

MELCOM (U.K.)

Minutes: 91st meeting

The 91st meeting of MELCOM (UK) was hosted in parallel to the BRISMES annual Conference at the University of Sussex in Brighton on 16 June 2014 at 11.00am.

The business meeting was followed at 2.30 pm by the Pearson Memorial Lecture: 'Printing as an agent of tradition: Printed materials in nineteenth-century Qajar Iran' by Professor Ulrich Marzolph of the University of Göttingen in Germany.

Present:

Dominique Akhoun-Schwarb, SOAS, London
Peter Colvin, SOAS, London
Yasmin Faghihi, Cambridge University Library (chair + acting treasurer)
Waseem Farooq, Agha Khan University, London
Celeste Gianni, al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation, London
Afzal Hasan, University of Exeter
Shah Hussain, Agha Khan University, London
MariaLuisa Langella, OCIS, Oxford (secretary)
Dinah Manisty, Bodleian Library, Oriental Institute, Oxford
Geoffrey Roper, London

1. Apologies for absence:

Catherine A. Ansorge, Cambridge University Library
Colin F Baker, British Library, London
Heather Bleaney, SOAS, London
Debbie Cox
Waleed Ghali, Agha Khan University, London
Mohammed Ibrahim, Islamic Cultural Centre of Ireland
Andrew Marsham, Edinburgh University
Carimo Mohamed
Maureen Pinder, University of Leeds
Mamtimyn Sunuodula, Durham University
Paul Tate, University of Manchester
Shenxiao Tong, University of Edinburgh
Muhammad Isa Waley, British Library
Alasdair Watson, Bodleian Library

2. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted as a correct record of the proceedings.

3. Accounts

Business Reserve Account £3,009.36
Current Account £ 578.00

MELCOM still receives the £150 yearly contribution from the Pearson family. This amount will be added to the figure.

4. MELCOM (UK) Website

Dinah Manisty and her team at the Oriental Institute are working on the website, which is now hosted by Oxford. There have been ideas on creating a new section on the menu called “Resources”, where information could be shared, such as new websites for Arabic and Islamic studies, open access resources, vendors, news and events, as well as links to relevant websites, for example Melcom International. All members will be able to contribute to this section by sending the information via e-mail to Dinah with a short blurb describing the resources. A future development could be to enable members to upload the resources automatically.

5. MELCOM (UK) officers

Waseem Farooq (Aga Khan University, London) has officially taken up the role of Treasurer as of today.

6. Developments in member institutions

University of Exeter

Afdal Hasan reported on the Arab World Documentation Unit (AWDU) as well as the main library collections. He is currently reviewing journal subscriptions because of budget shrinkage. He will contribute an article on AWDU to be sent to Dinah for the Melcom website. There is a new Head of Service at Exeter Library, Claire Powne, who is keen on a digital-first agenda.

Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations (ISMC) and Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS), London

Waseem Farouq and Shah Hussain reported that all the outstanding Arabic backlog cataloguing has now been done thanks to the help of two full-time cataloguers who were appointed in 2012. There still remains some Arabic as well as Urdu and Bengali books to be catalogued. The merge between the ISMC and IIS libraries has been formally done, although there is no formal name and no single budget yet. The Head Librarian now manages the two libraries as one. The two libraries had started merging their catalogues in 2011. As for the physical merge, this has started with the reference collection. Currently, the general collection is being merged and finally also the special collections will be merged, namely the Peter Avery collection of Persian literature and the Schimmel Collection which was donated to the Institute few years ago by a student of Prof Schimmel, but has since been expanded with some purchases. The library will soon advertise for two full-time cataloguers to work on these collections. The next task is to remove all the duplicates left from the merge and to take out the pre-1940 publications and add them to the rare collection. By 2017, it is expected that the AKU-ISMC and IIS together with the Joint library be moved to a new purpose-built building in King’s Cross, London.

SOAS/RAS

Peter Colvin is continuing his work on Fihrist, adding several hundred of Persian items from SOAS, and updating RAS Persian entries.

Index Islamicus

Heather Bleaney sent the following report: “Index Islamicus data has been moved to a new production system. Technical issues are still being resolved, but we are maintaining record production and online updates”.

Geoffrey Roper, London

Nothing to report.

al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation, London

Celeste Gianni reported on the Foundation’s latest publications, i.e. two edited texts published by the Manuscript Centre: The Corpus of al-Isfizārī in the Sciences of Weights and Mechanical Devices by Abū Ḥātim al-Muẓaffar ibn Ismā‘īl al-Isfizārī and the second edition of al-Maqrizi’s *Al-Mawā‘iz Wal-I‘tibār fī Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wal-Athār*; and the Proceedings of the symposia of the Maqasid Centre.

Recent events include two training courses on editing manuscripts, one held in Morocco in March 2014 and one held in Kuwait in April 2014.

In April 2014 the Centre hosted a lecture by George Saliba on “The role and originality of late Arabic scientific commentaries”.

As for the Library, work is in progress on the Arabic interface of the portal, which will hopefully be launched at the end of July 2014, and to complete the inventory of the library.

Bodleian Oriental Institute Library, Oxford

Dinah Manisty is doing a general survey of Turkish, Persian and Arabic journals in order to weed out least used resources. As for e-resources, the one-year subscription to the Arabic full text e-books database *al-Manhal* will not be renewed. The MARC records they promised did not arrive in time, and readers’ usage was overall very low. There is a new proposal from East View for a new database called “Arab leaders, historians and philosophers collection” or Turāth. This includes printed books scanned to PDF format; they are not downloadable and not OCRd, i.e. search within the text is not possible. Most of them are accessible and freely downloadable elsewhere on the internet. East View offer a special deal if a consortium of six libraries subscribes (\$1362 annually and a one-off fee of £525 for the Marc records). After six years, members get full ownership. They can opt out at any time. Afzal and Geoffrey will do the trial with Dinah.

The Bodleian is about to open its special collection library, the Weston library, in September 2014. It is a very busy time classifying, barcoding and refreshing open collections. The special collections currently housed in the RSL (Radcliffe Science Library) will also be moved to open shelves in the Weston Library. The Oriental reading room in the Weston library will also house the Rhodes House collection and

the Indian Institute library, so that all the Oriental material from the special collections will be housed there.

SOAS, London

Dominique Akhoun-Schwarb reported on SOAS library's consortial purchase of Kotobarabia (al-Turāth). She also reported on the purchase of some 700 titles in Arabic from North Africa from a company called Dar al-mahjar, set up by Fawzi Abdalrizaq, a former Harvard cataloguer specialising in North Africa. This recent acquisition has been the result of a renewed scholarly interest in the North African region. There remains the problem of purchasing books from Libya because of the current situation there. SOAS Library has also managed to secure more off-site storage space at the Senate House library, and the remaining pre-1950 library collection will be moved there over the summer. These books are often rare and not catalogued in OPAC, there is only a card catalogue available for them which is indexed by author and title and viewable online on the library's website. A restructuration of the Operation and IT team services is currently ongoing at SOAS. The consequences of this process are not yet clear.

Melcom International

The 36th annual conference of Melcom International took place at the Sakıp Sabancı Museum in Istanbul, Turkey, from 26 to 28 May 2014. The local convenors were Zeren Tanındı (Professor, Museum Consultant) & Ayşe Aldemir Kilercik (Collections Manager). The conference was attended by 88 librarians and book specialists from Europe, the US and the Middle East. Presentations focused on collection development projects, new catalogues, electronic resources and digitisation programmes, as well as Manuscripts and rare books collections. The Conference also included visits to local cultural attractions such as the Topkapı Saray Museum Libraries and of Istanbul University Rare Books Library. The excursion took place on 29 May 2014 in Bursa, with visits of the Muradiye Complex, the Mausoleums of Osman and Orhan Bey, the Ulucami (Grand Mosque), the Green Mosque-Mausoleum complex, as well as the Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum, the Koza Han (Old Silk Bazaar) and the covered Bazaar.

The 37th Melcom International conference will take place at the from Tuesday 28th to Thursday 30th April 2015 (inclusive), at the Institute of Library Sciences of the Abdelhamid MEHRI, University-Constantine 2 (<http://www.univ-constantine2.dz/>) in Constantine (Algeria)

British Library

Muhammad Isa Waley sent the following report:

The outcomes of the restructuring of the Collections Directorate (driven largely by the need to lose 30 FTE posts wing to government cuts) – are still awaited. An announcement has been scheduled for late July. On July 1st the new IHF-funded Persian Manuscripts Curator, Saqib Baburi, is due to take up his post. Numerous

Persian manuscripts have been digitised as part of the IHF project and are now accessible online. In addition, Muhammad Isa's 'Turning The Pages' versions of two Persian manuscripts, the Miscellany of Iskandar Sultan (Add. 27261) and the Emperor Akbar's illustrated 'Memoirs of Babur' (Or 3714) have finally been mounted online. The Asian and African Studies curatorial blog continues to enjoy great popularity; Ursula has been appointed the chief co-ordinator.

MELCOM UK's future and activities. I commend your efforts to reinject some vitality into our organisation. People have to realise, if they do not already, that unless one is striving to go forwards – in pursuing at least some aspects of the organisation's objectives – one will inevitably go backwards. The more we adopt the position that things seem hopeless and all we can do is a little damage limitation, the less motivation there will probably be for people to participate, whether in meetings or in any other way. One of the signs of a healthy group is that there are communications going on in between meetings. True, we are up against difficult circumstances with financial cuts, but there is nothing new there. There was a time when real efforts were made to coordinate acquisition policies between member libraries. I realise that some of this has continued, but maybe we should be looking to do more.

Aside from that kind of thing, is there anything new to consider? I would suggest that MELCOM UK's members have a try at reviving the idea of cooperating on bibliographical projects. Even if we cannot get more than half a dozen members involved, we might still be able to make a real contribution. (As Jim Pearson used to say, 'The best is the enemy of the good.' Why not look at something like the Arabic, Persian and/or Turkish periodical union lists and see whether we can update them? Editing this kind of work can even be undertaken as a Library Science degree course, I believe, which might provide somebody within or even outside MELCOM UK with an incentive.

One more suggestion, this time more for the meetings themselves. Why not have a 10-15 minute or so spot in each meeting when a member gives a mini-talk about some subject of special concern or interest to them (and preferably calculated to be of some interest to others)? Just for example's sake, I had an abstract for one of the TIMA conferences turned down in which I expressed my views about the likely (and in a way desirable) eventual demise of the 'definitive catalogue'. On the other hand, a colleague might want to give a brief illustrated talk about some item of special interest in his or her collection. If it be decided that such matters cannot be fitted into our meetings owing to time pressure or other reasons, at least items of this kind could perhaps be posted on MELCOM UK webpages, or even on MELCOM International ones.

Cambridge University Library, Cambridge

Yasmin Faghihi reported that she is now receiving the help of two new cataloguing assistants who are working a total of two days per week on modern Hebrew, Arabic and Persian books.

There has been a restructuring of the imaging service department so now the digital content and imaging department are together. This will hopefully bring about new positive developments.

On 16th May 2014 the University hosted the first Cambridge Qur'an Seminar focused on very early Qurans (Cambridge University library holds a collection of 47 early Quranic fragments. The Seminar was convened by James Montgomery (FAMES), Shady Nasser (FAMES), Yasmin Faghihi (FAMES/UL) and Elizabeth Key Fowden (FAMES), in association with the Centre of Islamic Studies and other partners. It was very successful and it will hopefully become an annual event.

There have been plans to upload records in the digital library for the Mikaelides Collection, including some 1000 fragments from Cairo in Arabic written on papyrus and paper, with some fragments in Coptic and Greek. This collection was bought from an antiquities dealer of Greek origin. Geoffrey Khan described the Arabic papyrus portion of the collection.

There is also a good amount of backlog cataloguing to be done, and one option to accelerate the process is to purchase MARC records from vendors such as Suleiman and LailaBooks (for Arabic records). These are uploadable straight away into the cataloguing system. LailaBooks also provide RDA minimum and full-level records.

Report on **FIHRIST**: there have not been major changes to the interface. Manchester and Birmingham have started contributing their manuscript records. The next project is to share the data storage between Oxford and Cambridge so that both have copies of the entire database.

Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies (OCIS), Oxford

MariaLuisa Langella reported that she has been busy cataloguing the backlog of Arabic books, mainly on classical Islamic sciences, that had been waiting for some time. She also started checking in new issues of serials. Due to the lack of space in the current library premises, acquisitions are limited to books for teaching purposes and reference works. The Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies is due to move into a new purpose-built building in the Marston area of Oxford within a couple of years. The move will take place gradually, but the library should be the first unit to be moved, hopefully over the summer of 2014. Work is in progress to allow the move to take place as smoothly as possible and without too much disruption to readers.

Pearson lecture

There have been a few issues with BRISMES for the organisation of today's conference. MELCOM members have always attended the conference for free; however, this time a fee of £300 has been paid by MELCOM UK for the rental of the meeting room and for the light lunch. Because MELCOM UK does not generate funds (apart from the yearly donation of £150 from the Pearson family to organise the Pearson lecture) Yasmin Faghihi asked members to make a voluntary donation of £10 to help MELCOM UK pay the BRISMES fees. For the future, the issue of the relation between BRISMES and MELCOM will have to be discussed. The options for MELCOM are either to step out of BRISMES altogether and hold the Pearson Memorial lecture in a separate place, or to keep the connection with BRISMES but become more involved in its activities. For example, MELCOM UK members could deliver presentations on issues relevant to scholars, such as access to electronic resources and future developments in the field. The risk is though that if MELCOM becomes more involved with BRISMES, MELCOM members will have to pay the

BRISMES yearly fee which is currently £120, as well as the fees for participation in the conference. At the next meeting, Yasmin Faghihi will give an update on these issues from discussions with the BRISMES representatives.

7. Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place on 21st January 2015 in the al-Furqan Islamic Foundation in London.