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Islamic and Middle East Area Studies Librarianship

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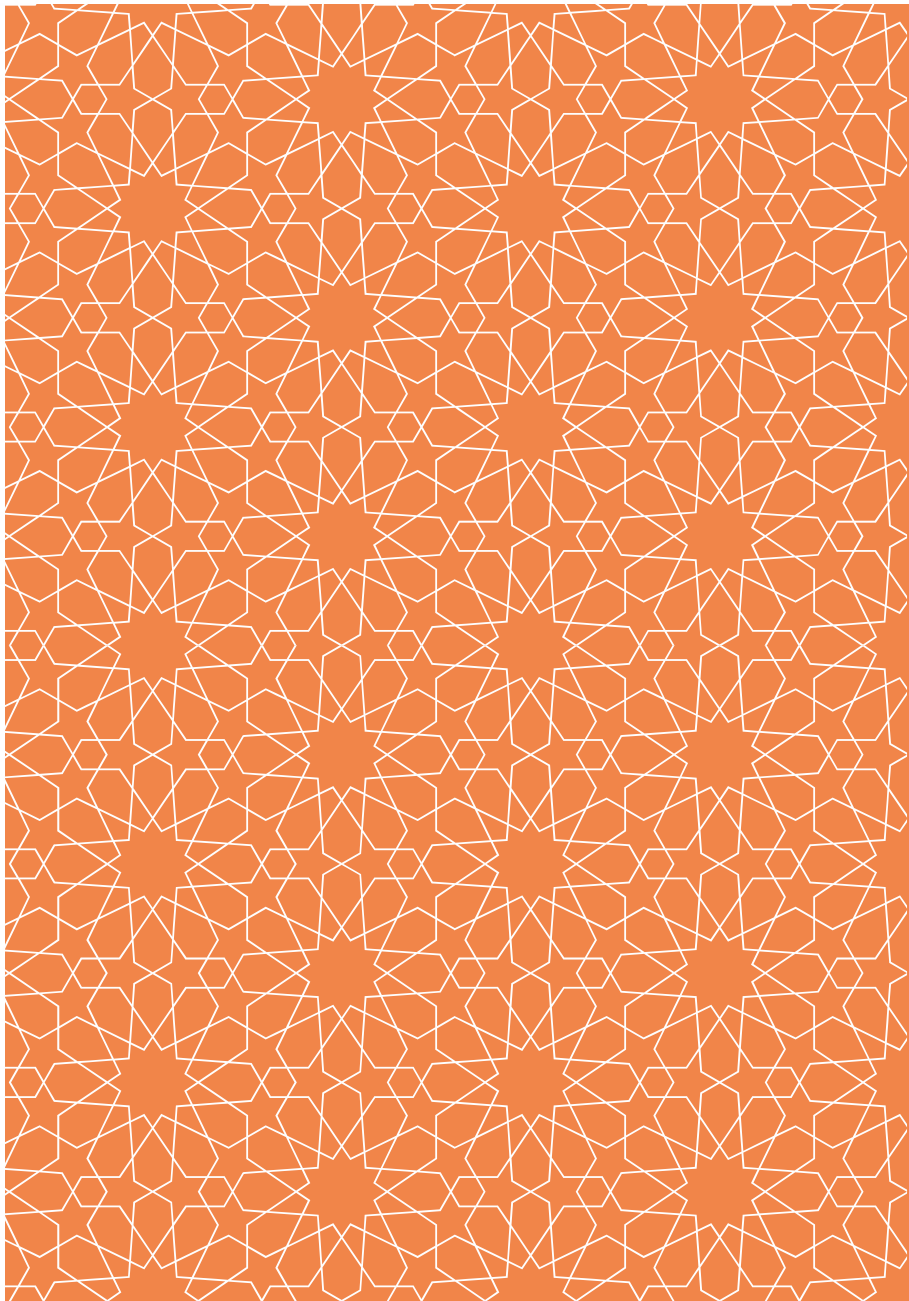
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ABDOU FILALI-ANSARY OCCASIONAL PAPER SERIES

Islamic and Middle East Area Studies Librarianship

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Vrolijk



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Abstracts:

Islamic Studies Librarianship: A Field in Decline

Walid Ghali

Introduction to the papers published here and the focus and aims of the joint Aga Khan Library/ Aga Khan University Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations seminar on 31 January 2019 at which they were originally presented.

Fifty Years of MELCOM UK and Forty Years as a Librarian: Some Reflections (Or, the Subject Librarian, the Baby and the Bathwater)

Paul Auchterlonie

Exploring the career of the author from 1960 until his retirement in 2011, this paper explores various aspects of his role as a subject librarian for Middle East Studies at the Universities of Lancaster and Exeter. It also examines the parallel development of the Middle East Libraries Committee of MELCOM (UK), which celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 2019. The paper concludes with an analysis charting how the work of academic librarians has changed in the last decades as a result of three factors: the introduction of computers, the professionalisation and commercialisation of university administrations, and, most importantly, the way in which individuals now search for information, and how these have impacted on the role libraries play in an academic setting.

Middle East Studies Librarianship in the UK: The Case of Three Universities

Waseem Farooq

Despite the rise in new Middle East Studies departments and courses, there has been an increasing trend to replace traditional subject librarians with functional teams which has impacted the position of Middle East Studies librarians. While research has established the motives for restructuring and non-replacement of subject specialists, few discussions have analysed the effect this change has had on the provision of area and language library services. This paper focuses on three cases, where subject librarians have been replaced and its impact on the work of three libraries. The paper concludes that although functional teams have their own merits, area specialists with language expertise are vital, without which current research in these areas will be inadequate.

On the ‘Excellence and Dignity’ of Middle East Librarianship in The Netherlands: A Personal Survey

Arnoud Vrolijk

The paper advocates the necessity to adapt to continually changing circumstances, and the fact that Islamic and Middle Eastern Librarianship is always a ‘*corpus alienum*’ or foreign body in the world of technological progress. Modern library technology seems eminently suitable for the latest novel by Margaret Atwood, but much less so for manuscripts in an incomprehensible script that seem to start at the wrong end of the book. How do you address your ‘techie’ colleagues without raising suspicions that you are always throwing sand in the machine? ‘Adapt or die’ is a fine expression, but in your everyday life as a curator, it all comes down to patience, social skills, and not being afraid of looking like a fool. This paper addresses these questions and gives examples from the life and career of the author.

Islamic Studies Librarianship: A Field in Decline

Walid Ghali

By way of introduction, I thought to contextualise the content of the papers published here by connecting them to the area studies librarianship in the fields of Islamic and Middle Eastern studies and collections. It is believed that Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies Librarianship emerged and developed in Europe alongside the fields of Orientalism that later became Islamic Studies.

Institutions offering Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies were established in France, Germany and the United Kingdom. Late in the sixteenth century, the study of Arabic was introduced at the Collège de France, and by 1635 it was taught at Leiden University in the Netherlands and at the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford in the United Kingdom. It fell to the early Arabists to construct grammars and dictionaries of the classical Arabic language.¹ Their work, that has long since been superseded, was essential to later progress and exemplary in its own time. However, the idea of a school specialising in Oriental Studies in the United Kingdom was first proposed in 1798, in a report by Richard Wellesley, Governor-General of India. It was not until 1917, however, that the School of Oriental and African Studies and its library opened in London.

With the increased opportunity for European scholars and missionaries to encounter contemporary Islamic societies, opportunities to discuss Islam with Muslims often took the form of disputations between Christian and Muslim clerics and leaders. Nevertheless, the terms of these polemics had changed, reflecting new ideas about religion and the evolution of scholarly inquiry into the human sciences. The study of Islam as a separate discipline, like so many disciplines of the modern university, emerged in the nineteenth century. This discipline was called Orientalism.²

Textual records and archives played a pivotal role in the studies that aimed to recover the richness of past human achievement and profoundly influenced Orientalism. The importance of Islamic Studies collections in Europe in support of nineteenth-century philological and textual studies is without doubt.

¹ Martin, Richard C., Empey, Heather J., Arkoun, Mohammed, Rippin, Andrew, "Islamic Studies," in John L. Esposito (ed) *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.

Available at <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e0395> [accessed 23 April 2020].

² Ibid.

A seminar on Islamic Studies Librarianship was held on 31 January 2019 at the Aga Khan Library (AKL), in conjunction with the Aga Khan University Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations (AKU-ISMC). Curators, area studies directors, and collection librarians, who are currently involved in this field, gathered to discuss common challenges and to identify strategic areas for collaboration. The seminar also offered a learning opportunity for those studying Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies collections or those who are planning to change their generic librarianship career to focus on the Middle East and Islam as area studies.

The idea to hold an Islamic Studies Librarianship seminar did not come suddenly and was the result of initiatives over the last two decades. The first example of such initiatives is that of Professor Ian Netton, who was unfortunately unable to attend the AKL Seminar. In 1983, Professor Netton published the directory of Middle East Materials in the United Kingdom and Irish Libraries.³ This work was well-received, and fifteen years later the Middle East Libraries Committee in the UK (MELCOM) supported a revised edition of it.⁴ Although the guide does not claim to be a comprehensive survey of the UK's Middle Eastern and Islamic collections, it does represent an excellent source for students, scholars and librarians. This is a well-known example of support from professional institutions such as MELCOM for Islamic Studies libraries.

The second example is on the advocacy level. In 2012, a small working conference was organised at Yale University in conjunction with Duke and Columbia University Libraries. The conference was entitled “International and Area Studies Collections in 21st-Century Libraries.” Librarians and academic leaders in the area studies field gathered to discuss common challenges and to identify strategic areas for joint action. The idea for the conference emerged as a result of the growing number of librarians with director-level responsibility for international and area studies collections.⁵

³ Netton, Ian Richard. *Middle East Materials in United Kingdom and Irish Libraries: A Directory*, edited and compiled by Ian Richard Netton. London: Library Association Publishing in association with the Centre for Arab Gulf Studies, University of Exeter, 1983.

⁴ Netton, Ian Richard and Middle East Libraries Committee. *Middle East Sources: A MELCOM Guide to Middle Eastern and Islamic Books and Materials in the United Kingdom and Irish Libraries: a MELCOM guide*, compiled and edited by Ian Richard Netton. London: Curzon Press, 1998.

⁵ Hammond, Ellen H., “International and Area Studies Collections in 21st Century Libraries: Conference Report,” *Focus on Global Resources*, 32:2, 2013. Available at <https://www.crl.edu/focus/article/9088> [Accessed 23 April 2020].

They found that they faced similar issues and challenges within their areas, but had few opportunities to discuss issues of common concern with other colleagues who supervised area studies across the United States. In brief, the conference participants identified four broad areas of common concern: financial constraints; access to digital content; recruitment, training and retention of area studies specialists; development of models for successful collaboration, including collection development, digitisation and shared expertise. It is worth mentioning that some of these challenges have become exacerbated.

The final example is Anaïs Salamon from the Islamic Studies Library at McGill University, who investigated the identity of librarians supporting Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies in North American and European institutions located in the Middle East.⁶ Building on previous studies, as well as surveying these libraries, Salamon's paper threw light on the challenges faced by the field, from the decrease in funding that affects collection development to the lack of trained librarians to replace retired professionals.

These fantastic initiatives have raised the alarm, but the time gaps between these selected initiatives indicate that there should be more organised and structured efforts in order to preserve Islamic studies libraries and librarianship. It is also worth mentioning that while the emphasis of these initiatives was on Middle Eastern Studies collections, more studies are needed on Islamic area studies which cover a more comprehensive range of geographical, historical and social issues.

Since the inauguration in June 2018 of the AKL in its new location (Aga Khan Centre, London), and with its new name and identity, AKL has been thinking of ways to contribute to the safeguarding of Islamic Studies collections and the profession charged with preserving these. On the one hand, the Islamic Studies Seminar was therefore AKL's contribution to continuing the previous endeavours mentioned above, and on the other, to supporting this field.

The seminar at AKL was divided into two panels. Speakers in the first panel on *Islamic Studies and Middle East Librarianship: Past and Present* shared their experiences in the field of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies librarianship. The focus of the panel was on the financial, technical and academic challenges that directors have experienced over their long periods of service. They presented valuable advice and recommendations, starting from increasing the knowledge of librarians to self-motivated initiatives and actions. In his paper, "Fifty Years of MELCOM (UK) and Forty Years as a Librarian," Paul Auchterlonie shared his knowledge and experience as a subject librarian at different UK universities. David Hirsch provided practical

⁶ Salamon, Anaïs. "Middle Eastern Studies Librarians: An Ambivalent Professional Identity," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 41:5, 2015, pp. 644-652.

tips for collecting and managing Islamic and Middle Eastern collections in his presentation, while the keynote speaker, Arnoud Vrolijk, paved the way for this panel by talking about the emergence and evolution of the profession and its main characteristics in his paper “Excellence and Dignity’ of Middle East Librarianship in The Netherlands: A Personal Survey.”

The second panel on *Tools, Challenges and the Future of the Profession* brought another dimension to the seminar. The speakers covered three different aspects. Firstly, Gregor Schwarb spoke about the importance of biographical works in the field of Islamic Studies and the suitability of old bibliographies in the digital age in a paper titled “Perspectives and Challenges for a Bibliography in the Digital Age.” The second speaker, Waseem Farooq, provided an overview of Middle Eastern Studies librarianship in UK universities and concomitant academic challenges. Finally, the third paper by Sarah Bowen Savant explored the types of innovation that Digital Humanities can bring to the field of Islamic Studies in general and to librarianship in particular, in a paper titled “Studying the Arabic Tradition at a Distance.”

In conclusion, one of the main goals of the seminar was to give policymakers and academic leaders a wake-up call by reiterating that Islamic Studies cannot survive without Islamic collections. Equally, Islamic collections cannot survive without curators and trained librarians. As far as the AKL is concerned, this seminar is a step towards exploring the interdisciplinary field of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies librarianship and related issues, focusing on state-of-the-art approaches such as developing strategies, advocacy of the profession, and capacity-building and training.

As part of that goal, the following papers were selected for publication in this issue of the *Abdou Filali-Ansary Occasional Paper series*: a) “On the ‘Excellence and Dignity’ of Middle East Librarianship in The Netherlands: A Personal Survey” by Arnoud Vrolijk; b) “Fifty Years of MELCOM (UK) and Forty Years as a Librarian: Or, the Subject Librarian, the Baby and the Bathwater” by Paul Auchterlonie; and c) “Middle East Studies Librarianship in the UK: The Case of Three Universities” by Waseem Farooq. These selected papers should serve the purpose of informing policymakers, academics, curators and librarians of the various aspects of this subject as a profession and field of study.

Fifty Years of MELCOM UK¹ and Forty Years as a Librarian: Some Reflections (Or, the Subject Librarian, the Baby and the Bathwater)

Paul Auchterlonie

Introduction

The 1960s are often seen as the beginning of the modern era, when Britain woke up from its post-war slumber and entered a period of dynamic and radical change, propelled forward by the “white heat of technology” as Prime Minister Harold Wilson had it in 1963. Much of this view is valid, and there is significant evidence for a change in higher education during the early 1960s: the Robbins Report on Higher Education² which led to a whole host of new universities, such as Warwick, York, Sussex and Lancaster, which were hotbeds of innovation in curriculum design, academic structure and modernist architecture, while the Hayter Committee of 1961 that resulted in the creation of Middle East Centres³ which were designed to marry expertise in the social sciences with the traditional staples of orientalism.

However, at the same time, many institutions in the 1960s did not react that strongly to the winds of change. When I first went up to Oxford in 1967 to read Arabic, the students in the year preceding mine studied single-honours Arabic without having to read any literature later than Ibn Khaldun. It was the first year where students were expected to read the classics of modern Arabic literature such as Najib Mahfuz, Tawfiq al-Hakim and Taha Husayn, and there was no consideration at that time of students spending a year abroad in an Arab country. British academic libraries were also relatively backward in the 1960s; for most, the most recent innovation was the card catalogue, but in Oxford, the Bodleian Library was still happily printing out and pasting up new catalogue entries into its wonderfully old-fashioned guard book catalogue. At the University of Exeter, quoting from Jeremy Black’s fascinating new history of the University, *The City on the Hill*, a new sociology lecturer, Stephen Mennell, arriving at the university in 1967 reminisced:

¹ Middle East Library Committee UK.

² Great Britain. Committee on Higher Education. *Higher education: report of the committee appointed by the Prime Minister under the chairmanship of Lord Robbins, 1961-63*. (London: HMSO, 1963)

³ Great Britain. University Grants Committee. *Report of the Sub-Committee on Oriental, Slavonic, East European and African studies* (London: HMSO, 1961)

“Exeter was above all very small. I remember thinking on first visiting the then-new library that it felt more like the library at my grammar school than the University Library in Cambridge or the Widener at Harvard, where I had been accustomed to working. In Sociology, there were only three telephones and the switchboard closed down at lunchtime. Nothing was resembling a modern photocopier, just a wet-dry contraption, which involved making a sandwich of your text between two types of negative paper, which was then run through a sort of mangle into a bath of developing fluid. One then pegged out the result on a washing line to dry slowly” (Black, *City on the hill*, 51). So much for the white heat of technology.

Another former colleague, who arrived at the University of Exeter in 1966 [Malyn Newitt], felt that:

“The prevailing philosophy was one that saw a university as a community of individual scholars. ‘Collegiality’ was a word often used and deeply felt by some people. Collegiality meant in practice that scholars got on with their work, showed a polite but not intrusive interest in the work of their colleagues, and passed over in silence those whose personal or academic qualities were found to be wanting. There was no adequate supervision of courses, degree programmes, or research productivity, while the system of tenure meant that no one could be sacked and no questions were asked of those who produced nothing. Teaching was never discussed, and the assumption was that a scholar would automatically be a good teacher” (Black, *City on the hill*, 47).

Personal narrative

I completed my degree in 1970, spent a year as a junior cataloguer and graduate trainee at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) Library, and then did a postgraduate diploma in library studies at University College London (UCL) in 1971-1972, a course where technology, management and reader services were hardly taught at all, the emphasis being firmly on cataloguing, classification and subject bibliography. Against this background of the cosy convention, the creation of the Middle East Library Committee (now known as MELCOM UK) and its fellow area studies committees such as the Standing Conference on Library Materials for Africa (SCOLMA) and the Southeast Asia Library Group (SEALG) were major engines for change. Through MELCOM UK’s foundation in 1967, British academics and librarians

working on the Middle East were brought together regularly for the first time, and, fifty years later, the Committee is still active and flourishing.⁴

I graduated from UCL in 1972 and was very lucky to be employed almost immediately at the new University of Lancaster which had, with the help of a seven-year grant from the University of Kuwait, set up a Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies. The Department never had more than three staff at any one time, nor more than a couple of postgraduates and a handful of undergraduates, which had the advantage that I was rarely under pressure, but the disadvantage of limited contact with other people working on the Middle East. The management of the University Library was innovative, if somewhat remote – there was a library research unit, whose two members of staff, Geoff Ford and Peter Brophy, both ended up as university librarians - assistant librarians attended boards of study by right, undertook duties as moral tutors to students, and were entitled to study leave – I used my nine months' leave partly to make an acquisitions trip to Cairo and partly to undertake an exchange with a librarian at the University of Bethlehem. Fortunately, membership of library and academic organisations was positively encouraged by the management at Lancaster, not only MELCOM UK, which I attended for the first time in November 1972, but I also went to the annual conferences of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) regularly and attended many of the World of Islam Festival conferences and exhibitions of 1976. Although isolation was an issue, I did learn a considerable amount about work as a subject librarian from my colleagues at Lancaster, in particular Peter Burnett, the Librarian for Russian and Central European studies, and, using Peter's groundwork, I created a chart on the different duties and activities of a typical subject librarian for my paper on "The role of the librarian in Middle Eastern studies" (Auchterlonie, *Collections in British libraries*, 91-8). The chart did not assign values to different activities. However, in that article and in a second one, published in the same collection on the problems faced by Lancaster University Library when establishing a new library in Arabic and Islamic studies (Auchterlonie, *Collections in British libraries*, 81-8), it was clear that cataloguing, classification and collection development took up the more significant part of my time.

⁴ The collaborative and supportive nature of MELCOM UK had been made clear to me even as a graduate trainee in 1970. Not only did UCL Library School lecturer John McIlwaine send one of his current students to talk to me about going to do a postgraduate diploma at UCL, so that I could benefit from John's special option on Asia, but Jim Pearson, the Librarian of SOAS and founding editor of *Index Islamicus*, actually drove me in his car from London to Cambridge to attend the bibliographical seminar which resulted in MELCOM's first publication *Middle East and Islam: a bibliographical introduction* (1972).

The world of MELCOM

MELCOM UK was also an invaluable part of my professional development, notably after I succeeded Derek Hopwood as secretary in the mid-1970s. MELCOM UK in the 1970s had three significant areas of activity.⁵ Firstly, the Committee had developed a system of area specialisation, with particular emphasis on grey literature, newspapers and periodicals. SOAS, for example, was allocated to Iran and North Africa and Oxford was allocated to Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey. Libraries did put much effort into the scheme, but because of the difficulties of selection, supply, staffing and finance, it was not always possible to sustain the programme. Later research, which looked at British acquisitions from the mid-1970s, showed that “none of the libraries in the area specialisation scheme had significant holdings [of modern academic books] from their countries” (Auchterlonie, “Coverage and distribution of modern Arabic books”, 127), although it is worth pointing out that the Middle East Documentation Unit at the University of Durham was collecting grey literature from a wide variety of Middle Eastern countries (MEDU) from 1970 onwards and the Arab World Documentation Unit (AWDU) at Exeter University from 1979.⁶ Interestingly, when a similar research project was undertaken twenty years later, it was found that the area specialisation scheme had become more effective and SOAS’s coverage of Moroccan publications and Exeter’s of Saudi books were substantial, even when compared with the level of North American acquisitions, and represented a much-improved level of investment (Auchterlonie, “Acquisition of Arabic Books by British Libraries”).

Secondly, MELCOM UK invested heavily in publishing; in addition to the two books mentioned above they published collective bibliographies such as *Arab Islamic Bibliography* in 1977, *Bibliographical Guide to Iran* in 1983, and an *Introductory Guide to Middle Eastern and Islamic Bibliography* in 1990, individual bibliographies such as Hala Kaleh and Simonetta Calderini’s on the intifada (1993), guides to Arabic, Persian and Turkish and Turkic periodicals, a guide to photographic collections on the Middle East in the UK, by Gillian Grant, which appeared in 1989, various short guides on specific subjects such as official publications, Arabic biographical dictionaries and on book selection and acquisition and, finally, two guides to Middle Eastern collections in British libraries, both compiled by Ian Netton, the second of which was published in 1998 and represents MELCOM’s last published contribution to the world of Middle Eastern scholarship.

⁵ For fuller details of MELCOM UK’s early activities, see Paul Auchterlonie, “The Middle East Libraries Committee”, in Auchterlonie, *Collections in British libraries*, 19-22.

⁶ AWDU ceased to collection actively from the Middle East in 2014.

Thirdly, MELCOM UK worked closely with other organisations, not so much with other area studies library groups, but rather with other societies involved in the study of the Middle East, particularly BRISMES, which had been founded in 1973. For many years, indeed until very recently, MELCOM UK held its summer meeting in conjunction with the BRISMES annual conference, and MELCOM UK also contributed regularly to the Society's periodical, which was initially called the *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies Bulletin* and subsequently, from 1991, the *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. Between 1975 and 2008, both journals worked with MELCOM UK members to review a wide variety of bibliographies, manuscript catalogues and other reference works, well over 300 in fact, with the high point in the 1980s, when up to twenty different titles were reviewed in a single issue. But the most significant collaboration was MELCOM UK's venture into Europe in 1979, when a small group of British librarians, led by Derek Hopwood and Jim Pearson together with Dr Emil Kümmerer from Tübingen in Germany, visited Aix-en-Provence to hold the first MELCOM International, hosted by Marie-Jo Bianquis. It was a memorable occasion, a particular highlight being the sight of Cambridge librarian Robin Bidwell almost setting his beard alight when he fell asleep in an afternoon session with his lit pipe clamped firmly between his teeth. We stayed at a university residence in Aix which had its own vineyard - this struck me as an excellent innovation, but one which sadly has not caught on in British universities.

It was MELCOM UK's twice-yearly meetings, and extremely sociable bibliographical seminars, which helped to educate me as a Middle East librarian in a way which Lancaster University was unable to do, all the more so, since, when I returned from study leave in Egypt in 1980, I found that, in my absence, the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies had been disbanded and I had been "retooled", in the Vice Chancellor's phrase, as a law librarian. No disrespect to the University of Lancaster Law Department, but I was delighted when I obtained the post of Subject Librarian for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Exeter in 1981.

Subject librarian (area studies)

John Stirling had introduced a structure of subject librarians when he became University Librarian at Exeter in the early 1970s. In 1981, when I arrived in Exeter, there were eighteen such subject librarians although many of them combined their subject work with other duties such as running the acquisitions department or reader services (Stirling, "The library within the university", 13-14). Exeter had a much greater critical mass in Middle Eastern studies than Lancaster with the Centre for Arab Gulf Studies, the Arab World Documentation Unit and innovative courses in Middle Eastern politics as well as the more traditional Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies. A new main library was opened in 1983, and the librarian had originally intended that the subject librarians should work in an open plan office behind the issue desk, but a mass protest resulted in mobile offices being built among the book stacks

nearest one's subject. This led to a much greater level of enquiries and engagement with academic staff and students, and although reference enquiries increased, and despite the introduction with my colleague Stuart Macwilliam of a course in reader instruction in Middle East politics (Auchterlonie, "Reader instruction in Middle Eastern studies"), my life as a subject librarian was still dominated by cataloguing, classification and collection development. It is interesting to note that even in the larger libraries in the United States the situation was not so different in the late 1980s, as a glance at an article by Dona Straley of Ohio State University Library (Straley "A day in the life of the Middle East Studies librarian") shows quite clearly.

Two issues which were significantly different at Exeter in the 1980s from Lancaster in the 1970s were finance and automation. Mrs Thatcher's government was determined to reduce the proportion of GDP made up of state expenditure, and the government's contribution to GDP fell from a high of 45% in 1982 during the Falklands war to a low of 35% in 1990. During the 1980s, it was difficult to obtain funds for book purchases, serials subscriptions were cut, and travel to conferences was a major issue. Automation was just beginning in the 1980s, and Exeter was at the forefront of British developments – which did not actually mean a lot. To catalogue a book then, we had to fill in a fortran form with one letter in each square, and if the typists made a mistake the whole form had to be rewritten. It did mean we could abandon the card catalogue and move over to microfiche production, but it was not until the end of the decade that a subject librarian was able to catalogue books by themselves on their own computer terminal.

Despite the difficult financial climate, MELCOM UK continued to meet twice a year in the 1980s and to publish regularly. MELCOM International also had a very successful decade, meeting in Oxford, Cambridge, Durham, Berlin, Leiden, Paris (twice) and Madrid, as well making its first foray into the Arab world, by holding its 1987 conference in Hammamet in Tunisia – which was followed shortly afterwards by meetings in Istanbul and Rabat. MELCOM International was as sociable and friendly as MELCOM UK, and the hosts could not have been more welcoming.⁷

Automation and the role of subject librarian

The 1990s were a more interesting decade as automation began to take hold. Remarkably, the eminent American librarian David Partington foresaw some of the challenges which

⁷ For a list of MELCOM International Conferences, see https://www.melcominternational.org/?page_id=160 [accessed May 1, 2019]

computers might pose for librarians as early as 1990. In an article published that year, he prophesied that

“the intention [of automation] is not so much to improve the quality of cataloguing but rather to reduce and eliminate the time-consuming and expensive application of intellect to the cataloguing process...I suggest that reference librarians will be downgraded to being mere clerks who are trained to connect a patron to a database...Librarianship, therefore, will be lowered further in prestige in the opinion of anyone whose profession is based on intellectual work. Our profession, librarianship, therefore, is causing its demise as an intellectually respectable occupation” (Partington, “Librarians”, 30).

Another note of caution was sounded at the end of the decade by American academic Daniel Varisco in a review of my bibliography on Yemen which was published by Clio Press in 1998. He warned that “published bibliographies are increasingly the dinosaurs of post-internet modern research...There are myriad ways of finding references. Locating a specific title or author is a breeze these days. Now that major library holdings are archived on the web, librarians no doubt have fewer and fewer personal queries to deal with” (Varisco, “Review”).

However, the 1990s certainly did not feel like a negative period to me, as online cataloguing and web OPACS with multiple scripts were introduced at Exeter during that decade, the world-wide-web was made available to the public in late 1991, email became the standard means of communicating – the discussion list for Middle East librarians in the UK and Europe, *lis-middle-east*, dates in fact from 1999 – and optical character recognition became incorporated into Unicode. At Exeter, as elsewhere in Britain, there was more money, and there were more students, and even some new buildings as universities sought wealthy donors in the Middle East.

The new millennium, however, brought with it substantial and to some extent, disturbing change not only in libraries but also in university administration. At the University of Exeter, Senate had been reformed in the early 1980s to reduce the power of too dominant professors, only for a caucus of “young Turk” lecturers to block many of the reforms (Black, *City on the hill*, 117). However, the introduction of league tables and the money which followed them brought a change of mood and intention, and the appointment of Sir Steve Smith as Vice-Chancellor of Exeter University in 2002 led quickly to the introduction of the phraseology of ‘new Exeter’ and ‘old Exeter’, which was a conscious imitation of Labour under Tony Blair (Black, *City on the hill*, 213). The words managerial, professional and centralisation occur ominously often in the latter part of Jeremy Black’s history of the university, as the new Vice-Chancellor gathered a management team around him called the Vice-Chancellors’ Executive

Group, which dominated decision making and emasculated Senate. Black saw the new structure “as an instance of a more widespread neo-liberalisation across much of the world. ‘Exeter plc’ had parallels with a modern high profile company, with a strong CEO, a clear mission statement, a concern with brand and positioning, a strong centralised administration, an emphasis on quantification, an intolerance of underperformance and a determination to invest for success” (Black, *City on the hill*, 238).

Meanwhile, in the library, in the early noughties, subject librarianship seemed to be going from strength to strength. The Middle Eastern collections dominated the reading room of the Old Library, the Arab World Documentation Unit expanded dramatically under the leadership of Ahmed Abu-Zayed, information literacy was incorporated as a compulsory element into the foundation course for all masters students at the new Institute of Arab and Islamic studies, collection development expanded as research in new subjects developed, for example, Kurdish studies and Shi`ite studies, and attempts were being made by many libraries, not only Exeter, directing the use of the world-wide-web by producing lists of the most important sites and URLs. I even, with the help of Ahmed, produced a report called *Review of User Requirements for Digitised Resources in Islamic Studies*, or more colloquially *Digi-Islam*, a summary of which I presented to the MELCOM International conference in Oxford in 2008. *Digi-Islam* was my last publication in the field of Middle East librarianship, and I have not been involved in any of the numerous excellent digitisation projects which have so transformed our subject over the past decade, and which have replaced hard-copy publication as the major method of national collaboration and co-operation for MELCOM UK.⁸

However, all these activities masked the fact that the fundamental principles of subject librarianship were about to change and the appointment of Michele Shoebridge in 2006 as Director of Information Studies at Exeter was the catalyst for transforming how Exeter University Library saw its staff and also its staff’s relationship to their users. Although never explained by management at the time, there were theoretical underpinnings to the changes imposed at Exeter as a review of the recent literature on librarianship makes clear.

Nearly all of the many user studies published in the *Journal of Academic Librarianship* over the past fifteen years confirm the rise of self-searching and the demise of the role of the librarian as a gatekeeper. In a participant observation study of young researchers in Sweden in 2008, it was found that “the search methodology of the researchers can be characterised by ‘trial and error’. They have no planned search strategy, but start at random, experimenting

⁸ For example, *Fihrist: a union catalogue of manuscripts from the Islamic world [held by British libraries]*, to which many MELCOM UK libraries have contributed (see <https://www.fihrist.org.uk/>) [accessed May 1, 2019]

both with the actual words and sources to use. Even if they are unsuccessful or fail to understand what went wrong, they never use manuals, for instructions. The idea of contacting the library for help does not occur to them. They have little or no knowledge of the finer points of many information sources. The majority of the researchers seldom use the library web page as a starting point for information searching” (Haglund & Olsson, “The impact on university libraries of changes in information behaviour”, 55). A more recent study confirms that bypassing library staff is not an isolated phenomenon: in the literature survey which begins their research, it was found by Thomas, Tewell and Willson that “when seeking help on their research projects, students turn to their professors and peers, and only sometimes to librarians. Nearly every published study of help-seeking behaviour reached this conclusion” (Thomas, Tewell & Willson, “Where students start”, 225). In their study of students in America, these three researchers found that “students were generally unsure or unaware of librarians’ roles or purpose...this finding is interesting to consider in conjunction with students’ perception of librarians as lacking insider knowledge, as it indicates a widespread lack of awareness of librarians’ work” (Thomas, Tewell & Willson, “Where students start”, 227).

It is not surprising that the cumulative effect of these user studies has been to cause the whole concept of the academic library and the subject librarian to be re-evaluated. Two of the more radical researchers in information science in the United States, Lyman Ross and Pongracz Sennyey, have looked at the library in three ways. Firstly, the library as a building, where they found it had adapted quite well, since it has “a central location, fast computer connections, free printing, comfortable chairs” (Sennyey, Ross & Mills, “Exploring the future of academic libraries”, 253) and often value-added spaces, for example, rooms for group study, a café, or student support services.

Secondly, however, they see the library as a place where collections are housed as a less successful concept, since the distributed nature of the digital content which has formed the bulk of recent acquisitions, and the use of Google as the primary discovery engine have together reduced the need for librarians. The authors see the library’s increasingly digital holdings as creating a paradox whereby the more digital content is available, the more this reduces the perception of the library as a place which needs to be visited in order to use the collections.

Thirdly, from staff, they suggest that “The compelling efficiencies of scale brought by approval plans, bundled digital collections and open access titles limit the library’s ability to select titles. In effect, the universe of collectable materials is shifting as, for example, the open access movement creates a growing corpus that is accessible outside the aegis of the library” (Sennyey, Ross & Mills, “Exploring the future of academic libraries”, 254). They continue, “As

a result, the institutional knowledge that the staff once had of the collection has diminished, and the stereotype of the librarian as gatekeeper is now largely false” (Sennyey, Ross & Mills, “Exploring the future of academic libraries”, 254). The authors suggest that librarians will gradually lose their subject functions and will assume roles such as managing institutional repositories, running cyber-infrastructure projects, and being involved in digital data conversion, data mining, GIS [Geographic Information Systems] applications, and other similar functions (Sennyey, Ross & Mills, “Exploring the future of academic libraries”, 255).

Conclusion

This may sound both like scare-mongering and the meanderings of a superannuated subject librarian, but, the essence of the changes foreseen by Partington as far back as 1990 and detailed with great clarity by Ross and Sennyey in the first decade of the twenty-first century,⁹ Have come to pass at Exeter University Library. So many library staff there have left recently and have not been replaced (almost 40% left over six months in 2015), that the array of subject librarians, of whom John Stirling was so proud, is no more. Enquiries are dealt with on a daily rota basis by whichever reference librarian is on duty that day. Although there are still substantial collections of Middle Eastern material - 60,000 monographs in the Main Library and 100,000 items in the Documentation Unit, and over thirty academics working on the Middle East - there is no librarian with the linguistic or subject knowledge to service these users, there is no directed book selection by library staff in Middle Eastern studies, and no books are bought in Arabic script (or if they are, they cannot be properly catalogued).

Although one must move with the times, there is a great danger, when looking at academic library staff structures, of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. I would argue strongly that librarians who do have subject knowledge – and almost everyone currently working in Middle East librarianship does, to go by Anaïs Salomon’s recent article in the *Journal of Academic Librarianship* – can give significant added value to the collections, provided, of course, that they can meet their users and persuade them that librarians can offer a useful service. The report by Laura Adams on the state of area studies in North America published by the National Council of Area Studies Associations in 2014, warns that “we may be seeing a trend of de-professionalisation among librarians with area studies expertise more broadly, with a large retiring cohort and a relatively small number of incoming students” (Adams, *State of Area Studies*, 11). This warning needs to be heeded. If the experience of Exeter University Library and the recent (December 2018) announcement by SOAS that some subject librarian

⁹ See also the important article by Lyman Ross and Pongracz Sennyey, “The library is dead, long live the library! The practice of academic librarianship and the digital revolution” in *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 34, ii, 2008, 145-52.

posts there are to be abolished, then both MELCOM UK¹⁰ & MELCOM International need to be on their guard, so that the de-professionalisation of the traditional Middle Eastern and Islamic studies subject librarian, so convincingly and frighteningly forecast by Ross and Sennyey, does not come to pass in their libraries and institutions.

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¹⁰ The Chair of MELCOM UK, Yasmin Faghihi, wrote an open letter of protest to SOAS about the proposed job losses and highlighted the recent loss of subject librarian posts in Middle Eastern studies at the universities of Manchester and Leeds. For the text of the letter see <http://www.melcom.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/SOAS-Library-Letter-A-plea-from-MELCOM-UK.pdf> [accessed May 1 2019]

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Middle East Studies Librarianship in the UK: The Case of Three Universities

Waseem Farooq

Introduction

Over the past six years, the role of Middle East Studies Librarian at various UK universities, along with other subject librarians, has been affected by an overall restructuring of library management structures. These changes have affected Middle East Librarians in various ways. Some have decided to continue and adapt to the changes. While others felt they could not identify with the new roles selected for them and decided to move to new subject areas elsewhere – despite these new areas being starkly different from their previous roles. Others have resigned from their libraries, hoping to find another Middle East Studies Librarian role elsewhere.

To illustrate the impact these changes have had on collection development, I have focused on three university libraries in this paper: the libraries of the Universities of Manchester, Leeds and Exeter, which have all been affected by these developments. I will show the number of universities offering Middle East or Islamic Studies courses, and whether they have a subject specialist librarian. In the end, we may well muse whether a subject specialist librarian is needed, and how the trend of relegating and not replacing specialist librarians could impact the future of other Middle East or Islamic Studies departments. Finally, for this paper, I have focused on Higher Education providers only and have not looked at other institutions that hold Middle East-related material.

Restructuring of the libraries

In 2012, a trend was initiated by the University of Manchester Library, a designated national research library, to replace its traditional subject librarians with functional teams (Bains, 2013: 8; Hoodless & Pinfield, 2018: 345). This also affected the position of the Middle East Librarian. The restructuring was a response to the changing information environment and the shift of emphasis from collections to users.

Those who supported the restructuring cited that the functional team structure promoted a flat management structure and a shift towards self-managed teams, for flexibility and adaptability to change (Andrade & Zaghoul et al., 2010: 273). Some also argued that functional teams were cost-effective, consistent and measurable (Heseltine, 1995: 432-3;

Hoodless & Pinfield, 2018: 347). Furthermore, as far back as the 1970s and '90s, Dennis W. Dickinson, Richard Heseltine, and others predicted that subject librarianship would become irrelevant as the focus shifted from contributing subject knowledge to teaching skills and competencies (Gaston, 2001: 30; Heseltine, 1995: 432-3; Hoodless & Pinfield, 2018: 346).

The major reason is the financial cutbacks that are often cited as common factors for restructuring; however, it seems that this may not be the only incentive. Indeed, the restructuring at Manchester University Library was not the result of cutbacks. According to them, the reasons for restructuring the Library were to align its services with the university's overall teaching, learning and research strategies. Instead of financial cuts, therefore, it was to invest further in staff training and development. The library had secured a successful bid for additional funding for this purpose (Tate, 2018).

The University of Leeds also cited that the restructuring was not due to financial cuts, but that they had followed the example set by Manchester. Moreover, the Librarian who initiated the Manchester restructuring had moved to Leeds to initiate the same experiment at Leeds (Pinder, 2018). In some cases, the reasons for restructuring were not clear, such as at the University of Exeter. Commenting on their decision, Paul Auchterlonie, who had served as the librarian at Exeter University Library for about 40 years, noted in the context of our correspondence on Exeter, that:

“Many academic libraries have abolished subject librarian teams because of the perceived reduction in the importance of the librarian as a source of information.” (Auchterlonie, 2017, 2018)

Impact on acquisitions

Due to this restructuring, there has been an overall impact on the level of acquisitions and collection development amongst the three university libraries mentioned above. Since the 2012 restructuring at the University of Manchester, where there had been a dedicated Middle East specialist, there had been a reduction in the number of requests from academics for Middle East resources in the vernacular scripts. In the recent past there had been a good number of requests for Persian material by an academic, however, when this academic moved to another university, these requests ended (Tate, 2018).

At the University of Leeds, from 2002-2014, they had a dedicated librarian to liaise with the Middle East department. As a result, the academics in that department recommended the acquisitions of Arabic publications. A part-time cataloguer then did the cataloguing. Since the 2014 restructuring, however, they rely on academics for requests, and there is no pro-active collection development. The library purchases the Middle East-related resources on demand. Arabic cataloguing is outsourced, as and when needed (Pinder, 2018).

At the University of Exeter, since the 2015 restructuring, there seem to have been no acquisitions of works in Middle Eastern languages. The library, however, has been reluctantly accepting donations in Middle Eastern languages. These were voluntarily catalogued by the retired Middle East Librarian, Paul Auchterlonie. He reported, in October 2018, that about 20 books were catalogued in 2018 (Auchterlonie, 2018).

Future prospects for the Middle East librarian

Based on the discussion above, the question remains: what does the future hold for the Middle East specialist? There is no shortage of courses available for Middle East Studies, and there seems to be a growing curve in universities offering Middle East-related courses. To gauge this, figure 1 (below) shows the various offerings shared on the website of The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS; a UK-based organisation, whose primary role is to manage the application process for British universities). When searching for Middle Eastern Studies courses on the UCAS website for 2019 entry, the results suggest 22 universities, which between them offer a total of 228 Middle East-related courses on a variety of subjects. These are primarily undergraduate or taught postgraduate courses; the actual figure may be higher than mentioned. Moreover, the number is growing.

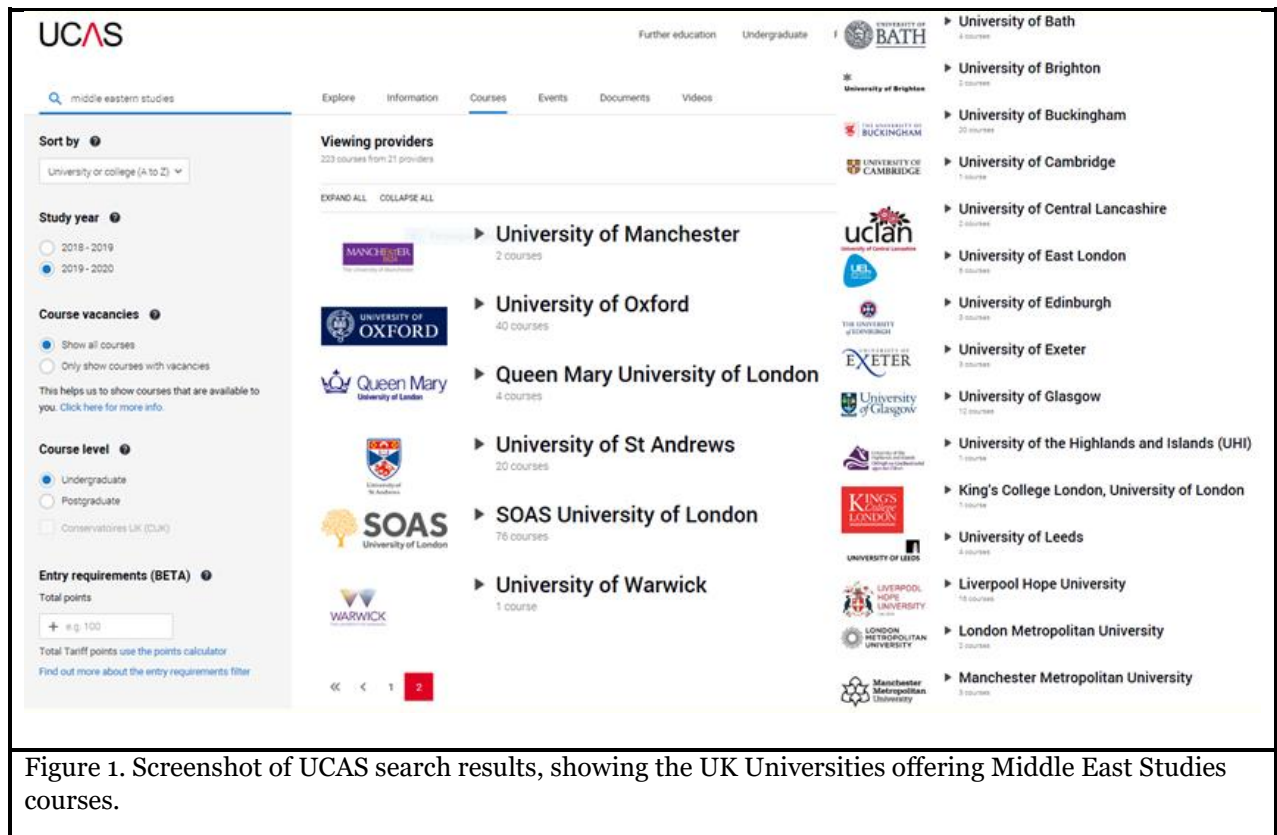


Figure 1. Screenshot of UCAS search results, showing the UK Universities offering Middle East Studies courses.

UK HE Institutions offering courses in Middle East Studies with a ME Librarian	
SOAS University of London	Yes
University of Oxford	Yes
University of Cambridge	Yes
University of Manchester	Previously
University of Exeter	Previously
University of Leeds	Previously
University of Durham	Previously
University of Edinburgh	
University of St Andrews	
University of Central Lancashire	
University of Warwick	
University of Glasgow	
University of Buckingham	
Liverpool Hope University	
University of East London	
Queen Mary University of London	
University of Bath	
Manchester Metropolitan University	
London Metropolitan University	
University of Brighton	
Birkbeck, University of London	
University of the Highlands and Islands	
Table 1. UK Higher Education institutions that have a Middle East Librarian, or that recently had one.	

Despite there being a good number of universities offering Middle Eastern Studies courses, the number of librarians related to the field is diminishing. Table 1 above demonstrates:

- 3 out of 22 universities have a dedicated Middle East Librarian
- 4 out of 22 universities had a dedicated Middle East Subject Librarian in the recent past (since 2012)
- The Middle East Librarian at the University of Durham left in 2018 (Sunuodula, 2019)

When one adds Islamic Studies to the UCAS search, the number of providers and courses increases significantly. Indeed, a total of 31 universities offer a combination of 324 courses on a variety of subjects. Despite the addition of Islamic Studies, the number of university libraries that have a dedicated specialist librarian remains the same at three. Sadly, if the trend of restructuring continues, and if area and language specialists are eliminated, this will have a devastating impact on area-specific collection development, research and their related academic departments.

Raising the profile of the Middle East librarian

To remain relevant and sustain value in today's rapidly evolving age, specialist librarians will need to be pro-active and demonstrate their skills and knowledge to their stakeholders. Therefore, librarians may contribute towards research in their subject areas, by presenting in professional or academic conferences, writing articles and publishing books or chapters, so that stakeholders will witness the depth of knowledge held by subject specialists. Nevertheless, they will need to develop their skills and knowledge in line with the changing nature of their trade, which has moved beyond print to the digital world of ebooks, ejournals and other information sources.

Librarians may also consider pro-actively promoting and demonstrating the significance of area and language specialist librarians and the value they add to the profile of an institution. It can be confidently asserted that the value of current resources from the Middle East in vernacular languages will add depth to the information needs of an institution's patrons and researchers, thereby adding value to both their own, as well as overall research outputs, thereby raising the university's profile and rank in national and international league tables.

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On the ‘Excellence and Dignity’ of Middle East Librarianship in The Netherlands: A Personal Survey

Arnoud Vrolijk

Introduction

It is a truism that during the past three or four decades Middle East librarianship has witnessed tremendous changes. When I started out as an assistant curator at Leiden University Library in 1987 we still worked with card catalogues for modern publications in non-Latin script languages. The computer had only just made a timid entry with an online catalogue which contained all titles acquired since 1963 – but only those in Latin script. It is not for me to decide whether we were the agents of change or rather its victims; perhaps we were both. But this is a perfect occasion to stand still and reflect on what has been. The topic itself is vastly complicated, and this contribution is explicitly not a detailed survey of technological change in librarianship. It is much rather a very personal – and admittedly subjective – account of how these changes affected me as an (assistant) curator of Oriental manuscripts and rare books.

It is also evident that technology was not the only aspect of change in librarianship; it was also inextricably linked to the general development of Middle Eastern and Islamic studies, which were in turn dependent on political and economic factors. I shall, therefore, explore the history of Oriental studies in the Netherlands and how it found a place in Dutch society. Secondly, I shall speak about the changes I witnessed in the organisation and management of my own library and how it affected my work as a curator. I shall furthermore devote some attention to the role of public and private funding in some of the projects I have undertaken, and I will give a brief exposé of the lessons I learned in my contacts with the world outside the walls of my library. Finally, I will reflect on the more technical matter of cataloguing Arabic manuscripts and how it followed the general trends in my library. In this contribution, I have generally omitted the names of the individuals involved, except where this was not necessary or undesirable.

Early beginnings

The history of the study of the languages and cultures of the Islamic world at Leiden University goes back more than 430 years.¹ In 1585, when the city of Antwerp was sacked by Spanish troops, the Protestant Flemish scholar Franciscus Raphelengius or Frans van Ravelingen (1539–1597), the son-in-law of the famous printer Christopher Plantin, went into exile in the northern part of The Netherlands. He found employment at the newly established University of Leiden, where he was appointed Professor of Hebrew. He was also the first to teach Arabic there on an informal basis.² However, the first Chair in Arabic and other Oriental languages at Leiden was only founded in 1613. In his inaugural lecture ‘On the Excellence and Dignity of the Arabic Language’ the first incumbent, Thomas Erpenius (1584–1624), pointed out the advantages of Arabic: it would give access to the lost Greek texts of Classical Antiquity which had only survived in Arabic, and to the many excellent works from the East on Mathematics, History, Geography and Medicine.³ Also, the linguistic kinship between Arabic and Classical Hebrew could provide new insights into the meaning of the Old Testament. But the main reason for appointing him, Erpenius insisted, was the fact that knowledge of Arabic was indispensable to ‘bringing back to Christ all those who had been deceived by the Ishmaelite impostor Mohammed.’

Careful comparison with University records, however, informs us that this latter argument of converting Muslims was for public consumption only. The Governors of the University basically believed that knowing Arabic was beneficial for trade, and the argument of converting Muslims to Christianity was never part of their deliberations.⁴ In fact, the foundation of the Chair in Arabic must be seen in the broader context of the political and

¹ The following passages on the history of Arabic and Oriental scholarship in the Netherlands are a brief resumé of my earlier contribution, Arnoud Vrolijk, “Arabic Studies in the Netherlands and the Prerequisite of Social Impact – a survey,” in Jan Loop, Alastair Hamilton and Charles Burnett (eds), *The Teaching and Learning of Arabic in Early Modern Europe*, Leiden: Brill, 2017, pp. 13–32. In February 2018 I held a similar presentation on the history of Arabic studies at a symposium on the “Histories of Islam in the Netherlands and Flanders,” held at Leuven/Louvain. Neither contribution, however, touched upon the special role of librarianship in Middle Eastern and Islamic studies. For a general history of Arabic scholarship in the Netherlands see Arnoud Vrolijk and Richard van Leeuwen, *Arabic Studies in the Netherlands: a Short History in Portraits, 1580–1950*, Leiden: Brill, 2014.

² On Franciscus Raphelengius see Vrolijk and Van Leeuwen, *Arabic Studies*, pp. 17–20.

³ Thomas Erpenius, *Oratio de linguae Arabicae praestantia & dignitate*, Leiden, in *Typographia Auctoris*, [1615 or later].

⁴ For the arguments brought forward by Erpenius on the usefulness of Arabic see Arnoud Vrolijk and Joanna Weinberg, “Thomas Erpenius: Oriental Scholarship and the Art of Persuasion”, forthcoming.

economic development of the young Dutch Republic, which had been granted extensive trading privileges by Sultan Ahmed I of the Ottoman Empire in 1612.

Yet, as I have argued elsewhere, the position of Oriental studies in The Netherlands has always had to be accounted for with the help of arguments, true or imaginary, to define its usefulness in terms of societal impact.⁵ No such elaborate apologias have ever been necessary in the case of Biblical Hebrew, the Classics, or, from the late eighteenth century onwards, modern languages such as Dutch, French, English and German. In the eighteenth century, Arabic played an essential role as a cognate of Hebrew in the Protestant exegesis of the Bible, which earned it the predicate of ‘the Handmaid of Theology’. During most of the nineteenth century, Dutch Oriental studies remained deeply influenced by the German philological tradition, which led to an impressive number of Classical text editions published by firms such as E.J. Brill of Leiden. Between c.1885 and 1942, however, a perfect symbiosis existed between the study of Arabic and Islam and colonialism in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia).

Its main protagonist, the Arabist and scholar of Islam Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936), studied Arabic at Leiden. After finishing his doctoral thesis, he obtained a government grant which allowed him to travel to Jedda in August 1884 in order to observe the movements of Dutch East Indian pilgrims who went on the Hajj or chose to remain in Mecca.⁶ He officially converted to Islam and travelled onwards to Mecca, where he stayed for almost half a year. After his expulsion in 1885, he returned to The Netherlands and worked his observations into the ground-breaking work *Mekka*,⁷ which was enhanced with two volumes of photographic reproductions, the first ever to have been taken by a Westerner in Mecca. He spent many years as an advisor to the Dutch East Indian colonial administration on ‘Arab, Mohammedan and Native affairs’. In 1906 he returned to the Netherlands to become Professor of Arabic at Leiden, and just as Erpenius had done almost three centuries earlier, Snouck Hurgronje defined the study of Arabic in terms of societal impact: knowledge of Arabic was the key to knowledge of Islam, which in turn was indispensable to the continuity of Dutch colonial rule. Until his death, he played a pivotal role in the education of civil servants for the colonies.

Societal impact after World War II

⁵ Vrolijk, ‘Arabic Studies and the Prerequisite of Social Impact’, p. 15.

⁶ On the career of C. Snouck Hurgronje see Vrolijk and Van Leeuwen, *Arabic Studies*, pp. 117–150.

⁷ Snouck Hurgronje, C., *Mekka: Bilder-Atlas zu Mekka von C. Snouck Hurgronje*, 's-Gravenhage: Koninklijk Instituut voor de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië, 1888-89.

After 1945, Indonesian independence made this particular colonial outlook on Oriental and Islamic studies obsolete, but the era of post-colonialism opened up new perspectives with more emphasis on the languages and cultures of the contemporary Middle East. Outside Leiden, universities felt encouraged to found new Chairs in Arabic. At the University of Amsterdam, for instance, a Centre for the Study of the Modern Middle East (IMNO) was created. Professors were appointed who engaged in the study of modern Arabic dialects and classical literature. At Leiden, after the ‘colonials’ had retired, Jan Brugman (1923–2004) was appointed, an ex-diplomat stationed in Cairo who was in close touch with avant-garde Egyptian poets and novelists. This upsurge in scholarly activity was fuelled by unprecedented economic growth. The 1973 October War between Israel and Egypt also led to a sudden increase in the number of students who wanted to study Arabic. This was probably because of a short-lived Arab boycott of The Netherlands on the supply of crude oil, the so-called ‘Oliecrisis’, which suddenly brought this distant conflict to the doorsteps of ordinary Dutch citizens. Simultaneously, there was an increasing interest in the Palestinian question among left-wing parties and their followers.

When I arrived at Leiden University in 1987, the first government expenditure cuts had already been introduced, and I vividly remember a three per cent cut in our salaries (which was gradually abolished in the course of ten years), in exchange for ten days extra leave (which we still have). Even in those days, the idea of a university as an elite school had become a distant memory, and mass education was a fact of life. Likewise, mass immigration from Muslim countries such as Morocco and Turkey was changing the character of Dutch society. Yet the philological tradition at Leiden University was still very much alive towards the turn of the 20th century when there were Chairs in Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Berber. Islamic Studies were to a certain extent represented by a single Professor of ‘Christian-Muslim Dialogue’ in the faculty of Theology. In this respect, it is rather mean that the last full Professor of Islamic studies in the Faculty of Arts, who retired in 1984, was replaced by an Associate Professor specialising in Dutch-Ottoman diplomatic relations in the seventeenth century.

The late 1990s, though, marked a turning point in the academic study of the Muslim world. The endemic political instability of the Middle East, the emergence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the ongoing public debate about the integration of Muslim minorities into liberal society did not fail to have their effect on public opinion – and consequently on public expenditure – in The Netherlands. In 1998 the International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM) was founded, a cooperation between the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and four universities coordinated by Leiden University. It was generously endowed with an annual budget of €900,000. With its strong sociological and anthropological bias, it proved extremely successful in its own field, but in

2008 the institute closed its doors after several parties – including the ministry – had withdrawn their financial support.

At Leiden University, ISIM was almost immediately succeeded by LUCIS, the Leiden University Centre for the Study of Islam and Society, which opened in 2009. It ‘promotes high-quality research on Islam and Muslim societies and actively communicates the insights and findings of that research to the larger public’.⁸ Allotted a yearly budget of €250,000 during the first five years of its existence from the University’s own resources (more recent figures are not available),⁹ it symbolises both the commitment of Leiden University to Islamic Studies and its acute awareness of societal impact. To avoid any association with bearded philologists who study the niceties of classical Arabic inflection, the LUCIS homepage features pictures of a brand new mosque against a clear blue sky (in Central Asia?), two Muslim girls playing football in headscarves, and a Muslim man on a bicycle (perhaps symbolising the desirability of low-cost transport in the Islamic world?). In contrast with its forerunner ISIM, however, LUCIS has to some extent managed to preserve the character of a Humanities research centre. At this moment in time, however, the future of LUCIS is far from secure. Nonetheless, it is important to note that Leiden University has had two consecutive institutes focusing on the study of Islam during the last twenty years, both with a generous budget, but that no comparable investment was ever made by the University, Ministry or similar in the fields of Oriental languages, kinds of literature and arts.

Upon superficial observation, however, the philological tradition at Leiden University appears to have stood its ground surprisingly well, for currently (July 2019) there are still Chairs in Arabic and Berber. The Chair in Persian has been abolished for some time, but will shortly be re-established. Only the Chair in Turkish has been lost, which is, in fact, a disgrace for a country with several hundred thousand inhabitants of Turkish descent. However, an era of turmoil in the Muslim world, with foreign invasions, full-scale civil war, regime changes, the rise of radical Islam and terrorism at home and abroad and the subsequent refugee catastrophe, has also profoundly influenced the study of the Islamic world. In comparison with a single Professor of Christian-Muslim Dialogue in 2000, there are now three chaired Professors in the study of Islam.

⁸ LUCIS website, available at <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/humanities/centre-for-the-study-of-islam-and-society/about> [accessed 9 July 2019].

⁹ See the *Performance Review 2009–2013*, p. 9, available at <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/geesteswetenschappen/lucis/lucis-review-final-version.pdf> [accessed 9 July 2019].

It cannot be denied that the mere number of professorial chairs is but an imperfect tool to measure the change in Oriental and Islamic scholarship, but there have also been other signs to mark a decisive shift from philology to studies with societal impact. Indeed, there is still a Professor of Arabic at Leiden University, but her research profile is very much oriented towards an alternative reading of the history of early Islam. It is hardly coincidental that in 2013, on the fourth centennial of the Chair in Arabic at Leiden University, two honorary doctorates were awarded to Patricia Crone and Michael A. Cook, both known for their fundamental criticism of the traditional Muslim narrative of the birth and rise of Islam. For instance, by claiming that ‘there is no hard evidence for the existence of the Quran in any form before the last decade of the seventh century’.¹⁰ Both were protégés of the controversial Orientalist Bernard Lewis, an influential figure in the Middle East policy of the United States.

On the national level, the shift from philology to the study of Islam and society had more serious consequences. At the Universities of Nijmegen, Utrecht and Amsterdam (both UvA and Vrije Universiteit) there used to be Chairs in Arabic, but these have either been discontinued or merged with religious studies or other disciplines. As a result, the orientation towards Islamic studies has become stronger than ever.

Nevertheless, recent developments show that nothing is permanent. In 2012, the Vrije Universiteit of Amsterdam re-established its Chair in Arabic in combination with, of course, Islamic Studies, but the fact that an Arabist was appointed at all is encouraging. The last incumbent, an eminent specialist of Arabic philosophy, had moved to Frankfurt University in 1995 together with his Assistant Professor. At Leiden, as already noted above, the Chair in Persian has remained vacant for years, but will shortly be occupied by a specialist in classical Persian literature. These developments are not so much the result of deliberate decisions or a change in university policies, as of the increasing importance of national, and in particular European, grant-giving bodies. It frequently happens that Assistant or Associate Professors are awarded important research grants, for example from the European Research Council, which necessitates their appointment as a chaired Professor because they have to supervise PhD candidates working on their projects. Living in a country where the public sector prefers to invest in education and research if it has a direct positive effect on the economy, I am amazed to see that at the European Union level it is still possible to attract funding for relevant and fascinating, but wholly unprofitable projects in the Humanities. Summing up, the only thing that can be said with any certainty is that Oriental studies in the Netherlands now probably employs more staff and attracts more students than ever before, irrespective of

¹⁰ Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977, p. 3.

political or social trends and that they are – and probably always will be – able to adapt themselves to changing circumstances.

The great paradigm shift in the library, 2005–

After this brief sketch of scholarly developments in Middle Eastern and Islamic studies, I shall return to more familiar ground: the University Library. There the development was much more of a technological and managerial nature, and it did not come without a struggle. In 1987, when I started working in Leiden University Library, I found a typewriter on my desk. Not long afterwards it was replaced by an AT286 computer with a 5.25” floppy disk drive. Soon there were more than a hundred of these stand-alone facilities in the building, which were maintained by a single employee. At a certain moment, he lost his temper, threw a bulky computer monitor through a window and was heard of no more. But it took many years after this incident before there was an actual ICT department. Nevertheless, there was already a nascent online catalogue, based on a computerised library system with a shared database that was used almost nationwide by academic libraries. There was a semi-automated book retrieval system in the library which printed request slips with the help of a matrix dot printer in the closed stacks and worked with a monorail-like electric transport system which is still in operation today.

On the curatorial level, however, things were still much as they were fifty years earlier. Each curator ruled in his domain with jealously guarded prerogatives. Many decisions were taken by just walking into the Director’s office for an informal chat. There were no annual performance reviews. My direct superior, the Curator of Oriental Manuscripts, had a ‘Do Not Disturb’ sign on his door. Special collections were catalogued and published in print, and the curators were pretty much free to do their research on the collections. The printed scholarly catalogues, published in the series *Codices Manuscript*, were excellent, as were the printed exhibition catalogues.¹¹ Of these *Kleine Publicaties*, or occasional publications (c. 60–200 pages each), more than seventy were published between 1988 and 2005. With the active encouragement of my superior, I did seven of those over the years. We also published a full-colour magazine in Dutch, *Omslag*, with brief notices and articles on interesting acquisitions and current research on the special collections.¹²

¹¹ The majority of the printed exhibition catalogues have been published in the series *Kleine publicaties van de Leidse universiteitsbibliotheek*.

¹² *Omslag: bulletin van de Universiteitsbibliotheek Leiden en het Scaliger Instituut*, 10 vols, Leiden: Universiteitsbibliotheek, 2003–2012. ‘Omslag’ means both ‘book cover’ and ‘turning point’.

On the downside, there was the disappointing fact that by 2005 there were no bibliographic records for manuscripts in the online catalogue and not a single digitised manuscript page. In the eyes of many observers, the library seemed ill-prepared for the digital future. In the same year, new management was installed with far-reaching executive powers. It operated according to the latest management theories, with a clear distinction between managers and professionals, more management layers, longer lines of responsibility and communication on a need-to-know basis. The new Director of the Library, formerly a *primus inter pares* among scholar librarians, had become a CEO. The transition was, of course, difficult and often frustrating, but there were also hilarious moments. I distinctly remember a management consultant, no doubt hired at prodigious cost, who claimed to be speaking with authority about the Oriental collections because he had been on holiday to Thailand with his wife.

Under the new management, annual reviews were introduced, as well as regular face-to-face meetings between professionals and their superiors. Scholarly research by library staff was formally abolished, and the curators were given new roles with reduced discretionary powers and similarly reduced salaries. Within a few years, the library's programme for publishing scholarly catalogues and related works had come to a grinding halt. The periodical *Omslag* survived until 2012 when the Director withdrew the necessary funding. The balance of the library shifted from collections and related research to digital information, technical services and end-user support.

The selection of new books, formerly the responsibility of the subject librarians, was replaced mainly by bulk approval plans, based on general guidelines drawn up by librarians but in day-to-day practice controlled by the suppliers. The curators and subject librarians suffered considerably, but eventually accepted the new situation, resigned or retired. Other departments, such as ICT and Public Services, thrived and were assigned roles that were better suited to the world of internet and digitisation.¹³ In practical terms, the restructuring proved beneficial: by 2019 there were c. 21,000 computerised bibliographic records for Oriental manuscripts, mostly of an elementary nature, and c. 300,000 digitised pages.

However, ironically, the content of these bibliographic records was to a considerable extent borrowed from the comprehensive inventory of Oriental manuscripts at Leiden, authored by

¹³ For a survey of the restructuring of the Leiden University Library after 2005 see the English re-edition of Christiane Berkvens-Stevelinck, *Magna Commoditas: Leiden University's Great Asset: 425 Years [of] Library Collections and Services*, Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2009: pp. 245–257. The passages in question were not written by Dr Berkvens but by a professional editor commissioned by the library management.

the curator who went on early retirement at the end of 2005 and published on his website.¹⁴ But wherever the metadata came from, it must be stressed that the creation of bibliographic records in the online catalogue is absolutely essential to making digitised manuscripts available worldwide. In theory, a physical item can still be brought up from the stacks by filling in a paper request form so that it can be examined on the spot in a reading room, but digitised items can only survive and prosper if they can be retrieved online.

The role of external funding

Although it does me no credit as a professional curator, I must admit that ever since I was appointed in 2006, I have never been able to attract public or semi-public funding in The Netherlands for the acquisition, preservation or digitisation of Oriental manuscripts or rare books, or the publication of books on the history of Oriental studies and manuscript collections. At the same time, my fellow curators of Medieval Western manuscripts and archives have had no trouble financing similar projects in their respective domains, for instance, the digitisation of Medieval Netherlandish manuscripts or the acquisition of the private archives of popular Dutch novelists. It must be feared that Oriental collections, which have been extant in this country since the early seventeenth century, are not considered as part of our national heritage, but rather as a *corpus alienum*. Nevertheless, this does not mean that I have been without resources. From 2007 onwards, for example, I have been able to preserve and digitise most of the scholarly papers, photographs, c. 4,500 letters and Arabic manuscripts of Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (see also above). Not because it was the archive of a prominent Orientalist, but simply because it met the general requirements for fragile nineteenth-century archives on acidic paper, regardless of contents. The money came from *Metamorfoze*, a national project coordinated by the Koninklijke Bibliotheek (Royal Library), The Hague.¹⁵

Since 2009 I have collaborated closely with Brill, Leiden, most notably with their publisher Dr Maurits van den Boogert, in the digitisation of more than 400 manuscripts from the collections of early scholars such as Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540–1609), Franciscus Raphelengius, Jacobus Golius (1596–1667) and Levinus Warner (c. 1618–1665). Brill bore the cost of digitisation, but as a commercial business, it needs to recover its expenses and also make a reasonable profit. As a result, the digitised manuscripts are freely accessible on the

¹⁴ Jan Just Witkam, *Inventory of the Oriental Manuscripts of the Library of the University of Leiden*, 25 vols, Leiden: Ter Lugt Press, 2007–19, available at <http://www.islamicmanuscripts.info/inventories/leiden/index.html> [accessed 12 July 2019].

¹⁵ *Metamorfoze website*, available at <https://www.metamorfoze.nl/english> [accessed 18 July 2019].

campus of Leiden University, but for all others, there is a paywall.¹⁶ More recently, in 2018–19, I have been able to preserve and digitise more than 160 Arabic manuscripts from Yemen with the help of generous funding from The Zaydi Manuscript Tradition, a project coordinated by Professor Sabine Schmidtke of the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton.¹⁷ The necessary preservation measures were carried out by Dr Karin Scheper, the conservator at Leiden University Libraries.¹⁸ Of course, thousands of manuscripts are still waiting to be digitised, but a modest beginning has been made.

In various book projects, my experiences have been more or less identical. In 2013, on the fourth centenary of Arabic Studies at Leiden, I was looking for opportunities for a combined exhibition and book on the subject in close collaboration with my fellow Arabist, Dr Richard van Leeuwen, of the University of Amsterdam. In the misguided belief that such a project on a unique aspect of Dutch intellectual culture would warrant (semi-)public funding, I applied to an affluent charity with close ties to Leiden University. My application was turned down out of hand 'because they had given priority to projects with social impact'.¹⁹ But after that, my prospects took a more positive turn. First of all, Director Wim Weijland of the National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden, offered his museum as a venue for an exhibition in September 2013 – March 2014,²⁰ and also published the Dutch-language version of the book on the history of Arabic Studies in the Netherlands, *Voortreffelijk en Waardig* (Excellent and

¹⁶ See *Pioneer Orientalists: the manuscript collections of Scaliger, Raphelengius and Golius from Leiden University Library*, Leiden: Brill, 2011, available at <https://primarysources.brillonline.com/browse/memo-1-pioneer-orientalists> [accessed 17 July 2019]. <https://primarysources.brillonline.com/browse/memo-1-pioneer-orientalists?tocStart=500> [accessed 17 July 2019]; *The Ottoman legacy of Levinus Warner*, Leiden: Brill, 2012, available at <https://primarysources.brillonline.com/browse/memo-2-the-ottoman-legacy-of-levinus-warner> [accessed 17 July 2019].

¹⁷ *The Zaydi Manuscript Tradition*, Princeton NJ: Institute for Advanced Study, 2018–2019, available at https://www.ias.edu/digital-scholarship/zaydi_manuscript_tradition [accessed 17 July 2019].

¹⁸ See Dr Scheper's personal webpage, available at <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/staffmembers/karin-scheper#tab-1> [accessed 17 July 2019].

¹⁹ Vrolijk, "Arabic studies and social impact", p. 21.

²⁰ Website exhibition *Voortreffelijk en Waardig*, National Museum of Antiquities, available at <https://www.rmo.nl/tentoonstellingen/tentoonstellingen-archief/voortreffelijk-en-waardig-400-jaar-arabische-studies-in-nederland/> (in Dutch only).

Dignified).²¹ The English version, *Arabic Studies in the Netherlands*, was published in 2014 by Brill, Leiden.²² In this case, I was fortunate to have the support of Professor Charles Burnett and Dr Jan Loop, who generously gave me a role in a project of the European Research Council, “Encounters with the Orient in Early Modern European Scholarship”, coordinated by The Warburg Institute, University of London (2013–16).²³ Additional financial support for the project came from Aramco Overseas, The Hague, who have consistently sponsored Leiden University for a longer period. More recently, in 2015–16, I received 100 per cent funding from Aramco Overseas to write and publish a book on the history and culture of Western Arabia as reflected in the collections of both Leiden University and the National Museum of Ethnology at Leiden.²⁴ The book was co-authored with Dr Luitgard Mols, an independent expert in Islamic art based in The Hague.²⁵

Bloopers in public outreach

In several projects to which I attached some particular importance, I have tried to communicate the results to the outside world. After all, it does not often happen that such results make any sense in the eyes of the public at large, and it is essential to retain some sort of visibility in the press. At the library, we thought we had found a suitable topic in the test results of the radiocarbon dating of a small set of very old Quran leaves on parchment, the Leiden codex Or. 14.545. These tests were carried out in 2013–14 by specialists from Coranica, a joint Franco-German project to examine and date early specimens of the Quran.²⁶ Here at Leiden, they cooperated primarily with my colleague Dr Karin Scheper, book conservator and a specialist in Islamic bookbinding. According to the official test report, “The two ḥiḡāzī [Quran] manuscripts Or. 14.545a and 14.545 b and c [...] both show a very high probability to

²¹ Arnoud Vrolijk and Richard van Leeuwen, *Voortreffelijk en waardig: 400 jaar Arabische studies in Nederland*, Leiden: Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, 2013.

²² Vrolijk and Van Leeuwen, *Arabic Studies in the Netherlands*.

²³ For the website of the project see <https://www.kent.ac.uk/ewto/> [accessed 17 July 2019].

²⁴ Luitgard Mols and Arnoud Vrolijk, *Western Arabia in the Leiden collections: traces of a colourful past*, Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2016.

²⁵ Dr Mols is founder of Sabiel, a centre for research and advice on Islamic art, see <http://sabel.info/pages1/pagina1.html> [accessed 17 July 2019].

²⁶ *Coranica Project website*, available at <http://www.coranica.de/front-page-en> [accessed 18 July 2019].

have been made in the 50 years between 650 and 700'.²⁷ Dr Scheper and I thought this deserved the attention of the general public and we posted a message on the library website which was taken over by the central news pages of Leiden University on 21 July 2014.²⁸

Radiocarbon or ¹⁴C dating is the most reliable method to establish the age of a once-living object (such as a leaf of parchment, which is the skin of a goat or sheep), but it works within certain degrees of probability and time margins. In this particular case, the calibrated results showed that there is 89.3% confidence that the leaves date from the period between 652 and 694 CE. Among the fourteen tested fragments, mostly from European libraries, the Coranica project identified several others from roughly the same period.²⁹ We knew perfectly well that the question of the emergence of the Quran was a minefield, especially after revisionist scholars such as the abovementioned Patricia Crone and Michael Cook claimed that there is no trace of the Quran before the end of the seventh century and that the first Quran as we know it dates from the early eighth century. Among revisionists, it is now accepted that Quranic revelations did indeed circulate before that time, but in isolated and fragmentary form, as if they were floating in the air but far from ready to be codified in a codified text. As a manuscripts scholar, I have always been struck by the ambiguous way in which revisionist historians use the word 'fragment', implying that it is a haphazard recording of some lines of speech on a scrap of parchment or papyrus, or on rocks and walls. In codicology, 'fragment' also means a remnant of a lost codex or book, and the early Leiden fragments under discussion were indeed parts of such books. These 'fragments' can be quite large, up to dozens of leaves. From what is left it becomes evident that in the earliest days of the Quran there was already a fixed order of the *suras* and verses. In no single fragment is the text muddled or in disorder as compared with the standard text which is in use today, and neither does any fragment contain passages that are alien to the modern Quran.

²⁷ *C14-Sample Results University Library Leiden*, Coranica project test report submitted to Leiden University Library on 1 July 2014.

²⁸ "Leiden's oldest Koran fragments more than a century older than previously believed", posted 21 July 2014, available at

<https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/news/archive-divers/2014/07/leiden%E2%80%99s-oldest-koran-fragments-more-than-a-century-older-than-previously-believed> [accessed 19 July 2019].

²⁹ Michael Josef Marx and Tobias J. Jocham, "Radiocarbon (¹⁴C) dating of Qur'ān manuscripts", in Andreas Kaplony and Michael Marx (eds), *Qur'ān quotations preserved on papyrus documents, 7th-10th centuries and the problem of carbon dating early Qur'āns*, Leiden: Brill, 2019, pp. 189–221, see Table 6.2, p. 216, nos. 4 (Sanaa), 5 (Tübingen), 9 (Berlin).

It is still too early to say anything definitive about the exact orthography of these fragments – or the lack of it. Of course, radiocarbon dating has its limitations, but carbon does not suddenly change its behaviour when it concerns a sacred text or when scholars are in violent disagreement. Further palaeographical or codicological research is therefore needed to refine or correct the results.³⁰ The problem with palaeography, however, is that it can establish a relative chronology of several manuscripts but not an absolute chronology. For example, if anyone tells you that Tom is taller than Jane, you still do not know how tall either of them is. However, in combination with radiocarbon dating, it should be possible to arrive at far more reliable results. Nevertheless, even at this point, it is interesting to note that if you juxtapose the revisionist views on the emergence of the Quran with the orthodox Islamic tenet that the Quran was codified (literally meaning ‘made into a book’) in the 650s during the reign of Caliph ‘Uthmān, then the preliminary results of the Coranica project show that the orthodox view is not so far-fetched after all. And this was the message we wanted to convey, together with the idea that it is very special for a library to possess even a small set of such very early Quran leaves.

I truly wished we had not said that, for it launched us firmly into the middle of the aforementioned minefield, which we would rather have avoided. Ten days later the Dutch daily newspaper NRC, a secular and liberal newspaper, devoted a full page (sic!) to the issue. The journalist, Dirk Vlasblom, gave the floor to the Leiden University Professor of Arabic, who expressed the opinion that the early Quran fragments were not news at all and that they did not contribute in any way to the ongoing debate about the genesis of the Quran. Curiously, though, the article bore a large colour illustration of exactly such an uninteresting and irrelevant Quran leaf. Neither the conservator nor I myself were asked to comment, which is hardly in accordance with the principles of journalism that the newspaper in question professes to uphold. In short, the University Library was made the object of ridicule, the exact opposite of what we had intended.³¹ In any case, this experience taught me that whenever a journalist cannot grasp the facts, they will inevitably follow the opinion of the highest in rank. From a certain point of view this is quite understandable, and I fear that if I were a journalist I would probably follow the same course.

³⁰ See, for instance, François Déroche, *Qur’āns of the Umayyads: a first overview*, Leiden: Brill, 2014, pp. 11–13.

³¹ Dirk Vlasblom, “Vragen over oude Koranfragmenten”, *NRC*, 31 July 2014, available at <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2014/07/31/vragen-over-oude-koranfragmenten-1405130-a584868> [accessed 18 July 2019] (access restricted to subscribers).

Another example of things going seriously wrong in my communications with the general public is the photographic collection of Hannie Halma (Or. 26.766). She was an independent-minded and certainly intrepid textile artist who in 1992 started travelling in Egypt (Sinai, Nubia) and among the Nuba peoples of South Kordofan. With her appearance as an innocent elderly lady, Halma managed to gain the confidence of local Bedouin tribes in Sinai, who are not known to take kindly to outsiders meddling with their private affairs. She took beautiful photographs, not only of the men but also of the women and young girls in their domestic settings. In South Kordofan she also took pictures of smiling guerilla fighters with their heavy machine guns. I never could make out whether she was completely unaware of the dangers to which she exposed herself in the middle of a civil war, or that she just pretended not to notice.

In 2012 I acquired c. 430 colour prints from her, and in 2014 I tried to interest the Leiden University Faculty of Law in hosting an exhibition of her photographs, for which they have a more attractive facility than the University Library. I exchanged many emails with their Arts Committee, but eventually they turned down my request 'because it did not have sufficient societal impact'. It was only years later that the president of the committee, a PhD candidate called Thierry Baudet, emerged as the leader of Forum, a populist right-wing party with a strongly anti-feminist, anti-Islam, anti-immigration and anti-environment agenda (there are more antis, but I cannot remember them all). During the 2019 elections for the provincial assemblies and the upper house of the Dutch Parliament, they won a landslide victory. Thus it was only a long time afterwards that I realised that my proposal to exhibit photographs of Muslims by a woman photographer had been doomed to failure from the start. Hannie Halma died of cancer in 2015.

Cataloguing Islamic manuscripts through the centuries

Finally, after having sketched the history of Oriental scholarship at Leiden through the admittedly imperfect instrument of counting the number of chaired professors, I shall now try to do the same with the help of the ebb and flow of Oriental bibliography. It is probably just as inadequate as a measuring tool, but it may serve to illustrate my point.

In the seventeenth century, the library collection of Leiden University was still so small that the description of its entire holdings, printed or manuscript, fitted into a catalogue of a single volume. Although the requisite knowledge to identify and describe an Islamic manuscript was generally available at the faculty, this did not always percolate down to the librarian, and the Latin descriptions were therefore often laconic and erroneous, such as the following description from 1674 of a manuscript of *Wiqāyat al-riwāya fī masā'il al-Hidāya*, a compendium of Hanafi law by Burhān al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn 'Ubayd Allāh al-Maḥbūbī al-Ḥanafī, who lived in the thirteenth century C.E. (Codex Or. 222): 'A compendium of law by

Obeidallah, in Arabic with interlinear Turkish translation. The Arabic is vocalised, but not the Turkish. This copy was wrested from the Turks in the famous naval battle that took place at Naupactus (Lepanto) in the year 1571, where the Christians won the day.’³²

Although he identified the languages correctly, the cataloguer was unable to discover the title of the work, and he mixed up the author with his grandson ‘Ubayd Allāh, for whom it was written. The unusual circumstances under which the book was appropriated by its first Western owner were obviously considered more important than the manuscript itself.

The next catalogue from 1866 is ample testimony to the progress of Oriental bibliography in the course of almost two centuries. The scholars in question, Pieter de Jong (1832–1890) and Michael Jan de Goeje (1836–1909), dedicated thirteen lines of Latin text to a description in their *Catalogus codicum Orientalium bibliothecae Academiae Lugduno-Batavae*, not only identifying the title of the work but also the correct author and the grandson for whom he wrote it, as well as indicating that the manuscript was not dated and supplying useful details about a letter in Spanish which was added to the manuscript, explaining how it was taken as booty during the battle of Lepanto in 1571.³³

In the mid-1950s, curator Petrus (‘Piet’) Voorhoeve produced a succinct handlist of the Arabic manuscripts in the absence of a comprehensive catalogue that would replace the nineteenth-century Latin one mentioned above. Supplying only the barest details, using a romanisation schema and opting for English as an international scholarly idiom instead of Dutch (not to mention Latin), it anticipated the essential computer records of fifty years hence. Printed cheaply from a typescript, it breathes the spirit of post-war austerity, but it also uses a number of very practical typographical devices such as capital letters for the title and underscores for the sorting element of the author’s name:

‘Compendium of al-Hidāya: WIQĀYAT ar-RIWĀYA FĪ MASĀ’IL al-HIDĀYA, by Maḥmūd b. Ṣadr aś-śarī’ a al-awwal al-Maḥbūbī (7/13th c.), with Turkish translation. *ff. 282; CCO 1801; before A.D. 1571*

³² *Catalogus Bibliothecae Publicae Lugduno-Batavae noviter recognitus. Accessit Incomparabilis Thesaurus Librorum Orientalium, praecipue MSS*, Leiden: Elsevier, 1674, p. 279: “Compendium Nomocanonis Obeidallah Arabice cum paraphrasi Turcica interlineari; Arabica vocalibus sunt insignita, non verò Turcica: hoc exemplar Turcis fuit ereptum in celebri illa navali pugna, commissa ad Naupactum A. 1571, ubi Christiani victoriam reportarunt.” (English translation A. Vrolijk).

³³ R.P.A. Dozy, P. de Jong et al., *Catalogus codicum Orientalium bibliothecae Academiae Lugduno-Batavae*, 6 vols, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1851–1877, vol. 4, p. 120.

Or. 222'³⁴

Only insiders will notice that the grapheme *ś* (s-acute) for Arabic *shīn* was adopted due to the deficiency of the typewriter; the official romanised character at the time was *š* (s-caron). The difference is immaterial, but we shall return to it below for different reasons.

In 2006–08 former curator Jan Just Witkam published the most detailed and up-to-date description of this manuscript so far in his *Inventory of Oriental Manuscripts*, published on his private website, from which I shall cite in full for comparison:

'Or. 222

Arabic, Turkish, and Spanish, paper, 282 ff., before 1571 AD. *Wiqayat al-Riwaya fi Masa'il al-Hidaya* by Mahmud b. Sadr al-Shari`a al-Awwal al-Mahbubi (7/13th cent.), which is a commentary on *al-Hidaya*, by `Ali b. Abi Bakr al-Marghinani (d. 593/1197), GAL S I, 645) on his own work entitled *Bidayat al-Mubtadi'*. With a Turkish translation. CCO 1801 (IV, p. 120). See Voorhoeve, *Handlist*, pp. 51-52. The present M.S. presents a bilingual, Arabic and Turkish version of the text. See Jan Schmidt, *Catalogue*, vol. 1 (2000), pp. 24-26. Spanish inscription in front. See A. Hamilton, 'Nam tirones sumus', pp. 563, 585-586, 587. See also Robert Jones, 'Piracy, war, and the acquisition of Arabic manuscripts in Renaissance Europe', in *MME* 2 (1987), pp. 96-110, with on p. 101 the reproduction f. 1r with the Spanish inscription concerning the Lepanto provenance, and on pp. 107-108, note 39, the transliteration of the inscription. Provenance: Captured at the Battle of Lepanto by Don Guillem de Sanctellimente (October 7, 1571), who gave the manuscript to Don Bernardo de Josa. Collection Franciscus Raphelengius (1539-1597), acquired in or shortly after 1626.

(Ar. 222)³⁵

Not only does it trace the commentary back to the original text by `Alī ibn Abī Bakr al-Mārghinānī (d. 1197 CE), but it also gives a detailed list of six references to recent scholarly publications starting with Carl Brockelmann's well-known bio-bibliography of Arabic literature. One of the works cited, an article by Alastair Hamilton, corrects the earlier assumption that this manuscript was once in possession of the Leiden scholar Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540–1609) and correctly attributed it to Franciscus Raphelengius. Apart from the

³⁴ P. Voorhoeve, *Handlist of Arabic Manuscripts in the Library of the University of Leiden and Other Collections in the Netherlands*, Leiden, Bibliotheca Universitatis Lugduni Batavorum, 1957 (second enl. edn The Hague: Leiden University Press, 1980), p. 52.

³⁵ Witkam, *Inventory of the Oriental Manuscripts*, vol. 1, pp. 97–98, available at <http://www.islamicmanuscripts.info/inventories/leiden/index.html> [accessed 12 July 2019].

number of folios, the description lacks further codicological information such as script, size, binding etc. Neither does it attempt to use diacritical signs to distinguish between Arabic phonemes such as *sīn* and *ṣād*, but on the whole, it gives a reasonably complete and positively useful picture of the manuscript.

In recent years, Leiden University Library has undertaken a significant effort to retrospectively upload bibliographic records of Oriental manuscripts to its online catalogue, Primo. Voorhoeve's *Handlist* was used for the core collection of Arabic manuscripts acquired before 1957; for later Arabic acquisitions Witkam's *Inventory* of 2006– was used. For other languages such as Turkish, Persian and Indonesian languages, yet other sources were used. The requirements for the selected metadata reflect the modern policy of an online catalogue as a finding aid rather than a scholarly description with detailed information. In the case of the Leiden codex Or. 222, the Lepanto manuscript, this has resulted in a return to the basic details provided by Voorhoeve in 1957. In 2019 the bibliographic metadata in the Primo catalogue was presented as follows:

Title: *Wiqāyat ar-Riwāya fī masa'il al-Hidāya*

Author/Creator: Mahbūbī, Mahmūd b. Sadr aś-Šarī'a al-Awwal al- 7/13th cent; Marginānī, 'Alī b. Abī Bakr al- d. 593/1197

Shelfmark: Or. 222

Note: Compendium of al-Hidāya with Turkish translation. Before A. D. 1571.

Reference: *Catalogus Codicum Orientalium Bibl. Acad. Lugd.*, 1801

Date: [No indication of date]

Form: 282 f.

Language: Arabic; Turkish

In comparison with Witkam's elaborate description, the limited aim and scope of the digital metadata as a mere finding aid are obvious enough, but there is also the added problem of romanisation. In this particular case, for instance, the unusual *ś* (s-acute) for Arabic *shīn* was adopted uncritically from Voorhoeve's *Handlist* of 1957, thereby perpetuating the deficiency of the old-fashioned typewriter. In order to understand the intricacies of these cataloguing rules, one should know that since c. 1945 various romanisation schemas for modern publications in Arabic script have been in use: from c. 1945–1983 a local schema that was used for the traditional card catalogue; from 1983 to c. 2015 a national schema devised especially for the national shared cataloguing database Pica/GGC, and finally, from c. 2015 onwards, the adoption of Library of Congress romanisation rules in combination with the original script. Since c. 2005 the romanisation rules for modern printed books also have to be followed in the case of newly acquired manuscripts. The use of various systems in quick succession has inevitably led to a general confusion that severely affects the successful retrieval of records

from the catalogue, which is a mixture of all the different systems. As an example, we shall give the various romanisations that have been current since c. 1945 for the words ‘Khalīfah’ (‘Caliph’, orthography according to Library of Congress usage) and ‘Khayrīyah’ (‘Charitable’):

1945–1983: *Local schema (incl. Voorhoeve 1957):* *Khalīfa, Khairiyya*

1983–2015: *National Pica/GGC schema:* *Kalīfa, Kayriyya*

2015– *Library of Congress:* *Khalīfah, Khayrīyah*

2015– *Arabic script:* *خيرية, خليفة*

2018– *Witkam Inventory:* *Khalifa, Khayriyya*

There is a general awareness in the library that this problem needs to be addressed, but a definitive solution is not to be expected in the near future. By presenting this case study, I hope I have been able to explain that although the internet and digitisation came on the scene as entirely new phenomena, they still carry the burden of the past and that the transition from the analogue world to the digital can only be achieved adequately if there is sufficient awareness of the history of Oriental bibliography.

About the Authors:

Paul Auchterlonie read Arabic at Oxford in the late 1960s before training as a librarian at the University of London. He then worked for forty years as a librarian specialising in Middle Eastern and Islamic studies, first at the School of Oriental and African Studies, then at the University of Lancaster. From 1981 to 2011, he was the librarian in charge of the Middle East collections at the University of Exeter. He is the author and editor of numerous works on Middle Eastern bibliography and library science. He has published articles on historical and cultural relations between Britain and the Middle East, including the first substantial study of Joseph Pitts, the first Englishman known to have made the pilgrimage to Mecca. He served for many years as Chair of the Middle East Libraries Committee (MELCOM-UK) and was founding Secretary of MELCOM International.

Waseem Farooq holds a BA (Honours) Arabic with Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies from the University of Durham (2002); an MA Library and Information Studies from UCL (2012); and an MA Historical Research Methods from SOAS, University of London (2014). Waseem began his career in librarianship at the British Library in 2002, where he was employed as an Arabic cataloguer and then Leading Library Assistant. He joined the Aga Khan University Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations in 2005 as Library Administrator and was responsible for developing the Turkish collection. He became Librarian in 2010 and currently works as the Acquisitions Librarian.

Walid Ghali is the Head of the Aga Khan Library and Assistant Professor at the Aga Khan University Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations in London. He completed his PhD in 2012 at the Faculty of Arts at Cairo University. Dr Ghali's current research projects focus on the Islamic manuscript traditions, particularly in Arabic script, and the history of books. He is a member of the Board of Directors of the Islamic Manuscripts Association. He teaches various subjects related to Muslim civilisations, including Sufism, Arabic literature and manuscript traditions. Before moving to London, he worked in various librarian roles at the American University in Cairo. He has also held several consultancy roles in and outside Egypt, such as at the Ministry of Endowment, Qatar University and the Supreme Council for Culture in Kuwait.

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AKU-ISMC is a higher education institution based in London with a focus on research, publications, graduate studies and outreach. It promotes scholarship that opens up new perspectives on Muslim heritage, modernity, culture, religion and society.

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