

Cross River monoliths: theft of cultural property

Text and photographs (2015) by

Dr. Ivor Miller and Dr. Abu Edet, Department of History and International Studies,
University of Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria
email: imiller@hampshire.edu; abu_edet@yahoo.com



Ntetakor monolith site: monolith in 1960s (Allison) and in 2015 with missing top.

Problem: After Allison's pioneering documentation of the carved monoliths of the middle Cross River region in the 1960s, selected monolith sites were declared as National Monuments under the Nigerian Department of Antiquities. Since then, there has never been a comprehensive survey conducted to establish the locations, numbers and conditions of the monoliths. Our recent expeditions to inspect the monolith sites has revealed general destruction through fire, intentional destruction, and theft. In the pair of photographs above, we compare that taken by Allison (1968) and our own photograph in 2015, revealing a triple threat: destruction of the stone by repeated fire, the use of the stone to crack nuts, and the possible theft of the top section. Sadly, we observed this scenario in multiple monolith sites.

March 23-25: With the guidance and support of the local community, including the Clan head and his people, we inspected several monolith sites in Nta, Nselle, and Nde areas of Ikom L.G.A. While there remain some carved monoliths in their original locations, the majority of monoliths were broken at the base with their tops missing, suggesting fire damage and theft for commercial sale.



Two carved monoliths in Ekpatana, intentionally broken and their tops missing.

In Egon Ekpatana, called “Ekpatana Farm Camp-Nselle”, in Allison (1968: 43), we observed more than 50 monoliths organized in a huge circle. These monoliths were surveyed but not photographed by Allison. Therefore there is no record of the stones that were broken and missing.



Two carved monoliths in Ekpatana, intentionally broken and their tops missing.



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Two carved monoliths in Ekpatana, intentionally broken and their tops missing.



Two carved monoliths in Ekpatana, intentionally broken and their tops missing. Note the freshly cut stones at left indicating recent breakage, while on the right the smooth surface indicating its being cut long ago, then used for breaking nuts or sharpening machetes.



The Nde Clan head (Engr. Nton Bassey Nsan), with red cap, led us to the Ekpatana site with members of the community.