

Egyptian archaeologist urges German museum to return Nefertiti's bust

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Petition by ex-antiquities minister asks for the return of the bust, saying it was removed from Egypt illegally in early 1900s. The bust of Queen Nefertiti is pictured in Berlin, Germany [File: Fabrizio Bensch/Reuters]

Cairo, September 9 (RHC)-- Prominent Egyptian archaeologist and former Antiquities Minister Zahi Hawass has launched a petition for the return to Egypt of the pharaonic bust of Queen Nefertiti from the Neues Museum in Berlin.

Nefertiti's famous painted limestone bust was uncovered at Tell el-Amarna, about 300km (185 miles) south of Cairo, in 1912 by a German archaeological mission, which shipped it to Berlin the following year.

Amarna was the short-lived capital of Nefertiti's husband, the 18th dynasty Pharaoh Akhenaten, who reigned until about 1335 BC. Akhenaten, called the heretic king, was notorious for promoting the worship of the god Aten to the exclusion of Egypt's other gods. His reign also introduced a radical change in Egyptian art.

In his petition launched on Saturday, Hawass asked for the return of the bust, saying it was removed from Egypt illegally after its discovery. "We announce today that Egypt – this is the national committee, it is not a government committee – asks for the return of the bust of Nefertiti," Hawass said.

"What I need from everyone here is to go to my website ... hawasszahi.com, and you will sign, one signature, to show that you would love for this bust to come back."

Hawass said he is not calling for the repatriation of artefacts taken out of Egypt legally. His campaign is focused on repatriating "three main beautiful objects" including the bust of Nefertiti, the Rosetta Stone and the Dendera Zodiac.

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