

Fouad I Hygiene Museum: Cairo's Forgotten Temple of Public Health (1920s–1960s)

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Abstract

This study is concerned with the history of Fouad I Hygiene Museum in Cairo (FHMC) which was inaugurated in Abdeen in 1927 and moved in the 1960s to the Sakakini Palace where the old FHMC became part of the wider medical museum. The latter included both of the FHMC collection and the history of Egyptian & Arab medicine museum. The FHMC was distinguished with certain features and impacts that were not available in other Hygiene museums abroad. This paper will trace the FHMC's history, characteristics and targets, and the Egyptian public attitude towards the museum. Although the FHMC, from the 1920s to the 1960s, was a temporary museum in a temporary building but it was real museum visited by considerable number of the Egyptians who registered their visits and the museum impacts on their lives. Hygiene Museums was a fact, from the end of 19th century and during the 20th century, with strong contribution to the global life. Beyond that; many of these museums outside Egypt have succeeded in surviving to this day because they have evolved, embraced scientific advancements, and aligned themselves with the scientific revolution to persist places that visitors enjoy and appreciate.

Keywords

Hygiene;
Museum;
Fouad I;
Dresden;
Abdeen.

Conflict of Interest: None declared
Funding: Not applicable
Author(s) Contributions:
Author 1. Hend Mohamed Abdel Rahman

Received: Aug. 30, 2025
Accepted: Oct. 9, 2025
Published: Jan 1, 2026

1. Introduction

In the early decades of the twentieth century, Egypt was undergoing profound transformations in governance, education, and public health. Within this context, King Fouad I sought to modernize the nation's approach to hygiene and health awareness by establishing the **Fouad I Hygiene Museum of Cairo (FHMC)** in 1927. In Arabic, the museum was known as *Mathaf Fu'ād al-Awwal al-Ṣiḥḥī* — literally, “Fouad I Health Museum.”

Conceived not merely as a repository of medical knowledge but as a pedagogical institution, the museum embodied the intersection of royal patronage, global scientific exchange, and local cultural sensibilities.

The museum's creation reflected broader international currents in health education, particularly the influence of European models such as the Dresden Hygiene Museum, while simultaneously adapting these frameworks to Egyptian realities. Its exhibitions were designed to resonate with diverse audiences employing religious references, moral exhortations, and visual persuasion— to instill hygienic practices and combat pressing public health challenges.

At the same time, the museum's location, administration, and evolving activities reveal much about Egypt's social and political landscape. Housed in Abdeen School under the authority of the Ministry of Religious Endowments, the institution symbolized the entanglement of education, religion, and monarchy in shaping public life. Leadership by figures such as Dr. Shaheen Pasha, trusted physician to King Fouad, further underscores the role of personal networks and royal confidence in determining institutional trajectories.

By tracing the museum's vision, exhibitions, outreach, and reception, this study situates the Fouad I Hygiene Museum within Egypt's broader efforts to cultivate a modern public health consciousness. It explores how the museum balanced international influences with distinctly Egyptian identity markers, and how its impact was measured not only through official initiatives but also through the lived experiences and impressions of its visitors.

1. Methods

This study employed a multi-layered historical and interpretive methodology to explore the evolution and impact of the Fouad I Hygiene Museum in Cairo (FHMC) from the 1920s to the 1960s:

- a) The study begins by tracing and narrating the institutional history of FHMC through a close reading of multiple archival sources that document its foundation, evolution, and shifting public role. These materials are critically analyzed to uncover deeper insights into the museum's curatorial strategies and administrative transformations across decades.
- b) The study analyzes its exhibitions and collections to understand their themes and teaching aims. How objects were chosen, arranged, and explained to promote health awareness and civic values.
- c) The museum's reception among Egyptian society is investigated by examining visitor feedback and commentary recorded during its establishment. This layer of analysis highlights how various social groups engaged with FHMC, offering glimpses into public perceptions of health education and modernity in a museum context.

2. Modern History of Hygiene

The term "hygiene" is derived from "Hygeia," the Greek goddess of health. (Firdaus & Anwar, 2024, p.7). In general, it refers to the conditions and practices that promote health and prevent the spread of disease (World Health Organization <https://www.afro.who.int/node/5610>).

The 18th century in Europe marked a fascinating transitional phase in the history of hygiene, where old beliefs met emerging scientific thought, and the term began to take on new cultural significance. In the 19th century, hygiene gained traction as a discipline capable of improving health conditions and compensating for the limited effectiveness of medical treatments before Pasteur's revolution. Physicians regarded hygiene as more reliable than their emerging therapeutic methods and medicine. At the same time, reformers embraced hygiene as "the most useful of sciences," capable of replacing superstition with health-preserving habits. (Chiffolleau, 1995, p.421)

The world moved toward improving its sanitary state by disseminating hygienic habits and practices. This can be observed during the last quarter of the 19th century through periodicals and publications focusing on hygiene. Conferences began to be organized, such as the first Congress of Hygiene and Demography, which was held in Brussels in 1876, accompanied by an exhibition of hygienic appliances in the Belgian capital. (See: *Congrès international d'hygiène, de sauvetage et d'économie sociale : Bruxelles, 1876*).

During the 1930s and 1940s, hygiene was losing prominence in Western contexts but remained central in Egypt, where it was promoted as a means of preventing diseases that lacked effective treatments. In Egypt, hygiene was framed as a pathway to improving human well-being—physical, moral, and intellectual—and this vision resonated with the emerging elites of the country's young university, who were committed to social reform. Physicians spearheaded the movement but worked in collaboration with engineers, agronomists, architects, and social workers to advance sanitary reform in rural villages, which were widely perceived as emblematic of Egypt's underdevelopment. (Chiffolleau, 1995, p.421)

3. Means of Achieving Hygiene Awareness in Modern Egypt

3.1 By Law

On September 14, 1844, Egypt established the Health Directorate Nizārat al-Ṣiḥḥa and issued the first regulations for public health and its preservation. The directorate later enacted a penal code to enforce these instructions, marking the beginning of state-led efforts to promote hygiene in modern Egypt through official orders and governmental decrees (Badran, 1995, p.132).

3.2 By Media

In Egypt, specialized publications such as 'Ya'sūb al-Ṭibb' magazine, first published in Cairo in 1865, mark the beginning of medical journalism and public health media in modern Egypt, offering medical advice in accessible Arabic. It was followed by 'al-Muntakhab' and 'al-Shifā'' which simultaneously promoted hygienic practices and public health awareness (Seddik, 2006, p.20).

3.3 By Visual and Textual Persuasion

The Director of the Rural Health sector, Dr. Hassan Kamal, in his 1939 lecture titled 'Teaching the public the basics of health and hygiene, analyzed the different means of teaching the public hygiene. Kamal considered the Hygiene museums one of the most effective tools in achieving this goal (Kamal, 1939, pp. 569-576).

The hygiene museum in Egypt was established in 1927 to deliver health messages. Egypt was not the first to construct a hygiene museum, having been preceded by several others, such as Parkes Museum of Hygiene (see: Buxton, 2018) and the Dresden Museum. The latter can be considered a model and source of tangible and intangible inspiration for the Fouad I Hygiene Museum in Cairo (FHMC); its concept was initiated in 1911 during the First International Hygiene Exhibition in Dresden, organized by industrialist Karl August Lingner (Neumann, 1987, p.11).

4. Why the Hygiene Museum Was Founded?

Dr. Mohamed Shaheen (1887-1936), the Private Physician of King Fouad, was the first to be responsible for the FHMC and the first Egyptian Minister of Health (see: 'Īsā, Aḥmad 1936, pp.5-8), delivered a speech during the museum's inauguration; his words clarified the reasons behind inventing Cairo Hygiene Museum as follows: *"In Egypt, where illiteracy remains widespread, especially among the general public, visual instruction proves to be the most effective tool for health education. It is nearly impossible to rely solely on written advice to reach these audiences. By equipping mothers with essential hygiene knowledge, these institutions play a crucial role in improving public health outcomes and, ultimately, contributing positively to the nation's well-being."* (Shaheen, 1927, p.5).

5. The Wandering Museum: Between Plans and Places

The Fouad I Hygiene Museum (FHMC) never received a specially constructed facility; instead, various locations were put forward as potential hosts.

5.1 Azbakya Garden Anticipated yet denied

The Public Health Authority reached an agreement with the Ministry of Public Works in 1926 to take over the premises vacated by a certain Monsieur Selvy in 'Azbakya' Garden to establish the Hygiene Museum. However, the Ministry of Education requested the same location to host the Fine Arts Exhibition. As a result, the Health Authority agreed to inaugurate its museum in the building which had formerly housed the Abdeen School, near Abdeen Square, which belongs to the Ministry of Religious Endowments (al-Ahrām 1926, p. 4).

5.2 Old Abdeen School

Located next to the al-Mabdūlī Mosque, this was the initial venue for the Hygiene Museum. It was likely chosen out of availability rather than suitability as a destination for the FHMC.

On the museum's opening day, Shaheen remarked that the FHMC, at Abdeen, was neither the ultimate nor the intended museum, but rather a nucleus for a larger initiative—one that would more fully realize its objectives and purposes. Shaheen, backed by King Fouad, proposed expanding the museum to include a medical professionals' section, a lecture venue, and a technical library. Shaheen wanted to unite Egypt's medical societies under one well-equipped space (Shaheen, 1927, p.5).

The Abdeen quarter itself was acceptable, but the problem lay in the old building of the former school (**Fig.1**). Near the FHMC (**Fig.2**) lies Abdeen Palace, which served as the residence of the ruler from 1872 until the 1952 Revolution. Around this seat of government, the Abdeen district emerged perhaps for this reason; Abdeen became the residential area for all those working in public offices, ministries, and matters related to governance (al-Ṭurābīlī, 'Abbās 2003, p.246). However, Abdeen Palace cannot be regarded as a supportive site for the FHMC, as it was separated from the surrounding world by a wall nearly three stories high. (al-Ahrām 1961, p.1) The wall began to be demolished after 1952 (Ākhir Sā'a 1961, p.10), but in general, the Abdeen quarter was inhabited by the middle class, with the exception of a number of palaces surrounding Abdeen Palace. (Abū al-Faḍl, M.2001, p.18) It was also a favored place of

residence for foreigners in Cairo, with approximately 34% of the city's foreign population living there, according to the 1927 census ('Abd al-Ḥamīd 1982, p.87).

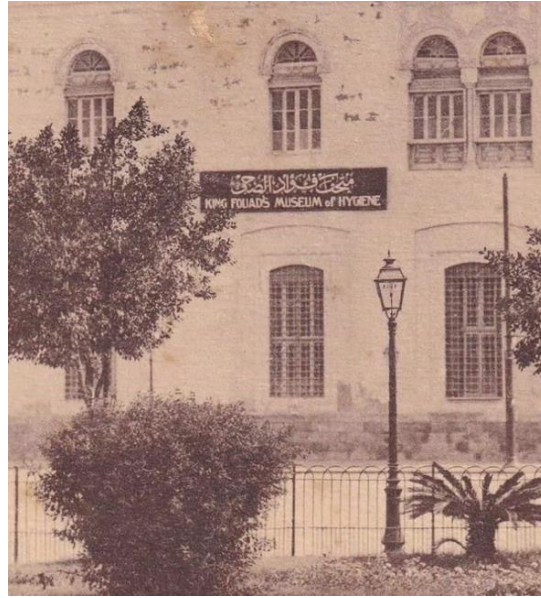


Figure 1 Old Abdeen School, which became Fouad Hygiene Museum in 1927
Retrieved March 18, 2025.

(<https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=1079161460232994&set=pcb.1079161763566297>)



Figure 2 A, B Recent photos of the same FPMC in Abdeen © H. Mohamed

5.3 al-Sayyida Zaynab: A Dream That Did Not Come True

In 1930, the museum administration submitted a request to the government to lease part of plot No.10 (A) in the al-Sayyida Zaynab quarter. The mentioned area measured 1,767 square meters in total, with a nominal rent of one pound per year for 99 years. This plot formed part of the land previously allocated to the Public Health Authority for the construction of hospitals and scientific institutes. The Council of Ministers approved the request on the condition that the museum building be constructed on the designated plot within two years; otherwise, the land would revert to government ownership. However, the FPMC continued in its same original Abdeen location (**Fig.3**). In the 1940s, 'Abd al-Raḥmān Zakī published a monograph on Egypt's museums, in which he criticized the FPMC at Abdeen: "*Had it not been for the limited space of the museum building and the overcrowding of its exhibits, this museum would have provided a great service to Egyptian society*" (Zaki, 1949, p.97).



Figure 3 Map of Abdeen Quarter, Cairo (1935), showing the location of the Old Abdeen School, where the FHC was housed.

Centre d'Études et de Documentation Économiques, Juridiques et Sociales (CEDEJ).

CEDEJ Map Library. Retrieved March 18, 2025

<https://www.cedejcrto.org/SearchResult?Serie=0&pageView=0&targetPage=0>

5.4 The 1949 Resurrection of the 1933 Dream

The Abdeen school building was eventually deemed unsuitable for use as a museum in 1949, and the exhibits are overcrowded and poorly arranged in a manner that failed to convey their purpose or how visitors might benefit from them. Renovation of the old project was announced, but nothing was actually carried out (0081-018931, National Archives, Egypt).

5.5 When the Museum Walked to the People

In 1951, the FHC organized two exhibitions on the occasion of Health Day and Family Day. One was held at *Dār al-Hikma*, the early form of the Egyptian Medical Association, which later became the Egyptian Medical Syndicate. Constructed in 1941 on Qasr al-‘Aini Street, the building hosted part of the FHC’s collection, enabling access for audiences who could not visit the museum itself (*al-Sijill al-Thaqāfi sanat 1951, 1953*, p.444).

5.6 The Relocation of the FHC: from Abdeen to Sakakini Palace

On November 20, 1957, the “Hall of Fame” in Chicago asked the Egyptian authorities to cooperate in establishing a hall commemorating “the history of Egyptian medicine.” While responding positively to this request, the Egyptian authorities seized the chance and produced a duplicate of each object that would be sent to Chicago. These duplicates were used to establish the Museum of the History of Medicine (MHM) at Sakakini Palace in Cairo. (Riad, 1964, p.187) Egypt announced this proposal during the 1960 conference that was held in Cairo.

(Galal, S.1960, p. 10). The FHMC was moved to dwell in the Sakakini Palace as part of the Museum of the History of Medicine (**Fig. 4**).



Figure 4 Sakakini Palace the second venue for the FHMC

(<https://maps.google.com/maps/contrib/109944414062399253680>)

To establish the MHM, the Ministry of Health appointed a committee of Egyptologists and physicians (*al-Ahrām* 1963, p.4) chaired by Professor Kamel Hussein, former rector of Ain Shams University, with Dr. Naguib Riad as General Secretary. Riad sought to create a distinctive museum, incorporating the collections of the former Hygiene Museum at Abdeen and adding a new section on the upper floor of the palace dedicated to the history of medicine from ancient Egypt to the modern era (Riad, 1964, p.187).

6. Administrative History of the FHMC

For the purpose of administering the FHMC in 1927, a committee was formed under Shaheen's chairmanship, composed of physicians and high officials such as Amīn Pāshā Anīs (see Bakr, 2008, p. 86), Dr. Austin Bern, health expert and advisor at the Public Health Authority; Dr. Aḥmad 'Īsā Bek, pioneering gynecologist and author of more than 20 works in medicine, history, and lexicography (see Abdul-Aziz, 2018, pp.15–52); and Dr. Muḥammad Khalīl 'Abd al-Khālīq, Professor of Parasitology at Cairo (1925), who specialized in bilharzia and hookworm (see Chiffolleau, 2005, pp.80, 122–123).

Upon its formation, the committee outlined a clear program of work:

- a) Naming the museum after King Fouad, to be called the Fouad Hygiene Museum in Cairo.
- b) Establishing contact with health institutes both in Egypt and abroad.
- c) Publishing newspaper announcements inviting institutions engaged in health-related work across the country to donate exhibits and models.

When Dr. Shaheen passed away, the Minister of Public Health issued a decree in 1936 to annex the museum to the Ministry of Health and appoint the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Health as the head of the museum's administrative committee (0081-018931, National Archives, Egypt). In 1949, the museum, along with its funds and contents, was officially annexed to the Ministry of Public Health. Its administration was restructured into a committee whose members represented a mix of medical, educational, social health, public health, hygiene, social studies,

and museum-related disciplines. The FHMC fund depended on the Ministry of Public Health—specifically the Department of Social Health (0081-018931, National Archives, Egypt)

This administrative shift in 1949 can be understood on multiple levels, all of which point to the museum's transformation from a cultural initiative into an official institution that just awaits its reorganization in a new and more suitable construction. The 1949 Affiliation with the Ministry of Health signified recognition of the museum as an integral part of the state's health and educational infrastructure. What had once been an elite project run by a select committee now received formal and institutional support, placing the museum on the national map in terms of funding and public attention.

The composition of the museum's supervisory committee reflected a multidisciplinary understanding of the museum's role, not solely medical, but also educational, cultural, and artistic. The presence of representatives from the Ministry of Education pointed to a desire to present public health as part of the national culture, rather than merely a medical service.

7. Financial History of the FHMC: Evolution of Funding

In 1924, al-Ahrām reported: *“Dr. Shaheen, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior for Health Affairs, sought to persuade his American colleagues to encourage the Rockefeller Institute to establish a hygiene museum in Egypt, modeled on its prominent institutions in the United States and major European capitals. The proposed museum sought to educate the public on disease transmission, stages of illness, their effects on the body, and methods of prevention. Reports note that Dr. Shaheen received a favorable response, indicating promising prospects for the initiative.”* (al-Ahrām 1926, p.4).

The complexity surrounding Rockefeller's separate archaeological museum project in Egypt—and the rejection it faced from Egyptian authorities (Abdel Rahman 2023, pp.83-84)—was a key factor in the Rockefeller Institute's decision not to support the establishment of a hygiene museum in Egypt. Despite these setbacks, the committee succeeded in inaugurating the FHMC in April 1927, relying on a combination of Egyptian and non-Egyptian donations. In his opening speech, Dr. Shaheen, the museum's chief official, explained that the museum lacked a fixed financial resource and operated instead through charitable donations from Egyptian benefactors, in addition to an annual Egyptian government subsidy of L.E. 300 (Shaheen 1927, p. 5). The museum's administrative committee, chaired by Dr. Shaheen, held authority over the allocation of these precarious resources. (al-Ahrām 1928, p.7).

The committee's ability to inaugurate the museum in 1927, despite unstable funding, reflects civic commitment alongside bureaucratic adaptability. Dr. Shaheen's dual role as the museum's director and Egypt's chief health official enabled flexible decision-making and strategic resource mobilization. By 1948, the FHMC's revenues consisted of visitor admission fees and an annual subsidy of LE 500 from the Ministry of Health. The museum's accounts closed that year with a balance of LE 7,700 in the National Bank (0081-018931, National Archives, Egypt)

In 1949, a royal decree issued from Qubba Palace formally annexed the FHMC to the Ministry of Public Health, and it established a dedicated budget line within the Department of Social Health, signifying a pivotal institutional shift. The transition from ad hoc donations to a formal budget allocation in 1949 marks the museum's evolution from an elite initiative to a recognized public institution of increasing relevance and sustainability. (0081-018931, National Archives, Egypt)

More than a fiscal adjustment, this integration reflected the state's evolving conception of the museum: no longer merely as an exhibition space, but as an active instrument in health policy and public education. By granting the museum relative autonomy in planning and funding, the

state inaugurated a new era in which museums became vehicles for societal reform and knowledge dissemination, anchored within national governance.

8. The FHMC Departments

At the museum's inauguration, Dr. Shaheen provided descriptions to the press (Shaheen, 1927, p.5), while visitors, according to their backgrounds, offered varied accounts of the FHMC. It was a modest institution, arranged into four sections on each floor, with distinctive features such as the Secret Diseases Room and the staircase (Jawharī, 1931, pp.176-178 & Nibrāwī, 1927, pp.14-17).

8.1 The First Floor (Fig.5A)

- Bone Hall.
- Room containing models for the circulatory system, lymphatic vessels, respiratory system, and endocrine glands.
- Room featuring the nervous system, a prehistoric human, prehistoric tools, and skin diseases.
- Room presenting the digestive system, food sources and consumption methods, the urinary system, and diseases arising from nutritional deficiencies.

8.2 The Second Floor (Fig.5B)

- Room dedicated to the venereal diseases and methods of prevention.
- Room focused on motherhood, childhood, and first aid.
- Room highlighting Ophthalmic diseases, medical tools, cancer, and reproduction.
- Room specialized in infectious and parasitic diseases.

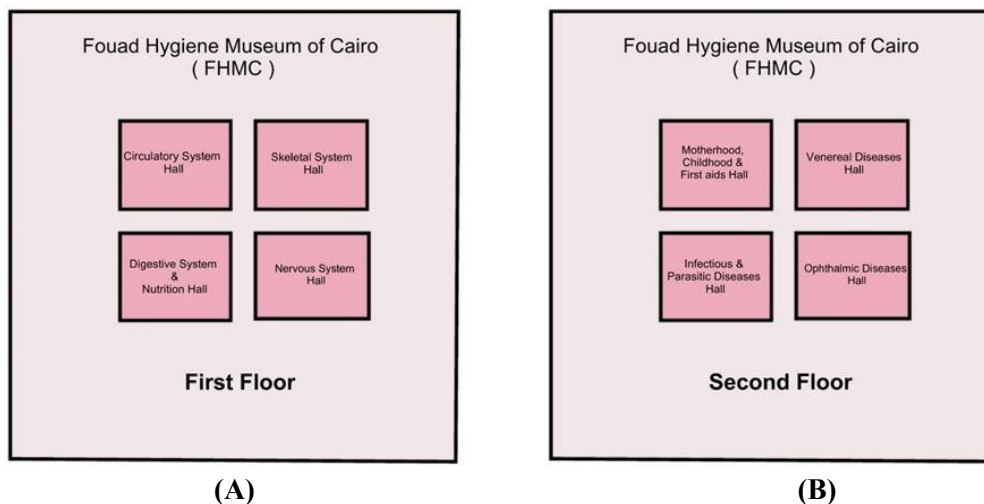


Figure 5. A–B Principal sections of the FHMC

By Eng. Mariam GadelRab

8.3 “Secret Diseases” Room

Before the FHMC was established, Dr. Fakhri Mīkhā’īl Faraj, a specialist in venereal diseases, submitted a report to King Fouad and his government in 1924 (Fig. 6) addressing the spread of prostitution and venereal diseases in Egypt, along with proposed measures to combat them. In this report, Faraj recommended establishing a free public museum in Cairo, featuring suggested that visitors receive a low-cost booklet explaining the exhibits and offering medical advice.

Faraj further proposed repurposing one of Cairo's School of Medicine museums, which had fallen out of use among medical students, by supplementing it with wax models and illustrations to transform it into an effective public health education tool, while preserving free public access (Faraj, 1924, p.113).



Figure 6 The front piece of Faraj's report about prostitution in Egypt published in 1924
Faraj, F. M. (1924). Taqrīr 'an Intishār al-Bighā' wa-al-Amrād al-Tanāsuliyya bi-al-Qutr al-Miṣrī
(Report on the spread of prostitution and venereal diseases in Egypt), Cairo: *Al-Asriya* Press

Dr. Shaheen described “Secret Diseases” Room in his speech, on the museum's inauguration, as the “Room of Horrors,” as it contained photographs of organs deformed by syphilis, displayed in a manner that chills the soul. He declared that if a young man were to see such images, "he would never allow himself to commit adultery even once in his life." Prominently placed on the door of the venereal diseases room, at the FHMC, is a sign that reads “*Secret Diseases*”, followed by the Qur'ānic verse:

"وَلَا تَقْرُبُوا الزَّانِثِينَ كَانَ فَاحِشَةً وَسَاءَ سَبِيلًا"

“Do not go anywhere near adultery: it is an outrage, and an evil path.” Qur'ān 17:32 (Sūrat al-Isrā', verse 32) (Abdel Haleem 2004, p.177).

This pairing of religious counsel and public health messaging powerfully illustrates how the museum used religious texts to reinforce behavioral guidance and moral instruction.

Corroborating this, the Egyptian Qur'ānic exegete al-Shaykh Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī (1870-1940) (see: Daneshgar, 2018) wrote about the same room, which was an accurate and deeply heartfelt depiction: (Fig. 7)

“What one sees in this room leaves no doubt about the destructive power of adultery on human life: Gaunt faces, crooked noses, withered necks, bleeding sores, oozing lips, deformed ears, bulging eyes, disintegrated genitals, perforated private parts, spotted or severed reproductive organs, hellish appearances, and bones of brownish hue in decaying bodies. A terrifying sight, a ghoulish spectacle, and a description that defies words—I have neither the strength nor the eloquence to fully convey it.”

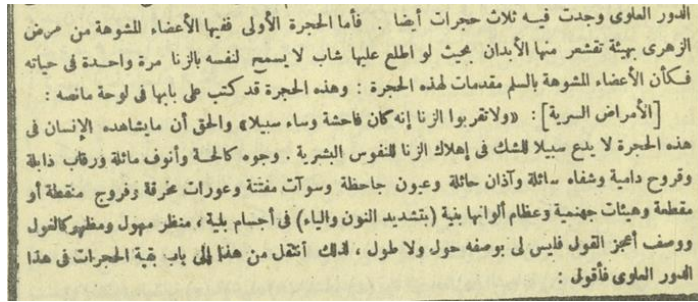


Figure. 7 Description of the Secret Diseases Room by al-Shaykh Ṭaṇṭāwī Jawharī Jawharī, Ṭaṇṭāwī (1931). *Al-Jawahir fī Tafsir al-Qur'an* [The Jewels in the Interpretation of the Qur'an] (Vol. 10, 2nd ed., p. 24) Cairo, Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi & Sons

Many countries, including Egypt, sought to eradicate venereal diseases. The Düsseldorf exhibition GeSoLei in 1926 devoted considerable attention to this issue, highlighting the evolution of treatment methods, symptoms of infection, causes, and preventive strategies (Krischel, Czirr, & Moll, 2025). The Deutsches Hygiene-Museum Dresden (DHMD), in cooperation with the Deutsche Gesellschaft zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten (DGBG), pursued similar initiatives abroad. The Egyptian design of the 'Secret Diseases Room' gave the exhibition a distinct character that set it apart from comparable displays abroad. Its uniqueness lay in the incorporation of Qur'ānic verses, such as "Do not go anywhere near adultery" (Q 17:32), to dissuade visitors from behaviors conducive to venereal disease. The message was unambiguous: abstinence was urged not only on health grounds but also as an expression of reverence for divine guidance and moral obligation. The room retained its name until the museum's closure, reflecting a persistent social discomfort with illnesses associated with illicit sexual conduct. The designation itself maintained an aura of discretion rooted in moral framing, which continued to shape public engagement with the subject throughout the museum's existence.

At the end of 1952, the venereal diseases section of the Hygiene Museum drew particular attention during the Social Health Conference held at Dār al-Ḥikma, chaired by Dr. Ibrāhīm Ḥanafī Nājī. The three-hour meeting focused on strategies for combating venereal diseases in Egypt (Fig. 8). The conference resolution called upon the relevant authorities to reorganize the FHMC in line with contemporary therapeutic developments, with the aim of transforming it into an educational center serving both the general public and medical specialists. Participants further affirmed the readiness of the joint supervisory committee to undertake this task and to provide the necessary technical expertise for its implementation (*al-Miṣrī*, 1952, p. 7).



Figure 8: The Most Effective Treatment for Venereal Diseases
The Reorganization of the Fouad I Hygiene Museum (*al-Miṣrī* 5th Dec. 1952, no.5395, p.7).

8.4 The Staircase

The central staircase of the FHMC drew particular notice from most visitors who wrote about the museum. Nibrāwī (1897–1985) highlighted the staircase in his account, noting that the hygiene-themed panels displayed there originated from Japan—a country renowned for its

cleanliness, whose advice-bearing placards carried considerable prestige (Nibrāwī, 1927, p. 15). Jawharī, in turn, documented in detail the content of each panel affixed along the staircase walls (Jawharī, 1931, p. 177). The decision to adorn the staircase with these distinctive panels proved both effective and impactful, as reflected in visitors' descriptions, which attest to their success in shaping the museum experience.

9. The FHMC Collection

The FHMC assembled a wide array of exhibits through both international and local contributions, including sanitary models, locally produced health displays, photographs, hygiene panels, and acquisitions from numerous exhibitions abroad, most notably from Dresden. Taken together, these materials illuminate the museum's broader mission: to educate the public on hygiene through scientific demonstration while simultaneously embedding moral and cultural values. In this respect, the FHMC functioned not merely as a hygienic institution but as a conceptual precursor to Egypt's later specialized museums beyond the realm of antiquities.

9.1 Sanitary Models from Abroad:

Several owners of sanitary engineering firms abroad generously donated numerous models to FHMC. Dr. Shaheen acknowledged their contributions in his inauguration speech, recording their gifts as follows: (Shaheen 1927, p.5)

- Messrs. Harriman and Co., London (models).
- Messrs. Shaoks and Co., London.
- Messrs. Doulton and Co., London.
- Messrs. Merryweather and Co., London.
- The National League for Physical and Improvement. London.
- The National Council of Education of American Medical Association.

9.2 Sanitary Models from Egypt

The FHMC benefited from generous contributions by both governmental bodies and private individuals.

- **The Ministry of Public Instruction** donated 417 plaster models, to the museum, which had previously belonged to the Faculty of Medicine.
- **A variety of disease-explaining models were donated by doctors :**
 - Euaedes and Louis Awad provided intricately designed wax models that served as powerful educational tools for illustrating venereal diseases (STDs).
 - Dr. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Khāliq donated a visual set from Shanghai, China, featuring healthy lifestyle practices and pathways of disease transmission.
 - Ṣāliḥ 'Alī Ibrāhīm contributed a series of images documenting operational structures within ophthalmology hospitals.
 - Certain "Osborne" gifted a box of historical significance containing relics linked to Clot Bey, the pioneer of Egyptian medical education. Among its contents were ophthalmic instruments over a hundred years old, with Clot Bey's name engraved on the lid (Shaheen, 1927, p.7).

9.3 Exhibits of Distinctly Egyptian Origin

Health Models Representing the Local Environment and Endemic Diseases such as ankylostomiasis, bilharzia, trachoma, and their treatments, as well as pellagra and its cause. These models were prepared by the staff of the Department of Parasitic Disease Research at the Health Authority's laboratories and storage division, as well as by the Physiology and Parasitology Departments at the Faculty of Medicine, Cairo University.

Furthermore, Shaheen visited various museums in England and France, selected and purchased numerous exhibits representing medical insects, alongside a large collection of plant products related to public health.

9.4 The Prehistoric Human Skeleton and Tools

This display ignites curiosity and fosters a deeper understanding of human history through a scientific and health-based lens. The showcased skeleton, accompanied by a full set of prehistoric tools (Shaheen 1927, p.5), likely emphasized the evolutionary journey of the human body and how early lifestyles shaped physical structure, and probably Egypt was waiting to establish a special museum for pre - dynastic objects (Egyptian Senate, 1930, p.282).

In this sense, the FHMC functioned as more than a hygiene museum; it became a conceptual seedbed for future museum models. This is evident in the second-floor displays, which offered visual guides and educational content on how to address workplace injuries. These materials foreshadowed the more structured initiatives of the 1960s, advocating for the establishment of a specialized museum in Egypt devoted to occupational health and injury prevention (al-Ahrām, 1961, p. 9).

9.5 Photographs and Hygiene Education Panels — Fouad Hygiene Museum, Cairo

When al-Shaykh Ṭantāwī Jawharī visited the FHMC, he offered a detailed and rare account of all the displayed images and panels, each inscribed with health advice meant to benefit visitors. He expressed particular pride in the museum's incorporation of Qur'ānic verses and prophetic sayings within these panels, which served both to guide the public (Jawharī, 1931, p.177).

By integrating religious wisdom into public messaging, the FHMC encouraged visitors to reflect on wellness not only as a physical practice but as an ethical and spiritual one.

9.6 German Contributions to the FHMC

The long-time president of the Dresden Hygiene Museum, Georg Seiring (1883-1972), briefly recounted, in his memoirs, the visit of Dr. Shaheen to the GeSoLei (see: Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf 2026) in 1926. Shaheen's visit was followed by the Egyptian request to purchase items manufactured by the Dresden Hygiene Museum's production facility (Seiring, 1961, p.3). Dr. Shaheen remarked: *"We received full support and facilitation from the Dresden Museum authority, which agreed to sell models of the same type held in their collection. The sets we obtained were marvels of creativity, representing numerous public health issues. Most of the illustrations were handmade by skilled artists"* (Shaheen, 1927, p.5). Prior to the arrival of the Dresden collection in Cairo, and under the supervision of Dresden's mayor Bernhard Blüher (1864–1938), the Dresden Hygiene Museum extended technical assistance by dispatching several staff members to help coordinate and organize the displays at the FHMC. The delegation was headed by Dr. Rudolf Neubert (1898-1992), who later described his journey and his role in setting up the Cairo Hygiene Museum in his autobiography. Shaheen expressed his gratitude to the Dresden Hygiene Museum in his inauguration day speech. The opening ceremony was modest, attended only by the king and a small number of senior Egyptian officials (Fig. 9). Perhaps owing to the fact that a change of government occurred on the very same day. Neubert attributed the understated nature of the inauguration to the damage

sustained by many of the imported Dresden pieces, which required time to repair before they could be displayed.

In 1929, Shaheen visited the Grand Health Museum in the German city of Munich, where he was impressed by a collection of models exhibited to promote health awareness. He recommended the fabrication of a similar collection to be displayed at the FHMC (al-Ahrām 1929, p. 6).



Figure 9: *Following the museum’s inauguration, His Majesty the King departed with Dr. Shaheen at his left. In procession behind them were the Chief Aide-de-Camp, the Chief Custodian, Secretary Anīs Pasha, and finally Aḥmad Muḥammad Ḥasanayn Bey, Governor of Cairo”*
(al-Ahrām 20th April 1927, no.15278, p.1)

Most of the acquisitions were obtained from the Dresden Hygiene Museum’s model factory, a point elaborated upon in a 1930 report submitted by Muḥammad Zaki Shafy to Dr. Shaheen following his visit to Dresden (Fig. 10). In his account, Zaki described the factory’s production methods: “*I visited the factory where the models are manufactured... The factory succeeded in developing a material cheaper than all others, far more resistant to deterioration than commonly used substances, and unaffected by the country’s hot climate. Moreover, this material is lighter in weight than any alternative*”. (Shafy, 1930, p.4)

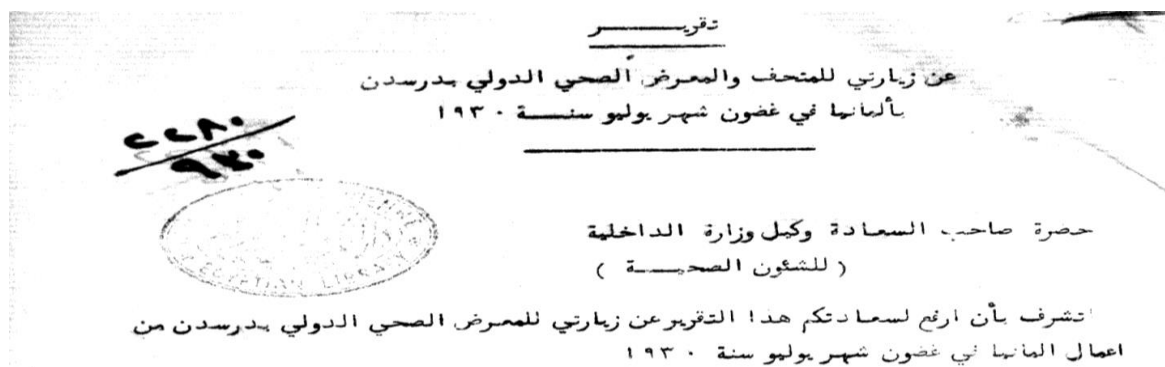


Figure 10: Front piece of Shafy Report

Shafy, M. (30th Aug. 1930) Report on My Visit to the Museum and the International Health Exhibition in Dresden, Germany, During July 1930, Submitted to His Excellency, the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior for Health Affairs, Dr. Mohamed Shaheen. No. 1540 (Medicine), National Library, Egypt.

10. Public Reception and Educational Impact of the FHMC

In his speech, on the museum's inauguration day, Dr. Shaheen identified the museum's intended audiences as individuals from all social classes, together with medical, scientific, and women's organizations, as well as school and university students of both sexes, provided they were accompanied by their teachers. Children under the age of ten were not permitted entry unless accompanied by their parents, guardians, or an appointed substitute. With regard to mothers, female students, and women's associations, the museum's management designated Tuesdays as a day reserved exclusively for women's visits, while the museum remained open to both men and women on all other weekdays.

The inclusion of bilingual labels in Arabic and a second foreign language indicates that the museum anticipated and welcomed foreign visitors, reflecting its broader commitment to accessibility and cross-cultural engagement (Shaheen, 1927, p. 5).

Recorded visitor numbers at the FHMC, beginning from 1928, are documented in several governmental statistical sources, as shown in the following table:

Table.1 The FHMC visitors' statistics from 1928 to 1954

The FHMC visitors from 1928 to 1954		
Year	Total of visitors	References
1928	41.811	Wizārat al-Māliyya, Taqwīm Sanat 1939, Būlāq bi-al-Qāhira, 1939 (Ministry of Finance. (1939). Official Almanac for the Year 1939 (p. 467). Bulaq: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Amīriyya, Government Press.)
1929	38.256	-----
1930	41.332	-----
1931	35.234	-----
1932	40.149	-----
1933	40.149	-----
1934	46.788	-----
1935	58.604	-----
1936	54.508	-----
1937	50.266	-----
1949	24.918	al-Iḥṣāʾ al-Sanawī al-ʿĀmm, Maṣlaḥat al-Iḥṣāʾ wa-l-Taʿdād 1949–1950(1953) (General Annual Statistics – Department of Statistics and Census) p.300
1950	27.763	-----
1951	35.519	Wizārat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUmūmiyya, al-Idāra al-ʿĀmma lil-Thaqāfa, Idārat al-Sijill al-Thaqāfi – al-ʿUnwān: al-Sijill al-Thaqāfi sanat 1951 /

		al-Maṭābi‘ al-Amīriyya, al-Qāhira(1953)(The Egyptian Kingdom, Ministry of Public Education, General Administration of Culture, Department of the Cultural Register – Title: The Cultural Register, 1951 / Government Press, Cairo, 1953.) p.444
1954	41.245	Jumhūriyyat Miṣr, Wizārat al-Tarbiyya wa-l-Ta‘līm, al-Idāra al-‘Āmma lil-Thaqāfa, Qism al-Nashra al-Thaqāfiyya wa-l-Dawriyyāt, al-Sijill al-Thaqāfi sanat 1954 (al-Mujallad al-Sābi‘), al-Maṭābi‘ al-Amīriyya bi-al-Qāhira Republic of Egypt, Ministry of Education, General Administration of Culture, Section of Cultural Bulletin and Periodicals. (1956). Cultural Register, 1954 (Vol. 7). Cairo: Government Press.) p.584

The visit statistics show the total number of visitors to the FHMC over consecutive years. The statistics did not clarify the visitors' nationalities, so we cannot compare FHMC visitors with those of other museums in Egypt, as other museums were preferred by foreign visitors while the FHMC was a required destination for natives.

Although we do not know the exact breakdown of those figures, *al-Ahrām* newspaper in 1928 provided us with a deeper insight by categorizing those who visited the museum during April: *"The museum issued a statement detailing the number of visitors in April 1928, with a total of 3,513 visitors among them, 152 students (constituting 5.3% of the total) from schools, and 51 soldiers (1.8% of the total)."* (al-Ahrām 1928, p. 5).

The FHMC statistics for April 1928 clearly indicate that the vast majority of museum visitors during that month were adult civilians who deliberately chose to visit the FHMC, suggesting that there was genuine public interest among Egyptians in engaging with the museum.

The FHMC visitors did not interact with the museum in the same way; each was impressed by different items in the museum's collection depending on their own background.

During the construction and even before the museum's opening, public Interest in the exhibits was noticed to be enormous. Neubert clarified: *"I often had to pull carpenters, painters, and workers away from fascinating moulages or devices they were eagerly discussing. Word of the museum had spread to nearby neighborhoods, and crowds gathered outside, requiring a guard to keep order. When the large apparatuses and models were placed in the entrance hall, we had a steady stream of public visitors enjoying the displays from the street in their modest way."* (Neubert, 1927, p. 3).

Sīzā Nibrāwī was struck by the fact that a day was set aside for women's visits, despite Shaheen's conservative stance toward women (Nibrāwī, 1927, p.14). In her description of the FHMC, she was able to convey the perfection and high quality of the museum's pieces and models. Nibrāwī suggested the employment of a guide, as in European museums, who could give visitors brief explanations of physiology and the various diseases, so that they would not leave without gaining some practical instruction from their visit. In this way, the true purpose of the FHMC would be fulfilled, and its impact would be that of an educational institution accessible to all. According to Nibrāwī, the educational policy of the FHMC depended on curiosity first, interest next these would continue to draw an ever-growing crowd of eager spectators, hungry to learn and understand: *"...and all these poor souls, gripped by the images they've seen, will return to their humble dwellings carrying with them a newfound horror of disease, a taste for cleanliness, and for science itself!"* (Nibrāwī, 1927, p.14)

However, the FHMC granted its audience a powerful perspective—not confined to education, but encompassing the psychological influence of visual deterrents. Najīb Maḥfūz writes, *"I*

remember they used to take us from school to visit museums, including the FHMC. There, we saw real images from hospitals of victims of drug use. At the time, we were teenagers, and one would leave the museum never thinking about such things again.” (Maḥfūz, 2005/2006, p. 48)

Al-Jawharī envisioned the FHMC, and the displays prepared for public exhibition within it as established in the manner of European hygiene museums, resonating deeply with its visitors. Europe, after all, had long exported narratives of debauchery and destructive passions, faithfully adopted and retold by Eastern libertines. Within the FHMC, however, were medical instructions and hygienic discourses. The underlying hope was that, by hearing and seeing such lessons conveyed through the museum, those same libertines might be inclined to embrace the best of them, so that God may guide them and make them among those endowed with understanding. (Jawharī, 1928, p.176).

Al-Jawharī's hope was a notable rhetorical strategy frequently employed in early twentieth-century reformist discourse: the deliberate juxtaposition of moral transgression with the aspirational promise of redemptive education.

11. Conclusion

King Fouad established a hygiene museum aimed at educating Egyptians and improving public health awareness in ways that resonated with local cultural values and everyday life. He chose to name it simply the Fouad I Hygiene Museum of Cairo, joining other institutions that bore his name, such as the Fouad Agricultural Museum. The museum was housed in Abdeen school, belonging to the Ministry of Religious Endowments (Awqaf), which came under royal authority following the 1923 constitution. This location may also have been selected for its swift availability or for its position within a particular urban setting, perhaps influenced by the social class living nearby and their expected reception of the museum. Indeed, elders in the surrounding neighborhood still recall that the building once hosted a museum, though little more is known. Dr. Shaheen's leadership of the museum (from 1927 to 1936) stemmed primarily from King Fouad's personal trust in him, as Shaheen served as the king's primary physician. He was appointed to various positions unrelated to his academic specialization, positions based largely on that royal trust, such as heading the Royal Entomological Society.

Shaheen rose to the highest position in Egypt's health affairs administration, which operated under the umbrella of the Ministry of Interior Affairs.

The museum's administrative committee did not lack members capable of contributing artifacts that reflected Egypt's medical heritage and the greatness of ancient Egyptian medicine. Dr. Aḥmad 'Īsā could have played this role effectively had it been required. However, they chose not to pursue this direction, as the museum's primary goal was to educate the present generation of visitors about the dangers of contemporary diseases and how to prevent them.

Egypt enlisted foreign expertise (from Dresden Hygiene Museum) to help organize the museum's displays; however, the foreign expert's role was largely limited. After 1930, complaints began to surface regarding the museum's small size, crowded exhibits, and poor display organization. In response, the idea of participating in exhibitions and lectures outside the museum took shape. The museum's collection was mobilized to breathe new life into and revitalize its public role.

The attempts to relocate the FHMC began in 1930, but it was unsuccessful, and the Old Abdeen School continued as the home of the FHMC until the 1960s, when the museum was moved to Sakakini Palace. Egypt's Department of Health Education and Public Awareness extended the museum's reach far beyond its physical premises by organizing regular school visits to the

FHMC. Over time, the museum took on a distinctly educational role, leaving a lasting impression on its young visitors, such as Najīb Maḥfūz.

The earliest and most famous visitors who documented and published their visit to the FHMC were Sīzā Nibrāwī and al-Sheikh al-Jawharī; Nibrāwī provided a comprehensive description of the FHMC, and supplemented it with practical recommendations to improve and maximize the benefits of visiting the FHMC, such as employing guides who could convey information orally to illiterate visitors.

The second important visitor was al-Shaykh al-Jawharī, who delved into the details of the museum's contents and described the content of the labels on display. Al-Jawharī documented what impressed him most: the Qur'ānic verses, proverbs, and other guidance drawn from the Qur'ān and Hadith. Both Nibrāwī and al-Jawharī described the panels on the FHMC's staircase. Nibrāwī's description identified the origin of the hygiene-related posters, highlighting that they came from a country held in high regard for cleanliness: Japan. Al-Jawharī, for his part, he documented the exact words written on the panels.

The museum's displayed collection employed every possible means to influence Egyptian visitors, instilling fear at times, appealing at others to religious sentiment through Qur'ānic verses and wise sayings, and persuading through images of healthy individuals. These strategies proved effective for literate audiences. The museum sought to raise health awareness around specific issues such as malnutrition and syphilis. It presented these problems in an engaging format, aiming to influence visitors and steer them away from harmful habits that contribute to such diseases, relying on persuasion rather than legislation. However, moral guidance and advice, as Sheikh Ali Abi al-Nour al-Jarbi Shaykh al-Ṭarīqah al-Idrīsīyah al-Shādhilīyah in Egypt (see Mur'ashlī, 2006, p. 923) mentioned, might be more effective than issuing regulations that are only read by their enforcers. (Dawoud, 1917, p. 315)

“The FHMC, though it might appear small in size, was in fact great in its usefulness—precious in its scientific and educational value. The country has long yearned for it”. (Shaheen, 1927, p. 5)

11. Acknowledgement

Many thanks to Ms. Marion Schnieder, Deutsches Hygiene Museum Dresden (DHMD), and Dresden Museum Archive. Also, I am so grateful to the CEDEJ, notably Prof. Lagrang & Dr. Hala Bayoumi, the Egyptian National Library (Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣrīyah), the Egyptian National Archive (Dār al-Wathā'iq al-Qawmiyya), Last but not least, I would like to thank Prof. Amina Elbendary.

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