

# Collecting Arab “Comics” at the British Library

MELCom Conference, Naples  
Wednesday, 19 June 2019

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#MELCom2019  
#BLArabic







Contemporary Arab literature festival at the British Library as part of the Shubbak Festival for Contemporary Arab Culture in 2015

- Lena Merhej, Samandal (Lebanon)
- Asia Alfasi (UK/Libya)
- Mohamed Anwar, Tok Tok (Egypt/Sudan)
- Tarek Shahin (UK/Egypt)
- Paul Gravett, comics curator (UK)



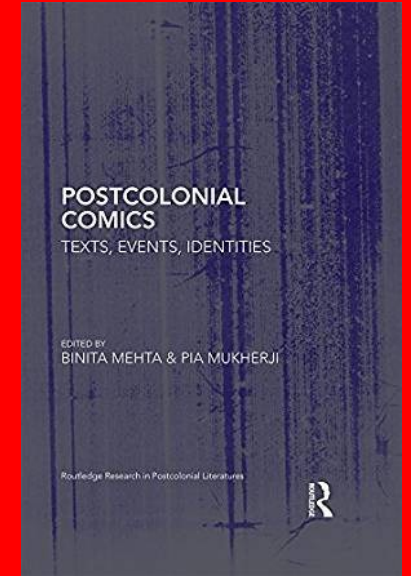
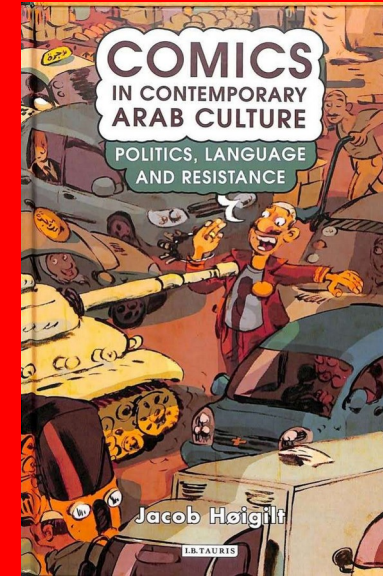
Audio on British Library Soundcloud account:

<https://soundcloud.com/the-british-library/drawingyourattention>

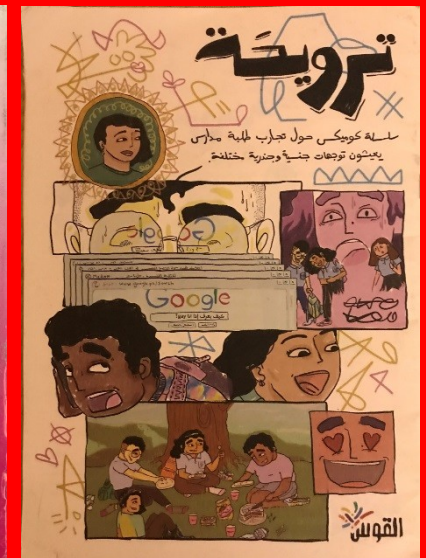
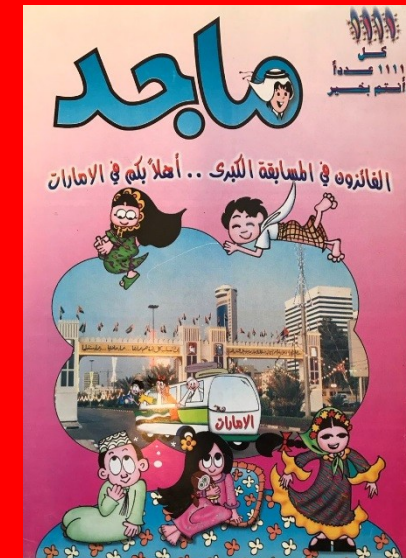
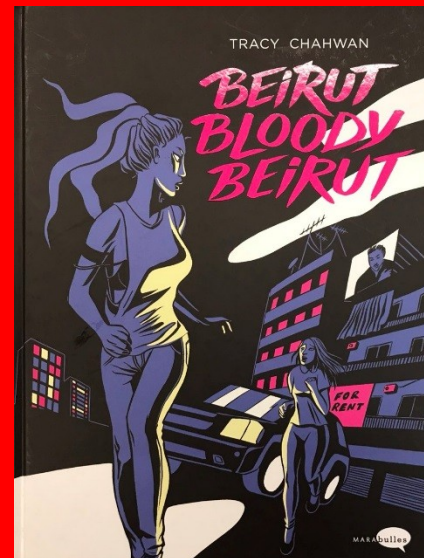
# Why collect Arab comics?

- Part of an ongoing tradition – back to Jacob Sanua, Saroukhan, Rose El Youssef, Sindbad and Samir, etc.
- Part of wider artistic practice, e.g. Hussein Bicar
- Content...
- ... but also Form
- Visual material – excellent for exhibitions
- Diversify collecting practice
- Increasing subject of academic study
- Cultural significance, e.g. winning awards
- Popular culture
- Histories of childhood
- Ephemeral

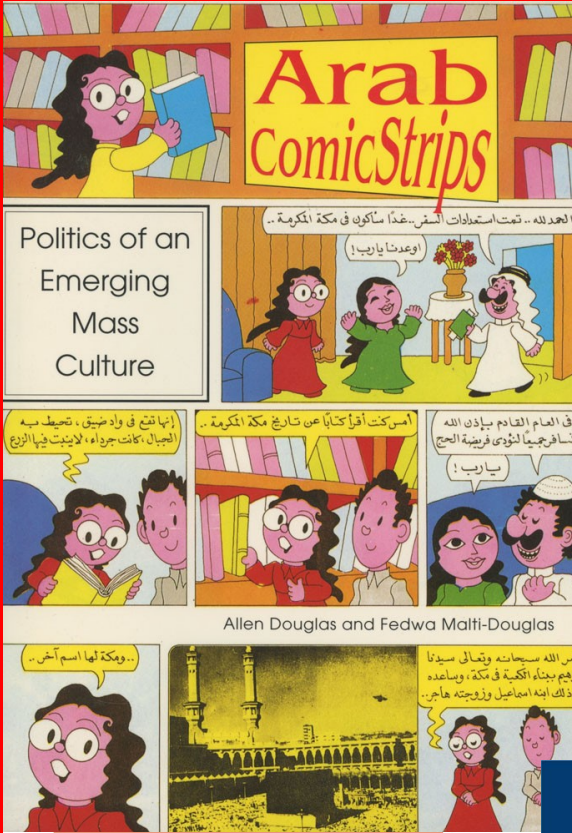
... And they're fun!



ual: london college  
of communication







Some useful resources...

## أم كرتون Oum Cartoon



Kiss and Tell

Overlooking Cairo, the Muqattam Hill offers a view like no other. Some might say that it's windy and dangerous upon the craggy cliffs, the site of drifters and no-gooders. The criminal-protagonist of Naguib Mahfouz's *The Thief and the Dogs* took refuge in a nearby necropolis. The now banned Muslim Brotherhood once battled protesters outside of their hilltop headquarters, and others have told stories of criminals and djinn causing trouble up there. But it's also tranquil and private, which is why it has been dubbed Cairo's make-out spot par excellence. The Evening Illustration *Oum* Hassan read from an unforgettable kiss from hills above

خير..!؟  
 ماشي!  
 مبادرة الشرائط المصوّرة العربية  
 1960 AUB  
 American University of Beirut  
 The Mu'az and Rada Sawad  
 Arabic Comics Initiative



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problems we were having with the old website, Bigmouth has moved over to the new one! Errors that customers were having with shipping prices should be fixed. We wanted to share with you a few more updates related to our big



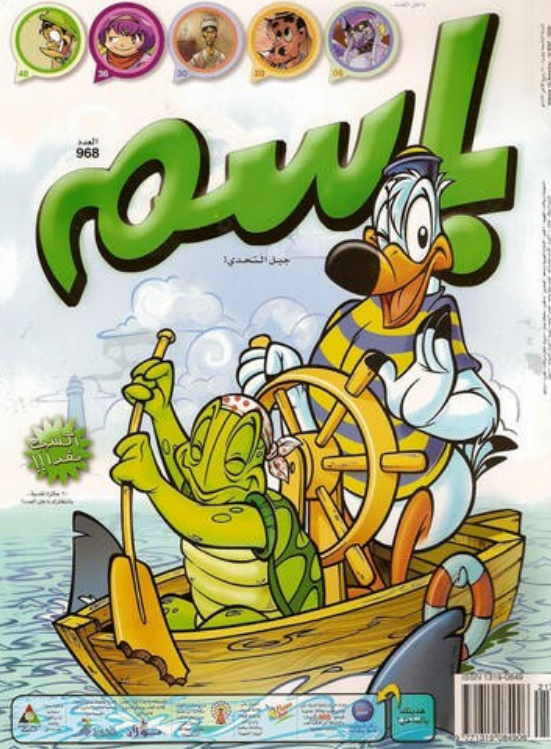


# What did we already have in the collection... and why?

- Mostly caricatures and political cartoons either in periodicals, satirical press or in albums

- Some surprise items like a run of Saudi children's magazine *Basim*

- Some items collected by other departments on the British Library





# What have we been collecting since 2015?

- Backfilling older publications which were not previously collected
- New publications
- From all Arab countries (though mostly Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco) and but also in Europe/ the diaspora
- In Arabic (MSA+Dialect), English and French
- Comics, graphic novels, political cartoons, fanzines, zines, comics ephemera
- A limited number of children's comics
- Books about comics, graphic novels, caricatures and political cartoons, etc.
- Monographs by single authors or collectives
- Periodicals (like Samandal, Tok Tok, Skefkef, Lab619)







## How have we been collecting since 2015?

### Purchased Acquisitions

- Usual suppliers: limited coverage, though improving
- Direct from creator or publisher
- Online stores
- In country acquisitions, e.g. shops, book fairs or comics fairs

### Legal Deposit

### Donations

- People often happy to donate their work
- Don't rely on donations: important to pay people for their labour

Informal Networks of friends, colleagues, creators

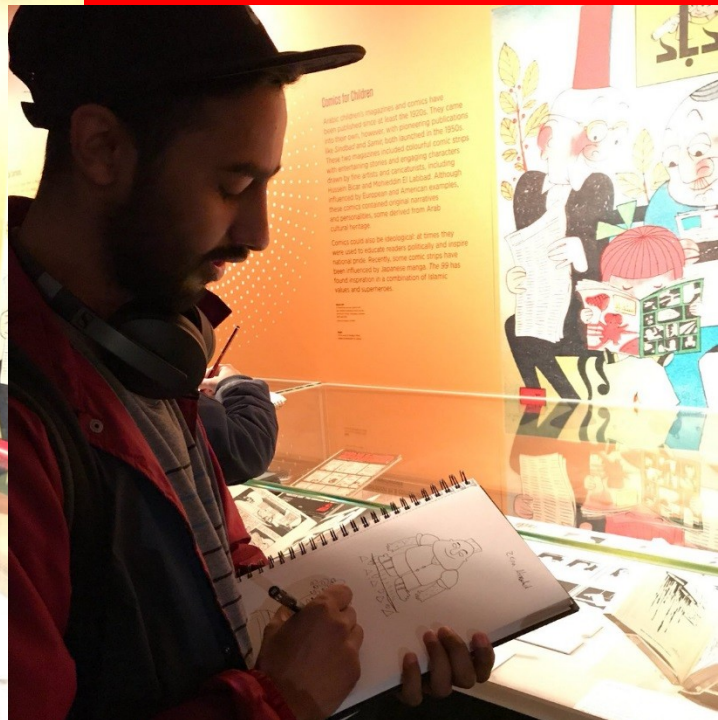


# Comics and Cartoon Art from the Arab World

Treasures Gallery, British Library

13 June – 29 October 2017

- Successes (and disappointments)
- Lessons
- Surprises





PANEL DISCUSSION

## Naji al-Ali: A Tribute

Fri 27 Oct 2017, 19:00 - 20:30



## Events and Learning...

- Naji al-Ali tribute event, 29 October 2017.
- Shubbak – 2019 with Joseph Kai and Deena Mohamed
- Working with Skefkef –Aicha El Belaoui and Mehdi Annassi
- Arabic comics translation workshop with Deena Mohamed, Nariman Youssef and Sawad Hussein



# Challenges and opportunities

- Acquisitions: sometimes defies how we usually do things
- Digital comics: developing infrastructures in place for collecting British publications, but what about global collecting
- Cataloguing (name and subject authorities, language, etc.) – 500 note fields are your friend!
- Conservation and storage
- Accessibility
- Resources: time and money
- How do we capture, record and document the 'comics culture' more broadly
- New forms of engagement: working with creators
- New linkages with wider British Library Arabic collections
- New audiences
- New areas of interest: artists books; zines; DIY-culture; emerging digital formats

