

## A DOCUMENTARY STUDY OF CULTURAL OBJECTS IN THE COMMISSION FOR MUSEUMS AND MONUMENTS IN NORTH CENTRAL ZONE, NIGERIA

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### Abstract

Cultural objects are ancient art products created by humans which give information about the culture of its creator or users. Cultural objects whether ancient or current have a significance because they offer insight into humans' activities of the past and the development of humans. Besides, the human value placed on these cultural objects due to their historical and socio-cultural importance, the desire to have a safe place for keeping them is what necessitated the creation of museum in Nigeria. Therefore, the problem of this study is an examination of cultural objects housed in museums in North Central Nigeria. The aim of the study is to documents the different aspects of the Nigerian cultural objects housed in the museum, also to categories, analyse and interpret the cultural objects based on their themes, styles and materials as well as their functions in the society. Relevant literature on the subject matter was reviewed. Furthermore, the study employed the descriptive and historical research methods. It involved instruments like oral interview, questionnaire, photograph and observation. After the application of the aforementioned, the data collected was analysed and categorized based on the socio-cultural significance of the cultural objects. The study reveals that museums located in the North central zone were established based on the archaeological, ethnographic, monumental and cultural discoveries of the objects in the area.

**Key Words:** Cultural, Objects, Museum, Monument, Documentary

### Introduction/Background of the Study

Cultural objects are ancient art products created by humans which give information about the culture of its creator and users. Cultural object whether ancient or current, have a significance because they offer an insight into technological processes, economic development and social structure among other attributes. These cultural objects created by humans have remained the only way through which history is made tangible. For instance, the history of Greece cannot be complete, without making references to their ancient artworks like Vases, which have helped cultural professionals (like art historians, ethnographers, anthropologists, archaeologist among others) in explaining how the society (Greek) used to function (Gardner, 1984).

The human value placed on these cultural objects due to their historical and cultural importance, and the desire to have a safe place for keeping them is what, consequently necessitated the creation of museums around the world and Nigeria inclusive. Although museums are primarily western in origin, the concept behind museums has long been evident in other cultures. In Africa for example, many museums were created out of Sheer need to protect, preserve, and promote the continent's cultural objects. Most cultural objects discovered during the colonial government were illegally taken out of Africa against the wishes of the indigenous peoples. At some instances the continent even experienced forceful taken away of cultural materials that were of special significance and highly value to the societies that created them according to (Boyi, 2013).

Most of these cultural materials were produced far way back to centuries. Gbadegesin (2018) avers that, terracotta objects stone, objects and bronze objects from Ife, Nok, Benin and Igbo-Ukwu among others, are the rich cultural artefacts that now place Nigeria high in the world. Some of this cultural objects according to Nwagbo (2014) are relics or monuments of ancient time, which serve as people's identities, for us they are interpretation materials tools collected and preserved. Kalu (2015) adds that, every society has its cultural artifacts, cultural expressions and other material culture.

In order to ensure that these cultural materials are protected and preserved for posterity, the then colonial government and the successive government ensured that an institution should be establish to cater for these cultural materials in the country. This development led to the establishment of Federal Department of Antiquities and the Antiquity Commission in 1979. It later created in its place, the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) in September, 1979 (Boyi, 2013). The National Commission for Museums and Monuments according to Okpoko (2006) was given the adequate mandate/power to transform the cultural environment of Nigeria through the network of its museums. Presently, the National Commission for Museums and Monuments operates fourty three (43) museums across the country to meet

the cultural needs of Nigerians and foreigners alike. Museums are located in many states of the country especially, at the state capitals, including the one established in North Central Geopolitical Zone which comprises of museums in Jos, Lafia, Esie, Lokoja, Kaduna, Makurdi and Minna, but this paper will discuss briefly on Esie Museum, Jos Museum, Minna Museum and Kaduna Museum. They are sited at different places and times depending on the archaeological, monumental and cultural discoveries of the objects in the area.

Esie museum was established in 1945 by the Colonial Government to house the soapstone sculptures that were brought to lime light in 1933 by H.G. Ramshaw. Seven years later the Jos museum was established in 1952. Esie museum is sited at the spot where the sculptures were discovered in 1933. This site formally a groove is about 14 kilometers South West of Esie township. Esie museum contains over one thousand (1000) stone carving of men and women presided over a king. They are the largest collection of stone carvings in the whole of black Africa. The objects range in height from 14 to 120cm and weigh between 0.55 and 104 kilograms. The carvings represent people engaging in different activities (Hambolu, 2004).

The Jos museum was open to the public in 1952. It is the second oldest and one of the largest museums in Nigeria after the small museum at Esie, near Ilorin in Kwara state, which was opened in 1945. For many years Jos was the headquarter of the Federal Department of Antiquities until, it was eventually transferred to Lagos. It is the second largest museum in Nigeria offering a wide range of exhibits and facilities for visitors (Nyam, 2008). Its establishment was due to archaeological discoveries of relics during the tin-mining operation in some part of Northern Nigeria. The National Museum Minna is located in the state capital, it is another museum in the North central zone, located within the Federal Secretariat Complex. The office facilities include the curators' office, senior and junior staff offices, gallery and other auxiliary spaces. Minna museum has also been involve in the identification of some cultural sites (Olaniya, 2007).

The National Museum Kaduna is regarded as one among the network of museums in Nigeria, under the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM), the umbrella body managing public museums in Nigeria. Kaduna museum is the second museum to be established in the Northern part of Nigeria after the Jos museum. The museum is located at Ungwar Sarki opposite the Emir of Zazzau's house, along Ali Akilu Road in Kaduna North Local Government Area of Kaduna State. The main features of the museums are the archaeological, the ethnographic and modern craft galleries.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Museums around the world are dedicated to promoting a greater appreciation and knowledge of history and culture of people in the society, hence, their ability to foster the understanding of the present and anticipating the future, is what makes them unique in the society where they are located. Therefore, the establishment of museums in Nigeria, for over five decades ago, is generally believed to be in the best interest of Nigeria's history and cultural sector development.

By year 2005, the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM), had forty-three (43) museums located in different parts of the country. While the traditional function of most Nigerian museums has not changed, the main collection policy of NCMM has been mostly to collect, preserve and showcase to the public the ancient material culture of the Nigerian peoples. In view of this, majority of these museums have remained mere repositories of cultural materials of the old traditions, which have existed in various regions in Nigeria. For example, the Benin museum houses predominantly, the art works of ancient Benin Kingdom; the Jos Museum contains generally discoveries of Nok cultural traditions; while the National museum in Ile-Ife exhibits a variety of artworks which are material culture of the ancient Yoruba kingdom. In the same way, the museum located in north central zone were established to house the material culture that were discovered in this region and other cultural objects. However, a cursory look at the museum shows that, it houses artifacts from cultures all over Nigeria. Hence, the problem of this study, is an examination of the material culture housed in this museums with a view to documenting and evaluating its, socio-cultural and educational functions, in relation to the present developmental needs of Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The aim of the study is to expose and document the culture objects housed in North Central Museums. The objectives of the study are to:

1. identify and document the cultural objects in these museums and their relevance to the education of the society.
2. categorise and analyse the cultural objects in the museums based on their themes, styles, and materials, as well as their functions in the society.
3. to identify museums located in the north-central zone and their composition.
4. examine the present collection policy of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) as well as the role of these Museums in relation to the current development needs of the Nigerian people.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because it will bring to the fore, quiet a number of historical discoveries of cultural objects that have been made in Nigeria, over the years which have placed Nigeria on a high pedestal of technology and cultural advancement, especially the cultural artifact collected from different parts of the country. The study will also help to provide cultural and historical information on the cultural materials that are housed in these museums to Nigerians and international communities at seminars, conferences and exhibitions thereby proving the contribution of Nigeria to world civilization. Pam (1991) also asserts that, "what attracts tourist from Europe to Nigeria are the arts, craft, culture and natural attraction". This study will give a deeper appreciation on cultural objects housed in these museums, it will also create better awareness, contribute to scholarship and increase partnership with other organisations for further research into Nigeria's rich cultural heritage for posterity. The study will also stimulate creativity, innovation and inventiveness with proper appreciation of the past efforts in manufacturing and technology. It will also enhance public appreciation of the importance of Nigerian culture to black and world civilizations.

### **Review of Related Literature**

Literature reviewed works on authors like Lothar (1998), Newton (1978), Riplay (1978), Abadon (1998), Hirzy (1998), Afigbo (1985), Wilson (1989), Alexander (1996), Hudson (1987), and Okpoko (2006) and museums offer a storehouse of information about how people and societies have behaved through the ages. Lothar (1998) remarks that, "the primary purpose and function of a museum and its exhibits is to educate. This shows that educators are looking up to museums to help them attain their educational objectives. Through the analysis of cultural heritage in the museum, ascertain whether these museums play such role to Nigerian educational system. Supporting this view Newton (1978) maintains that a museum "is a kind of tuition free Open University". The writer in this way views museums as cultural schools where people learn about past cultures and traditions. Riplay (1978) upholds that "museums distribution and its importance are seen in the role it plays. It is for recreational purpose, how we learn many things along the way about the past, other people, about aesthetics and philosophical ideas and ourselves". Abah (1998:14) similarly shares the view that, museum also functions as a research institution, it opens a wider room for study, exposes a wider knowledge of past events and areas of study. It permits and provides wider use of materials, for research services. The positions of Riplay (1978) and Abah (1998) clearly put museum as a life-long education centers for everyone".

Hirzy (1998) has also supported this view saying that education department even sets aside study days to allow for more intensive exploration of the cultural background to an exhibition on areas of the collections, and they usually include slide, lectures and gallery talks. These activities complement study programmes in a range of core subjects including English, Drama, Theater Studies, Design and Technology, History of Art, Music, Social Science and a whole lot of other fields. Similarly, Afigbo (1985:15) and Hooer-Greenhill (1992) place high importance on the role of museums as they offer many different opportunities for children and adults to enter into the world here they may play out skills that are vital in the real world. With the rise of technology, museums are able to provide the masses with interactive education. Hudson (1987), affirms that we would not be able to understand the influence of technological innovation, or the rise and fall of the Qing dynasty, or the role that beliefs play in shaping family life, if we do not know about the experience in the past. This is the fundamental reason why museums are important. It offers the only extensive evidential base for the contemplation analysis of how societies function, and people need to have some sense of how societies function.

Based on the literary works reviewed above, it is observed that museums play a big role in the visual understanding of the world especially through education which gives man a better insight into the past, present and future. However, considering the rate at which the world is fast moving technologically, there is need to examine the traditional role of North Central museums by analyzing critically, its cultural objects in relation to the current socio-cultural needs of the society. This study is therefore, necessary, as it will help in suggesting way on how the cultural objects in the museums will be more relevant to Nigeria society.

### **Research Design**

In this study, the researcher employed a qualitative research design, using historical and descriptive approaches in order to achieve the stated aim and objectives. According to Sambo (2005), "a qualitative research describes social phenomena of events or thing, so as to understand the effect that such events or things have on the lives of individuals, groups, societies, or cultures". The researcher employed this method in order to expose and documents the cultural objects in museums located in the North-Central geopolitical zone with a view to describe, analyse, interpret and document them. The historical approach was used by the researcher in order to give a logical assessment of the past and present events, as well as predict the future direction of the problem being studied (Adetoro, 1986). This enable the researcher to have an in-

depth study of these cultural objects, their background history and knowledge about the cultural object while the descriptive approach was used to describe the cultural objects. This will help in the general understanding of the ideological and philosophical basis for these cultural objects and these methods were used by Saliu (1994), Osuala (2005), Duniya (2009) and Muhammad (2015) it was successful.

### **Data Collection**

**Sources of Data:** The researcher collected data from two sources; primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include the cultural objects in the museums and staff of the National Commission of Museum and Monument in North Central Geopolitical Zones. The secondary sources include relevant literature/published and unpublished written materials on documentation of cultural heritage in Nigeria, especially museum cultural objects in North Central Zone. Journal articles in hard copy and electronic form on the internet and relevant newspaper articles on the museum and cultural objects.

### **Method of Data Collection**

The main technique that the researcher employed is field work. According to Nachmias and Nachmias (1996) and Okpoko and Eze (2011), field work is considered as a research exercise undertaken outside office, school; or laboratory setting, in order to gain knowledge through direct contact and observation on the subject matter. This involves the movement of the researcher from his base to the field, for the purpose of collecting research information. The field work approach was successfully used by various researchers, like Fosu (1986) Okoli (2009) Samuel (2015) Agada (2015) and Saliu (1994). In the field work approach, various instruments such as interview, observation, literature, internet search as well as research tools like digital camera, recording device and notebook was used by the researcher. The researcher visited the National Commission for Museums and Monuments in Kaduna, Jos, Esie, and Lokoja. The sources of every literary material used by the researcher were duly acknowledged appropriately. The interview was purposively conducted, using a recording device which was transcribed and printed for easy reference to important points, made by respondent during interview.

### **Sampling Techniques**

Sampling is a process in which a portion of the population is taken as representative of a larger population (Osuala, 2011). Hence, there are different types of sampling method (random, cluster, matrix and so on). However, two sampling techniques was employed in this study by the researcher, simple random sampling and judgmental or purposive sampling. The simple random sampling was employed to permit or (give) each member of the population an equal chance of being selected. This technique was employed specifically to give members of the population an equal opportunity of being selected for the study. The researcher also used judgmental technique on the staff of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments and any other person who the researcher believed could offer valuable information on issues on the subject matter (especially the host communities where the museums are located or situated). The researcher utilized the purposive sampling method as suggested by Patton (2002), to draw a sample from the available population for the study. This involved identifying and selecting individuals or groups that are knowledgeable about a phenomenon of interest (Cresswell and Clark 2011).

### **Method of Data Analysis**

Data collected during field work was discussed and analysed using the historical and descriptive approaches as used by Saliu (1994) and Okachi (2015). The historical method will help the researcher to articulate relevant background information about the cultural objects in the museums and their origin under study. According to Osuala (2011), historical analysis provides information for a current problem being studied but it also enables a greater appreciation of culture and society. While the descriptive method was employed to describe, analyse and discuss the cultural objects in these museums, it will also help to give detail analysis of the social cultural significance of the material. Both Adetoro (1986) and Asika (2002) recommend the appropriateness of combining these methods, for a detailed research analysis and discussion.

### **Analysis of Selected Cultural Objects**

There is a lot of cultural materials in the museums, but this paper will only analyze and discuss a few for further discussion on their theme, style, origin, materials and functions.

**Esie Stone Seated Figure:** Esie, seated stone figure are unique and distinctively homogeneous. It is a full figure seated on stool, the stool on which the figure sits have uniformly flat round bases and flat round seats joined together by cylindrical supports which together with the legs of the seated figure appear tripodal. The figure has thick neck, and the ears are depicted almost to the back of the head. From the head to the waist it is fairly proportional but the legs in their common seated position are somehow. The eye which is in the shape of a horizontally compressed circle is strongly outlined in relief with the eyeball left without any indication of the pupil. The seated figure is richly adorned with leads and bangles, the figure is wearing

a great variety of elaborate hair dresses and hair styles. It depicts affluence and royalty. It is made from steatite stone and it is a metamorphosis rock and is basically talc (Magnesium silicate).



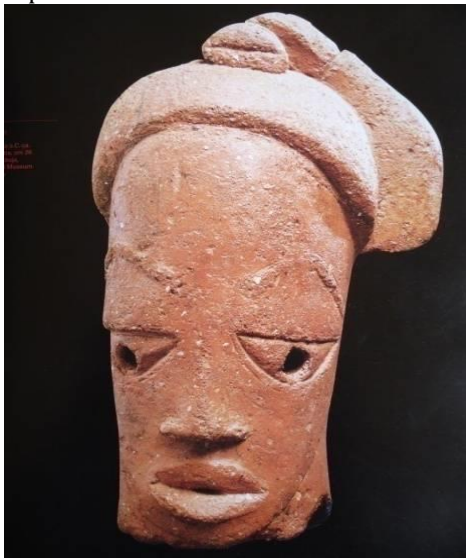
**Plate I: Esie Stone Seated Figure, Artist: Unknown**

**Date:** 18<sup>th</sup> Century **Size:** 69.9cm

**Medium:** Steatite Stone, **Origin:** Esie

**Location:** National Museum Esie Kwara State

**Nok Terracotta Head:** The head from Nok depicts a human head. It is oblong in shape. The eye is depicted without any attempt to model the eye lid as a cover over the eyeball. The eyebrow mostly carving downward like an expanded arch is depicted separate from the eyelashes. The mouth is invariable open with the lips pushed out as in singing position. The eye-brow, modelled evenly in low relief, is depicted far upon on the forehead, separate from the eye. The sculpture is also shown wearing a cap on its head. This sculpture was found in Idegi Northwest ward and consists of most zoomorphic sculptures and many human representations.



**Figure II: Title: Head from Nok, Artist: Unknown,**

**Date:** C.500BC/CAD 200, **Size:** 10cm, **Medium:** Terra-Cotta (Clay),

**Origin:** Jama'a - Kafanchan, **Location:** National Museum, Kaduna 1973.

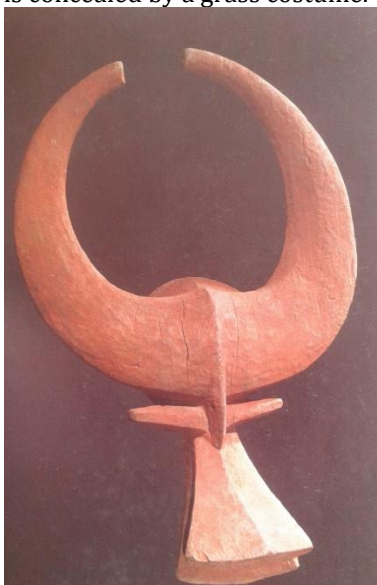
### Benin Bronze Head

Benin Bronze head (Abumuela) is for the royal ancestor's altar. The heads have become more stereotyped and seen to be intended to carry a great weight, such as carved tusks known to have been mounted on the later heads. This is a massive type of figure from Benin, with extreme exaggeration of proportion, and with a flamboyant ornamentation said to have been introduced by Oba Osemwede (1816-1848) according to Fagg and List (1990).



**Plate III: Title: Head from a figure, Artist: Unknown, Date: 12<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> century, Size: 16cm, Medium: Terra-Cotta (Clay), Origin: Ife, Location: National Museum, Kaduna 1983.**

**Buffalo Headdress:** The wooden headdress called Kambon carved to present a bush cow or buffalo, is made by the mama people, who live near Wamba in Nassarawa State. The dancers wear the mask with their bodies covered with a massive grass dress. The masquerade appears at different stages in the agricultural cycle and for funerals of cult members and commemorate the legendary heroes that taught them their agricultural skills. The mama mask sculptures are mainly representations of bush cow used in fertility (Mangam) dances. The masks have long horn and it is worn on top of the head, while the body is concealed by a grass costume.



**Plate IV: Title: Buffalo Headdress (Kambon), Artist: unknown, Date: unknown, Size: Height 89cm, Medium: Wood and paint, Origin: Wamba, Nassarawa State, Location: National Museum, Kaduna. 1972**

**Ekpu Figure:** The Ekpu is an ancestral wooden figure that played significant roles in the history of the Oron people. The carving of Ekpu figure was associated with the belief that the dead ancestor has roles to play in the life of a living person. The image represents the dead who is supposed to carry out all needed support



for the living. The Ekpu figure has a very tiny mouth, long and big beard and carries two wooden staffs in his two hands. Ekpu figure signifies the spiritual role of the ancestor in the life of a person or community. Carving of Ekpu figures shows the confidence reposed in the ancestor. The Ekpu figures were carved in different sizes from a single log of wood, they look greyish in colour, while others are dark brown in colour.



**Plate V: Ekpu Figure, Artist: Unknown**  
**Date: 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> Century Size: 69.9cm**  
**Medium: Carved wooden figure,**  
**Origin: Ibibio Oron Akwa-Ibom State**  
**Location: National Museum Jos, Artist Unknown**

**Bassa-Nge Mask:** The Bassa-Nge mask is a wooden carved mask which was collected in Ignira country and it is used there in connection with the ritual of Ekuēcici, representing the servants of the dead. Such rituals are performed during post burial rites and also for entertainment. The mask can be consulted by the sick, the barren and in connection with the prevention of premature death.



**Plate VI: Bassa-Nge: wooden face mask, elaborately decorated, carved by a Bassa-Nge carver from before 1920**  
**H 55.5m National Museum Jos**

**Epa Alaba Helmet Mask.** The mask is a double wooden face multi – coloured helmet mask. The super structure of the mask on display is complex; comprising of a seated figure under a canopy. The figure is surrounded by two rows of twenty-five smaller figures, representing mothers feeding their babies, hunters and flute players. The structure of each mask, which is sacred and Janus-faced, is said to represent an ancestral spirit, worshipped by the devotees of all kinds: This is among the cult members in eastern Yoruba land, during annual Epa festival dance, where youths wear wooden helmet shaped masks (Epa) and perform acrobatic feats of strength and skills. It is also used as an ancestral cult (also known as the Epa cult) which is believed to be spiritually connected with increase. The multiple figurines surrounding the *Epa Alaba* helmet mask, symbolically suggests its meaning of increase, which the members of the cult believed in.



**Plate VII: Title: Epa Alaba Helmet Mask, Artist: Akinyode,**

**Date: Unknown, Size: 123cm, Medium: Wood,**

**Origin: Lagos, Location: National Museum Jos, 1989**

**Brass Wall Mask:** The brass wall masks with two segmented horn, zigzag hair style, has four flat projections and there is a depression between the nose and the mouth. There is a hole in the mouth, nose and eyes just like the Nok terracotta. The mask is dual in shape, the mouth, nose and eyes are pierced or left open. There are geometric designs on the head, eye and around the lower jaw.



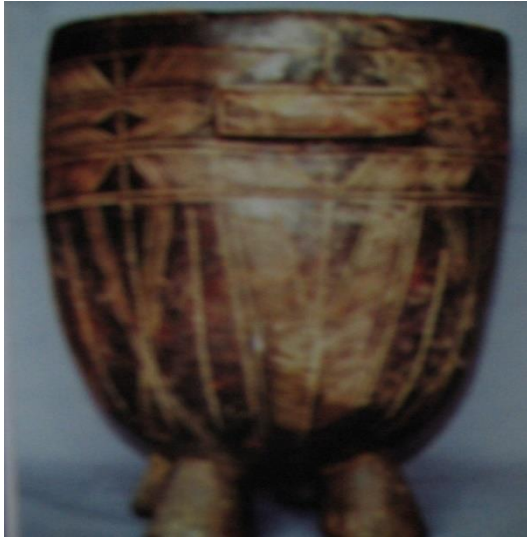
**Plate VIII: Title: Brass Wall Mask, Artist: unknown,**

**Date: unknown, Size:22.5cm, Medium: Brass,**

**Origin: Kaduna, Location: National Museum, Kaduna, 1992**

**Nupe Traditional Mortar:** The Nupe traditional mortar has four wooden legs attached to the mortar. It has decorative design with horizontal, diagonal and vertical lines, engraved on the mortar. The mortar is used to pound grains like corn, millet and it is also used by medicine priest and other priest to pound medicine herbs. Most of the traditional mortars, of the Nupe people, have designs on them and also serve decorative purpose on altars or in homes, when not in use





**Plate XIV: Title: Mortar, Artist: unknown, Date: unknown, Size: 25cm,  
Medium: Wood, Origin: Nupe, Niger State, Location: National Museum Kaduna 1988**

### **Conclusion**

Based on the analysis and discussions, it was discovered that, the National Museum in Jos and Kaduna houses three types of material culture, which are largely categorized into archaeological, ethnographic and craft sections. In these sections, there are artworks of different styles, cultural backgrounds, materials, as well as variety of themes (social, religious and political). The study revealed that, the National museums in Minna, Kaduna Lafia and Makurdi house ethnographic materials whereas National Museum in Jos and Esie house archaeological and ethnographic materials, while the National Museum Lokoja is considered as museum of National History or Museum of Colonial History. The cultural objects in these museums give insight into the belief systems, entertainment and artifacts of some of our local communities. It further brought to bear aspects of their religion, culture, moral values, norms, good harvest, after life and policing.

The sculptural piece in these museums have symbolic significance attached to them by traditional African population, which forms the philosophical and ideological bases for these sculptures. They connote different forms of symbolic implications, ranging from leadership to fertility, rites of passage, courage, authority, power, religious, purity, ancestral commemoration and funeral rites among others. These museums were established to ensure that cultural materials are collected, preserved and later exhibited to the Nigerian populace for viewing. This is done so that the cultural objects do not disappear and to ensure that culture, history and tradition of the past are kept alive.

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