

*Original article***ENHANCING COLLECTING PRACTICES AND ACCESSION PROCEDURES: A CASE STUDY OF THE EGYPTIAN MUSEUM OF CAIRO**

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Abstract:

This paper examines the acquisition policy and accession procedures for artifacts at the Egyptian Museum of Cairo (EMC). The EMC collection follows well-established curatorial practices, and it has undergone significant improvements in collecting, inventorying, and collection management. In spite of the fact that the collection is well managed and documented following professional standards, a written policy for acquisitions and documentation continues to be sought. Over the past decade, the museum has lost many curators, which has resulted in a reduction in the transmission of curatorial traditions due to a lack of written policies for collection and acquisition. The paper aims to collect, analyze, and enhance procedures, guidelines, and practices related to collecting and accessioning objects. In addition, this paper aims to identify, investigate, and explain the main issues involved. In conclusion, it emphasizes the importance of implementing written policies for acquisition and collection that facilitate the management of the collection and its scope.

1. Introduction

The history of the EMC's collection dates back to 1858 when A. Mariette established the national Egyptian antiquities collection in Bulaq [1,2], and its documentation system: Journal d'Entrée, fig. (1-a), hence after JE [3,4]. From that date forward, JE has served as the principal inventory system and accession register. Although EMC Documentation has a long history and development, its stability is threatened by critical weaknesses. In addition to a lack of information, object location tracking, and photographs, the absence of a written collection management policy is notable [4]. The museum has struggled to establish a consistent system for the proper care and management of its collections due to the influence of curators' personal experiences and directions concerning documentation, acquisition, and disposal practices [2,5]. Based on personal experiences and analysis of the museum's collection management system and practices, the research hypothesis focuses on evaluating collection documentation and management traditions when written policies regarding acquisition and documentation are absent. The author investigates the case of the Egyptian Museum through records, publications, and archival documents. Furthermore, it is reinforced by interviewing museum staff between June and September 2023. Several studies have focused on the EMC inventorying system [1,6,7] and documentation challenges [2], including case studies that highlight critical concerns associated with documentation [8,9]. The museum created a manual to guide registrars in daily duties and database management while work

traditions are smoothly passed from one curatorial generation to the next [5]. The Registration Collections Management and Documentation Department Protocol Book (hereafter RCMDD Protocol) is a manual that issued in 2011 to present procedures to be followed by the RCMDD office, arranged in cross-referenced protocols [2,10]. It describes the registration and documentation procedures, inventory system, accession and numbering; and outlines the three main documentation systems: the Database System, the Manual System, and the Computer Organization System [10]. In addition to the Journal d'Entrée, the museum has several inventory systems including *Catalogue général du Musée du Caire (CGC)*; *Temporary Registers (T.R.)*, and (SR.) *Special Registers*, fig. (1-b:e) [1, 2,7]. In addition, the RCMDD has created a new temporary numbering system to track on-demand acquisitions for exhibitions and uncertain acquisition. (This includes objects stored in the basement for decades, and for which no previous inventory number has yet been identified but might nevertheless exist as well as objects that the museum received, often temporarily, for purposes other than accession, e.g. traveling or in-house exhibitions. These objects may not yet have received an official SCA accession number from another museum or site magazine. In this case, temporary numbering is given by the code PV (Provisional Number) followed by the year and a sequential number.) Provisional Numbers (PV) are temporary numbers assigned by the RCMDD and are used in the database and the manual system for object tracking [10].

Managing all these inventories can cause confusion and errors because each system is designed to meet specific goals [2]. Furthermore, the lack of a collection policy leads to overlapping traditions and occasional errors in daily curatorial activities such as acquisition, disposal, and documentation [2]. In this paper, the author examines EMC traditions for acquiring, inventorying, and documenting collections. The discussion is based on literature, practice, collection and system analysis, and staff interviews.

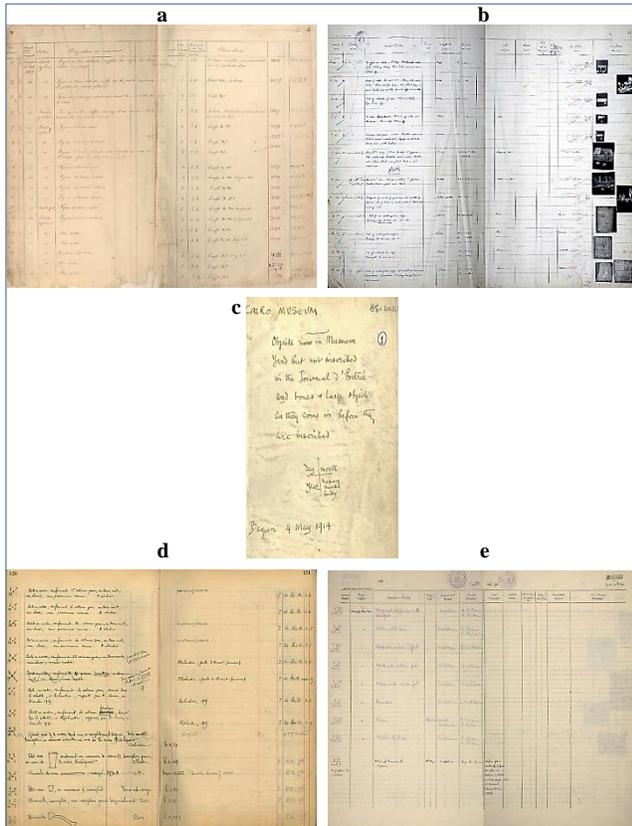


Figure (1) **a.** the first page of the first accession register (*Journal d'Entrée*) of the Egyptian Museum dates back to June 1858 with the remarks and notes of generations of curators (Courtesy of the Egyptian Museum of Cairo), **b.** an example of the special register with the curatorial handwriting for artifacts custody. (Courtesy of the Egyptian Museum of Cairo), **c.** The labeling page of the first volume of the temporary register (TR) stated that "Objects now in museum yard but not inscribed in the *Journal d'Entrée* and boxes of large objects as they come in before they are inscribed. Began 4 May 1914 ". The register is labeled with a note stating its purpose: to register objects that arrive at the museum without being entered into the journal for any reason. (Courtesy of the Egyptian Museum of Cairo), **d.** a page from the temporary register shows entries, including the removal of items transferred to the EMC permanent register (*Journal d'Entrée*). Compare TR. 8.5.26.5, which has been added to JE 59213, **e.** the last entry in the *Temporary Register* was recorded in 2004 before TR was discontinued. It pertains to "TR. 7.9.2004.1" - a fragmented head of Ramses II, stolen in 1992 and later seized

2. Methodological Study

2.1. Research question

How have the Egyptian Museum in Cairo's (EMC) acquisition and accessioning practices been impacted by the absence of standardized collection and acquisition policies, and what

steps can be taken to establish effective policies to enhance collection management?

2.2. Methodology

This study examines the EMC's collection and documentation practices through a mixed-methods approach. Qualitative data were collected via direct interviews with retired and current museum staff. Additionally, a thorough review of literature, museum registers, archives, and official documents was conducted. The analysis focuses on historical and current practices of artifact collection and accession, highlighting inconsistencies and gaps in documentation. Cases of object documentation were examined to illustrate the current state and challenges faced by the EMC. The study is grounded in the framework of the Egyptian Antiquities Acts and the ICOM Code of Ethics. The methodology is outlined as the following:

- a)** Literature review: conduct a comprehensive review of existing literature on museum collection management practices, focusing on the documentation and accessioning procedures at the EMC and other similar institutions. This includes reviewing previous studies that discuss the EMC's documentation system.
- b)** Qualitative data collection: conduct in-depth interviews with retired and current EMC staff, including curators, registrars, and documentation specialists, to gather insights into the practical challenges faced in the absence of standardized policies. As well as analyze specific instances of documentation and accessioning errors, such as duplicate inventories and inconsistent numbering systems, to illustrate the impact of the lack of policies.
- c)** Document analysis: examine museum registers, archives, and official documents to identify patterns and inconsistencies in the documentation and accessioning of artifacts. As well as review entries in The Museum System (TMS) to understand how artifacts have been recorded and tracked over time, noting any discrepancies or errors.
- d)** Comparative analysis: *) *Bench-marking*: compare EMC's practices with those of other major museums that have established collection and acquisition policies, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Collection Management Policy. *) *Best practices*: Identify best practices from museums with effective policies, focusing on how these institutions manage acquisitions, documentation, and inventory systems.
- e)** Policy Analysis: Review the guidelines provided by the Egyptian Antiquities Acts and the ICOM Code of Ethics to determine how they can be integrated into EMC's policies. This also includes the development of a framework for implementing collection and acquisition policies at the EMC. By following this methodology, the paper aims to provide a detailed analysis of the EMC's current challenges and propose actionable solutions to enhance its collection management and documentation practices.

3. Guidance of the Collection and Acquisition Policies

Collections are the defining attribute of museums and the center of their management. Documenting the collections fully and caring for them well is, in the long run, the fundamental criterion of a well-managed museum [11]. A museum's coll-

ection management system is structured around two pillars: museum functions and guiding policies. Policies are instrumental in regulating both the fulfillment of present museum functions and the achievement of a desired future condition at the requisite level of quality [11]. The collection policy (also called a collection management policy) is the museum's chief instrument of collection management and is fundamental to all museum operations. It guides the development and management of a museum's collection. The museum collection policy outlines the museum's operations involving its collections, and it can be defined as follows: *'a collection management policy is a detailed written statement that explains why a museum is in operation and how it goes about its business, and it articulates the museum's professional standards regarding objects left in its care. The policy serves as a guide for the staff and a source of information for the public'* [12]. The policy defines professional standards for collecting and collection care: preservation, accession, deaccession, documentation, handling, research, display, lending and borrowing, etc. [11-13]. It defines the range and limits of the collection related to the museum's mission and mandate [11]. It should specify what the museum intends to collect and what it will not collect, as well as the scope of the collection. ICOM Code of Ethics Article 2.1 defines the scope of collecting as encompassing themes, geography, time, materials, as well as the quantity and quality of collected objects [14]. Additionally, any other special considerations, such as accepting donations subject to conditions, should also be considered. It should also specify how and under what conditions the museum will acquire objects, such as by gift, bequest, purchase, transfer, or loan [13]. The policy is to fulfill the museum's obligations to society and its collection by maintaining all objects to the highest standard and best practice. Museums can demonstrate their knowledge of standards and effectively address issues by following *best practices* [16]. The policy should serve as a guide for management and staff and a source of information for museum users, and stakeholders, and should be published publicly so that staff may invoke it when necessary [11]. Museums cannot afford random activities around the collection. This could lead to wasted money or building collections not truly relevant to the museum's mission. Random acquisition results in collections that do not add to the museum and the loss of opportunities to acquire objects that may represent a real priority for the collection. It may also increase the financial cost of maintaining the whole collection at an appropriate level. Thus, museums should state the condition of objects to be collected. The Metropolitan Museum of Art collection policy (hence, MMA CMP 2023) states: *"All works should be in or capable of being returned to, an acceptable state of preservation, unless the deteriorated physical condition is integral to the meaning of the work. The Museum must be able to display, store, and care for the proposed acquisition according to generally accepted museum practices."* (MMA CMP 2023, section 4-A) [17]. This is especially true when it comes to collecting items that require a high cost to preserve them, which is not proportional to the museum's capabilities [11,18]. As part of its approach to new acquisitions, the V&A CMP considers

this scenario stating that: *'The Museum will also take into account limitations on collecting imposed by such factors as staffing, storage, and care of collection arrangements. [Concerning the Physical Condition] If necessary conservation measures are not feasible, an object will not normally be acquired'*. (V&A CMP article 4.2.13 [19]. According to the Code of Ethics, the governing body must have a collection policy in place: *"The governing body for each museum should adopt and publish a written collections policy that addresses the acquisition, care, and use of collections. The policy should clarify the position of any material that will not be cataloged, conserved, or exhibited."*(article 2.1) [14]. Collection management policy can be more accurately defined as a set of well-written and well-explained policies, and procedures. Museum policies even vary from one museum to another. Each museum can establish additional policies for acquisition, disposal, documentation, preservation, exhibition, and research. These policies can be separate or part of the collection policy [11]. The acquisition policy is a written document that defines the scope and methods of collecting, relevant procedures, and decision-making. It can be a separate document (e.g. Queensland Museum Acquisition Policy) [20], otherwise a dedicated section in the collection policy. The ICOM Code of Ethics articles 2.1-2.11 focus on acquiring collections [14]. Objects may be added to collections through gifts, bequests, purchases, exchanges, excavation, or any other transactions by which the title to the objects passes to the museum. Each museum should establish its criteria and methods of collecting. The policy should also state clearly the procedures to be followed in accessioning; who makes the final decision, what records must be made of the process, when the records are to be made and by whom, and where the records are to be maintained [12]. A section of MMA CMP is dedicated to acquisitions. It describes the scope, methods, decision-making levels, tasks, and responsibilities of collecting: *'Curators should propose exceptional works of art for acquisition to the collection that significantly further the Museum's stated mission. All works should be in, or capable of being returned to, an acceptable state of preservation, unless the deteriorated physical condition is integral to the meaning of the work. The Museum must be able to display, store, and care for the proposed acquisition according to generally accepted museum practices. The Museum is committed to the principle that all collecting be done according to the highest standards of ethical and professional practice'* [17]. In order to shape the collections of a museum, museums have collection policies. The policy is a set of principles that govern the process of collecting, lending, disposing, caring for, and accessing collections. An acquisition policy can assist museums in avoiding collecting items that are not relevant to their mission or in filling gaps in their collections. Acquiring and documenting acquired objects should also be performed with the utmost care to avoid silly mistakes.

4. Acquisition Methods and Practice at the Egyptian Museum

Accessioning is the formal process involved in accepting and recording an item as an object in a museum's collection

and its inventory. A record of the acquisition, accession processes and all relevant documents accompanying the object should be kept and preserved [21]. According to article 2.1 of the museum code of ethics, this process should be applied to all collections, whether part of the permanent collections or acquired for research and educational purposes as study collections. The ICOM Code of Ethics outlines the general guidelines for acquisition and accessioning which museums should follow in the preparation of their policies [14]. The Codes should also guide institutions that have not yet considered a collection policy. Even though the EMC seeks a written collection/acquisition policy, it is well managed. These traditions have been passed down through museum practices. The RCMDD protocol sets the current methods and steps for acquisition, accession, and museum inventory [11]. There were, however, minor differences in steps and regulations were noticed throughout the interviews conducted. The differences include the formation of an acquisition committee, the actual steps, and the decision-making process. A comparison of the acquisition and disposal committees' activities in the RCMDD protocol and in the curatorial department reveals some noteworthy differences. Hereafter, we outline, discuss, and assert these issues [10,22]. The RCMDD protocol sets the steps for newly accessioned objects. It covers the procedures for registering a newly acquired object in the Museum System (hence after TMS), i.e., in the Journal d'Entrée as the official register book. According to the RCMDD protocol, the majority of the objects being accessioned fall into four categories:

- 1) gold or other precious objects from recent excavations or magazines.
- 2) objects from SCA storage magazines that have been brought for an exhibition, and the museum recommends acquiring.
- 3) objects that have been in the museum's basement for an extended period and have now been registered for the first time.
- 4) recently repatriated objects. The Associate Registrar for Permanent Collections leads all accession activities for new acquired objects [10]. For identifying the newly acquired objects, usually the Associate Registrar for the Permanent Collections or a department head is consulted by a curatorial staff member(s) (usually the section head) who will be responsible for the object from the upcoming accession, fig. (2-a). The object can be in the museum already (in the basement or elsewhere). The object can be brought in from a recent excavation, a magazine, repatriated, or brought into the museum for any other reason [10]. The manual describes the accession procedures in fourteen steps: [Identify object; begin Accessioning checklist; obtain decree (If applicable); Fill Out Accessioning Form, fig. (2-b); Assign JE number; Process accessioning form; Mark object with ID number and do number check; Photograph Object; Fill Out JE; Create Object Record in Database; Create Location Records in Database; Get Record Approved; Create Object File; Do a Condition Report.] [10].

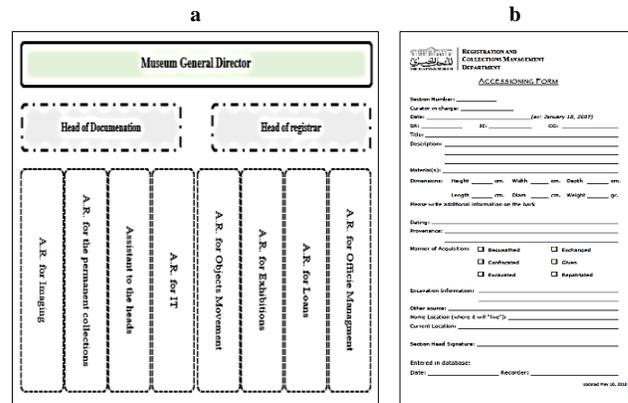


Figure (2) a. organization chart outlines the personnel structure of the RCMDD office at the EMC, b. accessioning sheet for new acquisition at the EMC

According to the scheduled interviews with collection managers and curators, new acquisitions may actually require fewer steps. This includes forming a committee, identifying the objects, taking photographs and measurements, giving the object a new inventory number in the Journal d'Entrée, and ending the process with numbering the object and storing it in the appropriate section under custody of a curator. It is noted that the curatorial staff is unaware of the exact steps the RCMDD protocol describes. However, they are responsible for overseeing and participating in all the museum's committees. They rely on museum practice to achieve tasks more easily. Following the museum's scope of collecting and the criteria outlined above, the curatorial staff described the acquisition process as follows: *Step 1*: the director decides whether to acquire the object or not. *Step 2*: forming a standing committee for accession (three curators including one senior and the curator who shall receive the object(s), and a registrar, and sometimes a conservator and photographer). In *step 3*: the committee identifies and checks the object(s). *Step 4*: the registrar fills out the Accessioning Form; and assigns the JE number to the object; *step 5*: the committee prepares an accession report. *Step 6*: The registrar processes the accessioning form; *step 7*: mark the object with the ID Number and do a number check; *step 8*: photograph the object; *step 9*: fill out JE and then create an object record in the database (or vice versa). Sometimes, it takes a while to enter the inventory in the register book; *step 10*: create location records in the database; *step 11*: get the record approved; *step 12*: create an object file. *Step 13*: do a condition report (*It might be made when they check the object(s) at step 3*) [22]. A museum's director or vice director usually forms a standing committee for acquisitions from the staff members who are present at the museum on the day in question, according to the curator interview. As part of the committee, which usually consists of three or four curators, at least one First or Chief Curator is required [22]. Per dr. Lotfy Abdel-Hamid's advice (Deputy director for archaeological affairs (the curatorial department)), the committee should include a curator from the basement section (where the objects should be stored), a movement member (security), and a registrar if the acquired objects are repatriated or confiscated. In this case, it is recommended

that repatriated objects be placed in secure storage in the basement. Then, the committee decides whether to enter the objects into the journal (accession register) if the museum will acquire them or to give them a PV number if they fall outside the scope of the museum and are to be transferred to another museum [22]. A committee of three to four curators, a registrar, and the curator responsible for custody must be formed to access objects from archaeological sites, archaeological storage, or other museums into the JE, fig. (3) [22]. Hereafter are some examples of recently acquired inventories, along with the procedures for registering them. The object(s) should be entered into TMS in any of the following cases:

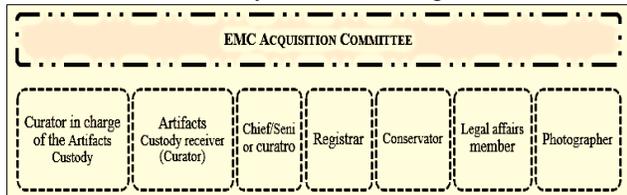


Figure (8) the formation of the standing committee for new acquisition at the Egyptian Museum of Cairo. (© the author)

4.1. Accessioning repatriated artifacts to TMS

As soon as repatriated artifacts arrive at the museum, they should be stored temporarily in the basement until the investigation and documentation committee achieves its work [10]. Once the museum decides to acquire them, they must be assigned a journal number. The exception to this rule is confiscated artifacts (confiscated objects are seized artifacts from someone holding the object illegally; e.g. antiquities smugglers or dealers) [10]. The object in this case will be given a serial number of the date of arrival instead. Until the case is resolved and the museum receives the official document preceding the acquisition procedure, it cannot be added to the permanent collection. Based on the interview with the basement's head curator, the museum created a special register for confiscated artifacts written in Arabic where all the confiscated artifacts under open cases in the court can be documented and tracked until a final decision can be made. The basement's head curator who is also responsible for the collection controls the register [22]. Here are some examples of repatriated objects that recently entered into TMS: **a)** JE 101100, a limestone funerary stela that has a figure of a man lying on a bed. Repatriated from France in 2017, and accessioned in 2021 [23]. **b)** JE 100424, a stone vessel with two handles, L. 24cm. Repatriated from Germany in 2016. **c)** JE 100900, a painted red stopper in the form of a man. Made of clay, and pigment, H. 16 cm, W. 11.5 cm. Also, JE 100910, an inscribed plate, h.3 cm, D. 14 cm. Repatriated from Australia in 2022. **d)** JE 101200, an alabaster cup in the shape of a lotus flower. Repatriated from Spain in 2021. For more examples of Repatriated artifacts, check *Journal d'Entrée* (JE) and the Museum database [23]. In 2016, the Museum General Director issued an order not to accession the repatriated artifacts into TMS (in the JE) but instead assigned them a provisional number (PV. number) only when needed for objects' tracking either for exhibitions or conservation purposes. It is noted that only repatriated objects considered for short-term exhibition were assigned a PV number, and thus not all repatriated artifacts

were given a provisional number at that time. She clarified this as a temporary action due to the unsuitable situation after the 2011 revolution that affected the work at the museum and SCA for years. This causes a delay in accessioning the repatriated artifacts into TMS. The General Director of the museum at that time explained that during the interview (Sep. 2023). In 2022, the SCA General Secretary issued an order to keep entering the repatriated artifacts consistently into the journal (JE), and the museum was instructed to reschedule the delayed task. As a result, the museum was overburdened with the heavy task of completing all the objects that had been on hold for years. The Basement section together with RCMDD office prepared object files for the repatriated artifacts at a regular time upon their arrival at the museum. However, no inventory was given during that period. The museum completed the entire task by June 2023 [22]. In many cases, repatriated artifacts are not within EMC's scope of collection, and therefore should be transferred to another museum after investigation. For instance, Coptic and Islamic artifacts are to be transferred to the Coptic and the Islamic Museum of Art. In addition, it should be noted that the museum may enter repatriated artifacts into the provisional register (PV.) rather than the journal. It is necessary to keep track of these artifacts when objects are selected for an in-house exhibition. In the following section [4.4], examples will be provided, such as PV.2018.30/31/32/33/34, which were repatriated from Italy in 2018.

4.2. Accessioning a newly arrived object from archaeological sites into TMS

EMC's collection is primarily based on official excavations in Egypt. Its collection is primarily derived from archaeological excavations. (About the different collecting methods, check the *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums*, 8-13 [articles 2.1-2.11]. Because of the rapid growth of the EMC collection, the building was unable to accommodate the new arrival collections. As part of the SCA's policy, only the gold and valuable artifacts should be transferred to the museum (estimated value is not stated and thus it is a curatorial decision that the museum decides), while the rest are stored in the archaeological storage facilities located at each archaeological site where artifacts can be found. It is noted also that the SCA Policy defines the scope of collecting of the EMC among other SCA museums. [Official document] [10]. Following RCMDD's protocol, the Museum's scope of collecting specifies the types of objects the EMC collects [10,14]. The EMC scope includes gold or other precious objects from recent excavations or magazines and objects from SCA storage magazines that are being used for an internal exhibition and will be kept by the museum as part of the exhibition [10]. Examples of accessioned objects from excavations are as follows: **a)** JE 100200/S.R.1.15404/ Excavation no. 21318. A gilded S-shaped fragment, made of bronze and gold, from Kom el-Nana. Excavated in 1991 by Barry Kemp for the EES. (JE 100200 [23]. **b)** JE 100300/ SR.1.15490. A gold ring with a stone bezel, made of gold and carnelian. JE 100300 [23]. **c)** other examples include JE 101259; 101260; 101262; 101263; and 101264. Gold leaves dated back to the Late Period, from the SCA excavation in Tell el-Deir, New Damietta in 2022 [23]. It is

noted that these objects are examples of golden objects that are required to be transferred directly to the EMC following the SCA's instructions. In addition to gold artifacts, the museum collects also precious objects from excavations. However, recent inventories indicate that other less important objects have been added to the collection without explanation. There are several funeral objects included in the list, including JE 101290 (Exc. 20367), two bronze statuettes excavated by Waziry, the SCA; as well as JE101295, a faience statuette of a deity; and JE 101296, two bronze fragments of Osiris. These are examples of less important objects that have been entered into the JE register, perhaps because the SCA General Secretary excavated them. The rules have been broken in this case [23]. Both the Museum Director for archaeological affairs and the RCMDD's head emphasized that artifacts that come into the museum from excavation and archaeological sites get priority to be entered into TMS. The acquisition committee must be held on arrival day, and the Associate Registrar for Permanent Collections leads all accession activities and provides the committee with the new inventory number (Journal d'Entrée serial), and the acquisition sheet [22]. The accession process proceeds through the predefined procedures.

4.3. Accessioning an object from the basement collection into the TMS

Among the main categories that the scope of collecting covers is the stored collection in the basement. The objects that have been in the museum's basement for an extended period are among the objects to be accessioned and added to the collection [10]. For various reasons, thousands of objects have been stored in the basement for decades without documentation. It can be classified into two main types: **a)** Holdings of the museum have been stored in the basement due to the fast growth of the museum collection and the crowded galleries over its history. **b)** Collections from excavations, archaeological sites, and belongs of other museums that have been transferred and stored temporarily in sealed boxes in the basement, mostly for security reasons. These do not belong to the museum, and most of them have been transferred recently to their original SCA holder otherwise to Dahshour archaeological storage. Investigations and registrations for the rest of these collections are still underway at the museum [22]. In 2007, the EMC began registering these collections [2, 23]. The priority was given to objects that form a part of the EMC's collection; however, since the staff has no accurate information on whether these objects have been entered into the museum inventory or not, this is a highly complicated task. Moreover, in most cases, there is no information about their provenance, history, and context [22]. Consequently, the registration team needs to investigate these objects and decide whether to include them in the entry journal or the new provisional register. The provisional register is the case if there is any expectation that the object(s) might have been recorded previously. The latter is the case if there is any expectation that the object(s) might be previously recorded. During 2015/2016, a study was conducted on a sample to gain further insight into the intricate documentation situation concerning collection in the basement. As a component of this analysis, a

coffin set and cartonnage from Lahun, which were not included in the inventory, were studied and published [14]. In normal circumstances, the museum enters objects either into JE or the new provisional register. The latter is the case if there is any expectation that the object(s) might have been recorded previously register (PV), or previously into the Basement Special Register (now stopped). The Basement Special Register was created in the 1960s, alongside the Special Register of the permanent collection, but its end date is unknown (no accurate date is documented). As of 2004, the museum has tracked the objects in this register, but no new inventories have been added [22]. The basement collections are checked and investigated and Excel lists are prepared as part of inventory preparation. Apart from the objects that already have accession numbers in the JE, CCG, and/or TR, the museum might accession new objects to the JE after investigation for conservation, study, and display. The selected objects for transfer to other museums will receive an official *PV. number* for tracking purposes [22]. Examples are as follows: **a)** S.R.8/3832; JE 35593, an inscribed stopper from Memphis [24]. This is an example of objects that were entered into the collection in the past and were placed in the basement. Luckily, information for its record and context were retrieved, and thus, the object kept its inventory number, in addition, it was added to the basement special register [23]. **b)** S.R.8f/961(8); TR 8.2.69.9 (38) (8), seal. Also S.R.8F/934(8); TR.8.2.69.9 (11) (8), a scaraboid seal, given by king Farouk [23]. **c)** S.R.8M/8; Exc. No. M 646, a limestone fragment with relief from Nag el-Madamud [23]. There is no associated data to check whether it has been entered into TMS yet. It is noted that the museum started in 1960s to register the basement collection in a dedicated Special Register and not in the JE. The special register of the basement consists of eight volumes, each starting with a serial from (1) onward, and given a distinguishing code consisting of an abbreviation (one letter indicates object type), plus the serial number, and an example is [S. R.8v.145], where the letter (v) indicates (various), used for unclassified objects [22]. This special register is stopped, and now the basement collections are given either a JE number or a PV. number (temporarily). The PV. number is the provisional number that often is given to artifacts found in the basement without any records. Gradually, the inventories of the basement collection are integrated into TMS database after a full revision. The museum ensures integration of all the inventories either unique or provisional into its system for tracking and management. However, one must book an official appointment to access the full records of the basement collection, since the work is still ongoing. On her side, the head of the basement section described the documentation work as a complicated and long-run process. The team checks the objects and investigates their history and records, tracking them; after that, they prepare object lists as a first step for accession, each object is given an ID number for identification and tracking. Then, at a certain point, these lists can be accessioned to TMS and given an accession number (JE) for each object [22]. Examples of new inventories for the basement collection in TMS are as follows: **a)** PV.2020.35, a wooden coffin box decorated with funeral scenes on the outer sides. H. 65 cm L. 208 cm. The database labels its source as [Found] since

it was found in the basement without any record. **b)** PV. 2020.37, a wooden coffin box decorated with funeral scenes on the outer sides. H. 38 cm, L. 162 cm. Its source labeled as [Found in the basement]. **c)** PV.2020.10, a gilded bronze seated Osiris statue. H. 15 cm. its source labeled [Found]. In the normal case, the museum enters the basement collections into the museum journal (JE) after a full check and a final decision for accession. However, there are a few cases in which objects were entered into the journal (JE), although there was a decision to be transferred to another museum. One example is a box containing the Egyptian Antiquities Service's excavations by Zahi Hawass in Kom Abu Billo in 1975. The objects were selected for the GEM, and since they have no inventories, they must be accessioned first before being transferred. In this case, the objects were entered into the journal with the serials [JE 100020-100081c] instead of being given PV. numbers as they should have been according to the survey of TMS and the Accession Journal. According to the protocol book, an object can be accessioned to the JE from the basement only when the museum decides to keep it as a part of its permanent collection [23]. Examples are as follows: **a)** JE 100020, painted pottery bowl, ex, no, T.S.2175, Kom Abu Billo. **b)** JE 100021; ex. No. T.S.2199, Pottery Dish from Kom Abu Billo. **c)** JE 10080; Exc. No. T.S. 2157, a pottery Vase with round body from Kom Abu Billo [23]. Since the museum did not intend to acquire the collection, including these objects in the JE was not the best decision. It was reasonable to consider inventories in the provisional register rather than the permanent register. The museum would be able to transfer these objects to the GEM without adding them to its permanent inventory system. The importance of establishing a policy for collecting, documenting, and acquiring objects is emphasized in this case. Additionally, it demonstrates errors made by the museum, such as adding an object to their inventory that was not intended to be accessed.

4.4. Accessioning an object into the temporary register instead of the JE.

In certain cases, the object must obtain a temporary number instead of the JE since it is not sure whether the museum will acquire the object(s) and add them to its system and permanent collection or not. There are various cases to provide a *PV. number*, a provisional number; to the object, these include objects which are brought to a temporary or traveling exhibition, etc. The RCMDD office uses Provisional Numbers (PV.) to track certain types of objects in the database and the manual system in any of the following cases: **1)** Objects in the basement for which no previous number has yet been found, but which may have been registered earlier; **2)** Objects that come into the museum from outside for purposes other than in-house exhibitions, before they are accessioned, or before they leave the museum again if they do not yet have an official SCA number (a museum or magazine number); **3)** Objects that come into the museum temporarily as part of an SCA loan, either on their way to the loan or on their way back from the loan, if they do not have adequate official SCA ID numbers. It must be noted that excavation numbers are not considered adequate, as they are not official SCA numbers.

Database format: [PV. Year. Three-digit sequential number (e.g. PV.2008.088)]. (It also noticed that objects coming temporarily for exhibitions do not fall into this category, as exemplified and clarified later here) [10]. Examples of objects are entered into the temporary register and given *PV. numbers* are as follows: PV.2018.30 gilded painted cartonnage funerary mask. It was repatriated from Italy in 2018. In this case, the item was assigned a PV number for a temporary in-house exhibit before a final accession decision was made. According to TMS: PV.2018.30 (checking date: Aug. 1, 2023) [23]. The same action was taken for other inventories that belong to the same collections, including: PV.2018.31 gilded painted cartonnage funerary mask; PV.2018.32, a gilded painted cartonnage funerary mask; PV. 2018.33; and PV.2018.34. The EMC database holds more examples of objects accessioned into the PV register [23].

4.5. Accessioning an object temporarily for an in-house exhibition or traveling exhibition

The database lists numerous objects entered for a short loan for a traveling or in-house exhibition from other museums or archaeological sites. Often, such objects have their inventory at the home museum; however, objects from archaeological sites/excavations might not be registered yet. Thus, the RCMDD usually gives these objects a temporary accession number (E. abbreviation for Exhibition/event) and labels them as (on loan). Exhibition Numbers are numbers assigned to objects with no official identification number (JE, CG, TR, SR, Other Museum, or Magazine number) coming temporarily to the Egyptian Museum for In-house Exhibitions. It follows the format: Exhibition number (E. year. sequential number) + three-digit sequential number: e.g. E.2007.05.001 [10]. These objects would be accessed in the database but not in the JE since they are not intended to be added to the permanent collection [10]. Official SCA museum numbers take various formats (e.g. Luxor J. 136 or MIA 3944). The formats for each museum can be found in the SCA Museum Codes [10]. In the case of objects that have accession numbers at their home institution, examples are as follows: **a)** MIA 3944, a glass Lamp. A short loan from the Museum of Islamic Art for an exhibition. **b)** Coptic J 7646 (Reg. 7646). A pottery decorated lamp was on loan from the Coptic Museum. Also, Coptic J. 1354, a cross decorated with a small cross in the middle. **c)** JE 4 (CG 38867/ SR.3-7939b), a limestone statue of Isis holding a small figure of Osiris Mummy on her lap. H.19.5cm, late period, excavated by A Mariette 1858. Alexandria National Museum. Also, JE 86098 (SR.1/9894). A gold libation vase of Amenepope, beloved of Osiris, gold. From San el-Hagar, Tanis, 21st dynasty. [Borrowed from Alexandria National Museum for a temporary exhibition] [23]. These two objects were first received by the EMC, then deaccessioned and transferred to the Alexandria National Museum. This is why they have a JE number. In the case of an object that has no accession number at its home institution, the museum assigns it an event number (E.). For example, check E.2007.04.69; E.2007.04.66; E.2007.04.60.2; E.2007.04.61; examples are as follows: **a)** E.2007.05.04 [Excavation: Inv. No. Coptic Msc.3]. Book of Isaiah, a loan from Alexandria National Museum. The object was given a temporary number when it was brought to the EMC, because it was not registered yet at the Alexandria National Museum. This case indicates

the absence of CMP not only at the Egyptian Museum but also in the SCA Museums Sector. Before lending any objects, a museum should first accession the object(s) to its permanent collection and assign an inventory number. **b)** E.2007.04.61 [Reg. 2a]. The lid of the Canopic Jar, pottery from Dra Abu el-Naga in a loan from NMEC [23]. In addition to the unique numbering systems, the RCMDD office has created several temporary numbering systems so that un-accessioned objects can be tracked in the database. These Unique Temporary numbers are not in use by the rest of the museum; they are for internal record-keeping only, including: Provisional Numbers; Exhibition (E) Numbers; and Temporary Gallery Numbers [10].

5. Results

According to the discussion and analysis conducted at the Egyptian Museum, the following results were found:

- *) Despite having a consistent system for accessioning, the museum repeatedly made mistakes due to the lack of policies, misleading decisions and staff's lack of awareness.
- *) Lack of Established Policies for collecting and collection management: The absence of the collection policy has led to inaccurate decision-making, inconsistent inventory systems, and errors in accessioning and documenting objects.
- *) Need for Unified Accession System: It is strongly recommended limiting the creation of new inventory systems and unifying accessioning processes into a single system to avoid overloading the system and repeating mistakes. This issue is currently considered at the museum; however, the absence of a decisive policy for collection management has caused repeated breaches of rules and non-compliance with regulations.
- *) Curatorial Practices and Policies: Interviewed curators emphasized the importance of adhering to museum practices and policies, but the lack of a clear policy outlining curatorial duties and responsibilities hinders effective management.
- *) Sharing Curatorial Experience: The current generation of curators lacks curatorial experience due to the retirement of several curatorial experts. To improve management and adherence to standards, curatorial expertise should be shared among staff and integrated into policy updates.
- *) Challenges with Temporary Acquisitions: The museum is facing challenges adhering to RCMDD accession procedures, especially concerning the collection stored in the basement. This collection was temporarily moved to the museum from archaeological sites and other museums for security reasons between 1967 and 1973. Although the collections were intended to be temporary, they were never returned. Consequently, the museum must now manage these items, deciding whether to incorporate them into its permanent collection or permanently transfer them to another destination.
- *) The basement collection, currently managed separately from TMS, needs to be integrated and unified with it. The EMC must implement clear policies for acquisition and collection management to ensure consistent and accurate management of its collection. Staff members require adequate

training on best practices and adherence to strict guidelines for collecting, inventorying, documenting, and disposing of artifacts.

6. Discussion

Section [4] illustrates the acquisition and accessioning practices at the EMC according to curatorial practice, collecting procedures, and the RCMDD's guidelines. The inventory examples under discussion uncover several critical actions that occurred due to the absence of a collection/acquisition policy. The absence of established policies has led to inaccurate decision-making, an inconsistent inventory system, and errors in accessioning and documenting objects. It explains why an object might be entered twice in the JE, or not even at all; why an object might be assigned a number in the general catalog, the special register, or the temporary register instead of the JE. Rashed discussed several examples of duplicate inventories and inconsistent documentation systems [2]. The absence of the policy causes an object to be accessioned to TMS (into the Journal d'Entrée in one case and assigned a PV. number in another). Section [3,4]. provides examples of objects that were left without inventories in the museum basement. Instead of being entered into the Provisional Register (PV.), these objects were mistakenly entered into the official journal (JE). Despite this, the objects were actually supposed to be transferred permanently to the GEM. This occurs when registrars/curators are not instructed to follow a consistent accessioning system and a well-organized policy to guide the work in the same sequence at all times. Examples are used throughout the paper to clarify and expose the exceptional and unanticipated errors that were made during the accessioning objects. Critical issues concerning the EMC documentation have been extensively discussed in previous studies [2]. In contrast, this paper focuses on collecting practices and procedures. It concludes that the EMC aims to implement policies for acquisition and collection to ensure that these processes align with the museum's standards and to prevent repeated mistakes in collection management. In addition, staff must undergo sufficient preparation and training on the best practices for managing collections. They should be knowledgeable about collection policies and procedures, and understand the significance of these policies for effective collection management. They must adhere to strict guidelines for collecting, inventorying, documenting, and disposing of items if required by the museum. Based on the analysis of the EMC collection management, one can draw the attention into certain issues: **1)** To alleviate the overload in the system, it is strongly advised to limit the creation of new inventory systems. The museum currently has multiple inventory systems that have been created over time. Accession should be limited to a single unified system which is the JE, in addition to PV for temporal acquisitions. **2)** During interviews, curators highlighted the significance of adhering to museum practices to management. It is not the case due to the lack of a policy that distinctly outlines the duties and responsibilities of curatorial work. **3)** The museum may encounter difficulties and obstacles when adhering to RCMDD accession procedures due to the lack of a clear policy. This issue is particularly apparent when dealing with

the collection, which the museum was forced to enter temporarily acquired artifacts in the permanent register before being transferred to the GEM [check section 4.3]. **4)** In 2023, the basement department lost two of its leading curators to retirement. This poses a risk, as the museum has not yet completed the accession and documentation project for its collections, which requires a twenty-year plan. The work is still in progress, however it increases risk due to the absence of a clear policy that state “how to do” step by step. **5)** Inventorying repatriated artifacts was delayed and put on hold, increasing the likelihood of errors and incorrect documentation [check section 4]. **6)** On certain occasions, the museum received gifted replicas or object reproductions, which were accessioned into the JE and the special register. For instance, the register notes that JE 96279/S.R.4-1542 is a replica donated by V. Golenisheff, with the original piece housed at the Russian Museum. Neither the register nor the database provides information on why an inventory number was assigned to the replica. It is noted also that the museum’s collection should not include replicas. This might explain why curators have not signed for the custody of these items in the special register [22]. The EMC collection contains various replicas, including some from King Fouad I’s collection. The museum received these objects as gifts without confirming their authenticity. To date, the museum has not yet assessed the collection to eliminate fake items. A plan to deal with this matter will not be put into action until a collection policy is created that outlines the legal procedure for disposing of such objects. MMA CMP (2023) has a commendable model for dealing with similar cases stating that: *‘The museum may deaccession but generally does not dispose of works determined to be forgeries. Curatorial departments generally retain these works for study purposes or seek the Director’s permission to destroy the objects; unless it can be determined, that disposal can be accomplished in a responsible manner without confusion to a possible buyer. Works incorrectly attributed or dated may be deaccessioned, provided that the new information or attribution is provided’* [17]. In 2008, the RCMDD office created an inventory system for replicas and educational materials called *Education Number (EDU)* that helps keep track of these items. Its purpose is to assign numbers to objects that are not considered antiquities, which can include replicas, molds created from antiquities, and items like Lego statues in the Children’s Museum. Hopefully, this system would encourage reconsidering the accessioned replicas in the permanent collection. This issue should also be defined in a reasonable manner in future collection policies.

7. Recommendations

The Egyptian Museum should prioritize ethical considerations when acquiring artifacts ensuring that artifacts are obtained legally, and accessioned with proper documentation and provenance. When acquiring new collections, it is necessary that they align with the museum’s scope of collecting. Additionally, the museum should review its collecting scope after transferring a significant portion of its collection to GEM, NMEC, and other SCA museums. This revised scope must

align with the museum’s mission and avoid any potential conflicts with GEM’s collecting scope. Thus, the museum should conduct a thorough curatorial review before acquiring an artifact. This involves evaluating the artifact’s authenticity, condition, and relevance to the museum’s collection. The museum must also consider the cultural and historical significance of its collection, its strengths, and its outstanding value on the national and international levels. To sum up, the museum needs to consider the following recommendations:

- *) The museum’s mission and scope of collecting need to be updated with consideration for the inevitable competition with the GEM and NMEC, and the possible conflict in collecting.
- *) The creation and implementation of acquisition and collection policies is necessary and at the top of priorities.
- *) A committee should be formed to formulate policy, including curators, conservators, registrars, and collection managers. Retired curators should also be included.
- *) The museum should collect and document rare and complex issues related to collecting, accessioning, documentation, and collection management to support policy formulation. The current paper may serve this aim.
- *) Guidelines for acquisition, accessioning, and documentation must be implemented to simplify and explain acquisition and collection policies. This should be accompanied by examples of rules and guidelines that were in use in the past. The actions and steps for accessioning objects must be defined and consistency followed by the curatorial staff and registrars.
- *) It is recommended to encourage sharing curatorial experience among staff and implementing policies that integrate museum practice into policy updates.
- *) A training program should be offered regularly to museum staff to enhance their ability to document and inventory the museum’s collections. It is important to take into consideration the vital role of curators in assessing the value and significance of potential acquisitions and documentation.
- *) Due to the complexity of managing the basement collection and its accession procedures, it is essential to follow consistent instructions for accessioning and documentation. Additionally, duplicating staff and equipment is necessary to facilitate the completion of this task.
- *) To effectively manage the basement collection, it is recommended to develop thorough accessioning and documentation procedures and guidelines that should be align with TMS and the collection policy.

8. Conclusion

This paper highlights the critical need for the EMC to establish comprehensive acquisition and collection management policies. Despite the museum’s efforts to maintain professional standards in documentation and curatorial practices, the absence of written policies has led to inconsistent decision-making, inventory errors, and duplication. Through an analysis of past and current practices, context, and interviews with staff, the paper identifies key issues and proposes actionable solutions. To enhance collection management, the EMC should prioritize the development and implementation of acquisition and collection policies. It requires also updating the museum’s mission and collecting scope, particularly in light of the competition with other major museums

in Egypt. Additionally, the basement collection must be integrated and unified into the Museum System (TMS), and provide comprehensive training for staff on best practices in documentation and inventory management. By addressing these challenges, the EMC can ensure the effective preservation, documentation, and use of its collections, aligning with policies, ethical standards and professional practices in museum management.

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