

**Factors Militating the Development of Jos Museum and its Role in the Preservation of Historical and Religious Heritage**

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**Abstract**

*It is obvious that a museum, since prehistoric studies, has purposefully provided space for processing, storage and display of historical, archaeological and ethnographic as well as modern art objects and relaxation. The Jos museum was founded within this historical objective. But it becomes obvious that the essence of the Jos museum seems to be losing its relevance and it is capable of meeting the proposed essence of being a museum. Looking at the set-up of the Jos museum, one laments over the maintenance culture embedded in the preservation and sustenance of the subjects (animals and artefacts). The aim of this paper is to explore the roles which Jos museum plays in the preservation of cultural, historical and religious knowledge. Using the historical analytical method, the study uses primary and secondary sources for data collection and systematic observations in order to underscore factors or problems militating against the museum and the possible solutions for alleviating such problems. This work revives the intended aim for starting the Jos museum and urges the need to support its activities and growth for national development. Only then that our cultural and religious values and identities can be preserved for the next generation in the midst of a technological century and the centuries to come.*

**Keywords:**Museum, Plateau State, Animals, artefacts, Jos Museum

**Introduction**

In the developed nations, museum has been one of the most important aspects of society. A lot of attention is devoted to its development because it contributes to the understanding of ancient cultures and civilization of the people. This aspect of the society has been of interest to both nationals and tourists and has served as a major means of transmission of historical, cultural and religious knowledge and values to the younger generation.

Museum has been considered as a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which

acquires, conserves, researches, communicates, and exhibits for purposes of education, study and enjoyment, tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment. Museum has become a permanent activity of man in the society and the activities of the museum has been spear-headed by the government and private sectors or collectors.

However, Nigeria has not been able to place itself in the midst of countries who value cultural heritages. Even when there is museum activity in a particular State, accessing the activities of the museum are restricted from the public. Amadi G. Azuwueze laments that it is unfortunate that some state governments in Nigeria are either blocking the museum from the public or removing parts of it. Azuwueze goes on to state that the museum is an institution, can be considered as the oldest human institutions; its right should be not be tampered with.

The concern for this work is not far from that of Azuwueze i.e. lack of access to museums and the maintenance of the museums are significant to the preservation of cultural and religious heritages in Nigeria. This work surveys a brief world history of a museum and how it got to Nigeria. It specifically concentrates on Jos museum and zoo and discusses the maintenance culture adopted to sustain these artefacts in Nigeria. It compares the museum activities in developed nations like the National Archaeological Museum (Greece), the National Palace Museum (Taiwan), The State Hermitage Museum (Russia), the Museum of the Bible (California, US), Vatican City (Italy), Galleria degli Uffizi (Italy), the Natural History Museum (London), the Louvre (Paris), The British Museum (London) and many in South Africa etc. with the ones in Nigeria in order to show relevance and enthusiasm. It also discusses factors militating against the effectiveness of museum in Nigeria and also suggested possible solutions to curb those problems.

#### **A Brief History of Museum**

The word 'Museum' is derived from Greek word *Mouseion* which means abode, home or temple of the Muses and where the daughters of Zeus. The king of Olympia gods lived. Since they were good at music, poetry and dancing. They helped men to forget their sorrows and anxieties through these activities, Hence, *mouseion* came to be associated with a place where people's mind found rest and peace from every affairs. The Greeks believed that knowledge could be gained by worshipping these goddesses who protected and encouraged Greek art –dancing, history, drama, love oratory, religion etc.

Museums have a long history going back to the 3rd century B.C., when the first known museum was opened in the University of Alexandria in Egypt, by Ptolemy Alphonsus Soter, although scholars believe the idea

was borrowed Demetrius of Phalerum. Azuwueze asserts that a museum has a lecture hall, a library, books, a courtyard, an astronomical garden, a collection of cultural and natural objects and a botanical garden and headed by a priest, assisted by a writer, an astronomer, a mathematician and physician.

The Romans took over such a civilization from the Greeks and imbibed a lot of religious orientation to muscological activities. The Greco-Roman world laid emphasis on education, religion, and politics. Such an understanding moved to the Dark Ages. Azuwueze surveys museums in the dark Ages, the Medieval society and shows the effects of these periods on the development of Museums. To him, there were practices of collecting objects by the Roman Catholic Church and kept them in monasteries and the monks kept records in scrolls, parchments and papyri. Princes and kings also kept records.

The West experienced the rebirth of classical times which witnessed great collection of artefacts in both arts and science. This renaissance period witnessed the exploration and discovery of new continent, decline of the repressive Feudal system, growth in commerce, invention of printing, knowledge of compass, gunpowder, review of classical learning and wisdom, after a long period of cultural decline and stagnation. There were a lot of effects on museum; collections were widened, diversified nature of objects, and religion was de-emphasized.

The sixteenth century witnessed a different dimension of museum activities. A lot of kings and princes began to have their private collections. These were headed by the Italians. For example, Medici of Florence. The Portuguese, Spaniards and the entire world became interested as the kings started collecting their private collections. For example, King Matthias of Hungary, King Augustus of Saxony, Basilius Amer Bach, Sir Robert Cotton, Elias Ashmole and John Tradescant and his son. There were also collections of animals, paintings and manuscripts. The Amators has cabinets or Wunder Kammer or gallery.

In the seventeenth century, there were museum activities. There were collections in religion, science and politics. People handed over their collections to others for safety. Basel Museum in 1672 became the first public museum after it was acquired from the Catholic Church. There was also the nationalization of private collections. Also, the Ashmolean Museum became the second public museum in 1681 from the collections of Elias Ashmole and the Tradescants and handed over to Oxford University.

From the Age of Enlightenment, different types of museum surfaced and there was emphasis on the growth of natural history. The British Museum became the third public museum in 1759 from the collections of

Sir Reuben Cotton, Sir Albert Harley and Mr. Hans Sloane. The fourth museum was Hermitage Museum in Russia in 1764. Subsequently, Louvre museum in Paris opened in 1793 and became public in 1808. The Altes museum in Prussia by Frederick William of Prussia in 1803 came to existence. Museum became a place of scholarship in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There were a lot of fairs and exhibitions organized and attended by many people. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, visiting the museum became a right and not a privilege, the curators became sensitive to the needs of the people, and it started giving quality of services to communities. Job opportunities surfaced and museology as a science of museum was started. Education was re-emphasized through the various exhibitions. Such influence led to the founding of the Charleston Museum in South Carolina and that of Mr Peale Willson of Philadelphia and that of Smithsonian Institution in 1858 and the National Museum of America.

Over the years, however, museum culture has spread to nearly every part of the world and today it has become uncommon to find any country that does not have a museum, no matter how small it may be. This implies that the concept of the museum has become a global concept that has survived up to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Africa was not left out in the effort to own museums. Culture to the Africans is life. The rich cultural and natural heritages of the Africans made it easier for the creation of museums. Africa is filled with natural surroundings. Also, colonization made it easier for African museums and the need to conserve the wild animals and the environment. Today, there are many museums in many African countries such as South Africa, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Kenya etc.

#### **Founding, Growth and Management of Jos Museum**

It is worth noting that Museum development in Nigeria began during the colonial period. The British colonial administration thought it necessary to establish a Museum in Jos in 1952- This is because of the discoveries through mining activities of artifacts such as terra-cotta Figurines, Iron Implements (Hoe and Cutlass) which dated the development of iron making in Nigeria.

It is obvious that the establishment of museum in any given society is significant in developing nations. The importance attached to any museum object derives its value in cultural and historical context which may span over areas such as religion, education, politics, economy and warfare. It is most unfortunate however, that many Nigerians to date have not yet realized the importance of museums to the society. To such people, museums are associated with artifacts and monuments, which are regarded as old and useless objects, meant for incineration. This type of impression

attached to museums has such affect that most of the objects which would have been very useful in the general enlightenment and education of the public suffer from deterioration

The traditional role of museums is to collect objects and materials of cultural, religious and historical importance, preserve them, research into them and present them to the public for the purpose of education and enjoyment bearing these in mind, Museums are institutions created in the public interest. They engage their visitors, foster deeper understanding and promote the enjoyment and sharing of authentic cultural and natural heritage. Museums acquire, preserve, research, interpret and exhibit the tangible and intangible evidence of society and nature.

The museum as an institution tells the story of man the world over and how humanity has survived in its environment over the years. It houses things created by nature and by man and in our modern society it houses the cultural soul of the nation. It holds the cultural wealth of the nation in trust for all generations and by its function and unique position, it has become the cultural conscience of the nation.

The National Museum Jos, under the auspices of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, is the largest and second oldest in Nigeria. This Museum was founded in 1952 to house the accidental archaeological findings discovered as a result of tin mining activities around the Jos Plateau in the 1940s.

In an effort to understand the background for starting the Museum, Azgaku Bala Charles states that it was the presence of Tin Mining that accounted for the original Archaeological interest in the area and in fact gave rise to the existence of Jos Museum. A large number of objects collections in the mining industries were rescued and this formed the basis of the museum. Jos Museum is the second oldest Museum in Nigeria after small range of exhibits and facilities.

The National Museum in Jos was commissioned in 1952 by Bernard Fagg, a British archaeologist and museum curator, and is recognized as one of the best museums in the country. It has one large exhibition hall and two smaller ones. The museum is renowned for its archaeology and its Pottery Hall has an exceptional collection of finely crafted clay artworks from all over Nigeria. It is Nigeria's first major museum of antiquities and the second museum established in the country (after the one in Esie, near Ilorin). The museum is home to some fine specimens of Nok terracotta heads and artefacts dating from between 500 BC and 200 AD.

Further explaining the growth or establishment of Jos museum, Nzrewunwain Azgaku Bala's work states that, the Jos Museum is the second museum in Nigeria after the small Museum at Esie, near Ilorin which opened

in 1945. It is the second largest Museum in the country, for many years Jos was the headquarters of the Federal Department of Antiquities until this was eventually transferred to Lagos. It offers a wide range of exhibits and facilities for visitors. It is also the principal research station for the department. It was by the combined efforts of Bernard Fagg, Government Archaeologist and K.C. Murray, surveyor of Antiquities that led to the development of the Jos Museum in 1952.

In addition, Bala asserts that Tin Mining for which Jos is Famous was responsible for the foundation of the Museum. It was the collection of objects dug up during mining operation in the 1920's and 1930's that attracted the first Archeologist to the area. The Jos Museum was first opened to the public in 1952, (Museum Journal 1978). The establishment of the Museum can be attributed to the discovery on Southern Zaria in 1944 of the two thousand years old terra-cotta of the Nok culture. This is the mining area around Jos also presented urgent needs and in fact resulted in the opening in 1952 of the Jos museum as the archacological branch of the Nigeria Museum. The Museum contains the Nok Terra-Cottas, Ife bronze heads, Benin and Yoruba brass work, woodcarvings from all over the country. It also, contains books written by northern scholars, rubes, masks, stone and iron implements, which encouraged as part of the Museum. There is also, a Museum zoo which was developed on the grounds of the museum in 1955.

*In discussing the Jos Museum, one of the notable work which is worth mentioning is that of Azgaku Bala Charles who discusses the guide to the Museum, the gallery, the library, the administrative section, the Centre for Museum Studies, the bright of Benin, staff accommodation, zoo and the relevance of the Museum to the community. Charles discusses that the zoological garden was established in 1957 as an additional attraction to the Museum. The Museum have also serve as a center of studies, research and other purposes. The Jos Museum has expanded its programmes, which include the training of personnel's on different field of Museum. As a result of the joint effort of Nigerian government, and the United State of American, a UNESCO training school was established in 1963. These students come within Nigeria and other African countries. The organization trained techniques, such as, the pottery Museum, zoo Museum, Open-air Museum, Transport and Mining Architecture Museum, etc. Museum serves as an educational resources center for both young and old in our community. Museum supply concrete basis for conceptual thinking. They make learning more permanent and through their various programmes enlighten its community on the functions of the Museum. The Museum educational unit organizes out of school holiday activities in the Museum.*

The unit also organizes symposia and discussion groups or debate for students as well as the general public to educate them on the Museum objects. Through these and many other ways, the education unit in a Museum is helping children and even adults to enjoy and profit from the great cultural heritage, which she possesses.

**Problems Militating against the Effectiveness of Jos Museum**

The essence of starting a museum has always been for education, study and enjoyment as outlined by International Council of Museum (ICOM) in 2007. It depends on the collections it has acquires. These artefacts could be cultural and natural heritages of a country which has aesthetic, historical, scientific, socio-cultural and technological values. Museums exist for the public and seek to satisfy the populace through the management, research and dissemination of information gathered on collections in the most favourable manner. Some of the Problems militating against the effectiveness of Jos Museum are:

1. **Museums were not supported by Colonial Administration:** The colonial administrators started the idea of the Museum in Nigeria, particularly the Jos Museum. However, this administration did not support the activities of the Museum to ensure continuity. These people withdrew from supporting the affairs of the Jos Museum.
2. **Funding:** The major factor is lack of enough working capital. The Jos Museum has been the property of the government. It is very clear that the funding of the museum has been low to enable it function effectively. This depends on the interest the government has on the museum. Nigeria is not the only country that owns museums. When one visits museums in other African countries, one appreciates the efforts put in place for the progress of the culture and history of the country or society. There is need for more funding of the Jos Museum for effectiveness.
3. **Capable and Effective Staffing:** Some of the staff working in the Jos Museum are enjoying their jobs. Most of them have not considered working in the Museum as part of life. Some of them are concerned about the money. They do not have the passion for the work. There would need to employ capable staffing for effective who are qualified have passion for transmitting the knowledge of the past and interpreting such knowledge to the modern person.
4. **Illegal trafficking of Objects and Animals:** There are many artefacts that are being discovered and sold by persons. Some of the

these artefacts are supposed to be properties of the government of sold to the government to safeguard the history of the people. However, one discovers that people don't even know the importance of those artefacts and sells them for the money. Money is not everything when enlightened. Preserving the history behind those artefacts would help the modern generation know about the history of the religious and cultural heritage rather than selling to illegal traffickers who take them out of the country.

5. **Lack of understanding of the Mission for starting Museums:** People did not know the reasons for starting museums in our societies. The current staff of the Jos Museum need to be reoriented on the mission of starting museum and compare the Jos Museum with other museums around the world to create awareness and spark interest in them and make them appreciate the work they do at the Jos Museum.
6. **Poor Maintenance Culture of Objects and Animals:** when one visits the Jos Museum, the maintenance culture is very challenging. Just like most of the organizations and institutions in Nigeria, the Jos Museum needs to step up its maintenance culture of handling these objects and collections. When the writers visited the Jos Museum and Zoo in April, 2019, the decapitating nature of items was disturbing. The animals rely at the mercy of visitors to feed most of the times. There was no water for the aquatic animals. This can be organized to get water for them during the dry season to aid their lifespan. It was a pity that most of the aquatic animals could not survive the hot weather and climate of the dry season. These are to be taken seriously to enable visitors appreciate the beauty of nature at the Jos Museum.
7. **Societal Perception of Arts and culture:** The perception of art in Nigeria is very poor, in spite of the progress made in art appreciation in the last few years. We must acknowledge that there are many art institutions in Nigeria today and that more galleries and art centers are springing up. Also many more activities and festivals have become part of the art calendar in Nigeria. But to a great extent, art and society in Nigeria are still divorced from each other. If art and aesthetics have no place in the general scheme of things, their appreciation will remain the exclusive preserve of a few elites. This situation is in contradistinction to what obtained in pre-colonial times when art belonged to almost every western



educated elite. Jos environment and society is not far from being affected by this factor. There is a need for orientation for the society to understanding cultural and religious significance of owning these artefacts and storing them for the future.

**Possible Suggestionsto alleviate these Problems**

1. **Networking:** Interest on artefacts in the society would contribute immensely to the development of the Jos museum. There should be a special networking programme that would enable the staff understanding the concept of running a museum and be able to connect with the international communities and attend meetings on the maintenance of museum.
2. **Need for International Bodies:** although it has not been easy but having international bodies contribute to the growth of this museum would revive the focus for the Jos museum. Such an understanding among people who have been out of the country and have seen standard museums would spend some among of time mobilizing support for the museum. We thereby call the international bodies to come for its aid as means to preserve cultural and religious heritages. There are bodies like the Global Heritage Fund who are working hard to prevent the destruction of monumental sites and artefacts through some funding programmes. Relating with institutions as this, would draw their attention and interest to support the museum.
3. **Funding by Government:** Jos museum was not founded as a private collection unit. It has always remained a government project and property. Therefore, government has been responsible for its growth and maintenance. It has not been easy with the funding of the museum in terms of staff welfare, acquisition of objects, and facilities. Recently, the Plateau State Government has been considering the sustainability of culture over the past years and reviving people's interest in cultural activities and festivals by the current administration. We plead on the Government of Plateau State and the Federal Government to still step up on their support for the Jos museum in order to sustain it. With this, Jos museum would adequately achieve its intended aims for establishment in 1952.
4. **Support from Individuals:** apart from the government, individuals have played vital roles in the development of museums. The Jos museum cannot be an exception when supported. People who have interest in ancient cultural and religious artefacts and

collections are summoned to help ensure the growth and maintenance of the museum. We call individuals to support the activities of the museum to ensure its growth and enable it rise to standard museums in the West or in countries like South Africa. This would be a collective effort.

5. **Support from Private Bodies and NGOs:** Enlightenment private bodies and NGOs on the national significance of a place as the Jos museum would contribute to raising support for its maintenance and growth. There are many private bodies and NGOs who are willing to support projects as this. But there is need to inform and enlighten them on the significance of these collections on national cultural and religious heritages.
6. **Creating Awareness Programmes to the Public:** The management of the Jos museum needs to deliberately create awareness to the general public through printing of flyers and bill boards, social platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and standard website in order create awareness to the public. These mediums would enable the museum post its recent activities and attract followership.
7. **Ensure Safety of the Objects:** Discoveries are being made every day even in Nigeria and on the Plateau. Some of the people who discover these artefacts sometimes do not know what to do with them. It is duty of the museum to encourage the society to submit these artefacts under their custody and the museum must ensure the safety of these artefacts under their care. We must ensure that laws governing the selling of cultural and religious heritages are enacted on the culprit who purchase these cultural and religious artefacts and illegally sell them beyond Nigeria's borders. We must build trust and working relationship with the public to enable them submit their artefacts under the care of the museum. This would promote growth and attract new artefacts to Jos museum.

### **Conclusion**

The essence of establishing the Jos museum has been to sustain cultural and religious heritages in Nigeria. The Jos museum, as important as it is, has witnessed growth over the years and government has been able to sustain it. However, it is obvious that there is much to be done to promote the activities of the museum to compete with standard museums in the world, which should be the focus in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These would mean there is the need to alleviate the factors that are militating against the growth and maintenance

of the museum, a dimension that is missing in recent modern research about the Jos museum. This work revives the intended aim for starting the Jos museum and urges the need to support its activities and growth for national development. Only then that our cultural and religious values and identities can be preserved for the next generation in the midst of a technological world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the centuries to come.

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