

## CONVERTING SAID HALIM PALACE INTO A MUSEUM OF EGYPTIAN EDUCATION

Ibrahim, S.<sup>1(\*)</sup>, Refai, H.<sup>2</sup>, Kandil, D.<sup>2</sup> & Fackler, G.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D. in Heritage and Museum Studies, Tourism Guidance dept., Faculty of Tourism and Hotel Management, Helwan Univ., Egypt, <sup>2</sup>Tourism Guidance dept., Faculty of Tourism and Hotel Management, Helwan Univ., Egypt, <sup>3</sup>Museology dept., German Philology Institute, Julius Maximilian Univ, Würzburg, Germany  
E-mail address: [souzan.Ibrahim.hcsm@fth.helwan.edu.eg](mailto:souzan.Ibrahim.hcsm@fth.helwan.edu.eg)

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#### Abstract:

The palace of Said Halim pasha is considered among the most important palaces in Egypt that dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century. It still stands proudly at Champollion St., Cairo, keeping some of its older glamour. Despite being empty from its collection, the pink marble palace is highly appraised due to its unique architectural style and decorations. It is a typical representation that reflects the elite lifestyle of its period. Unfortunately, its current status of abandonment and neglect might cause the loss of such architectural masterpiece that forms a part of Egypt's rich heritage. Consequently, this paper presents a proposal to safeguard Said Halim's palace and maintains it as a cultural heritage property through converting it into a "Museum of Egyptian Education". Suggestions for the rehabilitation of the palace to serve as a museum and a cultural hub as well as the means of building up a museum collection that would suit the character of the palace and deliver its aimed message are discussed thoroughly in this paper. The paper seeks to direct attention to this largely abandoned heritage and attract responsible parties to undertake this initiative and contribute jointly to save the palace from further deterioration in the future.

### 1. Introduction

Said Halim's palace is a unique historical palace located at the city center of Cairo. It belongs to Prince Said Halim who was a member of the former royal family in Egypt before the outbreak of July revolution in 1952 [1]. It was converted to a school known as "al-Nasiriyya School" in 1919 and continued to function until 2004 [2]. This had left a wide impact on its original architecture, as well as its oral and written history [3]. For example, Students' graffiti filled many of its walls, fig. (1-a) while red bricks were added to its external walls to raise its actual height, fig. (1-b).



Figure (1) Shows **a.** graffiti on the staircase, **b.** added bricks

In the same context, hanging class boards caused a partial damage to its internal walls, fig. (2-a). The negligence from which the palace suffered when it served as a school

and even after its closure raises nagging questions about the possible ways of rescuing it to bring it back to life and restore its glamour. The disappearance of its original furniture, nothing is mentioned in literature about the final destination of its original collection, fig. (2-b), and being used as a school supported the idea of converting this unique palace into a "*Museum of Egyptian Education*". The proposed museum would track and document the long history of Egyptian education and present it to the public in an innovative way. It would exhibit the development of schools in Egypt since the age of Muhammad Ali pasha's in new and effective ways that would fit the palace's features, architecture, and history and appeal to a wider audience. This article will highlight such possible ways to achieve this goal and shed the light on some ways that can be adopted to revive the palace and bring it back to life.



Figure (2) Shows a. a wall board, b. part of the original furniture, (After: [https://twitter.com/eng\\_sherien/status/14563430294895779-95/photo/2](https://twitter.com/eng_sherien/status/14563430294895779-95/photo/2)).

### 1.1. Prince Said Halim

Said Halim, fig. (3) (1865-1921) was a remarkable reformist and Islamic thinker who lived most of his life in Istanbul involved in politics. He was a thoughtful writer who occupied many ministerial positions during his life [4]. Prince Said Halim was born in the palace of his grandfather Muhammad Ali pasha in Shubra on 19 February 1865 where his father (1831-1894) lived. He was the son of Prince Muhammad Abdelhalim who is one of the sons of Muhammad Ali pasha. Prince Abdelhalim was supposed to succeed Khedive Ismail for being the eldest living descendants of Muhammad Ali pasha

according to the imperial decree of 1841. However, Khedive Ismail tempted the Sultan in 1866 to issue an amendment in the law of succession of power in favor of his sons and his grandchildren after him. As a result of his objection to the amendment of the law of the succession of the throne, Prince Abdelhalim was forced to leave Egypt and departed to Istanbul with his sons due to the Khedivial order of his perpetual exile. Abdelhalim was keen to well-educate his sons therefore, he sent his son Said to study political science in Switzerland between 1880 and 1885. After his return to Istanbul, Sultan Abdelhamid II appointed Said Halim as a member of the council of state in 1888.



Figure (3) Shows portrait of Said Halim pasha, (After: <https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/portrait-of-said-halim-pasha-grand-vizier-of-the-ottoman-news-photo/164081364>)

After overthrowing Sultan Abdelhamid II, Said returned very actively to Istanbul after being in Egypt joining the opposition abroad, represented by the "Union and Progress Association", which had an effective presence in Cairo and published the newspaper "Osmanli", funded by Said Halim himself. He rose in ranks as he first held the Ministerial portfolio of Foreign Affairs in 1912 [5], and then he was appointed a Grand Vizier in 1913 [6]. After three months of assuming responsibility, Britain, France, and Russia declared war against The Ottoman Empire. Hence Said Halim witnessed the end of the Ottoman existence in Egypt after declaring Egypt a British Protectorate in 1914. As a result of his loyalty to the Ottomans, the British confiscated his belongings including his palace on 13 March 1915 [1,6]. Later, in 1921, in Rome, he was shot by an un-

known man in the head while he was in a car with his friend. Unfortunately, the prince died on the way to the hospital and the criminal ran away [7].

### 1.2. The architect Antonio Lasciac

Cairo witnessed new economic, political, and cultural growth during the reign of Khedive Ismail. The development of the city started when Khedive Ismail visited Haussmann's Paris in 1867 and was impressed by it. The Khedive hence decided to build the new Cairo in the European style by European architects. The architecture of Cairo during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries formulated the dynamic building period since medieval times [8]. Antonio Lasciac fig. (4) was a European architect who became the architect of the royal family. He designed the palace of Said Halim pasha in Cairo between 1897 and 1898 [9] with about forty thousand pounds at that time [10]. Lasciac was born on September 21<sup>st</sup> 1856 in Gorizia (1856-1946) in Italy to a Slovenian father and a Friulian mother. He completed his study at the University of Vienna and traveled later to Egypt. In 1883, Lasciac moved to Alexandria and contributed to its reconstruction after its massive destruction by the British fleet in 1882. By the end of the century and as a result of many successful contributions to the real estate companies, Antonio Lasciac became the architect of the high society and hence the main architect of the Court in 1907. His designs appeared not only in Alexandria and Cairo but also in Istanbul and Kavala as well. Then he became a member of the Commission for the Conservation of Arab Art and found in the local architecture a source of inspiration [11].



Figure (4) Shows portrait of Antonio Lasciac, (After: Al-Naggar, A. (2021).

### 1.3. Palace's history and architectural style

Said Halim admired the architecture of Rome, especially the Baroque style, and wished his palace to follow the same style therefore, he imported most of its building materials and furniture from Italy [6]. The Baroque style is divided into Early Baroque, (1590-1625); High Baroque, (1625-1660); and Late Baroque, (1660-1725). The use of the style differed from one phase to another and from one country to another. For example, in some countries, the late Baroque architecture was identified by its sculptures and stuccos which sometimes tend to hide the buildings' geometries. On contrary, the early and high Baroque phases were distinguished by the high interaction between geometry and art [12]. Indeed, Antonio Lasciac magnificently built the palace following the Baroque style, with fine touches of the rising Art Nouveau style in some places like the interior iron double-staircase, fig. (5-a), the decorations on the roof, the entry portal, fence wall, and the using of fauna and flora decoration on some parts of the walls, fig. (5-b) [3,13]. Art Nouveau appeared in 1892 in Western Europe as a result of a movement in the decorative arts. The birth of art was not spontaneous as decorative arts went through diverse progress between the decline of the empire style around 1815 and the 1889 Universal Exposition in Paris [14]. The palace of prince Said Halim, fig. (5-c) is considered an outstanding example of a princely palaces in Cairo. His palace that stands in downtown Cairo close to Tahrir square and overlooking Champollion street surpasses other similar palaces [15]. It covers an area of 4781 square meters and takes its name after Said Halim pasha (1865-1921) [3]. The palace consists of two floors and a basement that consists of a huge hall, vestibule, and some other annexes that were used for services like kitchens and bathrooms. The first floor receives its visitors through a large lobby in its center that extends into the whole area of the palace with a double staircase, which separated three rooms on



its west and another three on its east resembling the second floor in its design. The palace is distinguished with its luxurious architectural designs, ornaments decorations, and marvelous statues [10]. The left side of the palace is occupied by the kitchen suite with a private door and chimney above it [15-17]. The facade of the palace with most of its columns was decorated with the first two letters “S” and “H” of the prince’s name mingled together with the emblem of the Ottoman Empire. Unfortunately, Said Halim never had the chance to live in his Cairene palace. It was later converted into al-Nasiriyya School for boys [3] and hence came under the supervision of the Egyptian Ministry of Education. The school became very distinguished among other Egyptian schools [18], with members of the royal family attending it. Unfortunately, after a number of years of being used as a school, the palace lost many of its original features [19] until the school was shut down in 2004 after graduating many famous Egyptian statesmen throughout its long history. The school closed its doors in 2004 due to the registration of the palace as an Islamic monument in 2002 under the supervision of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. The palace gradually lost many of its original features like the disappearance of its original Art Nouveau portal. Moreover, its large garden was reduced along with the destruction of some parts of its unique marble fittings. Not to mention that the original architecture of the palace included two large wings to the right and left of the palace and were unfortunately reduced for the sake of the surrounding urban development [10], fig. (5-d). The urban development of the palace’s surrounding area participated in this loss and destruction. Nowadays, the palace is suffering from neglect despite the fact of its registration as a monument [3] by the Ministry of Culture with decision number 121 of the year 2002 [20], fig. (5-e). Hence it became under the supervision of the Supreme Council of Antiquities in 2007 [2,3]. After being placed in the list of historic buildings, the palace

aimed to be converted into a museum that tells the history of Cairo that was unfortunately just an idea. Among the reasons that prevented this idea from come-truth was the appearance of a new owner of the palace who is a famous businessman. Since then the palace become a case of conflict and till now it is standing suffering in its unique location and good appearance looking for help [1, 17].



Figure (5) Shows **a.** the internal staircase of the palace, **b.** the fauna and flora on the external fence, **c.** palace’s external facades, **d.** Said Halim’s palace in 1899, (After: the official F.B. page of King Farouk I website), **e.** the registration decision of the Ministry of Culture

## 2. Research Methodology

The palace of Said Halim was taken as a case study and an intensive investigation of

its historic and artistic value was carried out. To collect data, the authors consulted various sources: *archival sources, contemporary sources, published literature, memoirs and old photos*. They also conducted field visits to the palace to determine its current status. Furthermore, they explored some similar historical palaces worldwide and examined the methods of their rehabilitation for guidance and inspiration. An analytical approach was adopted in this study to assess possibilities and risks in an attempt to develop a clear vision for rescuing the palace and rehabilitating it.

### 3. Results

Being a museum of Egyptian education would help in elaborating the great history and identity of Said Halim palace. This article presents ideas, themes, and exhibition techniques that would bring to light the whole history of the palace and preserve it for the next generations. Converting the palace into a "*Museum of Egyptian Education*" would be the best solution towards saving it, as the hypothesis of this research, rather than using it as a bank, hotel, or school, which might strip it out of its historical contextualization and identity. There have been many proposals that the researchers considered for the rehabilitation of prince Said Halim's palace. Among them were converting it into a historical hotel or to a specialized educational museum. After examining the pros and cons of each proposal, the researchers found that converting the palace to a specialized museum tracking the development of education in Egypt across time is the more convenient one. Such mentioned proposal seems to be combatable with the character and texture of the place since it hosted a school for a very long time. Moreover, converting the palace to a hotel would necessitate a notable change in its interior design which might negatively affect the identity and authenticity of the palace.

## 4. Discussion

As mentioned above, the palace of Said Halim has no furniture inside, which made it difficult to visualize what kind of museum to convert it into. However, it was decided to transform it into a museum with education as its theme. The absence of the palace's original furniture, combined with the fact that it was used as the building of al-Nasiriyya school for several decades, affected its original architecture. Its employment as a school is an integral part of its history. It is therefore here proposed to rehabilitate it as the Museum of Egyptian Education. Although there is a museum of education in the Ministry of Education, it is largely ignored as it is located inside the Ministry's campus. Figure (6-a & b). Its existence inside the ministry negatively affected its visitation rate and tighten its widespread which, in turn, urged the researchers to propose opening a museum of education inside the historical palace of Prince Said Halim to cope with its history as it was occupied as a school for a long time and provide adequate promotion for the palace and the museum. To this end, the museum's collection must be built up, and appropriate themes decided.



Figure (6) Shows **a.** entrance to the museum, **b.** one of its internal exhibitions.

### 4.1. Building up a museum collection

"Collections are the intellectual and spiritual capital of the museum" [21]. Original and authentic collections are vital to museums and their operation. Although there are some museums with no collections, they still serve their respective educational missions through exhibitions to communicate with their respective communities and provide visitors with the knowledge and experience they seek. Hence, museum collections and exhibitions

strongly support a museum's mission and operation as a core responsibility of any museum [22]. It is proposed here to use a private collection in the museum made up of well-studied and carefully chosen objects. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, museums around the world are seeking to re-evaluate the relationship between themselves and their communities [23]. Acquisition is about the process of obtaining the objects and should be guided by the rules and mission of the museum. This can be done through purchase, donation, gifts, and bequest [24]. In our case, the Museum of Egyptian Education would collect and exhibit objects from diverse sources in addition to structuring distinctive exhibits that fit its theme. We propose to establish the collection for Said Halim Palace through the Egyptian Ministry of Education and public donations.

#### 4.1.1. Egyptian ministry of education

Such proposed Museum of Egyptian Education would cooperate with the Ministry of Education to obtain some objects and plans that reflect the latter's ongoing reforms to education for the next generation. At the same time, this cooperation would go further by documenting the past of Egyptian education not only since the beginning of the Ministry, but beforehand as well. For the Museum of Egyptian Education to fulfill its goal, it is important for it to document the old system through archival photos and records, classroom furniture, tools, old editions of books, previous exam systems, and so on. The Ministry of Education's long-term reforms would also be reflected in the various roles of students, teachers, and teaching methods presented through the museum exhibition [25]. All this history and more would be a core part of the museum, and neither it nor the acquisition of its collection would be possible without the aid of the Egyptian Ministry of Education, and its invaluable help would be duly acknowledged.

#### 4.1.2. Donations

Donations can come from individuals, charitable organizations, or corporations and can take the form of financial support or tangible objects. The donor should not wait for something in return and can give any item that can be used in a museum collection or for museums' staff, such as office furniture. This type of the donated tangible objects cannot be accessioned as a result of wear and tear through the use [24,26]. One example of a museum that received precious donations was the Dimitar Dimov house-museum in Bulgaria, fig. (7) part of the National Literature Museum structure since its establishment in 1976. This museum is dedicated to Dimitar Dimov who was a doctor of veterinary medicine. This museum received many private belongings and archive materials related to Dimitar Dimov as donations to enrich its exhibitions and collection [24]. In our case study, the Museum of Egyptian Education would need donations in the form of school uniforms, tools, and supplies, correspondence between parents and the school, old photographs, and so on.



Figure (7) Shows museum collection (After: <https://nlmuseum.bg/kashta-muzey-dimitar-dimov/>)

#### 4.2. Themes, objects and exhibition techniques

Given its former use as a school, Said Halim palace would be the perfect venue for a museum that tells the history of schools and education in Egypt. This section explores and makes suggestions for the types of objects and exhibition techniques that would be appropriate for the Museum of Egyptian



Education. To this end, topics to be covered can include the *kuttab* and teaching tools and their development through time. At the same time, it should also be borne in mind that al-Nasiriyya School, fig. (8) has become a part of the history of Said Halim palace that has left a deep impact on it and that has changed its original features to fit its needs. For example, to render the palace suitable to its new function as a school, new walls were built. It is therefore fundamental to present the history of the structure itself housing the museum through an exhibition that reflects the school's effect on the palace. Among other suggested topics, the Museum of Egyptian Education in the palace of Said Halim would shed light on the evolution of education through time, while presenting an image of the school system with al-Nasiriyya School as an example. The exhibition could also include prominent graduates from the school, [27] and the figures who contributed to the educational process [28]. To successfully reopen the palace and rehabilitate it, topics, objects, and exhibition techniques are proposed below that would cover the history of education in Egypt on one level, and the history itself of al-Nasiriyya School on another.



Figure (8) Shows students in front of the palace in 1959. (After: <http://earth-arch.blogspot.com/2012/09/355.html>)

#### 4.2.1. Visualizing a *kuttab*

Since the earliest days of Islam, the *kuttab* was like an elementary school providing basic education, including reading, writing, arithmetic, and recitation of the holy Quran, usually attached to a mosque. *Kuttabs* spread

widely in many cities and countries throughout the Muslim world, including Egypt, where they played an important role in their educational systems [29]. Because our presented case study would be a Museum of Egyptian Education, it is essential to interpret the Egyptian *kuttab* as an important phase of the history of education in Egypt. The seating configuration in a *kuttab* is distinctive and iconic, so to show visitors how students sat around the *sheikh* in a circle, it is essential to create a life-size visualization of the *kuttab*, fig. (9). Moreover, this model would reflect the style of clothes and general atmosphere inside the *kuttab*. This model is going to be reinforced with valuable information about educational curricula, how *kuttabs* were funded, and history throughout diverse periods.



Figure (9) Shows boy's class in Kuttab (After: [https://alsaa.net/webp/pic\\_186063\\_800.webp](https://alsaa.net/webp/pic_186063_800.webp))

#### 4.2.2. School uniforms

School uniforms are a part of the educational system in many countries. Their main goal is to achieve equality among students, teach students to follow rules, and provide a comfortable and good appearance for them. Each school and each educational level has its uniform that suits its general aims and goals [30]. Because school uniforms have become a part of the history of Egyptian education, it is planned to include an exhibition in the Museum for school uniforms from the time of Muhammad Ali Pasha until the present, including governmental and non-governmental school uniforms. The school museum of the city of Friedrichshafen in

Germany is a perfect example, where space is given to some school uniforms in order to illustrate Germany's old system of school uniforms, fig. (10).



Figure (10) Shows an old German school uniform.

#### 4.2.3. Classrooms

Classrooms have changed a lot throughout the history of education in their development and equipment. The most important development in the last few years has been the appearance of what is known as smart classrooms, which use many interactive means of education through the internet to save time in actual classes [31]. It is strongly suggested for the Egyptian School of Education to document the development of school classrooms through time to reflect their diversity according to many educational factors such as the students' social class. The School Museum of the Museum for Industrial Culture in Nuremberg presents the same idea by featuring a school classroom from 1910, fig. (11-a). Another good example is the School Museum of Friedrichshafen, fig. (11-b).



Figure (11) Shows **a.** a classroom from 1910, **b.** old classroom.

#### 4.2.4. Teaching tools

In any educational system, both students and teachers use tools that help them reach their educational goals. These tools naturally include pens, worksheets, and teaching materials like textbooks, but also more modern equipment like computers and laptops [32], fig. (12-a). With its exhibition of the famous HB and Fabric-Castell brand, fig. (12-b), the above-mentioned School Museum of Nuremberg is a good example of how to feature educational tools and their importance in teaching. This exhibition is set up to reflect the progress of this product through time and its contribution to the educational system. Also, students' tools and belongings can be donated to the museum and put on display in an exhibition, along with some interesting stories about objects and their owners, as was done in the School Museum of Friedrichshafen, fig. (12-c).



Figure (12) Shows **a.** some digital collection, and **b.** HB exhibition in School Museum of Nuremberg, **c.** personal school tools in School Museum of Friedrichshafen

#### 4.2.5. Tactile model of the place

In contemporary museological practice, all possible means of interpretation are attempted to help visitors understand the exhibited objects, and to make their visit more entertaining by providing interactive displays. New technologies, like virtual reality and features that give access to extra information in diverse languages, are vital for the acco-



mplishment of this goal. However, it should also be noted that among the few disadvantages of such technological methods is that they do not provide a tactile exploration of a museum exhibition. To provide visitors with an interactive experience that is also tactile, allowing them to use their senses of sight, hearing, and touch, some modern technologies are used like haptic devices which make the tactile experience available in the shape of 3D models [33]. The word Haptics derives from the Greek word haptikos which means being able to come into contact with. Haptics in a simple meaning is the science of touch as it allows users to get in touch with exhibits. It is a recent enhancement to virtual environments [34]. A tactile model of the palace would therefore offer the opportunity for visitors to touch and get engaged to obtain more information. The implementation of a tactile model of the palace would provide a space for the people with visual impairment to get to know the architecture of the palace. It would also allow people with hearing impairment to hear information besides touching the module which provides an interesting and interactive atmosphere for every kind of visitor.

#### 4.2.6. Documentary on the restoration of the place

Films can be produced in different forms to serve diverse purposes in an exhibition. They can be produced to revive old objects and show them in their historical contexts in order to show how they were used and what for [35]. Films can be documentaries, and may also be animated [36]. Movies are vital in the archival preservation and documentation of the history of a building, [37] for which reason it is suggested here to record the conversation efforts to preserve and restore the palace of Prince Said Halim.

#### 4.2.7. Experimental interactive educational stations

Given Said Halim palace's previous history as a school, it would also be perfectly appropriate for the Museum of Egyptian

Education to also have interactive educational exhibits for people of all ages to enjoy. Interactive learning is vital for museums as educational institutions. In light of the digital age that we are living in, visitors are expecting to see many interactive and hands-on exhibitions in museums, especially science or children's museums. These interactive stations help in creating interaction between visitors and exhibits which in turn increases both social interaction and the knowledge gained [38]. Many topics could be covered in educational exhibitions in the Museum of Egyptian Education that can be learned through experiments like construction, colors, light, energy, and electricity. The School Museum of Nuremberg features a very interactive experience by providing experiments for students and children so that they can learn about some hard topics in an easy way. One of the most notable experiments in this museum is a station that explains the digital language of computers and how only "0" and "1" can produce letters on computers, fig. (13). For the Museum of Egyptian Education, in addition to educational experiments more generally, it is suggested here to also present interactive displays that are specific to Said Halim Palace itself, such as the construction methods and techniques used to build this structure, or to teach about art and architecture by pointing to the building's Baroque style to connect visitors to the palace itself.

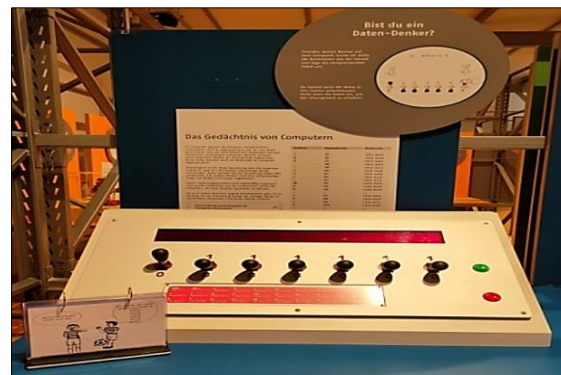


Figure (13) Shows experimental station about the language of computer.

#### 4.2.8. Challenges to the conversion

Routine stifles new ideas and presents an obstacle to success and achievement. In Egypt, the most common understanding of a museum is one that exhibits artifacts, while other types of museums tend to be seen as having less value. It might therefore take some time for the proposal for a museum that is both educational and about education to gain acceptance at first. The other, more important, challenge is the ownership of Said Halim palace, which has gone to a private property. Its ownership was contested and was given to a business man by a court verdict. At the same time, however, the palace is placed under the supervision of the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. This complicated case might therefore need some effort and negotiation from concerned parties to reach a suitable solution that ensures the safety, rescue, and revitalization of this unique piece of art which is located in a very distinctive and distinguished location in Cairo.

#### 5. Conclusion

*Converting Said Halim palace into a Museum of Egyptian Education and adopting the ideas presented here would help in saving the palace, keeping its historical features, and raising awareness of its value. Furthermore, highlighting the history of Egyptian education by exhibiting teaching tools, school uniforms, and classrooms would be an effective tool in delivering the museum's targeted message. Moreover, the suggested museum exhibitions that would present the history of schools including al-Nasiriyya school itself would enrich the knowledge of visitors on the topic of Egyptian education. At the same time, by providing educational experiments, such proposed Museum of Egyptian Education would also continue to fulfill the same mission it had as when it functioned as a school. Once collaboration between all concerned parties is achieved, the conversion should go smoothly. Finally, this conversion would be a step forward in encouraging the local community to participate in saving the palace and reinforcing their feeling of pride in their past.*

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