THE ART OF ADVERTISING EGYPTIAN FILM

Historical studies of the “golden age” of the Egyptian film industry, from the 1940s to the mid-1960s, have paid little attention to the colorful posters that advertised those films and the people who designed them. “Egyptian Film Poster Designers and the Print Shops of Hassan Mazhar Gassour & Sayed ‘Ali Ibrahim al-Nasr,” an exhibition in the Main Gallery of Firestone Library, presents a selection from two of the most prolific film poster publishers as a window into the formation and evolution of this popular art form.

The dozens of items on display, produced from the 1940s through the 1990s, are drawn from Princeton’s extensive Arabic Movie Posters and Lobby Cards Collection, acquired in Lebanon in 2008. Of the 1,748 movie posters in the collection, 1,474 are Egyptian, reflecting the preeminence of Egypt in the production of Arabic feature films.

Efforts toward founding an Egyptian film industry began as early as 1925. Between 1945 and 1952, production doubled to reach an output of about 48 films per year, all made in Cairo. Film production became the second-largest industrial sector in Egypt, surpassed only by the textile industry.

Paralleling the film industry, domestic film poster production and design were also evolving in Cairo. From the 1930s through the 1950s many designers prominent in poster art, if named at all, bore Greek, Armenian, and French names. By the early 1950s, however, designers with distinctly Arab names, such as Gassour, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, Wahib Fahmi, Magdi, and Walid Wahibi began to dominate the field. Artists’ signatures appeared on the posters with greater frequency, and distinctions were made between artists and copy artists on the poster art itself. By the end of the 1950s, the names of commercial houses such as Gassour’s al-Cinema al-‘Arabiayah and Sayed al-Arajuz [The Puppeteer] (Egypt, 1989). Poster designed by Nagi Shakir and printed in Cairo by Misr al-‘Arabiayah Printing. Although this poster is entirely photographic, the artist has managed to give it much of the power of earlier hand-drawn artwork. In the film, directed by Hani Lashin, Omar Sharif stars as an aging puppeteer who campaigns against social injustice.

‘Ali Ibrahim’s al-Nasr Printing were appearing consistently along the borders of colorful posters for Egyptian films intended for domestic and international distribution.

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Egyptian Film Posters . . .

At the time of nationalization of the film industry in 1960, al-Cinema al-‘Arabiyah and al-Nasr dominated Egyptian film poster printing. Although censorship of both domestic and foreign films had existed in Egypt from the early 1920s, political censorship became particularly severe during the presidency of Anwar al-Sadat (1970–1981). Along with political limitations on the content of films and the advertisements for them, changing technology affected the artistic character of Egyptian film posters. By the 1970s, photo offset printing had begun to displace the more labor-intensive stone and zinc plate lithography. The textured, evocative, and skillful representations of images and characters gave way to montages that relied heavily, if not entirely, on film stills. Some connoisseurs of cinema posters lament this change as the end of the “golden age” of cinema poster art.

Also on display are lobby cards for coming attractions, composed of multiple film stills taken on movie sets and affixed to standard-sized cardboard stock. The 768 cards in Princeton’s Arabic Movie Posters and Lobby Cards Collection represent 172 films, 145 of which were produced in Egypt from 1964 to 2007. The entirety of the collection has been digitized and soon will be made accessible to scholars and students through the Princeton University Digital Library.

The exhibition opens on September 21 and runs through February 2, 2014. A lecture and reception will be held on September 29.

—James Weinberger
Curator of Near Eastern Collections

More Awards!

The Princeton University Library Archival Description Working Group recently received the 2013 C.F.W. Coker Award from the Society of American Archivists (SAA) for its new finding aids interface, which was released in September 2012. Earlier in the year the group also received the Frederick Miller Finding Aid Award from the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference.

The Coker Award recognizes finding aids and finding aid systems that involve innovative development. Nominees must set national standards, represent a model for archives description, or otherwise have a substantial impact on national descriptive practice. Princeton’s system describes every archival collection held within the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections. The site includes a number of innovations, including direct access to digital content, sortable inventories, and user commenting at every descriptive level. The SAA award committee noted that the team at Princeton “created a complete user experience of the Princeton University collections that is elegant in its outward simplicity and robust in... [continues on next page]
Although some form of graduate study had long existed at the College of New Jersey, the Sesquicentennial celebrations of 1896, when the institution changed its name to Princeton University, generated enthusiasm for a distinct graduate school worthy of the new university status. An exhibition on display in the Wiess Lounge at the Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, marking the 100th anniversary of the opening of Princeton’s Graduate College, chronicles the events and decisions that determined the development of America’s first residential graduate school. “Building the House of Knowledge: The Graduate College Centennial” presents letters, documents, and photographs from the Princeton University Archives that reveal how the concept of residential graduate education went from an inspired idea to a grand achievement, though not without significant controversy that brought nationwide attention to Princeton.

As members of the faculty committee that urged the Board of Trustees to establish a residential graduate program, Andrew Fleming West and Woodrow Wilson agreed that a graduate school was vitally important to the growth of the University. But after West became the first dean of the graduate school and Wilson became the thirteenth president of Princeton, their differing views on the use of endowment funding and on an appropriate location for the new Graduate College hardened—and led faculty and trustees to choose sides. Reports and letters from West, Wilson, and eminent trustees such as Moses Taylor Pyne and former U.S. President Grover Cleveland show how bequests and promised gifts—each with strings attached—played a role in the controversy.

Ultimately, a bequest in 1910 supported West’s vision of a Graduate College secluded from the distractions of the undergraduate campus. Wilson acknowledged defeat and resigned to pursue the governorship of New Jersey. Photographs from the archives show construction of the Graduate College buildings from 1910 to 1913, largely along designs sketched as early as 1897. In his speech at the dedication on October 22, 1913, West declared that the Graduate College would be the “crowning glory of this household of knowledge,” where students who “dwell together in unity” would seek and find truth.

A view from behind the monumental statue of Andrew Fleming West, erected in the Graduate College quad in the 1920s, looking toward the Cleveland Memorial Tower.

Awards . . .

its search capabilities. . . . The site is, in short, a triumph of innovative descriptive practice.”

Maureen Callahan (Mudd), John Delaney (RBSC), Shaun Ellis (Systems), Regine Heberlein (RBSC), Dan Santamaria (chair, Mudd), Jon Stroop (Systems), and Don Thornbury (RBSC) serve on the Princeton Working Group. Santamaria stated, “As with the MARAC award, our biggest reward is seeing people use the site, but it’s very nice to get this recognition for our work.”
The retirement of Shirley Tilghman as the 19th President of Princeton University at the end of June 2013 provided an opportunity for the Friends of the Princeton University Library to celebrate the presidency of the University by making a gift to the Library in her honor. The Special Collections curators presented a wide range of possibilities to identify a suitable purchase. The choice: one of the extremely rare books that can be documented as having belonged to Jonathan Dickinson (1688–1747), the first President of the College of New Jersey.

At its modest beginning in 1746 in Dickinson’s parsonage in Elizabeth, the college consisted of the president, one tutor, and eight or ten students. Dickinson’s books were the college library. *Tactica Sacra* (Sacred Strategies), by John Arrowsmith, Puritan divine of Trinity College, Cambridge, is a manual for the spiritual warrior, part of the armament of clergyman Dickinson. A large quarto of 400 pages in its original 17th-century full calf binding, the book carries an inscription on its title page in Dickinson’s hand: “Jonathan Dickinson’s Book . . .” The group of Friends who supported the acquisition are named on a bookplate added to the volume.

The University’s efforts to acquire books with a Princeton association started in earnest during the second half of the 19th century. The extant books belonging to Jonathan Edwards were added, as well as some from other early presidents, including Samuel Finley. John Witherspoon’s books had been acquired in the first part of the 19th century due to the efforts of his son-in-law Samuel Stanhope Smith. These volumes were purchased not so much because they had belonged to Witherspoon but because, after the Nassau Hall fire of 1802, the college needed books. Recognition of the associational value of the Witherspoon books came to a climax during the librarianship of Julian Boyd. In the early 1940s Boyd instructed rare book librarian Julie Hudson to reunite the Witherspoon library, which had been dispersed throughout
the collections. The earliest survivors of the college library are on view in the Eighteenth-Century Room, just inside the entrance to the Main Exhibition Gallery in Firestone Library.

*Tactica Sacra* is the Library’s first book from Dickinson’s library with his statement of ownership. Given some years ago was a copy of Poole’s *Annotations* (2 vols.; London, 1683–1685), which has a record of Dickinson’s family and offspring in his hand on the verso of the last leaf of Malachi. However, these volumes lack the title pages, which presumably would have carried his signature and marking that the Poole was “his book.”

In addition to the Dickinson inscription, a hitherto unknown early American book label, “Samuelis Melyen liber,” is fixed to the inside board. The Reverend Samuel Melyen was the first minister of the nascent congregations in Elizabeth and environs. Jonathan Dickinson married Melyen’s sister Joanna in 1709, around the time that he began his ministerial work in the Elizabeth Town parish. Melyen died ca. 1711, and Dickinson emerged as the leading minister, a post he held until his death in 1747.

Samuel Melyen was clearly the first owner of this book. Dickinson’s inscription in full states that it was a gift of one Mr. Tilley: “Jonathan Dickinson’s Book Ex dono D. Tilley.” The Tilley family and the Melyen family were related by marriage, but the precise identity of “D[omini]. Tilley” is not yet known.

Dickinson apparently owned another book in which he inscribed “Jonathan Dickinson’s Book Ex dono D. Tilley.” It is a copy of Samuel Cradock, *The Harmony of the Four Evangelists* (London, 1668). The present whereabouts of this copy are unknown; it was last recorded in 1896.

The Princeton association of the *Tactica Sacra* does not stop with Dickinson. Beneath Dickinson’s inscription is the following: “Jonathan Elmer His Book 1768.” Elmer (Yale 1747) was pastor at New Providence, New Jersey, from 1750 onward. A slip in the book states that after Jonathan Elmer it was owned by Philemon Elmer (1752–1827); then his daughter Catharine, who married Aaron Coe, Princeton 1797 (d. 1857); then by their son the Reverend Philemon Elmer Coe (Princeton 1834); then his sister Catherine Elmer Coe, who married Alfred Mills (Yale 1847); then by their children Edith, Alfred Elmer Mills (Princeton 1882), and Edward K. Mills (Princeton 1896).

—Stephen Ferguson
Whenever a building gets turned inside out, unexpected mementos of its past inhabitants are sure to emerge. The renovation of Firestone Library, a project scheduled to continue to 2018, has so far involved the demolition of several areas and the discovery of diverse ephemera. Perhaps not unexpectedly, a fair amount of pornography lurked in student carrels. Newspapers from 1948, the year Firestone opened, were stuffed behind old walls. Travel seemed to be another theme: an 1850s guide for visitors to Oxford was found behind a cabinet in Graphic Arts, and a brochure for tours to pre-revolutionary Havana turned up in a carrel (cha-cha-cha!). Perhaps the strangest object was an origami bird discovered in the back of Augustus Saint-Gaudens’s bronze sculpture of James McCosh’s head, with a note: “On March 20, 1969, 4:37 p.m. This particular paper was inserted in the orifice located posteriorly (to the subject’s face) so that you, the discoverer of this message, will be cognizant of its significance.” Reference librarian Gabriel Swift performed the successful extraction. Project coordinator Margaret Kehrer is organizing an exhibition of some of these items in Firestone’s lobby.
Pardon Our Appearance

The renovations to Firestone Library reached the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections over the summer. Even before the exhibition “A Republic in the Wilderness” ended in early August, the entrance to the department was darkened by scaffolding in the lobby. Through most of August, half of the Main Gallery was walled off for asbestos abatement. Intrepid researchers and dedicated staff had to find their way through a dark tunnel, choose the door leading to the lady receptionist or the tiger (?), and navigate Scylla and Charybdis before reaching the Dulles Reading Room. All of the scaffolding has since been removed, and the Main Gallery will soon host a new exhibition.
THE FRIENDS’ CALENDAR

Exhibitions and Related Events

MAIN EXHIBITION GALLERY, FIRESTONE LIBRARY

Egyptian Film Poster Designers and the Print Shops of Hassan Mazhar Gassour & Sayed ‘Ali Ibrahim al-Nasr

September 21, 2013 – February 2, 2014

Sunday, September 29, 3:00 p.m.: Lecture in 101 McCormick Hall by art historian Dr. Christiane Gruber, followed by a reception in the Main Gallery

Sunday, October 13, and Sunday, November 17, 1:00 p.m.: Gallery tour with exhibition curator James Weinberger

SEELEY G. MUDD MANUSCRIPT LIBRARY
65 OLDEN STREET

Building the House of Knowledge: The Graduate College Centennial

September 16, 2013 – June 6, 2014

More Events:

Saturday, October 12, 2 p.m.: Memorial service for Dale Roylance, Princeton University Chapel.

Sunday, October 27, 4:00 p.m.: Question & answer session with Woody Allen, Richardson Auditorium. Friends have priority seating. Call 609-258-9220 for tickets (2 per membership).

Sunday, September 15, October 20, and November 17, 2:30 p.m.: Princeton Bibliophiles and Collectors, East Pyne 111. For more information: Ronald K. Smeltzer, 609-924-4789.

Sunday, January 26, 2014: Annual dinner with featured speaker A. Scott Berg.

Gallery Hours (call 609-258-3184 for holiday hours)

Weekdays, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; weekends, noon to 5:00 p.m. (except Mudd Library)