

Interview

The Man Behind King Tut

An Interview with Dr. Zahi Hawass,
Secretary General, Supreme Council of Antiquities, Egypt

EDITORS' NOTE Zahi Hawass is the Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA). Throughout his career, he has made many important discoveries, including the Tombs of the Pyramid Builders at Giza and the Valley of the Golden Mummies at Bahariya Oasis. Recently, he announced to the public the results of a forensic study that included the first successful use of DNA analysis on Egyptian mummies, which has illuminated the relationships of the family of the Tutankhamun and suggested new causes for his death.

Dr. Hawass received his doctoral degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1987, and has received many important awards worldwide. In 2006, he was named one of the Top 100 Influential People by Time Magazine. He has received the Golden Plate Award from the Academy of Achievement as well as many awards from foreign countries. He has received four honorary doctorate degrees from esteemed world universities, such as the American University in Cairo and the Catholic University of Santo Domingo.

Dr. Hawass lectures all over the world, and he has brought Egyptology into the hearts of people worldwide. He is considered by many

to be the spokesman for archaeology in Egypt. Since he became the head of antiquities in 2002, he has made great strides concerning site management programs, which protect the monuments while enhancing the experiences for tourists. He is implementing such programs throughout Egypt: for example, the site of Giza is being transformed from a zoo into an organized open-air museum, and the site of Saqqara is also seeing dramatic improvements. This has increased the numbers of tourists coming to Egypt. Dr. Hawass is also currently overseeing the building of 20 new museums all over Egypt, the most important being the Grand Egyptian Museum, which is being built now in the shadow of the pyramids. Other new museums include the Royal Jewelry Museum, which will open this year, the Textile Museum, which was opened by First Lady Suzanne Mubarak in February 2010, and also the Crocodile Museum, which recently opened



next to the temple of Kom Ombo in Upper Egypt. Renovations are also being carried out at older national museums: the Coptic Museum has already reopened, the Museum of Islamic Art will reopen soon, and the Greco-Roman Museum in Alexandria is undergoing restoration.

Many monuments in Egypt, including the Step Pyramid and Serapeum at Saqqara are being restored under Dr. Hawass's leadership. On March 14, 2010, the Maimonides Synagogue in Cairo was reopened to the public after restoration, and the SCA is currently restoring several other synagogues in Cairo and in Alexandria. Coptic churches are also being restored under his watch. The most important of these is the Monastery of Saint Anthony on the Red Sea, which reopened in February 2010. The SCA also restored 33 Islamic monuments on El-Muizz Street in Old Cairo, making this street a very attractive tourist site and emphasizing its historical importance.

As part of his quest to preserve and protect the antiquities of Egypt, Dr. Hawass has created a department for the return of stolen artifacts, called the General Administration for the Recovery of Stolen Antiquities. In 2010, he worked to change the antiquities law in the Egyptian Parliament to

make stricter punishments for illegal antiquities dealing. Over the past seven years, he has succeeded in bringing back many important artifacts to Egypt—more than 6,000 pieces to date. Most recently, he successfully put pressure on the Louvre to return some paintings taken from a tomb at Thebes by stopping their excavations in Egypt. On March 10, he was in Washington D.C. to accept the repatriation of a beautiful 21st Dynasty coffin that was seized by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in Miami.

It is his dream to bring back six unique artifacts that he feels belong in their homeland: the bust of Nefertiti in Berlin; the Rosetta Stone in the British Museum; the statue of the architect Hemiuunu in Hildesheim, Germany; the bust of the vizier Ankh-baf in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston; the Zodiac ceiling from the temple of Dendera in the Louvre; and the statue of Ramesses II in Turin.

Dr. Hawass has also created special programs to raise awareness of antiquities among Egyptians, as well as implementing and supporting important training programs for young Egyptians that are teaching them how to excavate and work in museums. For the first time, he is making Egyptology for Egyptians.

Egypt has had many artifacts stolen from it over hundreds of years, and now you're bringing things back as you can. But not everyone is as cooperative as they should be. Are other countries and leaders respecting this quest?

For the first time, people all over the world are beginning to recognize our efforts to regain stolen artifacts, and countries like China are now looking to do the same thing. The country that has helped us most in returning stolen artifacts is the United States. Seven years ago, the District Attorney of New York fought to put American Frederick Schultz in jail because he was involved with a big theft in Egypt. Jim McAndrew from Homeland Security came to Egypt in 2002 to investigate a case involving over 300 Predynastic artifacts. His work put an American officer in jail and returned almost 100 of these artifacts to Egypt. We also worked with the American government, especially with the FBI in New York City, to return many artifacts stolen from the city of Akhmim, Egypt. On the other hand, there are people who are working against us, such as the director of the Saint Louis Art Museum, who has the beautiful mask of a New Kingdom noblewoman named Ka-Nefer-Nefer in his museum and refuses to return it to Egypt although we have proof it was stolen, and is the rightful property of Egypt. I have written to the Congressmen, as have children from the state of Missouri, telling them how this man has a stolen artifact on display in his museum and refuses to return it. This, in my opinion, is a crime that he has committed. Egypt has also cooperated with many other countries in this regard, which is how we have managed to get back more than 6,000 pieces. When I went to London for a book signing in December of 2009, I found that the press is supporting me; they want me to ask for the

return of the Rosetta Stone. Also, many people from Germany are writing to me saying that the bust of Nefertiti should be in Egypt. All of this is happening through my strategy of teamwork and cooperation. It is my dream, in the near future, to see these six pieces I mentioned exhibited in the Grand Egyptian Museum, and for the bust of Nefertiti to be exhibited in the Akhenaton Museum in Minya, which will attract people from everywhere. There we will also show the three Amarna mummies we identified recently: the mummy of Akhenaton, the mummy of Queen Tiye, and the mummy of the mother of Tutankhamun.

Many of your dreams have already come true, but what are the dreams you have for the future?

My dreams for the future are to continue to concentrate on projects I am already working on. For example, all my life I wanted to excavate a mysterious tunnel in the tomb of Seti I. We are working here now, and we have reached a depth of 450 feet. At the end we have discovered 37 steps, which indicates that we are in front of the entrance to a tomb. Every night, I dream that I am down in this tunnel, opening this tomb. I feel that soon the world will hear something amazing about how an Egyptian team that I appointed revealed the secrets of the tomb of Seti I. My second dream concerns our excavations in the Valley of the Kings. We have already found many important things, such as how the ancient Egyptians redirected the flood waters to preserve the tombs. We also found many graffiti and inscriptions left by the workmen, as well as pottery. The

most recent finds are four foundation deposits found in the Valley of the Monkeys (the western arm of the Valley of the Kings, where the tombs of Amenhotep III and Ay are located), which indicates there should be a tomb nearby. It could be the tomb of Ankhesenamun, the wife of Tutankhamun, or of Queen Tiye, the wife of Amenhotep III. Another dream of mine is investigating the doors inside the Great Pyramid using robots, and we hope that in 2010, we will reveal the secrets of the Great Pyramid. Also, I hope to identify the rest of the family of Tutankhamun by using DNA to find the mummy of his wife Ankhesenamun and perhaps to identify the mummy of Queen Nefertiti. Finally, we are searching for the tomb of Cleopatra and Mark Anthony, which we believe to be in the temple of Taposiris Magna, 30 km outside of Alexandria. The SCA has been excavating with a Dominican team here since 2005, and has found many important objects, including coins of Cleopatra and Mark Anthony. We have also uncovered a large cemetery outside the temple, which indicates that someone important is buried nearby. I hope that we will be able to find the resting place of this great queen of Egypt. These are my dreams that I hope to accomplish.

All that you're doing must be very expensive. How do you obtain financing, and what can corporations, for instance, do to contribute?

Most of our work is supported by ticket sales to tourists, and also exhibitions that we send outside of Egypt. When I sent the King Tut exhibit to the States, I said there are no more free meals, and therefore we are getting money for these exhibits. Exhibits such as this earn around 1 billion Egyptian pounds, and all of it goes to restore pharaonic, Jewish, Islamic, Coptic, and modern monuments in Egypt. It is my dream to complete two things: first, building the Suzanne Mubarak Children's Museum. We are trying to build it with the help of the people, and many American friends of mine have helped me to raise 14 million Egyptian pounds so far. The second thing I am focused on raising money for now will be for the benefit of American and other young people to create an endowed Chair of Egyptology at the American University in Cairo (AUC). I have raised \$200,000 so far, but we need \$2 million. Donations to this fund are tax deductible, and we need people to help us to fund this Chair in order to bring outstanding professors to the AUC who will train Egyptian and foreign young people in Egyptology.

What is there still to be accomplished?

There is still much to be accomplished. I was planning to retire in 2010, but President Mubarak thought that I should stay, and appointed me as a Vice Minister so that I do not have to retire. Now I can stay and accomplish my goals, making more of my dreams come true. I would like to see the Grand Egyptian Museum finished and open it to show the magic and the mystery of pharaonic Egypt through this beautiful museum that will attract people from all over the world. ●



Dr. Zahi Hawass at work