

Germany, Egypt to talk over Nefertiti statue

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The Egyptian antiquities chief Zahi Hawass reported Wednesday that a German expert will attend talks next month to discuss Cairo's demand for the return of a 3,400-year-old

The bust of the Egyptian beauty is the centrepiece of Berlin's "Neues Museum", which reopened last month 70 years after it was closed following heavy bomb damage during World War II.

Hawass said that "The director of the Egyptian antiquities department at the Berlin museum will come (to Egypt) on December 8 to discuss the right of Egyptians to the return of the statue of Nefertiti"

Nefertiti's bust reached Germany in mysterious circumstances, with German archaeologist Ludwig Borchardt bringing the figure to Berlin a year after it was unearthed on the banks of the Nile.

Hawass said the Berlin museum official "will bring evidence that the statue left Egypt through legal channels."

"Our side will highlight documents showing the statue left in an illegal way, including ones that prove that in the allocation of antiquities discovered by a German team, (nothing) indicated the presence of a statue in the German share," he said.

"That proves the statue left in an illegal way," the antiquities chief added.

Egypt first requested its return in 1930 but successive German governments have refused.

Hawass claims that Nefertiti was sneaked out of Egypt under a coating of clay and shipped to Germany.

Berlin insists it acquired the stature legally and is reluctant even to loan it to the Egyptians, citing the danger of moving the "fragile" bust.

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