

79th MELCOM UK MEETING: MINUTES

The meeting took place in the Library of the Islamic Foundation at the Markfield of Higher Education, Leicester, at 2.30 pm on Tuesday 8th January, 2008.

It was preceded by a tour of the Library.

Present

Paul Auchterlonie	Exeter
Dominique Akhoun-Schwarb	SOAS
Catherine Ansorge	Cambridge
Humeyra Ceylan	Markfield
Peter Colvin	SOAS
Waseem Farooq	Institute for Study of Muslim Civilizations
Mays al-Kaisi	Quaritch
Maureen Pinder	Leeds
Geoffrey Roper	Institute for Study of Muslim Civilizations
Stefan Seeger	Institute for Study of Muslim Civilizations
Muhammad Isa Waley	British Library

1. Apologies for absence

Ahmed Abu Zayed, Jasmine Ansari, Heather Bleaney, Debbie Cox, Mastan Ebtehaj, Nadeem el-Issa, Yasmin Faghihi, Waleed el-Shobaki and Mamtimyn Sunuodula

2. Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

Muhammad-Isa had kindly corrected the minutes and these corrections would be incorporated in the minutes.

Comments on the online Encyclopaedia of Islam and Index Islamicus which had followed from an item in the previous meeting would be made during item 6, the item on digitisation in today's meeting.

3. Developments in Exeter and the Chairmanship

(The Chairman on the developments in Exeter during the last fifteen months).

The new director had radically restructured the library and issued new job descriptions. There had been some early retirements. Cataloguing and classification had been outsourced, and consultants had been called in to rearrange the spatial organisation of the Library.

This had led to some adverse comment in the press, and the false impression that large numbers of books would be disposed off. Paul had become the collection manager and with no mention of his responsibility for the Arabic collection, and Ahmed was placed in charge of digital services. The loss of the Arabic portfolio had made Paul think that he would have to

resign from the Chairmanship of MELCOM UK but the return of these responsibilities had made him change his mind.

Various plans to move the Arabic books and the AWDU (Arab World Documentation Unit) collection had turned out to be impossible, and they will remain where they are – available on open access and next to the subject librarian - for at least the next two years.

They have been no great purchase of Persian for the time being, but on the other hand there are big plans for the Kurdish collections as a Centre for Kurdish Studies has been set up.

4. Accounts

Reserve Account as at 8/12/2006: £2932.64

Current Account as at 9/11/2006: £1038.24

5. MELCOM UK workshops on the pattern of MELA's workshops

The meeting discussed Muhammad-Isa Waley's suggestion that MELCOM UK should be more involved in practical issues on the model of MELA's forums and workshops, and that this should be incorporated in the "aims and functions" of the Committee.

It was pointed out that this would not in fact be unprecedented as MELCOM UK had held a one day conference on the issue of transliteration which had led to the resolution to follow the Library of Congress system for its member libraries, besides the conferences on bibliography which it used to hold and which had fallen into desuetude.

It was agreed that the Chairman would propose an order of words for consideration by the committee like "Furthering technical aspects of Middle Eastern Librarianship", which would tackle subjects such as cataloguing, classification, digitization and IT problems.

It was also agreed that one day workshops like the workshop on Arabic manuscript cataloguing given by Jan Just Witkam as well as the one organised by MELA seemed to be the best pattern to follow. The Chairman agreed to seek out possible speakers for a workshop on current developments in North American Middle Eastern librarianship,

6. Developments in digitising including the HEFCE review of IT requirements for Islamic Studies

Exeter would be putting forward a bid for the HEFCE review of IT requirements for Islamic studies, basing it on a survey to be conducted with members of MELCOM UK.

The Secretary had received a visit in SOAS from Ingrid Heijckers who is the assistant editor for the Middle East, Islam and Africa list, and was "researching publishing opportunities on bibliographies" (in general) at Brill Academic Publishers in the Netherlands. The Secretary and the Electronic Resources librarian in SOAS, Beth Clark, had been able to demonstrate online the inadequacies of the platform for Index Islamicus and the Encyclopaedia of Islam. He also recommended Brockelmann, for which Brill possesses the copyright as an excellent project for digitization, provided it had a board of scholars to edit it.

The same question was raised in an e-mail correspondence on MELA and the same obvious suggestion was made. This provoked the following response from Liesbeth Hugenholtz of BRILL to the effect that:

"Further to the discussions about the desirability of having a digitalised, searchable edition of Brockelmann online, please note the publication of precisely such a version is scheduled for 2008. It will appear with Brill, the publishers of the printed edition. It is Brill's intention to publish Brockelmann both as a full text searchable separate online publication and as an integrated part of the Bibliography of the Arab Book. The Bibliography of the Arab Book, to be released in 2008, will be a full bibliography of all books printed in Arabic script before 1960."

It was reported that Yale University Library in partnership with the Bibliotheca Alexandrina held a workshop from December 3-7, 2007, offering advanced training in digitizing, OCR and workflow techniques.

7. TIMA Conference (Dominique Akhoun)

The Third Islamic Manuscript Conference was held at Magdalene College in Cambridge, on 28th-31st August 2007. It was hosted by the Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation and the Centre of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at the University of Cambridge.

All information regarding the attendees and the programme can be found at:

<http://www.islamicmanuscript.org/ThirdIslamicManuscriptConference.html>

The conference featured research from different fields of study related to Islamic manuscripts. Manuscript projects from around the world were presented and new techniques and technologies for conservation and digitisation were discussed.

The conference was articulated around four topics: each of TIMA's interest groups prepared conference panels on cataloguing, conservation, digitization and publishing. The sub-committees leading these groups discussed their work to date promoting best practice and standards in their fields. On the last day of the conference there was a practical conservation workshop and a visit to the Cambridge University Library.

This conference was very well attended with about 90 participants from a vast array of nationalities and specialities, bringing into light lots of ongoing projects around the world related to Islamic manuscripts. The TIMA organisers were at their usual best and the speakers were presenting very high quality papers, making the whole conference a very polished, agreeable and very informative event to attend.

Talks were given either in English or Arabic, with a translator in the room insuring that Q&A got properly translated and she delivered a very high standard of service. Papers of the talks were made available with their Arabic or English translations wherever applicable.

The more mundane aspects of the conference were also irreproachable: lunches and dinners were superbly catered for, there was an Andalusian music concert performed by *Charivari Agréable* and a practical conservation workshop on vacuum packing on the last day. I couldn't attend the latter as it was overbooked, but from what I heard this workshop was very much appreciated and the organisers intend to make this sort of event a regular in their program and declined it in various other specialities.

From a personal point of view, this conference was far more relaxed and friendly than the first one I was able to attend, maybe on the account that people were already acquainted with each other, and that there was far less formality too: the specialists and senior staff of all sorts and manners of institutions mixed happily with younger and less experimented individuals making the atmosphere less pompous, more friendly and enjoyable.

8. Lis-middle-east and the MELCOM UK Website.

Lis-middle-east now included some two hundred and two subscribers. Some technical difficulties had been encountered in receiving mail from some members, and this was being looked into.

9. Pearson Memorial Lecture

The next Pearson Lecture will be delivered by Sara Yontan-Musnic of the Bibliothèque

Nationale de France and the Secretary of MELCOM International. The title is yet to be decided but will be on the subject of Library materials from Turkey. It will be held in conjunction with the Annual BRISMES Conference in Leeds on Friday 4th July.

10. MELCOM International Conference (Mastan Ebtehaj)

The following is a brief on Melcom International conference:

- 1- There is a new deadline for the accommodation booking in case any one is interested to make a booking.
- 2- The 1st circular will be sent out in January, as usual.
- 3- Keep checking the web page for the latest.

11. BRISMES / NCOLR

There had been no one present able to report on these.

12. Developments in member libraries and reports on periodicals

CAMBRIDGE

Near and Middle East Department, Near and Middle Eastern Department.

During the last six months the Department has been renamed "The Near and Middle Eastern Department" to more closely reflect the collection's content and acquisitions. It now forms a Department under the Library's "Special Collections Division", as the "Oriental Division" of the UL, which had existed for many years, was dissolved on the retirement of its head, Professor Stefan Reif in 2005.

The Islamic Manuscript Association (TIMA) Conference, held in Cambridge in August 2007, was attended both by Yasmin Faghihi and Catherine Ansorge and the codicology workshop was held in the CUL on 1st-4th September, following the conference, using manuscripts from the Library's collection and staff expertise from several of the Library's Departments.

The Near Eastern section of the CUL website has been updated. In addition to information on services provided by the Department, the site now provides links to a digitised version of the printed catalogues of the UL's Middle Eastern manuscript collections by E. G. Browne and Arthur Arberry with a structured facility to browse the contents and search the indexes. The catalogues can be found listed in the text at:-

<http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/deptserv/neareastern/collection.html>

Individual pages can be enlarged by clicking on the text.

The pattern of acquisitions to the section has been consistent with previous years with new publications purchased mainly from Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq and Iran. Smaller numbers of purchases have also been made in Mongolian.

The post as Head of Department is now worked as a shared position between Yasmin Faghihi and Catherine Ansorge. There is a part time assistant in the Department for 5 hours per week to which a new assistant was appointed in July 2007. During Yasmin Faghihi's year of maternity leave beginning at the end of January 2008 the Department will be run by Catherine Ansorge.

EXETER

(see item 3)

LEEDS

The vacancies left by the removal of Ian Netton and Dionisius Agius to Exeter have been filled by Emad Bazzi who is interested in Modern Islamic thought and Hendrik Kraetzschmar with an interest in Comparative Politics in the Middle East & North Africa. Both therefore are interested in modern subjects and this will entail a change in acquisition policy which formerly concentrated on medieval subjects. There are some new journals being subscribed to. The Arabic cataloguer has left. Roderick's Vassie's company is microfilming Arabic and Persian manuscripts

LONDON

British Library

The Arabic Section has been allocated funding to recruit a temporary cataloguer of Arabic books to catalogue recent backlog, from April 2008 for two years. The post will be advertised in about six weeks' time. The advertisement will be posted on the BL website and on [lis-middle-east](http://lis-middle-east.org). We will be looking for someone with an excellent knowledge of Arabic who is able to enter in Arabic script and in accurate ALA-LC romanisation, and preferably with some experience of cataloguing or library training, but training will be given as necessary. The work will involve deriving and editing records from relevant catalogues, and original cataloguing where no existing records are available. MELCOM members are asked to mention this to anyone they know may be interested in the post. Anyone interested may contact Debbie Cox who will ensure they are alerted to the advertisement as soon as it is posted.

Otherwise my news is that I have been back since October. Arabic acquisitions are continuing as normal. We are continuing to receive material through MECAP (from selected countries) as well as our normal suppliers. We are also hoping that work will begin on a project to convert our printed catalogues of Arabic books to electronic format. (Debbie Cox)

Institute for the Study of Islamic Civilizations.

Waseem Farooq had attended the 26th Istanbul Bookfair in October and purchased a number of Turkish books. 10,000 volumes had now been acquired by the Library. The catalogue was still not working satisfactorily for the Romanised records. A new system for the all the Libraries in the Ismaili University system was being developed in Pakistan. A collection of three unpublished manuscripts (about 200 pages) by Muhammad 'Abduh had been acquired in an auction by the Library.

Geoffrey Roper is busy with organising the Third Conference on Arabic Printing and Publishing that will take place in Leipzig next September.

SOAS

The Librarian Anne Poulson left just before Christmas to become the Secretary of CURL. The School hope to be able to appoint a temporary Librarian for a period of a year during which it intends to decide on the future organisation of the Library in the context of the whole School and in particular in relation to the IT and the Learning and Teaching Units.

Meanwhile the School awaits information on whether it will continue to be in receipt of the annual £1 million funding of special funding from HEFCE.

MANCHESTER

I left it again to the last minute to apologise for not be able to attend this meeting at Markfield. I so much wanted to but we are having a busy time here in Manchester with the new Librarian Jan Wilkinson started yesterday and some other changes in the structure of the library. (Waleed el-Shobaki)

MARKFIELD

The report on Islamic studies in the UK by a Markfield academic had been well received. MIHE was now being accredited by the University of Gloucester, which will give them access to their electronic resources. The library has purchased a database of Islamic banking, which is an important speciality of the Institute, and will be subscribing to Oxford Islamic Studies online. A series of lectures for external visitors were being held in the Library, as well as an exhibition on the local history of Asian people in Leicester.

13. Any other business

Humeyra Ceylan enquired on behalf of Jasmine Ansari about the existence of a modern online Arabic-English dictionary. G. Roper pointed out the Lane's Lexicon, which has been digitized and can be either browsed online or downloaded.

14. Date and place of next meeting

The Summer meeting will be held in conjunction with the Annual BRISMES Conference in Leeds on Friday 4th July 2008.