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## King Tut's treasures return to Europe

(AFP)

6 April 2004

BASEL, Switzerland - Precious ornaments and gilded sarcophagi from King Tutankhamun's tomb will go on show in the Swiss city of Basel on Wednesday, marking the return of the treasures of ancient Egypt's pharaoh to Europe for the first time in 20 years.

The exhibits, which stirred European capitals when they went on tour through the late 1960s and 1970s, will be augmented by 70 precious items from other tombs in Egypt's legendary Valley of the Kings.



"We will have 120 pieces selected by the archaeological museum in Cairo," said Andre Wise, the curator of the northern Swiss city's Museum of Ancient Art.

Insurers have valued the display of opulence from ancient Egypt's rulers - called "Tutankhamun: the golden beyond" - at about 850 million Swiss francs (566 million euros, 680 million dollars), the museum said.

"Egyptian society was very hierarchical. With Tutankhamun, we are showing only the very uppermost echelons of that society," said museum director Peter Blome.

"The Museum has made a conscious decision to show works of art and not simply archaeological finds," he added.

### Famous death mask

But the most famous piece, King Tut's blue and gold coloured death mask, will not be on show in Basel because Egypt venerates the crafted piece of solid gold as a national treasure and will not allow it out of the country.

In exchange for hosting the exhibition, the Swiss museum paid five million Swiss francs to help finance the construction of a new archaeological museum in Cairo, and is now looking for other

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“Since we need more funds, we haven’t ruled out presenting the Basel exhibition in other major cities and negotiations are under way,” he said.

Tutankhamun’s tomb was unearthed by British archaeologists in 1922 and the death of one of them, Lord Carnavon, about a year later, revived the legend of the mummy’s curse.

The tomb of the pharaoh, who died at the age of 25, yielded one of the highlights of the exhibition, a glistening miniature gold sarcophagus covered with lapis lazuli and precious stones.

A full-size, 2.18 metre (7.2 foot), gilded wooden sarcophagus from the tomb of Yuya and Tuyu, the parents-in-law of pharaoh Amenophis III, will also be on show outside Egypt for the first time.

Visitors to the show, which spans a 258 year period of ancient Egypt’s 18th dynasty - 1550 BC to 1292 BC - will end their visit in a copy of King Tut’s mortuary chamber, the only part of his tomb which was decorated with frescoes.

The exhibition has been laid out in the museum’s basement, which can only be reached through narrow corridors guarded by giant jackal-headed statues of the god of death, Anubis.

Suzanne Mubarak, the wife of Egypt’s president, was due to officially inaugurate the exhibition on Tuesday, before it is opened to the public the next day.

“We have already sold 50,000 tickets over the Internet, that’s about ten percent of the number of visitors we are expecting,” Blome said.

There is a daily quota of tickets and museum officials warned of long queues at the exhibition, which will close on October 3.

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