

Return of British and Fascist Loot to Ethiopia  
By Richard Pankhurst (Prof.)

The return of the Aksum obelisk, though belated, is to be welcomed - and recalls a statement by an Italian Foreign Minister to the effect that the repatriation of the obelisk could be a precedent for the return of other loot: - perhaps the loot taken by the British from Emperor Tewodros's capital at Maqḍala in 1868. Indeed we have to work for the repatriation of the Ethiopian crown from the Victoria and Albert Museum, the 400 or so Ge'ez manuscripts from the British Library; the Ethiopian masobs, or holy of holies from the British Museum - and much else currently in Britain.

It should however be recalled that the Aksum obelisk was not the only item looted by the Italian Fascists from Ethiopia, Badoglio, the first Italian viceroy of Ethiopia, took back to Italy over 100 cases of loot, as well as half the silver Maria Theresa dollars in the Bank of Ethiopia, out of which he built his palace-like house in Rome, while Graziani, the second viceroy, took back to Italy over 70 cases of loot.

Italy has still not returned an important part of Ethiopia's national archives, the so-called Ministry of the Pen archives relating to Ethiopian -Italian relations, from the time of Menilek onwards. Italy has likewise failed to return the little aeroplane, Tsehai, assembled in Addis Ababa on the eve of the Fascist invasion - perhaps the first aircraft built in Africa, and called after the late Emperor's daughter, which remains to this day in the Historical Aviation Museum in Italy. Post-war Italy signed its Peace Treaty with the United Nations in 1947. Article 37 specifies that all loot taken from Ethiopia after 3 October 1936 (the date of the fascist invasion) should be returned within 18 months. It is the duty of the present Italian government to honour that still unfulfilled undertaking, and of United Nations members to see that it does so,

I feel that this is time to agitate for the return to Ethiopia of its looted property

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