

Kimon Evan Marengo

Kimon Evan Marengo, known as Kem, was born in Alexandria Egypt to Greek parents in 1907. Before he moved to Paris in 1929 to study at the École Libre des Sciences Politiques, Kem published his own satirical magazine in Egypt. Throughout the 1930s, he drew cartoons for the French newspapers *Le Petit Parisien* and *Le Canard enchaîné* and for several English newspapers including the *Daily Herald* and the *Daily Telegraph*.

Kem was attending Exeter College at the University of Oxford in 1939 at the outbreak of World War II. He began working as a political cartoonist and illustrator for the Ministry of Information in London. Kem created over 3,000 propaganda images on behalf of the British war effort for various audiences and in various languages, including Arabic and Farsi. He also worked in the French and North African sections of the Political Warfare Executive (PWE), a clandestine propaganda organization within the Foreign Office launched in September 1941, where he ran what was known as the “Kem Unit” with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. With time, Kem became adviser to the Middle East Section and one of the members of the Arabic Committee of the PWE.

In response to the success of German propaganda in Iran, and the large number of Germans living there, it became important for the Ministry of Information to spread effective anti-Nazi propaganda in the region. This was no easy task, as Iranians embraced Germany’s economic help and they were impressed by Germany’s commercial and industrial strength. In addition, many Iranians were illiterate, so written messages only reached the most educated civilians.

When Dr. Arthur Arberry, a member of the Arabic Committee, asked Mojtaba Minovi, an Iranian scholar working for BBC Persian, for his opinion on effective messages for Iran he suggested using stories from the *Shahnameh*, or Book of Kings, a well-known epic poem written by the Iranian poet Ferdousi. Minovi considered focusing on Iranian nationalist pride to inspire pro-Allied feelings, rather than using traditional western images such as “victory” posters, as a more effective strategy for reaching Iranian audiences. Drawing on Iran’s long history of using illustrations to impart political messages, Kem created the images from the *Shahnameh* as six posters in 1942. The images were re-printed as postcard booklets in 1943 to coincide with the Tehran conference, where Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin signed a Declaration on Iran that committed the three powers to Iran’s independence. Kem attended the conference as an observer.

Because Kem paused his studies in 1939 to devote his time to the war effort, he did not finish his BA until 1946. That same year, he began work on his PhD thesis “The Cartoon as a Political

Weapon in England: 1783-1832.” After the war, Kem was awarded the Légion d'Honneur and Croix de Guerre. He married and had two children. Kem died in 1988 at age 81.

Bibliography

Holman, Valerie. “Kem’s Cartoons in the Second World War.” *History Today* 52, no. 3 (2002): 21–27.

Sobers-Khan, Nur. “The Shahnameh as Propaganda for World War II.” *The British Library Asian and African Studies Blog*, April 11, 2016, <http://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/asian-and-african/2013/05/the-shahnameh-as-propaganda-for-world-war-ii.html>.

Wynn, A. “The Shāh-nāme and British propaganda in Irān in World War II.” *Manuscripta Orientalia* 16, no. 1 (2010): 3–5.

“Kimon Evan Marengo [Kem].” British Cartoon Archive, accessed April 19, 2016, https://www.cartoons.ac.uk/cartoonist-biographies/k-l/KimonEvanMarengo_Kem_.html.