

AUC Rare Books and Special Collections Library
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LEAD-IN:

The AUC Rare Books and Special Collections Library is a treasure on campus that AUC undergraduates rarely use. This section of the library has been available for twenty years. AUC's Mai Abdel Moaty has the story.

Music "Valsa"

Mr. Philip Croom: *This is the exhibit room, every year we have one or two exhibits in which we feature some of our collections specifically things like photographs, rare gravings rare books (:12)*

Music "Valsa"

Welcome to the AUC Rare Books and Special Collections Library, where you can find treasures of knowledge within the heart of the campus.

The official opening of this magnificent library was in February 1992 in Tahrir Square however, it has now moved with the rest of the university to the new Cairo campus.

Music "Sneeuwland"

The Rare Books and special Collections Library holds materials from many famous scholars including Naguib Mahfouz, Esmat Allouba, Constant de Wit, and many others. Even though this library holds such a valuable collection it is sad to say that many AUC graduates and undergraduates barely know about this section of the library.

Nada Nabhan a fresh AUC graduate talks about her knowledge of the library as an undergraduate.

Nada: *I think I heard about it but I never actually read a book from it. Well to say the truth. Actually the only motivation that made me go to the library was to fulfill a certain assignment or get a certain book that would help me through a paper for references. So maybe If I have had an assignment that required me to use a rare book from the Library maybe then I would have used it (:35)*

Music "Sneeuwland"

Nada carried on by saying that now that she has graduated she has less reason to check that part of the library out.

Stephen Urgola University Archivist & Director also, talks about the users of the archival material however; the undergraduates are sadly not part of those users.

Mr. Urgola: *more of the users are either graduates or outsiders. So they could be professors at other universities doing research or people writing a thesis, people writing a book. So we get a lot of users like that for the archives type material. The university archives has a lot of internal use by the university offices also (:24)*

Music "Sneeuwland"

Some students may assume that using the rare books library is not easy maybe there are restrictions however, that is not true and Mr. Urgola makes that clear.

Mr. Urgola: *Right there is no restriction on anyone using the rare books based on their class level whether they are undergraduates or graduates the restriction is in the space they need to be used in the library (:13)*

Relaxing Classical Bach Music

It is interesting to know that there is more to this part of the library than just books there is also the special collections. Most of the special collections materials are seen in the form of exhibitions where any one can go in walk around and enjoy the benefit of looking at the work of these famous scholars.

Mr. Urgola talks about the Wisa Wasif exhibition, which was up in the Rare Books Library during that time. However, he said that it was going to be taken down to show the opera house.

Mr. Urgola: *Well what you may have seen on display is our exhibition area. The one that's up right now and that's actually going to be taken down to show the opera house is on Ramses Wissa Wassef the famous architect in the 28th century and so the materials for that come from our regional architecture center which has his plans and drawings. And we also have some Photographs and some other memorabilia for him (:25)*

Relaxing Classical Bach Music

It turns out that not many students use the Rare Books and Special Collections Library not because it is sophisticated to use however, because they don't know what type of books they have there

This is what Nada Nabhan said when she was asked about the kind of books which are held in the rare books section library.

Nada: *I think historical ones I guess I have no idea what categories they have there (:12)*

Relaxing Classical Bach Music

Hearing this answer from Nada I couldn't help but ask if the library had ever thought of creating an awareness campaign to make students aware about this valuable section of the library that we have on campus.

Mr. Urgola: *I don't know if we ever attempted one that was aimed at undergraduates specifically. I think when we do something like publicize an exhibition we try to aim at the entire community (:11)*

Relaxing Classical Bach Music

On the other hand looking at the bright side those who have actually used the library or have actually had the chance to be exposed to the rare books and special collections library had a fascinating experience.

Mohamed Alaa an AUC graduate had the chance to work as a volunteer at the AUC rare books and special collections library and he talks about the fascinating experience that he was exposed to during the time that he worked there.

Mohamed: *When I first got there I was fascinated with the amount of books especially by Nagib Mahfouz. I always, I also saw a lot of memoires by these writers. When I first started I watched how the people there took the old books and also, tried to repair it without maintaining, with maintaining the originality of it. I also had a chance to whiteness a lot of writings the actual writings from a lot of authors with their hand. It was just a fascinating experience for me (:36)*

Music "Sneeuwland"

Mohamed carries on by talking about one of the major projects that he took on there which was he was part of a team that went to an artist house who had died and his children called the rare books section and asked to donate their father's books and as they went there they were determining which books were of value in order to, use them in the library and, he says how it was such a privilege to be part of that team.

Music “ Valsa

So the question is what would motivate students to go and take a look at the rare books library section

This is what Nada Nabhan and Mr. Urgola had to say about this issue.

Nada: *I would love to have an online reference to know what kind of books are there and whether they will interest me or not and maybe then I would find something interesting and I would love to check it out (:15)*

Mr. Urgola on the other hand has another opinion on what forces undergraduates to take a look at this section of the library.

Mr. Urgola: *I think when it comes to undergraduates it's a matter of what courses they are taking and what assignments they have, so we have had professors come to us and ask us to help with a course project. So for example some one in the department of the arts teaching a photography class, may be it was journalism...I forget...but It was a photography class, they wanted their students to use original photographs from our collection. So the professor set up an appointment, we set up a project, our photo curator set up a project with that professor and so the students used the actual material (:38)*

Nat sound in the library

As I walk out of the Rare Books and Special Collections Library I look back for a moment and I see that there are a good amount of students sitting there benefitting from the advantages of the library and I really hope that more students could be exposed to that beneficial experience because, the library is very well equipped with excellent facilities and very helpful staff who are willing to help.

Relaxing Classical Bach Music

It is also very sad to see all these valuable books that are not being used and being taken advantage of by the AUC students since these books contain valuable information that would feed our knowledge.

Mohamed Alaa is considered to be one of the few lucky people who actually had the chance to work on a project for the Rare Books Library and get exposed to such a great opportunity.

Moahmed: *Doing this project was an experience for me because not only now I know, or not only now I read what the writers are doing but also, I can visualize the environment at which they are doing. How did they write these words or how did they paint certain portraits. And it's not easy; it requires a lot of time. Especially when I went there I just saw lots of books all over the place, lots of papers, lots of portraits. And now when I'm reading a book I can actually visualize the environment they were in and what led them to write these words or paint these portraits and this experience is exposed to a minimum number of people and I had the privilege to be exposed to that experience (:43)*

Students should take the initiative and discover more about the magnificent library that we have on campus, and a good time to do that would be on Saturdays where the library is open to the public and that is also, a very good time for students since, there is no classes on that day.

Relaxing Classical Bach Music

Finally I would like to thank everyone who made this audio feature possible

I would like to thank my interviewees:

Mohamed Alaa

Nada Nabhan

University Archivist and director Mr. Stephen Urgola

Associate Dean and Director Mr. Philip Croom

Assistant Director Mrs. Daad Abdel Razik

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The music used for this audio documentary feature:

“ Valsa “ by Alexdandre Bateiras

“Sneeuwland” by Oskar Schuster

“Relaxing classical Bach”

This audio was narrated and produced by Mai Abdel Moaty

Thank you for listening.

Sources from: AUC Rare Books and Special Collections Library Website