Challenges and dangers of networking museums databases

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Digitisation is a priority for collections, and offers substantial benefits both for museums and for site management in the archaeology of Egypt, as of other countries. Recent losses and damage are reminder of the importance of digital recording. However, a digital future also requires support, including the older technologies of paper and print. In any digitisation project, serious risks and challenges must be faced, in order to secure and sustain best results. This paper presents a review of the particular difficulties and needs in the Egyptian context.

The constantly developing world of computers and the fast expanding means of digitalization have made handling, storing and sharing of data easier than ever before. Despite bearing some challenges and dangers, that are addressed and discussed here, digitization on a grand scale allows something that we were lacking before: a means of easy and fast networking between museums which could facilitate the virtual rejoining of objects, find-groups and collections. The process of digitization has been perceived by libraries, archives and museums world wide as an exciting evolution in curatorial methods, providing digital images of each object of a museum collection, together with the main information about it, in a database offline or even online; the results promise better management, accessibility and preservation.

Several of the largest Egyptian collections in the world have already made all or part of their material accessible online,¹ or at least have advanced in creating their digital database. Although all providing more or less the main basic information for each artifact, their systems of documentation and presentation of their collections still differ substantially and are not yet directly