

Minutes of the 98th MELCOM UK Meeting

The 98th meeting of MELCOM UK was hosted by the Aga Khan Centre in London, on Thursday 5th December 2019, 11-5pm.

- 11:00 - 12:30 MELCOM UK Business Meeting (brief reports from Libraries, daily activities, staffing, projects, etc.)
- 12:30 - 13:30 Lunch (Kindly provided by the Aga Khan Library)
- 13:30 - 15:30 MELCOM UK Business Meeting continued.
- 15:30-16:00 Tea break
- 16:00 - 17:00 Lecture from the [Digital Libraries Middle East](#): The Strength and Promise of a Shared Idea

Present:

Yasmin Faghihi (Chair)	Cambridge University Library, Cambridge
Lydia Wright (Secretary & Website)	Bodleian Library, Oxford
Waseem Farooq (Treasurer & Website)	Aga Khan Library, London
Pedro Sánchez	Aga Khan Library, London
Shah Hussain	Aga Khan Library, London
Carlos Leo-Roca	SOAS University of London, London
Daniel Lowe	British Library, London
Paul Tate	University of Manchester Library
MariaLusia Langella	Middle East Centre Library, Oxford
Mohammad Emami	Ferdowsi Library, Oxford
Jake Benson	John Rylands Library, Manchester
Nicholas McBurney	Antiquarian bookseller, London

Welcome to John Benson and Nicholas McBurney to their first Melcom UK meeting.

1. Apologies for absence

Edward Weech	Royal Asiatic Society, London
Elizabeth Gow	John Rylands Library, Manchester
Dominique Akhoun-Schwarb	SOAS University of London, London
Alasdair Watson	Bodleian Library, Oxford

2. Introduction by Chair

Yasmin Faghihi welcomed members and apologised for only having held one Melcom UK meeting this year and no Pearson Memorial Lecture (Melcom UK usually meets twice a year). Yasmin reminded those present that Melcom UK is supported by the family of the late Professor J.D.Pearson, bibliographer and librarian at SOAS who helped establish Melcom UK in 1967 as a forum to discuss relevant issues in the field. This support helps fund the annual Pearson Memorial Lecture, previously part of the BRISMES programme. Unfortunately, with no membership fees or any other income, except for the approximately £150 for the Pearson Memorial Lecture, participating in the BRISMES conference has become unaffordable since the costs of taking part increased. This has resulted in Melcom UK losing association with its academic base and thus there is a need to find new

associations and link Melcom UK meetings to other relevant events. Yasmin urged for more interaction and support from members in order to continue to make Melcom UK successful and relevant.

Attendees agreed that it would be helpful to brainstorm ways forward to make the most of the meetings, perhaps looking at how similar committees in other countries operate. Yasmin encouraged members to share information via the mailing list and via the Melcom UK twitter, either by sending this to Daniel Lowe or by tagging Melcom UK.

3. Minutes of the last meeting

Lydia requested members send missing library or institutional reports so she could add these to the minutes of the last meeting.

The minutes were circulated for approval but not discussed and have been uploaded to the website.

4. Accounts

MELCOM (UK)			
Financial Report - Dec 2019			
Current account			
	Previous total		£2,503.12
08.07.19	Pearson Fund	£150.00	
08.07.19	Website, Gandi via Lydia	-£50.40	
	Present total		£2,602.72
Reserve account			
	Previous total		£2,916.38
04.12.19	Total Interest	£6.32	
	Present total		£2,922.70

5. Website/Mailing List

Melcom Website report (Lydia Wright)

The Melcom UK website continues to operate from a Wordpress site <http://www.melcom.org.uk/> . This year's subscription fee £50.40 for the year was paid in August. The website uses a very simple template and could do with being updated, both in terms of design and content. Lydia suggested this be done by more than one person with input from the committee. Lydia is hoping to hand over the lead responsibility for the website's upkeep to somebody else and would welcome volunteers, but is also happy to continue to help as backup.

Daniel Lowe continues to operate the Twitter account and has seen a growth in followers.

6. Reports from Institutions and Discussion

Lydia Wright – Bodleian Libraries, Oxford University

- Oriental Institute Library renovations have been postponed until next summer. The Library is in the process of moving material offsite (rare books moved for safety and journals that are available online moved in order to free up shelf space)
- Retrospective cataloguing: Georgian backlog, previously only discoverable via card catalogues has now been catalogued on our ILS thanks to collaboration with the Ilia State University. The retrospective cataloguing of our backlog of Persian books discoverable previously only via the card catalogue is also now reaching completion – it has involved adding approximately 4700 records to our system.
- There is an increased budget for Central Asia and Caucasus resources but we still have not appointed anyone to the librarian post announced last year.
- The library has purchased several new e-resources this year including the newly developed Qur'an Gateway
- Increasing number of students for ME courses at Oxford bringing extra teaching and induction commitments for library staff
- The Library is collaborating with our academic colleagues to deliver a joint event on the theme of Syria & Silence in Spring 2020.

Discussion:

It would be useful if the methodology, workflow and timings of retrospective cataloguing projects were shared as this could help with future proposals of new projects. Those who would like information about the Persian retrospective cataloguing project can email Mohammad Emami for details.

Daniel Lowe –reported that the BL have created a spreadsheet system into which interns can enter cataloguing data since they cannot afford to train them in Aleph. This data is then transferred to the ILS.

MariaLuisa Langella – mentioned that the trend of not training employees in cataloguing on Aleph or other ILSs when on short-term contacts, including maternity covers, is problematic. Huge shortage of

trained cataloguers with language skills for this type of short-term work; it would be ideal if there was a base of trained freelance cataloguers that could be employed across the various libraries.

Paul Tate – said that outsourcing of this type of work in some libraries is not uncommon. In the past he has been contacted by Leeds and Durham to provide cataloguing services. This was done based on photos from title pages being shared with him. This work was not always remunerated.

Yasmin Faghihi – agreed that institutions are not keen to invest too much in this but groups such as Melcom UK could help create capacity.

Shah Hussain – suggested that Melcom UK institutions could engage in exchange programmes with each other in order to share and learn.

Several book vendors can supply catalogue records which then go into the shared OCLC database. Currently librarians are duplicating work by cataloguing the same thing.

Yasmin Faghihi reminded the group that historically Melcom UK Libraries had split the responsibility of collecting for different areas amongst them and that this could be looked at again at a future meeting. <http://www.melcom.org.uk/acquisition-policy/>

ACTION: Secretary to add collecting for different areas to next Melcom UK agenda.

Daniel Lowe – British Library, London

- Qatar Project ongoing
- New portal – [Discovering Sacred Texts](#) – allowed for further digitisation
- Backlog of cataloguing – mapping and quantifying what has not been catalogued in order to bid for funding.
- Focus on collection development strategy including new ways of collecting (i.e. collecting OA material) – with each area reviewing acquisition plans and looking at the audiences they serve. DL would be happy to share the finished document.
- BL engaged in the Nahrein Project <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/nahrein/>
- Using the Cultural Protection Fund Grant to help set up a library in Basra Museum and to support work at the Palestinian Museum: <https://www.palmuseum.org/language/english>
- BL participated once again in the Shubbak Festival this summer.
- More collaboration happening with artists using the BL's collections.

ACTION: DL to ask colleagues at BL to send in their reports.

Nick McBurney

- <https://www.ngmcburney.com/>
- Antiquarian bookseller based in London, covers material outside of Europe or America
- Can provide valuations

Paul Tate – University of Manchester Library

Institutional

- New registrar (Patrick Hackett)

- Brief is to help university reach 7% operational surplus target
- First round of cuts have already taken place among professional services staff at grade 8 & 9 levels
- Deeper cuts coming over the next two years to save 15 million, possibly extended to 20 million. These cuts will mainly affect Professional Services (PS) staff.

Library

- As part of restructuring Library has now moved from cultural institutions (Museum etc.) to PS, with line management shifting from academic line management to PS (Patrick Hackett)
- Leadership team of Library has been cut from 8 to 4 posts

Middle East Studies

- Department now shrunk in size with only four full time lecturers and two Arabic language tutors. Arabic programme remains fairly strong with an intake of 30-40 students.
- Purchasing of Persian material has now ceased following move of academic to St Andrews.
- Limited purchases of Arabic material in literature, philosophy and biographies along some Turkish history material.
- Retrospective cataloguing of Middle East material is continuing.
- All Roman script material has been moved into main sequence and Near East section has been renamed Middle East Collection to make it more exclusive and takes up roughly two floors.
- As of October 2019 I assumed responsibility for Law and Criminology, in addition to ME studies.

Carlos Leo-Roca - SOAS University of London

Library Restructure:

- SOAS has accomplished the restructure of the School's professional services that had been initiated in 2018.
- It has had a heavy impact on the Library. Now, we operate within the new Library and Learning Services Directorate, which is home as well for the Centre of Innovation in Teaching and Learning, the Widening and Participation Office, the SOAS Galleries, and the Endangered Languages Archive.
- The Library has now four main working areas: Access and Discovery, Archives and Special Collections, Reader Services and Strategy and Planning.
- Dominique Akhoun-Schwarb, Librarian for the Middle East, Central and Islamica for the last 16 years, has been appointed the first ever Curator of Rare Books and Manuscripts at SOAS, within the Archives and Special Collections.
- Carlos Leo-Roca has been appointed Middle East and Central Asia Librarian. This role covers the librarianship for the Middle East, Central Asia, the Ancient Near East, Islamic Studies and Jewish Studies.
- The structure was implemented on June 1st, 2019. During the weeks prior and subsequent to that date, Dominique Akhoun-Schwarb provided the incoming Librarian with extensive support and guidance on tasks specific to the role.
- The processes (initiated before the restructure implementation) for moving all the Subject Librarians to a single office on the Ground floor has now been completed. This office room is shared by the whole Access and Discovery Team, including the Scholarly

Communications Team, and is open to the public during all the Enquiry Desk opening hours.

- The Enquiry Desk keeps being the main point for bibliographic and resource reference, but now operates as a second-line support. The desk has been moved from the Library front desk to the Access and Discovery Team's office, easing the user's access to the Librarians.
- The opening hours of the Enquiry Desk have been extended and now it is open from 08.00am to 06.00pm, so students can come before and after their classes.
- The Library is currently piloting the provision of Enquiry Desk services on Saturdays.

Decolonising the Library

- SOAS Library has created an Operation Group, which had its first meeting on December 4th 2019 and will work to find ways of implementing decolonising procedures within the Library and in the frame of a wider decolonising activity in the School.

Crowdsourcing project:

- The Library launched in September 2019 a crowdsourcing project for enabling users to suggest amendments and improvements to metadata of catalogued resources in Urdu.

Other business:

- SOAS will host the SCOLMA Annual Conference in 2020. Dawn Wright, Librarian for Africa and African Languages, is the local organiser.
- SOAS is currently accepting applications for a permanent Lecturer or Senior Lecturer in Politics of the Middle East.

Discussion:

Brief discussion on the subject of decolonisation of the Library and what this means for our field.

Shah Hussain, Pedro Sánchez & Waseem Farooq - Aga Khan Library, London

Aga Khan Library Digital Collections

In collaboration with Bloomsbury Publishing, we have started the digitization of our rare books collections. This project includes the construction of a free digital platform for the visualization of the digitized materials. Due to the size of our collection and the variety of stakeholders involved, we have structured the digitization project in thematic modules. We have already published the first module, which contains 67 Ottoman books. The second module, with Ismaili print materials, is in the pipeline. The collection can be accessed at: <https://www.agakhanlibrary.digital/>

Muslim Civilisations Abstract (MCA) Project

Initiated by AKU-ISMC in 2006, MCA is an endeavour to promote the literary contributions of Muslim Civilisations by creating abstracts of the important titles unknown or less known to the scholarly community. The abstracts are published in English and major Muslim languages. While the project has published three volumes in three different thematic areas through Edinburgh University Press, however, the university feels that the project should be looked at from different angle. Therefore the library has been entrusted with the huge task of revamping the project. We would welcome any thoughts and ideas from colleagues from MELCOM and beyond.

Annotated Bibliography of AKDN Literature

As part of its research activities, the Aga Khan Library has started creating an annotated bibliography of the literature related to Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). Created by His Highness Aga Khan IV, AKDN is a group of agencies, institutions and programmes with mandates that include the environment, health, education, architecture, culture, microfinance, rural development, disaster reduction, the promotion of private sector enterprise and the revitalisation of historic cities. The aim of the annotated bibliography is to bring together all publications, both internal as well as external related to AKDN and its activities under a single database.

Prof Arkoun's Collection

We have now completed cataloguing of Professor Mohammed Arkoun's collection. The collection, mostly in Arabic and French, includes his professional correspondences, notes, offprints of his articles and over 200 titles including theses on Islamic thought, history and culture. A formal launch of the collection is being planned later this year.

Dr Daftary Collection

Dr Daftary, the current Director of The Institute of the Ismaili Studies, has graciously donated his private collection of around 5000 volumes to the library. The collection further strengthens our very strong holdings on Ismaili and Persian studies. The 2500 volumes received so far have now been added to the catalogue. We are awaiting to receive the remainder of the collection.

Cataloguing of Arabic Backlog

To finish the cataloguing of the Arabic backlog (693 titles) we contacted an external provider to obtain RDA records. We followed the usual procedure of scanning the essential information to identify the titles, creating a PDF and sharing them in batches. We experienced several problems in the return process, as the batches we shared weren't returned in the same order and sometimes the number of records didn't match the number of items sent for the batch. The quality of the records, in general, was acceptable. At our request, they added a local acquisition field; in hindsight, we should have asked them to add a holding field too that would have simplified our life enormously when processing the items for shelving.

Dar al-Mandumah

We had a two weeks' trial with al-Mandumah databases, which is being sold as a primary source for educational and social research. They offer 6 databases:

- . EduSearch : Education and Social Sciences.
- . HumanIndex : Arts and Humanities
- . IslamicInfo : Islamic and Legal Studies
- . AraBase : Arabic language studies, linguistics and literature
- . EcoLink : Economics and Management
- . Mandumah Dissertations

The databases claim to cover almost all academic journals published in Arabic, as well as conference proceedings and seminars and include around 75,000 theses and dissertations from various Arab universities.

Despite the Arabic content, it was possible to search with English keywords. However, not all resources are available as full text. Interesting content, but ideally suited to a larger institute. Perhaps they may be open to a consortium arrangement.

Jake Benson has been appointed as a Researcher Associate for Persian Collections at the John Rylands Research Institute, starting January 20, where he will work on cataloguing the John Rylands Library manuscript holdings. He previously attended MELCom International meetings in Istanbul in 2014 and Leiden in 2016. Originally trained as a bookbinder and conservator, he graduated from the Roshan Center for Persian Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park, where he also worked as a contract Persian cataloguer at McKeldin Library. He was subsequently Curator and Senior Conservator for the Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation & Dar al-Kutub Manuscript Project in Cairo where he managed their manuscript exhibition at Bab al-Khalq until it was devastated by a bomb in January, 2014, and also completed a large project preserving and cataloguing and more than 2,200 detached bookbindings, fragments, and slip cases. Drawing on his conservation training, Jake's research primarily focuses on decorated papers in Islamic manuscript culture, a topic about which he recently convened a short one-day symposium on November 23rd sponsored by the Thesaurus Islamic Foundation, The Islamic Manuscript Association (TIMA), The University of Hamburg Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC), and Orient Insitut Istanbul (OII).

Jake is currently completing his PhD dissertation "The Art of *Abrī*: The Advent and Impact of Early Modern Paper Marbling" at Leiden University, and has recently published on an essay on Deccani sigilliography, "Deccani Seals and Scribal Notations: Sources for the Study of Indo-Persian Book Arts and Collecting (c. 1400–1680)," co-authored with Keelan Overton (in *Empires of the Near East and India: Sources for the Study of the Safavid, Ottoman, and Mughal Societies*. Edited by Hani Khafipour. 554–96. New York: Columbia University Press, 2019). He has also published "The Art of Abri: Marbled Album leaves, Drawings and Paintings of the Deccan" (in *Sultans of Deccan India 1500–1700: Opulence and Fantasy*. Edited by Navina Haidar & Marika Sardar. 157–59. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2015) and "Satisfying an Appetite for Books: Innovation, Production, and Modernization in Later Islamic Bookbinding" (in *Persian Languages, Literatures, and Cultures: New Leaves, Fresh Looks*. Edited by Kamran Talatoff. 365–394. London: Routledge, 2015). He will also soon publish "Curious Colors of Currency: Security Marbling on Financial Instruments During the Long Eighteenth Century," in the forthcoming *American Journal of Numismatics*, 31 as well as three contributions to *Iran and the Deccan: Persianate Art, Culture, and Talent in Circulation, ca. 1400–1700*, edited by Keelan Overton. (Forthcoming, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, June 2020).

Mohammad Emami - Ferdowsi Library, Oxford University

We purchased more than a hundred new titles both from Iran and outside Iran over the course of the last financial year. These books are added to the shelves on a regular basis, together with the items received through donations. Wadham's manuscripts have also been added to Fihrist constantly as their catalogue records were translated in-house, currently standing at 215 manuscripts (many of them containing multiple works). I have also continued to work on an Inventory Control Project with the Bodleian Library cataloguing more than 4700 old Persian books published in the first half of the 20th century.

MariaLuisa Langella - Middle East Centre (MEC) Library, St Antony's College, Oxford University

MariaLuisa Langella, MEC Librarian, returned from maternity leave in January 2019. From this date onwards, acquisitions have resumed as normal. The Librarian has been cataloguing

new acquisitions and has been dealing with the backlog of uncatalogued books accumulated during her absence.

The Library has been holding a book sale of as many as 900 items in its reading room since September 2017. These books, mainly in English, with few books in French and Arabic, consist for the most part of donations which duplicate the library collections. So far the book sale has been quite successful. However, there are plans to start scaling it down as the books take up quite some space in the library reading room. Several options are being considered.

<https://www.sant.ox.ac.uk/research-centres/middle-east-centre/middle-east-centre-mec-library>

In partnership with the College Library, in 2019 the MEC Library participated in the Erasmus+ programme. This programme is organised by the Swiss Education Delegation for Information and Documentation, an independent organisation of the Swiss Librarian Association, and provides recently-qualified Swiss librarians with internship opportunities to work in other European libraries. As other Oxford libraries, St Antony's College Library and the Middle East Centre Library collaboratively hosted an intern from January to May 2019. A new intern will be recruited from January 2020.

7. Updates

1. MELCOM International Update

The last MELCom International business meeting report is available on their website:

http://www.melcominternational.org/wp-content/content/past_conf/2019/2019_report.pdf

The 42nd annual conference of MELCom International will take place over three days, from Tuesday 26th to Thursday 28th May 2020 (inclusive) in Germany, at the Philipps-Universität Marburg Library (<https://www.uni-marburg.de/de/ub>). It will be organised by Dr Susanne Saker (Subject Librarian). Our host is also planning to organise an excursion on Friday 29th May 2020

Updates were given on the next MELCOM UK & Pearson Memorial Lecture