Harnessing the Potentials of Rock Art Sites in Birnin Kudu, Jigawa State, Nigeria for Tourism Development

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Introduction

Paintings on caves and rock shelter walls and engravings on smooth exposures of rock surfaces are found widely throughout Africa, from north down to the south. Thus, two broad divisions can be seen in African rock art. These divisions fall into geographical regions of northern Africa and southern Africa. The northern African rock art has its major distribution concentrated in the Sahara and it is referred to as the Saharan rock art; while the Southern African rock art is found in the drier areas of the region and is simply referred to as the Southern African rock art. The latter triggered research interests since the pictures were observed by Europeans in the mid eighteenth century (Rudner and Rudner 1970: 245-68, cf Davis 1990:271).

The earliest of this art in the Sahara is found in the mountain areas of Morocco and Algeria, stretching from the Atlantic coast to the Red sea and down as far as the Niger bend in West Africa. Below the Sahara, in West Africa rock art has been identified in a few places. For example, engravings, executed on a granite outcrop with broad shallow polished grooves in what appear to be fish, triangles and other geometric designs have been identified at Igbara Oke, near Akure, western Nigeria. It is, however, in the northern part of the country that the paintings are found and they spread over a larger area.

The rock painting sites of northern Nigeria are all located within the savannah zone. The painting sites are found in Geji and Shira in Bauchi State; several small Marghi villages in Borno State; and Birnin Kudu in Jigawa State. Two traditions of the Shira paintings, namely naturalistic (humans and cattle with suckling calves motif) and anthropomorphic, can be discerned. All the paintings are in dark red monochrome executed on steep rock faces or boulder overhang (Swidensticker 1997). The anthropomorphic tradition differs from what is known from not too far away rock painting sites of Geji and Birnin Kudu. Similar paintings have been documented around Marhgi settlements where anthropomorphic representations of human and animal

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figures are connected to rituals of marriage and initiations (Vaughan 1962). At the village of Geji in Bauchi State, which lies about 130 kilometres South of Birnin Kudu, the rock paintings are executed in red pigments. The subject matter is more varied than those of Birnin Kudu and Shira. Three categories have been identified. The first consists of motifs that were painted solid, (11 antelopes, 5 hump less long-horned cows, 2 monkeys, 2 men and 6 unidentified). The second category comprises those painted in outline, (8 hump less long-horned cows, 1 horse, and 1 unidentified). Finally, the third category is made up of those that are painted in outline and stripe (2 hump less long-horned cows and 1 antelope) (Shaw 1978:59).

One or two of these painting sites are listed on the historical list of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments and this seems to be all the attention they have received. Consequently, the sites had steadily fallen into decline and some of them are virtually non-existent today, and this will not encourage any meaningful tourism development programme. Perhaps a review of the current state of affairs would provide an insight into some of the ways of solving this unfortunate turn of events.

Harnessing the Potentials of the Rock Art Sites

The rock art sites of Nigeria, mainly found on the rocky hills of the north-eastern part of the country was scientifically studied and documented in the late 1950s and that of Birnin Kudu, in present-day Jigawa State, declared a National Historical Monument in 1964, which among its function was the promotion of tourism in the area. However, since then not much has been heard about the site let alone its management and conservation. As a result, the site along with many others has systematically been degraded, which is among the many handicaps militating against tourism development in this country. Many reasons can be adduced to explain this failure and one of them is the lack of a proper management and conservation policy.

The prime and overriding function of sites such as these is to conserve the values for which they were recognised with a view to facilitating their progression towards placement on the World Heritage List. This is because the World Heritage Convention requires that countries should submit a management plan for such sites including the level of visitor access and tourism. This can best be achieved if impartial experts are engaged to prepare a broad list of management issues that are vital for protecting the sites' values. This is where the National Commission for Museums and Monuments should play a leading role. The commission should make government to realise the importance of such sites and the need to incorporate them into the national planning process, and subsequently determine how they can be harnessed to improve mankind. The first step towards actualising this development is by taking an inventory of the existing resources. Step two entails categorising and evaluating those resources with a view to determining their individual strengths and weaknesses; while the third step relies on the information emanating from

step two to determine the priorities for legislation, finances, personnel, equipment, interpretation and marketing.

At the Birnin Kudu site, three main styles of painting have also been identified. For example, there is superimposition at Dutsen Mesa, one of the sites, "so that a red outline (with black for part of a cow's back) underlying solid white, which is in turn over lain by solid red; red out line with white body also occur" (Shaw 1978:58). The Birnin Kudu paintings consist mainly of hump less cattle; both the long-horned and short-horned were represented and based on which Shaw (1978) argues that the Birnin Kudu cattle painting antedates the introduction of the humped cattle in northern Nigeria. He further suggests that it may be at least a thousand years old even though the paintings of the horse at Geji has been used to suggest that the paintings may not be earlier than the fifteenth century B.C. (Sasson 1960 *cf* Shaw 1978).



Plate 1: Painting of long-horned cows at the Habube rock shelter in the Birnin Kudu



Plate 2: Painting in the the Agwaja rock shelter, Birnin Kudu showing a cow suckling a calf .

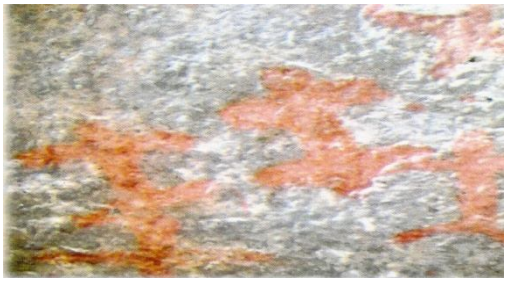


Plate3: Painting showing images that cannot be identified at the Rumfan Jirgi at the Shira site

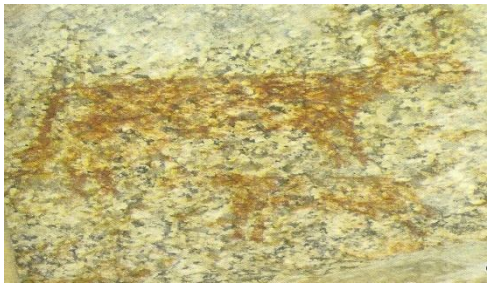


Plate 4: Painting of cows and calves in a rock shelter at the Shira site

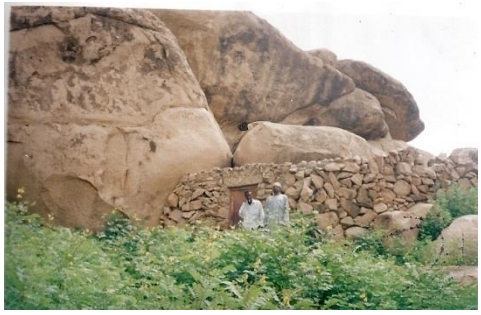


Plate 5: Entrance to the Dutsen Habube rock shelter at Birnin Kudu.

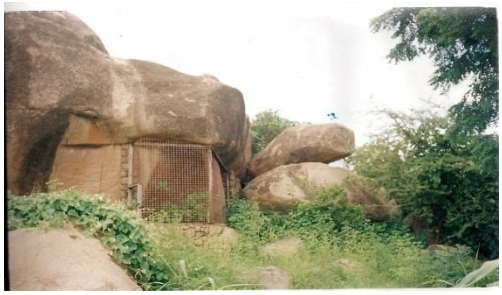


Plate 6: Entrance to the Dutsen Agwaja rock shelter, Birnin Kudu.



Plate 7: Entrance to the Agwaja rock shelter of Birnin Kudu where the painting is being destroyed.



Plate 8: The fading painting of Agwaja cave in Birnin Kudu, where there has been deliberate scraping of the the paint for medicinal purposes.



Plate 9: What is left of the blacksmith shop inBirnin Kudu

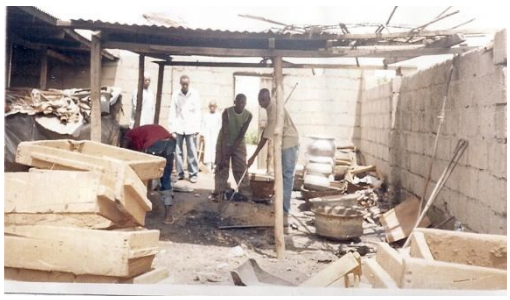


Plate 10: The surviving alluminium workshop at Birnin Kudu.

Involving Local Communities as Stakeholders

One major problem with nearly all government projects and programmes in and around local communities is that every decision and even the manpower have always come from the Headquarters. The local communities in most cases hear about the projects through rumours and sometimes they wake up in the morning to find strange people and equipment authoritatively moving in. This indeed leaves a lot to be desired.

What government ought to do in this case is that right from the onset it should show to the local communities that any project being undertaken is aimed at improving the communities. In this case, the local communities would be encouraged to be participants and beneficiaries from the development including tourism. One way of doing this is by creating employment where the local people are brought in, even if initially, as labourers but with a view to training them to master the art of conservation so that they could eventually take over. This is not to be restricted to the technical aspect of restoration alone but also in the area of construction work whereby there would be some degree of on-the-job-training to help improve the community's skill-bank.

Another way is by nurturing traditional and acceptable handicrafts for "site shops" as well as creating an awareness that would develop an economic programme in the community. This way, the residents can be helped to see themselves as representatives of the community, which would eventually make them establish the right sense of security for visitor satisfaction and not just guides. Once the ground for community participation has been created, the next step would be to encourage the formation of local site advisory councils and government must be ready to listen to the councils' problems and suggestions. This approach will make the local communities see themselves as parts and parcel of the outfit and valuable stakeholders.

Conclusion

The current state of affairs as far as our rock art sites are concerned reveals that the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, including government has grossly failed in its responsibilities. For instance, no conscious efforts have been made to manage and conserve the sites; neither has the local communities been properly informed about the values of these sites. Consequently, they see them as mere primitive worship or ritual areas that are even considered un-Islamic to visit. To worsen the situation now is the fact that cattle herdsmen have resorted to peeling off the paint pigments which they mix with some items to produce certain concoctions that they believe would improve their stock. A glaring example is what is found in plate 8, where there is scarcely any trace of the paint work now.

It is also sad to note that when the Birnin Kudu site was included in the Historical list of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments as

far back as 1964, the idea was to harness the vast traditional crafts industry in the area to go along with it. What we have today are just a couple of craft shops that are merely surviving at the mercy of the seasonal farmers who once in a while come around to mend their hoes at the blacksmith's shop, (as seen in plate 9) while the aluminium craft shops have been at the mercy of a few households that also once in a while pay a visit for a few domestic utensils, (as seen in plate 10).

It is our sincere hope and desire that things would turn around for the better so that we could harness the rich rock art sites of this country for tourism development.

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