Image gallery: The “Special Exhibition Cairo” at the Berlin Industrial Exhibition (1896)

Abstract

The first image in this gallery is a promotional poster for the “Special Exhibition Cairo,” a privately-sponsored addition to the Berlin Industrial Exhibition of 1896, was produced by the prominent Hamburg poster design firm of Adolph Friedländer. The firm was famous for its circus posters, its show posters (including American minstrel shows touring in Germany), and also posters for *Völkerschauen* (shows of native peoples) that toured under the leadership of impresarios such as Carl Hagenbeck.

The poster makes full use of dramatic color, with an “Oriental” skyline (mosque and minaret inside of a rising eastern sun) juxtaposed in a chaotic, exotic, and purportedly authentic street-scene from the reconstructed “Cairo” exhibit. The colorful poster was not only eye-catching for its romanticizing and Orientalizing motifs but became a potent symbol of the appeal of the exotic, and the “different” in a growing commercial culture. Such exotic and “Oriental” imagery would become the crux of cigarette advertising and packaging for two generations.
The second image is a reproduction of an original painting that showcases the exoticism of the “orient” waiting to be seen and experienced in the Special-Exhibition Kairo. In addition to the reconstruction of the great pyramid (which included a hidden elevator, for visitors to be easily carried to the top), notice also the reconstructed mosque at left, and the artists’ depiction of the pageantry and exotic pomp of Egyptians with camels and Somali horseback riders.
The third image is a photograph showing a performance of “Bedouins” for Emperor Wilhelm II and his retinue in the Special-Exhibition Kairo. Wilhelm II was originally skeptical of the Berlin Industrial Exhibition (thinking it frivolous) but was purportedly won over by the exoticism and drama of the Kairo exhibition, in particular. Two years later, in 1898, Kaiser Wilhelm II would go on his highly publicized voyage to the Near East, including the Levant in the Ottoman Empire.

Ethnographic shows [*Völkerschauen*] of performers from “exotic” locales played a large role in both the Exhibition Kairo and the Colonial Exhibition, as part of the larger Berlin Industrial Exhibition.

Source

Kairo aus der Vogelschau.

Nach einem Originalgemälde. Mit Genehmigung der Berliner Kunstdruck- und Verlagsanstalt vorm. A. & C. Kaufmann.

Suk en-Nabhâsin — Parade der Beduinen vor dem Kaiser — aus Kairo.
Nach Original-Aufnahmen. Mit Genehmigung der Berliner Kunstdruck- und Verlagsanstalt vorm. A. & C. Kaufmann.

Source: Image 1: Poster, design: Adolph Friedländer firm, 1896. Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg.
Images 2 and 3: Paul Lindenberg, *Pracht-Album Photographischer Aufnahmen der Berliner Gewerbe-Ausstellung 1896 und der Sehenswürdigkeiten Berlins und des Treptower Parks Alt-Berlin, Kolonial-Ausstellung, Kairo etc.*, Berlin, 1896. Available online at: https://opus4.kobv.de/opus4-btu/frontdoor/index/index/docId/3782

MK&G

Recommended Citation: Image gallery: The “Special Exhibition Cairo” at the Berlin Industrial Exhibition (1896), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/wilhelmine-germany-and-the-first-world-war-1890-1918/ghdi:image-5379> [September 13, 2026].