WHY ARE ETHIOPIAN TREASURES BEING RETURNED AFTER MORE THAN 150 YEARS?



WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Five historic Ethiopian Christian objects have been returned to Ethiopia after being held abroad. They include two illuminated manuscripts from the 15th century and three processional crosses used in religious ceremonies. The objects are believed to have been removed improperly from Ethiopian churches. Their return is part of a larger agreement involving the Toledo Museum of Art in the United States, Ethiopian officials and an American collector. The collector owns about 375 Ethiopian objects, and many may eventually be returned. Some items are connected to the British attack on Maqdala in 1868. During that expedition, British troops defeated Emperor Tewodros II and took religious and royal treasures from his fortress. The new arrangement means that objects will be examined one by one. Items believed to have been looted may be sent back, while others may remain in the museum.

WHY IS THIS INTERESTING?

This story shows that the effects of empire can continue long after an invasion has ended. Museums and collectors now have to ask how objects were acquired and whether they should stay where they are. Returning the manuscripts and crosses may help Ethiopia protect its religious history, but it also raises questions about who should care for historic objects and who has the right to display them.

THINK LIKE A HISTORIAN

“Should museums return objects taken during colonial wars?”

Source: The Art Newspaper

https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2026/11/20/five-ethiopian-artefacts-restituted-in-london-ceremony