99th MELCOM UK [Online]

Minutes

Tuesday 30th June (10-30-12:30)

10:30	1)	Welcome & Apologies [YF & LW]

Present:

Yasmin Faghihi (Chair) [YF]	Cambridge University Library, Cambridge
Lydia Wright (Secretary & Website) [LW]	Bodleian Library, Oxford
Waseem Farooq (Treasurer & Website) [WF]	Aga Khan Library, London
Shah Hussain [SH]	Aga Khan Library, London
Daniel Lowe [DL]	British Library, London
Paul Tate [PT]	University of Manchester Library
Mohammad Emami [ME]	Ferdowsi Library, Oxford
Nicholas McBurney [NM]	Antiquarian bookseller, London
Roberta Dougherty [RD]	Yale University Library
Antonella Muratgia [AM]	University of Naples "L'Orientale"

Apologies: Catherine Ansorge, Dominique Akhoun-Schwarb and MariaLuisa Langella

Welcome to Antonella Muratgia and Roberta Dougherty who are joining from abroad.

RD reminded the committee about the possibility to participate in MELA's online conference this year and encouraged members to participate by presenting a paper. Deadline for submission is soon though, on 1st July.

10:33	2)	Minutes [LW]

LW reminded members to send in their reports for inclusion in the minutes.

YF noted a correction in the previous minutes that the Pearson family contribution should be £150 a year rather than £250.

10:35	3)	Middle Eastern Librarianship during COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath [All attendees]

a. Job security, workload, our roles…etc
   Furloughed staff – ML
b. Changes in the way we operate
c. Provision of resources including e-book provision for materials in Arabic, Persian and Turkish languages (al-Manhal, Kotobarabia, Hiperkitap, Al-Kotob…)
d. Collecting, online resources and consortia

YF announced that we plan to hold another meeting again in 3 months' time or so since some of our colleagues will currently be furloughed and will not have been able to attend.

YF asked members about their thoughts on points 3.c and 3.d above.

On consortiums, DL explained that the BL is very reluctant to join such deals. YF had been keen to create a consortium deal to purchase al-Ahram online but has now gone ahead and purchased it for Cambridge having raised funds and achieved a decent discount from Eastview.

The group discussed various e-book providers for Middle Eastern languages which the libraries have either trialled or have subscriptions to (University of Naples – e-Marefa, Yale – al-Manhal and e-Marefa, BL & CUL – KotobArabia, Aga Khan – Dar Mandumah…etc.). Impressions are mostly that these e-book packages have poor metadata and contain material which is of little relevance to stakeholders. Additional issues are low usage, especially for libraries with smaller readership and in the case of the BL e-resources are not available remotely therefore reducing the usage stats even further. In the case of Dar al-Mandumah, it was felt that the content was good but the resource too expensive.

DL reminded the group of MELA's useful mailing list "mebookvendors" which is a discussion list which excludes vendors. RD reminded the group that everyone is welcome to join it — more info & a link to sign up can be found here: https://groups.google.com/forum/#!aboutgroup/mebookvendors . The group is not very active so nobody will be flooded with e-mail by joining; RD said colleagues on the group would love to hear from the UK perspective. Vendors are explicitly excluded from joining so that people can talk about them frankly.

RD mentioned the ACO (Arabic Collections Online), which is a collective project led by NYU Abu Dhabi with 15,000 fully-digitized volumes in Arabic available for free: http://dlib.nyu.edu/aco/. MARC records for ACO are available via GitHub: https://github.com/NYULibraries/aco-karms

LW raised the question of purchasing individual e-books rather than expensive e-book packages and inquired whether anyone present was doing this. LW was looking into whether individual Persian language e-books could be purchased from OPARS books for example https://www.oparsbooks.com/ . YF mentioned that Cambridge had been buying individual e-books from al-Manhal via GOBI.

WF inquired about Hathi Trust. RD explained HT is currently providing emergency temporary access to in-copyright work when the joining library owns a copy of the book. Out of copyright works are available to everyone free of charge. LW announced that the Bodleian has just joined HT in June and has access to this service.

ME mentioned that Persian e-books can be bought individually from Fidibo although he hadn't explored institutional purchasing https://fidibo.com/

YF suggested creating a working document where all this information could be collated and circulated.

LW expressed her concern over not just the inability to provide access to print books during the pandemic but also the inability to find e-books for material in these languages. RD agreed that this was also of concern in the US. As such MELA had come up with a statement endorsed by MESA to advocate the need to access print collections for these subjects and the need to retain adequate budgets for continued acquisition of print material: https://www.mela.us/2020/06/22/mela-statement-on-collection-development-access-and-equity-in-the-time-of-covid-19/

		LW updated the committee on the situation at SOAS on behalf of absent colleagues. SOAS is facing yet further restructuring, even more drastic this time, as £8 Million have to be further saved up yearly, and management are asking staff to voluntarily apply for a reduction of hours (and salary) to avoid staff redundancy as much as possible. If no one reduces their hours, they are looking at a reduction of nearly a quarter of their staff. They are currently only 2 weeks into the "consultation" phase. Dominique Akhoun-Schwarb would like to encourage members to send a letter to their MP requesting the government to reform their approach to Higher Education policy and strategy. A letter template is available on the link below and can be sent by any member of the public. Please complete it and share widely! https://saveourunis.eaction.org.uk/letter **ACTIONS:** ▪ **Board to think about how to create a working document to collate e-book and e-resource information which can be shared amongst MELCOM UK members.** ▪ **Board to consider if it would be useful to issue a statement similar to that of MELA to advocate the case of Middle East resource collecting during the pandemic.**
11:15	4)	How can MELCOM UK feed into discussions around addressing institutional racism and discrimination – do we want to issue a statement, can we take some action? [All attendees] YF inquired about the approach the BL has taken concerning these issues since it is a national library. DL replied that whilst there is seeming diversity amongst the workforce and diversity policies in place there is a difference between policy and reality. Certain values are there in policy but do not transmit to how people are actually experiencing the situation. YF stated that MELCOM UK should aim to be more inclusive and could also engage in more outreach work. YF gave the example of the Judaica Libraries group which is attended not just by major academic libraries but also by a large number of small community libraries. YF added that MELCOM UK is at the crossroads of the community and academia and would welcome the addition of smaller and more diverse groups relating to North Africa and the Middle East but not limited to Islam. MELCOM could reach out to more minority groups through some sort of MELCOM ambassador programme. DL asked if there is an equality and diversity statement for MELCOM UK. As for outreach work DL added that it is important to think about who we are reaching out to and what are the needs of these people. There is sometimes arrogance amongst subject specialists as to what they can bring communities; we need more humility to see how much these communities can bring us. DL emphasized that for any of this work there would also have to be some resources behind it as you cannot rely on it all being done on good will. SH said we can start by looking at our current situation, and the diversity of our own staff members. DL mentioned that on paper, the BL looks like a very diverse institution, but when you start looking at the positions BAME members hold they will generally be lower paid positions and this is a huge issue. It is about thinking about our own institutions, but also, critically, about the bigger picture. The BL does currently have a BAME staff network. DL suggested that what MELCOM could do is to give moral support and a starting point for this would be to issue a statement.

		LW replied that MELCOM UK was definitely planning on putting out a statement of support for which we were hoping to gather ideas from this group and perhaps form a working group online. However, we were also keen to move beyond words and see what we can do in terms of actions. YF raised the idea of having some sort of volunteering scheme which would benefit these communities and minority groups. DL agreed that we should definitely go beyond a statement to something actionable. DL expressed anxiety around the idea of a volunteering scheme if it is based on a skill, like a language, which should be valued. DL said we should be weary about doing something that might seem exploitative. RD mentioned that MELA had issued a brief statement https://www.mela.us/2020/06/18/mela-statement-against-racial-injustice/ and had set up a social justice committee. RD said that the inequality is systemic, including in the field of librarianship where only 7% of positions are held by black people. As for volunteering maybe we should think about it the other way round – we as professionals should be visiting these communities and helping them instead of the other way round. SH suggested we could set up a mentorship programme advertised via the website and to create a small budget line for apprenticeships. LW thought SH's idea of a mentorship programme could be a good one and suggested we could also hold exchange programmes for professionals. LW asked whether members would be willing to help collate a list of small community libraries that we could encourage to join MELCOM UK. This would help us expand our network and engage with more diverse voices. **ACTIONS:** ▪ **Board to draft a statement of support for Black Lives Matter with input from members.** ▪ **Board to think about how to create a working document for members to contribute to in order to gather a list of relevant community libraries in the UK not currently participating in MELCOM UK that we could reach out to.** ▪ **Request suggestions from members via email for further actions that MELCOM UK can take regarding supporting BAME people and discuss at next MELCOM UK meeting if not sooner.**
11:45		5min BREAK
11:50	5)	GDPR – MELCOM UK mailing list [WF] WF announced that we will be performing a GDPR exercise on the LIS-MELCOM-UK@JISCMAIL.AC.UK mailing list: ## GDPR compliant mailing list Accuracy is one of the 7 principles of GDPR, which requires that data held should be correct and up to date[1]. Mailing list administrators are responsible for, amongst other responsibilities,

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[1] ICO (Information Commissioner's Office)
Article 5(1) (d) requires that personal data shall be: "accurate and, where necessary, kept up to date; every reasonable step must be taken to ensure that personal data that are inaccurate, having regard to the purposes for which they are processed, are erased or rectified without delay ('accuracy');"
https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-data-protection/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/principles/

		managing subscriptions, so adding or removing subscribers on request, and removing invalid emails.[2] This is an opportunity to clean up the list, delete duplications and remove contacts that are no longer interested. As a good practice in mailing lists, we should ensure that we only contact the subscribers for whom we have well documented 'proof of consent.' Subscribers would have consented when they signed up, however, consent does not last perpetually and after an appropriate period of time must be refreshed, this could be anything between 2 and 5 years. We must assess and determine a length of time after which we will need to re-consent subscribers. To do this, we can request consent by emailing the subscribers and asking them to respond, to ensure that their email is active and correct. **ACTIONS**: ▪ **WF to send out email to mailing list about GDPR exercise as soon as viable allowing time for furloughed staff to reply.**
11:55	6)	Library re-opening plans [All attendees] SH – Aga Khan (AKL) Library has been providing Click & Collect service to students for most part of the lockdown period and is now planning to reopen its services with physical restrictions and limited hours from 7th July. YF – CUL is planning a Click&Collect (C&C) service for early July but with no contact services yet. This service is only available to CU staff and students. YF thinks there may be a very gradual reopening with a bookable table scheme. YF is unclear what will happen with material that cannot be borrowed. Staff are still being allowed to work from home for a certain amount of time. There are some plans to introduce a Scan&Deliver (S&D) service too. PT – C&C starting in Manchester University Library in July and further plans around a limited reopening in September but they have very little information yet. They have been providing a way for book returns to happen. PT asked about BL's plan to resume digitisation. DL – BL is opening in some capacity in July with reading room offering limited spaces and social distancing. There are also plans to reopen exhibitions with social distancing. Customer facing staff will be provided with PPE but it is unclear what the situation will be for cataloguing and office staff who will probably come into the office on a rota basis. Imaging services provided for material that is already digitised but no new digitisation is happening at the moment. LW – the Bodleian has been providing a S&D service to current staff and students since mid-June as well as providing drop-off points for the 40000 books that are out on loan. C&C is planned to start in July. Unfortunately, none of these services will be available for OIL material since it is a small embedded library space which involves added risk assessment procedures before reopening and therefore is low on the priority list for restarting services. DL – asked about the financial budget situation. In the BL budgets are being cut by 25%. YF – mentioned at CUL they have been able to pay for some items during lockdown and that CUL budget is being rolled over up to October but it is unclear what will happen after that.

[2] https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/policyandsecurity/index.html#4

		LW – has made no print orders during the entirety of lockdown. Most of the budget for Middle Eastern resources is endowed at Oxford and therefore will not suffer the same cuts other budgets are facing but it might be that a percentage will be requested back to be directed towards other resources. PT – has not made any print orders since the beginning of the lockdown. Money is being taken from budgets to go towards large databases. WF – AKU have also stopped all print orders. ME – at the Ferdowsi Library they have had a member of staff in once a week to provide a scanning service to students with a few requests from the Persian section. This section is confined so C&C is out of scope but ME is thinking about enabling some form of social distanced reopening. RD – Yale University is conducting a phased reopening with priority to those who have to have access to resources on campus such as access to labs. The argument from humanities however is that their lab is the library. There are plans for pick-up of material but staff are mostly working from home for the foreseeable future with only some processing staff going back form 1st July. There is no roll over of budget and no print orders but they had to make an exception for paying invoices at least for area studies. RD mentioned a 15% budget cut for next year. SH asked whether libraries will be providing browsing of shelves? YF and LW mentioned this would not be on offer in their institutions. AM noted that the library in Naples is still closed with little access to digitized copies of material.
12:15	6)	Pearson Family [YF] YF announced that the Pearson family has decided to stop supporting MELCOM UK with its financial contribution of £150/yr for the time being.
12:17	7)	MELCOM UK: its role and format (Survey) [YF/LW] LW announced the proposal that MELCOM UK sets up a survey that can be sent to members in the coming months with questions about the function of MELCOM UK and how it is run with results to be discussed at the meeting after next. Questions can include what members would like from MELCOM UK as well as getting feedback about holding online meetings and lectures in addition to physical ones, consortium deals, election of board members, membership fees, participation, the mailing list and more. LW asked if any members could volunteer to assist with this project to which SH offered to help. It was agreed that the GDPR exercise would have to be conducted first before sending any survey to the mailing list. **ACTIONS:** ▪ **LW to contact SH within the next few months to work on survey questions with input from other members who are keen to contribute.**
12:20	8)	Matters of the Board [YF]

YF announced that she is stepping down after this meeting and that we plan to hold the election of the board online with all members being able to send in nominations in advance, either nominating themselves or others, for any of the roles.

It was agreed that the election should wait until after members are back from furlough.

ACTIONS:
- **Board to find a way to hold elections online and to email members for their nominations once staff are back from furlough.**

Appendix:

A) Treasurer's Report

MELCOM (UK)
Financial Report - Jun 2020
Current account

Previous total		**£2,602.72**
	£0.00	
Present total		**£2,602.72**

Reserve account

	Previous total		**£2,922.70**
29.06.2020	Total Interest	£2.91	
	Present total		**£2,925.61**

B) MELCOM UK Institutional Reports - 30/06/2020

University of Manchester

Institution

- University estimates up to 25% loss of annual income (£270 million) due to Covid-19. This has been disputed by UCU. London Economics calculates the average loss for institutions like Manchester to average around £37 million.
- University not renewing fixed-term contracts, frozen new appointments, paused capital projects and all 'non-essential costs', including research grants, travel, bursaries etc.
- University wide voluntary severance scheme running until 31st July.
- All staff asked to consider voluntary pay cuts, unpaid leave and reduced working hours.
- Compulsory redundancies may be used in October if above measures.

Library

- Click & Collect to be up and running by late July.
- Possible limited reopening of Main Library but no specified date.
- Only purchasing electronic material.
- No news on budget for next year but most funds likely to be spent on e-textbook scheme (all negotiations undertaken directly between the Library and publishers)

Department – Arabic and Middle East Studies
- Year abroad for third year Arabic students cancelled but discussions ongoing.
- Purchasing of resources on hold as most material not available electronically.
- Main area of concern is Modern Arabic Literature courses as majority of material only available in pint.

Bodleian Libraries

Library Updates

- The Oriental Institute Library will undergo renovation works over the summer. With this in mind we have been sorting our on-site collections, sending low usage material and journals offsite and planning for a new layout.
- As part of this work we have been selecting most of our pre-1900 material to go offsite for conservation and security reasons and boxing as much of the remaining fragile or old material as possible.

Library Services during the COVID-19 lockdown

- All Bodleian Libraries are currently closed to readers and most staff are working from home with only some staff starting to return to site from mid June. About 300 out of the 800 staff are or have been on furlough.
- Recruitment freeze on all University posts.
- Only purchasing e-resources and e-books as all print orders have been put on hold with no deliveries possible.
- Book returns have been available since early June
- Scan & Deliver from some library sites from mid-June
- Click & Collect from some library sites from July
- These services are available to all Oxford University staff and students in the first instance. Provision of scans from material held at the offsite storage facility is available to all Bodleian card holders.
- None of these services are available for the Oriental Institute Library which is expected to remain closed until the end of September. The library will be undergoing renovation works over the summer and is also an embedded space which has therefore not been prioritised for restart of services.
- Aim for reopening of libraries in some form in October but this is still unknown.
- Budget cuts not yet known although Middle Eastern budget is mostly endowed and therefore more secure than other budgets.
- Concerns regarding access to material in Middle Eastern languages which are almost entirely in print and the continued purchasing of material from the Middle East. Keen to explore e-book options for these languages.

Aga Khan Library

Aga Khan Library Digital Collections

- In collaboration with Bloomsbury Publishing, we started the digitization of our rare books' collections last year. We have already published the first module, which holds 67 Ottoman books. We are restarting the digitization process, which we hope to complete in August/September. If everything goes according to plan, we will be publishing batches in October (Ismaili Print

Collection), December/January (Manuscripts I), March (Manuscripts II), May (Ottoman II). 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 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. No further development, since last report.

Annotated Bibliography of AKDN Literature

- As part of its research activities, the Aga Khan Library started creating an annotated bibliography of the literature related to Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). 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. We have now finished compiling the bibliography. The bibliography currently exists in Microsoft word, but we are trialling Mendeley and our LMS to house the data until we find a suitable platform to host the database.

Prof Arkoun's Collection

- We have 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. We have started the configuration of the public interface; we hope to have it ready for publishing in September.

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 2500 volumes received so far have now been added to the catalogue. We are awaiting to receive the remainder of the collection. No further development, since last report, due to Covid-19.

Cataloguing of Arabic Backlog

- To finish the cataloguing of the Arabic backlog (693 titles) we contacted an external provider to obtain RDA records. This is now complete.

Library Services during the COVID-19 lockdown

- **Acquisitions**
  Since the late March lockdown, the library suspended the purchase of printed materials, as there would have been no one available to receive and process them. On the other hand, we took advantage in this period to focus on e-purchases. However, we did purchase some essential print material and had them delivered to the requesters home addresses.
- **Library reference services** were provided via Microsoft Teams and email.
- **Click and Collect**

Since late May we have been providing a click and collect service, whereby users request books online and then collect them at a specified time, once a week. This was primarily for the students who were living at a nearby campus.

We are looking to partially reopen our library for a limited number of days and hours from July.

Courses and publications

- Some papers from the seminar organised by Aga Khan Library in 2019, were published entitled "Islamic and Middle East Area Studies Librarianship" in the "Abdou Filali-Ansary Occasional Paper series", edited and contributed by Walid Ghali and with contributions by Paul Auchterlonie, Arnoud Vrolijk and Waseem Farooq.
- Walid Ghali will be teaching a "Manuscripts in Arabic Script: Introduction to Codicology" short course in August.

Cambridge UL

Decolonising through Critical Librarianship

- Since mid 2019 CUL has been leading on the project with a survey, interviews with curators and librarians, workshops, various events a blog posts and a mailing list. https://decolonisingthroughcriticallibrarianship.wordpress.com/
- As a further response, the Library has allocated resources for the digitisation of a small number of significant Ethiopian manuscripts, which will be made available through Cambridge Digital Library in due course.

Digital Humanities

- The Library is hosting the newly established Centre for Digital Humanities with a permanent professorship and office based in the Library. The leading professor Caroline Basset has been in post since October 2019

Covid 19 crisis

- Since the beginning of the lockdown and the Libraries' closure, the shift in the acquisition policy towards e-resources has been enhanced.
- The University increased the overall budget in support of this policy.
- Many vendors have eased their access restrictions temporarily to allow continuity during the closure.
- In early July a click and collect Service will be made available ensuring a no contact service. The next phase is planned to be granting entrance to the Library to local students and staff by appointment where materials are exempted from borrowing. The readers will be allocated a time slot and designated desk. A very limited and registered number of staff will be allowed in the Library. Free movement of readers in the Library for browsing shelves will not be permitted during these initial phases.
- All conferences and workshops planned for this calendar year have been cancelled.

Near and Middle Eastern Department (2019)

- The NE/ME Dep. held the 12th Annual Islamic Codicology Course in September in collaboration with the Islamic Manuscript Association and Library sessions with academics from FAMES, CIS and History. YF Co-convened an International Symposium on Manuscript Descriptions in Oxford and co-convened the TEI strand of the Oxford Digital Humanities Summer School.
- The Department's part-time senior Library assistant left in May and was replaced in December.

Near and Middle Eastern Department (2020)

- The Department has been active in pursuing opportunities to acquire Al-Ahram on-line following a call through MELCOM UK to Libraries holding relevant resources to form a consortium. Demand was high in Cambridge with many requests for this purchase in due course while response from other UK Libraries was slow and hesitant.

- Thanks to support from the Faculty of Asian and African Studies in Cambridge, the Bin Talal Centre for Islamic Studies and an EastViews responsiveness in generating fixed term special offers, the Department succeeded in a one-time purchase including maintenance fee and annual updates in perpetuity.
- The Library is currently trialling al-Manhal till end July. The usage during the first month showing

Year/Month	Document Views	Copies	Prints	Search	Visit	Downloads	Total Actions
2020/May	384	3	0	183	84	16	670

- The overall collecting policy of the Library is shifting towards e-books and on-line resources, which is a challenge for collection Near and Middle Eastern resources in original languages since the scale of this industry is still under development.
- New Special Collection items are being added to Cambridge Digital Library during the Library's closure.

FIHRIST

- FIHRIST content is gradually expanding as stakeholders are adding new descriptions and upgrading old records.
- As a result of an overall TEI consolidation project, most TEI Manuscript catalogues managed by the Bodleian Libraries now validate against a unified schema. The data is open and accessible through GitHub. Following this process some editorial intervention on the content, had been outstanding since 2017. It became clear that this is best managed as a designated task for which time and funding must be found.
- In preparation for a new model to maintain and develop FIHRIST as a resource for research and teaching, it was felt that an editorial data fix was needed. Thanks to a successful application for seed funding from Cambridge Centre for Digital Humanities, a data clean-up on the name and work authority files is currently underway. The results of deduplication, disambiguation will be presented in a future meeting after completion of the project before the next academic year.
- Based on a high number of names, which have not been identified in any national or international authority files (OCLC, VIAF, ISNI), decisions have to be made with regards to a most effective and efficient practice for contributing names through existing channels (NACO) or by establishing a direct FIHRIST membership with ISNI.