

## **Campaign: "Nefertiti travels"**

### **Nefertiti, the "most famous Berlin lady"**

She is the icon of the Prussian Cultural Foundation and for advertising specialists she is obviously one of the best figures. The Berlin tourist trade puts the bust in all its advertising along with the Brandenburg Gate and the Victory column. Celebrated as a magnet for the public, she brings huge sums of money into the till on the Museum Island.

Now that the many years of inner-German dispute as to whether Nefertiti belonged to the Federal Republic or to the German Democratic Republic have been ended with the reunification of Germany, the whole of Berlin can enjoy her radiance. From 2009 she is to have a room all to herself in the New Museum.

### **Nefertiti wants to go home**

Before Nefertiti moves to her "final destination" on the Museum Island, the Egyptians would like to see the bust of their great queen visit Egypt for the first time. When the Director of the Egyptian Administration of Antiquities, Zahi Hawass, again expressed this wish in May 2006 on the opening of the exhibition of underwater treasures in the Gropius Building in Berlin, it provoked a huge wave of indignation. The President of the Foundation for Prussian Culture, Klaus-Dieter Lehmann, emphasised that "the legal ownership of the limestone bust is clear under international law and that the contracts were officially recognised as legal by all sides". Mr Hawass was in no way questioning the legality of the contracts, in fact he was even almost expressing acceptance for the first time in not demanding restitution but requesting a loan. Berlin also failed to recognise that he also provided assurances that in the case of a loan, the return of the bust would be contractually secured. Dietrich Wildung, the Director of the Egyptian Museum, considers the "talk of a loan to be merely a media campaign" with which Mr Hawass wanted to please the Egyptians. His museum pronounced "the lady is not willing to travel again after 3000 years".

So far as we know, Nefertiti has not expressed herself unwilling to travel in any recent interview. What did the museum experts want to express? That the bust had been damaged in some way during her many journeys within Germany? That would be a scandal if it were true!

The chronology of the dispute between Cairo and Berlin shows that the Egyptian side has been making approaches over decades by offering other significant objects in exchange and later sending nearly all their art treasures to Germany for exhibitions. In return they have received nothing comparable.

### **The value of cultural heritage**

In view of the huge number of foreign cultural treasures in our museums, Martin Roth, former president of the German Association of Museums, made an optimistic diagnosis back in 2002: "Our view of the value of cultural heritage for the cultures from which they originated has changed. European and North American museums have in their possession cultural assets from all over the world, some of which they acquired a long time ago in ways that today hardly anyone would regard as ethical. They are confronted with claims for justification and restitution. They cannot ignore these and for the most part they do not wish to do so any more.

In Berlin, however, there is no evidence of this attitude: The ownership and sole right of disposal of the bust are concerned to be perfectly legal. Apart from that, Nefertiti is an integral part of the cultural identity of Berlin, according to Mr Wildung. In former days this kind of acquisition and appropriation of elements of other cultures was called cultural imperialism, and today the question is really how to go about decolonising our museums. As long we fail to accept the peoples whose cultural treasures are stored in our museums as equal partners for cooperation, all the talk about "common cultural heritage" and "world cultural heritage" remains empty phrases.

## Nationwide campaign

We, the initiators of the campaign, do not agree with the Foundation for Prussian Culture. In our view the question as to whether Nefertiti should be exhibited in Berlin or Cairo or in both cities alternately is not a legal question. It is a moral question which calls for a political answer.

The core of the matter is whether we are prepared today to alter our attitudes to dubious titles of ownership and the resulting claims to sole rights of disposal in the case of foreign cultural assets. Then it will be possible to find solutions which are suitable for these cases of disputed objects.

As the representatives of the museums in Berlin who are responsible in these cases are obviously incapable of offering a solution giving sufficient consideration to the Egyptian interests and rights to their cultural heritage, it is time to call on the Federal Government in its responsibility for the state-owned Foundation for Prussian Culture to intervene and to make Egypt a fair offer.

In our opinion, a loan of the nature requested by Mr Hawass and before him by the Director of the Egyptian National Museum, Mrs Wafaa el-Saddik, should be no problem at all. This could be understood as a signal for the building up of truly equal relations worthy of a democratic state which likes to present itself as a nation of culture.

As decisions concerning state cultural ownership lie with the Federal Government, we have called on Bernd Neumann, Minister of State for Culture and the Media, in an open letter to offer Egypt the loan of Nefertiti. The minister denied a loan immediately. He referred to conservational doubts. CulturCooperation claims for an expert's report which clearly documents, that Nefertiti really is no longer transportable.

Whether the Federal Government actually sets this signal – presumably against the massive resistance of the Foundation for Prussian Culture – will depend mostly on whether a general debate can be generated in the public about solutions suitable to all sides. With this campaign "Nefertiti´s Travels" CulturCooperation is offering a platform for this.

The internationally known Hamburg poster artist and former professor at the Berlin University of Arts, Holger Matthies, has designed the main poster for the nationwide campaign. It all centres round the website [www.nofretete-geht-auf-reisen.de](http://www.nofretete-geht-auf-reisen.de). Here you can find information about the "case" of Nefertiti and other disputed claims for restitution. A web forum offers space for discussions. Here you can make suggestions and take part in discussions. If you would like to, you can take part by voting.

So that the Egyptians or other interested Europeans can participate in the campaign, the website is in German and in English.

In the action forum you can find announcements of accompanying events e.g. in Berlin, Hamburg and Freiburg.

We are looking forward to a lot of participation in the discussion and hope that your fantasy will come up with many possibilities for action!

### Contact:

**CulturCooperation e.V. Telephone: 040 – 39 41 33 Email: [info@culturcooperation.de](mailto:info@culturcooperation.de)**  
**Talk to: Anja Kuhr**

The campaign is subsidised by:



European  
Commission



Foundation for  
Redistribution



Committee for  
Church Service  
Worldwide (North  
Elbe)



Foundation :do



North German Foundation  
for Environment and  
Development