

MAY 2025

PRESS KIT



ROYAL TREASURES OF BENIN
**Restitution of the Katakè from
Finland to Benin**



RÉPUBLIQUE
DU BÉNIN

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The Return of the Katakèlè to Benin

A restitution made possible through cooperation between Benin and Finland

The Government of the Republic of Benin is pleased to announce the restitution of the Katakèlè, a royal stool from Benin.

This long-awaited return of an emblematic piece of Benin's history will be celebrated during an official ceremony held on Tuesday, May 13, 2025, at 10:00 AM at the Presidential Palace.

The Katakèlè is one of the royal treasures seized in 1892 from the Kingdom of Danxomè during the French colonial campaign led by General Alfred Dodds. Initially transferred to the Trocadéro Museum of Ethnography in Paris, it later became part of the collections of the Musée de l'Homme. In 1939, following an international museum exchange, it was sent to the National Museum of Finland, where it remained for over eight decades.

The restitution of the Katakèlè was made possible through exemplary cooperation between Beninese and Finnish authorities, reflecting a shared commitment to heritage justice, historical recognition, and respect for cultural identities.

This significant act strengthens the momentum initiated by Benin since 2016, driven by its Government, to recover, circulate, and valorize its most precious cultural assets. The return of the Katakèlè is part of a broader strategy to enrich national collections, nurture collective memory, and inspire contemporary artistic creation.

This restitution also underscores the growing importance of cultural and scientific exchanges among institutions, museums, and governments, within a spirit of shared responsibility and intergenerational transmission. Through this event, Benin reaffirms its ambition to make culture a pillar of international influence, historical transmission, and tourism development.



Photo : National Museum of Finland

The Kataklè: a royal stool at the heart of a restitution

From Danxomè to European museums: The journey of a royal treasure

The Kataklè is a three-legged stool from the Kingdom of Danxomè, founded in the 17th century.

A symbol of unity, stability, and leadership, it accompanied kings during public appearances. The object was looted in 1892 during the capture of the Kingdom of Danxomè by French troops led by General Dodds.

Transferred to the Trocadéro Museum of Ethnography in Paris, then integrated into the Musée de l'Homme in 1937, it definitively left France in 1939 as part of an international exchange of collections, arriving at the National Museum of Finland alongside a batch of artifacts from Africa, Asia, and Oceania.



General Dodds in Abomey in November 1892, with a kataklè stool in the foreground in the middle of other objects. Photo: The New York Public Library, Digital Collections.



A return made possible by years of dialogue and commitment

The return of the Kataklè to Benin is the culmination of a long-term restitution process marked by key symbolic and political milestones. From the colonial war of 1890 to the historic speech by Amadou Mahtar M'Bow at UNESCO in 1978, and the official request made by the President of Benin to France in 2016, the claims have steadily gained momentum.

Removed from French inventories in August 2024, the Kataklè became the subject of a bilateral agreement between Benin and Finland in November of that same year, during an official visit by the Minister of Foreign Affairs to Helsinki. A letter sent in December by the Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts to his Finnish counterpart initiated the technical work carried out between January and April 2025. This process will culminate between May 11 and 14, 2025, with the visit of a Finnish delegation to Cotonou and the official signing of the transfer of ownership.

A decree declaring the object part of Benin's national heritage will be adopted by the Council of Ministers, thereby enshrining its definitive return.

Characteristics of the Kataklè: technical description of a Beninese treasure



Photo : National Museum of Finland

Size and materials of a historic heritage object

Item Details :

- Name: Kataklè
- Type: Three-legged royal stool
- Inventory Number: VK5301:22
- Geographic and Cultural Origin: Kingdom of Danxomè, Benin – West Africa
- Holding Institution: National Museum of Finland, Helsinki

Dimensions & materials:

- Height: 20 cm
- Top Surface Diameter: 36 cm
- Maximum Width: 51 cm
- Material: Hardwood, carved from a single piece
- Color: Light wood with natural reddish hues

Toward a new Era of restitution and heritage responsibility

Restitution as repair : A path to justice and memory

The restitution of looted cultural property is more than a symbolic act; it strikes at the very heart of a people's identity and a nation's dignity.

These cultural assets carry fragments of history, founding narratives, and collective memory that are invaluable to their communities of origin.

Since 2016, Benin has firmly committed to a process of requesting the restitution, return, and circulation of its most iconic cultural goods. The Government has engaged in constructive dialogue with collectors, museums, and nations that currently hold these treasures—especially those seized during the colonial conquest.

The return of such items serves as a powerful lever to reconnect current and future generations with their history, nourish contemporary creativity, and assert cultural diversity on the global stage.



The Kataklè: between restitution, traceability, and heritage recognition

The restitution of the Kataklè not only affirms the fundamental right of peoples to reclaim their heritage but also highlights the journey of these works—many of which have passed through numerous hands and institutions before fading into obscurity. Today, they are the focus of meticulous traceability and respectful reintegration into their original heritage contexts.

The return of a treasure: heritage reappropriation and cultural assertion

A restitution that honors memory and dignity

The restitution of the Katakè, a royal treasure from the Kingdom of Danxomè, marks a symbolic turning point for Benin.

More than the return of an artifact, it is a foundational act reaffirming the right of a people to reclaim their history and reincorporate material witnesses of their memory into their national narrative.

For the people of Benin, its return offers an opportunity to reconnect with a vital part of their heritage. The Katakè does not come back alone: it brings with it stories, symbols, and powerful memories.

An educational, cultural, and scientific dynamic

The return of the Katakè paves the way for new educational, museological, and scholarly initiatives.

It will enrich cultural mediation content and strengthen the transmission of Benin's history to younger generations.

This return also offers a valuable opportunity to stimulate academic research on the historical and artistic contexts of royal artifacts while raising awareness around heritage preservation.

Through its symbolism, it encourages renewed international dialogue on the recognition of cultural legacies and their place in contemporary national narratives.



The Katakè: A bridge between nations, a link across generations

Beyond its memorial value, the restitution of the Katakè has tangible social and economic impacts. It strengthens diplomatic ties between Benin and Finland, fostering respectful and constructive cultural cooperation. It also contributes to the growth of heritage tourism by drawing visitors, researchers, and the curious to exhibitions and events. Lastly, it encourages civic and community engagement by generating collective momentum around heritage valorization and reigniting local awareness on memory issues.

Testimonials



Mari-Leena TALVITIE

Minister of Science and Culture of the Republic of Finland

“Finland strongly advocates cultural rights as well as the protection of cultural property, cultural heritage and cultural diversity. Finland deems it important that a missing piece of Benin's history, i.e. the Katakè royal stool, has now been repatriated to Benin and is on display for all the people of Benin to see.”



Babalola Jean-Michel H. ABIMBOLA

Minister of Tourism, Culture, and the Arts of the Republic of Benin

“The return of the Katakè to Benin is more than a physical restitution. It is an act of cultural sovereignty, a moment of historical truth, and a symbolic gesture of reparation for our people. This restitution reflects our commitment to reconnecting Beninese generations with their history and to using heritage as a lever for development, memory, and influence.”



Olushegun ADJADI BAKARI

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Benin

“The return of the Katakè is fully in line with the momentum Benin has fostered over recent years: that of an active cultural diplomacy rooted in cooperation, mutual respect, and heritage justice. Through this partnership with Finland, Benin demonstrates its capacity to shape a heritage diplomacy that is modern, peaceful, and future-oriented.”

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PRESS CONTACTS

GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF BENIN

René TALON
rtalon@presidence.bj | +229 01 66 37 09 73

Germin DJIMIDO
gdjimido@gouv.bj | +229 01 97 29 27 24

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF FINLAND

Sanna PAAKKANEN
sanna.paakkanen@museovirasto.fi | +358 295 336 200



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