CONSERVATION

Egypt

Luxor builds new tomb for King Tut

Egyptian authorities aim to preserve original chamber by diverting tourists to £500,000 replica

Preservation

Luxor, an exact replica of Tutankhamun’s burial chamber is to be built in Luxor next month, in an attempt to preserve the original for future generations by reducing the number of tourists who visit the site.

The 4,500-square-foot structure created by the Madrov-based company Ect interpersonal Arte between 2009 and 2010, using 3D laser scanners, at a cost of £500,000. It was scheduled to be built in early 2011 next to the archaeologist Howard Carter’s Luxor house, which is now a museum, but the project was delayed by the 2011 revolution. As well as creating a detailed record of the tomb’s current state, the replica will encourage tourists to explore the burial chamber instead of the original.

The country’s ministry of antiquities is keeping Tutankhamun’s original tomb open, although the number of visitors is now limited to 1,000 people a day. Measures include temperature and humidity, brought about by the breath of tourists, as well as harmful attempts at conservation, have caused the painted scenes to deteriorate badly. Other tombs in the Valley of the Kings – the burial site of pharaohs for 500 years, beginning in the 16th century BC – face similar problems, forcing the ministry to open them on a rotating basis to allow enough time for necessary conservation work. With almost two million tourists a year visiting the Valley before the revolution, however, achieving sustainable tourism has long been a challenge.

Replica tombs, if accepted by the public as authentic attractions, could help to achieve a balance between tourism and conservation. They could give tourists an immersive experience of an ancient space, while enabling the original tombs to be preserved for future generations. At the same time, the ministry would continue to receive much-needed revenue, while keeping the original tombs closed. Paris to fully scan the tombs of Queen Nefertari (visible by appointment only) and King Seti I (closed to the public since the 1980s) have been put forward by Factum Arte, but are on hold until the money can be raised. Replicas could give tourists their only chance to experience these fragile tombs.

Tourism needs Tutankhamun

Tutankhamun’s replica tomb comes at a time when Egypt sorely needs a boost in tourism. Violence in Cairo and the Sinai Peninsula is deterring visitors from holidaying in Egypt, and travel warnings from the governments of the UK, the US and Russia remain in place. A report by the research firm STR Global states that only one in six beds in Cairo’s hotels was occupied in July. The fall in tourism has had a crippling effect on the economy. Earnings from tourism reached £970m in the 2012/13 financial year, compared with £1.16bn in 2009/10, before the revolution. According to statistics from the ministry of tourism, 5.9 million tourists visited Egypt in the first half of 2013, bringing in £4.4bn of revenue – but since the custodia of President Morsi in July and the subsequent army takeover, the number of tourists has fallen by 45%, creating estimated losses of £1bn a month.

The replica tomb is due to be transferred to the Grand Egyptian Museum in Cairo after the museum’s completion in 2015. Ricky Sharp

Items looted in revolution go on show in Cairo

Cairo, Egypt’s ministry of antiquities is celebrating the recovery and restoration of artefacts from the Egyptian Museum that were damaged or looted in the early days of the 2011 revolution, by staging the exhibition “Destruction and Restoration” at the Cairo museum.

“This exhibition sends a message to the world about how much Egyptians care about their heritage and how much effort they will exert to preserve it,” said the antiquities minister, Mohammed Fawakh, at the show’s opening.

Around 20 artefacts are on display, including a statue of Akhenaten holding an offering table. The table was looted and the statue stolen during the raid in January 2011, the statue was recovered three months later. Also included is a statue of Tutankhamun standing on a leopards, which took conservators six months to restore.

Unfortunately, only part of another famous sculptural group featuring Tutankhamun, this time with the Nefertiti being held aloft by the goddess Mut, is on display. The former statue of the goddess was found in the museum’s garden and has been restored, but the figure of the king has not yet been recovered. According to Ahmed Sharaf, the ministry’s head of museums, 24 artefacts are still missing, including a so-called the figure of the king’s son, Amun-hotep’s daughter, Merit Amun. The show is due to run until the middle of this month.

Emily Sharpe

This statue of Tutankhamun has been restored

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