

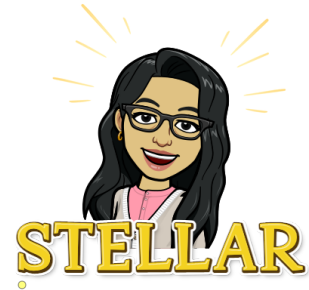
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Museums or Motherlands?



Should artifacts belong to the countries that created them, or should they remain where they can be preserved and shared with the world? Everyone can agree that artifacts are precious pieces of history, which connect modern societies to ancient civilizations. Historical artifacts have been collected, traded, purchased, and discovered for centuries. Now, many priceless pieces of the past are safely preserved in museums far from their past countries of origin. Across museums around the world, artifacts are like time machines, taking us back to ancient civilizations. However, during ongoing international debates over cultural ownership and museum collections, the question of who should control historical artifacts remains controversial. While some countries demand the return of these artifacts, others argue that museums and collectors should keep artifacts because they protect valuable artifacts, preserve important history, and provide global access to culture. Providing global access to culture and education, museums allow people from all nations to learn from shared history. Not only this, but returning artifacts can also create legal complications of ownership. This remains controversial. Ultimately, it is better to allow museums and collectors to keep artifacts.

Those that argue that artifacts should be returned to the cultures that created them claim it restores culture and the artifacts are more meaningful. By returning artifacts, countries could possibly restore cultural pride and historical identity. While it may seem to restore cultural pride and identity, their significance is already preserved through museums, where they remain accessible to a global audience and protected for future generations. Also, some say that many communities might feel absently disconnected from their history when important cultural objects are displayed in foreign museums: "These are historical gems and hold a strong symbolic

meaning to their culture, and so the question of ownership ought to go to those people” (“A Homecoming for History”). Even so, critics disagree. While some may argue that communities may feel disconnected from artifacts, museums actually help maintain that connection by preserving, studying, and sharing cultural objects with a global audience. Overall, while some suggest that returning artifacts may restore cultural pride and that foreign display can create feelings of disconnection, these claims overlook the fact that museums already preserve cultural identity while making artifacts widely accessible and protected. In addition, concerns about disconnection are less convincing because museums actively educate the public and keep cultural histories visible across generations, whereas returning artifacts can create new risks related to preservation, access, and long-term care. Museums are better at maintaining artifacts for numerous reasons: they protect artifacts from damage, allow public accessibility, and prevent legal disputes.

Because many countries lack the proper facilities or funding, museums can better preserve artifacts by protecting them from damage, shielding them from conflict and maintaining them with care. Unfortunately, some countries do not have the facilities or funding, which is necessary to preserve ancient artifacts properly. Experiencing war and political instability can also cause countries to lose and damage very important artifacts. This is a great loss. In many countries, governments do not prioritize protecting their artifacts, or else they would have invested in searching, excavating, and preserving artifacts instead of unrightfully claiming them from salvage companies after they were found. For example, “After losing the lawsuit to Spain, Odyssey Marine had to turn over the treasure without any compensation. On top of that, the Tampa company had to pay \$1 million in legal fees.” (“Purchasers and Finders”). The quote shows how unfair and unjust the countries are when third parties recover artifacts. This demonstrates how museums and salvage companies are often more capable of preserving and protecting artifacts than the countries that later attempt to claim ownership of them. Ancient artifacts and safeguarded by museums.

Preserving artifacts is only one of many things museums do. They make artifacts become easily accessible to the public. Culture should be openly shared globally instead of being limited to one country. By sharing the artifacts, more people who visit museums can learn about different cultures. Artifacts can educate numerous people. Millions of people visit museums every year and learn about cultures from around the globe. Unsurprisingly, museums allow people to truly appreciate artifacts: "Most artifacts are not kept behind a vault door but put on display for the public to see and appreciate" ("Purchasers and Finders"). When artifacts aren't returned to their countries, more people get to experience and appreciate artifacts whereas they would have been tucked away.

Finally, museums help prevent legal and ethical disputes by keeping ownership of artifacts clear and documented. Determining "true" owners of artifacts can be increasingly difficult, especially if it was traded or purchased centuries ago. In the case of the *San José*, Colombians located and excavated \$17 billion dollars worth of a Spanish ship that was sunk by a British squadron in 1708. "The Spanish do not have a legal or legitimate claim" ("Purchasers and Finders"). This is just one of many complicated cases regarding artifacts. Not only this, but many artifacts are legally purchased or discovered by explorers and archaeologists. When countries demand back their artifacts, they offer no compensation to these people who have spent lots of time and money for the artifacts. This creates conflict. These disputes are not just complicated, but they often lead to lawsuits which leads to conflict between nations.

In museums and collections around the world artifacts are objects made or used by humans in the past that help us understand history and culture. Since they are invaluable they should remain in safe museums and collections rather than always being returned because museums can better protect artifacts, make artifacts more accessible, and reduce ownership complications. They are windows into the past, allowing modern societies to look directly into the lives and cultures of ancient civilizations. Additionally, this issue not only matters to museums, historians, and governments, but it also matters to people who are interested in

preserving world history. This matters globally. Affecting how cultures are shared, how history is protected, and whether future generations will continue to have access to important historical artifacts shows how significant this decision is.

Works Cited

Pudewa, Andrew. "A Homecoming for History." *Structure and Style for Students*, by Andrew Pudewa, Institute for Excellence in Writing, LLC, 2019, pp. 185–186.

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