**Pre-Colonial African Artifacts & Their Current Status/Location**

Evidence Investigation

The Essential Questions:

1. Should these African artifacts be returned to Africa?
2. Do Africans today have a right to this pre-colonial African culture?

The 2 sides:

1. These artifacts should be returned to Africa.
2. These artifacts should stay in their current Western/European countries.

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Side #1: Artifacts should be returned to Africa.

**Source #1: Statement from Activist Richard Pankhurst**

“These treasures belong in Africa, as that's where they were looted from,' says British-born Pankhurst, who now resides in Ethiopia and specialises in Ethiopian studies. 'People of those countries should be able to see the treasures their ancestors created.’”

1. How would Mr. Pankhurst answer the question: Is an important work of art the property of the people of the world or one group?

<http://www.africaspeaks.com/reasoning/index.php?topic=9550.0;wap2>

**Source #2: Excerpt from Letter of President of Ethiopia**

The President of Ethiopia has written to the British Museum, the Victoria & Albert Museum, the British Library and Cambridge University Library seeking the restitution of more than 400 so-called “treasures of Magdala”, which were stolen by British soldiers following a battle in 1868.

In the letter… the President wrote: “I must state that Ethiopians have long grieved at the loss of this part of their national heritage. Ethiopians feel that this act of appropriation had no justification in international law. I feel, therefore, that the time has come for the return of Ethiopia’s looted treasures.”

Restitution: the return of something that was lost or stolen  
Appropriation: the action of taking something for one's own use, typically without the owner's permission.  
Looted: stolen

1. What reasons does the President give for the return of Ethiopia’s artifacts?

<http://www.elginism.com/similar-cases/ethiopia-demands-return-of-over-four-hundred-stolen-treasures/20081126/1568/>

**Source # 3: Statements from Prince Edun Akenzua in Benin City**

"Those things that were removed were chapters of our history book," says Prince Edun Akenzua, a younger brother of the current Oba.

"When they were made, the Benin people did not know how to write, so whatever happened, the Oba instructed the bronze casters to record it.

"We saw the removal as a grave injustice and we are hoping that someday people will see why we are asking for these things back," he says.

Prince Edun has **lobbied** the British Parliament for all the looted items to be returned to Benin City and argues that the British Museum should keep replicas instead.

"The English returned the Stone of Scone to Scotland some years ago. So why can't they return our things? They mean so much to us but they mean nothing to the British," he says.

Complete the statements from the perspective of Prince Edun Akenzua.

I think…  
I feel…  
I want…  
I hear…

<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-31605284>

**Source #4: Article “Collector Fights for African Art”**

Look at the 3 excerpts from this article and match each statement to the person who said it.

Options: **Sindika Dokolo**, a rich art collector who is strongly for returning African art to Africa  
**Andre Magnin**, a French museum African art specialist frustrated with Dokolo’s actions  
**Cecile Fakhoury**, a gallery owner in Ivory Coast who takes a less extreme, more in-the-middle opinion.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Statement/Action** | **Who said it?** |
| “…that doesn’t give him the right to decide on his own what is good or not for African art…I don’t think you’ve got to be from Africa to appreciate African art…” |  |
| “There are exhibitions in Europe and the United States that have helped promote African art, but more certainly needs to be done on our own continent and to develop a local market.” |  |
| “Any time such artwork can be identified…its owner will be offered a simple choice: Either sell him the work for the price at which it was acquired or face a lawsuit for theft.” |  |

<https://nyti.ms/1J6amSn>

**Source #5: Article “The art world’s shame: why Britain must give its colonial booty back”**

“The self-righteousnessness [feelings of being better] of British museums stops them from returning masterpieces pillaged [stolen] long ago to their rightful owners. It’s time they stopped hogging the world’s treasures.”

“Britain’s museums need to face up to a reality. Cultural imperialism [colonialism] is dead. They cannot any longer coldly keep hold of artistic treasures that were acquired in dubious [questionable & suspicious] circumstances a long time ago.”

1. Words such as “booty,” “pillages” and “treasures” imply the writer is comparing British museums to what?
2. What is the author’s tone? Circle key words that show his tone.

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2014/nov/04/art-worlds-shame-parthenon-elgin-marbles-british-museums>

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Side #2: Artifacts should be returned to Africa.

**Source # 6: Statements by the British Museum**

“As a museum of the world for the world the British Museum presents the Benin Bronzes in a global context alongside the stories of other cultures and makes these objects as available as possible to a global audience,” it says in a statement.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-31605284>

“It is not the case that all African material in the Museum's collection is 'looted,’…We feel it is essential that the diverse and varied cultures of Africa are represented in the collection so that our international audience can understand the impact of African material culture on the wider world.” -Hannah Boulton of the British Museum

<http://www.africaspeaks.com/reasoning/index.php?topic=9550.0;wap2>

1. According to the British Museum, how are they benefiting the world?
2. The British Museum states that African artifacts are not all \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

**Source #7: Explanation from British Librarian**

“According to Oliver Urquhart-Irvine of the British Library - which has a number of Ethiopian manuscripts in its collection - law stipulates that they can't just give back the looted items.  
  
‘The history of what happened [in Magdala] is quite clear but the issue of restitution is a matter for the British government,' Urquhart-Irvine says. 'The British Library is governed by the British Library Act of 1972. Under that act, we don't have any power to de-accession these items. This is a matter that has to be dealt with between governments.”

Manuscripts: hand-written books/documents Stipulates: states, demands  
 Restitution: the return of something stolen De-accession: remove from their collection

1. According to this source, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ has no power to give back artifacts because of the law of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Instead, only \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ has the power in this situation.

<http://www.africaspeaks.com/reasoning/index.php?topic=9550.0;wap2>

**Source # 8: Article on the Positives of the “Spoils of War”**

“It was the looting of Benin that made African art visible to Europeans. When the seized artefacts were sold, entering the collections of museums, there was a sense of surprise and mystification. Although travellers had written descriptions of Benin City, this was the first time anyone outside Africa comprehended the scale of Benin's artistic achievement.”

1. What good is this source saying came out of the looting of the Benin artifacts?

<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2003/sep/11/2>

**Source 9: Both Sides of the Argument Article**

“Some argue that African art should stay in foreign countries, because with its wars and poverty, Africa lacks the institutions and resources to protect these precious works. Besides, there is the question of ownership: some say many of these treasures were bought in the marketplace and that they belong to the buyers.”

1. Why do some say it is dangerous for the artifacts to be in Africa? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Also, some say the artifacts were actually bought where? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

“But the counter argument questions the legitimacy [truth] of such purchases, alleging [stating the actual truths were] theft and looting by westerners. And as many point out, Africa is not a single country; the entire continent is not melting in wars and without any capacity [ability] to keep its treasures safe.”

1. Which of the 2 statements do you think is the strongest? Why?

**Read these actual blog posts made by others on this issue. Beside each, write your comments and if you agree or disagree with this person.**



