

# Proposed Egyptian law could affect Las Vegas casino

Las Vegas – In the deep recesses of the Luxor, visitors pay USD 9.99 to view replicas of the contents of King Tutankhamen's ancient burial tomb as it was discovered in 1922, including a gilded cow's head, a gold-covered depiction of the jackal-headed Egyptian god Anubis, and minitombs that held the bodies of premature babies.

The Luxor's audio-guided tour through fake artifacts is the kind of cultural recreation for which Las Vegas is famous.

But Egypt, which cooperated in establishing the exhibit when the resort opened, may now want a piece of the action.

An Egyptian official has asked his country's parliament to require payment from those who commodify Egypt's treasures.

„Pharaonic Egypt has captured the hearts of everyone everywhere, and people who replicate that make millions in profits while we need money to restore the real monuments,“ said Zahi Hawass, the head of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities.

Hawass has spent five years developing Egypt's proposed antiquities law, which faces a vote in the parliament. The law would require permission and payment for full-scale reproductions of Egypt's artifacts and ancient statuary. Experts say it would be a sharp break from traditional copyright laws that expire after a short period. The law would also place tougher penalties on those who try to illegally remove treasures from the country.

Hawass said the law is designed to stop companies – especially in China – from replicating Egyptian treasures for sale in museum stores.

But for the Luxor, it may mean having to pay a royalty because of the reality of its fakery.

„To me it is American kitsch art, although very, very expensive,“ said Jeffrey Cass, a dean at the University of Louisiana at Monroe who has written about the hotel’s re-creation of Egypt. „The Luxor is Egypt as understood through the American imagination.“

When the Luxor opened in 1993, it heavily referenced ancient Egypt through such features as a Nile River ride, sphinxes and obelisks inside and out, and hieroglyphics lining the walls – all inside a building that reimagines the Great Pyramid of Giza as a modern black glass structure with a light beam shooting from its top. Next to a Bedouin-themed food court, the King Tut museum includes what the hotel calls a “historically accurate reproduction of the original burial chamber,” with items re-created by Egyptian artisans.

According to Bill Paulos, a former vice president of the Luxor, the original Luxor team met with Egyptian officials when they designed and built the resort. Hawass, in fact, is credited in old Luxor publicity statements as having been a „consultant“ to the original project, but these days both Hawass and Paulos remember it as a more informal role. The Egyptian government also gave the Luxor team a stone from the pyramids to display at the hotel, Paulos said.

„We didn’t want to offend anybody, so we showed them what we were doing,“ Paulos said. „We did some tourism back and forth, and talked with them on a fairly regular basis over two years. It was a friendly exchange.“

Since then, the iconic hotel has veered away from its Egyptian roots in favor of a more generally luxurious vibe. The Nile River ride was eliminated soon after opening, and MGM Mirage, which acquired Luxor in 2004, began removing much of the Egyptian theme inside the hotel this summer. But there’s been

no announcement on whether the King Tut exhibit will be removed in conjunction with the makeover.

Hawass said that exhibit, which purports to be meticulously faithful to the original tomb, is likely to fall within the purview of the proposed law – and require permission and payment – because of its replication of Egyptian treasures.

A spokesman for MGM Mirage says the company would abide by the proposed restrictions.

„Zahi Hawass is known throughout the world for his extraordinary efforts to stem the flow of looting and illegal copyrighting of antiquities from Egypt, which has been a major problem, and that’s something we greatly respect,“ said Alan Feldman, a company vice president. „We try to be very sensitive, and if this law should pass and it should turn out we could do some good for Egypt by making changes as minor as dealing with the replicas in the museum, then we’d make those changes.“

Other elements of the Luxor – including its pyramid-shaped building – are not threatened by the law because they are more interpretation than replication, Hawass said.