

Storage issues in Egyptian heritage: risk assessment, conservation needs and policy planning

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Egypt has an outstanding archaeological heritage, of world-class importance. Yet Egyptian archaeological finds have suffered a long history of neglect and dispersal, and centuries of illicit trafficking. The current storage and global distribution of Egyptian antiquities force us to think seriously about their present varying state of conservation, and to strive for their physical and intellectual accessibility to a wider public. This paper provides a risk assessment of the current storage and conservation conditions of the Egyptian antiquities in museums and archaeological sites, explores the conservation needs for better preservation, and addresses the need for new policies and strategies in conservation and collection management, with increasing research and public engagement.

Introduction

The conference *Forming Material Egypt* could provide the basis for a sustainable forum, among experts, researchers, international organizations, local authorities, heritage lovers and policy makers, for planning better future strategies for the conservation of Egyptian antiquities, and for building effective longer-term partnerships to document and preserve Egyptian artifacts in Egypt and abroad. Egypt has an archaeological heritage second to none, recognized as of world-class importance. Accordingly, there are many past and ongoing international efforts to document and preserve Egyptian archaeological heritage and present it to the public, including in England the project *Accessing Virtual Egypt*,¹ the national database *Cornucopia*,² and the activities of subject specialist curators grouped in the network *ACCES*.³ However, Egyptian archaeological finds have suffered a long history of neglect, dispersal, and centuries of illicit trafficking. Today, the present storage conditions and global distribution of Egyptian antiquities force us to confront realistically their current vulnerable state

1. Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, at <<http://www.accessingvirtualegypt.ucl.ac.uk/>> (accessed May 2013). Cf. further M. SERPICO, this volume.
2. At <<http://www.cornucopia.org.uk>> (accessed May 2013).
3. Website: <http://www.ssndevelopment.org/?page_id=2> (accessed May 2013).