

TREASURES OF THE PHARAOKHS EXHIBITED BY EGYPT IN ROME FOR THE FIRST TIME

■ By Lucy Gordan

Italy has several distinguished ancient Egyptian collections. The most important is The Egyptian Museum in Turin with artifacts from every period of ancient Egyptian history; others, although with fewer artifacts and some chronological gaps, include Florence, Bologna, Naples and Vatican City — founded by Pope Gregory XVI in 1839.

In addition, since the first century A.D. there have been more ancient Egyptian obelisks (13) in Rome than anywhere else in the world, including Egypt. Many of these were discovered by “archeologists” working for the Renaissance Popes and then erected outside Rome’s important churches as markers for pilgrims: St. Peter’s Basilica, St. John in the Lateran, St. Mary Major, the Pantheon, Santa Maria Sopra Minerva, Piazza Navona and Piazza del Popolo, to name a few.



Left, intricate gold funerary mask of the Pharaoh Amenemope (reigned 993-984 B.C.).

Below, amulet of the head of Hathor, goddess of the sky, of love, music, and dancing, and of women and fertility.



Soon Rome will temporarily host the new exhibition “Treasures of the Pharaohs.”

On display in Rome from October 24, 2025 to May 3, 2026, it will be a once-in-a-lifetime experience about ancient Egypt.

Located in the Scuderie (once the stables) of Rome’s Quirinal Palace — first the Popes’ summer palace, then the residence of Italy’s royal family and, since 1946, that of Italy’s President — this is the first time ever that Egypt has mounted an exhibition of its ancient artifacts in Rome.

In fact, it is only the second time that Egypt has lent many of its ancient artifacts to Italy.

The first exhibition, “The Pharaohs,” was held in 2002 at the Palazzo Grassi in Venice. But while the Venice exhibition of some 80 artifacts focused on the role of kingship in the New Kingdom (1550-1070 BC), the period known for its peak of

Egyptian power and prosperity, the 130 artifacts of “Treasures of the Pharaohs” will explore in six sections the complexity of Egyptian society, not only royal power and the divine authority of the pharaohs, but also daily life, religious beliefs, its multiple gods and goddess, funerary customs, the afterlife and artistic achievements over 3,000 years.

Thus, it will span the entire arc of ancient Egyptian history, from the Early Dynastic Period (c. 3150-2890 BC) to the Late Period (664-332 BC), and will include archaeological discoveries never before shown outside Egypt, on loan from The Egyptian Museum in Cairo’s Thari Square and the Luxor Museum.

It will also include recent discoveries, notably, from the “Golden City,” unearthed by an Egyptian team led by world-famous archeologist Zahi Hawass in Luxor in 2020.

This vast urban settlement dates to the reigns of Amenhotep III (reigned 1386-1349 BC) “The Magnificent,” and considered one of the greatest pharaohs due to his military prowess, and of his son Akhenaten (r. 1353-36 or 1551-33), best-known as the husband of Nefertiti and father of Tutankhamon.

This final section will offer an unprecedented glimpse into the lives of the artisans and craftsmen who built Egypt’s grand monuments including their tools, ceramics, amulets and personal belongings.

In addition, The Egyptian Museum in Turin will loan its *Mensa Isiaca*, or Bembine Tablet, the first object in Turin’s collection, and several of its treasures, still-to-be-



chosen, which have never been loaned before.

Among the highlights of “Treasures of the Pharaohs” are: the schist Triad of Menkaure, showing the pharaoh who lived more than 4,500 years ago and commissioned one of the three great pyramids of Giza.

A monumental sculptural masterpiece from the Old Kingdom, Menkaure is flanked by Hathor, goddess of love, beauty, music, dancing, fertility and pleasure, as well as the protective deity of the Theban region, underscoring the divine mandate of his rulership.

Other highlights are the lid of the gilded wooden coffin of Queen Ahhotep, adorned entirely in gold, a magnificent example of New Kingdom (c. 1550-1070 BC) funerary art. Also belonging to the queen is the legendary “Necklace of Golden Flies,” an honorary military distinction reserved for Egypt’s greatest warriors — for Queen Ahhotep commanded the Egyptian army before her son Ahmose I was old enough to reign.

Like Christianity, ancient Egyptian doctrine was centered on the belief of the resurrection after death, recognizing paradise and hell. In short, like Christians, the ancient Egyptians believed in an afterlife where the deceased would be judged on their deeds during their lifetime on earth.

One symbol of immortality, gold, was sacred to the solar deity Ra and is the material of many other treasures here: the intricate gold funerary mask of the Pharaoh Amenemope (reigned 993-984 BC); the golden

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coffin lid of Tjuya, grandmother of Akhenaten, with its intricate decorations and hieroglyphic inscriptions; and the golden funerary covering of Pharaoh Psusennes I, one of the most fascinating relics of the Third Intermediate Period (1070-664 BC). It is finely decorated with sacred symbols intended to grant the pharaoh protection in the afterlife.

Also on display are imposing statues. One is of Sennefer, a nobleman who was mayor of Thebes and “Overseer of the Granaries and Fields of Cattle of Amun.” A favorite of Amenhotep II, he accumulated great wealth and was allowed to place gray granite statues, shown here, of himself and his wife Senetney and their daughter Mutnofret in the Temple of Karnak.



**Sennefer, 15th-century B.C.
mayor of Thebes, with his wife and daughter**

Another two imposing basalt statues are of Ramses VI (reigned 1180-1136 BC) and Thutmose III (reigned 1481-1425 BC), the stepson and co-ruler of the domineering Hatshepsut, one of only a few female pharaohs, not to omit the exquisite royal jewelry, all revealing the extraordinary artistic sophistication and profound spirituality of ancient Egypt.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a richly illustrated catalog by Hawass, published in Italian and English editions by Allemandi Editore. Tickets are on sale from the Scuderie's website at scuderiequirinale.vivaticket.it.

Should you need help, you can telephone Vivaticket at 011-39-0292897722 Monday-Friday from 8:30 AM-7 PM and Saturday 8:30 AM-6 PM (Italian hours).○