many of the monoliths are in a bad condition or have gone missing since they were first documented in 1961/62. This means that they are in danger and this preservation work is urgent. It will not be possible to preserve the remaining monoliths without the interest and support of their local communities. Factum



Foundation is planning more fieldwork with its Nigerian partners in the Cross River region to track down and record more monoliths before it is too late.

Factum Foundation is also working with the Nigerian Commission for Museums and Monuments and the Trust for African Rock Art to create a new visitor centre in a village in the Bakor region called Alok. This centre will be a great resource of information and research about the monoliths.

Through Factum Foundation's efforts, the Bakor monoliths are increasingly recognised for their historical importance both locally and internationally. The monoliths will be the subject of an exhibition at the British Museum in London in 2022 (Covid-19 situation depending). This exhibition will then move permanently to the visitor centre in Alok thanks to a generous grant from the Carène Foundation. An additional long-term goal of the project is to have the Bakor monoliths registered as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. This would bring increased interest and economic support to the area. Well-preserved and well-known heritage sites often attract more visitors to a region.

In the next articles, we will examine some of the reasons that the monoliths are in danger and the ways we can preserve and protect them. We will look at one example, the Ntitogo monolith, in greater detail to understand the complex lives of these stones. We will also explore the monoliths' historical context, and we will hear from local and international experts about their significance.