



Back where they  
belong?  
Repatriating  
Museum Objects

# What is Repatriation?

- **Repatriation:** the process by which cultural objects are returned to a nation or state at the request of a government.
- **Restitution:** the process by which cultural objects are returned to an individual or a community.
- **Spoliation:** claims from people, or their heirs, who lost possession of cultural property during the Nazi era (1933-45).

# Why is repatriation important?

- Repatriation seems one way to address the historical injustice museums have caused. Museums cannot undo history but they can be part of the process of healing.
- Repatriation shows respect for the dead, for cultural beliefs, and for the hurt that has been caused to source communities as a result of the development of scientific and museum collections.
- 'Repatriation helps our Indigenous communities heal from the trauma of having our Indigenous Ancestors and cultural items held without our consent in repositories worldwide.' *Ryman LeBeau, Chairman, Tribal Council, Cheyenne River Reservoir, South Dakota*



How did  
Glasgow  
Museums get  
all of this stuff  
anyway?

Many artefacts held in  
Western museums and  
libraries are known to  
have been appropriated  
over the ages through  
conquest and colonialism.



The Empire in red in 1886, by Walter Crane





*The English term 'loot' derives from the Hindi 'lut', meaning to rob or pillage.*



- Looting took place in the service of the Empire, to pay for wars, Christian Missions or for Science.
- Looting took place to order. Museums and private collectors would pay for the treasures brought back.
- Looting was carried out by soldiers, missionaries, explorers, settlers and scientists.





# Glasgow Museums: Thirty Years Ago



## Scots give back relic of Wounded Knee

A SACRED ghost dance shirt thought to have been worn by an Indian warrior killed at the Battle of Wounded Knee in 1890 left Glasgow for the United States yesterday (Shirley English writes).

The bloodied, beige calico tunic, adorned with eagle and owl feathers and punctured with bullet holes, was the only relic of its kind outside America and had been on display in

the city's Kelvingrove Museum for a century. It was donated to the city in January 1892 by a translator working with Buffalo Bill Cody's travelling Wild West Show.

Glasgow councillors agreed in November to hand it back to the Lakota Indians at Pine Ridge and Cheyenne River, South Dakota, after a formal request from the Wounded Knee Survivors Association.

The Herald, Saturday, January 25, 1997

NEWS

Glasgow museum director rejects request from Africa for return of looted artefacts

## Battle royal for Benin relics

EXCLUSIVE  
By ALISON HARRIS

THE director of a Scottish museum was at the centre of an international row last night over the rights of a small African nation to reclaim royal artefacts plundered by British colonial troops a century ago.

A formal request by the King of Benin for the return of 22 bronze and ivory relics before the anniversary of their theft in February has been rejected by Mr Julian Spalding, the director of Glasgow's museums.

The struggle to wrest the pieces from Kelvingrove Art Gallery, where they sit in a glass case, has been taken on by Mr Benin Grant MP, who is also the chairman of the Africa Restoration Movement.

He maintains the controversy echoes Scotland's own fight to have the Stone of Destiny returned from Westminster, granted only last year by the Government.

He has the endorsement of a local Labour MP, Mr George Galloway and, it is understood, the tacit support of Glasgow City Council, which has been advised by Mr Spalding not to comply with demands of the Benin royal family.

Mr Grant is in the city this weekend to campaign, his cause and to call on Scots to look to their own feelings of national identity to understand what motivates the people of Benin, which neighbours Nigeria in west Africa.

Yesterday, as he viewed the Benin collection, Mr Grant was involved in an audible but heated meeting with Mr Mark O'Neill, the museum's head of curatorial services.

Most of the Benin religious and cultural objects currently in British museums and other institutions were looted in February 1897 from Benin City during the battle to carve up Africa into spheres of influence by the major European powers.

Mr Grant, who appeared yesterday, said he was "pleased" to be returned to Benin and, as the country of their looting, the strength of being asked to return them.

There are precedents that would allow Glasgow to return the relics to Benin. In 1962, aboriginal human remains were returned to Australia and talks with native Americans led to the return of a Stone Ghost shirt, a garment taken from the body of a brave after the US Army slaughtered more than 200 men, women, and children in 1890.



Mark O'Neill puts the point of view of the museum to MP Benin Grant in front of the Benin relics.

The largest collection of Benin relics in Britain is held at the Museum of Mankind in London, which refuses to enter into discussions about their return.

Mr Grant, who was acting as a spokesman for the Benin royal family, said: "I am not saying that all of them should be taken away, only the significant ones."

"The Scots set a lot of store on the Stone of Destiny. Now that it has been returned, I think the rest of the world will see the Scots as being two-faced if they are quite happy to have their relic returned but not do the same themselves."

These belong to a living culture and have a deep historic value.

Bernie Grant

Mr Grant said the relics are part of a "surviving and living culture" that relies on them as a guide to traditional ceremonies and dress.

"The Africans draw and make sculptures to consult rather than write things down, many ceremonies are now not being performed satisfactorily because many of the secrets are missing," he said.

Mr O'Neill said the museum had a "moral imperative to preserve the heritage of Glasgow and enlighten local people about Benin."

However, Mr O'Neill said the museum could be sympathetic to the request despite Mr Spalding's stance, which states: "Though it is possible for our museum service to restitute items... we cannot advise the City Council that this should happen in this case... these objects are an important relic to play in the public sector."

Mr O'Neill said he would have to be convinced by an independent expert that Glasgow's collection was unique before restitution could be considered. He told Mr Grant: "If we went through every object and assessed how it got here, then we could be in a situation where we were repatriating 60 or 70% of our collection and I don't think society has reached that stage."

"The bottom line here is that we are not in the business of restoring historic wrongs."



A photograph of four people in a meeting. On the left, a man with a beard and glasses wears a red turban and a blue suit with a colorful tie. Next to him is a man with a mustache in a blue suit and a striped tie. In the center, a man with glasses in a grey suit holds a blue folder. On the right, a woman with short red hair is partially visible. They are all looking towards the right side of the frame.

# 7<sup>th</sup> April 2022

Glasgow City Council's Repatriation of Artefacts Working Group approved the following requests for the repatriation of a total of 51 cultural artefacts from within the civic collection to:

- ❑ National Commission of Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, on behalf of the Royal Court of Benin.
- ❑ Cheyenne River and Oglala Lakota Sioux Tribes, South Dakota USA
- ❑ The High Commission of India on behalf of the Archaeological Survey of India



# 2022 Headlines

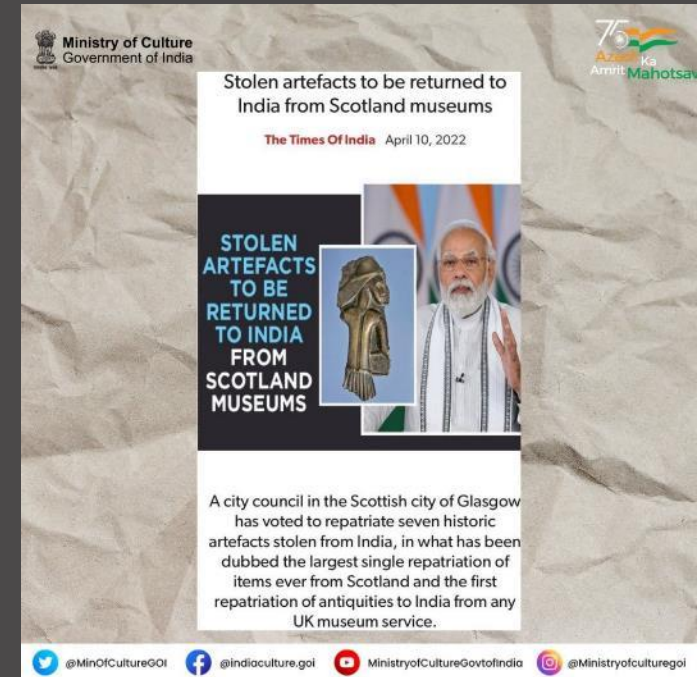
## Glasgow museum items to be repatriated to Nigeria, India and Native Americans

8th April

NEWS — REPATRIATION

## Largest-ever repatriation of cultural artefacts from a Scottish museum given green light

Glasgow to return looted items to India, Nigeria and representatives of massacred Lakota people in South Dakota, USA



News > People

## Stolen artefacts in Glasgow museums – including items taken from Wounded Knee massacre – set to be returned

Artefacts in Glasgow's museum collection taken from the site of a massacre of hundreds of Native Americans in 1890 are set to be returned to their descendants.

By Drew Sandelands - Local Democracy Reporter  
Tuesday, 5th April 2022, 8:02 am

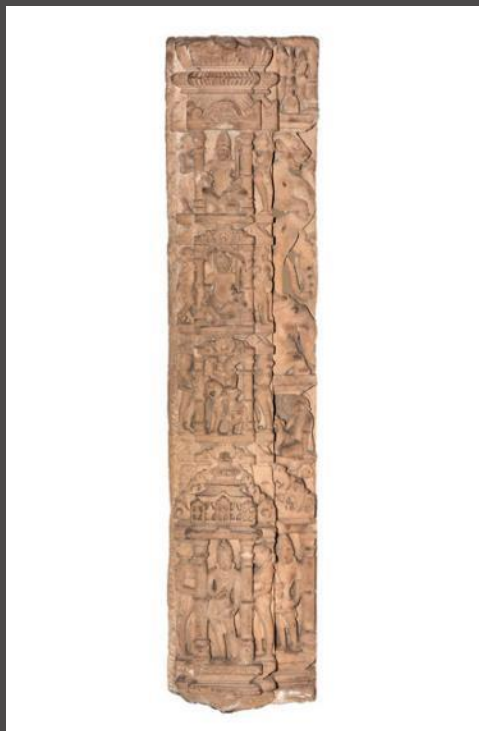




# How did we decide?

In January 2022, Glasgow City Council's Repatriation of Artefacts Working Group met to consider requests for the repatriation of artefacts held in the city's museum collection and made recommendations based on the following criteria:

1. The status of those making the request - their right to represent the descendants of the community to whom the objects or ancestors originally belonged.
2. The continuity between the people who created the objects or ancestors and the current community on whose behalf the request is being made.
3. The cultural, historical and/or religious importance of the objects or ancestors to the descendants.
4. How the objects and/or ancestors were acquired by the museum.



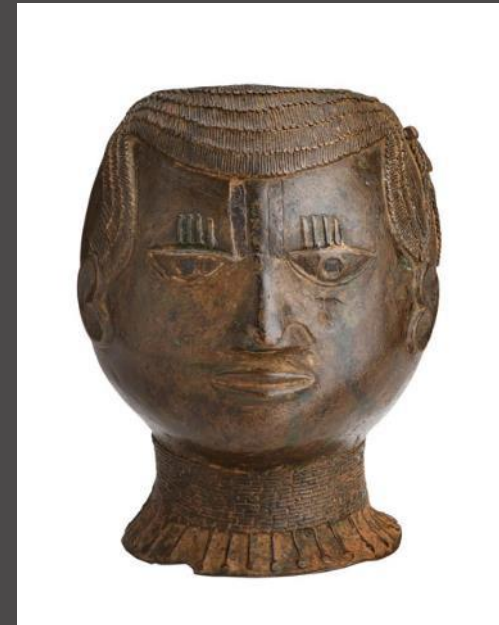
## High Commission of India on behalf of Archaeological Survey of India and Government of India: 7 antiquities

Ownership formally transferred 19<sup>th</sup> August 2022





**National Museums and  
Monuments Committee  
of Nigeria, on behalf of  
the Royal Court of Benin:  
19 artefacts**





# Cheyenne River and Oglala Lakota Sioux Tribes, South Dakota USA: 25 cultural artefacts



*In memory of Marcella LeBeau, 1919 - 2021*



# Key skills

- Communication
- Research
- Empathy
- Patience
- Acceptance
- Respect
- Moral compass
- Tenacity



Conclusion  
..repatriation is  
never  
straightforward..



If we cannot trace the rightful owner how can we return precious items or ancestors to them?



Expensive. Who should pay?



How do you untangle bureaucracy across cultures?



How do you achieve agreement amongst all parties on all sides? What are the pitfalls?



Is repatriation or restitution always the answer? What are possible alternatives?



# Useful links

Looted: Bringing back the Gods

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/watch/looted/bringing-back-the-gods-3007986>

Artefacts from Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum repatriated to India

<https://www.gettyimages.ae/detail/video/artefacts-from-kelvingrove-art-gallery-and-museum-news-footage/1415954225>

**James Acaster On The Absurdity Of The British Empire**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x73PkUvArJY>

Reclaiming the Past

<https://www.timeforkids.com/g56/reclaiming-the-past/?rl=en-900>

Stealing Art Is Easy. Giving It Back Is Hard

<https://freakonomics.com/podcast-tag/stealing-art-is-easy-giving-it-back-is-hard/>

Thank you!

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