

This report is by ICOM Australia Member Dr Muhammad Y Gamal who, earlier this year, visited the Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM) as part of his research into translation in museums in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Alexandria and Cairo.

Exploring the Grand Egyptian Museum

Dr Muhammad Y Gamal

Egypt's newest and largest museum is nearing completion with an impressive opening ceremony promised to match the building. Construction began two decades ago with a generous grant and ongoing support from the Japanese government.

In March 2023, the management of the GEM announced an opportunity to visit the museum through a private online booking service for small groups which would also be used as a test run for the museum. The visit, though short and limited to only one hall, was both impressive and informative.



Figure 1: Muhammad Y Gamal inside the new GEM, 2023. Authors own photo.

As shown in Figure 1 the first thing that strikes the visitor is the sheer size of the museum: Grand. As soon as one steps inside, the grandeur of the Pharaohs appears. Once inside, visitors need a couple of minutes to get their eyes adjusted to the lighting inside the museum; coming from the glaring Egyptian sun outside. Then the larger than life statue of Ramses II welcomes visitors: it is an awkward moment as one feels ambivalent feelings.

On the one hand, the statue commands our attention as we raise our heads to take in the sheer size of the colossus and on the other, one feels inclined to bow before one of the most remarkable pharaohs.

With twelve halls the GEM promises an experience unrivalled anywhere in the world. When opened the museum could not be covered in a single visit and this places some pressure of the management to tailor various programs for different visitors and

sections. This will mean considering everything from opening hours to parking and providing restaurants and other facilities. There is a special children museum which is a feather in the cap of the GEM being the first archaeological museum to cater for children.

Museums in Egypt, particularly archaeological ones, are largely tourist-attractions and are less frequented by the locals. The GEM is situated outside the city centres of Giza and Cairo and this may cause a challenge to being accessible and inclusive. Therefore in the digital age, online presence is crucial and this requires a digital team of curators, content creators, translators and IT specialists to operate a web site, a social media page and an active App in at least two dozen languages.

Translation in museums remains one of the least examined topics both in museum studies and

tourism studies. There is translation of the museum name into Japanese at the main gate and a Japanese help desk in the lobby, this is in recognition of assistance by the Japanese government.

A museum of the calibre of GEM will benefit from a robust translation policy that meets its physical and online needs and could also cater for all museums in the country. Digital technology provides solutions for translation needs particularly in tourist-dependant museums.

Judging by the impressive fanfare that characterised the opening of the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization in April 2021, the opening ceremony for GEM is not likely to disappoint.

Muhammad has provided an update early November 2023 that the official opening of GEM is likely delayed until the Egyptian Spring 2024, however, there are tours of the "open" section of the Museum and you can book your ticket on-line. It is important to book online prior to visiting the GEM.

Bio: Dr Gamal was schooled in Alexandria and earned his qualifications in Cairo, Sydney and California. Majoring in languages, Art & History, Applied Linguistics and Egyptology: his doctorate in Translation Studies was gained from the UNSW in Sydney. Dr Gamal is an active member of ICOM, ICA and MA.