

## A HISTORY OF THE WORLD WITH 100 LOOTED OBJECTS OF OTHERS: GLOBAL INTOXICATION?

*“What few people realise is that MacGregor's activities on behalf of the British Museum, although dressed up as a laudable didactic mission of public enlightenment and edification, are actually part of a more urgent project to protect the beleaguered edifice that is the Encyclopaedic Museum in Europe and North America.” Tom Flynn (1)*



*Oba of Benin with two Attendants and two Portuguese in background, Benin/Nigeria, now in the British Museum. Seized by British troops during the invasion of Benin in 1897.*

It is perhaps indicative of the cultural climate of our times that the British Museum and the BBC could announce a programme with a pretentious title such as “*A History of the World in 100 Objects*”. (2) A pretence to serving the whole world, a title which indicates a wider view but hides in fact the reality of frantic efforts to preserve the interests of a few in the guise of the so-called “universal museums” which have come under some heavy criticisms in recent years. The project appears to be aimed at diverting attention from the fact that the tide of history is moving against the illegitimate detention of the cultural objects of others. It is aimed at impressing the masses about the alleged indispensable role of the major museums and gathering support for their continuing possession that is tainted with illegality and illegitimacy. In the process, public interest for the museum would be stimulated and information about the objects as considered necessary would be produced.

The last few years have seen major Western museums being criticised for purchasing looted objects. Leading American museums and universities have been forced to return to Italy looted artefacts that had been bought by the museums, knowing full well that the objects could only have been looted. Indeed, an American curator is in jail in Italy, waiting for her trial for criminal offences in connection with acquisition of Italian artefacts for her museum in the USA. Moreover, Egypt has renewed its demands for the return of the Rosetta Stone, the bust of Nefertiti and other items that have been in major Western museums for several decades. The Greeks have constantly been reclaiming the return of the Parthenon/Elgin Marbles and the completion of the magnificent New Acropolis Museum has exposed the hollow British arguments for retaining the marbles. The British public has overwhelmingly voted in favour of returning the Parthenon/Elgin Marbles to Athens whenever a poll was made. We should also remember that the Nigerians who have never forgotten the brutal invasion of Benin in 1897 are seeking the return of some of the 5000 objects looted by the British troops in their bloody aggression against a kingdom that resisted British imperialist expansion and hegemonial endeavours.

The main objective of the British Museum and the BBC is therefore not simply to inform or educate the public. They have had more than enough time to do that if they so wished, bearing in mind that most Western museums do not even provide full information about the various looted objects they detain. We still do not have sure figures about the Benin bronzes that the British looted in 1897 and sold to others. The Chinese have had recently to send missions abroad to catalogue the artefacts looted during the nefarious Anglo-French 1860 attack on the Summer Palace in Beijing which Voltaire eloquently criticised as an act of barbarism and robbery. Do the “great museums” not keep records of the looted items in their collections?

A motivation for this so-called history of the world goes back to the idea of Neil MacGregor that there is a need for a new history of these objects, different from their history as objects seized in brutal imperialistic and colonial adventures. In his article of 24 July 2004 in the *The Guardian*, “The whole world in our hands”, MacGregor declared: “*The British Museum must now reaffirm its worldwide civic purpose. That must be the goal that shapes our future plans. Where else can the world see so clearly that it is one?*” (3)

From that point on, MacGregor has been busy trying to attribute to the British Museum an international and humanitarian character it does not possess. He has assiduously presented the British Museum as an institution for the whole world. (4) But how does history look like, from the point of view of MacGregor whose pronouncements do not always make it easy to distinguish “history” from “story”? Let us take as example, the invasion of Benin. MacGregor states: “*A British delegation, travelling to Benin at a sacred season of the year when such visits were forbidden, was killed, though not on the orders of the Oba himself. In retaliation, the British mounted a punitive expedition against Benin.*” (5)

What kind of delegation was it that came with an army of 250 soldiers with a mission to depose the Oba of Benin, already identified as the main obstacle to British colonial expansion and hegemony in the region? When the British Punitive Expedition came in retaliation of the killing of Phillips and others, the Oba was exiled and his close associates executed. Benin City was looted and burnt down by the British Army which terrorized the capital and neighbouring towns until Oba Ovonramwen gave himself up. The people of Benin have been asking for decades for the return of some of the thousands of objects looted but the British Museum which has allegedly some 700 Benin Bronzes refuses to consider such requests for restitution and does not even bother to acknowledge the existence of such requests.



*Rosetta Stone, Egypt, now in British Museum, London, United Kingdom.*

A basis of MacGregor's approach can also be discerned in the 250th British Museum anniversary lecture where he declared that it is only when the museum can show that objects like the Benin bronzes permit a different reading of history between Benin and Europe that their retention can be justified. From this fundamental premise, the museum director weaves a story which basically states that some of the materials used by the Benin people to make the famous bronzes came from Europe and therefore this justifies their retention by the British museum. We have already stated elsewhere our criticism about this approach to history underlying MacGregor's position and the project of telling stories with the looted artefacts of others. (6) Effectively, the others are prevented from telling their own history because most of the objects are kept by the "universal museums" that insist on telling our histories for us. True, some non-Westerners may be involved in the narration but they have to act within the parameters and limitations set by the museum.



*Parthenon/Elgin Marbles, Greece, now in British Museum, London.*

The story-telling approach is intended not only to defend the British Museum but also the so-called universal museums in their contested detention of the cultural artefacts of others. The major museums issued in 2002 the notorious *Declaration on the Importance and Value of*

*Universal Museums* which was initiated by the British Museum but cunningly not signed by the Bloomsbury museum. (7) The motivation was to gather support for the British Museum in its dispute with Greece which was mounting political pressure for the recovery of the Parthenon/Elgin Marbles. The Declaration sought to provide a blanket pre-emptive defence against the mounting claims for restitution which had gained the general support of the United Nations and UNESCO. The statement boldly declared that: “*Over time, objects so acquired – whether by purchase, gift, or partage – have become part of the museums that have cared for them, and by extension part of the heritage of the nations which house them*”.

Moreover, restitution claims would be considered only on case by case basis but there would be no general restitution. A similar notion was introduced by the organizers of the Benin exhibition, *Kings and Rituals – Court Arts from Nigeria* who argued that the Benin bronzes had acquired added value and significance in their sojourn in Western museums, the so-called shifting interpretation.(8) Those objects had become important objects of Western culture in addition to their importance for Benin.

The motivations of the project by the BBC and the British Museum are therefore more than a simple desire to inform or enlighten. We are here not concerned with whether the British Museum and the BBC present a good programme or not. A person who steals my Mercedes-Benz may be a better driver than myself and may even look after the vehicle better than I can ever dream of doing. But would his skill in driving or his excellent maintenance affect the property relations involved? Could he turn round and argue that since in addition to the Mercedes, he has also stolen Ford, Buick, Volkswagen, Opel and other vehicles from others and so returning my Mercedes amounts to a dismemberment of his large collection of vehicles? This has been the basic argument seriously made on behalf of the so-called “universal museums”. The British Museum used to argue that the Greeks had no adequate facilities for the Parthenon/Elgin Marbles and therefore they were better kept in London. However, as soon as the Greeks constructed the magnificent [New Acropolis Museum](#), it was impudently argued that the location of the Marbles was never an issue and that the important issue now is how the British and the Greeks can make it possible for Africans and Chinese to see the Marbles! We see here very clearly the distinction between “history” and “story”. (9)

On the announcement of the project, MacGregor declared that such a programme could only be mounted in London: “*MacGregor is adamant that his history of the world could be told only in Britain, only in his museum. It could not, he says, be done at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art, nor at the Louvre in Paris. The Smithsonian in Washington might come close. “Britain, and therefore the British Museum, is unique because of its particular history and the museum was set up to tell the story of human societies,” he says. “Britain stands alone not just because of its colonial past but also its intellectual history... Teachers have gone abroad, so have missionaries. That’s the history of many European countries over the past 500 years. But there is no other country in the world with such deep connections to other parts of the globe, particularly countries such as India and parts of Africa.” It makes London the most cosmopolitan city in the world, he adds, given the recent history of immigration: “There’s a richness here.”*(10)

MacGregor does not seem to realize that any emphasis on London as being the centre of the world reminds victims of British colonialism and imperialism of their suffering, defeat and continued humiliation through the detention of their cultural symbols as war trophies by the British. That one could recount a history of the world on the basis of the objects in the British Museum is an open admission that the museum retains a huge amount of artefacts looted during

the colonial era. It is noticeable that when asked about the colonial and imperialist origins of objects in the museum MacGregor was uncomfortable:

*“But when I ask how he feels about the British Empire – the source, after all, of so much of BM’s collection, including such contentious holdings as the Elgin marbles and Benin bronzes – he gives me a funny look... He shoots back: Well, how do you feel about all the other empires?” before continuing: ‘It’s a key bit, isn’t it, of why our city is the way it is? This wonderful, cosmopolitan world city is one of the consequences of an empire and I think what I find fascinating about the museum, and its collection, and the publics we now have, is that whereas in the 18th century it was the things that moved to London, as it were, now it’s the people that have moved... But isn’t the museum itself an enormous monument to a time when Britain ruled the waves? ‘It’s not, it’s not. I mean that is the really important and interesting thing. Of course some of these objects come to the museum directly through [an] imperialist function. Others come from intellectual collecting; others come from trade or whatever. But I think what is so interesting is that you have a pre-imperial collection that is now operating in a post-colonial world.”*

As for restitution, MacGregor cannot envisage circumstances where this might be a compelling solution:

*“So aren’t there any cases in which the circumstances in which an object came to be here are so regrettable that the only solution is to give it back?*

*Well, that’s obviously a question for debate, I mean people have their own views. Where there are real issues about the current location of the objects, that’s part of their history so we’ve addressed that in the programmes.” (II)*

The substantial evaluation of the BBC/British Museum project must be left to the specialists. In all probability, the programme as such will be interesting. With all the resources at its disposal, including the various looted items, the British Museum cannot fail to make a good programme. One could even go so far as to say it will probably make a better show than many of the owners of the artefacts who have not seen their looted objects for decades since many of them have been in the British museum for a century. Most of the Benin people, including the Royal Family, have not been able to see many of the Benin bronzes since they were looted in 1897. It is clear that those in possession of the objects of others are in the best position to report about them. Indeed many Africans do not know exactly where to find the objects taken away by the Europeans, including the Christian missionaries. The important question then is not the quality of the British Museum/BBC project but whether it is acceptable in our days that those in possession of looted cultural artefacts of others make an arrogant public display of the objects whilst the owners that are requesting their return, are being treated with utter disdain by the illegal holders, as if the further cultural development of the societies were of no importance. To believe that a massive programme of looted cultural artefacts would make the owners forget their loss is to misunderstand the nature of cultural objects, their spiritual value and the attachment of the societies that produced them in the first place.

One could well imagine the profits the BBC and the British Museum will derive from *A History of the World in 100 Objects*. They will claim copyright in the text of the programme although this was only made possible by the illegal possession of looted items. They will charge fees for the use of photos of the objects discussed or shown even though they are not the owners and have made no contribution to their creation. They will sell DVDs, books and other materials based on the programme. Those who created the objects and their successors will not derive a single cent from all this. On the contrary, if we are to go by the past practice of the British Museums,

the Africans and Asians who may be interested in the topics of the programme will have to pay cash for their use. The museum has been known to sell Benin bronzes to the Nigerian Government and others.

I was revolted by the sycophancy in the *Times* article by Deirdre Fernand which contained so many false statements which would sicken many who have some knowledge or experience of British colonial rule and history, the subjugation and oppression of many African peoples, the wars of conquest and the inherent racism of colonial rule. It is said to be MacGregor's mission to fight eurocentricism: *"It's his mission to give our sloppy Eurocentred thinking a good bashing"*. Can anyone seriously suggest that MacGregor who has been fighting in defence of the Western museums, the so-called "universal museums" and in interviews, including the very one that Deirdre Fernand is reporting, asserts the primacy and importance of London, is about to castigate eurocentricism?

How do MacGregor and Deirdre Fernand expect African and Asian intellectuals to take a statement such as: *"Teachers have gone abroad, so have missionaries. That's the history of many European countries over the past 500 years. But there is no other country in the world with such deep connections to other parts of the globe, particularly countries such as India and parts of Africa."* It makes London the most cosmopolitan city in the world, he adds, given the recent history of immigration: *"There's a richness here."*

The "deep connections" MacGregor is talking about are the colonial wounds and destructions which have made many African and Asian countries dependent on Britain in many ways. They should explain how, despite those connections, Africans and Asians are the least welcome immigrants and visitors to Britain today. Peoples who do not have those "deep connections" appear to be more acceptable in Britain.

I fail to understand MacGregor's criticism of the word "Mediterranean" except perhaps as an indirect attack against the Greeks and their efforts to recover the Parthenon/Elgin Marbles: *"I hope that the series will serve to point out that the very word 'Mediterranean' is no longer sustainable. It is a sea which, despite the claim of its name, is not and never has been in the middle of the earth."* If we went about trying to change the names of various seas and mountains we may have a lot more to do than we can handle.



*Double-headed serpent,  
Mexico, now in British  
Museum. London*

What can one say about the following: *"MacGregor firmly believes that art and culture can make us better people in our understanding of the world. And if in turn we understand each other, we will*



get along more easily. Objects have the power to speak of our inter-connectedness,” he says. “It’s his favourite political theme“.

Is somebody being naive or disingenuous? We all know that art and war have often gone together in Western history and experience. The major museums such as Louvre, Berlin State Museums and the British Museum, owe a large part of their acquisitions to wars and other aggressive actions. Napoleon Bonaparte, in his various military adventures ensured that the French army looted enough artworks for the Louvre. The Rosetta Stone though was lost to the British after Napoleon’s defeat in Egypt. The notorious Adolph Hitler was an artist himself; some would say a failed artist. Nevertheless he and Hermann Goering organized large scale robbery of artworks from occupied countries, such as France and Poland for their projected museum in Linz, Austria. Post-war Europe has been occupied till today with questions of restitution of Nazi-looted artefacts. Many Nazi-looted artworks are hanging in museums, including the British Museum. The British Parliament has recently passed legislation to enable owners and their successors to claim the return of such objects. Has all this discussion on Nazi-looted art gone unheard by some?

The British Museum probably has the greatest number of looted artefacts in the history of mankind. Jeanette Greenfield has stated in her excellent book, *The Return of Cultural Treasures* that: “*The United Kingdom stands out as a principal holder of some of the major cultural treasures of the world, primarily because of her colonial history, although not all the treasures were acquired as a direct result of this. Many were acquired simply as the result of long-distance archaeological raids and these were not always carried out by archaeologists. The United Kingdom was not alone in this, all the European countries which maintained colonial interests abroad mounted archaeological expeditions and amassed collections containing items which are of special cultural significance in their homeland. These countries included France, Belgium, Germany, Holland, Italy, Denmark and Spain. Often objects were collected in the spirit of intense competition and rivalry, and this only hastened the destruction or removal of countless treasures*”. (12)

We need not recall all the various aggressions against African and Asian peoples which resulted in massive transfer of artworks to Britain. The use of violence was frequent in colonial expeditions such as Benin in 1897, Kumasi (Ghana) 1874, Magdala (Ethiopia) 1868, and Dahomey (Republic of Benin) 1890. Tribute and punitive removal of treasures were the usual practice of colonial masters. The example of Benin is surely on the minds of most readers. British invasion and loot resulted in the dispersal of some 5000 Benin objects in the Western world, a large number being in the British Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Field Museum, Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago, the Ethnology Museum Berlin and the Ethnology Museum, Vienna.

Even the British Museum which is the example *par excellence* of the so-called encyclopaedic or universal museum has admitted at various instances the connection between its large collection and the imperial connection. David M. Wilson, former director of the British Museum, stated in his book *The Collections of the British Museum* as follows: “The Asante’s skill in casting gold by the lost-wax method, and the use of elaborately worked gold to adorn the king and his servants is represented by many superb pieces which came to the Museum after British military intervention in Asante in 1874, 1896 and 1900.” (13)

We know what happened to artworks in Baghdad after the invasion of Iraq in 2003 by USA, Great Britain and their allies. Baghdad Museum was looted and much of the loot ended in the Western world. Discussions on what artefacts should be collected seem to be part of war preparations.

In view of all this, how can MacGregor, the director of the British Museum declare that “*art and culture can make us better people in our understanding of the world. And if in turn we understand each other, we will get along more easily.*” Has the presence of the Benin bronzes in his museum for a century helped him to understand the people of Benin and their need and desire to recover some of their looted art? Most Western museums do not bother to respond to requests for restitution even from the Benin Royal Family.

One could assert that in the history of mankind, the more aggressive, less peace-loving nations have accumulated more art objects, looted from the peaceful or weaker nations. There is not a shred of evidence that the more peoples or nations understand the art of others, the more likely they are to live in peace. Germany’s aggressions against its neighbours surely disprove this postulate. Indeed, we might even suggest that the knowledge about the art and culture of some nations may have acted as catalyst for their invasion by foreign States. The gold of the Aztecs (Mexico) and the Asantes (Ghana) as conveyed by their arts and culture may have excited the greed of the invaders. That many European nations – Danes, Norwegians, Swedes, Germans, British and of course, Portuguese built castles and forts along the coast of Gold Coast (Ghana) was surely due to their knowledge or information about the availability of gold in that part of the world. Knowledge about the wealth of Asantes may have been conveyed by acquaintance with the display of gold in Asante art and culture.

The British Museum itself admits on its own homepage that it had sent experts to accompany invading British troops in Ethiopia. (14) It appears to be a well-established Western tradition to send art and culture specialists in wars against other nations. A look at the stocks of the great museums could be very instructive.

Western museums, including the British Museum, have had African arts for more than a century. Will anyone be bold as to declare that this illegitimate possession has made them any more respectful or tolerant towards Africans and their cultures? True, there is now a general, sometimes reluctant, agreement about the essential contribution of African art to modern art. But many take the wrongful possession of African artefacts as confirmation of their superiority and efficiency. How else can one interpret the often repeated insulting argument that Africans cannot look properly after their own cultural artefacts and that the Europeans have done mankind a great service in looting and keeping the objects?

The announcement of the BBC and British Museum project has been greeted with almost general uncritical approval by the British media which does not seem to be aware of the real motivation behind the programme. Tom Flynn has quite correctly stated: “...*we’ve witnessed a nauseating media hagiography of British Museum director Neil MacGregor in which he single-handedly educates the world from the comfort of his beautiful Bloomsbury office. We hear of ‘Saint Neil’, a ‘suave and smooth-talking Scot’, with a ‘lilting highland brogue’, a ‘skilled diplomat’ with ‘infectious schoolboy enthusiasm’, a “natural storyteller” and “the most fortunate man alive.”* (15)

If the British Museum and the BBC are hoping that through this massive publicity and propaganda for *A History of the World in 100 Objects*, they can divert attention from the urgent need for restitution of some of the looted artefacts amassed during the heyday of colonialism and imperialism, they have misunderstood the movement of history; they underestimate the intelligence and determination of those deprived of their cultural objects now located in the British Museum and other Western museums. Times have changed since the idea of the so-called “universal museum” was born. The museums cannot resist the tide of history and continue to offer us nineteenth century ideology of European superiority and domination to justify the constant



and permanent violations of the cultural right of the peoples of Africa and Asia.

Even some commentators, sympathetic to the project by the BBC and the British Museum, have seen through the real objective behind all the words of MacGregor. Ben Hoyle, who is supportive of the project, has declared:

*“The project will ram home his argument that the British Museum belongs to the world, strengthening its moral case for holding on to controversial artefacts such as the Elgin Marbles from the Parthenon in Athens and the Benin Bronzes from Nigeria both featured in the series”*. (16)

Another commentator on the programme also commented as follows: *“Casting his museum as an international hub is also his answer to the questions that won't go away about whether the BM should give some stuff back. “You have to decide what kind of museums you want, and whether you want museums that try to put the whole world into one context, into one building, so that you can actually look and compare and take a view of the whole thing, or whether essentially you feel that you want museums to be about individuated national stories, local stories.”* (17)



*Bust of Ramesses II, weighing 7.25 tons, Egypt, now in the British Museum, London, United Kingdom.*

The British Museum can sing the praises of Egyptian civilization, the glory of Greece and the beauty of Benin art as long as the museum is locked in permanent dispute with Egypt, Ethiopia, Greece, Benin (Nigeria) and other States over looted artefacts, so long will its credibility be in serious doubt whenever it presents programmes on those cultures.

Kwame Opoku, 6 February 2010.

## NOTES

1. Tom Flynn, “A History of the World in Looted Objects”, <http://tom-flynn.blogspot.com>
2. British Museum, <http://www.britishmuseum.org> BBC, “A History of the World in 100 Objects”, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/ahistoryoftheworld/programme> British Museum and BBC reveal history of the world in 100 objects <http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk> Telegraph, “A History of the World in 100 Objects”, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk> “The story of civilization in 100 Objects”, <http://entertainment.timesonline>
3. Neil MacGregor, “The whole world in our hands” <http://www.guardian.co.uk>,
4. <http://www.guardian.co.uk> See also, Martin Kettle, “The world needs new histories” <http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk>

5. N. MacGregor, <http://www.guardian.co.uk>, The story of Benin has been told several times but I found the short account by Sylvester Okunodu Ogbegie very useful: “In February 1897, an elite British force of about 1200 men (supported by several hundred African auxiliary troops and thousands of African porters) besieged Benin City, capital of the Edo Kingdom of Benin, whose ruler, the Oba Ovonramwen sat on a throne that was a thousand years old. The British Punitive Expedition used Maxim machine guns to mow down most of the Oba’s 130,000 soldiers and secure control of the capital city. They set fire to the city and looted the palace of 500 years worth of bronze objects that constituted the royal archive of Benin’s history, an irreplaceable national treasure. The king and his principal chiefs fled into the countryside, pursued by British forces that lay waste to the countryside as a strategy to force the people of Benin to give up their fugitive king. According to Richard Gott, for a further six months, a small British force harried the countryside in search of the Oba and his chiefs who had fled. Cattle were seized and villages destroyed. Not until August was the Oba cornered and brought back to his ruined city. An immense throng was assembled to witness the ritual humiliation that the British imposed on their subject peoples. The Oba was required to kneel down in front of the British military “resident” the town and to literally bite the dust. Supported by two chiefs, the king made obeisance three times, rubbing his forehead on the ground three times. He was told that he had been deposed. Oba Ovonramwen finally surrendered to stem the slaughter of his people. Many of his soldiers considered his surrender an unbearable catastrophe and committed suicide rather than see the king humiliated. A significant number, led by some chiefs, maintained guerrilla warfare against the British for almost two years until their leaders were captured and executed. The remaining arms of the resistance thereafter gave up their arms and merged back into the general population.”

<http://aachronym.blogspot.com>

6. K. Opoku. “Tristram and Neil, a dubious alliance.” <http://www.elginism.com>

7. *Declaration on the Value and Importance of Universal museums* (2002). See also, <http://icom.museum/universal> Signatories to this extraordinary document are: The Art Institute of Chicago; Bavarian State Museum, Munich (Alte Pinakothek, Neue Pinakothek); State Museums, Berlin; Cleveland Museum of Art; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Solomon R.

Guggenheim Museum, New York; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Louvre Museum, Paris; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Opificio delle Pietre Dure, Florence; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Prado Museum, Madrid; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg; Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

Tom Flynn, “The Universal Museum - A valid model for the 21 Century?” [www.tomflynn.co.uk/](http://www.tomflynn.co.uk/) Mark O’Neil, “Enlightenment museums: universal or merely global?” <http://www.le.ac.uk/ms/m&s/Is>

8. Barbara Plankensteiner, Ed. *Benin – Kings and Rituals – Court Arts from Nigeria*, Snoeck, 2007, p.17

9. K. Opoku, “The Amazing Director of the British Museum: Gratuitous Insults as Currency of Cultural Diplomacy?” <http://www.modernghana.com>

10. Deirdre Fernand, “The story of civilisation in 100 objects”, <http://entertainment.timesonline>.

11. Susan Rustin, “The greatest exhibition you could have”, <http://www.guardian.co.uk>

12. Third Edition, Cambridge 2007.p.97.

13. British Museum Press, 1989, p. 97

14. Richard Rivington Holmes, an assistant in the manuscripts department of The British Museum, had accompanied the expedition against Magdala, Ethiopia, as an archaeologist. He acquired a number of objects for the British Museum, including around 300 manuscripts which are now housed in the British Library.” <http://www.britishmuseum.org>

Professor Richard Pankhurst has written about Richard Holmes as follows: “One of those present at this large-scale looting was Richard (later Sir Richard) Holmes, an Assistant Curator in the British Museum’s Department of Manuscripts, who had been appointed “Archaeologist” to the expedition. He later noted in an official report that the British flag had “not been waved... much more than ten minutes” over the fort of Maqdala before he had himself entered it. Shortly afterwards, while night was falling, he met a British soldier who was carrying the golden crown of the Abun, or head of

*the Ethiopian church, and a “solid gold chalice” weighing “at least 6 lb”, i.e. pounds. Holmes purchased them both for four pounds Sterling. He was also offered several large manuscripts, but declined to buy them as they were too heavy for him to carry”*

“The Ethiopian Millennium – and the Question of Ethiopia’s Cultural Restitution” <http://nazret.com> <http://www.elginism.com>

An internet site provides the following: The invading British force included a number of mysterious civilians and an ‘official archaeologist«, a Mr Richard Holmes, said to have secured ‘many interesting items« from Magdala. Holmes was an assistant in the British Museum’s Department of Manuscripts, but soon after the successful war became Sir Richard Rivington Holmes KCVO, Keeper of the Queen’s Pictures and Librarian to Queen Victoria and her son Edward VII at Windsor Castle (from 1870 until 1906). <http://www.elecbk.com/facts.htm->

See also Adrian Cooper “Arts & Artefacts: Raiders of the lost ark, “<http://www.independent.co.uk> Terry Kirby, Hidden in a British Museum basement: the lost Ark looted by colonial raiders <http://www.independent.co.uk>

On the Ethiopian treasures that are in the British Museum, see [www.afromet](http://www.afromet) Ethiopian treasures are found at the following places in the United Kingdom: The British Library, The British Museum, Duke of Wellington’s Regimental Museum, Halifax, Dundee University Museum, Edinburgh University Library, The John Rylands University Library, Lancaster Museum & Priory, National Archives of Scotland, The Schøyen Collection (London/Oslo), The Victoria & Albert Museum and Windsor Castle. More stolen African treasures can be found at the homepage of the African Reparations Movement [www.arm.arc.co.uk](http://www.arm.arc.co.uk)

15. Tom Flynn, <http://tom-flynn.blogspot.com>

16. British Museum and BBC reveal history of the world in 100 objects <http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk>

17. Susan Rustin, <http://www.guardian.co.uk>