



THE STORY OF KOM-USHIM MUSEUM: FROM SITE MUSEUM TO PROVINCIAL MUSEUM

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ABSTRACT

This paper recounts the evolution of the Kom-Ushim Museum, which began as a site museum showcasing archaeological artefacts unearthed in the ancient city of Karanis, to a provincial museum featuring artefacts from various archaeological sites in Fayoum. This paper delves into the evolution of the museum, tracing its journey from the uncovering of the Karanis site to its present status. Although there was a lack of comprehensive documentation of the museum's evolution and the exhibiting and collection methods employed at each phase, the museum's history and operations could be reconstructed through scattered information regarding the museum and its collections, as well as interviews with staff members. This paper sets out to recount the story from its inception until now.

KEYWORDS

Karanis, excavations, Kom-Ushim museum- provincial museum- site museum- The methods of display.

1. INTRODUCTION:

The Fayoum is Egypt's governorate. It is located approximately 100 km southwest of Cairo city. The Fayoum is classified as an oasis; like the rest of Egypt's oases in the Western Desert, it is located in a depression; 43 km below sea level, it is the closest oasis to the Nile (Pirelli 2011). Throughout Egyptian history, the Fayoum region has been known by various names. The majority of these were related to Qarun Lake. The region was known as "Southern Lake" during the Old Kingdom. In the Middle Kingdom, it was known as the "land of the lakes" as well as the "land of Sobek." The names 'PA-ym' (the Sea) and 'Mr-wr' (Great Lake) were assigned to it in the New Kingdom. (Abd El-Sattar and Ibrahim 2013, 28-39).

المخلص

تروي هذه الورقة قصة متحف كوم أوشيم الذي تطور من متحف موقع يعرض الآثار المكتشفة في مدينة كرانيس اليونانية الرومانية القديمة إلى متحف إقليمي يعرض قطعاً أثرية من مختلف المواقع الأثرية في الفيوم. تبحث هذه الورقة في مراحل تطوير المتحف، من اكتشاف موقع كرانيس إلى الوضع الحالي للمتحف وطرق العرض في كل مرحلة. على الرغم من عدم وجود توثيق جيد لمراحل تطور المتحف وطرق العرض والمجموعات المستخدمة في كل مرحلة، إلا أنه يمكن وصفها من خلال المعلومات المتناثرة حول المتحف ومقتنياته، وكذلك المعلومات من الموظفين. تهدف هذه الورقة إلى تقديم قصة المتحف من البداية وحتى الآن.

الكلمات الدالة

كرانيس، متحف كوم أوشيم، متحف موقع، متحف إقليمي

The Fayoum is one of Egypt's most beautiful and fertile regions with a rich history of flora, fauna, and archaeology. It has two protected areas designated by the Egyptian government, Lake Qarun and the National Parks of Wadi Rayan. It also has Egypt's only natural heritage site on the UNESCO World Heritage List, the "Valley of the Whales" (Sector 2006). In terms of tourist attractions and archaeological sites, the Fayoum Governorate is considered one of Egypt's richest governorates, which is why it is known as "Little Egypt". Since it has been settled throughout history, from prehistoric times to the modern era, there are numerous archaeological sites of all ages, including the following:

Ancient Egyptian archaeological sites: Silla, Abjeej, Lahun, Hawara, Biahmo, Madinat Madi, Qasr Al Sagha, Fayoum City, Kayman Fares (SHEDT), Ghorab.

Greco-Roman archaeological sites: Umm Al-Braijat (Tibetinos), Kom Oshim (Kranis), Kom Al-Athal (Bakhis), Batn Hurriyet (Tiadelphia), Qasr Al-Banat (Ohimeria), the city of Al-Qutah (Senopios), Hit Gerzeh (Philadelphia), Qasr Qarun (Dionysus), Kom madient el Nahas (Magdola) (Holdaway and Willeke 2017, 93-95).

Islamic and Coptic archaeological sites: Mosque of Princess Aslbai, wife of Sultan Qaytbay, Mosque of Prince Suleiman (the Hanging Mosque), the tomb and minaret of Sheikh Ali al-Rubi, Qantara of Lahoun, Qandar of Khawand Aslbai, Wekalat al-Mughrabi, Monastery of Naqlun, Monastery of Qalamoun, Monastery of Siya, Monastery of Sadmant, Deir al-Ban.

(Al-Alfi 1994, 1-22).

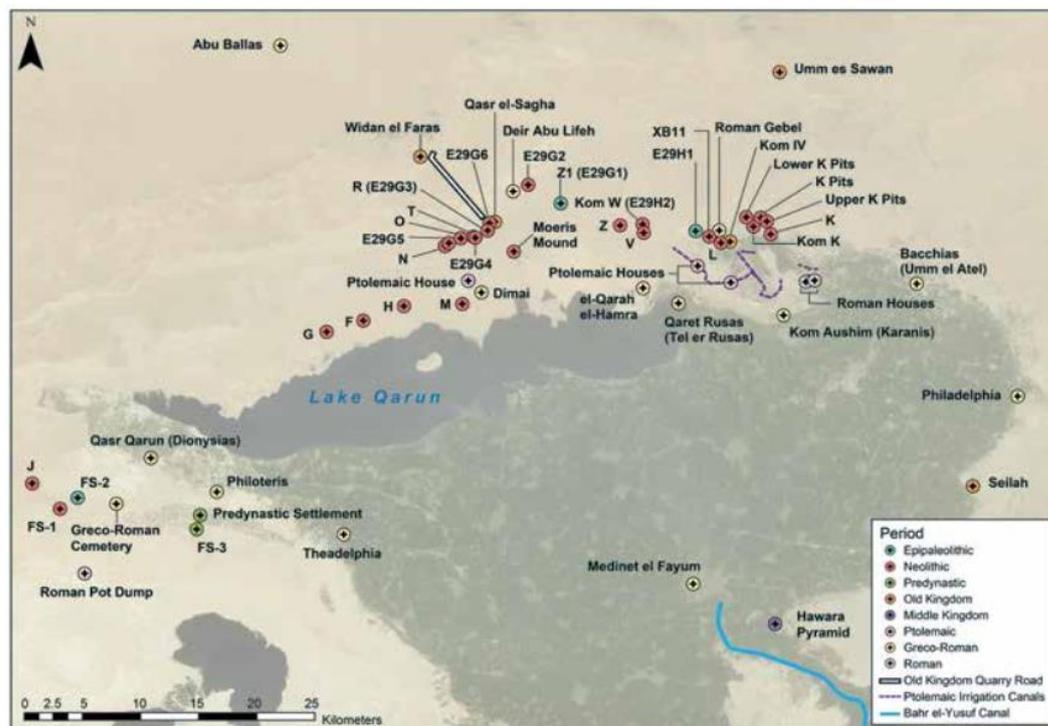


Fig.1. Archaeological sites in Fayoum Province (Holdaway and Willeke 2017).

Kom-Ushim Village: The recent name is Kom-Ushim (ancient name: Karanis) is one of Fayoum's villages; it is the first village on the Cairo desert route. It is considered the entrance to the Fayoum Governorate and is located 30 km north of Fayoum. It contains the ruins of the ancient Greek town of 'Karanis' (Keenan 2003, 119-139). Here, the

remains of 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 were discovered in Kom-Ushim Village. This discovery is regarded as one of the most important discoveries of documents that studied Egypt's economy during the Roman period, particularly in terms of taxes (Badrawi 2018).

2. THE STORY OF THE SITE DISCOVERY

Karanis was one of the Fayoum villages that flourished during Ptolemy II's reign, and it was one of the lands reclaimed during his reign, eventually becoming a prosperous agricultural community. The city was thought to have been settled until the fifth century AD, but evidence and documents from other sites suggest that settlement continued until the seventh century AD. Eventually, the city was almost certainly abandoned in the eighth century AD. The site, known as Kom-Ushim in Arabic, is uninhabited, covered in sand, and deserted for centuries. Because of the increased use of ancient mud bricks known as sabkh for fertiliser in Egypt and farmers repeatedly relocating it from the site of Karanis, papyrus began to appear, drawing attention to the site. (Fayoum 2013) In 1895, Bernard Grenville and David Hogarth of the Egypt Exploration Fund conducted the first controlled archaeological excavations at Kom-Ushim as part of their more extensive survey of the Egyptian Fayoum Region. These excavations were primarily concerned with the collection of papyrus rather than establishing the city's identity or confirming the modern Kom-Ushim relationship with ancient Karanis. The ancient city had been extensively looted, as evidenced by the appearance of large quantities of Karanis papyrus in the antiquities market (Gazda, Elaine K., and Terry G. Wilfong 2004).

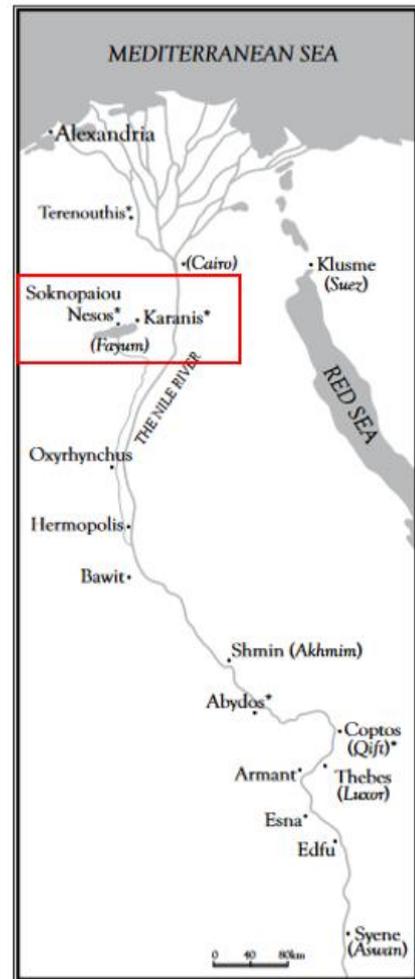


Fig.2. Map of location of Karanis, (Gazda, Elaine K., and Terry G. Wilfong 2004).

In 1924, the University of Michigan began excavations at the Karanis site, led by Francis W. Kelsey, a professor of Latin at the time, to study daily life in the Greco-Roman world. The initial results of the Karanis expedition far exceeded Kelsey's expectations, as thousands of artefacts and papyrus were discovered, revealing the diverse culture of a diverse community, although it was an agricultural village. He also witnessed the return of the expedition's artefacts to Michigan, paving the way for a museum to house the results of his numerous archaeological projects. This museum was later renamed in his honor, the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology. Following the resounding success of his project in Egypt, Kelsey died in 1927, and the Karanis project continued until 1935, yielding the discovery of hundreds of structures and thousands of artefacts and papyrus, as well as the production of thousands of photographs and other archival records (Wilfong and Ferrara

2014, 47-122). According to Sayed Al-Shura, General Director of Fayoum Antiquities, excavations in Karanis were carried out in 1968 by a mission from Cairo University's Faculty of Arts (the excavation results have not been published, but there are a few brief articles in the Annals of the Faculty of Arts, Cairo University, which can be found in the faculty library). The mission in the city uncovered a large number of coffins, houses, and artefacts (Al-Jali 2017).

3. KOM-USHIM MUSEUM FROM SITE MUSEUM TO PROVINCIAL MUSEUM

The Kom-Ushim Museum is located at the entrance of the ruins of the ancient Greek town of Karanis. The building was initially used to display the products of local handicrafts of the surrounding villages (pottery products, baskets) (A number of villages in Fayoum have outstanding traditional handicrafts reflecting the local people's histories and traditions. The Fayoum is well known for its abundance of palms and trees as well as clay, and as a result, it is well known for the production of baskets and pottery. The Fayoum's handicrafts reflect a close and robust connection with the regions heritage. It has a wide range of beautiful, deeply rooted handicrafts crafted by skilled and highly trained artisans who have inherited methods of authentic craftsmanship from Pharonic times. They are experts in a number of handicraft products, such as carpets, palm products, glazed and traditional pottery, and the old museum building was used to display these products) (Heritage 2020).

The idea of establishing a museum arose with the increase in archaeological discoveries in Karanis. Thus, the museum's first concept was a site museum to display nearby archaeological discoveries at random without an organised display scenario. In 1974, the museum's building was a single hall, and part of it continued to display local products and handicrafts until 1993. Then, the Egyptian Antiquities Authority decided to expand the existing hall into a provincial museum to display the finds discovered at archaeological sites in the Fayoum region, after which a second floor was added to the museum. The museum was inaugurated in 1994 (A. S. Al-Alfi 1994).

First Scenario: The first display scenario followed chronological order; the hall on the ground floor displayed antiquities from prehistoric times until the Greco-Roman, while the upper floor (the second hall) displayed Coptic and Islamic findings. In addition to a collection dated to the modern era. The museum staff stated that the layout of the display of the Fayoum objects was clear and provided sufficient interpretation and information about the objects for visitors. The museum was closed in 2006 for restoration, maintenance, and the redevelopment of the display scenario. It was reopened in 2016 with a new display scenario, which now included a thematic interpretation based on the concept of life and death in ancient Egypt (El Shawkey, 2021).

Current Situation of the Kom-Ushim Museum: The Kom-Ushim Museum is classified as a provincial museum within the museum sector of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. The museum displays the way ancient Egyptians conceptualized life and death through objects such as handicrafts and ritual objects. The area of the museum, garden, and administrative offices was approximately 1000 meters square. The museum's area is small compared to other regional museums, because the building was not designed to be used as a museum. The number of items displayed in the museum does not exceed 320 (EL-Aref 2016). The idea of display and interpretation in the museum is based on a thematic interpretation, as it discusses the idea of death, its rituals, and the handicrafts of ancient Egyptians' daily lives. Thus, the ground floor hall displays objects used in

handicrafts by ancient Egyptians, such as textiles, wood, pottery, etc., in addition to the tools used in agriculture, fishing, and livestock. The hall on the upper floor display ritual funerary objects.

The First Hall on the Ground Floor: The ground floor contains 19 showcases to display objects that express the handicraft of daily life, as shown in Fig. 2 and Table 1.



Fig.3. The ground hall of the museum, <https://fayoumegypt.com/kom-ushim-museum/>

Table 1: Showcases of display objects in the first hall and ground floor.

Showcase number	Its content	Number of objects
Showcase No. 1:	Primitive hunting tools such as arrowheads and grain grinding tools which date back to prehistoric and archaic periods.	19 objects
Showcases No. 2 and 3:	Objects dating back to the Old Kingdom and the Greco-Roman period. According to the museum's curator, these exhibits depict the sculptures of ancient Egypt.	16 statues
Showcase No. 4:	Contains a variety of beauty products such as perfume pots, kohl containers, eyeliner, hairbrushes, and other tools.	23 objects
Showcase No.5	Displays a collection of jewelry including bracelets, necklaces, earrings, bangles.	35 objects

Showcase No. 6	Displays pottery such as bottles and plates from different eras.	10 objects
Showcase No. 7	This showcase displays glass bottles dating back to the Roman era.	9 objects
showcase No. 8 and 9	Display textile handicraft and tools such as textile spindles, and tools for shearing wool, spinning tools, a tool for printing on textile, and wooden needles.	42 objects
showcase No. 10	This showcase displays (wood industry) wooden shapes and other tools used in manufacturing them. such as, rectangular pieces of wood, hammers, and a piece of pottery.	8 objects
Showcase No. 11	This showcase displays twisted ropes and a bull's muzzle. They are meant to represent Bedouin life.	4 objects
Showcase No.12	This showcase displays items illustrating Agriculture in Fayoum. It contains palm frond baskets, sieves, iron knives, and a wooden statue. According to the curator, these objects are supposed to express agricultural life in the Fayoum.	9 objects
Showcase No. 13	Displays items associated with the Manufacture of boats The case contains two models of boats and an Ostraka (An ostraka is a piece of pottery which is either painted or contains writing). A piece of pottery with a boat painted on it.	3 objects
Showcase No. 14	This showcase displays terracotta statues (terracotta) according to Cambridge dictionary, is a reddish-brown hard burnt clay that is used for pottery, architectural facades and as a sculpture material.) These kinds of statues were popular during the Roman era and are likened to children's toys of the modern era as they take the shape of small animal statues, head statues, and other various forms.	40 objects
Showcase No. 15	This showcase displays a collection of lamps.	22 objects
Showcase No. 16 and 17	These showcases display manuscripts. One is a paper manuscript while the other seven are papyrus manuscripts. They are dating to the Ottoman period	8 Manuscripts on glass sheets

	and written in Greek and Arabic calligraphy.	
Showcase No. 18	(The middle showcase (A)) This showcase displays a model of a house, a model of a dining table, a model of a chair, and other things.	7 objects
Showcase No. 19	(The middle showcase (B)) this showcases displays a wooden box, three glasses, and one bottle.	4 objects
The exposed objects on the ground floor		
Hawara panel	This is a limestone panel on a high wooden base without a showcase. It is one of the most important pieces on display at the museum because of the story inscribed on it.	One piece
purification basins	They are situated in a small area at the end of the first hall which has a stairway leading to the second hall on the upper floor. This area is filled with banners that explain the most important aspects of the Fayoum, such as its archaeological and tourist areas, as well as its history.	2 objects

The Second Hall on the Upper Floor (The Death): The display concept in this hall is based on death in ancient Egypt, the funeral rituals, and tools used in those rituals. The display begins with a large hall divided into two parts: the first part begins with a false door and an offering table, followed by a cartonnage mask, a statue of an unknown seated man, and the first showcase. Then, we have the second part of the hall which begins with the funeral procession banner shown in Fig. 3 and Table 2.



Fig.4. The first and second parts of the second hall were photographed by the researcher.

Table 2: The showcases of display objects in the second hall on the upper floor.

Showcase number	The content	The number of objects
Showcase No.1	It shows the four canopic vessels in which the deceased's intestines were placed during the mummification process.	4 objects

Showcase No. 2	It contains Shabti statues that the deceased used to place in the tomb to offer help with work in the afterlife.	25 objects
Showcase No. 3	This showcase includes the second part of the previously mentioned sterility panel of Hawara, as well as a small panel that researchers in the museum claim is a part of a tombstone.	Two objects
Showcase No. 4	This showcase displays objects that express the funeral rituals associated with the deceased's pilgrimage. The panel depicts the funeral boat that holds the deceased's mummy. It also contains a headrest.	4 objects
Showcase No. 5	It contains a funerary panel or stele with a Greek inscription from the Coptic period. The panel represents the crocodile God Soknopaios with a crocodile body and a hawk's face. To the left there is a representation of a ram-headed deity whilst to the right there is a depiction of Augustus as Zeus-Ammon. The origin is unknown.	One objects
Showcase No. 6 and 7	These showcases contain funeral panels.	One object
Showcases No. 8 and 9	Each of the two showcases has two objects on display. Coptic icons, as well as a portrait of a deceased individual.	4 objects
Museum masterpiece	In the middle of the hall there are two showcases, each one of them contains a mummy ,which it is covered with a Fayum portrait. It is worth mentioning that these two mummies are the museum's masterpieces. (El Shawkey, 2021)	2 objects



Fig.5. Examples of showcases on the ground floor photographed by the researcher.

As a result, it is clear that the display of artefacts and the design of the Kom-Ushim Museum are still in their classical shape and require substantial effort to correlate the theme of the museum display with the interpretation tools and design. It needs to reshape the visitor experience by including more modern applications such as, ICT and new technologies in the display and lighting design to be competitive with other regional museums such as Luxor Museum, Tanta Museum, Suez Museum, and Nobia Museum.

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