

MELCOM (U.K.)

Minutes of the 76th Meeting held in the School of Education of the University of Birmingham on Wednesday 26th July, 2006.

The meeting was preceded by the 7th Pearson Lecture delivered by Lesley Forbes and entitled "The Bodleian Grand Tour: Near and Middle Eastern manuscripts"

Present

Ahmed Abu Zayed	Exeter
Paul Auchterlonie	Exeter
Humeyra Ceylan	Markfield
Peter Colvin	SOAS
John Dowd	OCLC/Pica
Mastan Ebtahaj	St Antony's
Lesley Forbes	Bodleian
Nadeem El-Issa	Joppa/Adab Books
Martyn Minty	Oxford Oriental Institute
Meline Nielsen	Birmingham
Daphne Roper	Joppa/Adab Books
Geoffrey Roper	Institute for Study of Muslim Civilizations
Stefan Seeger	Institute for Study of Muslim Civilizations
Waleed al-Shubaki	Manchester
Colin Wakefield	Bodleian Library
MuhammadIsa Waley	British Library
Susan Worrall	Birmingham

1. Apologies for absence

Dominique Akhoun-Schwarb, Yasmin Faghihi, Jasmine Ansari, Heather Bleaney, Anne Poulson, Kathy Lazenbatt, Maureen Pinder, Colin Baker, Debbie Cox, Mamtimyn Sunuodula, Ursula Sims -Williams, Davidson Maclaren.

2. Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

Under item 10, and the section on developments at Leeds, the wording should be changed from "Microform Academic Publishers is microfilming Leeds's manuscripts" to "Microform Academic Publishers is planning to microfilm some of Leeds's manuscripts."

The position of "Keeper of Oriental Manuscripts" should read "Keeper of the Oriental Collection"
The item that the Oriental Institute in Oxford would close in 2009 should be removed.

As a result of the discussion on the possible effects of the Terrorism Bill the Chairman had written to associate MELCOM UK with the letter of CILIP and other organisations expressi other countries might be induced to write in favour of the scheme to the JISC.

However, while a comparatively small number of images were planned, it was considered that this would supply an important platform and important experience for more work in this field.

3. Accounts and post of treasurer

The accounts were presented by Nadeem el-Issa.

The current sums were:

Current account: £892.19

Reserve account: £2800.67

The question of whether Nadeem el-Issa could continue to be the Treasurer after he had moved to live in another country was raised, and the Committee was urged to consider the implications of this and possible solutions by the next meeting.

4. Diwan Proposal on Digitising Arabic Manuscripts

There was a discussion on all aspects of the Diwan proposal for digitising Arabic manuscripts that had been put forward to JISC, in which most member libraries of MELCOM UK were involved. It had

passed the first round, and JISC was asking for feedback, in particular evidence of user interest in the items proposed for digitisation. While the universities would propose items from their collections, the panel of experts would be expected to check for their fitting into the overall scheme, and might propose new ones. So far there seemed to be a particular emphasis on illustrated manuscripts and medicine and science. It appears that whole manuscripts would be favoured. MuhammadIsa Waley pointed out a problem with illustrated manuscripts where certain works are particularly favoured for illustrating, while in each case the illustrations only cover a few pages of the whole, and digitising the whole of one work, for example, would prevent the digitising of other illustrations of that work.

It was also suggested that other academics inC? ? ?

5. Report on the Digitisation of Arabic Language Books Planning Group and Conference, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, 21-25 February 2006 by Colin Baker

The purpose of the conference convened by the Bibliotheca Alexandrina (BA), Yale and Stanford University Libraries, was to foster the development of an international cooperative effort for the digitisation of Arabic language books. The conference was funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

- It was an intensive week of planning, presentations and discussion, the aim of which was to scope a pilot project, including both technical and collections aspects, and draft a proposal for funding it.

- Participants in the planning group included collection specialists (BL, Yale, Stanford, BA, Egyptian National Library); IT specialists and project managers (Yale, Stanford, Oxford, BA, Egyptian Ministry of Communications); and legal specialists in copyright and IPR issues (Stanford, Beni-Sweif University, Egypt).

- The public conference included librarians from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria as well as representatives from Middle Eastern IT companies and Arabic electronic book publishers.

- Among the issues discussed were:-

Format: Only printed books will be digitised.

Scoping and content: It was suggested for the pilot project that the selection of Arabic books should be on a subject such as history, and that the number of digitised Arabic books should be 50K. This needs further discussion. 5-10K would be more realistic on a subject selection approach. Also it was suggested that selection should be from a number of participating libraries and not from one specific collection.

Duplication in selection: This did not appear to be an issue. A small percentage of duplicated items would be considered acceptable.

Hosting and ownership: The ownership and public access issues are linked to each other. It was suggested that one complete preservation archive should be hosted by the BA and a mirror/duplicate preservation archive in either Stanford or Yale. All master scans would be kept by those institutions scanning their own books.

Capacity building: Full funding would be allocated to participating libraries to purchase the agreed scanning equipment, software, and for hiring staff.

Conservation: Funding for conservation of items to be included in the proposal.

Metadata: There will be an agreed standard on how the information would be delivered. As many of the records would be coming from different ILS systems, part of the funding proposal would include development of software to standardise records before inputting into BA's digital storage.

Interface: Minimum requirements would include the ability to support the broadest number of browsers in one operating system; discover and display must be on same device; possibility to change viewing from image format to text document format; operating system must be available to as wide a constituency as possible to allow for remote access; indexing for Arabic searching (word, phrase,

browsable, proximity searching).

Suggested workflow: Checking the item– scanning– processing– OCR– archiving– encoding– publishing.

Copyright: There was much discussion on public access and copyright and also to exemptions and limitations in international copyright law.

· Time Table for writing of grant proposal: Before a draft proposal is circulated to potential participating libraries, more work needs to be done on technical integration and work flow, copyright issues, and selection criteria. It is envisaged that the proposal will be sent out around September 2006.

Update from John Eilts, Stanford: “At Stanford we have been digitizing Arabic books using some of the remaining funds from the conference grant. We don't have a large collection, but we have taken all Arabic books published prior to 1900 from any country. We will be running them against OCR here and sending some images to the BA for OCR there. We want to compare the two versions and processes. When done with our current project this summer we will be placing all images up on a special web site and I will let you know when it is up”.

6. Cambridge TIMA Conference (Davidson Maclaren)

Davidson Maclaren was prevented at short notice from attending the meeting. Several members of MELCOM UK present would be attending the TIMA Conference that would be taking place in Cambridge from August 6th-9th and would report back to the next meeting.

7. Pearson Memorial Lecture

The Eighth Pearson Lecture will be delivered by Muhammad Isa Waley in 2007 on a subject yet to be decided.

8. MELCOM International Conference

Mastan Ebtehaj referred people to the website for details of the very successful MELCOM International conference held in Istanbul from 19th-21st June.

She mentioned that Geoffrey Roper had agreed to be the representative of MELCOM International at EUROMES., MELCOM International's account had been transferred to Oxford as it would be impossible to keep it in the Netherlands when the Treasurer was in another country. The webpage would be looked after at St Antony's college, with a collective responsibility, and help would be welcomed from any members.

The next three conferences will be held in Sarajevo, Oxford and Kazan.

9. BRISMES Council

Ian Netton was prevented from attending the Meeting by sciatica, and the meeting wished him a speedy recovery.

9.a. Lis-middle-east and the MELCOM UK Website.

It was agreed that this item should be a regular feature of meetings. The Chairman reported that the membership of lis-middle-east had exceeded 200 for the first time.

Ahmed Abu Zayed mentioned that not all members of MELCOM UK had supplied him with their contact details as it had been suggested they should.

A number of proposals for suitable items for the website were discussed and it was agreed that the following might be suitable.

The corrected minutes of the last two or three meetings, which would mean that they would not appear before the next meeting had discussed them.

Those Pearson lectures that the lecturers had not considered appropriate for publication in the BRISMES bulleting.

Important new acquisitions of the member libraries.

Following the example of the MELA website, mounting useful sort articles on relevant topics. The Chairman offered his “Guide to the citation of Arabic names.”

10. BL Content Strategy Document

The Chairman summarised the relevant parts of the British Library Content Strategy Document, and a discussion ensued. In general the document did not appear to effect in any way the current arrangements for cooperation among libraries specialising in the Middle East.

It was agreed that the Chairman would write a short letter despite the passing of the deadline mentioning some of the points that had arisen; in particular the request that the BL would not drop any of its special areas of collecting of Arabic materials without informing the committee, and similarly with periodicals coverage, and some questioning of areas apparently missed out.

11. Developments in member libraries and reports on periodicals

Birmingham

Taking part in two projects: the Diwan project and MIDES digitisation project, which involves e-reprints for shared records. Seeking for cataloguer for Mingana project outsourced for mss conservation - importance of expertise in conservation. Meline Neilsen is going to spend two years in Damascus. Susan Worrall will be head of special collections

Exeter

The AWDU (Arab World Documentation Centre) has expanded its remit beyond the Gulf to the whole Arab World, although not in such depth for the non-Gulf areas. Where possible government gazettes are in the form of CD-ROMs.

The Library and the IT Department have been converged. A new Director of Information Services is being sought.

London

British Library

It was mentioned that an old colleague from the BM, and former member of MELCOM, Yasin Safadi had died in April.

The English translation of the French collective work on Arabic codicology has been published by Alfurqan, edited by MuhammadIsa Waley.

The British Library has created a travelling exhibition on Afghanistan on flats which it wishes to lend to municipal libraries for one month periods, and it is looking for suitable libraries.

Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilizations.

The Library is moving into its new premises in 4-5 Bedford Square, and mobile shelving would be installed in the following week.

In the new academic year an MA Course with eighty students would be starting. There were still some problems with the Arabic script in the catalogue.

Geoffrey Roper was busy with his Muslim Civilisations Bibliographic Project and is looking for contributors .

SOAS Library.

The Library Strategic Review Group which had been set up to consider the future of the Library had come up with a number of scenarios, all of which depended on which direction the School chooses to take. The new Director, Paul Webley who comes to SOAS from Exeter University, takes over on the first day of August, and the first thing he will have to do is set up a strategic review of the whole School.

Dominique Akhoun-Schwarb is being replaced during her maternity leave by Patricia Jamal.

Manchester

Has purchased all the volumes of the Encyclopedia of the Quran/Koran, and is trialling the online version. Edmund Herzig is moving to a chair in Oxford, and Shuruq Naguib is moving to Lancaster. They are therefore looking for two Arabists, one in psychology and one in colloquial Arabic.

Markfield

As part of the "Inspire" programme the Librarian has opened itself to the public, and is working on the necessary regulations. As a result of the publicity it has sent out it has already increased its external membership from 9 to 21. It will be holding an open day on September 21st and invitations will be sent out.

Oxford: Bodleian

Book funds have been sorted out for ME.

Martyn Minty will order Middle Eastern books, and funds for St Antony's had been made available.

It is participating in the JISC Diwan bid, with the hope of digitising paintings. The Hebrew specialist is retiring.

They will be migrating from GEAC to Virtua (VTNS).

They are starting with two new standing order suppliers: Sulaiman's in Beirut for Arabic books and Aram Muhajir in Toronto for Persian.

St Antony's has found a benefactor who will fund a new building to house the Middle East Centre.

12. Any other business.

Chairman mentioned the success of the bid by a consortium of Edinburgh, Manchester and Durham to fund a new Centre of Excellence for the study of the Arabic (CASUW)

13. Date and place of next meeting

The next meeting will be on Monday 8th January in the Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilizations.