

MELCOM (U.K.)

Minutes: 81st Meeting

The meeting took place in SOAS Library on Tuesday 13th January 2009 from 2.50-5 pm.

The Business Meeting was preceded by a presentation by Professor Sabry Hafez on the setting up of an Arabic internet journal which ran over time by twenty minutes and the content of which was so relevant to the business of MELCOM U.K. that it has been considered suitable for inclusion in the minutes.

Present

Dominique Akhoun-Schwarb	SOAS
Affi al-Akiti	Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies
Catherine Ansorge	Cambridge
Paul Auchterlonie	Exeter
Jasmine Ansari	Westminster University
Colin Baker	B.L.
Heather Bleaney	Index Islamicus
Karimah Boudjillouli	al-Furqan
Humayra Ceylan	Markfield
Peter Colvin	SOAS
Mastan Ebtehaj	Oxford
Dinah Manisty	Bodleian
Meis al-Kaisi	Quaritch
Geoffrey Roper	London
Stefan Seeger	Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations
Waleed El-Shobaki	Manchester

1. Apologies for absence

Ahmed Abu-Zayed, Debbie Cox, Waseem Farooq, Alnoor Merchant, Maureen Pinder, Ursula Simms-Williams, Mamtimyn Sunuodula, Colin Wakefield and Muhammad Isa Waley

2. Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

Correction to the title of Afifi al-Akiti's institute in Oxford which is not the Islamic Institute but the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies.

Spelling of Sara Yontan-Musnik needed correcting in the Minutes.

In item 10 the MELCOM International Conference in Cordoba will be in 2010.

3. Accounts

Current account: £804.74

Reserve account: £2932.46

The Treasurer has so far been unable to get the \$250 to John Eilts for the Lesley Wilkins Fund, and was seeking a way to get it to him without paying banking costs.

4. Election of new Chairperson and Secretary

The new Chairperson and Secretary were voted nem con. They are respectively Mastan Ebtehaj of St Antony's College Oxford and Catherine Ansorge of Cambridge University Library.

5. Developments in digitising

▶ The Chairman reported that there had been no feedback from JISC in response to the Digilslam review of user requirements for digitised resources in Islamic Studies. In October they had reported that they were still consulting with the academic community.

▶ Professor Sabry Hafez gave a presentation on his on-line Arabic cultural journal *Al-Kalimah* (www.al-kalimah.com). He had been induced to start this by his discovery that young readers, academics and writers in the Arabic world could not afford to subscribe to the existing declining number of Arabic cultural journals, and decided to launch *Al-Kalimah* as a free electronic journal. It was launched in January 2007, a few months after the late Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish, closed his quarterly, *Al-Karmal*, because he only sold 100 copies of each issue. Like *al-Karmal*, *Al-Kalimah* is also a journal of secular rational discourse and aims to transcend geographical and censorship boundaries. From its first issue it attracted 40,000 hits per month, and this went up to over 300,000 per month at the end of its second year.

Al-Kalimah is not only a free on-line journal, but also free from all governmental controls and ideological biases. It is open to free liberal and secular intellectuals from all over the Arab world, and particularly free of censorship and aimed at the entire Arab World. It has soon established itself as the leading literary and cultural journal in the Arabic language, and each issue is widely reviewed in the Arabic press. It also hopes to act as a bridge between the two cultures, and is working on developing its English side soon.

It achieved over one million visitors in its first year, and now having reached its twenty sixth number it has climbed to 300,000 hits a month. It has published full length novels in each issue by most of the major writers currently writing in the Arab world, which are fully downloadable. When asked how this could be economically viable, he explained that the authors had discovered that not only does this increase the readership by an enormous amount over numbers who could get access to the limited print runs that they normally appear in, but that there is also an increase in the demand for the printed versions.

Of particular interest to librarians is the part of the project to supply a digitised archive of complete runs of major Arabic journals. So far *Apolo*, *al-Katib al-misri*, *Hiwar*, *Galiri 68*, and *al-Karmal* have been archived, Professor Hafez is working on adding some current journals, and making the whole archive fully searchable. He pointed out that this part of the project would need funding to bear the cost of the work involved, and asked two questions of librarians: firstly how much libraries would be prepared to pay to subscribe to such useful tool for research, (which would also preserve crumbling hard copies and make much easier access) and what further journals should also be digitised. He requested that answers and suggestions should be sent to him at Al_Kalimah@yahoo.co.uk or Editor@al-Kalimah.com"

▶ Digitization at Oxford (OULS)

1) Only a small number of Near Eastern and Mughal manuscripts have been digitized by the Bodleian Library.

2) The Oxford University-Google Digitization Programme – this is now well under way. The agreement between Google and Oxford covers only “public domain” material, meaning in effect books published before 1885. Manuscripts, archives, maps and early printed books are not included. Two digital copies of each item are produced; the Oxford digital copies should be available for consultation in the Oxford Digital Library later this year. (Google has similar arrangements with Harvard, Stanford and Michigan Universities and the New York Public Library.)

3) The Bodleian is seeking to be a partner in the KAUST-LC World Digital Library Project by

contributing scans of its scientific Arabic manuscripts. (KAUST = King Abdullah University of Science and Technology)

4) Oxford is interested in involvement in a JISC "US-UK collaborative digital project" (proposal deadline 29 March 2009), and Project AMEEL at Yale University Library. (From Colin Wakefield)

▶ Ahmed Abu-Zayed and Paul Auchterlonie will be visiting the National Archives at Kew to attend a meeting on the digitising of Modern Middle Eastern archives.

▶ Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation using Symphony, a SirsiDYNIX product, will make their library catalogue available online sometime during the first semester of 2009. The Foundation is currently studying Dr Geoffrey Roper's project proposal of updating the *World Survey of Islamic manuscripts*. The Foundation is also aiming to make the *World Survey of Islamic Manuscripts* searchable and freely accessible online.

The Foundation will also be digitising its published catalogues of Islamic manuscripts with the aim of having 25% of this collection searchable and freely accessible online later this year.

It has found the following two organisations very helpful:

The Arabic Manuscript Management System: <http://westafricanmanuscripts.org/>

Project for the cataloguing and digitising of 55 Islamic manuscripts: <http://www.islamic-manuscripts.net/content/below/index.xml>

The Foundation website is currently under construction and will be launched this year. The Library will have its own section which will provide information and links to its online catalogues. (From Karima Boudjillouli)

▶ The Catalogues of manuscripts in Cambridge and the Wellcome have been made available online, and the project for digitising the British Libraries Arabic manuscript catalogues are in the pipeline.

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

At present Lis-middle-east has two owners, Paul Auchterlonie and Ahmed Abu-Zayed. This will continue for the next six months, when Ahmed will take total control.

7. Pearson Memorial Lecture

The next Pearson Memorial Lecture will be delivered by Professor Netton at the summer meeting in Manchester on a subject yet to be decided. An abstract of his talk will be mounted on the web.

Sara Yontan has expressed an interest in having her lecture mounted on the MELCOM UK website.

Peter Colvin intends to revise his lecture when he has retired and have it mounted on the website.

8. MELCOM International Conference

The meeting expressed its thanks to Mastan Ebtehaj for the excellence of the conference she hosted in Oxford.

She reported that the next MELCOM International will be held at Kazan from 22nd-24th June 2009. An invitation letter is required and a scan of the passport is required by Nuria Garaeva, the local hostess. For further details please watch the MELCOM International web-site.

9. NACIRA

The Chairman and Secretary attended the annual Conference of NACIRA, the National Committee for Information Resources on Asia (formerly the National Council on Orientalist Library Resources, NCOLR). This was held on December 9th in SOAS and was on the theme of "Expanding the boundaries of information resources on Asia in the UK." The Chairman gave a presentation on the Digilslam project and report. Other regional groups are interested in doing similar projects.

The Mapping Asia project is to be revived, and it will no longer be housed in SOAS but in the University of London Computer Centre.

10. Developments in member libraries and reports on periodicals

Cambridge

University Library

Report on the Near and Middle Eastern Department – Jan 2009.

The level of funding support for the Department has remained the same during the past year and the rate of acquisitions to the section has been consistent with previous years. New publications have been purchased mainly from Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq and Iran. Smaller numbers of purchases have also been made from Turkey. Several new journal titles have been approved for purchase.

The Islamic Manuscript Association (TIMA) Conference, held at Queens' College, Cambridge in July and was attended by Catherine Ansorge. The TIMA Codicology Workshop was held in the CUL on 8-12th September and was attended by Catherine Ansorge and Yasmin Faghihi. The workshop, led by Francois Deroche, drew on selected manuscripts from the Library's collections to illustrate the presentations. The workshop was well-attended by academic staff, research staff and librarians.

A Digitization Officer post, newly created in the Library, has now been filled and an initial review has taken place of suggestions for collections of interesting and valuable items suitable for digitisation. Seven collections from the Middle East section have been put forward into the initial round, including a collection of Koran manuscripts, Persian illuminated texts and the papers and Babi manuscripts of E.G. Browne. These could be digitised in the near future, as soon as the necessary equipment is in place.

Several displays of manuscripts have been organised for visitors to the Library including a visit, in July, of the Ambassador of Iran. In December, a display of manuscripts relating to Islamic Spain was organised to in connection with a Conference in Newnham College. (Catherine Ansorge)

Exeter

No news from Ahmed or AWDU.

I am taking early retirement from the end of July 2009, but will continue working part-time (2 days a week) as Middle East Librarian for a fixed period of two more years (i.e. till the end of July 2011). The Old and Main libraries at Exeter will be fully refurbished over the next three years, which will entail the temporary displacement of some of the collections, including the Middle East material. The details of this programme have yet to be fully worked out and the final arrangement of the library stock has still to be decided. (Paul Auchterlonie)

London

British Library

Colin Baker reported that a new Arabic cataloguer was making inroads into the Arabic cataloguing backlog and was also doing some retroconversion of records.

Muhammad Isa Waley wrote:

I'm probably going to be abroad on the 13th, so would like to (a) apologize and (b) move, or second or third, a big vote of thanks to both you and Paul for your selfless service to MELCOM UK.

Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation

The Foundation will be moving to central London, High Street Kensington in the coming weeks. We will let you know once the move is complete about the exact address.

Al-Furqan> Al-Maqasid Research Centre, London - UK

The Foundation has developed in the last couple of years a new section called Al-Maqasid Research Centre in the Philosophy of Islamic Law which its giving all of its attention to the methodology and applications of Maqasid al-Shari`ah.

The Maqasid centre runs many events and workshops and has produced a number of publications. The publications however, are available in Arabic language only. One of Al-Maqasid centre publication is *Bibliography for Maqasid al-Shariah*, monographs –theses-articles, 3 Vol.; provide references and abstracts to about 3000 title. (English translation of the introduction is included).

Al-Furqan> Encyclopedia of Makkah & Al-Madinah, Jeddah - SA

The foundation overseas section; Encyclopedia of Makkah Al-Mukarramah & Al-Madinah Almunawwarah has also recently published the first 2 volumes of the 16 volumes of the *Encyclopedia of Makkah Al Mukarramah and Al Madinah Al Munawwarah* in Arabic language. Information about the published volumes in English can be accessed on http://mawsoa.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=86&Itemid=137&lang=ar.

More information about the Encyclopedia and about their publications is available through their website <http://mawsoa.org>.

Information about the Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation, Al-Maqasid Research Centre recent publications and how to order them including the published volumes of the Encyclopedia can be obtained by contacting Mr. Cherif Mezghrani in Distribution (cherif@al-furqan.com, sales@al-furqan.com, info@al-furqan.com).

Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations Library

The Institute is joining the Institute of Ismaili Studies in the old Wellcome Library building. The two Institutes will remain separate but the Libraries will be merged.

The teaching and the collection of the Institute are both growing, and the Library has recently bought a collection of about one thousand late Ottoman and early Modern Turkish books.

Institute of Ismaili Studies Library

Alnoor Merchant reports:

I wanted to inform you (and all at MELCOM) that the Institute of Ismaili Studies is no longer based in Victoria. We have moved and are now located at the old premises of the Wellcome Trust. The address is as follows:

The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 210 Euston Road, London NW1 2DA. Telephone: 0207 756 2700

The Library will be located on the ground and basement floors, and it is anticipated that we will start functioning from around mid-February. As the refurbishment is still in progress, I will let you know of more precise dates soon.

Also, I would be grateful if you could inform members at MELCOM that I have been appointed as

the Acting Head of the Library. My e-mail details remain the same: amerchant@iis.ac.uk

SOAS Library

The Interim Librarian, David Perrow, will be leaving at the end of February, having made extensive plans for the reorganisation of the Library staff and the refurbishing of the Library building. These have been made in accordance with conditions laid down by the HEFCE report drawn up by Sir Ivor Crewe, and are among the requirements given to make it possible that HEFCE might continue with its subsidy of £1 million per annum for access by external users. A new Head of Information Services and Library Services has been appointed called John Robinson, and he will be starting at the beginning of March. Meanwhile the Library director's role will be carried out in rotation by the four members of the senior management team.

The Languages and Cultures of the Near & Middle East Department is the biggest section of the Faculty of Languages and Cultures. Including Middle Eastern history and Islamic law, teaching and research activity in SOAS on all aspects of the Middle East continues to grow. The latest addition will be two part time teachers in Armenian studies, subsidised by the Gulbenkian Foundation for three years.

A voluntary severance scheme is expected to be launched in the latter part of January.

Index Islamicus

1: We carry on as before

2: Brill reports that most people buy the online service nowadays, but they will continue to issue II in print as long as anyone wishes to buy print.

Westminster University Library

The University of Westminster is not starting its MA programme in Islamic studies this semester. Our roles as subject librarians will also change by the restructuring of the University. (Jasmin Ansari)

Manchester

The library is undergoing a restructuring exercise; everyone will have to have an interview or as the library uses the term "aspirational conversation". The Idea is that, those who have a like for like jobs will just need to communicate that to the Leadership team at the library, but those with aspirations to a higher positions, will need to have more than just a conversation.

* We also talked about the Budget and I explained that, even though I have extra funding for Israeli Studies and Middle Eastern Media Studies, my budget is still and has been the same for the past 4 years.

* I, Mamtimyn of Durham and Shenxiao of Edinburgh are looking of ways to secure some funding for the newly (a year old!) created CASAW to cover the resources this new programme requires to fulfil its aims.

And finally, I shall be liaising with Oliver Bast with regard to the next MELCOM UK meeting in Manchester. (Waleed el-Shobaki)

Markfield

Dr. Siddiqi has resigned from his position as a director at Markfield Institute of Higher Education and Dr. Seif Tageddin, who is an Islamic economic lecturer, became an acting director for a year. Also the library purchased books on Interfaith from Prof. Waardenburg's collection in Lausanne as Islamic Foundation library extending its collection on dialogue and interfaith. The Library has

applied for funding to SpauldingTrust to finance this project.

Oxford

Bodleian and Oriental Institute, Oxford.

We have seen several recent changes at the Bodleian and Oriental Institute in Oxford with the retirement, at the end of September 2008, of Lesley Forbes, Keeper of the Oriental Collections, and in August 2008 of Martyn Minty, Librarian of the Oriental Institute. Both posts have ceased in their present form and a new post has been created with the title Subject Specialist, Middle Eastern and Islamic Collections, which Dinah Manisty took up on September 1st 2008. Colin Wakefield, who is now part-time, is devoting his time entirely to the Bodleian's Special Collections while Dawn Vaux, as Deputy Librarian, is responsible for the day to day running of the Oriental Institute.

These changes are all part of an overall plan to centralise the Humanities collections, which will include the Oriental collections, under one roof (yet to be built!) on the Radcliffe Infirmary site in the Woodstock Road. The first phase will involve moving all the Oriental collections housed in the Bodleian bookstack to a temporary site until the Humanities library is ready, while the New Bodleian Library (next door to Blackwells) will be completely renovated according to latest preservation and conservation standards and transformed into Oxford University's new Special Collections Library. (Dinah Manisty)

I am now a part of the Bodleian's Special Collections Department, which includes western mss., early printed books, maps, music etc. and I am focussing essentially on our Islamic manuscript collections. This is something I was trying to do before, in addition to other duties, but of course there was little time for it. So I'm involved in exhibitions, internal and external, fund-raising events, cataloguing of manuscripts, digitization, publications, filming (occasionally!) etc. etc., as well as answering the ever-increasing number of enquiries we receive about the collections. It's quite varied but seems to fit nicely into my 3-day week! The only bit of acquisitions work I still do is ordering the occasional Armenian book. We have a budget for Armenian and Georgian (and indeed a Professor of Armenian) so I do what I can to spend the budget. How long all this will go on for I'm not sure. I'm due for retirement at the end of September but I can apply to stay on for a couple more years. No decision required until the summer. (Colin Wakefield)

Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies

Dr Afifi al-Akiti is no longer the Librarian, and is now KFAS Fellow in Islamic Studies and Islamic Centre Lecturer in Islamic Studies at the Faculty of Theology, University of Oxford, as well as College Lecturer in World Religions at Worcester College. Rebecca Howard is the new librarian and they are looking to appoint an Arabic language specialist.

St Antony's college - MEC Library

Two posts have been endowed by the "Qatar Foundation of Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani " - first position is for a Chair in the contemporary Islamic Studies; and the second is for a Chair in the Modern Islamic Architecture. Both will be advertised any time soon.

Otherwise, business as usual.

NB. I have just discovered that the post in the Contemporary Islamic Studies that I reported will be "advertised any time soon", has in fact been already advertised at end of December 08 - but the report on the other one is correct, it will be advertised soon.

Two new journals have been subscribed to: *al-Ghurbal* and *al-Ithnayn*. There is now a complete list of journal titles on the website.

Planning permission for the new building is expected from the tree officers and it is hoped that the building works will commence next summer.

11. Any other business

The Chairman reported that in response to an enquiry to COPAC, we will be pleased to know that the problem of searching for words with a transliterated `ayn or hamzah in the middle will soon be resolved. It has not possible to find all (or even most) transliterated records for Arabic books which included words like mu`jam or mu'assasah in the title, or Ma`luf or Ma'mun in the author field. Following the reloading of Arabic records all Persian (Farsi) and Hebrew records will also be reloaded to cure similar problems with records in these languages.

12. Time and place of next meeting

The next meeting will be held in conjunction with the BRISMES Conference in Manchester on July 6th 2009. The Pearson Lecture will be at 12 and the business meeting at 2/30.