



## THE GRAND EGYPIAN MUSEUM: A HOME FOR INTERCONNECTIONS

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Grand Egyptian Museum, Giza

The creation of the Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM) is one of the most ambitious construction and antiquities projects ever undertaken in Egypt. Intended as modern home for conservation, scientific, and archaeological research in Egypt and the field of Egyptology, the GEM's mission is to be a host for international research in the vastly interconnected field of Egyptology and Egyptian archaeology. Furthermore, the GEM's vision is to be the major world-class museum for ancient Egyptian history and civilization and to be an exemplar of Egypt's interaction and cultural exchange with the world, past and present.

Located close to the pyramid fields of Giza, the GEM serves to symbolically link Egypt's past with its future. The museum is a part of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA)/Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA) and focuses on displaying the diversity of ancient Egyptian cultural heritage and preserving the fascinating legacy of Egypt.

While the primary display facilities are presently under construction, the GEM Conservation Center (GEMCC; Figure

1) was completed in 2010 and is bustling with activity. The GEM is around 500,000 square meters in size and will be constructed at a cost of approximately one billion US dollars. The GEM will cover and display the history and culture of ancient Egyptian civilization from the earliest Predynastic evidence through the Greco-Roman Period. Approximately 100,000 pieces will be displayed and stored at the GEM, the most famous among them being the collection of the "golden king," Tutankhamun. The great colossal statue of the legendary king Ramses II, previously displayed at Cairo's Ramses Station, will receive visitors to the museum at the entrance. The second boat of king Khufu is planned to be restored and displayed at the GEM in a separate gallery when its restoration and conservation project is completed. The GEM will have six huge galleries of thematic and chronological exhibit displays, offering around 20,000 job opportunities during construction and after opening. Hopefully, the GEM will open to the public in 2015 and will be capable of receiving some 8 million tourists annually.



Figure 1: Entry to the Grand Egyptian Museum Conservation Center (courtesy SCA/MSA).

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Collaboration and international links are cornerstones of the GEM's mission and existence, including:

## JICA FINANCIAL AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT

In 2006, The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has funded the GEM project with 300,000,000 US dollars as a loan paid back later. From 2008-2012, JICA established the Archeological Database Department (ADD) in order to register the GEM artifacts which will be owned by the museum. Moreover, JICA has offered technical support to the Grand Egyptian Museum Conservation Center since 2008 and will continue to do so through at least 2016. JICA has offered numerous opportunities to train GEM staff, including more than 43 courses in Egypt and supporting dozens of overseas trips for further training.

## GEMCC SYMPOSIUM

In order to support further interactions between GEM personnel and foreign institutions and scholars, in 2012 the GEM launched the Grand Egyptian Museum Conservation Center Symposium. The Symposium serves as an annual meeting for

conservators of the GEM, the SCA/MSA and the Egyptian universities and institutions and has a specific theme, several invited scholars and keynote speakers from Egypt and abroad are invited.

## GEMCC LIBRARY

The GEM has a formal library specialized to assist researchers and presently containing approximately will reach 10,000 references, old and modern, printed and digital, including audiovisual items. The library subjects are primarily conversation and technical study of Egyptian materials. The main library of the Egyptian Museum at Tahrir Square will be transferred to the GEM, probably to the second floor of the museum building.

## CONSERVATION REVIEW

The inaugural issue of *Conservation Review* was published by the GEMCC staff in 2012. It has several articles and reviews by the GEM staff and is intended to serve the local community of GEMCC and Egyptian conservators to make them familiar with the GEMCC conservation activities, and it will online for free.



Figure 2. Organizational chart for the GEM Conservation Center (courtesy MSA/SCA).

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## GEMCC JOURNAL

The GEMCC is in the process of preparing the inaugural issue of a peer-reviewed journal for conservation in Egyptology titled *GEMCC Journal*. This journal is intended to encourage scientific research and interconnections at the GEMCC. This journal will be open to submissions by any conservator all over the world. Soon, the GEMCC staff will have established a board of eminent members of the conservation community, from within Egypt and abroad.

## TRAINING

Through a series of internships and internationally funded initiatives, training courses are offered to GEM staff in Egypt, Japan, Singapore, USA, England, France, Germany, and several other countries. During these courses of study, Egyptian staff and personnel are being trained in archaeology, Egyptology, art and architecture, museology, conversation, and preservation of cultural heritage. For example, the GEM received financial support for several graduate study and post-doctoral fellowships for its staff through President Barak Obama's Cairo Initiative and via the British Museum. GEM staff study Egyptology, restoration and conservation, IT management, business administration, museum studies, exhibition design, and text writing.

## CULTURAL PROGRAMS

The GEM's Director General started a cultural seminar program in 2012, inviting Egyptian and foreign scholars to give talks at the GEMCC lecture hall. Through these lectures GEM staff meet with and engage scholars who teach, consult, and collaborate with them regarding recent trends and modern theories about Egyptology, restoration and conservation, museology, and cultural heritage. The GEM's Director General and his team participate, direct, supervise, and organize archaeological and museological congresses at home, projects to save and restore Egyptian antiquities, archaeological excavations, media, written and photographed guides for the public, and scientific publications of GEM and SCA/MSA. Further, the

GEM's Director General gives press conferences and media interviews and writes to the foreign, Arabic and Egyptian media, sharing the news of the GEM; GEM coverage regularly appears in newspapers, television, magazines, specialized periodicals in Egypt, the Arab World, and Europe.

## CREATING AND IMPLEMENTING EGYPTIAN MUSEUM ORGANIZATIONAL CHARTS

With the assistance of UNESCO and other institutions, the GEM is creating and implementing organizational charts for the GEM and other administrations within it (Figure 2).

## COOPERATION WITH EGYPTIAN AND FOREIGN ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTIONS

The GEM is working on numerous projects hand-in-hand with Egyptian and foreign institutions. For example, GEMCC staff are restoring the copy of the *Description de l'Égypte* owned by the SCA Ancient Egyptian Documentation Center, conserving the Abu Rawash boats recently discovered by the Institut français d'archéologie orientale, and the Khufu II boat being excavated by Waseda University.

As a leading conservation, educational, and research center in the region, the GEM also offers assistance to foreign institutions for training conservators and curators, setting up and planning similar facilities, and creating institutional programs for new institutions.

The grand vision is that the GEM, the Giza pyramids and the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization (NMEC; at Fustat, Cairo) will be a triangle of Egyptian tourism and the most visited tourist venues in Cairo – a must-see series for any tourist to Egypt, but also a home of international collaboration with modern research and conservation facilities. When the GEM fully opens in the coming years, the museum is expected to be run by a private administration with only the ownership of the antiquities by the state (SCA/MSA), with a board of trustees, in order to maintain the museum and keep its mission running in perpetuity, for *dt* and *nḥh*.