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## **Nigeria calls for return of Lander Stool from the British Museum**

**Woodcarving was taken from the African country in 1830  
by the UK explorer Richard Lander**

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Nigeria has requested the return of the Lander Stool in the  
British Museum's collection © British Museum

A Nigerian official has requested the return from the British Museum of a woodcarving known as the Lander Stool, which was taken from Nigeria in 1830 by the UK explorer Richard Lander. According to a statement from Lagos State, the item would go on display in the redeveloped John K. Randle Centre of Yoruba History and Culture, due to open in Lagos this spring. The new culture complex “will enable the Yoruba people to reclaim their heritage from a colonial narrative”.

Steve Ayorinde, the commissioner for Information, Tourism & Culture of Lagos State, made the request at a closed session colloquium held at the British Museum in London on 1 February with representatives from Edo State, Ghana and Lagos State to outline plans for their various new museum projects, including the John K. Randle Centre.

The stool is currently in storage at the British Museum and is an important element of the restitution debate, the statement adds. Asked if the stool request is the first of many, Ayorinde tells *The Art Newspaper* that it is “a starting point”. At a press briefing, he stressed that Africa is “taking seriously the need to have [culture] structures so that we can begin returning works”.

Hartwig Fischer, the director of the British Museum, said that he has been “in touch with colleagues [in Nigeria] for some time. It is an inspiring dialogue... the idea of working together includes the possibility of engaging in an exchange.” The British Museum is legally unable to deaccession objects in its collections by an act of parliament, the 1963 British Museum Act.

Meanwhile, Godwin Obaseki, the Governor of Edo State, revealed further details regarding the Benin Royal Museum (BRM) planned for Benin City in Edo State at the briefing. The BRM and its affiliate, the Museum of West African Research Institute, “will be a combination of a world-class museum with technology-enabled displays, as well as a research centre focused on archaeology, art and antiquities research”, officials say.

The new museum will be at the heart of a proposed culture quarter in Benin City alongside other heritage sites such as the Oba's Palace. \$1.5m has been made available for pre-development capital funding, Obaseki said.

The Kingdom of Benin was a pre-colonial state in what is now southern Nigeria. In 1897, British forces raided the kingdom's royal palace in an attempt to overthrow the Oba. Around 4,000 bronze and ivory artefacts were looted by the British army; since the 1960s, the Court of Benin and the Nigerian government have repeatedly called for their repatriation.

The British Museum holds more than 700 objects from Benin. Berlin State Museums also has an extensive collection of Benin treasures, part of which is due to go on display in the new Humboldt Forum culture complex later this year.

Asked if he plans to borrow objects from Western museum on a long-term basis or is seeking permanent restitution, Obaseki said that "the most important thing is access... [and seeing] the works in their original forms". He added that "issues such as ownership rights are best resolved through collaboration." Fischer stressed that facilitating the new museum projects in Africa had been the purpose of the closed colloquium, adding that the British Museum has been cultivating partnerships with institutions in Nigeria, Ghana and Kenya since 2005.