

Campaign: "Nefertiti travels"

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.

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 Egyptian Museum pronounced "the lady is not willing to travel again after 3000 years".

Nefertiti's journey from Tell el-Amarna nach Berlin is subject of a dispute. When it became known in Egypt in 1924 that she was in Berlin the Egyptian government demanded the immediate return of the bust. The chronology of the dispute which began then and has continued up to the present day shows that the Egyptian side has been making approaches in various ways. In return they have received nothing comparable. 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, Director of the Egyptian Museum.

The 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.

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. A limited loan as requested by various representatives from Egypt could be a start towards 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.

It all centres round the website www.nofretete-geht-auf-reisen.de. A discussion forum and the opportunity to cast a vote can be used by visitors to the website to participate and express their opinions. You can find an actual press review, too.

We invite the European and international public to participate in the debate. The website is available in English.