



A Neglected Built Heritage

(The Museum of the Suez Canal Authority in Port Said)

Raghda Yehia Seddik

*Tourism Guidance Department
Faculty of Tourism and Hotel Management
Helwan University*

Randa Alaa El-Din Fouad

*Tourism Guidance Department and Heritage
and Museum Studies Program
Faculty of Tourism and Hotel Management
Helwan University*

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Port Said is renowned for its richness in the tangible and intangible cultural heritage. It has a cosmopolitan heritage for being inhabited by various nationalities and religions. Its archeological and urban heritage affluence is evident in the diversity of its distinctive architectural buildings, which reflect the heritage aspects of its people throughout modern history. In this perspective, the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority, locally known as the Villa of Eugénie, is considered one of Port Said's exceptional cultural heritage assets that lacks proper and adequate attention. Thus, this paper aims at illustrating the functional role of the so-called Villa of Eugénie from its construction in 1866 to date. It also focuses on its development history, current condition. A qualitative approach was followed in this paper through conducting in-depth interviews with 18 key stakeholders engaged with Port Said's cultural heritage. In addition, a SWOT analysis was carried out to highlight the positive aspects and existing impediments and to identify the appropriate strategic solutions for the current problems. The findings indicate that the museum is closed and the majority of its collection has been relocated to the International Museum of the Suez Canal Authority in Ismailia. Furthermore, the building is neither registered on Port Said's heritage list nor the UNESCO'S World Heritage List, although it is 155-year-old. As a consequence, the museum should be registered on Port Said's heritage list. Moreover, it should be reopened as it forms an integral part of the Port Saidians' history, identity, and outstanding cultural heritage.

1. Historical background about Port Said governorate

Port Said governorate is an Egyptian coastal city and one of the Canal Zone governorates (Port Said, Ismailia and Suez). It has a unique geographical location on the country's northeastern side between *Buhairat al-Manzila* (al-Manzilah Lake) and the Mediterranean at the northern end of the Suez Canal. It is surrounded by the

Mediterranean Sea on the north, Port Fouad on the east, Ismailia on the south, and Damietta on the west (SIS, 2009; Port Said Governorate, 2016). It is the third-largest urban agglomeration city after Cairo and Alexandria, extending for about 30 km. along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea (Fig. 1), with a total area of 1351.14 km² and an approximate population of 752,402 (Population Stat, 2021). Today, the city comprises five major districts which are Port Fouad, *al-šarq*, *al-ʿarab*, *al-Manakh* and *al-Zuhūr* (SIS, 2009).

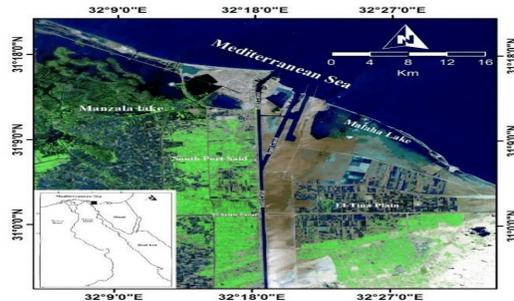


Fig.1. Map of Port-Said Governorate. (El-Kady et al., 2017).

The name of Port Said is a compound name consisting of two parts, the first is “Port” which means (marine harbor), referring to the city’s most important and second-largest port due to its strategic location on the northern entrance to the Suez Canal (Port Said Governorate, 2016). The second part is “*Saʿīd* /Said” in reference to the name of *Muḥammad Saʿīd* pasha, the wālī of Egypt (1822/1273-1279/1863) and the son of *Muḥammad ʿalī* pasha, who chose the city’s location. The name of Port Said was assigned to the city in 1855 during the meeting of the international committee composed of representatives from England, France, Russia, Austria, Spain and the Piedmont region in Italy (غباشي، ٢٠١٣).

The site of today’s Port Said was originally a small coastal village of fishermen known in the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs as (*Pr-Īmn*) or (*S3ʿnu*), which means the city of Amun or the house of Amun, situated at the northeastern side of Tanis (Gauthier, 1928). It was known by the Ancient Greek as Pelusium (*Πηλούσιον* or *Σαῖν*), which means muddy due to its location near to the Pelusiac branch of the Nile River (Donne, 1857).



Fig.2. The Location of Pelusium. (<https://ar.maps-egypt.com/>).

This site was blessed by the visit of the Holy family who entered Egypt from Rafia, *al-ʿArīš*, then Pelusium (Fig. 2). The area was also mentioned the Bible (*Ez. 30:15*): “*And I will pour out my wrath on Pelusium, the stronghold of Egypt and cut off the multitude of Thebes*” (خليل، ٢٠١٧).

Following the Arab conquest, the site was known as *al-Farma* derived from *al-Parama* which is originated from the ancient Egyptian name *Pr-Īmn*. Unfortunately, it

was entirely destroyed in 1118 during the Crusades' invasion led by Baldwin I (1100-1118) of Jerusalem. Today, its ruins are located in an area called *Tell Al-Farma*, Located about 30 km. to the east of Port Said (شقيير، ٢٠١٨).

On the 30th of November 1854, *Muhammad Sa'īd* pasha signed the concession authorizing Ferdinand-Marie De Lesseps to start digging the Suez Canal and entrusting him to direct the "Universal Maritime Suez Canal Company" (Stoess, 1869). The decree also determined the location of the two vital ports of the Suez Canal on the northern and the southern entrances (Tahoun, 2007). De Lesseps chose the location of the northern entrance for the foundation of the city of Port Said, accomplished in 1859. Thereupon, the city was divided into three main quarters: the European quarter (*al-Šarq*), with the European architectural styles that takes the shape of a right-angled triangle, the second was *al 'Arab*, and the third was Port Fouad (1926), located on the Asian bank of Suez Canal and inhabited by the employees of the Suez Canal administration (Megahed, 2014). Moreover, this city consisted of three principal streets parallel to the canal and started with the quay of Eugénie, which had been the former quay of the Mediterranean Sea and later Eugénie's Street or *Safīya Zaġlūl* street (ElKerdany, 2017). The first street was the *Cannebiere* (*al-Ġumhurīya* now), the second was called *Scierie* (Ramses street now), the center point of the city and extended from De Lesseps square (*al-Manšīya* square now), and finally the *Arsenal* (*Salāh Sālim* now) (نجم، ١٩٨٧).

The city of Port Said has experienced heroic periods in modern Egyptian history, beginning with the tripartite aggression invasion and their eventual withdrawal on December 23, 1956 (the Victory Day and the National Day of Port Said governorate), followed by the Six-Day-War in 1967 to 1973 October war (Bowen, 2003). As a consequence of its long-stood gallant attitude, Port Said was given the name the "Valiant City" as its nickname. It should be mentioned that there is an Egyptian movie known as "Port Said: The Valiant City" that depicts the city's struggle against the tripartite aggression. It was produced by the Egyptian famous actor Farid Shawky in 1957 in response to a direct request from the former president *Ġamāl 'Abd al-Nāsir* as a means to illustrate the aggression's brutal violence and how the people of Port Said intrepidly resisted it until it was obliged to leave (Magdy, 2018). After the victory of October 1973, the city of Port Said has declared a free zone on January 1, 1976. This decision contributed extensively to the promotion of the city's tourism, therefore increasing the national income and revitalizing several industries (SIS, 2009). Port Said has been a constant witness to war fields and political events throughout its history. From this perspective, the city's streets and squares continued to behold many events and incidents up to the present day, including the revolution of January 25, 2011, the Port Said Stadium massacre in 2012 and the revolution of 2013 (Lotfy, 2018). It should be noted that the city's subsequent incidences directly contributed to the distinctive formulation of its people's identity and heritage. Nonetheless, Port Said as a city has its own narratives of each of these iconic events, as well as others that are considerably less well-known by nationalist historians and historians.

2. Port Said governorate cultural heritage

Despite the fact that the foundation of the city of Port Said is relatively recent, just 162 years old when compared to the history of other Egyptian cities, it is exceedingly renowned for its richness in its tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Port Said is also recognized for its exceptional features which distinguish the city from any other destination in Egypt. According to UNESCO, cultural heritage includes tangible cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage, as cultural heritage does not end at monuments and collections of objects but also it encompasses traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our future generations (UNESCO, 2003).

2.1 Port Said's tangible cultural heritage

Tangible Cultural Heritage, also known as physical cultural heritage, refers to historical monuments, archaeological sites, objects and artifacts of human creativity that are maintained and transmitted intergenerationally as a result of their cultural significance to a community, nation or even humanity. In 1972, UNESCO adopted the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. Since then, there has been a considerable increase in public awareness regarding activities aimed at safeguarding cultural and natural sites of great significance (UNESCO, 2019). In Egypt, seven cultural and natural heritage properties were inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List (WHL) including Abu Mena Church (1979), Ancient Thebes with its necropolis (1979), Historic Cairo (1979), Memphis and its necropolis-The pyramid fields from Giza to Dahshur (1979), Nubian monuments from Abu Simbel to Philae (1979), Saint Catherine Area (2002) and *Wādī al-Ḥitān* (2005) (UNESCO, 2021).

The origin of Port Said as a city is peculiar as it was the first Egyptian city to be planned and constructed on idle soil (ElKerdany, 2017). Port Said has a cosmopolitan heritage due to its rich history of being inhabited by various nationalities and religions. Since 1859, the dominant language of the city was French and hence it became known as the “Cosmopolitan City” (the city of the world) and its residents by the “Cosmopolites” (citizens of the world) (ElKerdany, 2017). It could be also considered a heritage city based on its remarkable monuments and impressively designed heritage buildings that identify its distinct history and character, particularly those which were founded towards the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. Its built heritage combines the architectural characteristics of diverse European cultures, French, Italian, Greek and English and the Islamic architectural style within the Egyptian and Arabic context (Megahed, 2014).

In accordance with Cabinet Decree No. 1947 (2009), 139 architectural heritage buildings in Port Fouad were protected. In 2011, Cabinet Decree No. 1096 has designated 505 buildings as heritage based on their unique architectural style and age (Megahed, 2014; Wladika, 2015). Today, the total number of the registered heritage buildings in Port Said has reached up to 644 (Fig. 3), distributed among *al-Ṣarq* (340 buildings), *al-ʿArab* (106 buildings), al-Manakh (69 buildings) and Port Fouad (139 buildings) (Isaac, 2021). Although each of these four historical quarters has different

economic and cultural characteristics and architectural styles, harmonious and consistent life can be found everywhere (ElKerdany, 2017).

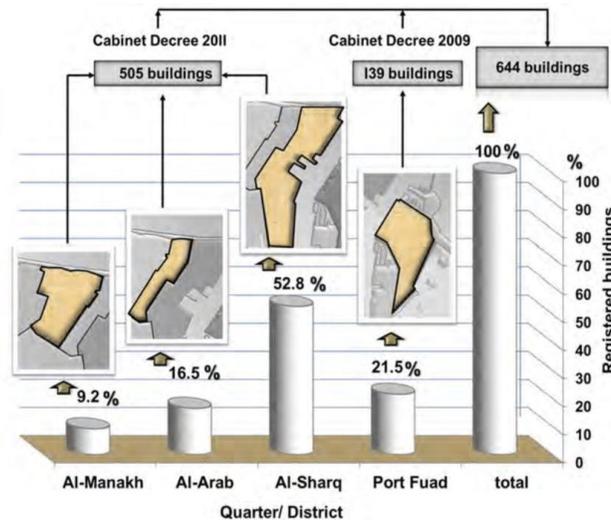


Fig.3. The total registered heritage buildings in Port Said. (Megahed, 2014).

Examples of the most outstanding and distinguished heritage buildings and monuments in Port Said are; the Villa of the French Empress Eugénie (1866), the Port Said Light House (1869), the earliest structure in the world built of reinforced concrete (أبو عيد، ٢٠١٨), *al-Tawfiqī* Mosque, the first mosque built in Port Said in 1882 during the reign of Khedive *Tawfiq*, the Church of Saint Eugénie, the most ancient church in Port Said, 1890, with the basilic style containing a substantial number of the 19th-century icons (نجم، ١٩٧٨), The Suez Canal Authority building (1895), the base of De Lesseps bronze statue (1899), and *al-Abāsī* Mosque, the second mosque built in the city in 1904 (عبد الرحمن، ٢٠٠٦).

Nevertheless, the affluence and high quality of Port Said’s historic urban fabric, as well as the infinite diversity of decoration and architecture which symbolize its rich and non-renewable cultural heritage, the city is not inscribed on the UNESCO’s World Heritage List (Megahed, 2014). In addition, some of its heritage buildings suffer from neglect and are under serious threat as a consequence of the city’s ever-increasing population, social and economic changes (ElKerdany, 2017), inadequate planning, and lax implementation of building regulations (Piaton, 2011). However, there have been few attempts to include the city of Port Said on UNESCO’s WHL. In response, the Port Said-based French Cultural Association in collaboration with other entities has the potential to include a number of the city's buildings on the UNESCO’s World Heritage List, ensuring international protection of the city's landmarks (Mahmoud, 2012). Moreover, efforts to raise the cultural heritage awareness on the outstanding value of Port Said’s heritage and continued discussions about preparing an official nomination of the city for the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List had almost no impact on the current demolition process of the urban and architectural heritage of the city (Wladika, 2015).

2.2 Port Said's intangible cultural heritage

The intangible cultural heritage, also called the living cultural heritage, refers to the practices, expressions, knowledge and skills that communities, groups and sometimes individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2003). In 2003, UNESCO adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in order to incite countries to protect their intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and to recognize the ICH's significance as a source of cultural diversity and a driver of sustainable development (UNESCO, 2011). Article 2 of the UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage has proposed five broad domains in which intangible cultural heritage is manifested as: *'oral traditions and expressions including languages as vehicles for intangible cultural heritage; performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and traditional craftsmanship'* (UNESCO, 2003).

The city of Port Said is not only acknowledged for its richness in the tangible cultural heritage, but also for its intangible cultural heritage which reflects the Port Saidians inherited traditions, performing arts, rural and urban practices, and shared expressions passed from one generation to another. Furthermore, the city's origin and development are unique for being planned by European architects as a dual city. Hence, Port Said has been a hybrid between European modernism and local traditions (ElKerdany, 2017). In this context, Port Said was chosen as the "Capital of Egyptian Culture" in March 2021, following in the footsteps of the Egyptian Ministry of Culture, led by Dr. Enas Abdel-Dayem (Al-Meligy, 2021). This practice strives to honor the valiant city and promote its cultural components, which have been and continue to be an inspirational source of creativity, thought, literature, and culture (Port Said Governorate, 2021).

It is noteworthy here to mention that several distinct intangible cultural heritage practices, traditions, expressions and performing arts are inextricably associated with the Port Saidians' lifestyle. For instance, *Al Simsimīya*, a well-known local collective singing genre in the Canal area started in Port Said in the 1930s, is considered one of the recognizable folklores and popular local music played by the Port Saidians that helped in forging their collective identity (Lotfy, 2018). The name *al-Simsimīya* refers to the traditional musical string instrument which dates back to the Pharaonic times (Gadalla, 2016). In ancient times, it used to entertain people on a background of songs evoking the peddling aboard the ships which went up and down the Canal. The performance of *al-Simsimīya* is frequently accompanied with the *al-bambūtīya* song, (*We are al-bambūtīya...No one resembles us... We are the sea traders, working in the Canal*) and the folkloric dance of *al-Simsimīya* (Lotfy, 2018).

Furthermore, the title of *Abū Al ʿarabī* is an expression pertaining to the Port Saidians' personality and their aspiring individuality. This title is used to describe the Port Saidians, especially in jokes. It is originally derived from the title of prophet *Ismāʿīl* (*Abū'l-ʿArab*) son of prophet *Ibrāhīm* and *Haġar*, in reference to the place of origin of his mother *Haġar*, *al-Farma* (عبد الفتاح، ٢٠٠٢) and was later used to refer to the Port Saidians men. In addition, it was reported among the people of Port Said that the

emergence of *Abū'l-^cArabī* character dates back to the years of the British occupation of Egypt when the people of Port Said thought about addressing the racism of the British by creating the folkloric character of *Abū'l-^cArabī*, which mocks the English and their actions. Moreover, an Egyptian movie based on the character of *Abū Al^carabī* was released in 2005. Also, a play about the same character is currently being performed at Cairo's Grand Tiba Theater (El-Adawi, 2021). In this respect, several seafood restaurants in Port Said and many other cities throughout Egypt have been named after *Abū'l-^cArabī* in recognition of the high quality of Port Said's fisheries products, including *al Saydīya*, *al Šabār* (Tilapia), *al-Sihilīya* (Keeled mullet), *Musā* (Sole), *Waqqār* (Golden Groupers), *Baklawīz* (Shellfish), *Um al-Khulūl* (Noah's Ark shell) (صبيح، ٢٠٢١).

3. The Museum of the Suez Canal Authority (locally known as the Villa of Eugénie)

3.1 The French Empress Eugénie (1826-1920)

Doña María Eugenia Ignacia Agustina de Palafox-Portocarrero de Guzmán y Kirkpatrick was born on May 5, 1826, in Granada, Spain (Stoddart, 1906). Her birth coincided with an earthquake, a bad omen by all accounts. However, it was believed that it signified that she was destined to convulse the world (A Biographical Encyclopedia, 2021). She descended from a Spanish noble and aristocratic family who fought on the French side during Napoléon I's Peninsular War in Spain. She was the second daughter of Cipriano Guzmán Palafox y Porto-Carrero, Count of Téba, Marquise of Ardales and afterward Count of Montijo, and Maria Manuela, the daughter of Kirkpatrick, the U. S consul in Malaga and exporter of Spanish fruits and wines (Tschudi, 1900).

Eugénie held many titles during her lifetime including the 16th Countess of Téba, the 15th Marchioness of Ardales and the 8th Countess of Montijo. She was popularly known by her father's county title, Montijo, although her surnames were Guzmán and Porto-Carrero (Ruvigny and Raineval, 1909).

She was praised for her beauty and she was one of the most courageous and influential women of her age. She had alert and facile intelligence and could speak fluently four languages. She received most of her education in Paris where she attended the Convent of the Sacré Coeur and there she was known as Eugénie de Montijo. Later, she joined a boarding school in the United Kingdom to learn English (Barker, 1957).

In January 1853, she married the French emperor Napoléon III, the nephew and heir of Napoléon Bonaparte I, and became empress of the French until 1870. In March 1856, she gave birth to their only imperial heir, Napoléon-Eugène-Louis Bonaparte, who was known by the French as the son of France (Stoddart, 1906).

Despite the fact that the French imperial family sturdily opposed this marriage, Eugénie was able to win the hearts of the French and she acquired many political and societal powers. Moreover, she contributed considerably to the court's brilliance and demonstrated a more prominent and powerful effect on her husband's foreign policy. Due to the physically weakened health condition of her husband, she was frequently

consulted on significant issues (Barker, 1967). Thrice, the French empress was involved in politics and plunged into the foreign affairs of the Second Empire when she served as regent during her husband's absence in 1859, 1865, and 1870 (Barker, 1959).

After the fall of the French Empire in 1870, Eugénie fled to England with her son while her husband was released by the Germans after his surrender in the Battle of Sedan and went to live in England as well. In 1873, Napoléon III died in England and he was followed by the death of his son in 1879 while fighting in South Africa (Stoddart, 1906).

After the death of her husband and son, the health of Eugénie deteriorated, however, she lived long enough to see the collapse of other European monarchies after World War I. Eugénie had been an empress of France, a banished queen in England, a widow and bereaved mother, who had come back to Madrid, after years of exile, to die on July 10, 1920, at the age of 94. She was buried in Hampshire, the United Kingdom, to rest along with her husband and her only son (Kurtz, 1964).

3.2 The French Empress Eugénie and Egypt

The French empress Eugénie traveled extensively and acted on behalf of her husband in several events and occasions all over the world (Barker, 1967). In this sense, she was invited by Khedive Ismail to attend the most important event in the history of Egypt during the year 1869, which was the opening of the Suez Canal. She also represented her husband Napoléon III and was the ceremony's guest of honor. Moreover, several kings, emperors, artists, writers and Europe's most sophisticated flocked to Egypt to witness the canal's splendid festival (The American Annual Cyclopedic, 1869).

During his reign, Khedive Ismail wanted to develop Cairo into a "Paris along the Nile" or colonial city, notably following his visit to the Paris World Exhibition in 1876 (Mestyan, 2017). He succeeded in transforming Cairo into a mirror image of Paris, both architecturally and socially; nonetheless, the glamour of this era reached its peak during the grandiose celebrations for the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 (Mostyn, 1989). Various historians assumed that Eugénie owned the heart of Khedive Ismail who was fond of her since they were studying in France, but her family firmly opposed this relationship (Mostyn, 1989). During the Suez Canal opening celebration, Khedive Ismail praised her character by saying "*Your brave soul does the greatest things in silence, My Eyes will forever fancy looking at you*" (عدلي, ٢٠١٣).

In preparation for the reception of his guests attending the opening ceremony of the Suez Canal, particularly the French empress Eugénie, Khedive Ismail ordered the establishment of many building projects all over Egypt. He built a magnificent palace for her in the area of Zamalek on the Nile River (Gezira Palace), Marriot hotel nowadays, in the French style as a mirror image of the Tuileries palace so that so she could feel as if she was still in France. He ordered the cherry blossom seeds to be planted in the palace garden after she expressed her desire for the scent of these flowers. Also, the Khedival Opera House was erected in Cairo, surrounded with *al-Azbakīya* garden, where the Egyptian-themed opera *Aida* was scheduled to be played

but instead the splendid Verdi's *Rigoletto* was performed (Petrocelli, 2019). In addition, a route was paved between Cairo and the Giza Plateau in order to facilitate her visit to the area. Moreover, his hunting lodge overlooking the pyramids, known today as Mena House Hotel, was enlarged to receive the guests of the opening ceremony (Mestyan, 2017).

The inauguration celebration of Suez Canal commenced at Port Said, November 16th evening, 1869, when Empress Eugénie arrived on board her yacht *L'Aigle* (Fig. 4). She was one of six thousand high-profile guests who witnessed different ceremonies in the open air (The Nautical Magazine, 1869). As a result of Eugénie's visit to Port Said, a street was named after her as "Eugénie's street" (Fig. 1)

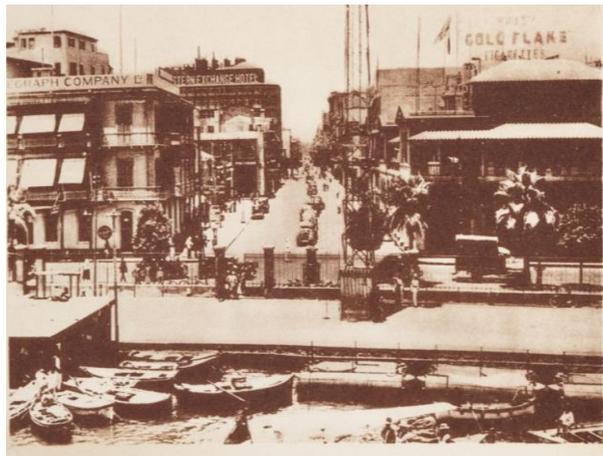


Fig.4. Empress Eugénie 's Street at Port-Said. (<https://hdl.handle.net/1911/5734>)

(Mayorkino, 1900). Despite the fact that Eugénie street's name has been officially changed to *Safīya Zaġlūl*, as after the 1952 coup, the majority of Port Said streets' names were changed to suggest another kind of belonging, people still call it "Eugénie's Street" or "Eugina's street". During her visit to Port Said, she stayed in a building which is later became known as "Eugénie's Villa", located in Eugénie's Street or today known as *Safīya Zaġlūl* street (Extra News, 2014).

The festivities continued on the 17th and 18th of November when Eugénie arrived at Ismailia on her yacht *L'Aigle* (The Nautical Magazine, 1869). The street which witnessed the procession of Khedive Ismail with Empress Eugénie during the celebration of the Suez Canal opening was named after her as "Eugénie's street" as well (Fig. 5). This street connects between the ancient Ismailia station to the port of Ismailia and is currently known as 'Urābī street (El-Gendy, 2015).



Fig.5. Empress Eugénie's street at Ismailia. (El-Gendy, 2015).

After 47 years from her first visit, Empress Eugénie had a strong nostalgia for Egypt as she revisited it in 1905 as an elderly lady disguised in black (الأميرة جويدان, ١٩٨٠). Her visit came after the deaths of Khedive Ismail, her husband and her son. She

started her tour with Cairo by visiting Khedive Ismail's widows, his tomb in *al-Rifāʿī* Mosque and all the places she had previously visited with him. During her visit, she stayed in Savoy hotel at Port Said for several days, however, there was a huge difference between this visit and the one while she was still an empress (علي, ٢٠١٣). It was believed that she witnessed the discovery of the tomb of Yuya and Tuya and sat on the chair of princess *S3t-Imn*, commenting on its imperial style and praising the greatness of the ancient Egyptian civilization (Wilson, 1964). Eventually, Empress Eugénie died at the age of 94 in Spain on July 11, 1920, while visiting her relative, the 17th duke of Alba (McQueen, 2016).

3.3 The location of the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority

The Museum of the Suez Canal Authority, also known as the Villa of Eugénie, is located at the intersection of Eugénie quay (*Safīya Zaġlūl* street now) and al Bazar street with the *Arsenal* street (*Salah Salīm* street now). On the northeastern side, the museum's façade overlooks Eugénie street (*Safīya Zaġlūl*).

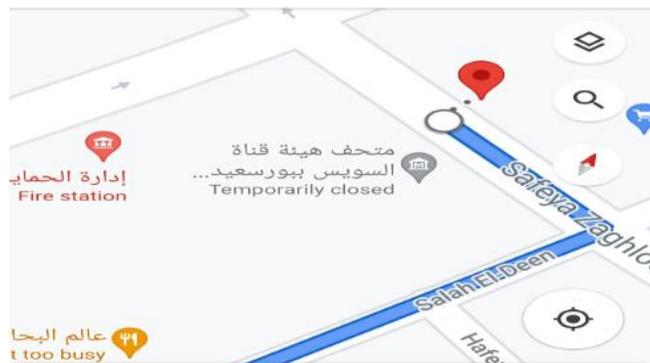


Fig.6. The location of the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority on google maps.

<https://www.google.com/maps/dir/30.0698833,31.4432299/31.263438,32.307186/@30.6651278,32.4240367,9z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m6!4m5!1m1!4e1!1m1!4e1!3e0>

The building is surrounded by the fire fighters' office (civil defense) on the northwestern side, the old fish marketplace on the southeastern side and an abandoned building on the southwestern side (Fig. 6).

3.4 The so-called Villa of Eugénie throughout its history

The so-called Villa of Eugénie was originally the building dedicated to the French Consulate, the earliest consulate in Port Said, as it was logical for the first French community to have the first consulate in the city. Also, the French acquired the majority of the Suez Canal Company's investments. In addition, members of the French community occupied administrative positions in the Suez Canal Company, maritime companies, banks, and within the Egyptian government as well. Moreover, since the beginning of the Suez Canal project (when the number of the French community in Port Said reached 827, according to the Egyptian population census in 1897), there has been an increase in the number of the French community in Port Said, necessitating the establishment of a consulate to handle the affairs of the community members (ظاهر, ٢٠٢٠).

The consulate's building, located in Al šarq quarter, is considered one of Port Said's oldest structures, dating back to 1866. Monsieur Laroche, one of the Suez Canal Company's engineers was the first to assume the position of the consul agent at Port Said. In fact, De Lesseps constructed this building during the Suez Canal digging to

serve as the French consulate and the residence of the French consul. The consulate was planned to open following the Suez Canal ceremony to provide its services to the substantial French community living in Port Said. Prior to the Suez Canal's opening in 1869, De Lesseps chose the French consulate building, which was temporarily closed at that time, to be the residence or the rest house for the French empress Eugénie during her visit to Port Said to attend the opening ceremony of Suez Canal, due to the consulate's close location to the celebration platform. Accordingly, the building became known to the general public till today as the Villa of Eugénie and the main street was named after her as well (أبو عياد، ٢٠٢٠).

The building's courtyard witnessed a part of the Suez Canal inauguration celebration, with three platforms installed in front of it devoted to the world's kings, princes and dignitaries who attended the opening ceremony (عوض، ٢٠١٨).

The building served as the French consulate until 1956 when it was closed as a result of the French alliance in the tripartite aggression against Egypt and converted into a French library. After the nationalization of the Suez Canal on 26 July 1956, the building was subordinated to the Suez Canal Authority (SCA) and it was inhabited by the nuns (عوض، ٢٠١٨), who worked in the French Church and the school attached to it, in recognition of their roles as nurses during the 1956 tripartite aggression (ظاهر، ٢٠٢٠). It should be noted that the building's well-preserved status is attributed to its location in *al-Šarq* district, which was occupied by the foreign communities and avoided by French and English planes, which focused their bombardment on the buildings of the Egyptian neighborhoods (عوض، ٢٠١٨).

For many years, the building was closed and utilized as a storehouse for the SCA, housing rare artifacts, maps and monuments of the Suez Canal. In 1998, Lieutenant-General *Ahmad ʿAlī Fadil*, Chairman and Managing Director of the Authority of Suez Canal (1996-2012), decided to transform the building into a Suez Canal historical museum. Since then, the building has been known as the Museum of Suez Canal Authority in Port Said, and it was officially opened on August 6, 2015, to coincide with Egypt's celebration of the opening of the new Suez Canal (Museum of Suez Canal Authority, 2019).

3.5 The layout of the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority in Port Said

The Museum of Suez Canal Authority, known as the Villa of Eugénie, occupies an area of 1292 m². The building is considered a unique architectural masterpiece with the European style as it was built on stone foundations and supported solely with stone walls instead of reinforced concrete. It is bordered by three gardens on three sides: the northwestern, southwestern and southeastern. The entire building, including the three gardens, is surrounded by a stone enclosure wall supported with iron bars. On the southern corner of the



Fig.7. The entrance of the museum (©Authors, 2021).

museum's garden, an adjacent building consisting of one story used in the past as stables for housing horses and today includes the administrative offices and toilets (يوسف، ٢٠٢٠).

The building consists of two floors, the ground floor and the first floor, with the main entrance on the northeastern side overlooking the formerly known as Eugénie street (*Safīya Zaġlūl* street now). The entrance door consists of two wooden panels framed with grey marble and surmounted by the first floor's balcony which its façade is decorated with four faience green carnation flowers and flanked with a long wooden terrace on each side (Fig. 7) (نجم، ١٩٨٧).

The main entrance leads to the ground floor which contains a reception hall and two pavilions. The northwestern aisle which consists of two longitudinal halls (10x4,5 ms.) served as an altar when the building was housed by the nuns, while the southeastern aisle consists of two longitudinal rooms and a reception.

The first floor can be reached by a wooden hanging ladder, consisting of two pavilions with two halls each. The two halls end with a long terrace with a wooden ceiling which forms part of the building's façade (Fig. 8). The roof of the building is supported with wooden beams and contains a room



with a vaulted ceiling used for storing the Suez Canal maps and maquettes

Fig.8. Long terrace with a wooden ceiling (©Authors, 2021).

4. Methodological framework

A descriptive research design was employed in this paper aiming at highlighting the current condition of the so-called villa of Eugénie and investigating its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT). In this context, a field visit to the museum and its vicinity was carried out in February 2021 to fulfill the paper objectives. Moreover, a qualitative approach was followed through conducting in-depth interviews and individual conversations with 18 key stakeholders engaged with the city of Port Said's cultural heritage from August 4 to September 30, 2021, to get a clear insight into their perception concerning this cultural heritage and the possibility for its reopening for the public. The target stakeholders included the Museum of Suez Canal Authority professionals, Suez Canal Authority (SCA), the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA), National Organization for Urban Harmony (NOUH), the Supreme Council for Heritage and Civilization Harmony in Port Said, East Port Said district headquarter, the Historic Port Said Association, tourism, heritage, and museums experts, tour guides, tourism companies, and the local community.

Data was obtained through 11 semi-structured questions with the target key stakeholders, allowing for an open discussion with the interviewees and delving deeply into the museum's current condition and its unrivaled collection. The questions also seek to explore the stakeholders' perspectives on the conversion of the so-called Villa of Eugénie into a museum and the transfer of the majority of its collection to the International Museum of the Suez Canal Authority in Ismailia. In

addition, the semi-structured questions investigate the building's registration on the Port Said heritage buildings' list, its inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List (WHL), and the role of the local community engagement in its safeguarding. Moreover, the questions attempt to determine the museum's key aspects of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

5. Findings and analysis

5.1 The visit to the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority

In February 2021, a field visit was conducted to the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority in Port Said, locally known as the Villa of Eugénie, to interview some of the target stakeholders in order to assess the building's current status, investigate its registration on Port Said's heritage buildings list, explore its potential inscription on the UNESCO's WHL and focus on the role of the local community engagement and the other stakeholders in its sustainable development and safeguarding.

The visit also aims at identifying the museum's key points of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats through analyzing the 11 semi-structured questions with the target stakeholders. The visit revealed that the museum is currently closed for public and private visits and that it has been under renovation and development works since 2018. Today, the museum accommodates its staff as well as those of the SCA's public relations department.

In addition, the visit detected a live example of the local encroachment along the museum's perimeter. For instance, the facade of the building, which overlooks Eugénie street (*Safiya Zaglül* street now) on the northeastern side, suffers from the haphazard parking of vehicles in front of its main entrance ignoring the iron fence with the SCA's logo that is placed to mark the museum's entry (Fig. 9). This is inconveniencing visitors and employees who want to park their cars nearby the museum. Moreover, the haphazard parking of cars prevents pedestrians from walking by the museum's building as there is only a narrow garden on the sidewalk separating the parking area and the museum's entrance.



Fig.9.The haphazard parking of vehicles in front of the museum's facade. (©Authors, 2021).

On the southeastern side, the extension of the museum's southeastern enclosure wall endures a rampant encroachment of the old fish market shops. The existence of the old fish market shops and the other surrounding illegal structures distorts the aesthetic value of the historic building. Also, the consistent use of excessive waters for fish cleansing and other utilities may pose a significant threat to the historic building and cause damage to the natural environment (Fig. 10), as evidenced by the drowning of the surrounding gardens causing the plants' roots to suffocate and begin to rot.

Furthermore, the running cleansing waters and the accumulated fish waste and littering do not only have negative impacts on health and the surrounding environment but also cause cluttered streets, unpleasant odor and an ideal breeding ground for bacteria, insects and vermin.



Fig.10. The rampant local encroachment of the old fish market shops on the museum's southeastern enclosure wall. (© Authors, 2021)

5.2 In-depth interviews with the target stakeholders

5.2.1 The Museum's current condition

Asking the key target stakeholders regarding the museum's current condition, they indicated that the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority is currently closed for domestic and international visits. Since 2018, the museum has locked its doors in front of its visitors. In February 2021, the museum reopened its doors to host the SCA's public relations employees as a part of the development and restoration plan of the SCA's Dome Building at a cost of 300 million EGP from the budget of the SCA. The Dome Building's development plan came in response to the rising of the groundwater table, which caused degradation and deterioration difficulties to the building. It is worthy here to mention that the public relations offices are among the SCA offices which have been distributed between the governmental buildings of Port Said until the completion of the SCA development plan, which may turn the building into a tourist destination narrating the Suez Canal's history. Consequently, the museum's building is now housing its original staff in addition to the employees of the SCA public relations department.

The Museum of the Suez Canal Authority in Port Said has been undergoing renovation and development works since 2018, which include some interior restorations and the construction of a wooden library in the museum's garden, as well as preparing an area adjacent to the library for interested readers. It should be pointed out that the museum's building has experienced three major stages of restoration and renovation projects; the first in 1900



Fig.11. Architectural drawing for the restoration project of the French consulate in 1900. (يوسف، 2020).

(Fig. 11), the second in 1998 when the SCA decided to transform the building of the French consulate into the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority, and the most recent in 2018. The building, however, still retains its wooden architecture since it underwent a restoration process to preserve its fundamental design. In this context, the restoration committee developed a new lighting system and central air conditioning for a more convenient atmosphere.

5.2.2 The museum's unique collection

The key stakeholders were requested to illustrate and identify certain examples of the museum's original and unique collection, they explained that the incomparable and precious collection of the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority in Port Said was primarily the private property of the French consulate and the residence place of Eugénie during her visit to Port Said in 1869. When the building was converted into the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority in 1998, other artifacts and maquettes were added. The extraordinary collection was displayed to the public since the museum's opening on August 5, 2015, to coincide with the inauguration of the new Suez Canal.

The museum's outstanding collection includes paintings, furniture, sculptures, vases, Persian carpets, metal and bronze works, candlesticks, crystals, maps as well as some heritage collectibles such as a phonograph, a piano and a desk clock. It should be mentioned that the majority of the museum's collection was gifted to Ferdinand De Lesseps, the earliest president of the Suez Canal Company, and was among his personal property. The following are some highlights of this notable collection, the most of which has been relocated to the International Museum of the Suez Canal in Ismailia:

- Ferdinand De Lesseps' marble statue, a miniature of his renowned bronze statue, which was placed near the north entrance of the Suez Canal on November 17, 1899, and removed later by the Port Saidians in 1956.
- A mainspring clock flanked by two marble columns decorated with vegetal motifs and a representation of two bronze human figurines, surmounted by two bronze winged sphinxes.
- A black wooden piano in a good condition of conservation, with its keyboard, casing, and lid. All of the original parts are in excellent condition and capped with a wooden mainspring clock.
- A brown Aubusson wooden sofa with two chairs with their backs ornamented with a representation of a musician, and the seats of which are decorated with a scene showing a lion hunted a deer and surrounded by grapes vine.
- A wooden carved gramophone in its authentic wooden case with its original disc recordings.



Fig.12. Collection of the museum. (© Authors, 2021)

- A large collection of hand-painted ceramic vases in vibrant colors and ornamented with a range of linear, floral, and geometric themes, as well as a group of bronze and silver vases set on marble bases.



Fig.13. hand-painted ceramic vases(© Authors, 2021)

- A collection of wall paintings, the most significant of which is a painting of Ferdinand De Lesseps by Leon Bonnat in 1878, followed by another in 1913, two drawings of Ferdinand in pencil by Cadart in 1869, and a painting of Auguste D'Arenberg, the third president of the Suez Canal Company (زيادة و يوسف، ٢٠٢١).

5.2.3 The museum's current collection

The target stakeholders were asked to determine the museum's current collection and its future fate, they stated that the unique collection of the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority has been relocated twice during its history. The first time was in 2014, before the museum's official opening in 2015, when the artifacts were displayed in an exhibition to promote the museum's valuable antiques and collectibles. The second relocation took place in 2018 when the museum participated in a year-long mobile exhibition commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Suez Canal's opening to international navigation. The Suez Canal mobile exhibition was in the planning stages before it began its journey through Paris, Marseille, Cairo, and Ismailia. After the exhibition, the collection stayed at the International Museum of the Suez Canal in Ismailia, which is planned to open soon, for conservation and since then it has never returned to the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority in Port Said.

The remaining artifacts from the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority at Port Said are currently stored in one of the rooms of the building's first floor, which served as a storehouse. The majority of the surviving collection is in poor condition as a result of negligence and improper storage measures. Consequently, adequate repair, restoration

measures, and emergency treatments are required for their safeguarding and to avoid and reduce potential future damages.

It should be mentioned that among the most significant transferred artifacts from the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority in Port Said, the so-called Villa of Eugénie, to the International Museum of the Suez Canal Authority in Ismailia are the dress that the French empress Eugénie wore during the celebration of the Suez Canal opening, in addition to some chairs and sofas that Khedive Ismail had previously prepared for Empress Eugénie during her attendance at the opening ceremony of the Suez Canal (فلاح, ٢٠٢١).

5.2.4 The reasons for the conversion of the so-called Villa of Eugénie into the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority

The responses of the key target stakeholders concerning the conversion of the so-called Villa of Eugénie into the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority pointed out that after the nationalization of the Suez Canal by president *Ġamāl ʿAbd al-Nāṣir* on 26 July 1956 and the evacuation of the British armed forces, all the establishments owned by the British and the French were transferred to the Authority of the Suez Canal including the building of French consulate. Subsequently, the Suez Canal Authority granted the nuns of the French church and schools permission to live in the building, owing to their notable role in aiding and treating the injured during the attack of the tripartite aggression.

In 1998, Captain *Ahmad al-ʿĪsawī*, the director of the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority in Port Said, proposed the conversion of the building into a museum to display the valuable collection of the French consulate to the public in addition to various artworks commemorating the different phases of the Suez Canal's digging as well as its vital role in Egypt's political, military and economic history till 1956. The museum also included several artifacts narrating the heroism acts of the Port Saidians against the tripartite aggression in addition to some portraits of the popular resistance heroes.

With the assistance of Lieutenant General Ahmad Fadil, Chairman and Managing Director of the Suez Canal Authority (1996-2012), the French consulate's building was converted into the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority and was opened on 6 August 2015 to coincide with the great celebration of the opening of the new Suez Canal.

5.2.5 The reasons behind the closure of the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority in Port Said

The target stakeholders were asked about the reasons behind the closure of the museum and they indicated that the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority is subordinated to the Suez Canal Authority, which has the upper hand in the decision-making process over its properties. The transfer of the museum's collection for restoration to the International Museum of Suez Canal Authority in Ismailia followed by its closure to the public in 2018 was utterly the decision of the Suez Canal Authority. Up to the present time, there are no apparent or proclaimed reasons for the

closure of the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority for domestic and international visits.

5.2.6 The Port Saidians' response to the museum's closure and the transfer of its collection

Asking the key stakeholders about the Port Saidians' reaction to the museum's closure, they replied that the museum's closure in 2018 was the direct decision of the Suez Canal Authority. The people of Port Said were outraged and resentful of the museum's closing, especially when the majority of its extraordinary collection was transferred to the International Museum of the Suez Canal Authority in Ismailia. The Port Saidians are typically attached to their city and heritage buildings, which are a living aesthetic manifestation of the blend of Egyptian heritage and foreign culture that testified the Suez Canal digging and witnessed significant deeds of bravery against the tripartite aggression (1956) and the War of Attrition (1967-1973). In addition, they believed that accepting the decision to close the museum and relocate its collection may contribute to the loss of a vital element of their cultural and historical identity as if they are giving up a piece of their history and their connection to the past.

In response, the Port Saidians opposed the transfer decision and protested in front of the building while holding signs condemning the transfer of the museum's collection to Ismailia clarifying that it is a part of their heritage and cannot leave the city. Moreover, with the aid of various non-governmental entities, several youth groups launched a variety of initiatives on social media platforms in an attempt to persuade the Suez Canal Authority to revoke its decision, but unfortunately with no governmental response or attention and no such action was taken.

5.2.7 The registration of the museum as a heritage building

The target stakeholders were asked whether the Museums of the Suez Canal Authority is registered on Port Said heritage buildings' list, they stated that despite the fact that there are 644 heritage buildings in Port Said, according to Cabinet Decrees no. 1947 (2009) and no. 1096 (2011), some heritage buildings are still not designated as historic due to their unique architectural style and age. In this context, the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority is a 155-year-old architectural masterpiece that has yet to be designated as a historic structure. Nevertheless, many attempts were made to include the building on Port Said's built heritage list, the building is still under registration.

As previously mentioned, the Museum of Suez Canal Authority is owned by the Suez Canal Authority and is served by means of heritage conservation measures under its full supervision. Hence, the SCA is the only governmental entity with the authority to call for the building's registration on Port Said's built heritage list.

5.2.8 The museum's inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List (WHL)

The key stakeholders were inquired about the inscription of the museum's building on UNESCO's WHL and they explained that the official declared objective of the UNESCO's WHL is to protect world heritage and to ensure its adequate safeguarding and preservation. In this regard, several governmental and non-governmental

endeavors have been conducted to nominate the city of Port Said and its heritage buildings for inclusion on UNESCO's WHL. For instance, the documentary heritage commemorating the memory of the Suez Canal, which is recorded in rare books, documents, photographs, paintings, etc., and dispersed between several institutions in different countries, such as the Suez Canal Authority in Egypt, *Compagnie de Suez*, *Bibliothèque Nationale* and *Archives Nationales* in Paris was submitted by Egypt for inclusion in the Memory of the World Register in 1997 (UNESCO, 1999). The French Cultural Association based in Port Said started a documentation project on the city's heritage in 2003 and registered 400 buildings. The association also organized several cultural awareness workshops, attended by French experts and architects, to develop an advocacy group for the preservation of the city's architectural history. In addition, in 2012, the French Cultural Association in Port Said contacted UNESCO with the hopes of adding 505 heritage buildings to the UNESCO WHL to ensure the international protection of the city's monuments and cultural heritage. Regrettably, despite all the exerted efforts and attempts, neither the historic city of Port Said nor any of its outstanding heritage buildings and monuments have been inscribed on UNESCO's WHL to date.

5.2.9 The reopening of the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority for visits

Asking the key target stakeholders about the possibility of the reopening of the museum for visits, they mentioned that until now there is no definite information concerning the reopening of the museum for the public since the only governmental entity which governs and decides the museum's reopening is the SCA. However, the local community, in collaboration with several non-governmental agencies, is hoping for the reopening of the museum for public visits in line with the governorate's current tourism development plans.

5.2.10 The museum's contribution to the tourism development in Port Said

The key target stakeholders clarified that on one side, the unique location of Port Said on the Mediterranean Sea at the northern entrance of the Suez Canal and at the crossroads of the three continents reflects its significance as one of the most outstanding tourism appealing destinations in Egypt. Port said enjoys valuable resources suitable for tourism development as it has plenty of tourism activities on the local, regional and international levels, particularly with the existence of the Suez Canal, one of the world's largest crossing traffic ports, linking Europe with the East. The city is distinguished by its Mediterranean weather, unique and memorable food, historical and monumental attractions, and cosmopolitan heritage, which is reflected in the diverse architectural style of its buildings. The building of the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority, originally the French consulate, is considered as one of the city's notable landmarks that witnessed the legendary inauguration of the Suez Canal in 1869. In the nineties and before the conversion of the building into a museum, it was visited by hundreds of the Mediterranean Sea cruise tourists who came to discover the coastal city and its historical buildings. Since its official opening to the public in 2015, the museum has attracted the attention of local and international visitors interested in the canal's history and specifically the French who flocked to the museum to explore the history of the achievements of their predecessors and their

contributions to the canal. Moreover, the museum received high-level delegations from around the world including that headed by Bruneau Shepard, the president and the member of the *Association des Amis du Canal de Suez* in Paris (also known as Friends of Ferdinand de Lesseps), who visited the museum in 2017 during his journey to Port Said to explore the possibility of developing the French heritage buildings and monuments in the governorate. Even though the museum is closed, frequent visitors keep on asking about the museum's reopening to plan and repeat their visits.

On the other side, Port Said's infrastructure and tourism facilities and services have been enhanced and several development projects have been undertaken to improve tourism assets and capabilities to attract national and international tourists. In addition, various tourism companies have collaborated with Port Said Airport to promote internal tourism between the governorate and other cities like Cairo, Marsa Alam, Sharm El-Sheikh, and Taba, at affordable rates, for the purpose of pushing domestic and international tourism. According to the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA) data, the average number of tourists from March until June 2021 reached more than 500,000 tourists monthly, or more than 45% of the same period in 2019, and the expected numbers of tourists who may visit Port Said in 2024 is 407,500 (وزارة السياحة و الآثار, ٢٠٢١). The increasing number of tourists in Egypt indicates their confidence in the touristic destination and the health safety measures and procedures in place.

Undoubtedly, the reopening of the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority for the public will be a great opportunity to highlight the history of Port Said, the digging of the Suez Canal and the richness of its numerous cultural heritage assets. It might also help in the promotion of national tourism, especially the one-day trips, as well as international tourism, with over 300 worldwide cruise ships and private yachts loaded with tourists visiting the city every month (SCA, 2021).

5.2.11 The Museum of the Suez Canal Authority and the community engagement

The responses of the key target stakeholders indicated that since the official closure of the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority in 2018 for development and restoration, the relationship between the surrounding local community and the building has become disjointed. Thenceforth, they have no connection to the building other than knowing it has been closed as part of a development project, without a declared ending date for its accomplishment, and the majority of its collection has been transferred to the International Museum of the Suez Canal Authority in Ismailia. It should be mentioned that the majority of the locals still refer to the building as the Villa of Eugénie, in reference to the French empress Eugénie's visit to Port Said and her stay in the building.

5.3 The SWOT analysis of the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority in Port Said

The SWOT analysis is a strategic planning method used to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats involved in any project under study. It is an effective tool for examining the current situation of any heritage site or historic building and determining the proper strategies for the internal factors, strengths and weaknesses, as well as the external factors, opportunities and threats. In addition, the

application of the SWOT analysis helps to identify the appropriate strategic solutions or tactics for current problems and threats.

The following strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the SWOT analysis were specified through the field visit, conducted on February 2021, and the in-depth interviews and individual conversations with the target key stakeholders from August 4, till September 30, 2021.

5.3.1 Strengths

- The authenticity and integrity of the museum's archaeological structure are well-preserved.
- The museum's building is a 155-year-old architectural masterpiece.
- The first building to be built of bricks in Port Said after the expansion of the wooden structures with the beginning of the Suez Canal's digging.
- The earliest consulate to be established in Port Said.
- The residence of Monsieur Laroche, the first to assume the position of consul agent in Port Said.
- The museum witnessed the celebration of the Suez Canal opening ceremony in 1869.
- The residence place of the French empress Eugénie which explains its local appellation the "Villa of Eugénie".
- The majority of the museum's unique collection was gifted to De Lesseps, the earliest president of the Suez Canal Company.
- The museum contained some of Eugénie's possessions.
- Local recognition of the museum's building in Port Said.
- Substantial local narratives associated with the museum's building.
- Launching of several youth initiatives and awareness-raising activities regarding Port Said's heritage buildings and calling for its safeguarding including the building of the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority.
- Unique location overlooking one of Port Said's main streets, *Safiya Zağlül*, and directly on the Mediterranean Sea before the gradual recession of water.
- Close to other renowned heritage and historic attraction places in Port Said.
- The museum has a worldwide acknowledgment specifically for those interested in the history of the Suez Canal.
- The museum was usually visited by the French and particularly the *Association des Amis du Canal de Suez* in Paris (also known as Friends of Ferdinand de Lesseps).

5.3.2 Weaknesses

- The museum's building is NOT registered as a heritage building on Port Said's heritage list, however, it is 155-year-old.
- The museum's building is NOT inscribed on UNESCO's WHL.

- The majority of the museum's remaining objects and artworks require immediate conservation.
- The transfer of the SCA's public relations employees to the museum's building contributed to its vulnerability.
- Insufficient information and official announcements regarding the museum's ongoing development plan, which started in 2018.
- The rampant local encroachments, notably of the old fish market and the haphazard parking of vehicles.
- Absence of walkways around the museum.
- Urban development, demolition of neighboring structures, and loss of identity.
- Lack of wayfinding and information signage boards.
- The vague plan concerning the development of the infrastructure and support services.
- Lack of qualified staff and finances to address an adequate heritage management plan for the museum.
- Unavailability of an official website for the museum and the accessible Facebook page is outdated and abandoned since 2018.
- Poor promotion for the museum on the national and international market.

5.3.3 Opportunities

- The reopening of the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority might help in the promotion of cruise ship tourism, particularly of the French and those who are interested in the history of the Suez Canal.
- Taking advantage of the museum in addition to the existing cultural and historical assets in Port Said for tourism growth, on the national and international level, especially with the inauguration of the airport of *al-Ġamīl* in Port Said (صبيح، ٢٠٢١).
- Expanding development surrounding the museum in accordance with the present governmental development strategy. Thus, encouraging local and foreign investors for the development in Port Said (Egypt's Projects Maps, 2021).
- Offering job opportunities for the locals and extending the guided historical tours.
- Raising the governmental and public cultural awareness of preserving Port Said's tangible and intangible cultural heritage.
- The willingness of the local community to assist and support maintaining Port Said's cultural heritage.
- Organizing special events and themed activities and festivals relevant to the Suez Canal and the French community who used to live in Port Said.
- Increasing the national income resulted from the tourism flow, development projects and job opportunities.

5.3.4 Threats

- The ongoing rehabilitation plan of the International Museum of the Suez Canal Authority in Ismailia.
- The potential transformation of the historical building of the Suez Canal Authority in Port Said into a museum.
- The decrease in tourists' traffic to Port Said as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020.
- The low profile of the available tourism activities in Port Said.
- Lack of communication, networking and collaboration between the stakeholders.
- Lack of assistance from the government and local authorities.
- Poor urban planning.

6. Conclusions

Without a doubt, the cosmopolitan city of Port Said is renowned for its exceptional cultural, archaeological and urban heritage that deserves to be properly preserved to be safely transmitted to future generations. The Museum of the Suez Canal Authority, locally known as the Villa of Eugénie, is considered a living example of Port Said's distinctive heritage buildings, narrating the valiance, persistence and determination of its people. The museum's building has witnessed a series of remarkable events that have become an integral part of the Port Saidians' identity, starting with its establishment in 1866, as the first consulate in Port Said, to its official opening in 2015, coinciding with Egypt's celebration of the opening of the new Suez Canal, as the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority.

Although the museum's building is a 155-year-old architectural masterpiece and the first building to be built in Port Said out of bricks, it is not registered as a heritage building on Port Said's heritage buildings list. Despite the fact that the building hosted the French empress Eugénie during her visit to Port Said to attend the ceremonial opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and housed the unique collection gifted to De Lesseps as well as some of Eugénie's personal belongings, the majority of its collection was relocated to the International Museum of the Suez Canal Authority in Ismailia in 2018. In addition, the museum has been closed for public and private visits since 2018 without explanation, and it has become the new residence for the SCA's public relations department since the beginning of 2021. The museum is currently undergoing a development and restoration plan that began in 2018, however, it has not been yet confirmed if the museum will be reopened for the public or not. Moreover, the precinct of the museum lacks wayfinding and information signages. Furthermore, it suffers from rampant local encroachment, most notably at the old fish market and the haphazard parking of vehicles. However, the prospective reopening of the museum may provide another opportunity for it represented in attracting a specific segment of the cruise ship tourists, i.e. the French, offering the locals new job opportunities and expanding the historical tours in the area. It would also help in the local community's involvement in the sustainable preservation of Port Said's built heritage. Additionally, it would contribute to organizing special events and themed

activities, enticing local and foreign investors, and eventually increasing the national income.

7. Recommendations

- The cosmopolitan city of Port Said should be nominated, as a heritage city, for inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List (WHL).
- The museum's building is 155 years old and according to law no. 117 of 1983 it should be considered a building of architectural value and historical importance based on its structure and age which exceeds 100 years. Furthermore, it should be designated as a heritage building under law no. 144 of 2006 since it is linked to the national history of Port Said, witnessed the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, hosted distinguished historical figures and served as a tourist destination. As a consequence, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA) should register the museum as a heritage and historic building. Moreover, it deserves to be included on the list of Port Said heritage buildings regulated by the National Organization of Urban Harmony (NOUH) in accordance with law no. 119 of 2008 and its executive rules and guidelines (NOUH, 2010).
- The reopening of the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority for public and private visits after the accomplishment of the current development and restoration plan particularly for those who are interested in the history of the Suez Canal and the *Association des Amis du Canal de Suez* in Paris (also known as Friends of Ferdinand de Lesseps). Furthermore, the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority is one of three museums located in Port Said; the Military Museum, which displays weapons and military equipment from Ancient Egypt and various items of the tripartite aggression in 1956 (MOD, 2018), and the National Museum of Port Said, which was demolished in 2009 due to the appearance of cracks and fissures in the museum's building and since then the construction work on the new museum has not begun (SIS, 2017). This makes the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority the only standing building in Port Said that narrates the history of digging the Suez Canal.
- Identifying the potential avenues for the future repatriation of the museum's unique collection which has been transferred to the International Museum of the Suez Canal Authority in Ismailia.
- Implementing the appropriate restoration and preservation measures needed for stabilizing and delaying the rate of deterioration of the remaining objects and artworks stored in one of the museum's first-floor rooms.
- The transfer of the SCA's public relations employees from the museum to any other governmental entity until the renovation and development plan of the SCA building is completed.
- The necessity for direct collaboration and coordination between all the key stakeholders in order to promote, enhance, and raise awareness about the museum's importance to solidify the preservation of heritage.

- Engaging the local community in the museum's current development and restoration plan since it is the responsibility of the local community and society to maintain their heritage and preserve the buildings in their full richness of authenticity. In addition, effective local involvement promotes meaningful management and proper conservation of cultural heritage (ICCROM, 2015).
- Raising the cultural awareness of the local community about the significance of their built heritage, notably the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority, as it represents their local identities, nurtures their sense of place, and provides a sustainable community.
- Involving the governmental and non-governmental organizations and agencies to promote Port Said's cultural heritage assets, including the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority, and raise the awareness among the local people of the importance of their cultural heritage safeguarding and conservation.
- Developing a strategy mitigating the impacts of the local encroachments, which is considered one of the key factors endangering historic sites. In this context, the old fish market might be relocated to the new fish market in *al Šarq* district, which has been inaugurated in 2019 (Egypt's Projects Map, 2019). Furthermore, a parking lot strategy and parking allocation planning should be put into consideration to overcome the haphazard parking of vehicles that impedes the accessibility to the museum's entrance.
- Installing wayfinding and information signage boards in the museum's vicinity to assist visitors in exploring the city and the museum. Within the framework of the National Organization for Urban Harmony's (NOUH) 2020 national project "The Street Story", which aims to preserve and distinguish urban and architectural heritage, the boards may also include the reason for the street's name, a brief of the name, and the event that inspired the street's name (Official Portal of Cairo Governorate, 2021). It is worthy here to mention that employing signage as a communication tool not only facilitates access but also reflects the civic culture and complements the context in which it is placed.
- Encouraging tourism companies to include the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority, in case of its reopening, on their visitors' itineraries by planning and developing new programs that incorporate the city of Port Said and its cultural heritage assets.
- Creating an official interactive website for the Museum of the Suez Canal Authority in Port Said in order to communicate with potential visitors, share vital information, tell interesting stories, and draw attention to its unique collection, exhibitions and events.
- Using online tourism communities and social media networks, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and LinkedIn, for the museum's marketing and promotion. These platforms also aim to interact with the museum's audience, attract a new segment of visitors and expand the museum's active experiences and entertainment.

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تراث ثقافي مهمل متحف
(هيئة قناة السويس ببورسعيد)

رندا علاء الدين فؤاد

قسم الإرشاد السياحي وبرنامج دراسات التراث والمتاحف،
كلية السياحة وإدارة الفنادق،
جامعة حلوان، مصر

رغدة يحيى صديق

قسم الإرشاد السياحي،
كلية السياحة وإدارة الفنادق،
جامعة حلوان، مصر

| المعلومات المقالة | المخلص |
|--|---|
| الكلمات المفتاحية الامبراطورة الفرنسية أوجيني؛ التراث الثقافي لبورسعيد؛ فيلا أوجيني؛ متحف هيئة قناة السويس؛ تحليل SWOT. | تشتهر مدينة بورسعيد بتراتها بالتراث المادي و غير المادي ، فهي تمتلك تراث معماري متنوع و فريد حيث أنها عمرت في الماضي من جنسيات أوروبية متعددة مما أنعكس على طرازها المعماري. يعد مبنى متحف قناة السويس المعروف محليا باسم فيلا أوجيني، واحد من أهم المباني التراثية الذي يحتاج للاهتمام به، ويستعرض هذا البحث الدور التاريخي للمبنى منذ بناؤها عام 1866 حتى اليوم، بجانب إلقاء الضوء على حالة المبنى الحالية و مقتنياته الأثرية. بالإضافة إلى إجراء مقابلات مع ثمانية عشر مسئول عن التراث في المدينة، وعمل تحليل لنقاط الضعف والقوة والتهديدات وفرص المبنى كمتحف، والذي اثبت بان المتحف حاليا مغلق، بعد نقل غالبية محتوياته للمتحف العالمي لهيئة قناة السويس بمدينة الإسماعيلية، و حتى الآن لم يتم ادراج المبنى ضمن قائمة المباني التراثية للمدينة ولا قائمة اليونسكو للتراث العالمي، بالرغم من أن عمره يتجاوز مائة خمسة وخمسون عام. ودور المتحف إذا تم إعادة فتحه للزيارة وعودة محتوياته الأصلية حيث أنه يشكل جزء أساسى من تاريخ المدينة و هويتها و تراثها. |

(JAAUTH)
المجلد 21، العدد 5،
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ص 48-78.