

MELCOM (U.K.)

Minutes: 82nd meeting

The 82nd meeting took place at Hulme Hall, Oxford Place, Manchester, on Monday 6th July 2009 at 2.30pm.

Present:-

Ahmed Abu-Zayed	Exeter
Dominique Akhoun-Schwarb	SOAS
Catherine Ansorge	Cambridge
Jasmine Ansari	Westminster University
Heather Bleaney	Index Islamicus
Humeyra Ceylan	Markfield
Peter Colvin	SOAS
Mastan Ebtehaj	Oxford
Dinah Manisty	Bodleian
Ian Netton	Exeter
Meline Nielsen	Birmingham
Maureen Pinder	Leeds
Geoffrey Roper	London
Stefan Seeger	Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations

1. Apologies for absence :-

Colin Baker	B.L.
Waleed El-Shobaki	Manchester
Yasmin Faghihi	Cambridge
Colin Wakefield	Oxford

2. Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising:-

The Chairperson pointed out that the new periodical title subscribed to by St. Antony's was 'al-Kawakib' not 'al-Gurbal'.

3. Accounts

Current account : £ 575.81
Reserve account: £ 3,003.01

4. Website

Ahmed Abu-Zayed put forward for discussion several ideas on how the MELCOM website could be improved and extended. This could include adding the historical run of minutes of the MELCOM (U.K.) meetings and the texts of previous Pearson lectures. The original scans of the documents could be held on the digital repository at Exeter University. It was also suggested that brief reports of member institutions, similar to those made at Committee meetings, could be added to the website. These suggestions were met with general agreement by the Committee.

5. Melcom International Conference

The Chairperson reported on the success of the 31st Melcom International Conference which had been held in Kazan on 22nd-24th July. The Conference had been both well organised and well attended. Papers had been presented on varied issues such as cataloguing, digitisation, preservation and collections. There was an interesting presentation about Libra Books by Rifat Bali. Tours of local places of interest had also been arranged and had been much appreciated.

The following two issues were discussed at the Melcom International business meeting:

- a) MI Grant: for the last few years the MI has awarded grants to number of speakers, including two grants awarded this year. The MI board has decided to announce the grant on the web for the forthcoming conferences. The grant policy and the criteria will be announced on the Web in due course.
- b) MI LOGO: a young French artist has been commissioned to design a LOGO for the MI web site.

Next year's Conference will be held in Cordoba on the 19th – 22nd (plus excursion on Thursday 23rd) April, 2010.

6. Developments in member libraries.

Birmingham

It was reported that Birmingham University has recently launched a new website – the 'Virtual Manuscript Room' at - <http://www.vmr.bham.ac.uk/> - which contains digitized versions of complete manuscripts from the Mingana collection. The collection contains the digital images of a very early Qur'an manuscript – Islamic Arabic 1572.

Cambridge

Cambridge University Library has appointed a new Librarian, Mrs. Anne Jarvis; also the Head of the Special Collections Division, retired in May and a replacement has not yet been appointed.

The level of funding support for the Department has remained the same during the past year though its value has fallen in real terms.

A funding application has been put forward to JISC for a project to create an on-line catalogue of the Islamic manuscripts collection in partnership with the Bodleian; the project would involve the creation of a fully searchable catalogue using TEI mark-up language. A result of the application is expected in July.

Conservation work on the manuscripts collection is continuing including the boxing of many fragile items in acid-free boxes. Work has just started on a major conservation project on an early Qur'an palimpsest (Or. 1287).

An exhibition, lecture and reading session was held in February and March to commemorate the anniversary of FitzGerald's translation of the 'Rubaiyat' of Omar

Khayyam. Several displays of manuscripts have been organised for visitors to the Library including one in June for visitors to the Skilliter Centre for Ottoman Studies in Newnham College.

Funding has been received from a private donor to produce a brief informative brochure about the Islamic manuscript collections. This is a publication designed to be used both for fund-raising and to present to Library visitors.

Exeter

During the last six months, the following collections have been processed from the cataloguing backlog and added to the stock:

- 1) books selected from the library of the later Professor Walid Arafat (about 80 titles in classical Arabic literature and Islamic studies),
- 2) Middle East related titles from the donation of Anthony Seymour on Mediterranean Studies (about 100 titles),
- 3) titles on modern Persian literature donated by SOAS and the titles recently purchased in this field (120 volumes),
- 4) books purchased from the University of Bristol on Shiite studies (700 volumes on law, hadith, tafsir in Arabic; manuscript catalogues and works by Ali Shariati and other Iranian intellectuals in Persian),
- 5) with the help of doctoral candidate Sophie Richter-Devroe about 40% of the collection of 2000 volumes purchased from the former Professor of Persian Studies at Oxford, Reza Sheikholislami (mainly Qajar and early Pahlavi history, and some facsimile copies of early Iranian newspapers). This latter project will continue next year, with the continued assistance of Sophie Richter-Devroe.

The University of Exeter is investing around £ 40 million in remodeling the centre of campus (the Forum Project) with the refurbishment of both the Old and the New Library is included as part of this program. The Arabic, Islamic and Middle Eastern collections have, as a consequence of building works, moved from the reading room of the Old Library (now renamed the Research Commons), to the floor below (Level 1 of the Old Library), where they will remain until the refurbishment of the Main Library in around eighteen months' time. The collection will then be relocated in the Main Library in its entirety with ample room for expansion.

Paul Auchterlonie will retire from full-time employment on August 1st 2009 but will continue to work two days a week looking after the Arabic & Islamic collections. Ahmed Abu-Zayed will assume sole ownership of lis-middle-east.

Exeter – AWDU

A bid has been put forward to JISC for a funding to support a project to create an on-line manuscript catalogue in collaboration with the Al-Furqan Foundation. The plan would be to use Dublin core records so these would be available for searching on-line. The design of the record structure would allow further expansion at a future date when further details of the manuscripts could be added. There was also a plan to make available on-line a collection of data consisting of 40,000 microfilms of statistical abstracts and reports from Arab countries which would be a valuable resource to put on open access.

Leeds

It was reported that £ 33m was to be made available to build a new library extension which was expected to be a 3-4 year project. There have been some changes in the Academic staff but no changes in the Library staff. It has been a difficult year financially with a temporary purchasing freeze in place earlier in the year due to exchange rate problems. The Library budget is 5% down overall for the next academic year although this is not expected to affect all Departments equally.

London

Institute for the Study of Islamic Civilisations

It was reported that the Library would be moving from its existing premises in Bedford Square to Euston Road where it will occupy part of the building which formerly housed the Wellcome Institute. The library will occupy the ground and lower ground floors. The plans to merge with the Library of the Institute of Ismaili Studies failed to reach agreement and will not now go ahead. At present the Library has no library manager.

SOAS

The SOAS library, and particularly its Middle East section, is on the brink of huge changes in the coming months.

First, Peter Colvin who has been running the Middle East and Central Asia section of the SOAS Library for over 35 years will take an early retirement at the end of September 09. His departure is certainly seen as the end of an era of scholarly librarianship and his expertise and jovial character will be sorely missed.

Dominique Akhoun-Schwarb, who has been his assistant for the last six years, is likely to step in most of his responsibilities at the head of the Middle East and Central Asia section of the library

The second challenge SOAS librarians are facing is the forthcoming building works that would improve the ground floor facilities up to the modern standards expected from a university and national research library. Twenty per cent of all the library open-shelved collections will have to be relocated in a deep store in Cheshire for the duration of the building works (estimated to last about a year and half), to allow the whole ground floor to be cleared and ready for refurbishment and to allow space for the remaining collections to be moved around. Each subject librarian has had to set criteria for the relegation of 20% of their material to send to non-retrievable, off-site, storage and to lay out a list of the designated collections. Work on this should start by September 2009 and building works should commence by Easter 2010.

As for the restructuring of the library and IT services, the new Head of Library Services and Information services, John Robinson, has been working on this since last March. He has already held an away-day for staff from the three services (Library, IT and Management Information Services) to meet up and discuss ideas for a common vision and to put forward suggestions towards the achievement of the further convergence of the various services involved.

Westminster

Changes were reported including the proposed appointment of a new manager to take charge of the subject librarians who will retain their special subject connections. More contact with readers is to be encouraged and subject specialists will take on the role of 'roaming librarians' who would be expected to deal with specific reader enquiries.

Markfield

Recently, information about the Islamic Institute has been more widely promoted in South Asia and more students are expected to come from this area in the future. At present there is a weeding out of stock taking place in the Library which is expected to last until the end of September. The Librarian is now on the Committee for the CILIP East Midlands Branch and on their newsletter task group.

Oxford – Bodleian

It was reported that the Bodleian had put forward a bid to JISC to support a joint project with Cambridge for on-line catalogue of its Arabic manuscripts. The two libraries between them have a collection of around 10,000 items and the catalogue records could be held on Oxford's 'Fedora' digital repository. Oxford now has new land earmarked for the building of a new book depository. There are plans to move out book collections, in the near future, from the existing building into storage while complete refurbishment of the New Bodleian takes place.

St. Antony's College, MEC Library

A list of periodical holdings in non-European languages is posted on the library page: <http://www.sant.ox.ac.uk/mec/mec-library-NEU.html>

Plans for the new building are still on course and building works are due to commence in May next year.

7. Mailing list for MELCOM (U.K.)

The Secretary put forward the suggestion that a mailing list for MELCOM members should be set up on JISC to facilitate easier communication between members. This met with general agreement.

8. Pearson lecture

It was suggested that Francois Deroche, the Islamic manuscript specialist, should be requested to deliver the next Pearson lecture. This would again be held in conjunction with the BRISMES Conference. He would be approached in the first instance by the Secretary or by Peter Colvin.

9. Date of next meeting

The next meeting was scheduled for Monday 11th January 2010 in London, provisionally at the University of Westminster.