

# RESHAPING THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE IN REGIONAL MUSEUMS THROUGH INTERPRETATION PLANS: A CASE STUDY OF THE KOM USHIM MUSEUM IN FAYOUM-EGYPT

BY

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[AR] إعادة تشكيل تجربة الزوار في المتاحف الإقليمية من خلال خطط التفسير: متحف كوم أو شيم بالفيوم- مصر كحالة دراسية  
تركز هذه الدراسة على أهمية التفسير الجيد لمجموعات المتحف في إرضاء الزوار. حيث توجد علاقة بين رضا الزوار وتكرار زيارتهم. لذلك، فإن الموضوع  
الرئيسي لهذه الدراسة هو تقييم تجربة الزوار داخل متحف كوم أو شيم في الفيوم - مصر وخطته التفسيرية الحالية لمجموعاته المعروضة لمعرفة مدى  
فعالية تجربة الزائر فيما يتعلق بالتفسير الحالي للمتحف؟ وما مدى شمولية عرض وتفسير قيمة معروضات المتحف والسرد التاريخي المصاحب لها؟ اعتمد  
الباحثون على جمع البيانات بعدة طرق كاستخدام الاستبيانات الموزعة على زوار المتحف، وإجراء مقابلات مع بعض الأكاديميين المتخصصين، وأولئك  
الذين يعملون في متحف كوم أو شيم على وجه الخصوص. كما اعتمد الباحث على مجموعة من معايير التقييم المستمدة من مراجعة الأدبيات وتناول  
حالتين من نماذج التفسير الناجحة لهذا النوع من المتاحف الإقليمية، وهما متحف الأقصر ومتحف النوبة. أظهرت نتائج تحليل البيانات أهمية التفسير  
الجيد والمعلومات الواضحة عند التعامل مع المجموعات المعروضة ودورهم الحاسم في إرضاء الزوار وفي تشكيل تجربتهم في المتحف. أظهرت نتائج  
الاستبيانات أيضًا الحاجة الملحة لتطوير خطة العرض التقديمي والتفسير لمتحف كوم أو شيم لإعادة تشكيل تجارب الزوار. وبناءً على ذلك قدمت هذه  
الدراسة في النهاية أفكارًا مقترحة لتطوير خطة التفسير في متحف كوم أو شيم.

[EN] This study focuses on the importance of a good interpretation of museum's collections on visitors' satisfaction as there is a relationship between visitors' satisfaction and repetition of their visit. Therefore, the main issue of this study is to assess the visitors' experience within the Kom Ushim Museum in Fayoum-Egypt and its current interpretation plan for its exhibited collections to see how effective the visitor's experience is in terms of the museum's current interpretation, and how comprehensive the presentation and interpretation of the value of the museum's exhibits and the accompanying historical narrative are. The researchers relied on collecting data through several ways, using questionnaires distributed to museum visitors, and interviewing some academic specialists, and those who are working in the Kom Ushim in particular. The researchers also relied on a set of evaluation criteria that derived from literature review and dealt with two cases of successful interpretation models for this kind of regional museums, the Luxor Museum and the Nubian Museum. The results of the data analysis showed how good interpretation and clear information are important when dealing with the exhibited collections and that they have a crucial role in the visitors' satisfaction and in shaping their experience in the museum: the results of the questionnaires also showed the urgent need to develop the Kom Ushim's presentation and interpretation plan to reshape the visitors' experiences. Accordingly, the conclusion of this study presents ideas for developing the interpretation plan at Kom Ushim Museum.

**KEYWORDS:** Visitor's Experience, interpretation, regional museums, Kom Ushim Museum.

## I. INTRODUCTION

This paper is a summary of a master thesis conducted at the University of Sharjah. It discussed in-depth the Kom Ushim museum and its current situation. There are a number of definitions developed by specialists, researchers, and academics to define the museum as well as those from scientific/professional institutions such as the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and the American Association of Museums (AAM). These definitions are always changing as a result of the ever-changing role of the museum due to changes in society and people's needs. The ICOM has set several definitions for the museum to adapt with the changes and developments. The first definition was set in 1946, then it was updated in 1951, 1961, 1974, 1989, and again in 2007, when ICOM defined the museum as: «A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment». During the last ICOM conference, held in Kyoto, Japan, in 2019, while discussing the subject of museums as cultural hubs, a new definition was proposed to develop the concept of the museums in order to cope with the expanding role of museums in societies, and the search for a new concept is still ongoing<sup>1</sup>.

Emanuela Conti<sup>2</sup> (2018) mentioned that museums are becoming important institutions and have a wide range of roles in society, in education, culture, entertainment, addressing social issues, preserving heritage or in identity. They have become more important than in the past and reflect the extent of development and progress of society. According to the UNESCO study, the number of museums worldwide has increased approximately 60% since 2012, which pushed UNESCO to issue its recommendations in 2015 for the protection and the promotion of museums. These recommendations have also concentrated on the museum's collections, diversity and their role in society<sup>3</sup>. The key and most important priority of many museums is to improve the visitor experience. A museum without visitors is unlikely to survive<sup>4</sup>. Visitor experience was described and analyzed by many researchers. These studies have shown that visitors' experience in general is usually shaped by a variety of factors; for instance, the overall setup, the services, the exhibition design, the colors and many other factors<sup>5</sup>. According to Sam Ham (2003)<sup>6</sup> [experience] was nothing more than thinking. The more visitors were provoked to think about a place or a thing, the deeper

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<sup>1</sup> ICOM 2019: 30.

<sup>2</sup> CONTI 2017: 21-34.

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO 2021

<sup>4</sup> WALLACE 2013: 3.

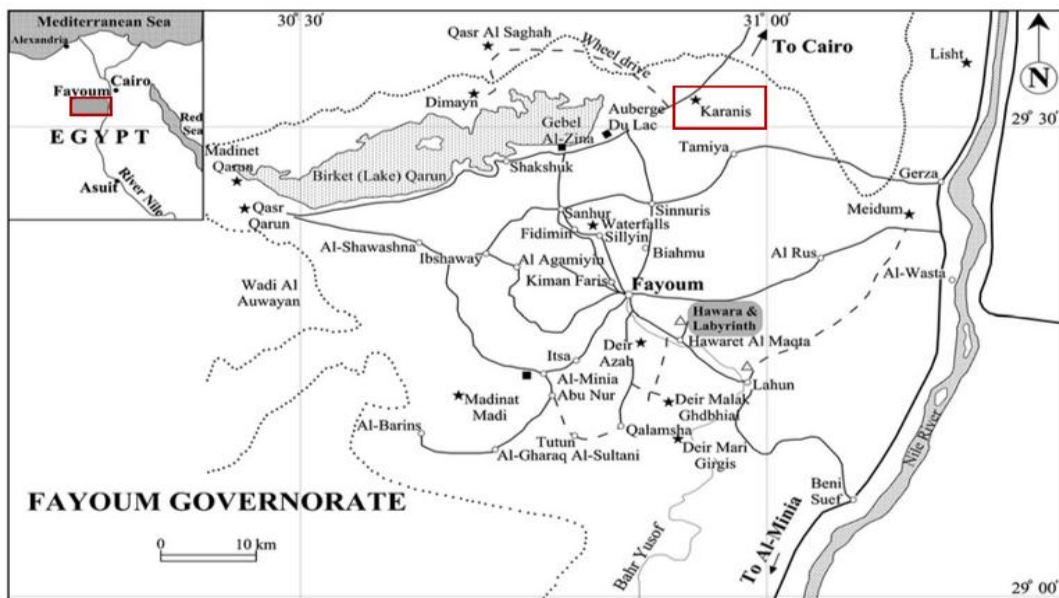
<sup>5</sup> WALLACE 2001: 12,36

<sup>6</sup> HAM & WEILER 2003: 3-8.

their experiences were. Susan Cross (2012)<sup>7</sup> also mentioned that there are many factors that contribute to shaping a good visitor experience, such as how easy the museum could be found, the attitude of the staff, museum facilities (like the state of the toilets), in addition to the interpretation. Therefore, a good interpretation makes the visitor's experience deeper and more meaningful. Many other historical studies have shown that interpretation is a prominent part of shaping the visitor's experience<sup>8</sup>.

On the other hand, many museums continue to use traditional methods of displaying and interpreting their collections without any thought of their visitors needs and how the museum could be upgraded by modern technologies and applications. These museums rely on the abstract display of objects behind the glass of the showcases, which sometimes shape negative and boring experiences for visitors. One of these museums is the regional museum of Fayoum Kom Ushim Museum. Kom Ushim is one of Fayoum's villages; it is the first village on the Cairo desert route. It is considered to be the entrance to Fayoum Governorate, located 30 kms north of Fayoum [FIGURE 1]. It contains the ruins of the ancient Greek town Karanis<sup>9</sup>, where the remains of the Greek temples dedicated to the worship of the official deity of Fayoum (Sobek) are located. Along with the remains of mud brick houses and several tombs, it is worth mentioning that over 5,000 papyri have been discovered in Kom Ushim village.

Kom Ushim was chosen for this study because of the importance of Fayoum as an historical region and a city in Egypt that has a deep history with many archaeological sites and finds that are stored in Kom Ushim.



[FIGURE 2]. Location of Karanis (Kom Ushim) in Fayoum.

[https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Location-of-the-Egyptian-city-of-Fayoum-showing-the-area-of-Hawara\\_fig6\\_257785978](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Location-of-the-Egyptian-city-of-Fayoum-showing-the-area-of-Hawara_fig6_257785978), (Accessed on 12 Nov, 2021)

<sup>7</sup> CROSS 2012: 10-13.

<sup>8</sup> SEDMAK & BREZOVEC 2017: 141-150.

<sup>9</sup> KEENAN 2003: 119-139.

## **II. REASERCH PROBLEM AND SIGNIFICANCE**

Kom Ushim is considered to be the main museum that presents the history of the Fayoum region. The preliminary observation of the museum showed that it has some weaknesses in its interpretation of its collections and was judged to be a negative and boring experience for visitors. The museum's role is to interpret the collections and communicate relevant information and the stories behind it in an informative and attractive interpretation that helps in enhancing the visitors' experience. Therefore, this study focuses on making an assessment of the current interpretation plan of collections at the KOM USHIM in order to recommend an appropriate new interpretation framework for its visitors. This assessment was based on a set of questions. This research tries to determine the importance of the Kom Ushim as a regional museum and the role that it is currently playing; how sufficient the visitor's experience in the current interpretation of the museum is; how comprehensive the museum's presentation is, the effectiveness of the interpretation of the museum's objects and the historical stories behind it; what is missing in the Kom Ushim and what should be done about those omissions.

This is the first study to tackle this important issue in Kom Ushim. It aims at highlighting the importance of developing the interpretation of the Kom Ushim collections in a way that illustrates the importance of re-interpreting of the museum's archeological collections to visitors in a new way, based on authentic and attractive information.

## **III. METHODOLOGY**

This research was conducted by applying two main approaches, the quantitative and the qualitative. The qualitative data was collected from the review of literature, interviews and field observation. The quantitative data was derived from questionnaires that were distributed to the museum's staff, visitors, scholars, and students of the faculty of archaeology of Fayoum University who visited the museum as a result of the college's regular scientific visits to the Museum.

## **IV. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1. Museum Visitor Experience**

Museum experience can be seen as an interaction or a dialog between the visitor and everything around him<sup>10</sup>. The visitor's experience used in this study reflects the concept of an individual's immediate, subjective and personal reaction to an activity outside their natural environment. Based on the fact that the visitor's experience is a «personal experience». Don Enright (2015)<sup>11</sup> mentioned that the visitor's experience is

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<sup>10</sup> FORREST 2015: 51-59.

<sup>11</sup> ENRIGHT 2015. 2.

the sensory feedback of the visitor during the visitor's experience period, from the desire phase, through the visitor's travel and arrival phases, to the memory of the visit. The internal experience of the visitor is like the external experience, begins before the visit and continues; the cognitive processes produced by the visit become part of the many pre-existing systems memories of previous lessons, attitudes and moral values.

The museum visitor's experience has many definitions, and it is hard to describe it precisely. It is been mentioned that the visitor's experience begins with entering the museum. It also includes all interaction during the visit<sup>12</sup>. Others see that the visitor's experience as beginning before that, when a person decides to visit a specific museum. Lilla Wallace (2001) mentioned that Museums have to put themselves into visitors' shoes, just like any corporation or organization that deals with the general public through multi-faceted checklists of whether a visitor's experience can be made or break, it covers anything from the moment a person chooses to visit the museum, for instance: Is public parking sufficient and easily accessible? Is the interpretation of the museum's collections clear to the visitors?<sup>13</sup>

According to Gkatsou (2018), «the museum is not the sum of the objects it contains but, rather of the experiences it triggers». She also mentioned that in order to assess the visitor's experience, museums have to study the needs and requirements of visitors. Many museums study their visitors' experience to identifying and remedy obstacles, guide the interpretation's efficacy, evaluate visitor's satisfaction, measure their interaction with the museum, and identifying various attitudes and feelings about the museum. Visitor's satisfaction and experience are essential to the museum<sup>14</sup>.

## 2. Factors Shaping Visitors' Experience

This subject has been discussed and tackled by many researchers such as Center, 1998; Hennes 2002; Packer & Ballantyne 2002; De Rajos & Camerero 2006; Gkatsou 2008; Wearing & others 2008; Booth & others 2011; Kirchberg & Tröndle 2012; Association of Independent Museum (AIM) 2013; Papp 2013; Forrest 2015; Enright 2015; Sedmak 2017; Santoso 2019; Preko et al. 2020. From those, AIM 2013 and Enright et al. 2015 focused on the factors that shape the visitor's experience, while Kirchberg & Tröndle 2012; Papp 2013; Gkatsou 2018 and others focused more on interpretation as an important factor in shaping visitor's experience. In addition, Forrest 2015 stated many factors that shape the good visitor experience, such as the museum's design, exhibition, and the museum's environment and atmosphere. Other researchers like Eleni 2006 and Wiber 2009 mentioned that the museum's services are very important factor for visitor's experience and first impression.

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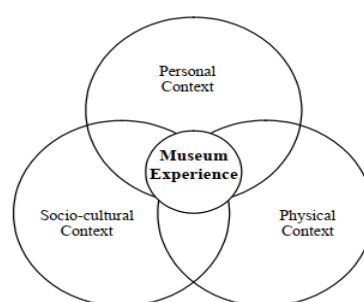
<sup>12</sup> PACKER & BALLANTYNE 2016: 128-143.

<sup>13</sup> WALLACE 2001: 3-8.

<sup>14</sup> GKATSOU 2018: 15-24.

According to M. de and M. Camarero 2006<sup>15</sup>, when visitors' expectations are met or surpassed, satisfaction is achieved. In general, the visitor experience is usually shaped by a variety of factors. Some researchers believe that the visitor's experience is closely related to the general environment or the general atmosphere inside the museum, as well as the design, whether the design of the museum itself or the design of the objects displayed inside, it is one of the factors that attracts visitors and creates a positive experience for them<sup>16</sup>. Others have mentioned that the museum can provide a good experience through its staff who should be nice with visitors. This highlights the importance of staff not only in delivering an appropriate service but also in supporting the organization through shaping visitors' views by the word of mouth<sup>17</sup>.

There are many other studies that dealt with the most important factors that affect the experience of the visitor, one of those leading studies dealt with the visitors' participation or engagement as an important factor in shaping their experience. Victoria Wallace from the Association of Independent Museums (AIM) mentioned that visitors were glad to stand at a respectful distance behind glass to view the museum's objects, when conventional museums were conceived, but they may actually prefer a variety of options for their participation, rather than just listening or watching in silence. They may want experiences<sup>18</sup>. Susan Cross noted that, the museum can shape the experience of the visitor through easy access to the museum, whether physically or online, as well as through the services that the museum provides to its visitors, such as the condition of the bathroom and the cleanliness of the place<sup>19</sup>. According to Gorman<sup>20</sup>, experiences in the museum include three main contexts: 1 the physical context (museum's rules, design and architecture, facilities, technology, and activities) 2 the personal context (personal beliefs, motivations, interests, previous experiences, expectations, and prior knowledge) and 3. the socio-cultural context (human engagement between visitors and museum's staff) [FIGURE 2].



[FIGURE 2]. A model shows the contexts shaping the experience of the visitor. GORMAN 2008: 6.

<sup>15</sup> DE ROJAS & CAMARERO 2006: 50-61.

<sup>16</sup> FORREST 2015: 51-59.

<sup>17</sup> DE ROJAS & CAMARERO 2006: 50-51.

<sup>18</sup> WALLACE 2001: 5:7.

<sup>19</sup> CROSS 2012: 10-16.

<sup>20</sup> GORMAN 2008: 23-24.

### 3. Museum Interpretation

The term interpretation means translation, «the translation of languages from one language to another», but it has a special meaning in heritage sciences such as sites and museums. For example, interpretation in museums refers to how the museum explains the objects to visitors<sup>21</sup>. The first to use the term «interpretation» was Johann Muir in 1871 in a learning context, he wrote: «I will interpret the rocks»<sup>22</sup>. Over time, the use of this term evolved into a profession one when, in 1916 it became a profession. An «interpreter» is the person who interprets heritage sites and national parks for visitors, and the use of this term developed until it was related to heritage in 1940 (interpretation of heritage). In 1957, Tilden used the term «interpretation» to describe education and laid down some principles and defined it as «educational activity for discovering the relationships and meanings by using original objects»<sup>23</sup>. The term «interpretation» continued to evolve over time, especially after the founding of the British Heritage Interpretation Association in 1975. The Burra Charter of 1979 defined the concept of interpretation as: all the ways of presenting the cultural significance of place<sup>24</sup>. One of the best definitions is that of Interpretation Canada, which was developed for use within Canada. This definition has been used over the past 17 years, describing interpretation as «A process of communication that reveals the meanings and links of natural and cultural heritage through the participation of objects, landscapes and artifacts<sup>25</sup>». In 2008, The ICOMOS developed a definition for interpretation as «a wide range of potential activities to raise public awareness and improve knowledge of the site of cultural heritage»<sup>26</sup>.

### 4. Role of Interpretation in Shaping Visitor's Experience

In the last few decades, visitors' experience in many museums has been of a great prominence on the assumption that high satisfaction of visitors leads to increasing numbers and positive support for the museum. Visitors agreed that one of the most important factors that can shape and influence their experience is the interpretation of the content of the museum. This provided some valuable insights into the role of interpretation in shaping visitor experiences. Several heritage studies proved that interpretation is an essential factor of the experience of the visitor<sup>27</sup>. The displayed artifacts in a museum are the only thing left of historical events in the past and they

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<sup>21</sup> AMBROSE & PAINE 2006: 78.

<sup>22</sup> BABIC & et AL. 2026: 22- 23.

<sup>23</sup> TILDEN 1977: 31.

<sup>24</sup> FORIST 2018: 3-9.

<sup>25</sup> VEVERKA 2015: 11-29.

<sup>26</sup> ICOMOS 2008: 377-383.

<sup>27</sup> SEDMAK& BREZOVEC 2017: 141,150.

continue until the present to tell us the story of the past<sup>28</sup>. Thus, these objects can be revived again through interpretation, since what distinguishes the museum is not the number of objects it contains, but the way that the visitor is connected with the place, and how through effective interpretation, it connects the present and the past, which can lead to an increase in the level of satisfaction of the visitor and shape memorable experiences for the visitor<sup>29</sup>.

A meaningful interpretation should answer questions in visitors' minds when they see objects such as, why this object was made, and how was it made? These questions reveal many important aspects that are more important from an archeological point of view, such as the cultural aspect of this object, as it reflects the culture of the community at that time. The material from which the piece was made may also reflect the economic condition of the community and its beliefs, as it may also reflect the schools of art at that time through the sculptural style. Therefore, the significance of the object lies in the story behind it and the historical event that it witnessed<sup>30</sup>. As a result, the correct interpretation of the exhibited objects, as mentioned by Tilden, leads to an increase in the visitor's understanding and awareness of the importance of the pieces, which leads to a sense of appreciation, and this leads to his participation in the protection of the objects [FIGURE 3]<sup>31</sup>.



[FIGURE 3]. The conception of Tilden's theory © Diagrammed by the researchers.

According to Schwarz's study, in order to create an interesting interpretation that attracts visitors, we should first ask what makes the visitor fascinated. The results of his study confirmed that the interpretation of the storytelling makes the visitor so fascinated<sup>32</sup>. Stories are an effective way of learning that affect visitors more than just numbers and dates. They make visitors relate to their feelings with people and situations, attracts them and sympathizes with them, as narratives are shared more easily than information. Stories give visitors a desire to learn more about events, stories, interactions, participation, and to form opinions that lead to a constructive dialogue that results in different perspectives, as people benefit from their interactions during the visit, which will enhance their experience<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> BECK & CABLE 2011: 31.

<sup>29</sup> CROSS 2012: 7-10.

<sup>30</sup> CAVILLIER 2018.

<sup>31</sup> TILDEN 1977: 38.

<sup>32</sup> SCHWARZ 2015: 74-79.

<sup>33</sup> BABICK & et AL. 2026: 22-23.



## 5. Interpretation Tools

Lourenço and Wilson (2013)<sup>34</sup> mentioned that interpretation tools (techniques) are the explanatory materials used by the museum to explain its collections and are the most direct way to communicate with visitors [FIGURE 4]. They are divided into traditional tools, such as labels and banners, and technology-dependent tools. Everything that contributes to the interpretation of the collections in the museum is called an interpreting tool.



[FIGURE 4]. Simple methods of displaying museum objects.  
*Sharjah Archaeology Museum © Taken by the researchers.*

- Traditional or classical tools are a group of elements that can be found in the museum to help interpret the displayed collections, whether written elements such as posters, wall texts, banners, labels, printed brochures and illustrative image. There are many studies on how to write these explanatory materials in a way that is consistent with the needs of the visitors in terms of the size of the font and the number of words. It should be noted that the readability of the text on labels is as important as their content<sup>35</sup>.
- Information and Communication Technology ICT tools or digital technology applications such as touch-screens, audio guides, Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR) [FIGURE 5], hologram technology, mobile applications are part of the advances in the use of technology in museums as elements of efficient interpretation<sup>36</sup>. Technology has become valuable and attractive to visitors<sup>37</sup>,

<sup>34</sup> LOURENCO & WILSON 2013: 744-753

<sup>35</sup> GORMAN 2008: 15-19.

<sup>36</sup> KULESZ 2016: 6-24.

<sup>37</sup> VAZ FERNANDES & VEIGA 2018: 37-43.

Although technology tools allow visitors to interact, they rely primarily on traditional tools and information about displayed objects.



[FIGURE 5]. Using VR and AR tools for interpretation in a museum.  
[Http://www.radicalvr.ca/5-benefits-virtual-reality](http://www.radicalvr.ca/5-benefits-virtual-reality), (Accessed on May 25, 2021)

These tools contribute to creating a suitable atmosphere for interpretation<sup>38</sup>. Appropriate lighting is an important interpretive tool, allowing visitors a new experience and exciting atmosphere [FIGURE 6]<sup>39</sup>. The wall colors of the display, the shape of the showcases and their size, and even the way in which the pieces are arranged, contributes to a good interpretation<sup>40</sup>.



[FIGURE 6]. The museum interpretation, lighting system, illustrative banners, <http://www.Nubia museum.com>, (Accessed on May 28, 2021)

It is worth noting that some museums, such as the Luxor, Nubia, and Tanta museums, used traditional tools for interpretation in an interesting and appealing way by using an appropriate lighting system and eye-pleasing colors, as well as arranging objects in a good manner within showcases.

<sup>38</sup> ROBERTS 2014: 191-209.

<sup>39</sup> GMAHLING 2020.

<sup>40</sup> GORMAN 2008: 15-18.

## V. SUCCESSFUL EXAMPLES OF INTERPRETATION IN REGIONAL MUSEUMS

Many regional museums in Egypt such as (Luxor Museum, Nubian Museum, Suez Museum and Tanta Museum) have a clear presentation scenario, and good and clear interpretation of the objects and the stories behind them. In addition to the use of tools that contribute to clarity of presentation and interpretation, as well as contribute to increasing visitors' satisfaction with the museum, such as the lighting system, colors, and showcases, and the method of arranging objects within the showcases, in addition to the presence of banners and labels with sufficient and brief information to explain the exhibits.

### 1. Luxor Museum

The Luxor Museum is located on the Nile cornice in the center of Luxor city, (old Thebes). Luxor Museum was the first regional museum in Egypt. The building has two floors and is distinguished by a magnificent architectural design that complements the method of presentation and interpretation. The museum follows the historical sequence (chronological) to interpret its objects. The display begins with the presentation of the masterpieces in the museum [FIGURE 7]. The most important reasons for the clarity of the interpretation plan in the Luxor Museum are the design of the building and exhibition halls with their very attractive lighting and effective use of color, the clear presentation of the history (or archaeological context) of the finds through posters, banners, and labels with very clear information, and the use of appropriate showcases.

Samia Abdel Aziz, the General Director of Upper Egypt Museums, said that interviews had been conducted with Egyptian and foreign visitors about their view of the museum and the interpretation of its collections, and that the result was very positive regarding their satisfaction with the interpretation and that they had exciting experience<sup>41</sup>. As a result of the researcher's interviews on the Luxor Museum's experience as a regional museum; almost all participants agreed that it is one of Egypt's best and most successful in terms of presentation and interpretation. The clarity of the displays and the successful interpretation of the museum's objects are the most important factors toward achieving visitor satisfaction.

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<sup>41</sup> ŠINĤŪ 2019.



[FIGURE 7]. Luxor Museum display © Taken by researcher, 2018.

## 2. Nubian Museum

The Nubia Museum has been classified as one of the best regional museums in Egypt. It was established by UNESCO in cooperation with the Egyptian Government following the campaign to save the monuments of Nubia. It opened to the public in 1997<sup>42</sup>. The reason for its establishment was the need to have a museum in which the artifacts of Nubia were collected and displayed to interpret the distinctive historical, cultural, and environmental heritage of the region from the earliest times to the present<sup>43</sup>.

The Interpretation Plan follows the historical sequence of Nubian antiquities from the earliest to the most recent, including the pharaonic, Coptic and Islamic antiquities, then a section on current Nubian heritage. It is worth noting that the Nubia Museum contains not only antiquities and ethnographic displays, but also environmental record data, excavation archives, and photographs and films of sites and monuments<sup>44</sup>. The museum's building design is inspired by ancient Egyptian and Nubian architecture that blends harmoniously with the surrounding rocks and hills. It was awarded the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 2014<sup>45</sup> [FIGURE 8]. The museum employs a variety of interpretation tools that complement the presentation concept, such as traditional tools (banners, posters, and brochures), as well as

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<sup>42</sup> BRANIA 2011: 73-89.

<sup>43</sup> ATTALLAH & MOZAMMEL 2019: 23-27.

<sup>44</sup> MEGUID 1996, 5.

<sup>45</sup> NUR AL-DIN 2014.



[FIGURE 8]. The landscape of the Nubia Museum, [www.Nubian museum.com](http://www.Nubian museum.com), (Accessed on May 28, 2021)

Technology-based tools such as display screens, as well as other tools for lighting, colors, and exhibition design as, and showcases [FIGURE 9].



[FIGURE 9]. The main hall of the museum shows the museum's colors, lighting system, <http://www.Nubian museum.com>, (Accessed on May 28, 2021)

The former director of the Nubia Museum, Hosni Abdel-Rahim, indicated that interviews were conducted randomly with visitors for their opinion on the museum and the exhibition, and that all Egyptian and foreign visitors had an excellent experience. He also said that it is the most important museum of its kind in the way it integrates Egyptian and Nubian civilizations, and that it is one of the most popular museums that also attracts local residents. He also reported among many of the foreign visitors, it was their second visit to the museum.<sup>46</sup>

## VI. Kom Ushim Museum

Kom Ushim Museum is located at the entrance to the ruins of the ancient Greek town of Karanis<sup>47</sup>. The building was initially used to display the products of local handicrafts of the surrounding villages (pottery and baskets). As a result of the

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<sup>46</sup> ABDEL-RAHIM, H.: Personal communication (December 15, 2020).

<sup>47</sup> KEENAN 2003: 119-139.



continued excavations of the University of Michigan and Cairo University<sup>48</sup> in the Karanis area, many objects were discovered and some of them are displayed in Kom Ushim.

Thus, the museum's first function was to be a site museum to display the archaeological discoveries. The museum building was initially used to display the products of local handicrafts of the surrounding villages. When the excavations in Karanis began to discover artefacts, the idea of establishing a museum to display the discovered antiquities emerged. Thus, the museum's first concept was a site museum to display the nearby archaeological discoveries. In 1974, the museum's building consisted of a single hall, and part of it continued to display local products and handicrafts until 1993. Then, when the Egyptian Antiquities Authority decided to expand the existing *ŠINHŪ* upper floor displayed Coptic and Islamic antiquities. It is worth mentioning that the museum followed a chronological order in displaying its objects from the oldest (pre-history) to the recent (Modern era of Muhammad <sup>c</sup>Alī).



[FIGURE 10]. Kom Ushim building. <https://fayoumegypt.com/kom-ushim-museum/> (Accessed on May 22, 2021)

## 1. The Current Interpretation of the Museum

The museum displays about 320 objects. A lot of objects are not from Fayoum and are not related to Fayoum region or sites. The display and interpretation is thematic. The first floor has nineteen showcases [FIGURE 11] with objects that address daily life and ancient handicrafts such as textile, pottery, glass, statues, jewelry, wood, and etc. [FIGURE 12].

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<sup>48</sup> WILFONG & FERRARA 2014: 47-48.



[FIGURE 11]. The ground hall of the museum and one example of the museum showcase  
<https://fayoumegypt.com/kom-ushim-museum/> (Accessed on November 10, 2021)



[FIGURE 12]. Examples of bad display in the ground floor © Taken by the researchers.

The second floor contains nine showcases that are supposed to tell about funeral rituals, as well as two mummies (considered to be highlights of the museum (masterpieces)). The display in this hall addresses the concept of death in ancient Egypt, including funeral rituals and its tools. The display begins with a false door and an offering table, followed by a cartonnage mask, a statue of an unknown seated man, while in the second part of the hall, which begins with the funeral procession banner, has showcases displaying portraits and icons [FIGURE 13].



[FIGURE 13]. Examples of the displayed objects in the second hall on upper floor ©  
Photographed by the researchers.

Out of the field observation and many visits to Kom Ushim, the researchers determined there were many negative points in the museum. These include:

1. The showcases are very old, cramped, and unsuitable for the displayed objects.
2. The background color of the showcases is inconsistent. Some have a red background, others have a green background, and others do not have any background, causing visual confusion for the visitor.
3. The lighting inside the museum is not appropriate, as the museum uses both natural and artificial lighting, which may endanger the objects, such as textiles and papyrus.
4. The interpretation provided to visitors is not clear enough, and it must be explained by the curator to be understood.
5. Explanatory labels are not informative and unclear, the physical size and font is relatively small, and they are placed in positions that are hard to notice and read.
6. Some objects are displayed outside showcases (Aphrodite statue and Hawara painting). Thus, they are vulnerable to damage because visitors can touch them.

## **VII. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

### **1. Field observation**

Questionnaires were distributed to the students, and a general discussion about the museum and their opinions was held, the most important of these questions were as follows:

- What do you think of the museum's overall setup?
- Is the museum's display clear to you?
- What do you think of the labels? Do they provide enough information about the objects, and are they readable?
- Would you come back to the museum if you had the chance?
- Do you think the museum reflects the history and sites of Fayoum?

The questionnaire analysis revealed that the vast majority of students responded negatively to the questionnaire items, specifically the lack of clarity of the museum's collection displays and interpretation, as well as the lack of clarity and sometimes absence of labels. The results of the questionnaire and discussion helped suggest a new interpretation plan and how to overcome the weakness in the museum's displays. When conducting discussions with local people, as well as conducting surveys and discussions on social media platforms, the researcher concluded the following:

- A large number of local people are unaware of the existence of a museum in Fayoum. Those who are aware of it stated that the museum is in a modest condition and that they will not visit again.



- The number of visitors to the museum is very limited. The majority of those who came were originally planning to visit the ancient archaeological site of Karanis and happened to pass by the museum.
- In terms of building, presentation, and interpretation, as well as services, the museum is very modest when compared to the rest of Egypt's regional museums.
- Many of the objects on display in the museum lack accurate information.
- The unclear interpretation has a significant impact on the comprehension of the presentation, which has an influence on the visitor experience.
- A large number of the objects on display in the museum do not belong to Fayoum.

In addition, many objects of unknown origin are displayed, which is contrary to ICOM Code of Ethics, element Nr<sup>o</sup>.5 of section four, that states that museums should avoid displaying or using objects whose source is doubtful or unknown<sup>49</sup>.

## 2. Interviews

The final component of qualitative data was face-to-face interviews and phone calls. The vast majority of these interviews were face-to-face. The first interviews were with the museum's director and staff. Most responses indicated that they preferred the display before redevelopment because it was based on a historical sequence over the thematic interpretation of handcrafts and death in ancient Egypt. They also mentioned the display of many artifacts that do not belong to the Fayoum region's history, which is inconsistent with the mission as a regional museum.

In their response, the interviewees agreed that the current display was not extensively studied because the museum's inauguration was unexpected, which resulted in the objects being chosen quickly. They agreed that the museum is not very popular with visitors. Furthermore, that the museum should display objects discovered in the Fayoum region.

The second type of interview was conducted with some faculty members of Archeology in Fayoum University to determine their opinions about the museum and their experience in it. Most of the responses mentioned that the museum does not express a clear message about Fayoum, particularly with the display of many objects that do not belong to Fayoum. The interviews also included questions about the Luxor and Nubian Museums, both of which were said to use attractive interpretation tools, such as color, lighting systems, collection arrangement, and methods of interpretation, as well as services that both museums offer for their visitors such as the status of the bathrooms, the Cafeteria, souvenir shop, library and lecture hall.

In conclusion, it was confirmed that there is no clear policy for displaying the collections in Kom Ushim, that the objects were not presented well, and there was no

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<sup>49</sup> LEWIS 2006.

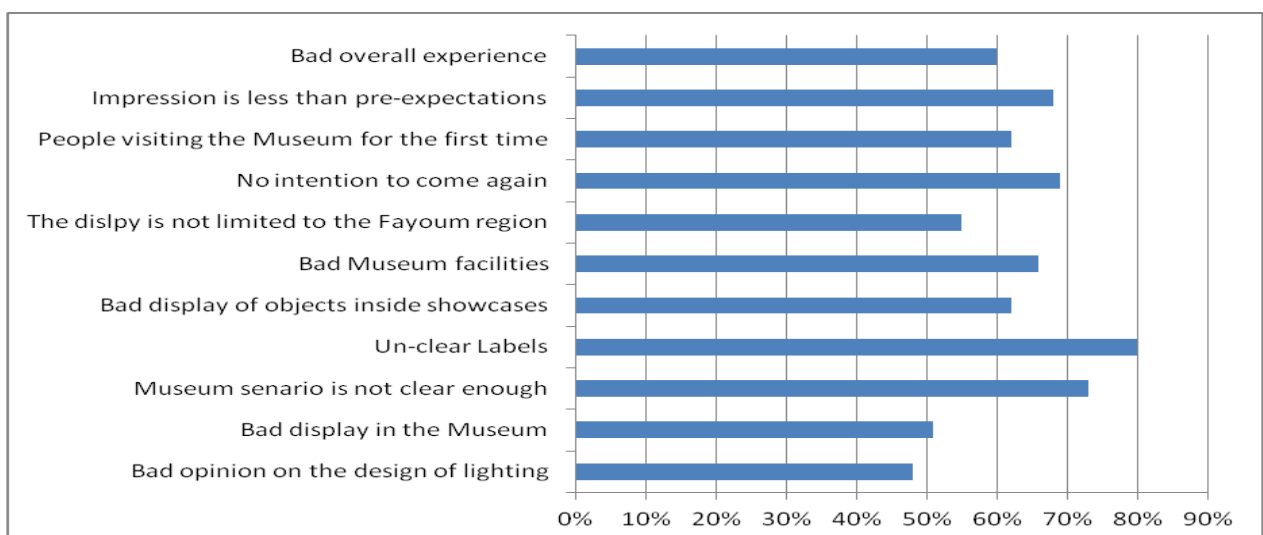
explanation of their significance or purpose. Moreover, the museum doesn't address the history and civilization of the Fayoum region.

### 3. Questionnaires

The researcher conducted two different types of questionnaires. The first was distributed randomly to museum visitors and to students from the Faculty of Archeology. One hundred and fifty were distributed and only 130 responded. The second questionnaire was distributed to researchers and scholars who visited the museum. It was distributed to approximately 100 researchers and academics and eighty responded. The questionnaires were distributed to assess their opinions, feedback, satisfaction, and experience with the museum's collection interpretation [FIGURES 14-15].

#### A. Visitor's Questionnaire [FIGURE 14]:

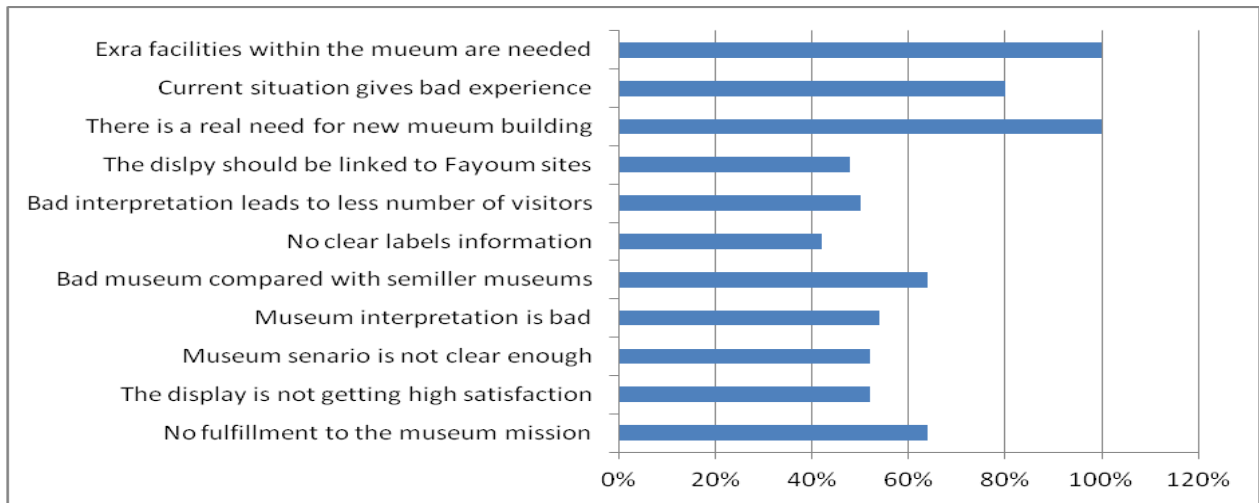
It summarizes the major results of the visitors and student's questionnaire:



[FIGURE 14]: Major results of visitors' questionnaire (130 respondents)

## B.Academics' Questionnaire [FIGURE 15]

It summarizes the results of the academics and scholar's questionnaire:



[FIGURE 15]: Major results of academics and scholars questionnaire (80 respondents)

## VII.CONCLUSION

Analysis of the results indicated how interpretation can play an important role in visitors' understanding of the significance of the displayed objects in the museum and the history associated with them, and consequently, appreciate their value. The visitor's experience is significant in publicizing the museum and encouraging repeat visits. The study's findings show that Kom Ushim needs development of the building and its services. It has a lack of modern applications and technology that contribute to a good and appealing interpretation of the museum. In comparison to the Luxor and Nubian Museums or other regional museums, Kom Ushim lacks the necessary means and tools to carry out its mission. It is worth noting that the percentages also showed that the number of visitors to the museum from the local population is very low, owing to the fact that the majority of the population is unaware of the existence of a regional museum. The majority of museum visitors who responded to the questionnaire and interviews who were aware of the museum's existence stated that it was their first visit to the museum and that they would not return. They suggested that focusing on geographical areas and archaeological sites in Fayoum is the best display method for the KOM USHIM. This method could provide information about Fayoum, the most important areas of the region (archaeological sites), According to the ICOMOS chart for interpretation and presentation, the first step in protecting heritage and cultural property is interpretation, because effective interpretation contributes to increasing awareness about the importance of the displayed objects and their history, which helps in showing appreciation for their value, and consequently their preservation. As a result, this study proposes a new interpretation plan for the museum's collection to

make it more understandable to visitors. This can be accomplished by following the steps below:

1. The presentation and interpretation plan for the museum must be developed in accordance with its mission as a regional museum expressing the heritage and history of Fayoum region.
2. Re-obtaining important pieces, such as the famous Fayoum portraits, discovered in Fayoum but are now displayed in other museums. They could function as the museum's masterpieces. Likewise, statues of the main Fayoum deity Sobek that were transferred to the Crocodile Museum in Kom Ombo, could also be transferred to KOM USHIM, as it is illogical that the museum that addresses Fayoum history does not have objects that represent the ancient religion of Fayoum or its official deity. Furthermore, the museum could also house parts of the Sobek temple that were transferred from the museum to the garden of the Greco-Roman Museum in Alexandria.
3. To fulfil the International Council of Museums' mandate that the museum should be in the service and development of society. The museum's activities should be expanded so that it can reach a larger number of local residents as a target audience.
4. The museum new building may include several exhibition halls depending on the interpretation plan. Each hall displays an archaeological site from the Fayoum and tells the story of the excavations, their dates, and the objects that were discovered.
5. The museum could employ a variety of tools, including simple ones such as banners, posters, labels, and images, as well as interactive technology-based tools such as AR, VR, audio guide (as mentioned before in chapter 2), mobile applications (It's a Guide application, the app identifies the objects and art work by scanning them by the smart phones) and interactive touch screens, ect.
6. As a short-term plan, first, inventory and categorize the museum's collections into as major and important objects that will be re-displayed in the proposed scenario, such as mummies and Fayoum portraits, and the objects that do not belong to Fayoum and should be moved to storage or exchanged with other museums. Second, selecting the most important objects that represent each of Fayoum sites, whether from the museum or from Fayoum storehouses. It is worth noting that there are collections for entire tombs, such as the Hawara collections where the tomb's collections can be fully displayed and supported with appropriate interpretation tools such as illustrations and banners.

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