

# Museum collections and moving objects in Egypt: an approach to amend the current situation

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*Defining museum, collection, institution or “heritage” are key questions in museum studies and practice: even the term “museum object” hides the idea that the museum is the place not only to shelter objects, but principally to transform things into objects. Such fundamental questions are still not adequately considered by the authorities for antiquities and museums in Egypt. One example to be highlighted here concerns the practice and procedures of moving objects. In Egypt as elsewhere, museums lack shared guidelines for moving objects. Examples are given here of the physical damage and loss of information that resulted from repeated moves, often in the context of founding new museums without clear rationale. These risks highlight the need for national authorities in Egypt, and elsewhere, to reconsider a common collection policy, both for moving museum objects and for establishing new museums.*

## *Introduction*

What is a museum? And what are its tasks, duties and responsibilities? How do we define a collection? What is an institution? What does the term “heritage” encompass? Museum experts have inevitably developed answers to such questions, which are fundamental to their work. The expression “museum object” could almost be a pleonasm, as the museum is not only the place which shelters objects, but also a place with the principal mission of transforming things into objects.<sup>1</sup>

Yet it seems that the answers to these questions are still not considered clearly by the authorities of the antiquities and museums in Egypt (Supreme Council of Antiquities / SCA or lately the Ministry of State for Antiquities affairs). One example to be highlighted here is “moving objects”. In Egyptian museums, there are no common rules and regulations for moving objects. To take one example, in the 1980s, a group of Coptic papyri were moved from the Egyptian Museum in Cairo to the Coptic Museum in Cairo. This movement itself could be considered as a logical decision. However, without any clear reason

1. A. DESVALLÉES - F. MAIRESSE (eds), *Key concepts of Museology*, Paris 2010, p. 15.