Restitution of African Cultural Heritage

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Colonialism in Africa
Timeline of Looting

01 Pre-African Raiding
02 Early Looting
03 Professionalized Extraction
04 Ideological Change, Inaction
05 Restitution Begins
01: Pre-Africain Raiding

Athen's Forum

Napoleon signing the Treaty of Tolentino
02: Early Looting (1885-1920s)

African Colonization After the Berlin Conference (1884–1885)

The Hague Convention
02: Early Looting (1885-1920s)
03: Professionalized Extraction

(1920s-1960s)
04: Ideological Change, Inaction

(1960s–2010s)
05: Restitution Begins (2010s-NOW)

AFROMET
Association for the Return of The Maqdala Ethiopian Treasures

AFRICAVENIR

Alter Natives
Héritages culturels & usages sociaux
05: Restitution Begins (2010s - NOW)

THE BIG SHIFT:

Professor Joseph Ki-Zerbo (1922-2006)
Report Overview:
Attempts at Restitution

Left: Omo n’Oba n’Edo Uku Akpolokpolo, Akenzua II (center) pictured with the Earl of Plymouth (right), 1938.

Center: Warrior Chief (left), Junior Court Official (right). Benin (Nigeria). Benin Bronze Plaques. 16th-century. Brass

On French Restitution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Saharan Country</th>
<th>Number of Objects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>9,296 objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td>7,838 objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madagascar</td>
<td>7,590 objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>6,190 objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivory Coast</td>
<td>3,951 objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>3,157 objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of the Congo</td>
<td>2,593 objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabon</td>
<td>2,448 objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sengal</td>
<td>2,281 objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>1,997 objects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sarr & Savoy’s 3 Dynamics of French accumulation of objects:

- Hyper-centralization of Paris
- Flow dynamic
- Inheritance or gift
Varying European Responses

Art

Edo bronze plaque, Kingdom of Benin

Political

Macron and French Cabinet

Economic

Royal Palaces of Abomey, Benin.
Minimal U.S. Responses

Art

Economic

OPEN SOCIETY Initiative for West Africa
Unified African National Response

Nigeria comes to UK to demand looted Bronzes
Arguments for/against Restitution

Cultural Heritage
A physical return along with a reclaim of cultural significance

Healing Colonial Trauma
Colonial trauma has yet to be worked through by way of speech and representation

Preservation of Objects
Claims that African institutions lack capacity and resources to preserve and display objects adequately

Legal Inheritance
Objects that were acquired as gifts or via purchase stand as legal transactions
Why is Restitution Difficult?

Temporary v. Definitive

To Whom?

Legality

Private v. Public Collections

Interactions with Objects
Open Dialogue

- To what reason would you attribute the slow pace at which items are being repatriated?

- What changes need to be made in future repatriation proposals to make the process more efficient?
Sources:

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https://www.dailyartmagazine.com/colonial-looting-african-art/
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https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/03/arts/design/african-art-france-museums-restitution.html
THANKS!

Questions?

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