

For Immediate Release



AUB establishes Sawwaf Comics Initiative for the study and promotion of Arabic comics

Beirut, Lebanon- 15/09/2014 - The American University of Beirut has established the Mu'taz and Rada Sawwaf Arabic Comics Initiative, which will provide opportunities for the academic research and promotion of Arabic comics.

With a five-year pledge from the Sawwaf family, the initiative, which will be under the direct authority of the University Provost, will help AUB promote the research, teaching, and production of Arabic comics, and develop and maintain a repository of Arabic comics literature.

An AUB trustee since 2014, Mu'taz Sawwaf (BArch '74), is a comics connoisseur and an accomplished illustrator as well as an executive board member of the Saudi Binladin Group and the managing director for the Architecture and Building Construction Division (ABCD).

Sawwaf believes that comics and cartoons have always influenced society and public opinion and, they continue to inspire them in the 21st century.

"The Arab world is no exception," he said, "yet no one has tried to understand and promote comics art from an educational, academic, and entertainment perspective, nor has anyone honored the Arab pillars of this very creative art form."

He added, "I believe AUB is the most suitable platform to initiate a center for the study of Arabic comics."

AUB Provost Ahmad Dallal agrees. "The region would benefit tremendously from an academic body that would act as a hub for the study of this Arabic cultural heritage and a platform for the interdisciplinary inquiry and specialized teaching of this art form," he said.

While an abundance of scholarship has focused on American, European, and Japanese (and other East Asian) comics, noted Dallal, very little research of Arabic comics has been produced.

"This is partly due to the lack of resources allocated to the study of this medium, but also due to the inexistence of an accessible and professionally maintained database of Arabic comics," he added. "This is why AUB would serve as the ideal institution for hosting such an initiative, with its library and lab resources and its academic expertise."

Lina Ghaibeh, associate professor of animation, motion, and graphics at AUB, has been named the founding director of the Sawwaf Arabic Comics Initiative. "I hope that we will be able to grow

this initiative and develop it into a full-fledged Arabic Comics Center for the study of this Arabic cultural heritage,” she said.

For academics researching Arabic comics, several resources are made available at AUB through this initiative. These include: professional studio spaces, advanced digital imaging labs, AUB’s extensive library, and a multitude of research centers along with their relevant research activities and events, including the Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship, the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs and The Center for Arab and Middle Eastern Studies (CAMES), among others.

The University Libraries already has some 250 English and 50 Arabic scholarly books on comics and several hundred issues of Arabic comics series including, *al-Samandal*, *Tin Tin*, *Samer*, *Tok Tok*, *Sindibad*, *Little Loulou*, and *Ahmad* magazine. “We also have over a dozen major reference works that are a must for any library or institution with interest in comics research,” said Dr. Lokman Meho, University Librarian.

“Our library collection on Arabic comics is expanding and will further be enhanced by a future in-kind gift of several thousand items from Mr. Mu’taz and Mrs. Rada Sawwaf’s personal collection and via an active library acquisition campaign that is generously supported by them,” Dr. Meho added. “Our aim is to become the largest repository of Arabic comics literature in the world, which will be made accessible physically and online via a searchable database to anyone interested in Arabic comics.”

AUB, through its Department of Architecture and Design under the Faculty of Engineering and Architecture, currently offers a number of courses on comics. These would naturally benefit from the establishment of the Sawwaf Comics initiative, which will also organize an annual conference to promote and advance the field and to encourage the publication of artistic and scholarly works on comics. The Arabic Comics Initiative will also be home to the Mahmoud Kahil Awards recognizing great Arab talents in the field of comics, and celebrated with an awards ceremony.

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Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 700 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,500 students. AUB currently offers more than 100 programs leading to the bachelor’s, master’s, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full service 420-bed hospital.

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