

Gabriel Berhanu Kassayie and friends
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Your Ref
Our Ref cms 72839

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department for
culture, media
and sport

Dear Gabriel and friends,

Thank you for your letter dated 17 June 2007 to the former Prime Minister. Your letter has been passed to this Department as we are responsible for cultural property issues. I have been asked to reply.

It is encouraging that you and your classmates take such a keen interest in cultural property and that you have taken the time to write in. You are obviously very familiar with the history of the treasure.

Cases such as this often stir strong feelings on both sides of the debate and the case of the Maqdala treasure is one is no exception. However, there have been no official requests, for example from Government, for the Maqdala treasure to be returned to Ethiopia. Therefore Ministers are unable to intervene.

In the UK, it is a valued principle that our national museums are independent from government. Often trustees are unable to 'de-accession' or release items in their collections, such rules govern the British Museum for example. There are no plans to change these arrangements.

There is however, some good news that you may be interested to know about. The British Museum plans to instigate a very long term loan of the pieces it houses to an Ethiopian church here in the UK. So, although remaining on British soil, the artefacts will be in the hands of an Ethiopian institution, for the enjoyment of the community.

Kind regards,

Rachel Stratton
Cultural Property Unit