

Digitising the Antiquity Teaching Museum of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife

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Publication Date: 2026/08/13

Abstract: This study examined the artefact logging system at the Antiquity Museum of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria; identified and adapted an appropriate cataloguing schema suitable for the documentation of artefacts in the antiquity museum; applied the adapted cataloguing schema for the classification and organisation of the logging of the museum's artefacts, with a view to generating a functional database for the documentation of the museums artefacts to enhance accessibility, research utility, and preservation. Data gathered formed the basis for developing a functional artefact database using a modified version of the Dublin Core Metadata to create a digital database. In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of adopting modern cataloguing standards and digital technologies for sustainable collection management. It provides a replicable model that can support the long-term stewardship of cultural heritage objects, ensuring their educational and cultural value is preserved for future generations.

Keywords: Antiquity; Museum; Artefacts; Documentation; Cataloguing Schema.

How to Cite: Grace C. Ighavbota; Babasehinde A. Ademuleya (2026) Digitising the Antiquity Teaching Museum of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 11(7), 3705-3712. <https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/26jul1815>

I. INTRODUCTION

The Iconic symbol of a museum is preservation, conservation, collection and display. Clearly put in view, the International Council of Museums [14] defines a museum as “a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage.” Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. Thus, museums have always been tasked with the constant collection of historic objects; traditional and contemporary, respectively, giving rise to the age-old issue of sorting and taking inventories of these artefacts. The process of documenting these finds is a progressive act that never stops, especially with constant technological advancement. As such, it has proved to be a very taxing one that often goes uncompleted or incorrectly documented due to the workload that the museum staff are charged with, and there's also the issue of space. To buttress this is the case study of the rediscovered ancient Roman burial urn at the National Museum Scotland, and the wooden artefacts from the Great Pyramid at the University of Aberdeen Museums 2018 [9].

These cases prove that documentation in a museum is a continuous act, and museums in Africa are no exception.

Museums in Nigeria have barely scratched the surface of proper documentation; as such, the digitisation of museums is still underexplored. However, due to the fact that museum documentation is continuous, it creates a loophole for errors in artefact logging. These errors can range from personnel change, theft, to natural disasters such as flooding, fire, earthquake, among others, thereby leading to loss of logging documents and inventory, as in the case of our study museum, “the Antiquity Teaching Museum of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Of great relevance to the study are the scholarly works on museums [18], [19] and [20], cataloguing [3], [21] and [23], the systematic process of inventorying [8], [24] and [28], imagery, typography, and digital technology [22] and [25]. The museum catalogue plays a pivotal role in communicating the identity and mission of museums. The existing literature

has shown that imagery, typography, and digital technology have played a significant role in enhancing the effectiveness of museum catalogues. Therefore, it is crucial to stay up-to-date with the latest research to leverage catalogues as a powerful tool for communicating the identity and mission of museums.

Many museums rely on manual recording methods with little structured documentation, leading to inconsistent and incomplete records [7]. The National Museum in Lagos partnered with the Fowler Museum at UCLA to create an online, searchable database of over 5,000 artefacts [3]. However, a lack of sustainable funding threatens the maintenance of these early digitisation efforts. Furthermore, other literature explores reclaiming the catalogue, seeing the museum as a site of transformation, and practising art not only as creation but as cultural repair. However, one major issue has been a lack of standardised cataloguing procedures and professional training programs for museum staff ([18]; [27]). Reference [17] probes the fragmented, often opaque histories behind museum collections, particularly those rooted in indigenous African material culture, and in doing so, it unearths profound questions about authorship, representation, and the legacy of the colonial gaze.

Scholarly works on the history of the Antiquity Museum in the Department of Fine and Applied Arts and its collections are very limited. This limitation goes on to buttress the necessity for historical documentation of the museum and digitalisation of the collection therein.

The Department of Fine and Applied Arts was established not only to provide the students with practical and academic training in all aspects of the visual arts, but also to conduct historical research into the various aspects of indigenous and contemporary African arts [2]. The artefacts in the collections of the antiquity teaching museum are to reinforce this purpose. It is therefore apposite, not only to reconstruct the history of the museum but also to provide a functional database and suitable cataloguing schema for the museum, ensuring the fulfilment of the primary purpose of establishing it, hence this study.

The study focuses on the digitisation of the Antiquity Teaching Museum of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, OAU. The aim of the study is to examine the artefact logging system at the Antiquity Museum of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, with a view to generating a functional database for the museum.

➤ *The Objectives of the Study are to*

- Examine the current state of documentation of the artefacts within the antiquity Museum of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife;
- Identify and adapt an appropriate cataloguing schema suitable for classification and documentation of artefacts in the antiquity museum;
- Generate a functional database for the documentation of the museum's artefact

III. METHODOLOGY

Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data were collected using a qualitative approach through physical observation of artefacts and photographing items. Interviews were conducted with curators, the faculty and the previous handler of the museum. The Dublin Core Standard for museum cataloguing is adopted and adapted for the profiling of the artefacts. The criteria for catalogue entries shall include title, artist/creator, source, date, medium, dimensions, provenance, condition, and location. The secondary data collection was sourced from relevant literature in the form of articles, archival materials, theses, books, journals, extracting information from existing records, handwritings with no particular identified author and other relevant publications confirming the issues related to museums, cataloguing systems and digitisation. The data collected were used to establish the total number of objects making up the collection, identify the specificity of objects, carry out an inventory, link information to specific objects, and classify the objects to build a database for easy accessibility, both manually and electronically.

IV. FINDINGS

The Antiquity Museum of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts OAU, predates the establishment of the Department. Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, at the inception of the university in 1962, has as its motto "For Learning and Culture". This was to reflect the need to promote the people's culture through education. To put this in proper perspective, the Institution of African Studies, with its four units, was established. This includes music, dramatic arts, Yoruba and Fine Arts. The museum became a strong support for the Institution in promoting African teaching and research into African Culture.

The Department of Fine Arts, now the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, kicked off in 1975 with the decentralisation of the African studies program, which transformed the four units into departments according to Ojo [30]. The establishment of the department to run degree programs in Fine Arts and Art History led to the inauguration of the Antiquity museum and the artefacts that were obtained from the then Western Nigerian Historical Society, initially stored at the army Barracks Eleyele, before the inception of the University, were handed to the department as teaching objects [29]. But in 1989, the incessant issue of theft plaguing museums and cultural centres in Nigeria [11] came knocking, leading to the closure of the museum to the public, the destruction of the artefacts' logging system and the identities of the objects. Thus, making it difficult for objects to serve their primary purpose; furthermore, the relocation of the department, from the African Studies complex to the old Environmental Design and Management (EDM) building, further buttresses the need for digitalisation of the Antiquity Teaching Museum of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, OAU.

➤ Analysis

The rate of technological advancement globally has birthed new approaches to documentation, conservation and even display of museum objects, which has eased some of the founding hassles of museum documentation [16]. Nevertheless, most museums in Nigeria and Africa lack technological innovation and retain traditional museum operations. While museums around the world have evolved from physical exhibition to virtual reality, most Nigerian museums have yet to successfully upgrade their documentation to a digital format. Digitisation, as defined by UNESCO, is the creation of digital objects from physical, analogue originals by means of a scanner, camera or other electronic device. Simply put, it implies the conversion of documents and artworks into digital images [10]. Digital documentation is a broad term used to describe anything from computer data entry (transcribing information from catalogue cards into an electronic database) to digital photography to the creation of virtual reality systems, and everything in between [12].

Museums stand as institutions founded as a means to preserve and convey our natural and cultural history. “As such, they hold a significant part of the ‘intellectual capital’ of our information society. Thus, the use of emerging digital technologies to activate, engage, and transform this ‘capital’ is paralleled by shifts in the organisational and practice culture of the institutions entrusted with its care” [4]. However, stating the obvious, [12] notes that there is no long-standing tradition of research on the topic of digital heritage management. The majority of literature on the subject gives detailed technical accounts of the methods and outcomes of digitisation, but there is just a handful of it documenting the museums in Nigeria and even fewer capturing the Antiquity Museum of Fine Arts OAU. The digitisation of museums not

only strengthens the protection and management of precious cultural artefacts but also facilitates global sharing of cultural resources through online platforms, significantly enhancing the social value and public service functions of museums [26]. This, however, amplifies the importance of the Antiquity Teaching Museum in a University with a digitised system of operation.

➤ Classification of the Artefacts in the Antiquity Museum of Fine and Applied Arts by Types

Reference [13] describes the Dublin Core metadata standard as a simple yet effective element set for describing a wide range of networked resources. The Dublin Core standard comprises fifteen elements, the semantics of which have been established through consensus by an international, cross-disciplinary group of professionals from librarianship, computer science, text encoding, the museum community, and other related fields of scholarship. However, all elements are optional, and all elements are repeatable. The scheme itself is format-independent, meaning that it is not tied to any single data representation the way, for example, the TEI header is tied to SGML/XML. The scheme is also not tied to any particular set of content rules this therefore makes it adoptable and modifiable [5].

Dublin Core elements make it easy for the description of both digital representations of artefacts (e.g., images, 3D models) and the physical objects themselves, providing a flexible framework adaptable to various types of museum collections. Elements such as Date, Creator, and Source assist in documenting the provenance and historical context of artefacts, which is crucial for conservation and scholarly research. Thus, for this paper, eight of the elements has been adopted and modified to create a suitable cataloguing system (Table 1).

Table 1 Modified Dublin Core (dc) Schema Property and Its Description

Dublin Core (dc) Schema Property (Modified)	Modified Terms and Description
dc: creator	Artist: An individual, ethnicity group or region of the artefact
dc: date	Year: Year of creation
dc: format	Medium: the materials/technique used
dc: rights	Owner: Informal rights statement, indicating who the artefacts belong to
dc: source	Accession No: this is a unique identifier of the work such as the accession number
dc: subject	An unordered array of descriptive phrases or keywords that specify the purpose or thematic content of the work
dc: title	Title: this is the name by which an artefact is formally known
dc: type	Type: The nature or genre of the artefacts

The artefacts in the Antiquity Museum range from works made out of wood, clay, terra- The artefacts in the Antiquity Museum range from works made out of wood, clay, terra-cotta, fabric, raffia, metal, iron, and precious metals such as bronze, brass, copper and silver. However, using the modified Dublin Core element, the objects are here classified by the DC: Type, in a tabular form comprising title, artist, medium and accession no. The artefacts are here classified into 5 types and they include; figural (figurine and head), mask and headdress, Utilitarian object (domestic (pots, regalia, fabrics, jewellery), commerce), Architectural

(Doors, Pillar post/totem, boards), and paraphernalia (war, spirituality (masquerade regalia, ile ori, cult, oponi ifa), royal) to facilitate consistency and sustainable logging system.

➤ Figural (Figurine and Head)

This is a representational form of art that imitates the real world, such as the human form, animals or tangible scenes. Figural artefacts can be grouped into figurines and heads. The figurine depicts a human or animal in three

dimensions (3D), ranging from a torso to full anatomy, while the head is a portrait of an animal or human head (Table 2).

➤ *Mask/Headdress (Mask and Headdress)*

Art objects are used as vehicles for spiritual communication. Some are created for use in an altar, as a link to ancestors or a shrine to receive sacrificial offerings [6]. The mask depicts a face cover or covers for the entire head, while the headdress is a form of mask worn on top of the head with a cloth covering the wearer's face during a masquerade festival. Thus, masquerading was a vital activity used for initiation, correction, festivals and education. The mask and headdress are usually used for these events. Table 3 contains objects in the Antiquity Museum of Fine and Applied Arts classified as masks and objects known as headdresses.

- *Utilitarian Objects: Domestic (pots, regalia, fabrics, mats, jewelry, amongst others) and commerce.*

Utilitarian objects are items designed for a practical function and are also aesthetically pleasing. They include domestic items and objects of commerce. Domestic objects are objects meant for daily use, such as pots, regalia, fabrics, utensils, stools, mats, fans, caps and jewelry, while objects of

commerce are used to facilitate the exchange of goods and services from producers to final consumers. Table 4 consists of items categorised into utilitarian objects.

➤ *Architectural (Doors, Pillar Post/Totem, Boards)*

This refers to architectural sculptures such as carved doors, pillar posts, reliefs, boards, totems or statues, directly incorporated into the structures of buildings. They are functional and also decorative, with deep cultural meaning. Table 5 contains objects from the Antiquity Museum under the Architectural category.

➤ *Paraphernalia (Spirituality (Masquerade Regalia, Ile Ori, Cult, Oponi Ifa), war and Royal)*

Paraphernalia refers to the equipment needed for a particular activity. It also refers to tools, equipment and personal belongings associated with a particular activity, lifestyle or culture. Therefore, there are paraphernalia objects of spirituality (masquerade regalia, ile ori, cult, oponi ifa), royalty in the Antiquity Museum as contained in Table 6. Paraphernalia refers to the equipment needed for a particular activity. It also refers to tools, equipment and personal belongings associated with a particular activity, lifestyle or culture.

Table 2 Figures (Figurine and Heads)

Figural	Title	Medium	Artist	Accession No
	Esu (Elegbara)	wood	Yoruba	ATQ490
	Onile	Wood	Yoruba	ATQ042
	Erile	Wood	Yoruba	ATQ292
	Ori	Wood	Yoruba	ATQ072

Table 3 Mask and Headdress

Mask	Title	Medium	Artist	Accession No
	Dan Mask	Wood	Ivory Coast	ATQ002
	Gelede Mask	Wood	Yoruba, Nigeria	ATQ018
	Yam Mask	Raffia	New Guinea	ATQ231
Headdress	Title	Medium	Artist	Accession No

	Egungun Onijo	Wood	Yoruba, Nigeria	ATQ078
	Eri Ori Egungun	Wood	Yoruba, Nigeria	ATQ545

Table 4 Utilitarian Object: Domestic (Pots, Regalia, Fabrics, Mats, Jewellery, Amongst Others) and Commerce

Utilitarian Instruments: Domestic (pots, regalia, fabrics, jewellery)	Title	medium	Artist	Accession No
	Hand Fan	Raffia	NK	ATQ222
	Hualapai Basket	Straw/Raffia	Hualapai, Native American	ATQ045
	Ikoko Ajere	Terra-cotta	Yoruba, Nigeria	ATQ115
	Water pot	Terra-cotta	Yoruba, Nigeria	ATQ093
	Cooking pot	Terra--cotta	Yoruba, Nigeria	ATQ120
	Set of three	Terra-cotta	Madrki-Myer	ATQ109
	Effigy pipe bowl	Bronze	Yoruba, Nigeria	ATQ058
	Bark cloth	Tree bark	Uganda	ATQ458
	Aso oke	wool	Yoruba, Nigeria	ATQ435
	Tuffed Rain Hat	Raffia	Sierra Leone	ATQ 225
	Ashanti stool	Wood	Ashanti, Ghana	ATQ249
Object of commerce	Title	Medium	Artist	Accession No
	Basket of cowries	Raffia and sea shells(cowries)	Yoruba, Nigeria	ATQ467
	Manilla	Bronze	Yoruba, Nigeria	ATQ516

	manilla	Bronze	NK	ATQ5
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Table 5 Architectural (Boards, Doors, Pillar Post/Totem)

Architectural (Boards, Doors, Pillar post/totem)	Title	Medium	Artist	Accession No
	Gope Spirit board	Wood	New Guinea	ATQ026
	Ceremonial Papua Mask	Wood	New Guinea	ATQ254
	Door Panel	wood	Yoruba, Nigeria	ATQ207

Table 6 Paraphernalia Spirituality (Masquerade Regalia, Ile Ori, Cult, Oponi Ifa), War and Royal

Paraphernalia spirituality (masquerade regalia, ile ori, cult, oponi ifa, ibeji)	Title	Medium	Artist	Accession No
	Iroka Ifa	Wood	Yoruba	ATQ012
	Oponi Ifa	Wood	Yoruba, Nigeria	ATQ174
	Agere Ifa	wood	Yoruba, Nigeria	ATQ190
	Igede Ifa	wood	Yoruba, Nigeria	ATQ540
	Ere Ibeji	Wood	Yoruba	ATQ056
	Ile Ori	Cowries and fabrics	Yoruba, Nigeria	ATQ323
	Oshe sango	Wood	Yoruba, Nigeria	ATQ008
	Janus Edan Ogboni	copper	Yoruba, Nigeria	ATQ370
	Opa Osanyin	Metal	Yoruba, Nigeria	ATQ382

	socks	Fabric	Yoruba, Nigeria	ATQ441
Paraphernalia: Royal				
	Fly whisk	Horse Tail	Yoruba, Nigeria	ATQ440
	Staff	Elephant tusk	Yoruba, Nigeria	ATQ454
War Implements				
	Short Gun	Wood and metal	NK	ATQ005
	Bow and arrow	Wood and metal	Yoruba, Nigeria	ATQ537
Paraphernalia: Sound				
	Shekere	Gouge (calabash)	Yoruba, Nigeria	AT214
	Caxixi	Cane	South America	ATQ 318
	Caxixi	Cane	Brazil	ATQ350
	Kundu Drum	Wood and crocodile skin	Papua, New Guinea	ATQ247

V. CONCLUSION

Digitisation is so essential because it offers a means to supplement museum collections without supplanting them. It unlocks research opportunities and can lead to important scientific discoveries. The structured inventory and classification process undertaken in this study has established a systematic and reliable database for the Museum's artefacts. By adopting a modified Dublin Core metadata schema, each object was documented using standardised descriptive elements such as title, accession no, date, medium, and type, among others. This approach has enhanced the consistency, accuracy, and retrievability of records, thereby improving collection management, research access, and long-term preservation. Consequently, the introduction of digital cataloguing represents a significant step towards modernising the museum's documentation system and safeguarding its rich cultural heritage for future generations.

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