

## 101<sup>st</sup> MELCom UK minutes

<p><b>Date:</b> January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022  <b>Place:</b> Online, via MS Teams</p>		
In attendance	<p>James DOWNS (Exeter University)          Yasmin FAGHIHI (Cambridge University Library)          Waseem FAROOQ (Aga Khan Library)          Daniel LOWE (British Library)          Carlos L ROCA (SOAS)          Ziyad WANIS (London Central Mosque &amp; ICC Library)          Lydia WRIGHT (Bodleian Libraries)</p>	
Apologies	<p>Nicola HOWORTH (Exeter University)          Maria Luisa LANGELLA (Middle East Centre, St. Antony's College, Oxford)</p>	
Agenda Point	Discussion	Actions (if apply)
1. Welcome and Introductions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attendees introduce themselves, present their professional backgrounds and the most relevant aspects of their institutions.</li> <li>Changes reported: W. Farooq is now Reference and Instructional Librarian at the Aga Khan Library.</li> </ul>	N/A
2. Minutes of the 100 <sup>th</sup> meeting – matters arising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minutes of the 100<sup>th</sup> meeting are approved.</li> <li>Matters arising:</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RE e-resources: cf. agenda point 3.</li> <li>Anti-racism action plan, postponed for</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ It is agreed that e-resources holdings and new acquisitions will be reported during the meetings. But, for the time being, not included on the website.</li> <li>○ Action on anti-racism [action point from last meeting] to be discussed in next in-person meeting.</li> <li>○ Following up on the request from the MELCom UK of public support towards political issues related to conference attendees' visas, our general feeling is that the MELCom UK is a professional group, not a political one. Thus, while expressions of humanitarian support are considerable, the group will not take political or partisan positions. Each case will be discussed and considered individually.</li> </ul>	<p>next in person meeting.</p>
<p>3. Library updates</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Reports were circulated. Cf. Appendix to these minutes.</li> <li>● Inclusion of updates related to Special Collections is successful.</li> <li>● Members are encouraged to also provide information about new e-resources in their reports, when possible.</li> <li>● Y. Faghihi reports that Cambridge University Library has been able to secure a deal to acquire Noor Digital Library and al-Manhal is being trialled on.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● All members, to include updates about e-resources in their reports when possible.</li> </ul>
<p>4. To discuss: consortia working group</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● W. Farooq discusses the importance and benefits of settling a consortium to acquire or licence electronic resources.</li> <li>● Y. Faghihi and L. Wright summarise the significant research they have already done about comparable consortia. This includes other committees or groups of regionally focused librarianship.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The board to consider the organisation of a consortium-focused meeting.</li> <li>● All members, try investigating</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• W. Farooq highlights that some institutions offer courses in HE with a focus in the Middle East but do not have a Middle East Librarian. The consortium can attract some of these institutions too, which would be also in the interest of the vendors.</li> <li>• Y. Faghihi express a strong interest for al-Manhal, which is identified as a priority for Cambridge University.</li> <li>• L. Wright suggest setting a working group separate for the general MELCom UK.</li> <li>• Y. Faghihi discuss the meeting periodicity of that group, as some offers and conditions from vendors can require us to act quickly.</li> <li>• W. Farooq remarks the importance of formalising the terms and checking the departmental budgets within the financial year.</li> <li>• Z. Wanis considers these proposals of potential interest for his institution, although the current priority is the collection cataloguing and making the reference services available.</li> </ul>	<p>of possible further details about comparable consortia that can be of reference for us.</p>
<p>5. MELCom UK board reports, positions, aims</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reports: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Treasurer's report to be added to the minutes.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Currently, there is not a dedicated webmaster.</li> <li>• Aims <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Rising funds:</b> L. Wright suggests research and identify potential sources to increase the balance and rise funds.</li> <li>○ Attendees discuss suggestion by W. Farooq of the creating a mentorship program, externally funded, for librarians with different backgrounds to whom we could help gain expertise.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The board to incorporate points discussed to the next meeting agenda.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ideally, a visiting scheme for visiting librarians from abroad.</li> <li>○ The deliverer of a training program for TEI and other aspects of librarianship is also discussed. Y. Faghihi has delivered similar programs in winter and summer schools. Y. Faghihi is also member of the Cambridge Digital Humanities (CDH) where initiatives like this are in place.</li> <li>○ <b>Metadata:</b> Y. Faghihi and L. Wright discuss the importance of working from the MELCom UK on authorities control and review of subject heading in line with decolonising agendas.</li> <li>○ <b>Collection management and cooperation:</b> Y. Faghihi suggest mapping specialisation (regions, languages, subjects) in each institution, identifying areas of potetntial cooperation to optimise schemes such as interlibrary loans, to mitigate issues related to budget and space constrains.</li> <li>○ D. Lowe suggest institutions to share collections development policies and plans and L. Wright agrees this can make selections easier.</li> <li>○ J. Downs suggest strategise on circulation of duplicates among members of the MELCom UK. W. Farooq agrees on the importance of cooperation among libraries in the UK. L. Wright suggest using the distribution list for enabling the donation of duplicates.</li> </ul>	

6. AOB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No AOB raised.</li> </ul>	N/A
7. Date and location of next meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Next meeting is planned to take place in the summer months. June is a tentative date.</li> <li>In principle, it is expected to be in person, if possible. The pandemic can pose a hazard.</li> <li>Location and hosting institution can be decided nearer the time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The board to circulate a survey with dates and locations nearer the time, via the distribution mailing list.</li> </ul>

## Appendix: Reports from Libraries

### Bodleian Libraries MELCOM UK Report 20/1/22

- Events: The Bodleian Libraries hosted the collaborative [Syria & Silence](#) project over the months of October-December, which presented opportunities for reflecting on the ongoing war in Syria. The project included a public pop-up library with over 100 books in Arabic, Kurdish and English, selected and curated by the Bodleian Nizami Ganjavi Librarian (Middle Eastern and Islamic collections) with input from the academic project lead. The library was accompanied by a rich programme of events including Syrian author talks, a comic-book workshop, Syrian manuscript show-and-tells from colleagues in the Oriental special collections department, and various outreach activities with participation from the local Syrian community, as both attendees, and as employees helping to run the project. The project was a success with a good turnout of visitors from amongst our students, academics and members of the public.

In July 2021 The Bodleian Libraries hosted a Persian Arts of the Book Conference, a virtual reunion of scholars who spoke about their research into the Persian collections of the Bodleian Libraries. Over the past five years, through the Bahari Fellowship programme, scholars have visited the library to examine texts, paper, paintings, bindings, and provenance of manuscripts now in the Bodleian collections. Their insights and conversations with distinguished panel chairs were shared with an online audience watching from around the world, on 13 and 14 July. More information about the event can be found on the Bodleian blog: <https://blogs.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/theconveyor/persian-arts-of-the-book-conference-july-2021-reuniting-bodleian-bahari-fellows/> and a link to papers delivered at the conference can be seen as [podcasts at this link](#).

- - Digitisation: Thanks to the Bodleian Libraries' Tolkien Project the Bodleian has been able to upload images for items already in the Imaging Studio archive onto Digital.Bodleian. A total of 35 items were identified from the Islamic and Middle Eastern Collections that had been already photographed but were not on Digital.Bodleian. These included Saladin's War Treatise, and an illustrated copy of Gazurugahi's Majalis al-'Ushshaq.
- - Collections management: The ongoing project at the Nizami Ganjavi Library to send pre- 1800 material offsite continues as and when the pressures of term allow.
- - Acquisitions: Steady number of acquisitions for Turkish material but fewer Persian and Arabic acquisitions this year due to the need for more academic input and a better set-up for selecting material from lists. Large focus institutionally on e-book bundles and evidence- based acquisition programmes for English language publications. Aiming to increase holdings of vernacular language e-resources without much success due to high prices, inadequacy of resources and other obstacles.
- - Recruitment: The Bodleian Libraries are currently preparing to recruit a Subject Librarian for Caucasus and Central Asian studies, this had been delayed for a couple of years since funds were diverted towards the renovation works at the Nizami Ganjavi Library which are now complete. The Bodleian Libraries also plans to re-recruit for the new technical services Persian & Arabic specialist post which will help support the current technical services post for Persian, Arabic and Turkish in view of a future increase in purchasing across the whole field.

## Cambridge University Library – report 2021/2022

In line with a shifting collecting policy in favour of digital resources, CUL has acquired

- NoorDigital Library
- Noormags
- Miras Maktoob e-Collection
- Brill's Sezgin on-line
- al-Manhal is currently on trial until 31 January.

### Staffing

The art time position of Departmental assistant has been made permanent. Digitisation

- The Shahnama Project has been transferred to Cambridge Digital Library (CUDL) and will be maintained here: <https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/shahnama/1>
- 20 complete manuscripts have been added to CUDL with full descriptions
- The manuscript Catalogues of Browne, Nicholson and Arberry are now available on CUDL: <https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/islamic/8>
- Some archives of the Ancient India and Iran Trust Collection have been added to CUDL: <https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/aiit/1>

- 11 Ethiopic manuscripts have been digitised and will be published on CUDL as part of CULs decolonisation initiative.

#### FIHRIST

A successful CHRG funding proposal has secured funding for a research focused DH project working with the FIHRIST [on-line catalogue for Islamicate manuscripts](#) data on the question of manuscript provenance in collaboration with [CDH](#) (Cambridge Digital Humanities).

Yasmin Faghihi

## **Middle East Centre (MEC) Library, St Antony's College, Oxford University**

### **Report for MELCom UK meeting 24<sup>th</sup> January 2022**

- The Library welcomed new and returning students in its premises in Michaelmas Term 2021
- External readers from the UK and abroad have gradually started to return to the library and to book reading sessions to consult its collections.
- The Library is still offering a Click&Collect service to allow readers to request books for borrowing without entering the library. The service has been highly used by readers since its implementation in 2020.
- A Scan and Deliver service is available in the library to Oxford members as well as external readers.
- Priority has been given to purchasing e-resources for teaching purposes
- After a slow down in 2020 to face the new priorities created by the pandemic, cataloguing of the backlog of uncatalogued resources resumed in 2021
- The Library is carrying out a conservation project on its old and rare books. Training was attended on dust and pest management in 2021 to better tackle any potential issues arising
- The project of reclassifying the Library collection according to the LC official shelfmark is ongoing
- The Library's book sale project is ongoing and new titles are regularly being added to the sale

## **SOAS Library report for the MELCOM UK**

### **Collections**

- The librarians have been working in reducing the backlog generated after the successive lockdowns.
- Many of the periodicals are temporarily stored offsite while basement refurbishment in HVACS progresses (see Special Collections and Galleries). They are planned to return to the Library once the renovation works are complete.
- No major e-resources have been purchased nor trialled since last meeting. **Staff**
- The Library has recruited a Collections Assistant to support the librarians with purchase processing and Western material cataloguing.
- Our Special Collections Curator of Rare Books and Manuscripts is on Sabbatical during the current academic year. Her role is being covered on an interim basis by the Middle East and Central Asia Librarian and the Regional Centres and Institutes manager.
- The School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics is recruiting a post-doctoral researcher in Islamic Manuscripts to contribute full time for three years on the Leverhulme Research Leadership Award project, “Mapping Sumatra’s Manuscript Cultures”.
- The Department of Politics and International Studies is recruiting a new Lecturer / Senior Lecturer in Politics of the Middle East.

### **Special Collections and Galleries**

- Preparations are being made for the refurbishment of the stores.
- The collections would be inaccessible, and the reading room closed for the next few months, but the SC team will keep supporting uses via email and phone and the website, offering when possible alternative forms of access.
- The Library’s Collection Care and Digitisation team is finalising its planning for creating a new digitisation Hub (See report to 100th meeting).
- The Brunei Gallery has resumed some of the exhibitions planned for the pre-covid days, including Hanaa Malallah’s *Co-existent Ruins: Exploring Iraq’s Mesopotamian past through contemporary art*. Many of the periodicals are temporarily stored offsite while basement refurbishment in HVACS progresses (see Special Collections and Galleries). They are planned to return to the Library once the renovation works are complete.
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## University of Exeter

### **Middle East archives and the Arabic World Documentation Unit (AWDU) at the University of Exeter**

There are a few updates to report on since our meeting last July, the most significant of which is probably the launch of a three-year project in October 2021, the Digital Archive of the Middle East (DAME), which will involve digitisation of selected materials from both the Middle East archives held in Special Collections and other items from the Arab World Documentation Unit (AWDU) which is also held in the Old Library. The Archivist for the Middle East Collections will be acting as Co-ordinator for the DAME project, which will include three PhD posts working on digital research relating to our collections, as well some technical staff hired to assist in the digitisation work. There will also be a dedicated DAME digital platform providing access to the digitised materials, plus regular research seminars and partnerships with other institutions including archival collections in Kurdistan.

AWDU is going to return this summer to the University's Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (IAIS), from which it was transferred in 2012, and where it will be used much more heavily by staff and students. This will involve some weeding, relocation and additions to stock, bringing together parts of the collections that had been broken up and housed elsewhere.

Some of the material held in AWDU, including uncatalogued boxes currently in storage, are actually of a more archival nature and will be transferred to Special Collections due to the personal nature of the papers, their rarity or fragility. These include papers and photographs relating to revolutionary activities in Dhofar in the 1970s, and correspondence and documentation of pro-Palestine campaigning in the UK and America. We have also received another donation of photographs and papers belonging to Sir William Luce, documenting his work as Political Resident in Bahrain (1961-66) and in the formation of the UAE (EUL MS 474), complementing a previous donation from another family member. We are still trying to resolve some practical issues in the transfer from France of a photographic archive containing thousands of images of the Middle East and Kurdistan, taken between 1970 and the early 2000s.

Use of the archives and AWDU collections has been steady over the last few months, and we continue to welcome external researchers as well as our own students and staff. The archivist regularly attends meetings at IAIS and our Centre for Kurdish Studies, who have been adding direct links on their websites to the Special Collections webpages and archive catalogues. The archivist has also attended various events including completing a course on 'Manuscripts in Arabic Script: Introduction to Codicology', a two-day 'Medicine, Magic and Healing' workshop based around the study of medieval Arabic manuscripts and other archival collections in November, and a research seminar on 'Digital Islamic

Studies: Projects and Prospects' which was held at IAIS in December. The archivist has also given various presentations on the Middle East archives to postgraduate and undergraduate students, and published an article in *Photographica World* magazine on the collection (EUL MS 11) of prints and glass slides taken by William Joseph Harding King in North Africa in the early 1900s.