

Ever since, these works have remained in foreign museums as they were dispersed by the British to Austria, Germany, France and the USA. The British Museum collection continues to grow in leaps and bounds from acquisitions of expedition members. Up until 1960, other discoveries of Benin objects were acquired from the estate of Admiral Egerton and J.P Howe (Plankensteiner 2007:35).

A German daily queried the motive of the British mission to Benin. It described the expedition as 'allegedly' peaceful and wondered why 'all leading authorities' were represented in the mission to persuade the king. Much earlier, Mary Kingsley, a well-known African traveller who had been to Benin in 1895, had queried that if the mission was solely to convince the king to abide with the treaty one person would have gone to the palace rather than the entire team along with 250 armed natives (Plankensteiner 2007: 202). In other words, the attack on Benin was premeditated. The ambush of January 4, 1897 served as the much needed catalyst for the operation which in any case would still have taken place. British plan to loot Benin, annex it and make it a British protectorate is revealed in a letter written by Phillips to Lord Salisbury in November, 1896. The British Foreign secretary requested approval to invade Benin and depose the reigning king. The letter clearly states: 'I would add that I have reason to hope that sufficient Ivory would be found in the king's house to pay the expenses incurred in removing the king from his stool.'<sup>9</sup>

It would therefore be right to conclude that the Phillips party was the first military expedition to Benin. The second expedition was swiftly arranged in February 1897 once the first one failed.

### **Efforts at the Repatriation of Looted Works**

Several requests have been made to foreign museums with holdings of Benin works. None of these requests has been answered favourably. It was only in 1938 that some form of repatriation was made to the Benin monarchy. Part of the regalia of Oba Ovonramwen found in a private collection in the UK was returned to Oba Akenzua II. He was so joyous that he sang and danced on receiving these items. The regalia form part of a sartorial tradition passed on from generation to generation and, therefore, has no meaning when kept in showcases for viewing pleasure.

In order to build up the collection of the newly founded National Museum in Benin, the Federal Government had to buy back some of the Benin pieces in the 1960s. In 1977, a pectoral mask found in the bedchamber of the king was chosen as the symbol of the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC). The Nigerian government requested from the British Museum a loan of the Ivory mask for the event, but this request was turned down on the excuse that it was too fragile to travel.

The present Oba (king) of Benin, HRH Solomon Erediauwa, in his introductory note to the recent Benin catalogue entitled *Benin Kings and Rituals: Court Arts from Nigeria*, though expressing his pleasure in participating in the exhibition, clearly stated that:

It links us, nostalgically, with our past on show today. It is our prayer that the people and the government of Austria will show humaneness and magnanimity and return to us some of these objects which found their way to your country<sup>10</sup>.

Princes Gregory and Edun Akenzua, brothers of the reigning king, attended the exhibition in Vienna as the king's representatives. Prince Gregory Akenzua, the Enogie or duke of Evbuobanwosa, in his lecture titled 'The loss of Benin Artworks and their Original Function', reiterated the Oba's view clearly demanding the return of the Benin artefacts. In 2000, Prince Edun Akenzua appeared before the British House of Commons requesting for the repatriation of the