The Nok Terracotta Sculptures of Pangwari
Tanja M. Männel & Peter Breunig

Abstract
Since their discovery in the mid-20th century, the terracottas of the Nok Culture in Central Nigeria, which represent the earliest large-scale sculptural tradition in Sub-Saharan Africa, have attracted attention well beyond specialist circles. Their cultural context, however, remained virtually unknown due to the lack of scientifically recorded, meaningful find conditions. Here we will describe an archaeological feature uncovered at the almost completely excavated Nok site of Pangwari, a settlement site located in the South of Kaduna State, which provided sufficient information to conclude that the terracotta sculptures had been deliberately destroyed and then deposited, emphasising the ritual aspect of early African figurative art.

Similar observations were made at various other sites we had examined previously. But the terracottas found at Pangwari not only augmented our insights into the advanced stylistic development of the Nok sculptures, they also exhibited scenes of daily life like a relief of a dugout boat with two paddlers, or remarkable details like a marine shell on the head of a human figure – details indicating trans-regional trade and long-distance contacts. Other finds from Pangwari deepen our knowledge of therianthropic creatures among the terracottas of the Nok Culture.

Résumé
Depuis leur découverte au milieu du XXe siècle, les sculptures de la culture Nok au Nigeria central sont connues, au-delà des spécialistes, comme la tradition la plus ancienne des sculptures de grande taille de l’Afrique subsaharienne. Toutefois leur contexte culturel resta inconnu pour longtemps, dû à l’absence de situations de fouille pertinentes démontrées scientifiquement. Ici nous décrivons une découverte, trouvée à Pangwari, lieu de découverte Nok, située dans le sud de l’état de Kaduna, qui fourni des informations suffisantes montrant que des sculptures en terre cuite ont été détruites délibérément et puis déposées, ce qui, par conséquent, met en évidence exemplaire l’aspect rituel de l’ancien art plastique africain. Auparavant, des observations similaires ont été faites sur d’autres sites de recherches.

Or les sculptures en terre cuite découvertes à Pangwari nous permettent non seulement d’augmenter nos connaissances du développement stylistique avancé des sculptures Nok, mais elles révèlent aussi des scènes du quotidien, par exemple le relief d’une pirogue avec deux pagayeurs ou bien des détails remarquables comme une coquille sur la tête d’une figure humaine – des détails qui témoignent d’un commerce interrégional et de relations de longue distance. D’autres découvertes à Pangwari approfondissent nos connaissances sur des créatures therianthropiques parmi les sculptures en terre cuite de la culture Nok.

Keywords: Nok Culture, Nigeria, terracotta sculpture

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Introduction

While a number of researchers performed extensive studies on the Nok terracottas, their source material was based on sculptures kept in museums and private collections that had not been subject to archaeological excavations or scientific documentation (de Grunne 1999; Boullier 2001; Chesi & Merzeder 2006). In the 1940s the British archaeologist Bernard Fagg had begun investigating sites of the Nok Culture in Central Nigeria (Fagg 1945; 1990), his work was continued by his daughter Angela Fagg-Rackham (Fagg, A. 1972) and later by the Nigerian archaeologist Joseph Jemkur (Jemkur 1992). It was however not until 2005 that archaeological research was resumed and intensified when a long-term research project was launched at the Frankfurt Goethe University in the course of which a team of German archaeologists in collaboration with Nigerian colleagues surveyed and excavated numerous sites dating to the Nok Culture (Breunig 2009; Breunig & Rupp 2010).

Having focused on aspects of chronology during the first years of research (Franke & Breunig 2014; 2016, this volume), priority later shifted to the structural analysis of Nok Culture sites. This involved large-scale excavations to comprehend the spatial organisation and nature of the Nok sites. Part of this endeavour were excavations at the site of Pangwari, located in the northern section of the project’s key study area (Fig. 1) which started in 2011. Being neither seriously affected by looting nor by farming activities,
Pangwari proved ideal for studying the archaeological remains of a Nok community. Until 2014, ten units comprising 2,617 square metres had been excavated (Fig. 2). 12,978 individual measurement points were recorded in a three-dimensional grid, of which nearly ten percent have been classified as fragments of terracotta sculptures. Among the sites that have so far been examined by the Frankfurt project, percentages of this range are common among inventories of Nok sites containing terracotta fragments. Equally common is their appearance in association with other find materials, in particular potsherds or waste like broken grinding stones, fragments of ground stone axes, and charcoal or charred food remains from fireplaces, which occur side by side without any specific context, apart from their presence in pits or pit-like structures (Schmidt 2014: 47–48). While this implies that the sculptures mostly ended up in fragments and were treated as ordinary waste, the excavation of one of the trenches (trench E) at Pangwari revealed a different context. A circumstance yet encountered quite rarely (Rupp 2010: 75–76; Rupp 2014), there, in feature 10 and 11, we found several larger fragments of Nok terracotta sculptures which had apparently been intentionally deposited. Clearly classifiable as hoards these two features reflect a ritual aspect that is not recognisable in other features where the terracotta fragments seem to form part of the settlement waste. Focusing on the crucial importance of contextual information for the understanding of the Nok sculptures, the Pangwari evidence will be presented here.

Context of Nok sculptures from Pangwari (feature 10 and 11)

Like many Nok sites in the study area, Pangwari is located on slightly sloping terrain, stretching up to a saddle between two shallow hilltops (Fig. 3). The saddle constitutes a favourable position, offering level ground, distant views to the east and west, and a cooling breeze which is absent on the lee side of the slope. The advantageous setting either intentionally or accidentally coincides with the peculiarity of the archaeological discovery made in trench E which extended along most of the saddle’s expanse. In the west-central section of this trench a rocky ridge covered by a layer of sedimentary deposits was exposed, one of the numerous outcrops of plutonic bedrock which spreads all over the hilly area of the site (Fig. 4).

Evidence of human activity was found along the entire excavated part of the ridge. In the northern portion a congregation of charcoal was detected, forming part of the backfill of a pit (Fig. 4). South and east of the ridge two pits containing fragments of terracotta sculptures were uncovered. Compared to the surrounding soil, the southern pit appeared darker in colour due to a concentration of charcoal particles, it also proved to be of slightly softer texture (feature 11). In the upper level of this feature a therianthropic sculpture, displaying attributes of human and bird was recovered (Fig. 16), also found was an anthropomorphic head with large ears (Fig. 17) as well as an anthropomorphic sculpture with a four-legged animal on its thigh (Fig. 18) at the bottom of the feature (positions indicated in Fig. 4, feature 11).
Figure 3. Pangwani. Aerial photo indicating the excavated trenches and the position of features mentioned in the text. Blue dots represent fragments of terracotta sculptures. The red stars indicate the position of a model of a dugout canoe in trench C and the cubic statuette in trench D.
Immediately east of the ridge the excavators exposed a plaster of hand-sized pieces of local granitic rock (feature 10). Underneath this cover lay miscellaneous fragments of terracotta sculptures (Fig. 5a), all in a good state of preservation, due to having been in a protected position under the stone plaster. Already at this stage of the excavation it became clear that such a concentration of terracotta fragments carpeted by apparently carefully selected cobbles was not in line with the above-mentioned waste scenario, but pointed to a deliberate deposition. This assumption was confirmed in the excavation process. After the removal of the stone plaster, more parts of terracotta sculptures, lying among small granite boulders appeared (Fig. 5b). Dark soil indicated that feature 10, like the neighbouring feature 11, was indeed a pit. It contained large amounts of charcoal and different to feature 11, many pieces of broken terracotta sculptures — hands, arms, fragments of faces, heads and other body parts. The finds themselves turned out to be just as unique as the context of the finds.

37 radiocarbon measurements were performed on samples taken from all over the site (Tab. I) — eight on charcoal samples, 29 on charred remains of annually growing plants, mainly *Pennisetum* (details see Franke 2016, this volume). This data and the analysis of dateable potsherds allowed for a reconstruction of the site’s chronology. Pangwari first was settled during the Early Nok period (ca 1500 – 900 BCE). This period is well represented in the dispersion calibration of the radiocarbon dates (Fig. 6). While no terracotta sculptures were produced during this phase, Early Nok pottery
Table 1. List of all radiocarbon dates from the site of Pangwari (2012/13) obtained until March 2014 by the Frankfurt Nok Project. The list includes the uncalibrated C14 age (bp), the calibrated age range (BCE/CE), information on the sample dated, the laboratory number, as well as context information. „AB” refers to the number of the archaeobotanical sample, from which the material was taken; „#” indicates the find number, if measured individually with a total station. The program OxCal 4.2, IntCal 13 (Bronk Ramsey 2009; Reimer et al. 2013) has been used for calibration with a probability of 95.4% (2-sigma).

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Trench</th>
<th>C14 age (bp)</th>
<th>Calibrated age (BC/AD)</th>
<th>Sample collected</th>
<th>Sample dated</th>
<th>Lab. No.</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
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Archaeological material that we can identify as Middle Nok (terracotta fragments and potsherds) mainly occurs in a few spots, for instance in pits like features 10 and 11 (Fig. 4), or in features that we interpreted as graves (see Breunig & Rupp 2016 this volume). Either these are the remnants of brief visits possibly only undertaken to deposit sculptures and to bury the deceased in the ground of their ancestors; or Middle Nok people did settle at Pangwari, deposited sculptures and held funerals in the place where they lived. At this point it is not possible to develop a more precise model since the majority of finds from Pangwari such as grinding equipment or undecorated potsherds cannot yet be attributed to a specific phase. \(^{14}\)C-signals also point to revisits during the Late Nok period (ca 300 BCE – 0 CE) and Post-Nok times. However, the delivered evidence still remains unspecific, so that the \(^{14}\)C-datings do not unequivocally mirror this interpretation. For instance, the dates acquired from the eight samples taken from features 10 and 11 disperse all over the first millennium BCE (Fig. 6) which can hardly be regarded as reliable data to determine the point at which the deposits were made. However, looking at the stratigraphic position of the dated samples, non-conforming dates stem from the upper levels, while those from the basal levels consistently remain in the Middle Nok period (Schmidt 2014: 75, 79, 109). Thus, the lack of chronological clarity seems to be due to a mixture of the upper deposits of the site caused by erosional processes.

Figure 5. Pangwari. Feature 10 (terracotta sculpture deposit) in trench E. a: situation at level -60 cm below surface with fragments of sculptures between and below of cobble-stone pavement (above). b: situation at level -90 cm below surface with large fragments of terracotta sculptures below pavement. Sculptural parts are outline white. All other objects are stones.
General remarks on the attributes of Nok sculptures

The terracotta finds from Pangwari are in line with the general appearance of Nok sculptures as described by Bernard Fagg (Fagg 1990), style and manufacturing technique leave no doubt about their Nok origin. Constants in the manufacture of the sculptures concern the use of clay mixed with a coarse temper of quartz, feldspar, mica (the components of the local granite) and fireclay, as well as the torso being built using coiling technique (Beck 2014). At the end of the sculpting process, a thin clay slip was applied to the sculpture’s surface which usually is only partially preserved but present on most of the Pangwari figures. Without this coating, the coarse temper is exposed and gives the surface a rough appearance. After drying, the figures were most likely fired at approximately 600 to 800°C in an open fire (Fagg 1990: 21; Beck 2012: 256–257), a firing process resembling practices still used in Nigeria today.

Regarding the stylistic features of the Nok sculptures, the disproportionately large eyes are most significant and the typical “Nok eye” is identifiable even on small terracotta fragments (e.g., Fig. 12). The triangular or crescent-shaped rims of the eyes are carved deeply into the clay, creating an effect of bulging eyeballs (Fagg 1948: 587). The pupils of the larger sculptures are pierced, in smaller figures they are just dented (Männel & Breunig 2014: 189). Other attributes are subject to remarkable variation. The size of the sculptures ranges from a few centimetres to over a metre in height. They appear either as three-dimensionally shaped figures in various positions, often placed on a base that consists of a pot turned upside down, as standing figures with a cylindrical body, as reliefs on the bodies of specific, possibly ceremonial vessels, or as figurines in miniature size — either solitary, Janus-faced, as pairs embracing each other or standing back to back. Where it can be determined, the sculptures seem to represent men more often than women, rarely children, sometimes animals or therianthropes.

With a rather high degree of probability, the sex of the figures can be assigned when respective characteristics or gender attributes are visible. Thus, some figures display clearly female protruding breasts or flat male chests. Genitals are virtually never depicted. However, a large number of the statues exhibit no such clearly male or female features. As far as garments are concerned, the sculptures are frequently shown wearing a loincloth. The loincloth of male figures is styled as a flat, downwardly tapered band falling from the waist, where it is attached with straps.

The women’s loincloth, in contrast, consists of a broad strip of cloth tucked under the hip-belt, sticking out above and below in different lengths (Männel & Breunig 2014: 190). We also observed that female figures wear two chains or bands, each running from the necklace to the right and left hip and then back to the necklace. When bands or chains are shown in male figures, there is only one band that runs diagonally across the torso and is attached laterally to the hip belt.

Also depicted are a variety of clothing with plaited cords, knots, pleats in textiles, also lavish hairstyles, headgears, beards, scarifications, a broad range of adorn-
ments, as well as tools from the daily life of farmers or possibly ritual objects, for instance axes. Some sculptures also display symptoms of sickness like eye disease, ulcers and physical abnormalities (Männel 2010: 60). Similar observations have been described for other Nok sculptures since the early discoveries of Bernard Fagg (Fagg 1990: 31; Nozais et al. 2000), however, the terracotta finds during recent excavations, especially those made in Pangwari, have greatly contributed to form a more comprehensive picture of the vast range of images in Nok figurative art.

The terracotta sculptures of Pangwari

Next to the sculptures found in features 10 and 11 of trench E, some outstanding finds uncovered in other trenches must also be referred to. They do not derive from specific contexts like the deliberately deposited objects from feature 10 and 11, but were found in cultural layers coinciding with other materials that have to be addressed as discarded objects, and are thus classified as belonging to the “waste-scenario”.

Model of a dugout canoe

Of particular interest is the terracotta relief of a boat with two paddlers (Fig. 7), reassembled from three relief fragments found in trench C (position see Fig. 3). Navigable watercourses like the Gurara River, a tributary of the Niger, are located close to Pangwari (Fig. 1). The shape of the model, tapering to a point at both ends, suggests a dugout canoe. There are two anthropomorphic figures, one in the front and one in the back of the boat, each holding a paddle. Both wear round caps in a style known from other sculptures; more details from the heads or bodies are hard to recognise due to the eroded state the relief is in. The artist seems to have placed emphasis on the fact that the figure in the back of the boat appears to be more dainty than the paddler in the front, possibly to indicate that it takes less effort to steer a boat than to keep it moving forward. An alternative reading could be that of the rear figure as an experienced navigator, maybe a knowledgeable person of older age who could safely guide the boat through rapids and over long distances.

Between the two figures four piles are depicted, representing cargo that cannot be clearly identified. Nevertheless, the watercraft can be regarded as an indicator that there was potential for transporting large amounts of goods and that in all likelihood an extensive trade network existed in the Nok Culture area. Whether these trade contacts were long-distance, reaching as far as to the Atlantic Coast, as might seem possible regarding a sea shell shown on the head of one terracotta sculpture (described below), remains an open question. Besides the 8000 year old dugout canoe from Dufuna in northern Nigeria (Breunig 1996), the small relief fragment from Pangwari dating to the first millennium BCE is the second oldest known evidence of a watercraft in Sub-Saharan Africa, thus constituting a matter of particular significance for the history of nautical endeavour in Africa.

Cubic statuette

Among the 185 fragments of terracotta sculptures from trench D is a somewhat unusual three-dimensional statuette in cubic form (position see Fig. 3). Compared to the other figures found in Pangwari, one might gain the impression that this figure was not crafted by a very able hand. This is not least due to the eyes not being in typical Nok form, lacking the dented pupils but instead showing several small arches above the eyes that may portray wrinkles (Fig. 8). An equally possible interpretation is
that the attributes were intended to illustrate an illness or physical abnormality. Depictions of river blindness for instance are common among Nok sculptures and are known from the site of Ungwar Kura (Männel 2010: 62; Männel & Breunig 2014: 198–199).

Sculptures from trench E

The sculptures discussed below stem from feature 10 and 11 in trench E. The man-bird-hybrid creature, the head with large ears and the kneeling figure with a quadruped on its upper leg were found in feature 11, the remaining terracotta sculptures were recovered from feature 10. Each object has its own peculiarities but regarding the circumstance that they were found in close association, having been purposefully placed into the ground, they become vital to our aim to understand the ritual aspect of the sculptures.

Large torso

One outstanding piece among the finds from Pangwari is a torso which constitutes the largest three-dimensional Nok sculpture excavated by the Frankfurt team so far (Fig. 9). It was recovered in two fragments, neck and shoulder as well as the lower part of the body, lying next to each other in feature 10 (body in position No. 6 in Fig. 5a, neck and shoulder in position No. 14 in Fig. 5b). No additional parts could be refitted, thus the deposition undoubtedly took place without the head and base. After restoration of the two fragments which had several fractures, and their reassembly, the sculpture measured 82 centimetres in height. Considering the missing parts, the extrapolated total height must have been around 130 centimetres. The body is sculpted in the form of a tubular container, without legs or feet. Of the arms only stumps remain but those indicate that the left arm was kept close to the body while the right arm was stretched out. The ornamentation is typical for Nok sculptures and displays multiple rows of necklaces which are placed on top of each other, covering the whole neck and shoulder area. An equally multi-row belt or chain running diagonally across the torso is attached laterally to the hip belt. The fragmented apron or penis sheath is also attached to the front part of the girdle. This defines the figure as male. The navel is shown as a little bump and the spinal column as a line, another typical but not necessarily constant feature of Nok figures. On the back of the sculpture is a hole measuring two centimetres in diameter. Other large figures also have such a “ventilation hole”, it was possibly added to prevent the figure to burst during firing.

Figure 9. Pangwari, trench E, feature 10. Large male torso.
The Nok Terracotta Sculptures of Pangwari


Another three-dimensional torso (position No. 11 in Fig. 5b) shows a good preservation of the clay slip, thus giving an impression of how the sculptures originally looked like. Apart from the missing head, arms and legs it is almost complete (Fig. 10). This sitting figure is a prime example of the diversity in ornamentation and the creativity of the artists displayed on Nok figures. For instance, there is a necklace composed of several rows of chains or ribbons joint together by four bold rings. Attached to the necklace with another ring is an elongated pendant which decorates the athletically shaped male chest down to the abdomen. In the back of the neck the necklace is tied with a knot, the girdle on the right side of the body is a bow. Bow tying has rarely been noticed so far. Until now, it has only been observed on a figure from the nearby excavation site of Ifana 1, radiocarbon dated between ca 900 and 800 BCE. It is possible that we are looking at a regional peculiarity. This is why this attribute deserves more attention in the future.

On the left arm of the torso (Fig. 10) there is a broad conically shaped and partly decorated upper arm bangle with an incised pattern. The torso has a rope or a ribbon running across the left shoulder. Attached to it is another decorated element.

**Single arm with bracelet**

However, the find of one single arm and hand from the same feature is not in line with past discoveries — the arm is adorned with a broad bracelet whose form suggests that it was made of metal, most likely iron (Fig. 5a).

**A man with shell decoration**

A three-dimensional figure (position No. 10 in Fig. 5b) with a complete head, front torso and folded arms, characterised as male by its chin beard, is unique in the way that its head is decorated with a large sea...
shell (Fig. 12). As with most other sculptures from Pangwari, the well-preserved slip allows for the identification of a lot of detail, not only the shell, but also the decorated eyebrows and eyelids or the delicate lines representing the hair tightly tied to a bun high in the back of the head. It is likely that the shell belongs to the family of marine scallops called ‘Pecten’ or ‘Senilia senilis’ (pers. comm. R. Janssen, August 2013). Since fresh-water mussels can be excluded, we reckon that the original, after which the sculpture’s shell ornament was shaped, came from the West African coast which is about 700 kilometres away. The distance that had to be bridged to transport the shell entails the rarity and high regard that was placed on the item, emphasising the value of the object as status symbol and hypothetically even representing a rare evidence of social inequality. This idea may be supported by the unusual embellishment of the figure consisting of a multi-rowed stone-bead necklace and a scarf or decorative plate around the neck and shoulders, decorated with comb impressions.

**Shattered heads**

All sculptures from feature 10 are fragmented. However, two shattered anthropomorphic terracotta heads attracted specific attention due to the form of fragmentation. Both heads are smashed, one is fractured vertically (Fig. 13), the other horizontally (Fig. 14). The pieces could not be matched with any other terracotta finds from the feature, hence must have been deposited in their fragmented state. This once more sustains the assumption of deliberate destruction and selective deposition of merely parts of the sculptures instead of the complete figures. The destruction appears as strong contrast to the outstanding design of one of the heads which can be addressed as male because of the chin beard (Fig. 13) (position No. 13 in Fig. 5b, lowest level in feature 10). The head displays an elaborate hairstyle and an unusually modelled mouth and nose with details such as a vertical furrow that runs down from the nose through the centre of the bulging upper lip. The skill of the sculptor is also demonstrated by other details, for instance the indentation in the middle of the upper lip accentuated by a narrow rim, or open mouth revealing two rows of teeth. Of the second head only the neck, some remains of the hairstyle and the lower half of the face are preserved (Fig. 14) (position No. 5 in Fig. 5a). It also displays a chin beard and two rows of teeth in the slightly opened mouth.

**Therianthropic sculpture**

In the lowest level of feature 10 (position No. 15 in Fig. 5b) an anthropomorphic head was found exhibiting both characteristics of man and animal (Fig. 15). The eyes and the whole facial structure appear human,
Figure 13. Pangwari, trench E, feature 10. Fragment of anthropomorphic head with unusual physiognomic design.

Figure 14. Pangwari, trench E, feature 10. Lower part of anthropomorphic head.

Figure 15. Pangwari, trench E, feature 10. Therianthropic sculpture combining attributes of man and feline predator.
while strong fangs protruding from the mouth and a wide nose with a fur-like pattern are unmistakable attributes of a feline predator. A hood is draped around the head, framing the face, evoking the resemblance of a threatening cobra spreading its neck shield. The forehead is covered by an oval-shaped plate with decorated edges. Similar figures are known (Schädler 1997: 203, Boullier 2001: Fig. 655) but the Pangwari head is the only example from a scientifically documented context.

**Man-bird-hybrid creature**

Another therianthropic figure was found in the upper level of feature 11. The find consists of a small delicately worked head with human attributes in its upper part and a large beak instead of a human mouth adding a birdlike component. The beak is divided into an upper and lower beak by a furrow (Fig. 16). The eyes starkly resemble those of the sculpture of the man with the sea shell decoration (Fig. 12), so that it may be speculated that they were made by the same craftsman. We identified a further therianthropic head from the same feature (Fig. 17) whose chin beard indicates a male figure exhibiting disproportionally large and pointed ears with deep auricles that emerge from the equally pointed head cover.

**Kneeling figure with quadruped**

Also unearthed in feature 11, almost half a metre below the position of the man-bird creature, was a three-dimensional headless male figure, which had originally been kneeling on an inverted pot. The figure holds an equally headless four-legged animal in its left hand and is fully dressed in garment that features jagged braids (Fig. 18) and a male style loincloth. Above the posterior a flat object of unknown purpose sticks out from the body, apparently a part of the dress. Similar clothing as well as the possibly symbolic pose of holding an animal with the hand placed around the quadruped’s neck are known from fragments of sculptures found on other sites in the research area.
Conclusion

Most terracotta sculptures that have been excavated at Nok Culture sites during the last years affirm hitherto known stylistic patterns and fit into a few basic figurative categories. Thus, we did not necessarily expect sensational revelations through new findings but rather expected them to fit into known patterns. The discoveries we made in Pangwari, however, taught us differently. Here it was clearly demonstrated that just one newly uncovered terracotta object can offer a radical change of perspective, providing details that were unknown up to this point and could not be inferred from other archaeological materials. Most outstandingly this holds true for the sculptural evidence of a watercraft, indicating transport of people and goods, or the occurrence of a piece of adornment attached to a sculpture like the sea shell, an item which points to far-distance exchange or trade and maybe even to the open display of social status by owning and wearing something that was not available for everybody in Nok society. One may even go as far as to conclude a social stratification for which in the terracotta sculptures despite their elaborate endowment with jewelry no indicators can be found because nearly all sculptures are similarly equipped. Altogether the excavations at Pangwari have greatly enlarged our knowledge about therianthropic creatures and have given us a notion of the complexity of the beliefs behind them.

In addition, new insights beyond the scope of the objects themselves have been gained by analysing contextual data. Apart from peripheral sections, Pangwari has been almost entirely excavated, meaning that practically all materials left behind by a Nok community during the various occupation episodes are present in the assemblage and available for research. Consequently the entirety of preserved finds enables us to evaluate the significance of the terracottas in relation to other find categories and brings analysis to another level of understanding. As one result, we regard the “waste-scenario”, the assumption that the sculptures were predominantly treated as waste after an unknown stage of usage as confirmed. Alternatively, fragmentation of the sculptures could not only have occurred due to a treatment as rubbish but may have another cause, for instance their handling during ceremonies where the figures might have been unearthed, used and buried again. However, this explanation does not seem to fit the circumstance of the general mix of terracotta fragments with all other settlement waste quite as neatly.

The bulk of terracotta sculptures was found together with other ordinary finds — in fragmented condition only. However, the fragmentation process remains enigmatic. Because all preserved material was excavated, theoretically all parts of formerly complete sculptures also should have been gathered, hence it should be possible to reassemble the pieces and reconstruct their initial form. Yet, this is not the case. This means that either the sculptures are fragmented in such a way that the pieces are too small to be refitted or, which seems more probable because not too many tiny pieces have been found — parts of the broken sculptures were taken somewhere else, possibly away from the settlement.

To explain the findings regarding the terracotta (fragmented sculptures, missing parts, deliberate deposition) we propose a model that is based on the assumption that the fragmentation of the sculptures is intentional and marks the end of their biography as ritual objects. This accounts for the total lack of complete sculptures. After fragmentation, some parts were discarded alongside other settlement waste, while other parts were deposited in isolated positions, possibly sacred places of spiritual importance in some distance from the settlements. It is equally possible that all broken parts were deposited in
the settlement or on its fringes. However, the latter is less likely because no complete figures could be refitted from excavated fragments. The “spiritual-place scenario” seems more feasible since it would offer an explanation why these intentional deposits of broken sculptures have only been found thrice during ten years of excavations by the Frankfurt team. Due to the scarcity or total absence of other finds that could be indicative, such places are difficult to discover — unless the deposition took place on the grounds of abandoned old settlements. Pangwari might represent such a place. The two main phases of occupation, identified by radiocarbon dating and pottery analysis as described above, fit a scenario in which people of the Middle Nok period brought shattered parts of sculptures to the places where their ancestors dwelled. Here they disposed of the fragments by burying them in the ground, possibly accompanied by lighting fire because large amounts of charcoal were found in the soil among the sculptures, backfilled the pit and sealed it with a layer of cobbles. This indicates the intention to part with the sculptures in such a way that they would not return into the world of the living. Feature 10 of Pangwari can be interpreted this way, however, alternative explanations are conceivable. Middle Nok finds in other sections of the site point to the existence of a settlement in the vicinity of Pangwari, encouraging the idea that the inhabitants repeatedly visited Pangwari for similar reasons or to bury their dead in a place of their ancestors. This is indicated by the discovery of at least two features situated a few metres west of where the deposit of terracotta fragments was found, which have been tentatively interpreted as graves of the Middle Nok period (XRF soil analysis and \(^{14} \mathrm{C} \) dates are not yet available). The relation between settlement and spiritual place and the model outlined above that explains the dichotomy between terracotta fragments as waste or as pars pro toto intentionally buried ritual objects will hopefully be tested at already known sites in the future. We have not solved the Nok enigma yet — but the research carried out in Pangwari has brought to light many details suited to further refine the existing models.

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