“Gold gleams throughout the Ashanti story: one wonders in retrospect whether the punitive expedition would have been quite so dedicated if the major product of Ashanti had been anything else but the potent lure.”

Russell Chamberlin. (1)

Gold mask, 20 cm in height, weighing 1.36 kg of pure gold, seized by the British from Kumasi, Ghana, in 1874 and now in the Wallace Collection, London, United Kingdom

A recent visit to London reminded me that apart from the British Museum, and the Victoria and Albert Museum many other museums in London and elsewhere in the United Kingdom are still holding onto African cultural artefacts which, to
put it very mildly, were removed from the continent under conditions and circumstances which can be considered as questionable. One such museum is the Wallace Collection, London. (2)

Once in the museum, our attention was drawn to the Asante golden trophy head and swords which are displayed in the Wallace Collection. This spectacular piece of the Asante regalia looted by the British has been described by Fagg as “the largest gold work known from Ashanti or indeed from anywhere in Africa outside Egypt”. (3)
Next to these Asante objects was a short notice which read as follows: “Part of the Treasure of Kofi Karikari, King of Ashanti (Asante, now Ghana in West Africa) 1867-75, consisting of two ceremonial SWORDS, A PAIR OF TERMINALS from a Chair of State, three FINGER RINGS, a KNIFE HANDLE (incorporated into a paper knife), a DAGGER KNIFE and a TROPHY HEAD, all of virgin gold. Taken during Field Marshall Viscount Wolseley’s punitive expedition of 1873-4 and subsequently auctioned for charity”.

A reader who looks at the Guidebook of the Wallace Collection (6th Edition, 2010) will not find a section on Africa or on Ghana. The Asante objects are not found or mentioned in any of the pamphlets or books that should assist orientation in the Wallace Collection. In the museum itself however, the Asante objects are placed in the section called Oriental Armoury where the brilliance of the Asante gold cannot be overlooked.

A search at the homepage of the Collection under the heading Africa shows an empty frame for some eight objects for which the images are said to be not yet available. Below the empty frameworks is the following standard statement;

“This finger ring is part of the fabulous golden treasure of King Kofi Kakari of Ashanti (Asante), an ancient kingdom in Ghana, West Africa. The treasure was seized by British soldiers on the orders of their commander, Field-Marshall Viscount Wolseley, during the Ashanti campaign of 1873.

Sir Richard Wallace bought the Ashanti treasure at a charitable auction in London, the proceeds of which were given to the wives and families of soldiers killed or incapacitated during the 1873 Ashanti War”.

Having seen these objects in the collection, one starts wondering, why in this age of advanced photographic technology the images of the Asante gold objects are not available. Could it well be that even this rich museum does not have the means and resources to put most of its acquisitions on computer? Perhaps the African artefacts are not high on its agenda? Where then does this all leave the often presented argument that in this age of digitalization, the location of artefacts is not important and that there is no need to transfer physically looted African artefacts? We have never considered as serious the spurious argument based on digitalization for even if the Asante objects in the Wallace Collection were to be digitalized, how many Ghanaians could afford purchasing individual computers in order to see their cultural artefacts? Besides, would anyone seriously argue that the King of the Asantes, the Asantehene, could do with a digitalized sword instead of the swords in the museum? How does one fight or dance with a digitalized sword or wear a digitalized ring? The Asante objects once more demonstrate that the argument based on digitalization has no validity at all as far as cultural objects are concerned and that there is no substitute for
the physical transfer of such objects from Western museums that do not need them to Africans who use them in their living culture.

The history of the British invasion of Asante Kingdom in 1874 has been told by many writers even though it does not appear to be as well-known as the history of the Benin Punitive Expedition. In the Gold Coast, as in Nigeria, British imperialism had met with resistance from some African nations that did not easily accept imperialist rule and resisted attempts by Britain, a country with which the African nations did not share a common frontier, a country that was thousands of miles away from Africa and in another continent but was determined to subjugate Africans. The Asante kingdom, like the Benin kingdom, was in British eyes, an obstacle to be eliminated and subdued. Like Benin, Asante was to be punished by military force.

The British desire to control the Gold Coast, now Ghana, was mainly motivated by the insatiable wish to control trade in gold and slavery. So much gold had been found in the territory that the British, following the Portuguese who were the first Europeans to visit the area and named it Costa d’Ouro, also called it Gold Coast. The reputation of the country for its gold was such that almost all Europeans sought a foothold in the country: Portuguese, Dutch, British, French, Germans (Brandenburg), Danes, Dutch, and Swedes all built forts and castles of varying qualities along the coast of some 500 kilometres.

Less well-known than the British Punitive Expedition to Benin in 1897, was the British Punitive Expedition of 1874 to Kumasi, Ghana. The British had been trying to gain control over the lucrative trade in gold and slaves in the then Gold Coast but had found in the Asantehene, Kofi Karkari, the king of the Asantes from the interior of the Gold Coast, a formidable competitor who controlled effectively trade along the coast. The Asantes were known for their gold and the Golden Stool which was said to embody the spirit of the Asante nation and not even the Asantehene was allowed to sit on.

With deliberate provocations and other acts of challenge by the British to the political authority of the Asantehene, wars inevitably ensued and gave the British the pretext they had been seeking to attack. The attack on Kumasi was presented as necessary to liberate the Europeans and other Ghanaians that the Asante had kept as prisoners in Kumasi and by the need to enforce provisions of the Treaty of Fomena.

The Europeans, Swiss-German missionary Friedrich Ramseyer, his wife and two children, Swiss missionary Johannes Kühne and French trader Marie-Joseph Bonnat had been captured by the Asante army when they invaded Kepi in 1869. The British had no ground for interfering since the prisoners were not British subjects. Moreover Britain was not involved in the war in which they were
captured, the war being between the Asante and other nations in the Gold Coast who were not allies of Britain. In any case, before Wolseley and his army reached Kumasi, a message had been sent by the Asante that the prisoners had been released. Indeed, one of the envoys sent to Wolseley was accompanied by the Swiss-German missionary, Ramseyer whom the Asante suspected of spying for the British. (6).

In 1872, the British bought the Dutch settlement at Elmina on the coast which had been an ally of Asante, thus threatening Asante position and authority at the coast. The Asante therefore sent in 1872 a large army to the coast to prevent British takeover of the whole area. The British decided to push the Asante back and in addition, to invade Kumasi as a lesson that would never be forgotten. Wolseley, commander of the British force explained the motivation for the invasion as intended “to show not only the King, but to those chiefs who urge him on to constant war that the arm of Her Majesty is powerful to punish, and can reach even to the very heart of their kingdom. By no means short of this can lasting peace be insured.” (7) The will and determination to humiliate the Asante were strong with the British who had been defeated in some battles by the Asante.

Despite all attempts by the Asantehene to seek peace with the British and to avoid war, Wolseley and his troops kept moving towards the Asante capital, Kumasi. To the various attempts and offers by the Asante to dissuade the British from their march, they replied by requesting impossible or extremely high demands and conditions from the Asante. For example, when the Asantehene asked for a halt so that there could be negotiations over outstanding issues, Wolseley demanded from the Asantehene, as hostages, pending negotiations the following persons: “

Prince Mensah, your Majesty’s heir
Your Majesty’s Mother
The heir of the King of Juabin
The heir of the King of Kokofu
The heir of the King of Mampon
The heir of the King of Bekwai
and half of 50,000 ounzes
of gold dust” (8)

The price of halting British advance to Kumasi had been made deliberately high so as to make peace impossible and war inevitable.

On February 4, 1874 early in the morning a British Punitive Expedition Force, consisting of European troops of 118 officers and 1044 men supported by 449 African troops entered Kumasi under the command of Sir Garnet Wolseley and
met no resistance. The Asantehene had left Kumasi with the Royal Family and the Golden Stool which had to be protected from falling into the hands of the invading British since it contained the soul of the Asante nation; its fall would be the end of the Asante nation.

The next day the British officers went around Kumasi to see important places including the palace and inspected the treasures of king. The town and the palace were taken over by Wolseley and his troops who ransacked all the valuable objects they could find. Brackenbury, secretary of Wolseley, gives this description:

“The first room visited was one which during the day had been seen to be full of boxes, some of which, at all events, contained articles of much value. Here we found those gold masks, whose object it is difficult to divine, made of pure gold hammered into shape. One of these, weighing more than forty-one ounces, represented a ram’s head, and the others the faces of savage men, about half the size of life. Box after box was opened and its contents hastily examined, the more valuable ones being kept, and the others left. Necklaces and bracelets of gold, Aggery beads, coral ornaments of various descriptions, were heaped together in boxes and calabashes. Silver-plate was carried off, and doubtless much left behind. Swords, gorgeous ammunition-belts, caps mounted in solid gold, knives set in gold and silver, bags of gold-dust and nuggets; carved stools mounted in silver, calabashes worked in silver and in gold, silks embroidered and woven, were all passed in review. The sword presented by her Majesty to the king was found and carried off; and thousands of things were left behind that would be worth fabulous sums in cabinets at home.” (9)

As it became clear to the British that the Asantehene did not intend to negotiate with Wolseley, the British commander left Kumasi without meeting the king. Wolseley and his troops left Kumasi on 6th February at about 6 in the morning and orders were given to burn the town. The town of Kumasi and the palace were completely destroyed by burning. Brackenbury describes the burning of the Asante capital as follows:

“The town burnt furiously, all these three days of rain failing in any way to impede the progress of the devouring element. The thick thatched roofs of the houses, dry as timber except just on the outside, blazed as though they had been ready prepared for the bonfire, and the flames ran down the framework which supported the mud walls. In the larger houses, more substantially built, only the roofs caught fire; but the destruction was practically complete. Slowly huge dense columns of smoke curled up to the sky, and lighted fragments of thatch drifting far and wide upon the wind showed to the King of Ashanti, and to all his subjects who had fled from the capital, that the white man never failed to keep his word.” (10)
The racism and callousness of those who pretended to be bringing civilization to Africa require no commentary. The Sagrenti war of 1874 was concluded by the Treaty of Fommanah (Fomena), 13 February, 1874, imposed on the Asante by the British. The treaty provided inter alia that:

*Art. 1. There shall be hereafter perpetual peace between the Queen of England and her allies on the Coast on the one part, and the King of Ashanti and all his people on the other part.*

*Art. 2. The King of Ashanti promises to pay the sum of 50,000 ounces of approved gold as indemnity for the expenses he has occasioned to her Majesty the Queen of England by the late war; and undertakes to pay 1,000 ounces of gold forthwith, and the remainder by such instalments as her Majesty’s Government may from time to time demand.* (11)

Thus the British not only imposed an exorbitant “indemnity” on the Asante who did not start the war and had indeed done everything to avoid it, but also provided for themselves the opportunity or pretext to come back whenever it suited their purpose.

The British attacked Asante again in 1894 after Asante had refused an offer in 1891 from the British to become a British protectorate. This time the pretext was that the indemnities levied after the 1874 invasion had not been paid. The British expedition force entered Kumasi in January 1896 without meeting any resistance. The King and the Queen mother made their submission to the British authority by signing a treaty of protection. After the submission of Prempeh, the British soldiers collected all the gold-hilted swords, trinkets and other treasures from the palace. The collection or stealing of the gold trinkets and other valuables were made under the supervision of none other than Baden Powell, founder of the Boy Scouts movement. He described with arrogance and impudence the oppressive and barbaric acts of the British in *The Downfall of Prempeh; a Diary of Life with Native Levy in Ashanti, 1895-96.* (12) The Asantehene, Agyeman Prempeh, was deposed, arrested and sent to exile in the Seychelles with his chiefs and their families. Even the BBC seems to have recognized the unfair treatment of the Asantehene. Under the heading “IMPERIAL INTERVENTION”, the B.B.C stated:

*In 1896 the Asantehene (the king of the Asante) had to endure public humiliation at the hands of the bullying British Governor Maxwell. Unable to pay an enormous fine for failing to keep to the demands of the Treaty of Fomena of 1874, the encounter ended with the Asantehene and his entourage being sent, quite out of the blue, into exile.*” (13)

Britain annexed Asante and Fanti areas of the Gold Coast in 1896.
The last resistance of the Asantes to British domination came in 1900. The British Governor, Frederic Hodgson, asked on 28 March 1900 the Asante chiefs, already aggrieved at the exile of Prempeh I, to bring The Golden Stool so that he could sit on it;

“What must I do to the man, whoever he is, who has failed to give to the Queen, who is the paramount power in this country, the stool to which she is entitled? Where is the Golden Stool? Why am I not sitting on the Golden Stool at this moment? I am the representative of the paramount power: why have you relegated me to this chair? Why did you not take the opportunity of my coming to Kumasi to bring the Golden Stool and give it to me to sit upon?” (14)

Hodgson must have been fully aware of the significance of the Golden Stool, as the symbol of the unity of the Asante and said to be containing the soul of the nation. He must have known that not even the Asantehene was allowed to sit on the Golden Stool which is not allowed to touch the ground but is placed safely and securely on its own chair. This is the minimum that most people knew about the Asante and it would be hard to establish that a governor of the Gold Coast had no idea about this. The Asante chiefs did not respond to Hodgson’s provocation and arrogance. They left in silence.

The Asante chiefs, under the leadership of the Queen Mother of Edwisu, Yaa Asantewaa, with an army lay siege to the British fort in Kumasi in which were 29 Europeans, including the Governor, Lady Hodgson, and three ladies from the Basil Mission from March 28 to end of September 1900 in what became known as the War of the Golden Stool or Yaa Asantewaa War. (15) After the defeat of the Asante, Yaa Asantewaa and the other chiefs were also sent to exile in Seychelles to join Prempeh I in January 1902. Yaa Asantewaa died in exile some twenty years later. Prempeh was allowed to return in 1924 as a private person, later became Kumasihene. The title of Asantehene was only resumed by his successor, Agyeman Prempeh II in 1935.

Many of the stolen/looted Asante items found their way to the Museum of Mankind in London and are in the Wallace Collection. There are also some Asante cultural objects in Pitt-Rivers Museum in Oxford and in the Glasgow Museum and Art Gallery. Many Asante gold objects are also in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. A considerable number of looted Asante goldweights can also be found in these museums.(16)

It is interesting to note that the context of British attacks and invasions of non-Europeans has often followed similar pattern whether we look at the attack on Benin (Nigeria) in 1897, Kumasi (Ghana) in 1874, Beijing (China) in 1860 or Magdala, (Ethiopia) in 1860. The scheme is as follows:
1. Existence of lucrative trade in a non-European country or its strategic importance in the region.
2. The British seek to take control over trade in the area and meet resistance.
3. The British send a team or delegation allegedly to negotiate peace, a delegation which is often secretly armed.
4. Some or all of the members of the delegation are attacked and killed. In some cases, the alleged killing of some Europeans, such as missionaries, suffices as justification.
5. Britain sends an army, a punitive expedition army to the non-European country.
6. The non-European country is attacked, government there is deposed, city or main palace there is burnt but before doing that, all treasures, including artworks are looted. What cannot be taken is burnt. In view of the historical record and the evidence of established British tradition, it is remarkable that some historians have tried to argue that the burning of Benin City was due to an accidental fire started by a soldier! See Ekpo Eyo, “The sack that was.” http://www.edo-nation

This pattern of behaviour of Britain towards other continents should be borne in mind when considering present claims for restitution of objects resulting from aggressive colonialist actions. A pattern of this kind, which is traditional in the British army, cannot be obscured by allegations of particular instances or incidents.

The lure of gold seems so strong that even after some hundred years; the British do not appear to be in the mood to discuss the return of some of these looted objects to Ghana. The Times reported on December 11, 1974 under the heading, “Ghana: Plea for return of Ashanti Regalia rejected” about discussions in the House of Lords as follows:

LORD MONTAGU of BEAU-LIEU asked the Government whether, with a view to fostering Commonwealth relations, they would use their good offices to facilitate the early return of the Ashanti Regalia to the Ghana nation.

LORD GORONWY-ROBERTS. Under Secretary for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs - The regalia is not at the disposal of the British Government. The majority of it forms part of the collections of the British Museum and the Wallace Collection. Neither body may legally dispose of these exhibits.

LORD MONTAGUE -These relics were originally war booty, captured by the British Army. The Ashanti people have deep feelings about the return of these sacrosanct objects which are supposed to contain the soul of the Ashanti people. A special Act of Parliament may be needed to release these objects from the museum. Will the Government facilitate the passage of such a Bill?

LORD GORONWY-ROBERTS - I cannot give an undertaking that we will seek passage of such legislation, nor could I advise that we should do so. Far-
ranging Implications may ensue from dealing with such a case because a variety of other cases would immediately come up for consideration. The Council of Chiefs have petitioned the Government on this matter and we have replied in terms of my answer here. So far they have not commented on that answer.

LADY LEE of ASHRIDGE (Lab) - When it comes to returning booty from this country we should tread warily because it may turn into a striptease. (Laughter.)

LORD GORONWY-ROBERTS - Perhaps the term booty is not appropriate here. It is part of an indemnity agreed by the former King of Ashanti, the proceeds of which were devoted to compensation for dependants of British troops killed in horrific conditions in that part of the world at that time. I sympathize with the motivation of the question that we should do everything possible to promote an improvement in Commonwealth relations - but this is not the best way to do it.

LORD GISBOROUGH (C) - Would it be possible to keep the booty and return the soul? (Laughter) (17)

The justification presented in the House of Lords debate was that the looted items were part of an indemnity agreed to by the Asantehene Kofi Karkari. So the Asantes are to pay for a war they did not start against a European power that came from thousands of miles from Europe to attack the Asante. Admittedly, the British also recruited some ethnic groups that were against the Asante as well as other Africans as mercenaries. The comment that “the proceeds of which were devoted to compensation for dependants of British troops killed in horrific conditions in that part of the world at that time” may elicit sympathy in some quarters. But what about the dependants of the Asante who were killed by the British troops? Have the British ever bothered about this group?

The noble Lords may choose to crack jokes during discussions on the restitution of the golden Asante regalia that the British stole in 1874 but for the Asante and the people of Ghana this is no laughing matter. The noble Lords must have known that the gold and the valuable items that were collected by the British soldiers the next day after the invasion of Kumasi, 5 February 1874, under careful instruction and guidance of the prizemen, were certainly not part of the indemnity provided in the Treaty of Fomena signed later on 13 February 1874. That treaty clearly specified 50,000 ounces of gold as indemnity. It is not conceivable that the Asante would have given away the golden ceremonial swords, royal regalia and gold masks as part of any indemnity even if they did give other objects of gold away.

Dr. Greenfield reports that there were also suggestions in the House of Lords discussions that ethnic differences in Ghana would complicate the return of the regalia. (18) This is a very interesting justification or explanation. When the British looted the Asante regalia in 1874 there were surely ethnic differences in
Ghana but this did not prevent the immoral ransacking of Kumasi and the Asantehene’s Palace of its valuables. Why should their return be made difficult by ethnic differences?

In 1974, on the centenary of the invasion of Kumasi and the loss of the Asante Regalia there were various ceremonies in Ghana. Memorial services were held and people sang funeral dirges and wept. At a ceremony attended by millions in Kumasi, the then Asantehene, Otumfuo Nana Opoku Ware II (November 30, 1919 - February 26, 1999) declared it was time the British returned the regalia and appealed to the British to return the sacred objects. A *Times* reporter, Nicholas Ashford, who was at Kumasi, unfortunately reported the event under the misleading title “Ashanti nation still yearns for the sacred golden stool” (19) This prompted Ghana’s leading historian, the late Prof. Adu Boahen of University of Legon to send to *The Times* a letter published on February 28, 1974. (20)

After expressing his astonishment at the claim by the *Times* correspondent that what Asantes were asking for was the return of the “sacred golden stool”, Adu Boahen stated categorically that the British never lay their hands on the Golden Stool and that the Stool was never lost or stolen. Some articles, such as bells and fetters associated with the stool were stolen in 1921 but the Golden Stool has always been in the palace of the Asantehene since its creation until 1900 when it was hidden from the British till 1924 when it was returned to the palace where it has been since then. During certain Asante festivals, the Golden Stool is paraded openly. Professor Boahen goes on to state what the Asante are asking for;

”What the Asante are asking the British Government to return to them are those regalia and ornaments that were taken away when the expeditionary force commanded by Sir Garnet Wolseley entered and sacked Kumasi in February 1874 and - the Golden Stool was certainly not one of those articles as implied by your correspondent. These articles included, according to H. M. Stanley, the famous American journalist and explorer who himself accompanied the expeditionary force and witnessed the sacking of the palace, "Strings of valuable Aggry beads . . . Gold nugget and bead, bracelet and necklaces. Swords European and native . . . Gold and silver-headed canes, Regalia, staffs, gold topped, Royal Stools, beautifully carved and ornamented with gold and silver, seven gold masks, each weighing several ounces (writer's emphasis), silken and cotton cloths, Enormous silken umbrellas . . . Gold decorated muskets . several knives with bits of gold on hafts, sandals, gold plated. (H.M. Stanley, *Coonuassie and Magdala, 1874, pp. 233-4). It is these articles and not the Golden Stool that the Asante are yearning for”.

The responses of the British Government and the British Museum to the Ghanaian request for the return of the Asante Regalia, as reported in the *Times* (21) were in effect flat refusals:
“The Foreign Office said in a memorandum to the Ghanaian Foreign Ministry we regret we have no power to comply with the request.” Parts of the regalia are housed in the British Museum and the Wallace Collection. Other pieces are in private bands. It was explained that the British Government had no control over the museums and that the matter would have to be pursued with the museums and the individuals concerned.” The head of the Ashanti, the Asantehene, had made the appeal for the return of the regalia on the centenary of the invasion of Kumasi, and the Foreign Office said the British High Commissioner in Ghana had paid a call on the Asantehene to explain the matter.”

“The British Museum said yesterday that its trustees had no power to dispose of such material as the regalia. That was forbidden under the British Museum Act, 1963. The museum said there would probably have to be a special Act of Parliament to allow the return of the objects. The collection in the British Museum consisted of several fragments of jewellery and costume embellishments, some gold. They were part of the ethnography collection at the Museum of Mankind, Burlington Gardens; the exhibitions there were changed regularly and the parts of the regalia were not on display”.

We have in several articles relating to the recovery of the Parthenon/Elgin Marbles and the Benin Bronzes referred to this “Spiel” (game) of the British Government and the British Museum. The Parliament says you have to talk directly to the museum and the museum says an act of parliament prevents it from returning any object. We have described this game as unworthy of both the British Parliament and the British Museum. It is clearly a game or play with well-defined roles. If it is their wish and decision to keep forever the stolen or looted cultural artefacts of others, it is up to them and their conscience. But, must they also insult the intelligence of the rest of the world with this game whose structure is plain for all to see? The late Prof. P. L. Shinnie who had seen through this game and was disappointed by the refusal of the British Government and the British Museum to agree to return the Asante regalia, wrote as follows:

“Whatever justification can, mistakenly in my view, be adduced for the action taken 100 years ago surely the time has now come to make a generous gesture to a people who maintain feelings of friendship for Britain. The cold refusal is surely a certain way of destroying some of this friendship. Since the trustees of the British Museum require an Act of Parliament to release objects in their collection it is hardly correct for the Government, who control parliamentary business, to claim that they have no power. If they were to provide parliamentary time and to indicate to the trustees that they would look with favour on the transfer of the objects I cannot imagine that there would be an insuperable difficulty in returning to the Asante objects which have far greater emotional and historical meaning for them than they have for us. I do not know
what legal requirements are needed to release objects from the Wallace Collection but no doubt with good will the same result could be achieved. It is difficult to see what Britain has to lose by accommodating Ghana in this way. Many of the objects, including the famous gold head, usually in-correctly known as the 'death mask' of Kofi Karikari, are not available for the public to see. If exhibited in Kumasi not only would Ghanaians be able to see them but it is not improbable that they would be visible to more British citizens than they are at present”. (23)

In 1985, following negotiations between Ghana and Britain a ceremonial Asante stool was returned to Ghana. The stool had been one of the objects looted by the British in the 1874 punitive expedition to Kumasi. The stool had been taken as booty by a Captain Jackson and was given back to Ghana by his family. (24) But the bulk of the Asante regalia looted in 1874 still remains in Britain. The refusal to return the looted objects, despite the appeal by the Asantehene, Otumfou Nana Opoku Ware II means that all subsequent kings of the Asante would have to pursue this quest which has become a sacred duty. In an interview in 2009, the present Asantehene, Otumfou Nana Osei Tutu II, referred to this pending issue raised by his predecessor:

Q: And they are still keeping the artefacts?

A: They are still keeping them.

Q: Can't you get them back?

A: Well, when I hear people talk about human rights, I question their sincerity, because I walk through the British Museum and see artefacts and ornaments belonging to my people, the Asantes, being showcased in London, and they won't give them back to me.

I went to Windsor Castle some time ago and saw the gold cup of Nana Karikari and other artefacts being exhibited there. They still have our treasures there; and also at the British Museum. But when we talk about human rights, are we not saying that I, the Asantehene, also have things over which I have rights? And why can't I have the treasures and gold looted by the British from my people back?

Q: Have you brought up this issue with Queen Elizabeth II who is the overlord of Windsor Castle?

A: Not with the Queen personally, but the demand for the return of these artefacts and gold was started by my immediate predecessor, Otumfuo Opoku Ware II, and I also took it up by talking to people over there. Their whole argument is: "Oh, we can bring them back on a short trip like exhibiting them in
a museum for a while, but we cannot give them back to you on a permanent basis because they are war artefacts." It smacks of rank hypocrisy. (25)

Writing about the opening of the exhibition “Asante. Kingdom of Gold”, at the Museum of Mankind in 1981, by the late Asantehene Otumfuo Nana Opoku Ware II, Russell Chamberlin wondered what must have been going on through the mind of the Asante monarch: “It is impossible to guess what his thoughts are, but they must be, at the very least, wry, for it is as though Queen Elizabeth II, having been invited to open an exhibition celebrating British history in Accra, should find herself contemplating the British Crown Jewels. For these golden objects form part of the regalia of Ashanti taken during the sack of the city in 1847 which resulted in the destruction by fire.” (26)

As we have seen, the present Asantehene was equally angry to see the Asante regalia displayed in the imperialist capital. Indeed, hardly any African can see such a display of looted African artefacts without feelings of anger, revolt and deprivation. Feelings have to be controlled in the face of such brazen provocations.

But why do African Royals attend such exhibitions to which they are invited? For many of the Royals, as indeed for most Africans, such exhibitions offer the first possibility of seeing those treasures that were looted under the colonial/imperialistic eras and were never returned to their countries of origin. Thus they have to fill gaps in their knowledge and experience about ancestral objects they have heard about but have never seen. But should African Royals attend such exhibitions to which they are invited and also grace the occasion of the opening by their presence? Many Africans would say they should not. Such participation and presence may be construed as acquiescence in the revolting acts of the looters.

When invited to attend the opening of a recent exhibition, Benin: Kings and Rituals - Court Arts from Nigeria, the present Oba, Erediauwa I, did not attend himself but sent representatives from the Royal Family. He issued a caveat in the catalogue of the exhibition to warn that Benin’s participation should not be construed as acquiescence in the British invasion of 1879 and its accompanying acts and crimes of looting, killing and burning Benin City. He requested the restitution of the Benin Bronzes. (27) This request was rejected in the preface to the catalogue where the Western organizers suggest to the Nigerians to forget the past and look forward to the future. Till today none of the Benin objects has been returned. Subsequent demands by the Royal Family have not even been acknowledged by the museums detaining the Bronzes.

Why do the African Royals who call for restitution attend such exhibitions? Presumably they rely on the goodwill of the British and other Westerners. However, the past 500 years have shown that such goodwill cannot be expected.
especially where European material interests are involved. Calls for the return of looted objects have always been met with contemptuous rejection or dead silence. Nor is reciprocity part of the Western vocabulary in cultural matters. It is all a one way affair.

The invitation to Africans to view the display of looted African cultural artefacts is also an invitation to put a distance between themselves and the culture that produced those objects or at least to recognize such a distance in time and space. Normally, others should not be showing me my cultural artefacts. I should be showing them my cultural objects. The French do not show the British, British cultural artefacts. Normally, I should not travel thousands of miles to other countries and continents to see the icons of my culture. Others should come to my country to see my culture. But with respect to African culture, the situation has been reversed by the West to such an extent that what would generally be considered as perverse is becoming normal. This is also part of the general scheme to appropriate all useful and valuable African material culture and other materials whether this be gold or diamond and to present them as part of the property of humankind. Thus most African cultural objects are now being presented as part of the cultural heritage of mankind and thus entitling all to possess them. The West contests the right of Africans to seek the return of the looted treasures. Unfortunately, even some highly educated Africans and peoples of African descent are beginning to accept and propagate the Western idea that African artefacts are better kept in the West. The alienation of the African from his land, property and culture that was begun in the colonial days seems to be making tremendous progress since Independence.

More and more Westerners are presenting themselves as experts on African culture with the number of African scholars and experts diminishing with time. For every African who writes on African culture, there are hundreds of Western scholars writing and lecturing on African culture with the great advantage of having the African icons in London, New York, Paris, Berlin and elsewhere. In a recent excellent book by Ekpo Eyo, *Masterpieces of Nigerian Art*, we notice that many of the masterpieces are not in Nigeria but in London and elsewhere in the West. (28) We have reached a point where Westerners are able to question whether cultural objects found in Africa belong to African culture. The question whose culture is raised with the implication that those objects belong as well to the West. Indeed, some have even declared African cultural objects as belonging to a past with which present-day Africans have nothing in common. Cuno has even defined Benin antiques as belonging to a non-existing culture at the very time a Benin exhibition was on at his place of work, Chicago Institute of Art and the Benin Royals were requesting the return of the Benin Bronzes. (29)

The British, who make every effort to ensure that art works in public galleries and institutions as well as artefacts found in the country are not allowed to leave,
seem to find it difficult to understand that other peoples also want their artefacts, especially religious and political symbolic objects back in their own countries.

An unspoken assumption of many of those who oppose restitution of cultural artefacts is that restitution would imply admission of guilt or fault in the initial removal of the object. This leads them even to support colonial acts which by now are recognized by most people as wrong. Return of a cultural object need not be interpreted as admission of guilt but recognition of the fact that the deprived people need it more than the present holder. Take for instance the Asante regalia and other African objects in the British Museum and other museums in the Western world. Do the Western nations need African objects more than the Africans whose culture produced them?

The British have advanced the usual excuses for holding on to other peoples artefacts cultural heritage, none of them being valid. So far, however, they have not applied to Asante gold the most recent explanation provided by the British Museum with regard to the Benin Bronzes, namely that the material used for the artefacts came from Europe and that this somehow justifies their retention by the British Museum. The reader will be spared the examination of this baseless argument. But we should not under estimate the inventive genius of the supporters of the retention of looted artefacts in Britain. (30)

The British Museum and the BBC are making frantic efforts to divert world attention from the pressures building up on the issue of restitution of looted cultural objects. Their method has been to tell a story of the objects in their museum so that the reader may accept a perspective that justifies their retention in the so-called universal museums and thereby avoid any discussions on their return to the countries of origin. (31) But such attempts are, in the long run, bound to fail in the face of the determination of countries in Africa, Asia and in the Americas to recover their looted/stolen cultural artefacts. Egypt has taken the lead in bringing together all States that are fighting for the recovery of their looted/stolen cultural artefacts. (32)

But what is to be done in the face of British determination not to return the looted/stolen artefacts?

1. First of all, we must all, Ghanaians, Africans and other persons interested in just international relations and observance of human rights, support the demand of Ghanaians for the return of the looted or extorted Asante artefacts. The reasons for this support have been stated by Prof. Adu Boahen as follows:

“First and foremost these properties are much more than a regalia or art pieces. Culturally, they sum up Ghana’s and much of West Africa’s technical sophistication. They provide more than a glimpse our craftsmen’s excellence, and they show Kumasi as the centre of an Akan civilization in particular
stretching from the Volta to the Bandoma River in the Ivory Coast and of a West African civilization from Senegal to the Cameroons. They therefore represent together with the bronzes of Benin and Ife, the peak of our West African cultural heritage. Such pieces must therefore be here in West Africa in general and in Ghana in particular and no where else.

Secondly, these treasures are of great research and educational value. They embody in them silent testimony of the expanse of influences that went into the making of our civilization. Also most of the regalia depict symbols in which one may find the summation of our ancestors’ teachings on political life, and of their moral, social and political philosophies. Thus, while to their present owners and admirers abroad, these may be at best exotic, artistic and romantic value, to us, they hold the key to the wisdom and even the history of our ancestors.” (33)

2. Ghana, Nigeria and other African States must examine their co-operation with British museums and other cultural institutions in the West to determine whether there are any valid grounds for accepting this detention of cultural objects and evidence of African history which should have been returned at Independence.

3. Needless to say, Ghana, Nigeria and other African States should examine critically what the benefits there are for remaining in such British dominated organizations such as the Commonwealth. Do these institutions serve development and our people?

4. Egypt has set the pace and tone for the recovery of looted/stolen cultural artefacts. The platform set by Egypt at the Cairo Conference on restitution (2010) should be fully utilized for efforts at recovery and above all, Ghana and all other African States that have restitution claims should submit detailed and precise list of looted articles to the Cairo Conference when it meets next year.

5. In order to raise consciousness about the history and achievements of African civilizations before colonialism, Ghana and other African governments should ensure that easily available texts on these subjects are at the disposal of their public.

6. Ghana, Nigeria and other African States should state clearly their policies on the issues of restitution. So far apart from Egypt, the general reader does know what the policy of most African States is in this matter. Policies should make clear on restitution and other matters related to preservation and recovery of cultural artefacts.

7. Discussions between African representatives and the West on our cultural objects so far should be made public so that the general public would be in a position to measure how far we have come since Independence. In our age of transparency, there is no reason why public matters should be the subject of
exclusive circles or private conversations. Moreover, publications on such matters should be considered as part of the education of the general public for if one never hears of such matters, how would one learn about our culture?

Many of our Western contemporaries are no doubt against colonialism and all that it stands for and they would be among the first to point out that colonialist methods of securing compliance with their laws and wishes were fundamentally against human rights and democracy. Yet we seldom read about our Western contemporaries arguing in favour of the return of the African cultural artefacts that were extracted from the Asante and the Edo (Benin) through military aggression. It is almost as if for many Westerners, the possession of Asante or Benin cultural objects were not in any related to colonial brutality and subjugation. The historical connections are, fortunately, well established even though some museum directors from Chicago and elsewhere may argue to the contrary and be able to convince even educated persons about the validity of their position. But can one be against colonialism and imperialism and still fight tooth and nail against the restitution of looted cultural artefacts? This is surely a small part of the huge amount of resources that colonialists took away from Africa, America and Asia. Are we asking for too much in pleading for what, in effect, would be symbolic restitution of a small part of the whole colonial and imperialist despoliation?

Such contradictions between condemnation of colonialism and hanging onto the benefits of colonial robbery comes from the fact that the West and with it many Western intellectuals have not given up the pretension of the West that it has a god-given duty to safeguard the world and its resources, including cultural artefacts. From this position, it seems logical for the West to seek to hold on to looted cultural objects. Many intellectuals also feel they have a duty to study and explain the non-Western world, not only to their own people but also to the peoples of the non-Western world. From their position, it becomes understandable that British universities such as Edinburgh University which hold looted Ethiopian manuscripts and artefacts have the arrogance, courage and impudence to tell Ethiopians that these objects are better kept in Britain. That Africans are thus deprived of objects necessary for their cultural practices and for studying and explaining their own history appears unimportant to Westerners. They are not worried that such wrongful detention of cultural objects is against innumerable resolutions of the United Nations, UNESCO and several conferences.

By holding illegally and unjustifiably the cultural objects of other peoples, the museums and their directors, are in practice supporting colonial and imperialist positions no matter what they profess. Some Westerners who are conscious of this fundamental contradiction are busy trying to present a different history of the looted objects that would justify or at least render tenable their continued detention. Colonialist and imperialist States may have failed in their attempts at
political hegemony but the intellectuals of those States have not given up their claim to epistemological hegemony. And others, including unfortunately Africans, look on as if nothing decisive were taking place in the world of knowledge.

The struggle to recover our cultural artefacts that have been looted by those who pretended to bring us civilization would be long. We have no choice but to recover artefacts that convey our ideas and portray our perceptions of the world unless we wish to give up our human rights, our identity and the records of our history. Those who have been saying that Africa had no history before European colonization are certainly happy to keep our historical records and evidence of achievements on our continent.

The movement for the repatriation of cultural artefacts looted/stolen is definitely gaining tremendous momentum in our times despite what some supporters of illegal retention have been preaching. This decade has witnessed massive return of cultural artefacts from several American museums and institutions to Italy. Most recently, Yale University has returned, after years of dispute and legal battles, Peruvian cultural objects that had been taken by Yale Professor Hiram Bingham from the Machu Picchu citadel in Peru in 1912. The Metropolitan Museum of Art has recently returned to Egypt 19 artefacts, including a bracelet and a small bronze statue of a dog that were excavated from the tomb of King Tutankhamun and have been held by the museum for decades. France has promised to return to South Korea 297 Uigwe books, royal records from the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910) that were stolen in 1866 by a French military force. The Japanese, who took some of these records during their 1910-45 rule of Korea, have agreed to return some 1,205 volumes of books, including 167 Uigwe volumes, to South Korea. Japan had already in 1965 returned 1,432 cultural artefacts to South Korea. (35)

Western institutions, including the British Museum, that have declared their wish to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Independence of various African countries, could seize this opportunity to demonstrate their solidarity by returning some of the African artefacts that landed in their museums under somewhat dubious circumstances. It clearly does not look like a sincere expression of well-wishes when Western museums say they wish to celebrate with us, show the looted objects and keep them all in their museums. What kind of solidarity is this? What kind of morality is thus demonstrated?

When will the British Government, the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, Wallace Collection and others follow the above-mentioned examples by returning some of the Asante regalia looted in 1874 and the Benin Bronzes looted in 1879? These two invasions of Asante and Benin constitute some of the most flagrant violations of human rights and all principles for the protection of cultural property in times of war and peace. Those aggressions did not constitute
glorious moments in the annals of history and yet some would like to convince us that such aggressive despoliations were or are normal.

Kwame Opoku., 5 January, 2011

“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 are represented by many superb pieces which came to the Museum after British military intervention in Asante in 1874, 1896 and 1900”.

David M. Wilson, a former Director of the British Museum (36)

The late Asantehene, Otumfuo Nana Opoku Ware II. in full regalia.
See also, on the present Asantehene Otumfuo Nana Osei Tutu II
http://www.youtube.com
On Yaa Asantewaa, http://www.youtube.com
http://www.youtube.com

NOTES

http://africa.si.edu/exhibits/akan

2. Wallace Collection, http://www.wallacecollection.org
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wallace_Collection

3. Russell Chamberlin, *op. cit* p.93

Gert v. Paczensky and Herbert Ganslmayr, *Nofretete will nach Hause; Europa Schatzhaus der “Dritten Welt”*, C. Bertelsmann, München, 1984, pp. 135-137. The above mentioned writings are enough for our present purposes but there is a vast amount of interesting books on the Asante campaigns that can be read with profit; Baden-Powell R.S.S. 1896. *The Downfall of Prempeh: A Diary of Life with the Native Levy in Ashanti 1895-96*. London. Methuen.
Lloyd A. 1964 *The Drums of Kumase: The Story of the Ashanti Wars*. London Longmans;

5. Albert van Dantzig, _Forts and Castles of Ghana_, Sedco Publishing Limited, 1980, Accra In the introduction, p.vii, Van Dantzig listed some 50 castles and forts and stated “At various places such as Accra, Komenda and Sekondi, forts were actually built within gun-range of each other. Within three centuries more than sixty castles, forts and lodges were built within a stretch of coast less than 300 miles (500 km) long. Many of these buildings are still in existence at the present and if some of them could be regarded as important individual monuments, the whole chain of buildings, whether intact, ruined or merely sites, could be seen as a collective historical monument unique in the world; the ancient “shopping street” of West Africa.” See also, Kwesi J Anquandah, _Castles and Forts of Ghana_, Ghana Museums and Monuments Board, 1999.


8. Adu Boahen, _ibid_. p.278

9. Brackenbury, op. cit. p 241. The number of items looted from the Asantehene’s palace was so great that Henry M. Stanley who accompanied the Punitive Force ends his list with the phrase: “And so on, ad infinitum, of valuable, curious, and worthless things heaped together in every room.” Stanley, _op.cit_ p. 242;


13. BBC World Service http://www.bbc.co.uk

14 Russell Chamberlin, op. cit .p 93, Claridge, op. cit. 443-445; Ward, op.cit 308-309.


27. Barbara Plankensteiner (Ed), *Benin: Kings and Rituals - Court Arts from Nigeria*, Snoeck, 2007, pp. 13-15. This is surely a very remarkable situation. The King of Benin, the Oba, writes in an introductory note in the catalogue of the exhibition *Benin: Kings and Rituals - Court Arts from Nigeria* requesting the return of some of the Benin cultural artefacts. Almost immediately thereafter, directors of four museums organizing the exhibition with the co-operation of Nigeria declare in a preface that they have no intention of returning any of the Benin objects and advise the Nigerians (and by implication all Africans) to forget the past and look to the future. A singular performance by those whose duty is to keep records and evidence of past achievements and development of human societies.


34. K. Opoku, “Are we getting closer to the season for restitution?” [http://www.museum-security.org](http://www.museum-security.org)

Ashraf Khalil, “Egypt Hunts Ancient Artifacts New York's Metropolitan Museum Says It Will Give Back 19 Items as Archaeologist Lobbies for Returns”.

“Home countries of relics join forces”, http://www.koreaherald.com


ANNEX I

The following text can be found in Brackenbury, The Ashanti War V2, A Narrative Prepared from the Official Documents by Permission of Major-General Sir Garnet Wolseley, 1874. We have kept the old English spelling of Asante names, e.g. “Coommasie” instead of Kumasi and “Fommanah” instead of Fomena.

TREATY OF FOMMANAH, 1874

Treaty of Peace between Major-General Sir Garnet Joseph Wolseley, acting on behalf of her Majesty Victoria, Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, and Saibee Enque, acting on behalf of his Majesty Koffee Kalkali, King of Ashanti

Art. 1. There shall be hereafter perpetual peace between the Queen of England and her allies on the Coast on the one part, and the King of Ashanti and all his people on the other part.

Art. 2. The King of Ashanti promises to pay the sum of 50,000 ounces of approved gold as indemnity for the expenses he has occasioned to her Majesty the Queen of England by the late war; and undertakes to pay 1,000 ounces of gold forthwith, and the remainder by such instalments as her Majesty’s Government may from time to time demand.

Art. 3. The King of Ashanti, on the part of himself and of his successors, renounces all right or title to any tribute or homage from the Kings of Denykyira, Assin, Akim, Adansi, and the other allies of her Majesty’s formerly subject to the kingdom of Ashantee.

Art 4. The King on the part of himself and of his heirs and successors, does hereby further renounce for ever all pretensions of supremacy over Elmina, or
any of the tribes formerly connected with the Dutch Government, and to tribute or homage from such tribes, as well as payment or acknowledgement of any kind by the British Government in respect of Elmina or any other of the British forts and possessions on the Coast.

Art 5. The King will at once withdraw all his troops from Appolonia and its vicinity, and from the neighbourhood of Discove, Secondee, and the adjoining coast line.

Art 6. There shall be freedom of trade between Ashanti and Her Majesty’s forts on the coast, all persons being at liberty to carry their merchandise from the coast to Coomassie, or from that place to any of Her Majesty’s possessions on the coast.

Art. 7 The King of Ashanti guarantees that the road from Coomassie to the river Prah shall always be kept open and free from bush to a width of 15 feet.

Art. 8. As her Majesty’s subjects and the people of Ashanti are henceforth to be friends for ever, the king, in order to prove the sincerity of his friendship for Queen Victoria, promises to use his best endeavours to check the practice of human sacrifice, with a view to hereafter putting an end to it altogether, as the practice is repugnant to the feelings of all Christian nations.

Art. 9. One copy of this Treaty shall be signed by the King of Ashanti and sent to the Administrator of her Majesty’s Government at Cape Coast within fourteen days from this date.

Art 10. This Treaty shall be known as the Treaty of Fommanah.

Dated at Fommanah, this 13th day of February 1874.

ANNEX II

Major R. S. S. Baden-Powell
THE DOWNFALL OF PREMPEH
A DIARY OF LIFE WITH THE NATIVE LEVY IN ASHANTI 1895-96
(Chapter XIII. http://pinetreeweb.com/bp-prempeh-13.htm )

THE DOWNFALL.

10th January.
NOR were these long in beginning. Six o'clock had been named as the hour for Prempeh and all his chiefs to be on the palaver-ground. This was done, well knowing that he might then be expected about seven, and it was desirable to make an early start with the ceremony, in order not to keep the white troops exposed to the sun in the middle of the day. Soon after seven o'clock the troops began to form up on the parade-ground, but still no sign of any of the Ashantis coming; nor even was there any of the usual preliminary drumming that invariably goes on to summon all the retainers who usually form the procession.

Nearly two hours' grace had been given him; it looked as though Prempeh did not mean coming. The order was accordingly given for the Special Service Corps, assisted by the native levy, to surround the palace and the queen-mother's house, and to bring Prempeh and the queen to the Governor. Captain D. Stewart went in to "draw" them.

The native levy, in view of such course becoming necessary, had during the previous day cut away the bush adjoining the palace enclosure, and thus the cordon was enabled rapidly to take up its position to close every outlet.

In a very few minutes the king was carried forth in his state cradle with a small following, and, escorted by the troops, he proceeded hurriedly to the palaver-ground. The queen-mother, similarly escorted, followed shortly after, as well as all the chiefs. They were then marshalled in a line, with a limited number of attendants each, in front of the Governor, Mr. Maxwell, C.M.G. who was seated on a dais, together with Colonel Sir Francis Scott, K.C.B., and Colonel Kempster, D.S.O.

A square of British troops was formed all round, backed by Houssas and the native levy. Then the doom of the nation was pronounced in a set-scene, and amid dramatic incidents such as could not fail to impress both natives and Europeans alike.

Through the medium of interpreters - Mr. Vroom, Secretary for Native Affairs, acting for the Governor; Albert Ansah, for the king the conditions of the treaty to be imposed upon the Ashantis were demanded of them.

The first of these was that Prempeh should render submission to the Governor, in accordance with the native form and custom signifying abject surrender. This is a ceremony which has only once before been carried out between the Ashantis and a British Governor, namely, Governor Rowe. On that occasion the king deputed officers of his court to perform the actual ceremony; but in this case it was insisted that the king must himself personally carry it out.

Accordingly, with bad enough grace, he walked from his chair, accompanied by the queen mother, and, bowing before Mr. Maxwell, he embraced his knees. It
was a little thing, but it was a blow to the Ashanti pride and prestige such as they had never suffered before.

Then came the demand for payment of the indemnity for the war. Due notice had been previously given, and the Ashantis had promised to pay it; but unless the amount, or a fair proportion of it, could now be produced, the king and his chiefs must be taken as guarantee for its payment.

The king could produce about a twentieth part of what had been promised. Accordingly, he was informed that he, together with his mother and chiefs, would now be held as prisoners, and deported to the Gold Coast.

The sentence moved the Ashantis very visibly. Usually it is etiquette with them to receive all news, of whatever description, in the gravest and most unmoved indifference; but here was Prempeh bowing himself to the earth for mercy, as doubtless many and many a victim to his lust for blood had bowed in vain to him, and around him were his ministers on their feet, clamouring for delay and reconsideration of the case. The only "man" among them was the queen.

In vain. Each chief found two stalwart British non-commissioned officers at his elbow, Prempeh being undercharge of Inspector Donovan. Their arrest was complete.

But there was still an incident coming to complete the scene. The two Ansahs, although they held a large hand in causing the trouble between the British and Ashantis, appear in their own country to have little or no influence with the people, and, indeed, were looked on with jealousy and suspicion. These were surveying the scene - their handiwork - with a somewhat curious look, half amused, half nonplussed, when the Governor added to his remarks the suggestion that the present might be a suitable occasion for the arrest of these two gentlemen on a charge of forgery; and before they had fully realised between them that the charge was actually being preferred against them, they found that Mr. Donovan had adroitly handcuffed them wrist to wrist, and the scene was complete.

During the performance of this act another had been quietly preparing behind the scenes. Parties of the native levy had been withdrawn from the parade-ground, and were added to the cordon already drawn round the palace. All was silent there, and all the many doors were locked. But a path from the jungle leading to the back door, also locked, brought one within sound of the buzz of many men talking within, and of the soughing of bellows of smelting fires. At the close of the palaver on the parade-ground, two companies of the West Yorkshire Regiment, under Captain Walker, were detailed to take possession of the palace, clear it of all people inside, and to collect and make an inventory of all property found inside.
One company was accordingly sent to stiffen the cordon of native levies, and with the other company I proceeded to effect an entrance by a back way, which I had previously reconnoitred. There had been reports of the palace being undermined, and it was natural to expect that if this was so, the main entrance would be the spot selected for the mine, and that at any rate the place where the inmates were collected would be safe. Accordingly, making its way through the deserted garden, this company proceeded to the back entrance, and burst open the door. This opened into a large courtyard. Not a soul to be seen! Everything silent. Two painted doors in a side wall were kicked in by soldiers, and immediately after Tommy Atkins' persuasive voice was sounding, "Come out of that, you blatherskiting idiot; d'ye think I want to eat you?" and so on, as a frightened flock of natives were dragged out into the daylight. They were placed in the courtyard under sentries, while the remainder of the company proceeded to search every corner of every court and alley of the palace - and these were many - for further occupants. A hundred or two of these were taken, and then the work of collecting valuables and property was proceeded with.

There could be no more interesting, no more tempting work than this. To poke about in a barbarian king's palace, whose wealth has been reported very great, was enough to make it so. Perhaps one of the most striking features about it was that the work of collecting the treasures was entrusted to a company of British soldiers, and that it was done most honestly and well, without a single case of looting. Here was a man with an armful of gold-hilted swords, there one with a box full of gold trinkets and rings, another with a spirit-case full of bottles of brandy, yet in no instance was there any attempt at looting.

It need not be supposed that all the property found in the palace was of great value. There were piles of the tawdiest and commonest stuff mixed indiscriminately with quaint, old, and valuable articles, a few good brass dishes, large metal ewers, Ashanti stools, old arms, etc. But a large amount of valuables known to belong to the king had disappeared, probably weeks previously - such as his celebrated dinner service of Dutch silver, his golden hat, his golden chair of state, and, above all, the royal stool, the emblem par excellence of the King of Ashanti.

These were all probably hidden, together with his wives, in various hamlets in the remote bush. The "loot" which we collected was sold by public auction, excepting golden valuables, which were all sent home to the Secretary of State.

The term "palace" has merely been used to denote the residence of the king. In reality there is very little that is palatial about it. It consists of a collection of the usual wattle-and-daub huts, with high walls and enormous high-pitched thatched roofs; endless courts, big and little, succeed each other, with narrow entries between, and with little or no attempt at architectural design or ornamentation.
The foundations of the old palace, built on more substantial principles, and destroyed in the last campaign, are still to be seen in the centre of the present place in a disused court.

Finding so little of real value in the palace, it was hoped that some treasure might be discovered in the sacred fetish-houses at Bantama, the burial-place of the kings of Ashanti, about a mile out of Bantama. This place had also been piqueted, but all its priests had disappeared previously, and when we broke in, only one harmless old man was found residing there. No valuables - in fact, little of any kind was found in the common huts that form the sacred place. In the big fetish building, with its enormous thatched roof, when burst open, we only found a few brass coffers - all empty! The door, which was newly sealed with mortar, showed no signs of having been quite freshly closed up, and it may therefore be inferred that the treasure had been removed some weeks previously.

Then, in accordance with orders, we set the whole of the fetish village in flames, and a splendid blaze it made. The great fetish-tree, in whose shade hundreds of victims have been sacrificed, was blown up with gun-cotton, as also were the great fetish-trees on the Kumassi parade-ground. Among the roots of these there lie the skulls and bones of hundreds, and possibly of thousands, of victims to the regime which to-day has so dramatically been brought to a close.

**ANNEX III**

**ASANTE OBJECTS IN BRITISH MUSEUMS.**

It is not intended here to show the many looted Asante objects in British museums but to show a few that will give readers, especially those in Africa who cannot afford to travel to London or cannot obtain visa for the United Kingdom, an idea about the objects we are discussing. There are surely many other museums in Britain, apart from those mentioned here, with some of the looted objects from Asante, Ghana.

It should be noted that the museums do not facilitate the viewing of the Asante regalia. In addition to the Wallace Collection that has no African section and puts the Asante regalia in the Oriental Armoury, the Victoria and Albert Museum does not display the Asante objects in an African section. True these objects are displayed on the internet and on the intranet in the museum but there is then the indication that the objects are in store. That is, one cannot simply walk in and see them. When we inquired we were told we would have to see the director. He will presumably ask why one wants to see them at all and for what
purposes. How does this fulfil the pretence to general public information and education?

**Victoria and Albert Museum.**

Pectoral disc

Ring

Ornament
Ornament

Ornament

Pair of Silver Anklets
In the British Museum are to be found Asante pectoral discs, cast in gold.
These gold works, including music instruments are said to have been collected in 1817 by Thomas Bowdich.
Silver-gilt dish with a soul-bear’s disc inserted, in possession of Marquess of Exeter. This object of doubtful taste was made in the same year as Kumasi was looted.

**ANNEX IV**

**Conclusions of the Athens International Conference on the Return of Cultural Objects to their Countries of Origin**

*Athens, 17-18 March 2008*

Experts on the issue of the return of cultural objects to their countries of origin, who participated in the first International Conference held in Athens, on 17th and 18th March 2008, within the framework of the meeting co-organized by the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in case of Illicit Appropriation and the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, in the presence of the Member States of the Committee have reached the following conclusions:

It is important that UNESCO organise international conferences, so that experts intensify their study of the issue of the return of cultural property to its country of origin, in order to produce viable and realistic solutions;

Cultural heritage constitutes an inalienable part of a people’s sense of self and of community, functioning as a link between the past, the present and the future;

It is essential to sensitize the public about this issue and especially the younger generation. An information campaign may prove very effective toward that end;
Certain categories of cultural property are irrevocably identified by reference to the cultural context in which they were created (unique and exceptional artworks and monuments, ritual objects, national symbols, ancestral remains, dismembered pieces of outstanding works of art). It is their original context that gives them their authenticity and unique value;

The role of the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to its Countries of Origin or its Restitution in case of Illicit Appropriation must be strengthened through the necessary means, resources and infrastructure. Effort should be made to encourage mediation either through the Committee or by other means of alternative dispute resolution;

Requests and negotiations for the return of cultural goods can work as a vehicle for cooperation, collaboration, sharing, joint research and economic promotion;

In recent years a clear tendency towards the return of cultural objects to their countries of origin has been developed on legal, social and ethical grounds. The return of cultural objects is directly linked to the rights of humanity (preservation of cultural identity and preservation of world heritage);

Museums should abide by codes of ethics. On this basis, museums should be prepared to initiate dialogues for the return of important cultural property to its country or community of origin. This should be undertaken on ethical, scientific, and humanitarian principles. The cooperation, partnership, goodwill and mutual appreciation between the parties concerned could lead to joint research programs and exchange of technical expertise.

*http://portal.unesco.org*