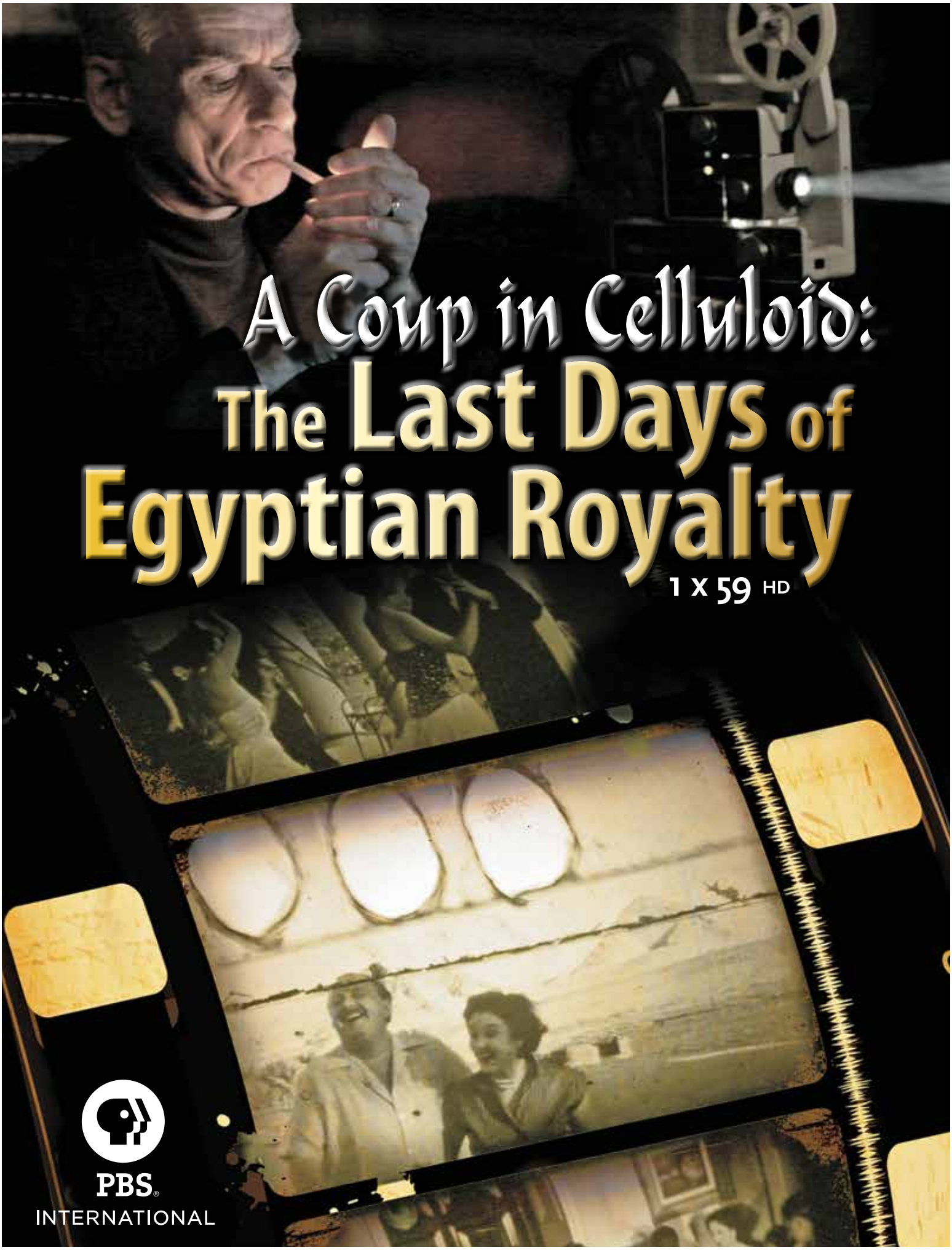
A Coup in Celluloid:
The Last Days of
Egyptian Royalty
1 x 59 HD
PBS
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A Coup in Celluloid: The Last Days of Egyptian Royalty

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In the 1950s, when Hollywood came to Egypt in the form of emerging star and model Frances Ramsden, a social gang of royals, elites, diplomats, and aristocrats dubbed the "Zohreya set" embarked on a cinematic project they called *Oil and Sand*. To them, it was a lark, but in reality, it was an extravaganza written, acted, directed, and filmed by members of the Egyptian royal family and their closest friends and relatives. Little did they know that six weeks after finishing the film about an aging ruler overthrown in a military coup d'etat, an actual coup would take place, throwing them all out of power. And so with the end of the film came the end of an era.

Decades later, however, several 8mm reels of the film were discovered in the attic of Mahmoud Sabit, a relative to the late king of Egypt and a guardian of many secrets from the era. *A Coup in Celluloid: The Last Days of Egyptian Royalty* follows Sabit, a descendant of the Zohreya set, as he pieces together the events surrounding the film with the aid of the unpublished memoirs of his parents, an Egyptian royal cousin and a Hollywood beauty, caught up in their own story of love and adventure during a pivotal moment in history. The documentary not only explores the cinematic story, but also provides a deeper understanding of why the Middle East was, and continues to be, a political hot zone.

In a film that is part politics and part theatrics, the very theme of "political narratives" is questioned and what is revealed is a human story of a man who is both a guardian and a prisoner of his legacy, with a family caught in the middle.

"Intelligent nostalgia is rarer than intelligent comedy, yet Wael Omar and Philippe Dib beautifully succeed in resurrecting the teetering glamour of Egypt's late monarchy...The kind of docu that sends auds into their imaginations as well as their history books, [A Coup in Celluloid] will be sought out by nonfiction sidebars, and is ideal for smallscreen rotation."—*Variety*

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CREDITS

Director: Wael Omar
Co-Director: Philippe L. Dib
Producers: Wael Omar, Philippe L. Dib, Mahmoud Sabit

Photo: Courtesy of Middlewest Films; Film border photo: Copyright Janaka Dharmasena

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