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ARABIC CHILDREN'S COMICS

CONTENTS AND PARENTS' OPINIONS

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Shoqi Andreas Qassim 2004

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PURPOSE AND METHOD

Growing up reading comics, and working professionally for three years as a comic artist, a natural question for me to ask, after two years of Arabic studies, was: “What are comics like in the Arab World?” Of course, finding an answer that covers all aspects of this general and very broad question would require a lot more space than the ten credit essay allows. Just giving the highly interesting, and not any less amusing, field of satire and political caricature a fair treat would take at least a thick book in length to accomplish. Therefore I found myself forced to the unfortunate, but necessary measure of limitations. I went for what I have the most “know how” about, namely children’s comics (since my own comic work so far has been mostly for children). Further, covering all children’s comics circulating in the Arab world is perhaps not an impossible task, but it would surely take some serious traveling, and big bags to carry all the magazines. I had the great privilege of spending nearly a year in Jordan, and so the comic material I’ve researched is mostly selected from what’s available there. That doesn’t mean that all of it is of Jordanian origin. Far from. The magazines originate from all over the Arab world, from countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, just to name some of them. The method used to deal with these comics has been firstly to read them and understand them, then making a small analysis and finally to group some of the more interesting ones into categories based on subject matter to be able to make comparisons. I haven’t tried to pinpoint characteristic national trends, rather more general ones, since the comics and magazines have a lot in common in format and content, independent of country of origin.

The comic culture is of course dependent on the culture in which it’s being produced and distributed. Because of this, I was curious about what the attitudes are towards comics, specifically among Arabic parents and the magazines themselves. In Sweden and the west the comic media is by now a fairly respected art form, at least children’s comics and “funny comics”, and at least among ordinary people. Comics can be found in just about any kiosk, shop or super market. What status does the comic have in the Arab world? Is it just seen as cheap entertainment, or is there the belief that there’s actually something to gain from it? When it comes to children, I would say that Swedes, at least, generally acknowledge that comics have the ability to play an important role in education, especially in the crucial phase of learning how to read. From what I remember, the first word I ever read was “Långben”, the Swedish name for Disney’s “Goofy”, in a Swedish comic book. With this essay, I wanted to find out if comics have the same sort of positive image among Arabs, or if there are different

views. Thus I wrote two short questionnaires (in Arabic), one for the magazines, responsible for publishing the comics, and one for parents, supposedly responsible for what their children read.⁰ The magazine questionnaire I sent by e-mail to the chief editors (“ru’asā’ at-taḥrīr”) of the magazines that provide e-mail addresses (most of them do). Unfortunately none of them answered. Their opinions and policies regarding comics will therefore remain a mystery. Hence, the “INQUIRIES” chapter will only concern Arabic parents. This questionnaire I distributed among some families in ‘Ammān (Jordan) and Ta’izz (Yemen) through the help of friends.

⁰ See “SUPPLEMENTS” for questionnaires and official letters to magazines and parents.

INTRODUCTION AND PRESENTATION OF THE MAGAZINES

There are, as far as I know, no “comic books” in the Arab world as we know them in the west. That is, a weekly or monthly magazine with just comics. However, there are Arabic magazines of this format with imported material, for example “*Mīkī*”, with Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse comics in the purest “fuṣḥā” (“classical Arabic”), or translated DC and Marvel super hero comics, like Batman and Spiderman. But the 100 % Arabic produced counterparts are distinguished by their absence. What you find instead is a plethora of children’s magazines with mixed material, like articles of different kinds, humor pages, illustrated stories, readers’ or members’ pages, and short comic stories of an average length of 2-6 pages. It’s the comics in these magazines, written and drawn by Arabs, that I have focused on in this essay.

Since I only bought magazines in Jordan and Yemen, the collection I’ve chosen is probably not representative for the Arab world as a whole. Four of the magazines are being produced in Jordan: “*Wisām*”, “*Ḥātīm*” (under the wings of biggest daily Jordanian newspaper “*ar-Ra’ī*”), “*Barā’im ‘Ammān*” and “*Fikra*”, whereas “*’Usāma*” is a Yemeni publication from Ṣan‘ā’. If these magazines ever find their way outside the country they originate from is a question I don’t have the answer to, but there are others that definitely do. These are “*Mājid*” (United Arab Emirates), probably the most well known of all Arabic children’s magazines, “*al-’Arabī aṣ-Ṣaghīr*” (Kuwait) and “*Bāsim*” (Saudi Arabia). “*Al-’Arabī aṣ-Ṣaghīr*” is the youth version of another well known publication, “*al-’Arabī*”, which is a kind of Arabic counterpart to *National Geographic*, evident in both content and design. Lebanese magazine “*’Aḥmad*” and the Egyptian magazines “*’Alā’ ad-Dīn*” and “*Samīr*”, I bought in Amman, so they’re apparently being exported, but to what extent, and in what parts of the Arab world, I haven’t learned.

What follows is a presentation and analysis of some of the comics in these magazines that I, for different reasons, found interesting. I’ve grouped them after common subject matter to be able to make comparisons.

EDUCATING MORALS AND BEHAVIOR

A popular subject matter in the Arabic comics, at least for the scriptwriters, seems to be the education of good morals and proper behavior, either indirectly or more commonly, in overtly obvious ways. In fact, from the selection of stories I read, this is the category to which I could ascribe the largest amount of examples. Patronizing and supposedly indoctrinating,

these stories are often presented as being funny, but they are rather quite sad, or at least not very good. They're usually about instructing, forbidding and telling off, and this generally affects the story in negative ways, especially if it skips the usual "twist" or "punch line" in the end, in favor of the purpose of teaching a moral lesson.

In "*'Akhtā' ar-riḥla*" (the Errors of the trip)¹, written by 'Umar al-'Arīqī and drawn by 'Usāma ash-Shamīrī, a class (of boys) go on a school trip to Wādi Zahr and the famous Dār al-Ḥajar (also known as "the Palace of the Imam"). The teacher requests his pupils to take notes of what they see during the day. This, it turns out, is not for the purpose of being able to discuss in class the historical significance of the place or status of the Imam in society, that one might expect. Instead it's so the boys can report on each other in what ways they misbehaved during their excursion. One student happily informs the teacher that he saw a classmate sticking out his head through the window during the bus ride. Another noticed that some pupils threw their banana skins on the street. Someone ruined the edge of his seat with a sharp tool, and someone else touched one of the antiquities inside the palace. The teacher thanks them for their cooperation, turn to the readers with a big smile and a raised finger, hoping that "*you* don't commit such errors as *your* colleges have mentioned on *your* next trip."



Sharp eyed, yet by authority somewhat oppressed boys and their patriarchal school teacher.

"*Hānī wa-l'utlat aṣ-ṣayfiyya*" (Hani and the summer holidays)², also written by al-'Arīqī and drawn by Bushrā ash-Shahārī, is championed by the wandering milk box, Hānī (the character of an actual milk brand sold in Yemen). A group of children wonder what to make of their holidays. Hānī shows up and give them a two page lecture on beneficial things to do during the summer. These include memorizing the Qur'ān, reading books and magazines that

¹ 'Usama #77, May-June 2004, s 25-27

² 'Usama #77, May-June 2004, s 16-18

makes the mind grow, religious and scientific stories of the imagination and of famous scholars (it's important that these books are printed in clear letters and that the place of reading is well lit in order to preserve the health of the eyes!), learning languages and how to use the computer, and practicing cultural, sport-, artistic and scientific activities. Hānī summarize: "And thus my friends, he who uses his time and (wisely) arranges it wins, and he who waste it (on non beneficial things) will be disappointed and regretful." As stories, these two comics are completely worthless. If they're useful in any other way is doubtful. All the smiling and educational prudeness rather gives you the creeps than joy.



Hānī, a wandering and highly patronizing Milk Box.

In "*Ākhir kadhba*" (the Last lie)³, an episode of the "soap opera", "*Fī madrasat al-banāt*" (In the girls' school), written by Manāl 'Azām and drawn by Jihān Badrāwī, the commandment "thou shalt not lie" is what dictates the action. Qamr claim that a famous singer is a relative of hers. Najma doesn't believe her, so she gathers all the classmates together at the hotel where the singer will perform that same night. There she announce publicly that Qamr is a liar, asking "Why don't you ask him to come and greet us at least?" with a wry smile on her face. Qamr's head drop between her shoulders in shame. To create a little twist or joke at the end isn't even attempted. "If you lie you should be punished, preferably in public", seems to be the uncompromising message the authors want to deliver.

³ Mājid #1308, March 2004, s 8-9



Qamr gets some useful advice from her caring friend, Lūlū.

A better way, in my opinion, of dictating what's good morals and proper behavior can be found in "*an-Nasā'ih az-zujājiyya*" (the Glass advice)⁴, by scriptwriter Jamāl 'Alūsh and artist Samīr 'Abd al-Man'am. A merchant sends his son to the glass manufacturer to pick up some glass vessels and bring them back to the store. He hires an old and tired man to carry all of the glass vessels for him in one big and heavy basket. The son is in a hurry to get back home, and the carrier having trouble keeping up with him beg him to slow down. When the son refuses to do so, the carrier gives him three pieces of advice:

"He who says to you that laziness is better than work, don't believe him."

"He who says to you that hunger is better than being full, don't believe him."

"He who says to you that walking is better than riding, don't believe him."

The son agrees on all these statements. However, he wishes to be cost effective in order to impress his father, so he gives the exhausted carrier his own piece of advice:

"He who says to you that I'm going to pay you for your troubles, don't believe him."

The carrier, having had enough, throws the basket with the glass vessels on the floor, giving his final piece of advice:

"He who says to you that there's anything unbroken left in the basket, don't believe him."

Not being world class story telling, this piece still uses a more indirect way of teaching morals and how to behave, that I believe is just as clear to young readers. From this they'll still understand that you shouldn't behave like a fascist, even though no one is preaching about it.

⁴ Al-'Arabī Aṣ-Ṣaghīr #141, June 2004, s 33-35



An ignorant, cowl young man and his poor old carrier.

In the context of these upbringing lessons about moral and behavior, Ra'īd 'Abd al-Wāhid's "*Mughāmarāt as-sayyid Kaḥtūt*" (the Adventures of Mr Kaḥtūt) is a happy acquaintance. The episode, "*Ayyuhumā 'abkhal?*" (Who of the two is stingiest?)⁵ starts with a young man, Shaḥīḥ (another word for "stingy") claiming that there's none stingier than himself, and that among his ancestors there has never been anyone even slightly generous. Getting worried for his reputation as the stingiest of the stingy, Kaḥtūt ask a senior friend if there has ever been anyone generous among his forefathers. Yes, there was actually one among them nicknamed Karīm (Generous) who had impulses of generosity. This is a great insult to Kaḥtūt and he goes to borrow a genealogy book from one of his stingy relatives (who take Kaḥtūt's son, Kaḥta, as a safety deposit until he gets his book back) to prove Shaḥīḥ wrong. With the help of his wife, Kaḥtuta, Kaḥtūt eventually find what he's been looking for. His grandfather had actually been nicknamed "The Most Generous of the Stingy", in spite of his severe miserliness. When the hungry and poor among the stingy ones had come knocking on his door in the morning to ask him for breakfast, he had passed around a piece of cheese to let each one of them have a smell of it and then taken the cheese and left them. Kaḥtūt inherited that piece of cheese and he still has it for breakfast the same way every morning. The others surrender. There couldn't possibly be anyone stingier than that.

Children are generally not stupid. They'll understand that you shouldn't behave like Mr Kaḥtūt without having it hammered into their little heads by humorless lists of "dos and don'ts". Unfortunately, the function of the Arabic children's comic, far too often seem to be

⁵ Fikra #6 2004, s 28-29

just that. Another note to be made about this category of stories is that they rarely feature boys and girls interacting, except inside the haven of the family. If comics are supposed to reflect and reinforce the structures and traditions of the society they were made in and targeted at, the examples I've shown so far go well with such a theory.



Could there really be someone stingier than the master himself, Mr Kahtūt?

PROVERBS, FABLES AND FAIRYTALES

Another common subject matter to base stories on is the plentiful heritage of Arabic proverbs, fables and fairytales. Sometimes these are straight off comic adaptations, at other times more loosely connected to its source. There are the modern takes and the pastiches. For the scriptwriters working with these contents, there's obviously a lot to pick from, and this material is often well suited for the comic media.

Under the umbrella of what appears to be a series called "*Qiṣṣat mathal 'arabī*" (Arabic proverb story), writer Ḥasan Nājī and artist Hāzim Nimrāwī have dramatized and illustrated a well known Arabic saying "'*Ukiltu yawma 'ukila ath-thawr al-'abyaḍ*" (I was eaten the day the white bull was eaten)⁶. Three bulls, a white, a black and a red one, live in a somewhat forced friendship with the king of the forest, the Lion. Together these three bulls are too strong for the Lion to attempt harming them in any way. But the Lion like bull meat so he has to come up with some tricks in order to be able to fill his empty stomach. First he gets the red and black bull to believe that the white one, with its bright color is a danger to the others' safety. This sounds reasonable to them so he's given the permission to eat the white bull. He proceeds by addressing the more racist sides of the red bull's personality, pointing out the fact that their color is the same and suggesting that it'd be better to get rid of the black bull so they can have the forest to themselves. The red bull thinks this is a good idea and so the lion eat the

⁶ Wisām #141, 2003, s 24-25

black bull. With only the red bull remaining, there's no one to prevent the lion from completing his cunning scheme. Under the claws and jaws of the triumphant lion, just before being eaten, the red bull concludes that "I was eaten the day the white bull was eaten".

I'm not sure how this proverb is being used, but it seems to mean something like "you're history the day you give in to selfish desires and vanity and turn on your friends" or "you were finished long before you actually die", suggesting some sort of belief in destiny, which is central in Arabic culture. The comic is a well suited media for passing on these old sayings and traditions to the young.



A red, sly and cunning lion and a vain and easily fooled red bull.

The names of the maker/makers of "*Anā wa ḥimārī wa-l'adhāb*" (Me, my donkey and the suffering)⁷ aren't given, but the signature found on each page suggest that the name of at least the artist is Nizār Fawzī. This is a modern take on the popular tales about foolish character Juḥā, this time with his donkey as the protagonist. This poor animal is going through a psychological crisis. He can't bear hearing people using the word "donkey" to insult or curse each other. They use him and his kind as an example of stubbornness and stupidity. Why don't they recognize noble qualities like his patience and cleverness? He's able to find his way after having walked it only once; he has saved children from fire and drowning; authors have written beautiful books about him (what books we're not told); his loyal services to mankind should've left him at an elevated position in the minds of people. Juḥā take his depressed and suicidal animal to the donkey doctor, who only make things worse by calling Juḥā "donkey" for being stupid. On the way back home they pass by chance the "Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals". Here, Juḥā get the advice to take his donkey on a charter

⁷ Hātim #62, February 2004, s 6-11

trip with the society's special airline, where man and animal travel together in order to make the animals stop feeling they are of a lower rank than their masters. This seems like a good idea to Juḥā, so the two of them embark on the trip. Aboard the plane the donkey befriends a naughty bird. Together they spend their time playing pranks on the stewardess by repeatedly pressing the button calling for service just to tell her they don't actually want anything. Eventually she has had enough and throws them off the plane. For the bird, this isn't a serious problem since he knows how to fly, whereas Juḥā's donkey will fall into the cold waters of the sea where he'll have to wait for a ship to pick him up.

This is a pretty long and quite confused story, and the drawings are mediocre to say the least. Falling through the air, the bird preach to the donkey that “you shouldn't commit acts you're not able to bear the consequences for”, but except for this it's not so clear what the author is trying to say, or for that matter what the second part of the story (on the airplane) has to do with the first one.



Juḥā and his suicidal donkey.

A modernized satire on a canonical text can be found in 'Aḥmad 'Abd al-'Azīzī's “'Alf layla 'aṣṣriyya – Miṣbāḥ 'Alā' ad-Dīn” (Thousand contemporary nights – “Aladin's” lamp)⁸. 'Alā' ad-Dīn goes to buy a magical lamp. The shopkeeper thinks he's crazy, but hand him a lamp anyhow, saying it might be magical. Through the thick smoke from the lamp a female spirit appears. She promises him her services, after he has provided her with “a few

⁸ Al-'Arabī aṣ-Ṣaghīr #124, January 2003, s 60-61

necessities”. Ad-Dīn curse his luck – he’s the one supposed to do the wishing part – but do as she says and bring her a big pile of stuff. Now at his service, Ad-Dīn ask the spirit for 1.000.000 dinars, no, make that 20.000.000 dinars, and in small change! It turns out that the spirit wasn’t actually a spirit, but his neighbor who had come because of the thick smoke to see if he was in need of aid.



Hopeful “Aladin” meets a disbelieving shopkeeper.

Not all source material needs to be Arabic to find its way into an Arabic magazine. This is proved by another satire on a well known character, “*Drākyūlā yurīdu an yamūt*” (Dracula wants to die)⁹, written by Maḥmūd Šāliḥ and drawn by Fāris Qarh Bayt. The story begins with the Count himself being depressed. He’s fed up with “night life” and blood sucking. He wants to live and die like everybody else, and decide to try to commit suicide. Firstly he exposes himself to sunlight, but fleeing the scene with his behind on fire he decide that burning to death is too painful. Then he tries killing himself by drinking garlic juice, but that’s just a bit too disgusting a way to die. His fellow vampires are chocked by his behavior. “Indeed, the distinguishing feature of the bloodsucker is that he doesn’t die. He’s not as weak as the regular human being”, states a female friend of his. They go for a night hunt to try to reinvigorate the poor count. Encountering a big black bull that would be sufficient to feed the whole band of vampires, Dracula, with his experience and expertise, is the one expected to hunt it down. But he’s lost his golden touch; the bull charge right into him sending him flying through the air. Beaten and disencouraged he stumble across a fruit basket. He hates fruit, but his pressing hunger makes him brave enough to have a bite. That night his blood doesn’t get

⁹ Al-‘Arabī aṣ-Ṣaghīr #124, January 2003, s 43-48

thinner and fruit didn't taste that bad after all. He continues eating fruit and even vegetables, to the other vampires' disgust. Soon his skin has become refreshed and he's delighted to once again being able to see his own mirror reflection. Feeling the vitality returning to his body he prepares himself to face daylight, praising the sun, and he even discovers that his heart started beating again. Finally he has become like the descendants of Adam; he will from now on live like them and die like them. "Curse the bloodsucking, curse the life of darkness" he says cheerfully upon leaving his castle.



"Mmm, garlic juice..."

In this yet limited selection of magazines and stories, one man is outstanding as a maker of Arabic comics in just about every way, both as a writer and artist. A skilled and obviously experienced storyteller and a genuine professional of his craft, Diyā' al-Ḥijār's work is distinguished by well constructed scenarios, beautiful ink and water color illustrations and stories steeped in Arabic history and culture. From a European point of view, aesthetically I would place his style somewhere in between Hergé's *Tintin* and Uderzo's *Asterix*. In "*Mughāmarāt 'Antara wa Zarqā' wa 'Ash'ab*" (the Adventures of 'Antara, Zarqā' and 'Ash'ab), al-Ḥijār has gathered three authentic historical Arabic characters, from different eras and geographical locations and put them in one and the same adventure. These characters are:

'Antara – a famous knight and poet from pre-Islamic times; he had an Arabic father but his appearance was more of an African, like his mother

Zarqā' – a beautiful woman from the Yemen, known for her blue and very sharp eyes

'Ash'ab – infamous for his excessive gluttony



An incredibly detailed, “very Arabic” opening panel. 'Ash'ab is hungry as always.

In “*as-Sāriq al-majhūl*” (the Anonymous thief)¹⁰ the three heroes arrive in a new town. A monkey steal 'Ash'ab's turban. The owner apologizes and offers his services by directing them to a nice hotel, Funduq as-Sa'āda (Happiness Hotel). During the night the hotel guests, including our heroes, are robbed of their gold and money, despite locked doors and windows endorsed with iron bars, leaving no room for a thief to enter. The next day, 'Antara, Zarqā' and 'Ash'ab see the monkey owner directing a group of wealthy looking visitors to another hotel of his choice, Funduq ar-Rafāh (Hotel Pleasant), and 'Ash'ab's turban is once again stolen by the mischievous monkey. That night the heroes camp outside Funduq ar-Rafāh. Zarqā', with her sharp sight, see a small creature (“maybe a cat or a mouse”, as she says) climbing the wall of the hotel, entering the rooms through the small openings of the barred windows. A couple of hours later the guests of ar-Rafāh discover that they too have been robbed of their belongings. On the third day three rich salesmen come up to the monkey owner asking him for a hotel suitable for men of their rank. After having been directed to Funduq as-Surūr (Hotel Joy), we learn that the salesmen weren't really salesmen but our heroes dressed up. Proceeding according to their plan 'Ash'ab make preparations in the hotel room while 'Antara and Zarqā' overlook things from outside. As expected, there's another

¹⁰ Fikra #6, 2004, s 14-19

attempted robbery that night, but this time criminal activity is brought to a halt as the monkey is caught in 'Ash'ab's mouse trap and the monkey's owner, who'd been waiting outside the hotel is captured by 'Antara and Zarqā'. They bring the criminals to the grateful police and the stolen goods are returned to their owners. Feeling sorry for the monkey, who was merely trained to obey the commands of his owner, 'Ash'ab bring him with him on the heroes' continued journey, planning to release him at the nearest oasis. Getting there the monkey immediately rushes off with his turban for what might turn out to be his last theft...

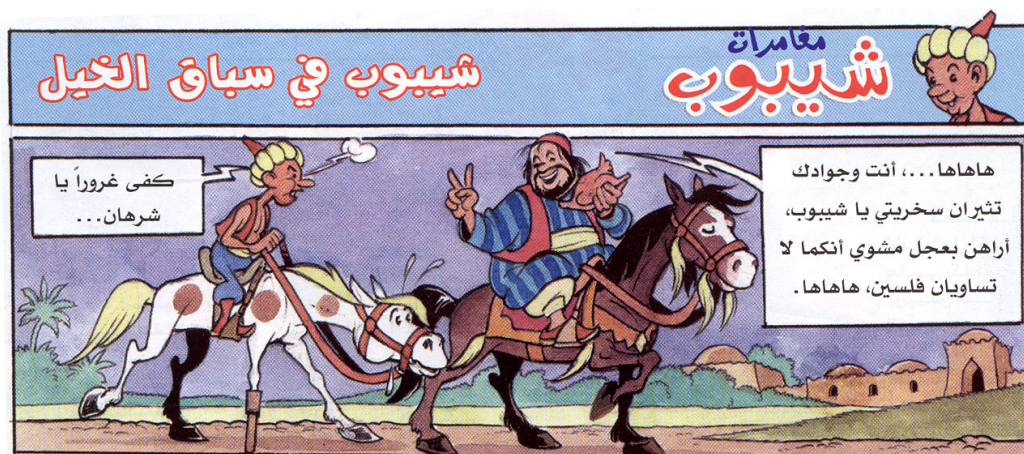


Al- Hījār's talent as caricaturist is evident.

Another elegantly told and well drawn story by Ḍiyā' al-Hījār is "*Mughāmarāt Shaybūb – Shaybūb fī sibāq al-khayl*" (the Adventures of Shaybūb – Shaybūb at the horse race).¹¹ The comic is based on an old Arabic saying, "Al-Khayl bikhayyālihā" or "Al-Faras min al-fāris" with the meaning that "the horse is (as good) as its rider". Shaybūb, him too being a well known character from the Arabic past, was said to be able to run faster than any horse or camel. Whatever the case, in this episode he's riding a miserable limp horse (with a wooden leg), thus his speed doesn't measure up to his reputation. He's being bullied by big fat and arrogant Sharhān (a relative of 'Ash'ab perhaps?) who brag about his graceful Arabic horse's noble origins. He bet a grilled calf that Shaybūb and his horse aren't even worth two fils. Shaybūb has had enough of this boastful arrogance and challenges Sharhān to a horse race. If he loses he promises to present his adversary with a grilled pigeon. Sharhān laughs and promise Shaybūb a grilled camel in the unlikely case he wins. At night Sharhān put on a big banquet for his friends, ridiculing his opponent and betting a grilled mountain goat that Shaybūb will pull out of the competition before the morning comes. But Shaybūb doesn't pull out and the two of them get ready for the race. Sharhān take the immediate lead after the start, but not before long his strong and graceful horse is exhausted and Shaybūb and his wooden legged racer can easily overtake him. At the finishing line they're greeted as heroes. Sharhān getting in an hour later with the horse on his back is now the laughing stock of the crowd:

¹¹ Fikra #6, 2004, s 42-44

“Hi, hi, hi.. Finally the horse and his Sharhān arrive.. ha, ha, ha” someone laughs teasingly. The people think Shaybūb’s win is a miracle and wonder if there’s been magic involved, but the explanation is simple. Not even the strongest horse in the world could have won with the weight of Sharhān’s massive body on its back. Shaybūb realized this and knew from the beginning that he was going to win, concluding “fa-lkhayl bikhayyālihā”. Sharhān bet a grilled dinosaur that Shaybūb is right.



The normally so fast Shaybūb, this time on a limp, wooden legged horse, getting bullied by corpulent and arrogant Sharhān.

In these three pages, Diyā’ al-Hijār has made perfect use of the space he’s been given, considering the carefully planned and well distributed plot, the reappearing and in size increasing “running gag” with the grilled animals, and so on. In other words it doesn’t need to be any longer. ‘Antara, Zarqā’ and ‘Ash’ab on the other hand seem to scream for more space. They belong in a format of larger proportions than the magazines’ general 2-6 page restrictions allow. “*As-Sāriq al-majhūl*” is as well constructed and carried out as the Shaybūb story, and even though you’d want to see more, it’s nicely rounded off at the end, and works just fine in such a small format, but I think that an album of 50-60 pages would be more appropriate for a comic of this caliber.

GEOGRAPHY, HISTORY AND OTHER LECTURES

Some of the comics found in the magazines were obviously designed for the purpose of teaching its readers some specific facts. Again, this can be done either directly or preferably indirectly, since the indirect way usually has a higher potential of being interesting as a story at the same time as being educational. Shouldn’t the children’s comic in the first instance

catch the interest of the child and spur his imagination and craving to read? If he also learns something in the process, it's for the better, but just plainly throwing out fact after fact isn't really that exciting, and the child might choose to do something more fun, like watching TV, instead of reading.

“*Sindbād fī Wādī Ḥaḍramawt*” (Sindbad in the valley of Ḥaḍramawt)¹² – story by ‘Alī ar-Rashīd, drawings by Bushrā ash-Shahīrī – is obviously based on a well known literary character. This particular version of Sindbād can also be found in the cartoon adventure series on the *Space Toon* channel, as well as on packages of the Sindbād chocolate bars. The character has apparently enormous potential for tales of thrilling adventure, but what we’re presented with in this particular episode is a mere uninspiring geography lesson, in which Sindbād, his little wife and his parrot leave hometown Baṣra for seaport Mukallā in the Yemen. Here they get a guided tour through Wādī Ḥaḍramawt from the captain’s friend, Farīd, taking them to Say’ūn, Shibām, Tarīm and then back to Mukallā. All highly interesting places indeed, but unfortunately there has been no attempt made at creating an interesting story to make them more memorable to the reader.



Sindbad and friends in Yemeni seaport, Mukalla.

A cleverer way of educating the reader can be found in “*Āthār Masrūqa*” (Stolen antiquities)¹³ under the serial title “*Farīq al-baḥṭh al-janā’i*” (the Criminal investigation team), written by Muḥammad al-Mansī and drawn by Muḥammad Bayram. Criminal

¹² ‘Usāma #77, May-June 2004, s 4-6

¹³ Mājid #1308, March 2004, s 55-57

investigators Khalfān and Fahmān have gone on vacation to Egypt and ancient city of Luxor. Here they discover that priceless murals are being stolen from the pharaonic tombs, so in spite of them being off duty, they responsibly get on the case. In this final episode a keeper of a fake antiquities shop (there are certainly more than one of these in Egypt) help them find the murals, and they can stop them from being smuggled out of the country. By going over their plentiful photographs, Khalfān and Fahmān are able to reveal and track down a foreign man, and this in turn leads to the uncovering of a band of smugglers. The Egyptian police are grateful for their help, and they're left to get on with their photo vacation.

Here, the actual “lecture” is only a backdrop to the action. We learn about pharaonic history and Egyptian geography through the framework of a detective story. The execution could've been better; neither drawings nor storytelling is that brilliant, but the idea is attractive.



Everyone's happy because the invaluable murals have been retrieved.

“*Khuyūl fī-lhawā’ – Mawlid šinā’at as-sīnamā*” (Horses in the air – the Birth of the cinema industry)¹⁴ tells the story of photographer Eadward Muybridge, whose photographic work of moving bodies in late 19th century played an important part in the development of the film camera and the ensuing cinema industry. Two elderly gentlemen at the horse racing track discuss if the horse, while galloping, at a certain point has all four legs in the air at the same time, or if it first lifts the two front ones, then the two back ones as the front ones hit the ground. They consult Mr Muybridge who doesn't know the answer but becomes interested in finding out. It turns out to be a harder task than he expected, but he's a stubborn man, and as his obsession with solving the problem increases, there's less and less room for other photographic jobs. At the brink of bankruptcy, Muybridge with his assistant finally come up with the idea of connecting twenty four cameras with an electric wire and then distributing

¹⁴ Al-‘Arabī Aṣ-Ṣaghīr #141, June 2004, s 66-69

them evenly along a part of the race track. This enables him to take series of consecutive photographs of the horses as they pass by, showing the horse in every stage of its run. Thus Muybridge becomes the first to capture moving bodies on photo, and shortly after his assistant is happy to inform him that he's been granted the patent for his invention. So, who of the two elderly gentlemen was right? Well, the story doesn't actually give the answer, but thanks to creative inventors like Muybridge, by now we can easily find out.

This comic adaptation of an important piece of modern history is ambitious in its thorough research, evident for example in the care put into accurately depicting clothes and props typical for the period, even if the drawings are a bit stiff. To dramatize and illustrate actual historical events seem to be another good way of lecturing the reader.



Finally managing to photograph moving bodies - a historical day for Muybridge and the world.

In “*Kramila – al-Jamāl ṣiḥḥa*” (Kramila – Beauty is health)¹⁵, written by Intiṣār ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq and drawn by ‘Awāṭif ‘Abd Allāh, Kramila and her three friends sit and talk about what’s guaranteed to be their favorite subject: beauty. They ask Kramila what she does to make her face look so great. During a one page lecture she share secrets of beauty, such as “avoid exposure to the rays of the sun, especially between noon and four in the afternoon and persist in applying protective cream”, “wash your face at least two times daily with lukewarm water and natural soap” and “eat lots of fruit and vegetables, they’re good for the skin” etc. (I wonder if maybe Count Dracula reads Kramila?) Again there’s a remarkable nonexistence of a story, something one usually tend to take for granted when reading comics. Instead we have a two page product information on beauty products illustrated in a Manga inspired style (big eyes, hardly any noses, especially on girls). The only “humoristic element” present is the chubby girl who sits and eat in four of the five panels she’s in, stating in the final panel that “al-gātūh” (a type of cake) is more delicious (than fruit and beauty products).

¹⁵ Mājid #1308, March 2004, s 38-39

In another episode, “*Su‘arāt ḥarāriyya ‘aqaḥ*”¹⁶ (Less calories!), Kramila is lecturing her 3-4 year old daughter about calories (!), with the child having horrific future visions of being fat. Teaching a healthy life style is good I suppose, but should children (girls to be more specific, who “Kramila” clearly is aimed at) really be introduced to the world of beauty products and caloric paranoia at an age this early?



McDonald's and beauty could hardly be compatible, could they?

The most original “educational comic” from this selection must be “*Barā‘at al-muttaḥam*” (the Innocence of the accused)¹⁷, written by ‘Alī ar-Rashīd and drawn by Sāmīr ash-Shamīrī. The story takes place in the court room where “Vitamin A”, in the shape of a man, is being accused by an aggressive prosecutor of being the cause of diverse illnesses. Witnesses are called to testify that “A” is the reason behind their bad night sight, partial blindness, retarded growth process and generally weak immune system. In his defense speech, “A” claim that it’s rather because these people had too little of him during their childhood that they now have become disabled, and the charge should be leveled at the parents for having failed to provide their children with sound nutrition. After having conferred the issue the court proclaim the defendant not guilty and call the witnesses for further interrogation. The trial is followed by an epilogue consisting of a short factual text about the importance of “Vitamin A”.

The language in this comic is as formal as one would expect from a court room, which is a bit remarkable considering the age of its intended readers. Aesthetically it’s dark and scary with a touch of Kafka in its claustrophobic surrealness. Original for a children’s magazine, indeed.

¹⁶ Mājid #1322, June 2004, s 38-39

¹⁷ ‘Usāma #77, May-June 2004, s 39-42



“Vitamin A” is in serious trouble, and in court.

SCIENCE FICTION

It’s a small category, but a welcome escape from all the education and pedagogy: The tales of science fiction, where imagination usually is allowed more freedom. The norm for the Arabic science fiction comic seem to be the continual, a format that welcomes more elaborate plots and developed stories.

“*Rihlat ’inqādh al-’arḍ - Musalsal al-faḍā’ wa al-khayāl al-’ilmī*” (Journey to save the Earth – the Space and science fiction series)¹⁸ would have been a lot more interesting, weren’t it for its terribly amateurish, somewhat Manga inspired, drawings. Two boys, Ḥamāda and Ḥasūn, set out on a journey to save the earth together with Dr Bahādir in his brand new space ship (exactly what’s threatening the earth isn’t revealed in this episode). Accompanying them is a tiny green extra terrestrial who crashed on earth after having been hit by rockets from space pirates. He used to be larger in size, but the earthly oxygen made the cells of his body

¹⁸ Wisām #153, 2004, s 6-8

shrink, for some reason. As befits an action science fiction, this story moves from cliffhanger to cliffhanger as our heroes are being pulled towards black holes or opposed by attacking space ships. Interestingly it's a clearly Islamic science fiction, evident in its frequent mentioning of Allah and the boys delivering their creed – “‘Ashhadu ‘an la ilāh ‘illa Allāh wa ‘ashhadu ‘anna Muḥammadan Rasūl Allāh” (I testify that there's no god but God and I testify that Muhammad is his Prophet) – when facing lethal danger.

In the final episode of “*Kurat an-Nār*” (Ball of fire)¹⁹, written by Muḥammad al-Mansī Qindīl and drawn by Fawāz, the magazine's in house champion, al-‘Arabī aṣ-Ṣaghīr (“the Little Arab”, who arguably looks more like an ‘arabī shābb (young Arabic man)) has been caught up in a story about a mysterious ball of fire. In the previous episode, aṣ-Ṣaghīr went to the village, Barmāna, in the mountains of Libanon, where he met Mr Ṭānyūs, who claims to be hundred and ten years old. As a ten year old boy, Ṭānyūs had witnessed a space ship land on earth and out of it had come a creature that had shot him with beams that didn't harm him. Aṣ-Ṣaghīr finds an old news article, about a luminous meteor that had plunged through the earth atmosphere and then mysteriously and suddenly disappeared, that partly confirms the old man's story. To get to know the rest of the story, aṣ-Ṣaghīr attends Mr Ṭānyūs's hundredth and tenth birthday party. At night, after the guests have left, the two of them go out in the mountains and there the ball of fire reappears. It turns out to be the space ship Mr Ṭānyūs had been talking about. The aliens, from an advanced far away civilization, have come to take the old man with them for his final journey. All these years ago they'd made a deal; Ṭānyūs would be granted hundred years without physical illness and weakening of the mind on the condition that he'd on his hundred and tenth birthday would go with them and teach them everything he'd learned during his long life. The time has come and Ṭānyūs bids farewell. The extra terrestrial then approaches aṣ-Ṣaghīr asking him if he'd want to be like Mr Ṭānyūs. Aṣ-Ṣaghīr hesitates for a while but in the end decides that he couldn't leave the mountains, rivers and forests of earth. “You refuse eternal life”, says the creature, but aṣ-Ṣaghīr prefers to be like the rest of mankind, to live like them and die like them. As the ball of fire departs, the young Arab try to convince himself that he's been dreaming.

This is a classic “Close Encounters of the Third Kind” type of science fiction, a bit on the philosophical side. Drawings are neat, with photo montage backgrounds and “spacy” coloring effects. The theme of the story could've been exploited a bit more if given a bit more space than here.

¹⁹ Al-‘Arabī aṣ-Ṣaghīr #141, June 2004, s 5-9

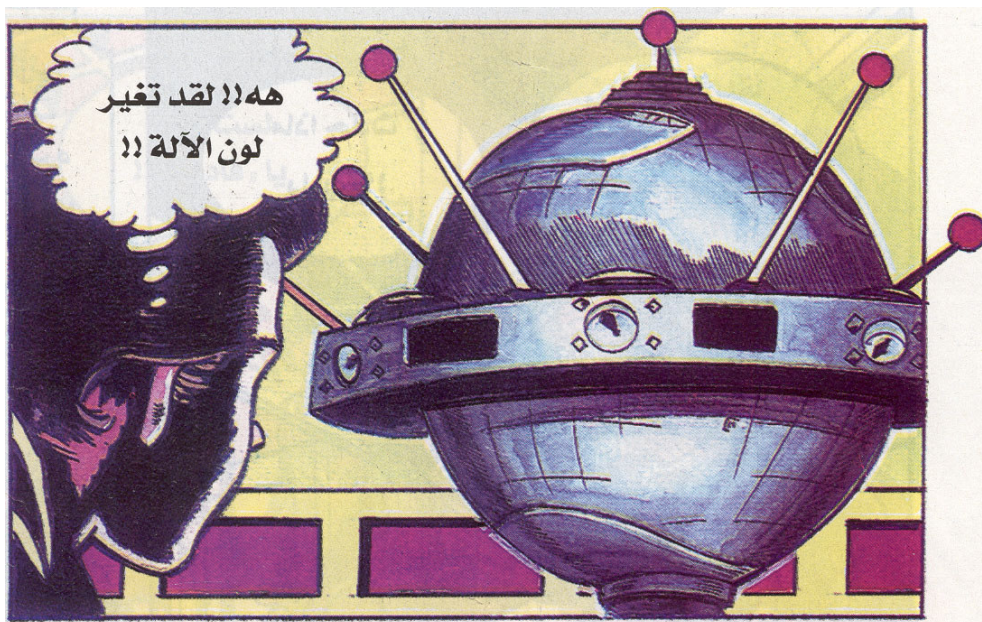


Who could refuse a hundred years of perfect health? Not to speak of embarking on a space journey with a creature as pretty as this one...

In the first episode of “*Sirr ’ālat az-zaman*” (the Secret of the time machine)²⁰, written by Hishām aṣ-Ṣayyād and drawn by Ṣufūt Qāsim, we’re acquainted with Dr Māḍī’s newly invented time machine (derived from Einstein’s theory of time being the fourth dimension). While the Doctor is out of the laboratory, the machine change color from red to black and a big scary arm come out of it, grabbing assistant Ru’ūf by the neck and pull him inside. Upon hearing his scream, Dr Māḍī and his daughter Fāḍiya hurry back to the lab. Once again the machine change color and this time it’s the Doctor’s turn to disappear into the interiors of his own mysterious invention. Fāḍiya scream in terror...

If this had been a Hollywood film from the 50’s, it would’ve been labeled “B-movie”, considering its “low budget” and cheap style. In fact, not only the scenario and “production” points to this period, but also the hairstyles and clothes of the characters, who look everything but Arabic.

²⁰ Samīr #2516, June 2004, s 16-21



Why haven't anyone invented the term "B-comic" yet?

Also 50's inspired, but maybe more so from comics like Blixt Gordon rather than American B-movies, is writer Ḥusām al-'Aqād's and artist Mamdūḥ al-Farmāwī's continual "*al-Mahammad al-ghāmiḍa*" (the Secret mission)²¹. Prior to this third episode a meteorite crashed in the middle of the desert after which enigmatic plants started to appear that destroy everything and everyone that touches them as well as excreting a dangerous poison, and "Rū" revealed that he's from the planet "Mandā" on a secret peace mission. 'Umar, Sharīf and a scientist watch how the plants grow larger by devouring desert sand. They inform "The Agency" who immediately send a military unit to wipe out this alien threat. Our heroes try to put them on hold for a while until they've had time to gather important information and knowledge about the plants, but the soldiers start shooting on their leader's order. Rū remarks that the earthlings are as civilizationally undeveloped as they'd expected, but promise that their mission of peace will be accomplished, in spite of still being weak (from what, or exactly where Rū is located, isn't clear in this episode). After the attack, there's nothing left of the plants except a hole in the ground. As the soldiers enter it, the scientist goes to his tent to complete his experiments on a small specimen of the plants. He discovers a poison that removes the nutritious element in the sand that the plants feed from, and which in turn kills them. But before he gets the chance to tell the others, the plant swallows him. Meanwhile the

²¹ Bāsīm #863, May 2004, s 35-37

hole in the ground has suddenly disappeared, together with all the soldiers. “We’re facing terrible powers.. terrible!!” says ‘Umar ...



Science fiction as it should be, mysterious and exciting, with brave heroes and curious scientists.

With at least for children quite challenging language, this is an intriguing story with classic conflicts such as the one between noble heroes who wants to understand and learn more about what they’re dealing with and paranoid and incompetent government representatives who rather shoot first and think afterwards (did I hear anyone say “pre-emptive strikes”?). Together with some well crafted, but not spectacular, artwork, this is in my opinion a good example of Arabic science fiction comics.

FAST, NOISY AND CHAOTIC

This high paced, a bit crazy and a bit “over the top” mode of comic storytelling seem to be favored by the Egyptians. From the examples I’ll give, two are from Egyptian magazine “‘Alā’ ad-Dīn”, one from Cairo based “Samīr” and one from the Saudi “Bāsim”, however with Egyptian settings, characters and style of humor. This being typical “Egyptian humor” could be argued I guess, but at least these comics in their pace, “noise” and chaotic confusion reminds a whole lot about comedy plays or films starring ‘Adil ‘Imām.

“*Wasfat Tibbiyya*” (Medical prescription)²², written by Faraj az-Zafīrī and drawn by Khālīd ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, is the story about a failed veterinarian. By incompetently having caused the death of a buffalo cow in labor as well as her fetus, he’s forced to flee for his life from

²² Bāsim #863, May 2004, s 4-7

enraged villagers. Eventually he find work in another village as a dentist, treating the village chief, in pain and in a foul mood from a nasty wisdom tooth, with pain killing injections for buffalos.



Opening up a clinic (for people) in the village he conjures up a medical prescription that's going to prevent his secret from being revealed. The prescription consist of three grains of barley in a glass of water, and most importantly, before going to sleep, trying hard not to think of buffalo cows (or else the pain will return). The more his patients try not to think about buffalo cows, the more they do, and this in turn cause sleeplessness, headache and increased pain. The villagers start suspecting that their dentist is a fraud. They wish that he'd see the pain that the buffalos have been causing them, so at night they let in a stampeding herd of buffalo cows in the veterinarian's house. Next morning the villagers laughingly ask the bashed, beaten and blue eyed doctor if he couldn't sleep because he had buffalos on his mind, or was it because they slept in his bed? The veterinarian-gone-dentist announce that he will from now on once again be a veterinarian, this time with the specialization of protecting the villagers from being exterminated by buffalos.

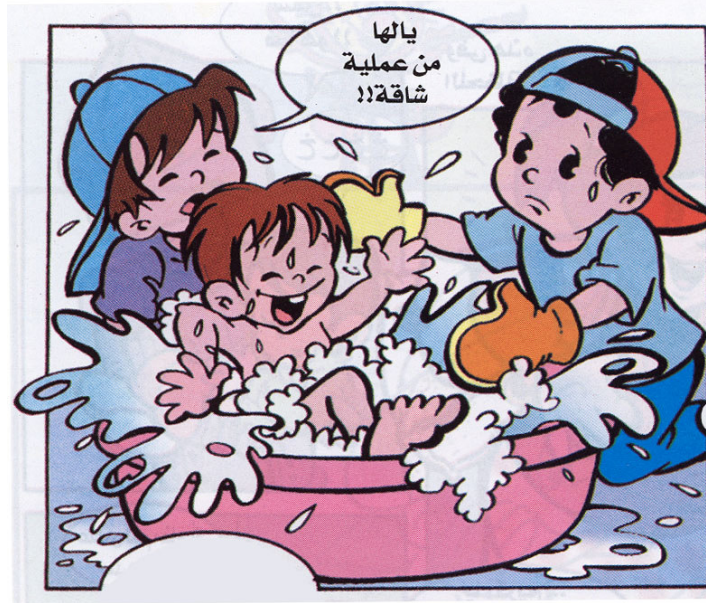
Without a doubt the "wackiest" of all these comics, "*Wasfat Tibbiyya*" features as crazy a story as the visuals are hilarious and lively, yet a bit messy. It reminds a bit in style of the satirical comics on popular films one would find in the humor magazine "MAD".



A herd of stampeding buffalo cows; men have gone insane for less.

Not as crazy perhaps, and with more conventional and a bit “stiff” drawings, “*Yawm hādī’ jiddan*” (a Very calm day)²³, written by Dr Shahīra Khalīl and drawn by Āmāl Khattāb, still proceeds by the principles of chaos and mess. The clever Zīkū Zakī and his friends, “The Joyous Four” have opened up a summer holiday day nursery for children of their neighborhood. Everything is programmed by Zīkū and can be operated by a remote control, including the robot ’Abū Hadīd. A mother brings her child, Hādī (named as such for a reason, and “a real angel” according to her). As soon as the mother has left, Hādī start going berserk, screaming and wreaking havoc in the nursery to the dismay of the irritated neighbors. Zīkū, the Joyous Four and ’Abū Hadīd try everything to calm him down, but without success. Finally, after a unusually wet bath and a change of clothes, Hādī fall asleep. As Zīkū and friends let their breaths out, the mother return, and with her a “marvelous surprise”, all of Hādī’s young relatives, since she was so pleased with the service of the nursery. Chaos erupts once again...

²³ Samīr #2516, June 2004, s 6-10



Hādī, “a real angel”, according to his mother.

“Ba’jūr” is a lazy boy, or at least he’s harboring the opinion that there are better ways than physical exertion to achieve things. In “*Najm al-qarn*” (the Star of the century)²⁴, written by Muḥammad Ḥulmī and drawn by ‘Isām ash-Shūrbajī, there’s going to be a football match, the match of the season, between team Ba’jūr and team Maṣṣūr. The teams have fifteen days to get in shape before the match, but since Ba’jūr doesn’t like the idea of physically exhaustive training, he make preparations in other ways. He writes large propaganda posters saying things like “(Team) Ba’jūr is stronger than Real Madrid”, and he get his mum to write invitation letters to stars and VIPs. He stages a big press conference under the slogan “Ba’jūr.. the Star of the century”, at which well known faces from the world of football appear and discuss his team’s chances, and popular singer Sha’bān ‘Abd ar-Raḥīm (famous for his song “I Hate Israel”) perform, singing lyrics that predict victory for team Ba’jūr. The breaking news is that Ba’jūr will play as goalkeeper without prior experience and without training before the game. “What’s the use of training?” he says, putting his trust in the presence of the football coaches and the millions of fan mail he’s received. The day of the game, Ba’jūr is still confident that he’s going to win, but when the balls start flying past him he notice that he’s not able to stop a single one of them. “The posts are so far apart that I’d need a taxi to reach them”, he thinks. With the smashing defeat of 0-124, a CNN reporter asks curiously if he’s planning to retire. Of course not, he’ll continue playing football, on his computer...

Storywise, these four pages are pretty wild. Drawings aren’t that great.

²⁴ ‘Alā’ ad-Dīn #572, June 2004, s 26-29



Vocalist Sha'bān 'Abd ar-Raḥīm not only hates Israel, but also supports Team Ba'jūr.

Ḥusām at-Tahāmī's "*Ṣaddiq aw la tuṣaddiq*" (Believe it or not)²⁵ is about another lazy boy, Mīdū, who's living in a high floor apartment at the beach. He's so lazy that instead of walking down the stairs with the garbage he simply throws it out the window. Shocked by his master's behavior, his pet frog, Ḍafdū', jump after it to try to stop this heedless pollution of nature. But the garbage bag has sunk into the sea and Ḍafdū' has to convince Mīdū to go look for it. Diving into the waters together at first they only see happy fish, but then a furious octopus shows up holding the garbage bag in one of its arms. The naughty boy gets beaten up. Concludes Ḍafdū': "We don't find any animal or creature dirtying the world, unfortunately the only one doing this is man..!"

²⁵ 'Alā' ad-Dīn #572, June 2004, s 52-55



Lazy boy, Mīdū, and his crazy pet frog, Dafdū', all in colloquial Egyptian dialect.

With funny, however messy and awfully colored drawings and a whimsy story, “*Ṣaddiq aw la tuṣaddiq*” could be regarded as something like a wild anti-pollution advertisement. It should be noted that the dialogue is in colloquial Arabic, something I’ve only seen examples of in “‘Alā’ ad-Dīn” magazine. Classic Arabic (“fuṣḥā”) is otherwise the norm. Maybe the reason only Egyptians dare to use the spoken language in their comics is their strong and characteristic “‘āmiyyah”, famous all over the Arab world through film, TV and literature.

RELIGION

Surprisingly enough, perhaps, religious content in the comics isn't that common (at least not in this selection of issues), considering that the magazines are distributed in countries where a majority of the population are Muslims. Some of the magazines are clearly Islamic, more evident in the "non comic" parts (articles, illustrated stories, readers' pages etc.), for example *Bāsim* and *Wisām*, whereas others are more religiously neutral. In some comics there are religious elements, even if small, like in "*Riḥlat 'inqādh al-'arḍ*", or one could regard the plentiful examples of "stories" dealing with morals and behavior as being based on religious principles. However, I only found two comics that are straight out about religion, both of them Islamic, and both of them in *Wisām*:

"*Aṣ-Ṣayyād as-Sa'īd*" (the Happy fisherman)²⁶, written by Jalīl Khaz'al and drawn by 'Alā' Kāzim, is an adaptation of an old well known Islamic story. 'īd is approaching and the children of the righteous and hard working fisherman, Sālim, are in need of new clothes (as Muslim tradition goes, children get money and new clothes for 'īd). Setting out in the morning for work, Sālim put his trust in Allah for a good catch, so that he can provide his children for the festivities. On his way to the river he helps his neighbor, an old man, to carry a heavy bundle of wood, and at the shores of the river assists his colleague, Ḥamdān, in repairing a torn fishing net, in spite of this making him late for his own work. Allah has apparently been listening to his prayers since Sālim get an abundant catch of fish that day. Even though being late for the market, he manages to sell all of the fish, except one big one that he brings back to his family for dinner. While rinsing the fish, his wife find a precious gem inside its belly. Sālim sell this gem for a large amount of money enabling him to buy a new beautiful house (they lived in a simple hut before) where the family lives happily and in well-being.

The problem with these two yet beautifully illustrated pages is that they don't problematize a single thing in the story. Sālim the fisherman just cruise through it, as happy as the title suggests from the first panel to the last, and everything goes his way. The intended message should be something like "be a good Muslim, and you'll be awarded". Fair enough, but as a story it's far from intriguing.

²⁶ *Wisām* #145, May 2003, s 6-7



Meet Sālim, a very happy guy.

Ramaḍān, the Muslim month of fasting, is the central theme in writer Muḥammad 'Ismā'īl Mustarīḥ's and artist Ḥāzim Nimrāwī's "*Sāmī wa aṣ-ṣayām*" (Sāmī and the fasting)²⁷. Sāmī is woken up early in the morning by his mother for "ṣaḥūr" (the last meal before daybreak when the day of fasting begins). "There's truly a blessing in the ṣaḥūr, just like the Prophet said, God bless him and grant him salvation", says the father at the "breakfast" table. As far as Sāmī is concerned, the blessing is to be found in the food only. An argument erupts in which Sāmī's parents and sister Sāmiyah try to make him understand that: "The food is a blessing because it helps us through the fasting" and "after the food of the ṣaḥūr we're ready for prayer, and in that there's a blessing" and "after praying we read parts of the Qur'ān, and in that there's a blessing". Sāmī on his part still claim that the most important thing is the food, so he stuffs himself with as much as he can eat. That day he fall sick and must stay in bed. The doctor checks him and draws the conclusion that he ruined his stomach by eating all that food, and so Sāmī learns his lesson. "Fasting is the refraining of food, not devoting oneself to it", his father explains. "Allāhumma laka ṣamtu" (O God, for you I fasted) says Sāmī before eating his 'Iftār (first meal after sunset), sensibly this time.

²⁷ Wisām #150, October 2003, s 10-11



Sister Sāmiyah telling her ill-bred brother, Sāmī, off for his passion for food.

The purpose of this comic is obviously to teach about Ramaḍān, why Muslims fast and the benefits that lies therein. Actually, the benefits are many and could've been dwelled upon some more. Not drinking coffee or smoking or stuffing oneself with other kinds of poison as long as the sun is up certainly has a cleansing effect on the body, not to mention the strengthening of the will of the mind from resolutely staying away from eating and drinking for such a long period. These aspects could've been given attention, just as well as saying that there's a blessing in this and that because the Prophet said so. Teaching religion in the shape of comics is good as long as it doesn't get forced onto its reader in a too patronizing way. And it's to the comic's advantage if the story doesn't have to be sacrificed in favor of its pedagogic message. Pretty watercolor illustrations apart, one could say that "*Sāmī wa aṣ-ṣayām*" therefore is walking on fairly thin ice...

MISCELLANEOUS

Some of these comics were a bit difficult to place in categories, either because there weren't any other ones with similar contents, or simply because it was too original to categorize. This doesn't necessarily mean that the ones falling outside the general frame should be neglected.

"*Shamsa wa Dāna*", written by Samīra Shafīq and drawn by 'Ihāb Shākir is definitely a bit "wacky" – two girls living alone on an island where just about any action might take place – but not in as wild a way as the Egyptian comics. In "*al-Fi'rān taghzū al-jazīra*" (the Mice

invade the island)²⁸, two men want to buy the island. The girls don't want to sell it, so while busy studying in their tent, the men plant a bunch of mice on the island. These mice invade both the bedroom and the kitchen of the tent, scaring the girls and keeping them from sleep. In the morning they get unexpected help from their friend, the bird Manṣūr, who thinks mice are delicious and he take great pleasure in helping the girls getting rid of them. The men return expecting an easy surrender, but the girls repeat that the island isn't for sale and they thank them for the mice on behalf of Manṣūr, who wants to have more, if possible.



Dāna is freaking out because there's one, no two mice in her bedroom.

In "*al-'Akhbār hiya as-sabab*" (the News is the reason)²⁹, the girls are being paid a visit by their friend, Laylā, and her grandfather, who has become depressed from reading the newspaper too much. Even so, he continues reading today's issue, so Dāna tries cheering him up by reading aloud to him from a booklet of funny jokes. This doesn't work, but what does is when the girls' friend, the goat Ḥabūba, starts chewing on his newspaper. As the grandfather is cured, laughing once again, Ḥabūba start to cry from eating all these saddening and depressing news.

Not so strong a focus on education of morals and behavior mixed with an imaginative setup give the stories of Shamsa and Dāna a certain freshness and spontaneity that's often missing elsewhere. The naivistic drawings are perhaps not that exciting, but at least they're original and stylistically coherent.

Written by Maḥmūd Qāsim and drawn by Muḥammad Ḥākīm, "*'Arḍunā al-khaḍrā'*" (Our green land)³⁰, represent a not so common type of comics found in these magazines, namely the political. Sure, everything is political when picked apart, but in this context rarely as obvious as in this example. A father decides to return with his family to the countryside

²⁸ Mājid #1308, Mars 2004, s 32-33

²⁹ Mājid #1322, June 2004, s 32-33

³⁰ Mājid #1308, Mars 2004, s 11-13

where he was born. There they discover that an (evil) company is about to build a hotel and recreation centre on the land that's legally theirs. While their lawyer gets on the paperwork, the children start cultivating the land with a tractor to stop the company from starting building. But they encounter a group of angry looking men with baseball bats and are forced to leave. The children gather their classmates (they're all boys) and once again enter their occupied territory. The men don't dare to do anything to the boys in fear of attracting hostility from the village. Finally the father shows up with the papers that prove that the land is theirs. In the finishing panels, the children and the villagers praise the fruit of farming. "If the hotel had been built here.. could this fruit have fallen to my share..?" asks one of the boys.



"Yikes! Strangers with base ball bats! Let's make like a tree and leave!"

In this story we find the theme of countryside versus urbanization, with a clear bias towards the earlier. It even justifies civil disobedience among children as a solution when nothing else helps.

As a superhero comic, Hānī Samīr's "*al-Jūkir yuwājihu as-sāḥir Khatābīsh*" (the Joker faces Khatābīsh the sorcerer)³¹ isn't that impressive maybe. Both script and drawings are quite amateurish. But being the only superhero comic among this selection, it's worth mentioning. I've been requesting longer stories, and this is actually *the* longest one (nine pages) of the non imported Arabic comics found in these magazines.

The evil sorcerer, Khatābīsh, transform himself into a giant by drinking a newly prepared potion. With the intention of eventually taking over the world, he start causing

³¹ Samīr #2516, June 2004, s 26-34

destruction in the city and putting fear into its people. Seeing what's happening on the television news, Hishām decides that it's time for his alter ego, the Joker, to enter the scene. With acrobatic movements faster than the eye can perceive, the Joker rush to the rescue engaging in lethal combat with the colossal Khatābīsh. This is done partly by physical straight on attacks, partly by insulting his adversary by calling him things like “mischievous” and “corpulent”, asking how he can bear to carry such an ugly name. After a long and tiring battle that nearly cost the Joker his life, he come up with the idea to connect an electrically charged cable to a metallic tower, then fooling the sorcerer to punch with his fist right into it, jumping up in the air a millisecond before the hit. The electric shock make Khatābīsh's size return to normal and the police can easily arrest him and put him in custody. The Joker award himself by going home to sleep.



A crazy giant causing destruction in the city. This calls for action. Enter the Joker.

Clearly inspired by the superhero comics of Marvel and DC, particularly Spiderman (evident in al-Joker's acrobatic poses and his “wise guy” attitude when conversing his enemies), this kind of stories are welcome, since there's definitely a lack of them in the Arabic magazines. If the hero and the settings had been a bit more “Arabic”, it would've been even more welcome. Again, more room would allow for more development both story and character wise.

INQUIRIES

ABOUT THE QUESTIONS

The first four questions for the parents regard their opinions about comics in general, and how they believe the comics influence their children. Thus I ask them if they think comics are important at all, or if they just see it as something trivial with entertainment value only. I also ask what they think about comics in relation to other available media: animated cartoons, illustrated short stories and books (sparsely, or not illustrated). I could have included things like video games and other forms of leisure, like sport activities for example, but the former would only concern richer households; as for the latter, this essay is, when all comes around, about image and text, therefore I chose to focus on the above mentioned categories. Can comics play an important role in children's education? As stated in the "PURPOSE AND METHOD" chapter, this is a generally acknowledged fact in the West (or in Sweden at least). I wanted to know what Arabic parents have to say about this. Further, spending a year in an Arabic culture, I got the impression that the transmission of knowledge and wisdom from adults to children is often carried out in a highly patronizing way. It's about instructing and indoctrinating, rather than encouraging the children to think for themselves and evaluating independently what's right or wrong. Even university studies have much more of a "school approach" to teaching than what we're used to in the West. This attitude shines through clearly in some of the comics – the Yemeni magazine 'Usāma is a good example of this. Therefore I'm asking about what sometimes seems like compulsory elements of cultivation, education (as in upbringing), morals and religion, and how these elements affect the stories of the comics. What's most important, an interesting story or sound and "correct" content? I think most Swedes would answer "the story"³². What do Arabic parents think? Question five and six are about habits of purchase. How often do the parents buy comics for their children? Does the price make a difference? Comics, magazines and books in Sweden, are relatively expensive these days. Certainly, people would buy more if the prices were lower. The last questions concern language and culture. "Classical Arabic" ("fuṣḥā") is the norm in Arabic media, no matter if it's for adults or children, if it's newspapers, magazines or television shows. How important is the language according to the parents, and what benefits best the child, fuṣḥā or colloquial Arabic? Finally, I'm dealing with the fact that there doesn't seem to

³² There are however exceptions. For example did a story in Swedish comic book *Bamse*, the episode *Skalman och Trollkarlens Röda Blomma*, receive harsh criticism twice (at its first publishing in *Bamse* 10/88 and at its rerun in *Bamse* 03/01) for taking up the subject of drugs in a children's magazine. This in spite of children living in a society where drugs and narcotics are common. That the point of the story was a clear warning to children about the seductive nature of drugs was apparently not that important to the critics.

be any “pure” Arabic comic books (at least this goes for Jordan and Yemen), except the imported ones. Could a “fully fledged” Arabic comic book - i.e. a comic book with longer, more intricate stories with purely Arabic content and more developed characters, drawn and written by Arabic talent only - succeed in the competition with other children’s magazines? In the two to six page limit, which is the norm in all of these magazines, there’s only so much you can do with a story and its characters. I believe that if the publishers were interested and supported Arabic comic books of above-mentioned kind, it could bring about better and more interesting comics that are more distinctively Arabic and therefore better suited for Arabic children. But, of course, there must be someone who’s prepared to buy it, so what are the parents opinions about this?

The questionnaire for the chief editors of the magazines is similar to that of the parents’, but they focus more on policies and attitudes. Do they consider comics a priority, or do they use them mainly to spice up their magazines with some “funnies”? Do they see it as an art form? Could there be serious comics, or even comics for adults (like we have in the West)? What could *they* do to improve Arabic comics? Higher salaries for the creators? “Pure” comic books with nothing but comics? Special schools for comic artists and scriptwriters?³³ As mentioned earlier, no chief editor of the magazines I e-mailed replied. The aim of the two questionnaires was to try to measure the awareness, interest and knowledge among these two groups about the comic media, in order to perhaps be able to discuss the future of Arabic comics. There’s clearly a lot of talent dwelling among the artists and writers, but if they aren’t met with understanding, support and encouraging from publishers and consumers, it doesn’t matter how hard they work, the comics won’t make it to its next evolutionary stage anyway. Because Arabic comics, in spite of the obvious talent, are actually quite under developed. Not least the two to six page restriction is a clear sign of this. If someone was prepared to put in some effort and financial support and give the talent more room and opportunity to flourish, Arabic comics could, without a doubt, develop into something great. Just imagine if someone like ʿAbd al-Ḥijār was given an album’s length to fill with his wonderful drawings and distinctively Arabic stories! In the end, the main responsibility for this, I believe, is on the publishers’ desk.

³³ In Sweden we have at least two schools exclusively for creators of comics, one in Hofors and one in Malmö.

ABOUT THE ANSWERS

As mentioned above, in “PURPOSE AND METHOD”, this chapter will only concern the views and opinions of Arabic parents, since none of the chief editors of the magazines replied. It should be noted that:

A) The answers don't amount to more than ten. Therefore this compilation shouldn't be treated as a complete picture of how Arabic parents regard comics for their children, but merely as to show some examples of different views.

B) The area in which I distributed the questionnaire is geographically limited to the Yemeni city of Ta'izz (five questionnaires) and the Jordanian capital 'Ammān (five questionnaires). It should be kept in mind that Ta'izz is a city in a third world country whereas 'Ammān is relatively modern.

C) Answers are from both mothers and fathers.

D) The parents that replied are from different “levels” of society, educationally and economically, ranging from those of a low-income household with no experience of studying beyond secondary education, to those relatively well off with university degrees or masters.

E) In these questions I've tried to clarify the difference between comics, cartoons (animation), illustrated stories and books (without pictures). Not everyone grasps this difference, and thus the opinions expressed sometimes regard several categories at once. The most common confusion is the one between comics and cartoons, which are often treated as the same thing (which they certainly aren't).

F) Handwritten Arabic (ruq'a) can pose a quite challenging process of deciphering at times, depending on the style of the writer, the speed it was written with etc. Additionally, the use of words was in a few cases questionable, to say the least, and sometimes outright grammatically wrong, which further added to the difficulties. Generally though, the answers were given in a relatively correct “fuṣḥā Arabic”, and I was able to extract “the main point” from them.

G) I didn't specify the age of the children in the questionnaire. Thus some parents have in mind very young children when giving answers whereas others refer to older ones. The relevance of television cartoons and books, for example, is of course different depending on the age of the child.

COMPILATION OF REPLIES

What follows is firstly a translation of the question and secondly a compilation of the different views expressed.

1. *“What's your opinion about comics? Are they important for the children or do you regard them as simple entertainment without any importance?”*

Most parents find comics important for their children. Comics are simple, exciting, entertaining and easy to understand. They develop the child's senses and comprehension. At a crucial age they stimulate the children's latent potentials and creative talents and develop their imagination. Further they can direct the children to sound behaviour by implanting positive meanings and values. Comics teach the children the Arabic language (more about this later) and some meaningful ideas like cooperation, affection etc. Comics have the ability to transmit, in a fast manner, the ideas that the parents wish to forward to their children. The comic can have an important function in teaching the early stages of speech by having the children repeat what they hear (this probably refers to television cartoons, rather than comics).

Some replied that comics are nothing but simple amusement most of the time, or that they're important only to a certain extent, depending on their quality. One mainly positive answer also recognized that comics do contain certain elements of entertainment and other things that aren't necessary for the child. Another view is that comics are not as important as reading stories (supposedly books) and watching children's shows on television, since

“there’s more reality to these”, and that the mother reading to her child is very important.

One notes that the humour in some of the comics is not for children, but for adults.

2. *“What do you think the child benefits most from: animated cartoons on television, comics, stories in magazines with few illustrations or books without pictures altogether? And why?”*

Here, views certainly differ. Three prefer comics. The children themselves seek them and they smile and laugh when reading it. Comics arouse the child’s interest more (than other media?) and bring both joy and knowledge. Comics also develop the child’s imagination and reading.

Four advocate the sparsely illustrated stories or books without pictures. These ignite in the children the love of reading, so important for the future. Again, reading to the child (by the mother) is important because it develops his thinking and raises questions about what he hears and the will to know more. Books with few or no pictures are preferable since they develop the imagination of the child; he has to picture the events, place and time, that the story revolves around, in his own mind. This goes for the child that has learned how to read. For younger ones, television cartoons are more suitable. Someone prefers reading stories that are illustrated with cartoons.

One view is that television cartoons and comics are more beneficial for the children, since they don’t get bored so easily when watching or reading them. They do get bored quickly though from reading stories and books because of the absence of pictures. Pictures are very important to children. They make them feel with the story and make reading easier.

Remaining views are that all of these are beneficial, but perhaps the television cartoons affect the child more. The benefit differs with age, interests and the quality of what’s displayed. It’s not a question of illustrated stories, books, magazines, cartoons or comics; it

all depends on the maturity of the children and to which one of these they have an inclination to. No doubt there's a desire for these media, especially the cartoons for all their influences of sound, colour and movement that the books and magazines might lack.

3. *"In your opinion, can comics play a special and important role for children in learning the language and how to read"?*

The general answer is yes. Some add the condition that this requires the child to have started his educational phase and that he knows the foundations of the language. Later on it's to the advantage if he can also learn a non native language, like English, through comics, depending on the linguistic base of the child. Someone says that comics play a big role in learning the language, and in a fast way, thanks to the ease of transmitting ideas through the media. The child repeats and imitates what he sees, whether he watch it on television or read it in a story.

Only one writes that comics don't play an important role in this matter, at least not to a very high degree. They are still interesting and amusing to the child though.

4. *"What's the importance of cultural, educational, moral and religious elements in the contents of children's comics? Do they always have to be present or can they sometimes prevent the stories from being interesting, exciting and developing for the child's imagination? What's most important?"*

Most agree that the existence of these elements is indeed very important. Some say that they are the most important thing and that they always have to be present. Many add that this doesn't necessarily prevent the stories from being interesting and exciting. Best is if the child can learn something useful and be thrilled at the same time. These [elements] help

the child to develop his morals and knowledge of the foundations of religion; he will better understand the instructions that his parents give. In the crucial phase of upbringing and education, among the most important things is that the comics include these aspects so that the child doesn't "slip" in the future towards devious and immoral behaviour and excessive imagination. This doesn't prevent comics from being exciting and interesting and at the same time achieving artistic and creative goals. The cultural and educational elements should be there so that the child understands, in a gradual and daily fashion, the morals and culture of his parents and the environment he lives in. The stories can still be interesting and exciting and develop the child's imagination. The important thing is to originate an idea that will combine all this. Someone puts forth the view that comics, even without text, can heighten the children's imagination and stimulate them to write stories of their own inspiration.

Only one de-emphasises the importance of these elements, saying that they might prevent stories from being interesting and exciting.

5. *"How often do you buy magazines for your children? Often, sometimes or never?"*

Predictably perhaps, most answers are "sometimes". One family even buys them often, whenever they see in them the educational, behavioural, moral or artistic benefiting factors from the above question. However they tend to ration the magazines at times of monthly or final exams. Someone buys stories and magazines once a month approximately; another says that it depends on how busy and burdened the family is with other economic more important matters. In one family both parents and children buy the magazines.

Among the parents that never buy magazines for their children, one of the explanations given is that it's up to the mother to do that. He, who's obviously the father, adds that he'll

from now on seriously consider buying these magazines. The question is good in order to make parents care more for the development, cultivation and entertainment of their children. One parent doesn't buy stories for the children since their school books are full of stories anyway. Another never buys them since the children buy them themselves weekly.

6. *“If they [the magazines] were cheaper, would you buy them more often”?*

Ranging from “maybe” to “yes” to “certainly”, most of these ten parents would. It's important for the children's culture and the strengthening of their talents. One of them would buy more if they were cheaper and available at places close to the house.

Three says that the price doesn't constitute a problem or make a difference. What's important is that the stories are meaningful.

One says “I don't think so”, and another that it's irrelevant if the magazines are cheap or not, the children get bored from reading stories (I take that as a “No”).

7. *“The majority of the comics are in “fuṣḥā” (classical Arabic), however, in a few cases I've seen comics in “'āmiyyah” (colloquial Arabic). How do you regard the language in comics? Is it OK if it's closer to the spoken language or does it have to be correct in all circumstances? What's best for the children?”*

Here, “fuṣḥā” is generally the preferred language. Interesting is that many use the phrase “al-lughat al-'arabiyya” (the Arabic language) instead of “fuṣḥā” when talking about correct Arabic language. This they put opposite “al-lughat al-'āmiyya” or “al-lughat ad-dāraja” or “al-lughat al-mutadāwala”, all of which denotes the colloquially spoken language. It's as if they want to say that the language they speak everyday isn't really Arabic, but something that derives from Arabic.

Many prefer “fuṣḥā” so that the child learns its vocabulary from an early age, which will obviously benefit him a lot in the future. One of the Yemenis point out that “fuṣḥā” is better for the children, in spite of eventual difficulties they might face understanding it. Not many comics or cartoons are produced in Yemen; rather they’re imported from other countries. If all of these were in colloquial language, for example Egyptian “‘āmiyyah” or any other dialect, the children might not understand it. Of course, the majority of the imported television cartoons are from Japan, USA and other countries, but since they’re dubbed into Arabic, the point about the benefits of “fuṣḥā” remains. Another parent acknowledges that “‘āmiyyah” might be more accessible to the child, since this is what he hears daily in the house and other places, and he’ll understand it quickly. But maybe “fuṣḥā” is better, to give the child knowledge of his ancestor’s language. Without a solid base in classical Arabic he might face difficulties in studies and other areas when he grows up. Several parents highlight the special importance of television cartoons being in “fuṣḥā”, so that the child not only reads classical Arabic but also get used to hearing it.

Two parents see no obstacle in mixing between the two languages. The children will be close to both their own language and the classical Arabic and they will be familiar with different linguistic styles from an early age. Best is to have both language in the comics, whereas cartoons are more beautiful in “fuṣḥā”. The children will learn to recognize it and they will quickly pick up different expressions such as of astonishment, joy, pain, success, defeat etc.

One states that “‘āmiyyah” is closer; the children will get the jokes and laugh. They talk “fuṣḥā” in school anyway. Another says that the language doesn’t matter. What’s important is the content.

8. *“The regular Arabic children’s magazine contains comics only partially. If there’d been a magazine with nothing but comics, with longer stories and more developed characters, like the magazine “Mikī” (imported Disney comics, translated into fuṣḥā), but with 100% Arabic content produced by Arabic artists and Arabic script writers, would you buy it for your children?”*

This wasn’t intended to be another question about language. I meant to ask if there is any interest for more, in numbers and development, specific Arabic comics, story wise and content wise. However, a few of the answers carry on the discussion about the “fuṣḥā” and

“‘āmiyyah” issue from the previous question. Not everyone understood what I actually meant. This I take as an indication that I didn’t formulate my question well enough.

Anyhow, most of the answers are “yes”. Some adds a few more details. The children will benefit from learning about the life and history of the great men of the “umma” (nation) and its historians. The Arabic artists and script writers have the possibility of creating stories and pictures that relates to our environment and culture as Arabs. They’re also in a position to present ideas and characters that can communicate quickly to the children what the father and mother might not be able to during the daily life in the house. Someone says that the magazine “Mīkī” is loved by both children and adults, and if there was a magazine with [Arabic] comics and stories it would certainly be better, especially if they were longer and had more [developed] characters.

Among the views expressed is that the success of such a magazine will eventually come down to the degree of the artists’ and script writers’ capability of producing exciting, imaginative, realistic and creative material, connected to the life as children and Arabs, and linked to what’s happening in the rest of the world.

One simply answers “No”.

CONCLUSION

The first thing to establish is that comics don't seem to be a "big thing" in the Arab world. There are no pure Arabic comic books except the ones with imported material. There are no "very popular" Arabic comic characters that everyone can relate to. In Jordan/Palestine that would perhaps be 'Imād Ḥajjāj's "'Abū Maḥjūb"³², or if we move back a few years, Nājī al-'Alī's "Ḥanzala"³³. But these characters are for adults, and therefore not something I will discuss in this essay. There isn't an Arabic "Donald Duck", "Mickey Mouse" or "Bamse".³⁴ A successful introduction of an Arabic equivalent to these characters would perhaps create room and opportunities for a full fledged comic book. The mentioned American and Swedish characters came to fame through the joint promotion venture of cinema or television cartoons and comic books. The cartoons paved the way for the success of the comic books, so to speak. Something along the lines of this strategy is to be seen in the character of "Sindbād", which we find on television, on chocolate bars and in the Yemeni magazine 'Usāma. But at least the comics have a long way to go before being interesting to any child or adult. The character of Sindbād should have great potential though, so maybe a serious investment in its different ventures could pay off.

Comics not being "big" in the Arab world can also be seen in the answers of the parents to the questionnaire. Although generally positive to the media, Arabic parents generally don't seem to have that much knowledge about it. I guess they have more important things to think about. However, since they acknowledge the importance in their children's development that the comic has the capability of constituting, it should be in everyone's interest to make more and better comics. Unfortunately, the difference between comics and television cartoons isn't always understood. They're thought of as the same thing, which they obviously aren't. Comics necessitate a certain amount of mental activity from its reader, whereas it's possible to be totally passive when watching cartoons. Of course, cartoons can be as involving and stimulating and might impress children more than comics, with all its drama heightening tools of sound, music and the additional element of time. But I think that comics have an unequalled function in the child's early stages of education, not least in the process of learning how to read. Further, I think the combination of watching cartoons and reading comics is the best "imagination booster" available. The child watches the cartoon, becomes inspired, then reads the comic, imagining voices and sounds and movements from what he

³² "'Abū Maḥjūb" - satire on the everyday life, culture and society of Jordan.

³³ "Ḥanzala" - dark satire on the situation in Palestine, and a general symbol of sympathies with the Palestinians.

³⁴ "Bamse - Världens Starkaste Björn" - Swedish comic book and cartoon character created by Rune Andréasson.

experienced from television or the cinema. This might not just inspire the child's desire for reading, but also bring about creative efforts such as drawing and acting, for example.

So what about the Arabic comics available at present? Obviously there's no lack of creative talent, imagination and technical "know how". We find gifted artists, like ʿĪyā' al-Ḥijār (*The Adventures of 'Antara, Zarqā' and 'Ash'ab*), Fawāz (*the Little Arab*), Khālīd 'Abd al-'Azīz (*Medical prescription*) and 'Alā' Kāzīm (*the Happy fisherman*), as well as scriptwriters, such as Ra'id 'Abd al-Wāḥid (*the Adventures of Mr Kaḥtūt*), Muḥammad al-Mansī Qindīl (*the Little Arab*), Faraj aḏ-Zafīrī (*Medical prescription*) and also al-Ḥijār of course. What's lacking is sufficient room, or an appropriate arena for these talents where they can flourish and blossom. The non existence of a "pure" Arabic monthly or weekly comic book once again makes itself apparent. Maybe what's really lacking is understanding and courage to believe in and invest in these artists from the magazines and publishers. The fact that none of the chief editors cared to answer the questions I sent by e-mail could indicate that at least the interest in comics from their side isn't that big. Or it was simply I who chose an inappropriate way of approaching them. Who knows?

When it comes to the sparse children's comic material that still exists in the magazines we can assert a few things. Learning morals and the difference between proper and improper behaviour is good, but too much focus on these aspects seem to affect the stories negatively. Better is to "weave" the educational stuff into the story in less obvious ways. If I had grouped the comics differently, categories such as "Family comics" and "School comics" (stories taking place in the family or in a school environment) would have been a huge part of the total amount of material. These would generally have fallen under the "Educating morals and behaviour" category though, where setting up boundaries for what's right and wrong is the main concern. Less forbidding and more encouraging would further benefit the stories in these comics.

The comics also seem to gain in cultural integrity from being more "Arabic" and less imitative of European or American models. Al-Ḥijār's work is in my opinion an excellent example of "good Arabic comics". They're well crafted, intriguing, funny and entertaining and steeped in Arabic "mythology" (history, culture, proverbs and old tales). Even characters in supportive roles are indeed "very Arabic", caricatured in highly amusing ways. More material of this kind would be welcome. Of course, an Arabic comic doesn't necessarily have to take place in "the golden era of Islam"³⁵ and involve characters provided with a complete

³⁵ Generally considered to be "the Abbasid period" (ca 750-1250 AD), with Baghdad being the power centre of the Islamic empire.

set of “jalabiya”, “kūfiya”³⁶ and long beards. It can also be “modern”, like Ḥusām al-‘Aqād’s and artist Mamdūḥ al-Farmāwī’s “*al-Mahammad al-ghāmiḍa*” (the Secret mission), with contemporary looking characters. But at least placing the stories in an Arabic context seems to be a good idea and preferable for the young and receptive readers. This goes for both science fiction and adventure comics, which in my opinion there’s far too little of. Educational elements can still be part of these stories, even if remaining in the background.

³⁶ Jalabiya (full body dress) and kūfiya (head scarf) are traditional Arabic male garments. In Yemen they would be called fūṭah and mashadda.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

الموضوع: أسئلة بحاجة إلى ردود

المحترمون

السادة الآباء

تحية طيبة

إشارة إلى الموضوع أعلاه،

أنا طالب للغة العربية أقوم ببحث عن الرسوم المسلسلة الكاريكاتورية العربية لجامعة "لوند" في السويد. كنت أدرس سنة في الجامعة الأردنية في عمان حيث بدأت الاهتمام بالمجلات العربية للأطفال وخصوصا بالرسوم الكاريكاتورية فيها. نتيجة قائمة الاستفهام التالية ستكون قسما مهما من البحث. أتمنى الاطلاع على قائمة الاستفهام ومشاركتكم في الإجابة على الأسئلة التي وضعتها.

يرجى تعاونكم معنا و لكم جزيل الشكر

الباحث

شوقي أندرياس قاسم

قائمة الاستفهام

- 1- ما رأيكم عن الرسوم المسلسلة الكاريكاتورية؟ هل هي مهمة بالنسبة إلى الأطفال أم تعتبرونها لهوا بسيطاً ليس لها أي أهمية؟
- 2- بأي شيء تعتقدون أن الطفل يستفيد أكثر: الرسوم المتحركة في التلفزيون أو الرسوم الكاريكاتورية أو القصص بقليل من الصور في المجلات أو الكتب بدون صور تماماً؟ ولماذا؟
- 3- هل يمكن للرسوم الكاريكاتورية في رأيكم أن تمثل دوراً خاصاً ومهما للأطفال في تعليم اللغة وقرائنها؟
- 4- ما أهمية العناصر التثقيفية والتربوية والأخلاقية والدينية في محتويات الرسوم الكاريكاتورية للأطفال؟ أ يجب أن تكون موجودة دائماً أم يمكنها أن تمنع القصص أحياناً من أن تكون ممتعة ومثيرة ومطورة لخيال الطفل؟ ما الأهم؟
- 5- كم مرة تشترون مجلات لأطفالكم؟ مرات كثيرة أو أحياناً أو أبداً؟
- 6- لو كانت أرخص هل ستشترونها مرات أكثر؟
- 7- أغلبية الرسوم الكاريكاتورية باللغة الفصحى لكنني رأيت في أحوال معدودة رسوماً كاريكاتورية باللغة العامية. كيف تعتبرون اللغة في الرسوم الكاريكاتورية؟ أ يمكنها أن تكون أقرب من اللغة المتداولة أم يجب أن تكون صحيحة في كل الأحوال؟ ما الأفضل بالنسبة للأطفال؟
- 8- تحتوي المجلة العربية العادية للأطفال على الرسوم الكاريكاتورية جزئياً فقط. لو كانت موجودة مجلة بالرسوم الكاريكاتورية فقط بالقصص أطول وشخصيات أكثر تطوراً مثل مجلة "ميكي" بل % 100 بمحتويات عربية أنتجها الرسامون العرب وكتبوا السيناريو العرب فهل سيتم شراءها لأطفالكم؟

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

الموضوع: أسئلة بحاجة إلى ردود

السيد رئيس تحرير مجلة "أحمد"

المحترم

تحية طيبة

إشارة إلى الموضوع أعلاه،

أنا طالب للغة العربية أقوم ببحث عن الرسوم المسلسلة الكاريكاتورية العربية لجامعة "لوند" في السويد. كنت أدرس سنة في الجامعة الأردنية في عمان حيث بدأت الاهتمام بالمجلات العربية للأطفال وخصوصا بالرسوم الكاريكاتورية فيها. نتيجة قائمة الاستفهام التالية ستكون قسما مهما من البحث فقد أرسلتها لمن يلي: مجلات "أحمد" و"ماجد" و"فكرة" و"سمير" و"وسام" و"أسامة" و"علاء الدين" و"حاتم" و"براعم عمان" و"باسم" و"العربي الصغير". تحتوي كل هذه المجلات جزئيا على رسوم كاريكاتورية. أتمنى الاطلاع على قائمة الاستفهام ومشارككم في الإجابة على الأسئلة التي وضعتها.

يرجى تعاونكم معنا و لكم جزيل الشكر

الباحث

شوقي أندرياس قاسم

قائمة الاستفهام

- 1- تحتوي المجلة العربية العادية للأطفال على بعض الرسوم المسلسلة الكاريكاتورية وبعض القصص المصورة وصفحات القراء وربما بعض الحقائق النادرة وبعض الممازحات الخ.. ما دور الرسوم الكاريكاتورية بين هذه المحتويات؟ أ تعتبرونها قسما مهما للمجلة أليست مهمة كثيرة؟ ولماذا؟
- 2- يختلف طول الرسوم الكاريكاتورية في المجلة العربية العادية للأطفال بين 1- 9 صفحات لكنها عادة بين 2 - 4 ص. لماذا لا يوجد غير هذا الطول؟ لو كانت موجودة مجلة الرسوم الكاريكاتورية بالقصص أطول وشخصيات أكثر تطورا مثل مجلة "ميكي" بل 100 % بمحتويات عربية أنتجها الرسامون العرب وكاتبوا السيناريو العرب فهل تتوقعون نجاحها؟ وهل ستساعد تطور الرسوم الكاريكاتورية العربية كنوع من أنواع الفنون؟
- 3- هل يمكن للرسوم الكاريكاتورية في رأيكم أن تمثل دورا خاصا ومهما للأطفال في تعليم اللغة وقراءتها؟
- 4- في رأيكم ما أهمية العناصر التثقيفية والتربوية والأخلاقية والدينية في محتويات الرسوم الكاريكاتورية للأطفال؟ أ يجب أن تكون موجودة دائما أم يمكنها أن تمنع القصص أحيانا من أن تكون ممتعة ومثيرة ومطورة لخيال الطفل؟ ما الأهم؟
- 5- كم عمر القراء الذين نتجه مجلتكم إليهم؟
- 6- هل هو ضروري دائما أن كل الرسوم الكاريكاتورية مضحكة؟ أو يمكن أن تكون قصص بمحتويات بليغة؟ أ يمكن في رأيكم أن تنجح مجلة الرسوم الكاريكاتورية متجهة إلى البالغين في العالم العربي؟
- 7- في رأيكم ما هي الأشياء التي ستعاون في تحسين وتطوير الرسوم الكاريكاتورية العربية؟ ربما إيجاد مدارس و معاهد خاصة لفناني الرسوم الكاريكاتورية؟ وربما مجلات بالرسوم الكاريكاتورية فقط؟ وربما ارتفاع رواتب الرسامين وكاتبي السيناريو؟ أو شيء آخر؟
- 8- هل برأيكم مهم وضع أسماء الرسامين والكاتبين في عناوين القصص؟ أو غير مهم ولماذا؟
- 9- أغلبية الرسوم الكاريكاتورية باللغة الفصحى لكنني رأيت في أحوال معدودة رسوما كاريكاتورية باللغة العامية. كيف تعتبرون اللغة في الرسوم الكاريكاتورية؟ أ يمكنها أن تكون أقرب من اللغة المتداولة أم يجب أن تكون صحيحة في كل الأحوال؟ ما الأفضل بالنسبة للأطفال؟

SOURCE MATERIAL

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