

MELCOM (U.K.)

Minutes: 90th meeting

The 90th meeting of MELCOM (UK) took place in the joint Library of the Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations (ISMC) and the Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) on 14 January 2014 at 11.15am.

The business meeting was followed at 2pm by a visit to the joint Library of the Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations (ISMC) and the Institute of Ismaili Studies. After the visit, Dr Aptin Khanbaghi (Agha Khan University) presented the “Muslim Civilisations Abstracts Project: Making the Less Accessible more Accessible”. Finally, M Javad Ardalan of the Oxford Persian Institute, Supplier of Persian books and journals on Iran, gave a presentation of his services.

Present:

Dominique Akhoun-Schwarb, SOAS, London
Muhammad Javad Ardalan, Oxford Persian Books
Colin F Baker, British Library, London
Heather Bleaney, SOAS, London
Peter Colvin, SOAS, London
Yasmin Faghihi, Cambridge University Library (chair + acting treasurer)
Waseem Farooq, Agha Khan University, London
Waleed Ghali, 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
Otambek Mastibekov, Agha Khan University, London
Ian Netton, University of Exeter
Maureen Pinder, University of Leeds
Geoffrey Roper, London
Suhanna Shafiq, British Library
Paul Tate, University of Manchester
Shenxiao Tong, University of Edinburgh
Alasdair Watson, Bodleian Library

1. Apologies for absence:

Jasmine Ansari, Islamic Cultural Centre, London
Catherine A. Anson, Cambridge University Library
Daniel Lowe, British Library
Andrew Marsham, Edinburgh University
Nicholas McBurney, Quaritch's
Ursula Sims-Williams, British Library
Mamtimyn Sunuodula, Durham University
Muhammad Isa Waley, British 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 £3,010.14

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

Thanks to Dinah Manisty and her team, the website is now up and running and will be regularly updated. If members have suggestions or images to post on the website, they can contact Yasmin. Dinah will be coordinating the website for the time being, before a new webmaster is designated.

5. MELCOM International Conference

Dominique Akhoun-Schwarb (Melcom International Secretary) announced that the 36th Conference will be held at the Sakıp Sabancı Museum in Istanbul from 26th to 28th May 2014. The call for paper as well as the first circular have been sent out and pre-registration is now open.

6. MELCOM (UK) officers

Catherine Ansoorge has retired from her role as MELCOM secretary, which began at the 82nd meeting in 2009 and ended at the 89th meeting in 2013. MELCOM UK members express their gratitude and appreciation to Catherine for all her work during the past four years and would warmly welcome her continuing participation at the meetings.

Maria Luisa (OCIS) has taken up the role of Secretary. Yasmin Faghihi acted as treasury in 2013 and Waseem Farooq (Aga Khan University, London) will officially take up the Treasury following this meeting.

7. Developments in member institutions

Exeter University

The Arab World Documentation Unit (AWDU) is undergoing a major status review given the impact of online resourcing and as the Digital First ethos takes hold at the University of Exeter's Forum Library.

This includes consultation with its users, sifting of its materials and the enhancement of its unique strengths.

University of Manchester

Paul Tate reported on the transfer, in September 2013, to a new library software management system, *Alma Ex-Libris*. There have been a few issues, for example with

Alma not displaying multivolume records correctly, i.e. not linking to parent records. Also there have been issues with relevance ranking in Library search and no export to Copac since introduction of Alma. Around £ 50000 have been spent last year to purchase Persian material and Arabic literature, as well as newspapers from Iran in various formats including microfilms. The project to digitise key Iranian newspapers from the 1950s, late 1970s and 1990s is going well and by the end of 2014 some of these should be up on line on the dedicated website. The John Ryland's Research Institute is now headed by Professor Peter E Pormann. A steering group has been established with emphasis on Persian and Arabic material and to catalogue Persian manuscripts at Manchester.

University of Leeds

Maureen Pinder reported on the restructuring still in progress at the library which will result in new roles and new job descriptions from January 2014. Subject librarian teams will be abolished and replaced by functional teams (learning support, research and marketing). It is still unclear what this restructuring will really entail and what its impact will be on membership of organisations like Melcom.

Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations (ISMC), London

Otambek Mastibekov joined the library in 2007 as cataloguer and has been working for the past two years on cataloguing the backlog of 8000 books, 80% of which in Arabic. So far 85% of these have been catalogued, and about 1000 are left.

SOAS/RAS

Peter Colvin reported that he had finished adding records onto Fihrist and cataloguing the Arabic and Turkish material in the RAS as well as SOAS's Turkish material (50-60 ottoman titles). He is now working on several hundreds of Persian items in SOAS, and updating RAS Persian entries.

Index Islamicus

Heather Bleaney reported on the upcoming move to a new content management system. She is now working on harmonizing keywords and classification in order to make data more user-friendly. There are 460000 records which will be moved into the new system.

British Library

Due to reductions in the BL's annual grant funding from Government, the BL has to reduce the number of staff in post, and a voluntary exit scheme is currently in progress. Debbie Cox has been seconded to the BL Content Strategy Manager, Arts and Humanities post for the next 18 months. Nur Sobers-Khan has left the Iran Heritage Foundation funded Persian manuscripts digitisation project in the BL to become curator of Turkish collections at the Islamic Arts Museum in Doha; it is intended to fill the IHF/BL temporary position shortly. The BL/Qatar Foundation digitisation project (India Office records relating to the Gulf and Arabic Scientific manuscripts) is going well; phase 1 comes to an end in December 2014 and a proposal

for a continuing phase 2 project is now being put together. The BL has received a major grant from the Polonsky foundation to digitise its Hebrew manuscripts; the project is up and running and making excellent progress.

Geoffrey Roper reported on the publication in November 2013 of *Historical Aspects of Printing and Publishing in Languages of the Middle East*, a collection of papers presented at the Symposium held at the University of Leipzig in September 2008. These range geographically from Iran to Latin America, via Kurdistan, Turkey, Egypt, the Maghrib and Germany, temporally from the 10th to the 20th centuries CE, and linguistically through Arabic, Judæo-Arabic, Syriac, Ottoman Turkish, Kurdish and Persian.

Bodleian Library, Oxford

Alasdair Watson reported on the preparations for the move to the Weston library, which will include a new Oriental reading room on the top floor. The move of the book stock should start in mid- 2014 and staff are expected to be there at the end of October 2014. He is working with Dinah Manisty on updating open shelf material and changing the cataloguing system into a modified LC with language prefixes. The new library will have 2 exhibition rooms, one permanent and one temporary with rotating exhibitions. The first exhibition planned after the Weston library's public opening in 2015 is *Marks of Genius* which will feature some of the Bodleian's greatest treasures. In April 2013 a grant was awarded to the Bodleian Conservation from the National Manuscripts Conservation Trust to preserve MS Huntington 212, a copy of al-Súfi's Book of Fixed Stars produced in Mosul in 566/1170. Work started in August 2013 and will continue for 18 months.

Dr Keith Small, Quranic scholar, joined the Bodleian as consultant on the library collection of Quranic manuscripts. Ms Lydia Wright is presently working as a volunteer with Dinah to enhance Fihrist.

There have been new acquisitions in the special collections: 2 volumes of travelogues and 40 photographs documenting the travels of Muhammad Ali Kuhzad former director of the Afghani National Museum in Kabul in the 1970s. The library has also received a donation of a copy of the Quran dated 1895 in Arabic with Persian commentary printed in Tehran.

Last year three sales of manuscripts were held at Christie's in London to benefit the University of Oxford. The manuscripts were donated by Dr Ebadollah Bahari and the funds were used to create posts at the Oriental faculty and the Bodleian. Interviews were held in November 2013 and Watson was appointed as Bahari Curator of Persian collections.

University of Edinburgh

Shenxiao Tong is the Academic Support Librarian for the School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures (LLC) that includes Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies (IMES). He is also responsible for the University Library's East Asian Studies Collection. There is no dedicated subject librarian for Arabic and Middle East material as is the case for most of the other subject areas. The Middle Eastern collection includes 25,000 items, most of which in Western languages, 6,400 in Arabic, 2,100 in Persian and over 1,200 in Turkish. Books and journals for IMES are interfiled with the general collections except for a few named donation collections.

The library budget is not allocated to the subject level within LLC though monograph spending for each subject area is recorded. About £15,000 are spent yearly on monographs on Middle Eastern Studies and Islam. Journals and databases come from the top slice of the library budget for the School. A few years ago, an extra sum of £50,000 was allocated by the Library and the College of Humanities and Social Science to support the purchase of both print and electronic resources for IMES. Thanks to this, the Library has acquired subscriptions to 10 databases specifically for the subject area and has purchased over 100 DVD films. Book orders are done mainly through recommendations from academics but recently a library assistant was appointed within IMES to liaise with academics and the Library on Arabic and Persian language acquisitions. An Arabic speaking cataloguer takes care of cataloguing the Arabic and Persian collection.

Oriental Institute, Bodleian, Oxford

Dinah Manisty reported on issues related to Open Access and electronic legal deposit in Oxford. Some big journal conglomerates will be switching to electronic legal deposit only, rather than printed. This means that readers can only access the resources on the library workstations. Committees are being set up with subject specialists to decide what to do. An e-book steering committee has also been set up at the Bodleian to train staff to show readers how to download full text books onto ipads and laptops.

For the first time, Oxford has subscribed to an Arabic full text e-books database (*al-Manhal*) for one year. The *al-Manhal* special academic selection on humanities and social sciences covers books published from the 1980s on. The database can only be searched in Arabic script. MARC records are due to be provided for uploading into SOLO. The subscription fees are quite expensive but special discounts can be obtained for consortia of libraries. User statistics are in progress and will be available later on in the year. Oxford has also subscribed for two years to a Western language platform, Ebrary academic complete of some 85,000 e-books, including full-text books on Middle Eastern and Islamic studies.

al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation, London

At the end of last year the Foundation opened a portal covering 5 different collections: the library collection, the manuscripts collections, the maqasid collection, the Foundation's publications collection and the Islamic law collection. The interface is in English but will be also available in Arabic at the end of the year. The material from the different collections is in Arabic, English and other languages. Work is now in progress to improve both the functionality and the content of the portal, in order to allow for advance search and to complete the inventory of the library. The portal also includes an interactive map showing libraries holding Islamic manuscript collections all over the world.

SOAS, London

Dominique Akhoun-Schwarb reported on a new open-source library management system (Kuali OLE) developed consortially by the Bloomsbury Group (Senate House, Birkbeck, IoE and SOAS) and to be implemented in the Library within the next couple of years (at the moment things are still at the point of process mapping).

SOAS library budget will remain the same for acquisitions on Middle East and Central Asia, thanks to the constant and even slightly increase in students numbers taking degrees related to the Middle East.

Due to a renewed research interest in the Maghreb region, the cooperative acquisition project with Melcom UK which had been put aside for some years has now been resumed and the blanket order for Maghribi literature reactivated.

SOAS Library has devoted an increased budget for e-resources: a PDA scheme has been established with Ebrary that allows SOAS students and Staff to access and download 70,000+ e-books. A certain number of downloads for an e-book automatically triggers its permanent purchase. This model has encountered lot of success, meaning that the initial budget was rapidly devoured, and a price cap had to be put in place: no books over a certain amount (£200) would be visible on the SOAS Ebrary platform, though they can still be purchased at the discretion of both the Head of Acquisitions and the relevant Subject Librarian.

A trial is in progress with al-Manhal database as well as with Arab e-Marefa database of e-journals, books and dissertations. Another Arabic contents database from Kotobarabia (Eastview) is undergoing review.

Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS), London

After the retirement of the Head librarian, Omar Ali-de-Unzaga has been appointed as Acting Librarian at IIS. The Ismaili special collection unit, independent of the library, has been created to manage and develop the special collections. IIS members of staff have started cataloguing the backlog including the Peter Avery collection of Persian literature, acquired by the Institute in 2011. An OCLC cataloguing service has been purchased to speed up the process. The existing IIS collection is undergoing a reclassification to bring it in line with ISMC's LC classification. This work is in progress and should be completed by 2016. An extra member of staff has been hired to assist with the cataloguing. RFID tagging has also been implemented to complete the merge of the IIS and ISMC library collections.

Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations (ISMC), London

Waseem Farouq reported that 85% of the Arabic backlog cataloguing has been done and there remain 1000 titles in addition to 800 books in Urdu and Bengali to be catalogued. 800 Turkish titles (400 of which Ottoman rare books) have now been completed and added on the system. The collection is also searchable on OCLC. The library is considering moving to an e-books platform and discussion is in progress to decide which model would better suit the library's needs.

Cambridge University Library, Cambridge

Catherine Anson retired at the end of July 2013 as joint head of the Near and Middle Eastern Department. Yasmin Faghihi reverted to her position as Head in full charge of the Department, supported by two library assistants for a total of two days per week. They will be working on modern Hebrew, and Arabic/Persian respectively. Discussions are in progress to recreate the old division on Oriental Languages within the special collections units including Chinese, Japanese, South East Asian and the Genizah Unit, headed by Dr Ben Outhwaite. The process of affiliating Faculty libraries to the Cambridge University library is going ahead.

The annual budget has remained consistent and the Department continues to purchase books from Egypt, North Africa, Yemen, Lebanon, Iran and Turkey. No purchases had been made from Iraq in the past year.

[Cambridge Digital Library released further content on Islamic Manuscripts.](#)

Work on [FIHRIST](#) is on-going with corrections and upgrades made to existing records. These are currently initiated due to suggestions made by Peter Colvin, who is actively using the catalogue by adding new records for holdings of the Royal Asiatic Society and SOAS and by readers making use of the *comment* option for feedback.

The annual codicology workshop taught by Professor François Déroche took place at Cambridge University Library in September 2013.

The Ninth Islamic Manuscript Conference was held at Magdalene College, Cambridge on 2-4 September 2013 under the theme Manuscripts of the Mamluk Sultanate and Its Contemporaries.

Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies (OCIS), Oxford

MariaLuisa Langella reported on the cataloguing of the backlog of Arabic books in the OCIS Library. The library collection includes 13000 catalogued books and serials, both academic and non-academic. Due to space constraints, the acquisition capacity of the library is very limited. Nevertheless, an effort has been made to increase holdings on Islam in Europe and South-East Asia, and to expand the reference collection, while at the same time ensuring books from Fellows' reading lists are purchased. The main tasks for 2014 will be to continue cataloguing the backlog of Arabic books but also to undertake the RDA cataloguing and checking-in of the serials collection.

8. Pearson lecture

Possible speakers for the Pearson Memorial lecture in June 2014: Ulrich Marzolph (Gottingen), Robert Irwin (SOAS) or Peter Pormann (Royal College of Physicians).

9. Date of next meeting

The next meeting as well as the 15th Pearson lecture will take place on 16th or 17th June 2014 at the University of Sussex in Brighton, in parallel with the 2014 BRISMES Conference.