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Repatriating the Bust of Nefertiti: A Critical Perspective on Cultural Ownership

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ABSTRACT

Who owns antiquities? This question has plagued the global community in recent times and has opened dialogues between former colonial Western countries and their past colonized nations whose property is exhibited. This essay examines the conflicting perspectives of ownership in the repatriation of the Bust of Nefertiti between Berlin, Germany and Egypt. By analyzing the effects of European occupation in Egypt and the Western dominance in foreign cultures during the Age of Imperialism, a moral argument arises questioning the legality of the Bust's removal. This article will review the historical significance of the Bust of Nefertiti in terms of its original intent as well as its removal to Germany and transformation into a global artwork and how this has affected her proposed return to Egyptian ownership.

Keywords: Cultural patrimony, Repatriation, Bust of Nefertiti, Age of Imperialism, Egyptian Revolution

She sits on a stark black platform (fig. 1). Her height is a meager one foot and three inches. The darkened room with theatrical spot lighting is solely for her display. Her gaze commands the center of the room and beckons wandering visitors to stop. Within her large pristine glass cage, she gazes just above eye level, radiating power just by the strong elegance of her solid pose and striking features. The honey-golden rays of light from the coffered ceiling direct their focus upon this breathtaking beauty. Her alluring perfection is in the elegance of her unnaturally elongated neck and angular bone structure, a convention of her time. The iconic conical headdress, which seems only to enhance her features, still emits her eternal power. She is ethereal and pristine, a piece of history from a culture so widely studied but yet so unknown. She is the visual affirmation of a woman whose name means “The beautiful woman has come.”ⁱ

Figure 1. Bust of Nefertiti. Limestone and stucco, 16 in, New Kingdom, Egypt. Berlin, Germany. Photo: Vvoveale at Dreamstime Images

It is this 3,300-year-old beauty, sitting beneath false stars in a glass cage to preserve her limestone stucco markings, which attracts thousands of visitors a year to the German Neues Museum in Berlin. It is also this beauty who has cultural activists and politicians embroiled in intense arguments behind closed doors and across news outlets, vying for ownership of her.ⁱⁱ But as fervent as the West's stand on repatriation is, so too is the outcry of the Egyptian government and its Supreme

Council of Antiquities who demand for the return of the Bust of Nefertiti from German ownership.ⁱⁱⁱ This heated cultural debate is one of many at the center of the global community that ultimately produces the philosophical *and* political question of “who owns art?”

This simple question is one that has created cultural Cold Wars between countries furthering the division into what is perceived as “The West and the Rest.”^{iv} Through analysis of the effects of European exploration and colonial occupation which created an excitement of all things foreign, a clearer idea emerges of how the present issue of cultural ownership is the result of a more than century-old event. This correlation between colonial occupation and its continuing effects on foreign cultures displays an undeniable relationship between the past and present. The development of socially constructed separation between cultures is at the root of the argument of repatriation and has, in turn, created differing perceptions of cultural patrimony and the value of heritage. This can be seen in the controversy surrounding the Bust of Nefertiti’s desired return to Egypt.

From the contemporary Egyptian perspective, the Bust left Egypt under false identity, rendering it a stolen artifact.^v But when presented with the circumstances surrounding the main characters involved in its move, a second perspective for the Egyptian argument emerges. It asks, morally, should an object that is by all accounts stolen be returned to the original owner? However, the 2011 Egyptian Revolution gives Germany – and the critical eye of the global community – a strong argument that the safety of this precious artifact will be in jeopardy if repatriated back to Egypt.^{vi} These are the arguments on which the Bust of Nefertiti’s future hinges.

But the actual historical figure of Nefertiti is not unfamiliar to revolution herself. In fact, conflict defined the history she left behind.

The fame of the Nefertiti Bust’s beauty has long outlasted the actual queen. Yet when she lived during the thriving and lavish New Kingdom period in Ancient Egypt, Nefertiti was known for much more than just her beauty. In fact, she was at the epicenter of a great upheaval in ancient Egypt’s religious pantheon. However, to know Nefertiti is to also know her husband, Pharaoh Akhenaten.

In the fourteenth-century BCE, Nefertiti became the Great Royal Wife to Amenhotep IV, who soon after proclaimed himself King Akhenaten, which bequeathed her the status of Queen of Egypt.^{vii} Egyptian hieroglyphs and wall friezes record through text and art the unconventional rule of the King and Queen during the eighteenth dynasty that was characterized by cultural shifts from tradition.^{viii} By analyzing these ancient artworks, a comprehensive understanding of the significance of Nefertiti’s role in Akhenaten’s reign is formulated.

The Egyptian Empire was vast, stretching to both ends of the Nile. The proposed conversion of monotheism in the Egyptian polytheistic religious center of Thebes would be a nearly impossible task for Akhenaten. His answer was simple. One of Akhenaten’s earliest decisions as King was to move the royal court (and ultimately the capital) to a location off the banks of the Nile, centered between modern day Cairo and Luxor. This site, known as Tel el-Amarna, became the new cultural hearth of religious devotion solely to Aten, Egypt’s sun god, which was the inspiration for Akhenaten’s religion and name.^{ix} Carl Reeves, the curator of Egyptian art at Eton

College, articulates the purpose of this new city as understood by Egyptian inscriptions from stelae discovered on location:

It was to be a city controlled, on the god's behalf, by the king and queen alone. The Aten desires, and the king acts – precisely the situation mirrored by the king's new name, 'Akhenaten': 'He who is effective on the Aten's behalf.'^x

Reeves's interpretation reveals three key components of Nefertiti and Akhenaten's image during their lifetime. First, it reveals that this city was created as a religious station for worship, but worship only done by those who are chosen and blessed -- in this case the queen and king. Delving further into that statement, it is apparent that Akhenaten and Nefertiti are to be seen as equals as decreed by the god, Aten. Lastly, Akhenaten's name establishes a direct connection between the King and Aten, thus deifying Akhenaten and in turn, furthering the separation between royalty and Egypt.^{xi}

This development leads to questions of how Nefertiti's new religious role was executed. Did Nefertiti actually enact any of her religious duties as chosen worshiper of Aten? Or was this decree simply inscribed to legitimize the new religion? Both questions can be answered with a resounding yes. Akhenaten scholar Cyril Reed affirms Nefertiti's unusual role in daily religious life: "Unlike other chief queens, she is shown taking part in the daily worship, repeating the same gestures and making similar offerings as the king: in fact the divine service is a reciprocation between the god and the royal pair."^{xii} And in similar cases, Nefertiti took on the role of King in sanctified temples. Egyptian scholar and researcher Joyce Tyldesley first explains,

"Women had always been permitted to serve in temples as priestesses . . . Centuries of tradition, however, decreed that the king, and only the king, as chief priest of all cults should offer to the gods."^{xiii} Tyldesley then exemplifies the unusualness of Nefertiti's role within the constructed religious tradition, "Within the precinct of *Hwt-Benben* [temple associated with the larger Aten temple *Gempaaten*] it was Nefertiti and not [Akhenaten] who took the king's role of priest."^{xiv} It is then impossible to ignore the depth of duties Nefertiti enacted under King Akhenaten, which went against

Figure 2. *Akhenaten, Nefertiti and their Daughters*. New Kingdom, Egypt. Berlin, Aegyptisches Museum. Photo: Kathleen Cohen.

centuries of traditions. Yet, Akhenaten did not stop his revolution with a new city and religion. Akhenaten's decisive move to Tel el-Amarna along with his new monotheistic religion was then followed by a new style of art.

Akhenaten's deliberate break from traditional Egyptian art into his Amarna style was established with the purpose of creating a distinctive image to his new reign, city center, and religion. The Amarna-style relief, *Akhenaten, Nefertiti and Their Daughters*, is just one example of the unusual imagery uncommon to most Egyptian artwork (Fig. 2). This relief is one of many visual documents that reflects the

same conclusions previously stated by Reeves, Aldred, and Tyldesley. There are three key concepts to be taken from this image: Nefertiti's equality, the importance of lineage, and the centerpiece of the religious revolution, the god Aten.^{xv}

In this image, there is a hint of hierarchal status between the slightly larger Akhenaten and Nefertiti. However, Nefertiti and Akhenaten are depicted with the same profiled pose. What this presents to the viewer is a sharing of power between equals. Nefertiti and Akhenaten face each other in profile in an intimate locked gaze. Nefertiti is not represented as a submissive wife, but instead as a holder of shared responsibility and power.

Contextual elements found in this visual document define Akhenaten's style of rule and cultural reforms during this period. For example, an emphasis is not only put on Nefertiti as support to his seat as King but also on their three (of six) daughters. This indicates that during Akhenaten's reign, importance of family lineage was determined through artistic record to legitimize his daughters to the throne as well as worshipers of Aten.^{xvi}

A third concept that can be read in the context of this work derives from the image of the sun with rays of light beaming down on the royal family. This illustrated representation of the Sun God Aten was a commonplace image in most depictions of Akhenaten and Nefertiti.^{xvii} The rays casting down on their profiles as if the Sun God himself was blessing the royal family was an artistic element used to legitimize Akhenaten's new religion. This imagery confirms the notion that Akhenaten's new religion gains value when endorsed with the image of Nefertiti by his side.

Art was essential to legitimize the reigns of Pharaohs and ensure their success in the afterlife –the Great Pyramids of Giza and the Karnak complex of temples are two examples – so it became important for every reign to have a company of court artists to produce works in royal styles. The most agreed-upon theory to the purpose of the Bust of Nefertiti was that it was used by Thutmose, the head court painter to Akhenaten.^{xviii} The bust resided in Thutmose's workshop serving as the prototype to depicting Nefertiti in the Amarna style. In 2006, Dietrich Wildung, affiliated with Germany's Berlin Museum, used a CT-scan to uncover an aging wrinkled Nefertiti that hid just below the surface of the perfected bust we know of today.^{xix} According to Wildung, this suggests that Thutmose manipulated her natural looks in order to keep with the Amarna style of deified youthfulness.^{xx} But for whatever purpose, Thutmose smoothed her features, leaving the world to view her idyllic beauty.

Following the years of Akhenaten's seventeen-year reign, Nefertiti quickly disappears from Egyptian culture, her name forgotten, her death unrecorded, leaving much of her life a mystery. Her history is only known from these inscriptions and images found at this Royal site of Tel el-Amarna. Following Akhenaten's death (and a short two-year reign of Smenkhkare), Akhenaten's son, King Tutankhamen, reinstates the Egyptian polytheistic religion and returns Egypt's capital back to Thebes and Memphis.^{xxi} Tel el-Amarna was then deserted and the artwork left to decay. The Bust of Nefertiti was shelved and forgotten as quickly as Nefertiti herself. The site of Tel el-Amarna and the artifacts left within are the last remnants of Akhenaten's short-lived revolution. For thousands of years, the bust sat deserted in the confines of the royal

workshop of Thutmose, gathering dust, mud, and dirt, until German archaeologist Ludwig Borchardt made its discovery, which brought fame back to the forgotten queen.

Borchardt was born in Berlin, Germany in 1863.^{xxii} His earlier studies led him into the world of architecture. His tutor, Adolf Ermin, was an Egyptologist, which led to his new scholarly pursuit of Egyptology complemented by his background in architecture. In 1895, Borchardt worked within the Egyptian department at the Berlin Museum. With financial backing from The Prussian Academy of Science, Borchardt succeeded in heading extensive excavations of various locations in Egypt to study Old Kingdom architecture.^{xxiii} Soon after, Borchardt became an active employee for the Egyptian Museum in Cairo while also completing work for the Berlin Museum. It should be noted that at this time, Egypt was occupied by French and British military that also held positions within their government and cultural antiquities board allowing for foreign scholars like Borchardt to complete research within these Ancient Egyptian sites. It was these earlier visits that strengthened Borchardt's already strong ties to Egypt, which led him to purchase a house there in 1901.^{xxiv}

On December 6, 1912, at the ancient New Kingdom site of Tel el-Amarna, a team of German archaeologists, led by Borchardt with financial backing by the German Oriental Company in cooperation with the Berlin Museum, discovered the mud-clad Bust of Nefertiti.^{xxv} So enamored with her beauty, he wrote in his diary shortly after its discovery, "...[y]ou cannot describe it with words. You must see it."^{xxvi} This private admission would be used almost a century later to discredit the lawfulness of the bust's move to Germany.

Following the bust's discovery, it was placed with other spoils from this excavation to be reviewed by the Egyptian Department of Antiquities. At that time, laws were not completely developed when it came to dividing the collection of artifacts, as Egypt could not develop laws quickly enough to catch up to the amount of excavations. Also, these laws were created in a dependent Egyptian nation under French and British occupation, who enforced their laws to favor divisions of artifacts for European ownership. For this excavation, as with most others, everything was divided fifty-fifty between the Germans and Egyptian Department of Antiquities.^{xxvii} However, the Department of Antiquities would have the final decision as to which artifacts would leave the country and which would stay because of their cultural significance to Egyptian history. In 1913, The Egyptian Department of Antiquities handed the responsibility of this divide to junior official Gustave Lefebvre, a Frenchman, whom according to Reeves was "a man whose professional competence was clearly open to question."^{xxviii} The Bust was then looked over by Lefebvre and allowed to join the German collection.

By the end of 1913, the Bust of Nefertiti had reached the shore of Germany. It has been speculated that the bust was then given to a sponsor of the excavation who then donated it to the Berlin museum seven years later.^{xxix} The bust was finally placed on display in Berlin's Egyptian Museum in 1923. Slowly, the bust began to draw attention, and quickly became one of Berlin's most favored attractions. But Nefertiti's bust also attracted the attention of the Egyptian Department of Antiquities, leading to a series of formal and informal demands to return the bust of Nefertiti to Egypt.

The first informal demand from Egypt was in 1925, two years after the bust was first displayed.^{xxx} In order to gain their desired outcome, the Egyptian Government forbade any German involvement in further excavations in Egypt unless the bust was returned. Germany ignored the order and excavations continued. The second informal demand came four years later; Egypt offered to trade a collection of antiquities for the bust but again was rebuffed. In 1933, Germany came close to returning the bust to Egypt until Adolf Hitler rescinded the decision.^{xxxi} Reeves expanded upon this decision: “Because of the queen’s flawless ‘Aryan’ looks . . . the plan was vetoed by the Führer: ‘What the German people have’, Hitler reportedly decreed, ‘they keep!’”^{xxxii} And so the bust was once again kept in Germany. The piece continued on to endure World War II in a German bunker for safe keeping from falling bombs and warfare along with other collections from the Berlin Museum.^{xxxiii} And the last rally of Egyptian pleas ended in the 1950s; Egypt asked to open a conversation about the bust’s repatriation but once again was declined.^{xxxiv}

The frustration the Egyptian government has felt is not something uncommon to most countries that have been plundered for artifacts and discoveries that have been recently displayed in Western museums.^{xxxv} The connection between the Western museums and the countries whose work they display is directly related to their excitement for globalization. But from where did this excitement, this Western attitude seen around the turn of the nineteenth-century for foreign cultures, arise?

The ambition of Europe to spread its shores to distant lands created a growing scholarly industry in anthropological study, archaeology being a newly popular sub-

discipline. Around the late 1890s and into the early 1900s and onward is when numerous excavations led to the unearthing of these ancient discoveries, as was the case for the Bust of Nefertiti.^{xxxvi} Ten years later, in 1922, Howard Carter discovered the Tomb of Tutankhamen, Akhenaten’s son from another wife.^{xxxvii} It is this period of European occupation that has displaced countless artifacts from antiquity from colonized foreign countries and placed them into museums in Western countries like France, Britain, and Germany. From the moment it was rediscovered, the bust became the focal point of the repatriation dilemma between “the West and the Rest”. Their refusal to acknowledge Egyptian moral right to their own antiquities displays Western hubris toward these other cultures. On its face, the West’s stance is legally and morally questionable if not wrong; however, its questionable position is nonetheless bolstered by widespread unrest in these countries due to the Arab Spring. The West has become the protectors of these artifacts.

As seen from earlier attempts by Egypt, returning an artifact to its home country is a long process made longer by stubborn politics. In the past decade, Egypt has returned with a new and aggressive figurehead spearheading the movement of repatriating stolen artifacts that sit in Western museums. This turn of events began with the induction of Dr. Zahi Hawass in 2002 to the head of the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities [previously the Egyptian Department of Antiquities]. Dr. Zahi Hawass has become a superstar of Egyptology.^{xxxviii} He is a staple figure for media segments on anything Egypt, which led to his own reality show on The History Channel suitably titled *Chasing Mummies*. There is a general disapproval of Hawass within the Egyptology community for his seemingly elitist attitude and questionable

political relationship with former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.^{xxxix} Despite the undercurrent of jealousy within the community and questionable conduct of Dr. Zahi Hawass, it is difficult to deny the amount of attention Hawass has brought to the issue of repatriating the Bust of Nefertiti as well as other stolen artifacts from antiquity. As the protagonist of the “fight” to bring Nefertiti back to Egypt, Hawass as leader of the Supreme Council of Antiquities held an International Conference to reopen the dialogue about these stolen artifacts.^{xl} However, what was seen at this conference was a body of people frustrated with what seems to be a one-sided dialogue of communication.

But what has sparked this new string of Egyptian demands from the earlier accounts? It is no longer constant and albeit desperate pleas for the artifact. Now, Egypt has what it claims to be undeniable evidence threatening the lawfulness of the bust’s removal to Germany. And the base of their argument begins with the intent of Borchardt. Law scholar Kurt Siehr explains this theory in greater detail:

“It seems to be very likely that Borchardt, eager to preserve the bust of Nefertiti for Germany, either did not reveal the find to the Egyptian antiquities authority . . . at all or diligently hid the bust underneath some unimportant antiquities or Gustave Lefebvre as an epigraphist and papyrologist did not recognize the importance of the bust of Nefertiti.”^{xli}

The Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities hired a panel of lawyers to delve into the events of December 4, 1912 and analyze the movement of the bust. Many theories have run rampant in the media that

have aided Egypt’s argument. Egypt vehemently argues that Borchardt obscured the quality of the object by leaving it thick with grime. Allegedly Borchardt initially described the bust as an image of a princess, which was nothing of extraordinary measures.^{xlii} Lawyers for the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities used this statement from Borchardt’s personal diary as a basis for forming his intent: “[y]ou cannot describe it with words. You must see it.”^{xliii} Dr. Zahi Hawass argues that Borchardt knew the identity of Nefertiti from the moment she was unearthed.^{xliv} This belief is merited by the claim that Borchardt listed her as a simple Egyptian princess combined with Lefebvre’s lack of knowledge on the subject; it then enabled Borchardt to change the bust’s identity. Cultural heritage Law scholar Stephen Urice clarifies this claim with a translation from Borchardt ten years after the bust’s discovery:

It took a considerable amount of time until the whole piece was completely freed from all the dirt and rubble. This was due to the fact that a portrait head of the king, which lay close to the [Nefertiti] bust, had to be recovered first. After that, we concentrated on the bust, and we held the most lively . . . piece of Egyptian art in our hands. It was almost complete. Parts of the ears were missing, and there was no inlay in the left eye.^{xlv}

It is interesting to note that Borchardt and his team shifted greater concentration on excavating Nefertiti’s bust with more sense of eager than the work depicting Akhenaten. He speaks as if the Akhenaten portrait was what stood between him and “the most lively . . . piece of Egyptian art . . .”^{xlvi} This affirmation from Borchardt does validate the

Egyptian claim. From Egypt's perspective, Borchardt falsified and hid the identity of the bust, which then would render the object stolen as its value was intentionally not accurately disclosed.

This exchange has come under fire and has only hurt Germany's argument for legitimizing the bust's current locale. Egypt is just one example of multiple countries that was looted under European occupation.^{xlvii} Egypt was under British rule. The Department of Antiquities was made up of French officials who had final say in what travelled home to Europe. The excavations were led by European archaeologists. Where were the *Egyptian* officials? Where were the *Egyptian* archaeologists? Why was Lefebvre, an expert in papyrology, *not* New Kingdom sculpture, given the final decision? Egypt is now its own independent nation, a last gift from Europe. But how do they ensure the return of these stolen artifacts from Germany, who is not so willing to return them? It is not as simple as sending a crew to Germany, walking into the Neues Museum, claiming ownership with a paper, and bringing the bust back. Now there are International laws in place that make returning the object a difficult and frustrating process.^{xlviii} Under European occupation, the bust was easily removed, and now with Egyptian independence, strict global laws discouraging the trade of these items keeps the bust from returning home. These are the modern struggles of occupied countries during the Age of Imperialism.

Does Egypt have ownership rights to this object at all? Philosophically, yes. Cultural patrimony is a philosophical ideology that nationality can be experienced through artifacts of a past culture.^{xlix} In this case, the importance of the Bust of Nefertiti to modern Egypt is its historical reference to the New Kingdom culture. Cultural

patrimony spurs the concept that there is an innate bond created between a modern society and its cultural past that is symbolized through these unique artifacts. In contrast, it can be argued that the modern Egyptian culture is starkly different from the Egypt of the past, their only similarity being the soil they existed on, therefore nulling the idea of cultural patrimony.¹ Egypt is a democracy, not under Pharaonic rule. The most common religious practice in modern day Egypt is Islam, whose principal belief contradicts the Ancient Egypt's polytheistic pantheon of gods.

Alternatively, what would it be for a twenty-first century American to wander into a museum in Europe or Asia and find the American flag with the thirteen star design commonly attributed to Betsy Ross? Would the American guest find it odd that a culture so different from theirs was housing objects from *their* history? Would there be a feeling of misplacement? Modern day America prides itself on its international relationships as well as its diversity within. But, would Americans travelling abroad feel a sense of cultural ownership despite their country's support of globalization? The original thirteen starred flag is symbolic of a revolution and birth of a nation – much like the Bust of Nefertiti was created to symbolize Akhenaten's religious revolution. Although the American flag used today does not have thirteen stars, it is still celebrated for its placement and symbolism in American history and evokes national identity.

These arguments are not just applicable to Egypt but can also be made relevant to Europe and America. What if Italian Renaissance Master Leonardo Da Vinci's *The Last Supper* was housed in India? Or if France's Eugène Delcroix's *Liberty Leading the People* was removed

from the Louvre Museum and placed in a South American permanent collection? To argue the difference between a modern culture and its historical past as a way to diminish the effect of cultural patrimony is to ignore the existence of nationality, an important component to cultural heritage. However, this argument is made not only as Egypt's defense for ownership, but also for Germany's.

Since the rediscovery of the Bust of Nefertiti, it has been in German hands. Just as the bust was a testament to the history of Akhenaten and Nefertiti, so is it a testament to a chapter in German history. The bust had come to the attention of Adolf Hitler. The bust survived the bombs of WWII under a bunker and rose again to be displayed once Germany had rebuilt itself post-WWII.^{li} Though it is a symbol for the Amarna period of Egypt, it has also been reformed into a symbol of German rebirth. The cultural significance the bust has with Germany can even be seen on German postcards designed with the iconic image of the bust.^{lii} Because of this new cultural linkage, Germany in essence has claimed the Bust of Nefertiti as part of its cultural patrimony. But cultural patrimony is not the only way to define cultural ownership. The word ownership itself involves a relationship with law.

Germany also claims that Borchardt followed Egyptian law at the time of excavation and did not falsify the bust's value by concealing the identity. As stated by Stephen Urice, a law-oriented expert in cultural patrimony, the Egyptian laws in place at the time of the excavation confirm the legality of the bust's transfer into German ownership:

Although Egypt has regretted Lefbvre's selection, there is no question that the partage [division of

goods] accomplished on January 20, 1913, comported entirely with Egyptian law. That Egypt subsequently would have preferred another result is irrelevant to the *legal* issue: a partage and subsequent export of the [German Orient Society's] share of finds from the 1912/13 season at Amarna, including the bust, occurred in compliance with Egyptian law.^{liii}

Urice effectively resurfaces the issues of repatriating the Bust of Nefertiti as a colorful problem with a simple black and white solution. Law is law is law. He achieves this purpose by stating, "[t]hat Egypt subsequently would have preferred another result is irrelevant..."^{liv} As effective of an argument as this is for Germany's case, it dismisses human error. It is not necessary to include how European occupation affected the outcome because when it comes down to Germany's claim, the bust left legally, and for Germany's case, that is enough evidence to secure its position.

However, in an ever-changing market, the bust of Nefertiti has also caught the attention of a third competitor vying for ownership -- the global community. How does the global community have any affiliation with an Egyptian Queen whose own history was forgotten until rediscovered in 1912? Well, once again it has come down to the symbolism of the object. For Egyptians, the bust was symbolic of lost heritage. For the Germans, it had survived WWII and symbolized new beginnings. In the present, it has exceeded its original function and now assumes the identity of an idyllic beauty idolized by the global community.^{lv} Her beauty is from a culture that had risen to an empire and is mirrored by a world that strives for this same power.

Beyond the symbolism, what purpose does the Bust of Nefertiti serve in a global market that differs from an Egyptian museum?

The progression of Western relationships with foreign countries indicates an intention to make the global community an international gateway for sharing information. Similarly, the art market enhances this ideology through a much more subtle context. The art market is becoming increasingly global, believing that sharing pieces of foreign cultures to a broad audience creates understanding and respect for diversity. Urice delves into greater detail about the value of cultural property in an international art market:

This value is especially significant at a time of cultural globalization: it promotes recognition of the world's many, distinct cultural traditions. The bust's presence in Berlin has permitted generations of German and international visitors the opportunity to view an exceptional example of pre-Islamic, Egyptian culture and to gain in appreciation for the culture.^{lvi}

There is definite merit to Urice's claim; however, there are more subliminal purposes to keeping the bust in Germany for the good of the Global market at the expense of Egypt. The key word that Urice uses in his explanation is *value*.

The Bust of Nefertiti has certainly been one of the most popular attractions when touring the museums in Berlin. In fact, much like Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* in the Louvre or Michelangelo's *David* housed in a Florence gallery, the bust is the main attraction for the Neues Museum. But what is its value? The romantic would say the bust is invaluable; however, in a global world where the economy is the driving

force of every nation, its monetary value is what ultimately perpetuates German and Egyptian arguments of its repatriation and rightful ownership. Germany earns substantial revenue from the bust as a lead attraction and if repatriated, Egypt would undeniably receive the same benefits.^{lvii} However beneficial this could be to Egypt's economy, if relocated to Egypt, the change of audience is to be taken into account. From the Western position, concern could

Figure 3. Nefertiti replicas in profile. Photo: Pxlxl at Dreamstime Images

arise that the bust would only serve an Egyptian audience, closing off the global community to its wonders.

However, this theory of a closed audience is inexact. The *Death Mask of King Tutankhamen* is unable to be removed from the Egyptian Nation.^{lviii} Yet, it is easily one of the most recognizable artifacts from antiquity. Similarly, because of the Bust of Nefertiti's iconic status and various replications for diverse purposes, one being postage stamps, it can be recognized by a person who has not set foot in Germany (Fig. 3). In comparison, immobile cultural artifacts are examples of objects that are globally known for their iconic value. The *Statue of Liberty* is easily recognizable as a visual representation of freedom.

How many Americans are able to visit the actual statue itself in their lifetime? Yet it is integrated in their education system

and forged as an icon. Thanks to the invention of the internet as well as a plethora of dissertations and scholarly books, the audience is granted access to a world they might not visit in their lifetime. These books and articles offer a depth of knowledge that doesn't exist in a placard next to the object. It can therefore be reasoned that books and the internet are suitable substitutions for people with limited access to museums. This dispels the claim that the bust residing in Egypt would create a closed audience.

What would happen to the bust if repatriated to Egypt? Popular Egyptologist Dr. Zahi Hawass, the head of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, announced that as a result of the battle for the return of stolen artifacts during European occupation, Egypt has designed a museum for the sole display of Amarna culture artifacts.^{lix} And to further the cultural justification of repatriating the bust, the Museum would be placed in El Minya near Tel el-Amarna. This is a clever move by the Egyptian government to strengthen their argument for the return of the bust. Where better to learn of New Kingdom Amarna artifacts than in a museum near the actual city? Unfortunately for Egypt, their progression in demands for the bust has been marred by the Egyptian Revolution of 2011. Germany's silence following the Revolution has halted all demands for repatriation while Egypt continues to work towards stabilizing their country.

On January 25, 2011, news outlets eagerly covered the Arab Spring dawning in Egypt. The scenes were dramatic displays in Cairo's Tahrir Square as protestors and marchers demanded the resignation of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. These protestors called for a complete dissolution of the Mubarak regime, their frustrations rooted by the faltering economy.^{lx} As

frustrations grew, so did the chaos as news outlets carried every detail of the clashing police and local civilians. Images flashed on screens of rioters being beaten by police, tear gas in the air, as the death toll rose. But their reward was the Revolution they asked for. However, the people were not the only ones at the center of the chaos.

The plundering of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo a month into the Revolution quickly became a prominent topic among bloggers and news outlets. Eight artifacts were found missing from the museum, one of those a statue of Nefertiti. The main voice for these missing artifacts was Dr. Zahi Hawass, Egypt's resident expert. To discourage misinformation from media outlets, Hawass took to his blog to divulge the severity of the situation. And as soon as the pieces were found missing, an investigation began. But the missing artifacts were not the only subjects of investigation at that time.

Two weeks prior to the Revolution, Dr. Zahi Hawass was appointed Minister of Antiquities, a role specifically created for him by President Mubarak. Hawass' new position in Mubarak's cabinet marked him as an ally to the very person blamed for the Egyptian unrest. Following Mubarak's cessation, Hawass came under intense scrutiny. Criticism throughout the internet grew as to whether he abused his personal relationship with Mubarak and his family in order to gain higher standing.^{lxi} It had also become apparent through media outlets that Hawass was not entirely truthful regarding the extent of damage to the artifacts. Hawass has since stepped down from both his previous seat on the Supreme Council of Antiquities as well as his controversial position as Minister of Antiquities.^{lxii} The discrediting and swift descent of Hawass, who was the international star for Egyptian

preservation, has furthered damaged Egypt's argument for repatriation.

The Egyptian Revolution is not out of the minds of the global community. The media perpetuated the perception that Egypt does not appreciate their own heritage by showcasing the actions from undoubtedly frustrated rioters. Egypt is now under intense scrutiny from around the world. Can Egypt take care of a priceless artifact even though it can't ensure the safety of its people? What makes this claim interesting is the fact that a link emerges between repatriation and political climate. Now political stability becomes the basis of who can safely house art. And however valid an argument this is for keeping the bust in Germany, one key component is forgotten when judging the safety of the bust after the Egyptian Revolution of 2011 -- *Amarna*.

The Egyptians have planned for the bust to reside in El Minya, along with many other cultural objects of relevance to Tel el-Amarna. Egypt's purpose for displaying the bust in El Minya near Amarna is the prospect that it could become its own landmark destination for tourism. But with the revolution being in Cairo – *200 miles north of Amarna* – media outlets are quick to persecute the handling of Egyptian artifacts as a whole.^{lxiii} And with the controversy of Hawass as a follower of Mubarak along with his connection to repatriating the bust, media outlets question Egyptian competency and motives. Yet despite his recent fall from popularity, Dr. Hawass has undoubtedly been a prominent leader in bringing awareness to the topic of repatriation on an international level. But he is not the only expert in this field and with the new revival of negotiations of repatriation, he is surely not going to be the last to lead this movement.

With the media response and outcry

from the global community, the fate of the Bust of Nefertiti is uncertain. Repatriation does not present a simple answer and probably never will. The answer cannot be simplified by law nor can it simply be solved by moralistic drive. One side will always feel the loss of cultural patrimony whether the object is repatriated or not. Though the fate of Nefertiti will undoubtedly stay unresolved (depending on which view you have), the events that led to her controversy should be a valued lesson to what exactly cultural ownership means and how it affects an entire nation of being. Cultural patrimony can change the meaning of an object over time, as seen with the Bust of Nefertiti, which blurs the definition of cultural ownership. Who owns culture? It is a question with an undefined meaning changed by diverse perspectives. Yet out of these different perspectives vying for ownership of the limestone sculpture, one thing is for certain... The Bust of Nefertiti will forever be an institute of ideal beauty confined to her glass cage.

Footnotes

ⁱ Joyce A. Tyldesley, *Nefertiti: Egypt's Sun Queen* (London: Penguin Groups, 2005), 41.

ⁱⁱ Judy Dempsey, "A 3,500-Year-Old Queen Causes a Rift Between Germany and Egypt," *The New York Times*, October 18, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/19/world/europe/19iht-germany.html?_r=2&ref=global-home

³ "Egypt Makes Claim to Nefertiti," *Illicit Cultural Property: A weblog about Art, Antiquities, and the Law*, October 19, 2009, <http://illicit-cultural-property.blogspot.com/2009/10/egypt-makes-claim-to-nefertiti.html>

^{iv} John Henry Merryman, "Introduction," in *Imperialism, art and restitution*, ed. John Henry Merryman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1-3.

^v Kurt G. Siehr, "The Beautiful One Has Come – To Return: The Return of the Bust of Nefertiti from Berlin to Cairo," in *Imperialism, art and restitution*, ed. John Henry Merryman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 117-18.

^{vi} Andrew Lawler, "After the Revolution, Who Will Control Egypt's Monuments?," *Science Insider*, February 12, 2011, <http://news.sciencemag.org/scienceinsider/2011/02/after-the-revolution-who-will-co.html>.

^{vii} Nicholas Reeves, *Akhenaten: Egypt's False Prophet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2005), 8-9, 88.

^{viii} *Ibid.*, 107-08.

^{ix} Nicholas Reeves, *Akhenaten: Egypt's False Prophet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2005), 107-108.

^x *Ibid.*, 109.

^{xi} *Ibid.*

^{xii} Cyril Aldred, *Akhenaten: King of Egypt* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 223.

^{xiii} Joyce A. Tyldesley, *Nefertiti: Egypt's Sun Queen* (London: Penguin Groups, 2005), 58.

^{xiv} *Ibid.*

^{xv} Nicholas Reeves, *Akhenaten: Egypt's False Prophet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2005), 139, 146-52.

^{xvi} Joyce A. Tyldesley, *Nefertiti: Egypt's Sun Queen* (London: Penguin Groups, 2005), 55.

^{xvii} Nicholas Reeves, *Akhenaten: Egypt's False Prophet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2005), 146-47.

^{xviii} Cyril Aldred, *Akhenaten: King of Egypt* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 59.

^{xix} Rossella Lorenzi, "Scholar: Nefertiti Was an Aging Beauty," *Discovery News*, September 5, 2006, http://dsc.discovery.com/news/2006/09/05/nefertiti_arc.html

^{xx} *Ibid.*

^{xxi} Nicholas Reeves, *Akhenaten: Egypt's False Prophet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2005), 179-85.

^{xxii} Lee Sorenson. "Borchardt, Ludwig." *Dictionary of Art Historians*, <http://www.dictionaryofarthistorians.org/borchardtl.htm>

^{xxiii} Lee Sorenson. "Borchardt, Ludwig." *Dictionary of Art Historians*, <http://www.dictionaryofarthistorians.org/borchardtl.htm>

^{xxiv} *Ibid.*

^{xxv} Kurt G. Siehr, "The Beautiful One Has Come – To Return: The Return of the Bust of Nefertiti from Berlin to Cairo," in *Imperialism, art and restitution*, ed. John Henry Merryman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 115.

^{xxvi} Kate Connolly, "Is this Nefertiti – or a 100-year-old fake?," *The Guardian*, May 7, 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2009/may/07/nefertiti-bust-berlin-egypt-authenticity>

^{xxvii} Stephen K. Urice, "The Beautiful One Has Come – To Stay," in *Imperialism, art and restitution*, ed. John Henry Merryman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 141-44.

^{xxviii} Nicholas Reeves, *Akhenaten: Egypt's False Prophet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2005), 24.

^{xxix} Stephen K. Urice, "The Beautiful One Has Come – To Stay," in *Imperialism, art and restitution*, ed. John Henry Merryman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 140.

^{xxx} Kurt G. Siehr, "The Beautiful One Has Come – To Return: The Return of the Bust of Nefertiti from Berlin to Cairo," in *Imperialism, art and restitution*, ed. John Henry Merryman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 116.

^{xxxi} Kurt G. Siehr, "The Beautiful One Has Come – To Return: The Return of the Bust of Nefertiti from Berlin to Cairo," in *Imperialism, art and restitution*, ed. John Henry Merryman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 116.

^{xxxii} Nicholas Reeves, *Akhenaten: Egypt's False Prophet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2005), 24.

^{xxxiii} "Nefertiti in Berlin," *Nefertiti Travels*, <http://www.nofretete-geht-auf-reisen.de/eberline.htm>

^{xxxiv} Kurt G. Siehr, "The Beautiful One Has Come – To Return: The Return of the Bust of Nefertiti from Berlin to Cairo," in *Imperialism, art and restitution*, ed. John Henry Merryman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 116.

^{xxxv} John Henry Merryman, "Introduction," in *Imperialism, art and restitution*, ed. John Henry Merryman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 10.

^{xxxvi} Nicholas Reeves, *Akhenaten: Egypt's False Prophet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2005), 13-27.

^{xxxvii} *Ibid.*, 186.

^{xxxviii} Ashraf Khalil, "Egypt Hunts Ancient Artifacts," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 11, 2010, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704689804575535662169204940.html>

^{xxxix} Osama Diab, "Sacking Zahi Hawass is a Sign of Egypt's Ongoing Revolution," *The Guardian*, July 22, 2011,

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/jul/2/sacking-zahi-hawass-egypt-revolution>

^{xl} Ashraf Khalil, "Egypt Hunts Ancient Artifacts," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 11, 2010, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704689804575535662169204940.html>

^{xli} Kurt G. Siehr, "The Beautiful One Has Come – To Return: The Return of the Bust of Nefertiti from Berlin to Cairo," in *Imperialism, art and restitution*, ed. John Henry Merryman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 117-18.

^{xlii} Rosella Lorenzi, "Egypt Wants Nefertiti Bust Back," *Discovery News*, January 24, 2011, <http://news.discovery.com/history/egypt-wants-nefertiti-bust-back.html>

^{xliii} Kate Connolly, "Is this Nefertiti – or a 100-year-old fake?," *The Guardian*, May 7, 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2009/may/07/nefertiti-bust-berlin-egypt-authenticity>

^{xliv} Derek Fincham, "Egypt Makes Claim to Nefertiti," *Illicit Cultural Property: A weblog about Art, Antiquities, and the Law*, October 19, 2009, <http://illicit-cultural-property.blogspot.com/2009/10/egypt-makes-claim-to-nefertiti.html>

^{xlv} Stephen K. Urice, "The Beautiful One Has Come – To Stay," in *Imperialism, art and restitution*, ed. John Henry Merryman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 139.

^{xlvi} Ibid.

^{xlvii} Ashraf Khalil, "Egypt Hunts Ancient Artifacts," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 11, 2010, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704689804575535662169204940.html>

^{xlviii} Ashraf Khalil, "Egypt Hunts Ancient Artifacts," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 11, 2010, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704689804575535662169204940.html>

^{xlix} John Henry Merryman, "Introduction," in *Imperialism, art and restitution*, ed. John Henry Merryman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 10-11.

ⁱ Ibid, 1-11.

^{li} "The Bust of Nefertiti: Chronology," *Nefertiti Travels*, <http://www.nofretete-geht-auf-reisen.de/echronol.htm#e1973>.

^{lii} "Nefertiti in Berlin," *Nefertiti Travels*,

<http://www.nofretete-geht-auf-reisen.de/eberline.htm>

^{liii} Stephen K. Urice, "The Beautiful One Has Come – To Stay," in *Imperialism, art and restitution*, ed. John Henry Merryman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 143.

^{liv} Ibid.

^{lv} Tristana Moore, "Row over Nefertiti Bust Continues," *BBC News*, May 7, 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/6632021.stm>

^{lvi} Stephen K. Urice, "The Beautiful One Has Come – To Stay," in *Imperialism, art and restitution*, ed. John Henry Merryman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 154.

^{lvii} Stephen K. Urice, "The Beautiful One Has Come – To Stay," in *Imperialism, art and restitution*, ed. John Henry Merryman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 151-52.

^{lviii} "King Tut: Listening to Our Visitors," *Art Matter's Blog*, December 11, 2009,

<http://artmatters.ca/wp/category/tut/page/2/>

^{lix} Ashraf Khalil, "Egypt Hunts Ancient Artifacts," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 11, 2010, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704689804575535662169204940.html>

^{lx} Molly Hennessy-Fiske, "Digital Artifacts of an Uprising," *Los Angeles Times*, July 7, 2011, <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/jul/07/world/la-fg-egypt-archives-20110707>

^{lxi} Mark Vallen, "The Museum at the Center of Egypt's Revolution," *Mark Vallen's Art For A Change Blog*, February 22, 2011, <http://art-for-a-change.com/blog/2011/02/the-museum-at-the-center-of-egypts-revolution.html>

^{lxii} Osama Diab, "Sacking Zahi Hawass is a Sign of Egypt's Ongoing Revolution," *The Guardian*, July 22, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/jul/2/sacking-zahi-hawass-egypt-revolution>

^{lxiii} Joyce Carta, "The Road Less Traveled... Tell el-Amarna and El Minya," *Egypt Magic*, April 2008, <http://egyptmagic.com/StoryElMinya.htm>

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