



Curators' Roundtable: Islamic manuscripts

Rothermere American Institute, University of Oxford, 27
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Present:

Firouza Abdullaeva, Oriental Institute, University of Oxford;
Ali Mir-Ansari, Wadham College, University of Oxford;
Arezou Azad, Oriental Institute, University of Oxford;
Colin Baker, British Library, London;
Gillian Evison, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford;
Theresa Fitzherbert, Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford;
Lesley Forbes, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford;
Alexandra Franklin, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford;
Paul Groves, Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford;
Edmund Hertzog, Oriental Institute, University of Oxford;
David Hirsch, University of California, Los Angeles;
Richard Ovenden, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford;
Judith Pfeiffer, Oriental Institute, University of Oxford;
Helga Rebhan, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich
Emilie Savage-Smith, Oriental Institute, University of Oxford;
Rupert Shepherd, Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford;
Arnoud Vrolijk, Universiteitsbibliotheek Leiden;
Oliver Watson, Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford;
Elaine Wright, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin

Presentations and statements by participants and partners of the Centre for the Study of the Book

Several of those attending were invited to outline the achievements of different projects in bringing medieval manuscript information online.

1. Presentation by David Hirsch on online cataloguing of Islamic manuscripts at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)

A handlist had been compiled in the mid-1970s, and published in Persian in Tehran, as part of a general survey of Islamic manuscripts in the USA. The Minassian collection contains over 1500 manuscripts, of which 2/3 are included in the project to catalogue Arabic and Persian manuscripts online.; The NEH-funded project had made available \$346,000 for preservation and access. The aim of the project was to create electronic records, with the ultimate aim of enabling scholars to add annotations and transcriptions to the electronic records. The workflow of the project includes graduate students examining the manuscripts at UCLA to make descriptive entries, and a trained cataloguer, working remotely from Waterloo, Canada, checking entries and adding authority-controlled headings for names and subjects. A large percentage of the names have had to be established as authority forms by this cataloguer. A list of items digitized is available online, that will include over 470 manuscripts by the end of the project.

The public site for the project was demonstrated, showing browsing by title and name, and showing

the moderated wiki enabling users to add comments. A VRE is planned to enable scholars to append annotations and transcriptions to records.; The project still needs to create a search and retrieval interface for use with English, Arabic, and Persian languages.; A special grant was received to enable a graduate student to survey the codicological features of the manuscripts.

At present, the records are formatted in Dublin Core and stored in an in-house database. The records will be crosswalked to MARC21 from Dublin Core to make them available on the main library online catalogue. An aim of the project is to deliver records to a union catalogue of Islamic manuscripts, which UCLA would propose to host on a server.; UCLA would also host a harvester to retrieve records from other locations.

The thumbnail images will ultimately be labelled with title/folio references for easier access. There is no plan to watermark images to prevent theft, and UCLA does not charge a reproduction or publication fee.; The interface as planned does not have image manipulation tools, but allows users to download images and work with these freely.

Main project page: <http://digital.library.ucla.edu/minasian/>

List of digital items : http://unitproj1.library.ucla.edu/dlib/minasian/list_mss.cfm

2. Presentation by Dr Emilie Savage-Smith (Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford) of the project to catalogue Arabic & Persian manuscripts at the National Library of Medicine (NLM), in Bethesda, Maryland

The project (1990-1994) was to make 361 entries for Arabic and Persian manuscripts in the NLM. Emilie did the work by completing worksheets in typescript, which we later input by NLM staff. She was also responsible for establishing authority forms of names. The entries were initially put into the main online catalogue of the NLM, but were then and still are difficult to access. Dr Savage-Smith demonstrated how, in spite of the facility to limit searches within the main OPAC of the NLM, the term "manuscript" is not used to refer to manuscript codices, and therefore does not create a satisfactory limited search for retrieving the materials catalogued in her project. Other difficulties with the search interface from the main catalogue were the lack of browsable indices and the problem of making entries with a single main title for collectaneous manuscripts that might have several authors and titles. The solution devised by Dr Savage-Smith was to create a separate website through which users can access the collection by thematic categories and chronology. Emilie added several features to this site that are especially useful to students and scholars, including bio-bibliographies for authors, a glossary of codicological terms, and tools for recognizing numerals and Hijrah dates.

Project website: <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/hmd/arabic/arabichome.html>

3. Statement from Colin Baker, British Library

Digitization has been carried out within several programmes, mainly aimed at "virtual museum" experiences and public access to images. The result is that the library does not digitize to create surrogates, or digital facsimiles (cover to cover), except in one instance for 'Turning the pages', but to provide illustrative material and highlights selected by theme (as for the exhibition Sacred and public programmes associated with that). There are currently no online catalogue records for Islamic manuscripts (about 14,000 volumes and c. 20,000 works), and the policy is that these will be part of the main Integrated Library System (ILS), will be catalogued in MARC and made available via Aleph in an interface that will also be developed for western manuscripts.

4. Statement from Helga Rebhan, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek (BSB) The Islamic manuscripts of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek

The Bavarian State Library (BSB) in Munich holds manuscript treasures which rank it among the top libraries of the world. The Islamic manuscripts of the BSB as part of a larger collection of 16.500 Oriental and Asian manuscripts comprise 4.100 items (Arabic 3000, Turkish 560, Persian 510, other languages 30). They range in date from the 8th to the 19th century, geographically from Spain to Java and cover a broad subject scope. The collection dates back to the very beginning of the library which will celebrate its 450th anniversary in 2008. The history of the collection at BSB goes back to the library's purchase of the collection of Johann Albrecht Widmanstetter in 1558. With the addition of

the collection of Etienne Quatremère in the 19th century, and other purchases, this now amounts to over 16,000 oriental manuscripts. There is currently no comprehensive catalogue, and users are directed to an accessions list in the reading room. This will be scanned and mounted on the library's website. BSB holdings are also represented in the Union Catalogue of Oriental Manuscripts in German Collections; and there is a printed catalogue of more than 300 items. Digitization is done on demand and there is a programme to digitize valuable items for preservation. The online records that have been made are for items that have been digitized. Online records for these consist of a brief catalogue record on the main library system (Aleph), with a link to the URL of the scans. Therefore digitized items can be searched for within the main library online catalogue.

5. Statement from Arnoud Vrolijk, Universiteitsbibliotheek Leiden Online Access to the Leiden Collections of Islamic Manuscripts: current developments

Online Access to the Leiden Collections of Islamic Manuscripts: current developments

Leiden University Library embraces the digital library as a prime tool for higher education and research.

- Present holdings of Middle Eastern 'Islamic' manuscripts: c. 6,000 volumes in Arabic, Persian and Ottoman Turkish.

- Holdings of Indonesian manuscripts: c. 15,000 volumes.

- The core of the Middle East collection was formed in the late 16th and 17th centuries by scholars like Josephus Justus Scaliger (1540-1609), Jacobus Golius (1596-1667) and Levinus Warner (1619-1665). In the 18th century Oriental studies declined, only to be revived in the second half of the 19th century (Amin al-Madani collection acquired by M.J. de Goeje, Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, 1857-1936). - Acquisition of new materials continues.

- Printed MSS catalogues: Arabic (Voorhoeve, 1957, 2nd ed. 1980), Turkish (Schmidt, 2000-2006), Persian (19th-century Catalogus codicum orientalium...) Available online resources - External resource: Electronic inventory of MSS by former curator Prof. Jan Just Witkam, made available on his personal website as non-printable pdfs (www.islamicmanuscripts.info).

- Post-1999 acquisitions converted into MARC21 catalogue records and searchable through the Leiden OPAC 'U-CAT' (opac.leidenuniv.nl). - Current cataloguing project: conversion of Voorhoeve's Handlist of Arabic manuscripts into catalogue records. In the course of 2008, c. 8,000 Arabic manuscript texts acquired before 1957 will be made available online. Manuscripts conservation & digitisation - Leiden has limited facilities, staff or budget for digitisation of MSS. There is no 'production line' as envisaged in earlier plans. Leiden uses the central University reproduction services, which are costly (€14 for a 300dpi TIFF).

- Leiden is a partner in national projects for conservation & digitisation, e.g. Government-funded 'Metamorfoze'. A K€140 proposal for the Snouck Hurgronje collection has been accepted. Leiden seeks external funding to match Government grants.

The two concerns are: 1) How to make old printed catalogues or handlists available as catalogue records; whether by scans or PDFs of the printed records or by converting these into formatted records in an Ex Libris database. Leiden is still producing printed catalogues of manuscripts but the procedure is there to create records that can be displayed in the Aleph catalogue interface. 2) Creating a database of images of manuscripts. Leiden uses Digitool to display METS records, enabling the images of all pages of a manuscript to be arranged into a digital facsimile for display.

[Leiden University Library Digital Special Collections: Oriental Collections](#) (click on "Description" at top of any screen showing large image to see MARC record)

More information on the Leiden University Library Oriental Collections can be obtained from the website <http://www.bibliotheek.leidenuniv.nl/collecties/bijzonder/oostersecollecties.jsp> (currently only

in Dutch, an English version is in course of preparation).

6. Statement from Elaine Wright, Chester Beatty Library

There is currently a five-year project to make a catalogue from the handlist of non-Koranic Arabic manuscripts, totalling c. 2600 records. The problem the library has found is getting people with the language expertise to do the work on a project basis. It is intended that the new catalogue should be printed, but plans may change to deliver it over the web instead. Digitization of manuscripts at the library captures single pages only, there is no programme to make full digital facsimiles. The library has microfilm of almost all these items and has had these scanned, so an online catalogue could be delivered in conjunction with full images (though in black and white).

7. Statements from Martin Kauffmann and Lesley Forbes, Bodleian Library

Oxford is currently engaged in making new EAD/XML descriptions for c 10,000 western medieval manuscripts (comprising many more texts), and an individual manuscript can take up to a week to describe using the TEI P5 schema. At present the publicly-accessible website only permits a word search across the EAD descriptions. As regards Islamic manuscripts, of which there are about 6000 (comprising an estimated 8000 texts) it is planned to apply for a grant to make an online finding aid to provide an integrated cross-searchable catalogue of summary descriptions, to which more detailed descriptions and digital images can be added as resources are available. Currently for the record content it is proposed to follow AMREMM (Gregory Pass, Chicago, 2003), and Library of Congress practice for names, subject headings and transliteration. Records will be formatted in TEI P5, and coded in XML. It is planned to ensure that the finding aids for the Bodleian's western and Islamic manuscripts can be made available through compatible interfaces.

8. Written statement from Don C. Skemer, Princeton University Library Islamic manuscripts at Princeton

The Princeton University Library has some 9,500 Islamic manuscripts, chiefly bound paper codices containing more than 20,000 texts, located in the Manuscripts Division of the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, at the Harvey S. Firestone Memorial Library. Robert Garrett (Princeton Class of 1897) collected approximately two-thirds of these manuscripts and donated them to the Library in 1942. Since then, the Library has continued to acquire manuscripts by gift and purchase. The manuscripts are chiefly in Arabic but also include Persian, Ottoman Turkish, and other languages of the Islamic world. They date from the early centuries of Islam through the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Most of the manuscripts originated in Arabia, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and other main centers of Islamic civilization. But there are examples from Moorish Spain and the Maghreb in the West, to the Indian sub-continent and the Indonesian archipelago in the East, and even sub-Saharan Africa. Subject coverage is broad and comprehensive, including theology based both on Qur'ān and tradition (hadīth); Islamic law (fiqh); history and biography (especially of the Prophet and other religious leaders); book arts and illustration; language and literature; science; magic, and the occult; and other aspects of the intellectual and spiritual life of the Islamic world and its diverse peoples. Representative works of virtually every important Muslim thinker are present. Although textual manuscripts are predominant, there are also illuminated Qur'āns and Persian literary works, including five Safavid and Qajar manuscripts of Firdawsī's Shāhnāmah, the Persian national epic. In addition, the Manuscripts Division also holds Arabic papyri and documents, calligraphy collections, and modern personal papers relating to the Near East. Supporting research in this area are some 300,000 printed volumes in the Library's Near Eastern Studies circulating collections.

The Library has long been committed to making these collections available to researchers worldwide, with access provided by published catalogs, principally those compiled by Philip K. Hitti (1938), Mohammed E. Moghadam and Yahya Armajani (1939), Rudolf Mach (1977), and Rudolf Mach and Eric L. Ormsby (1987). Thousands of additional manuscripts, including most of the Persian and Ottoman Turkish holdings, are briefly inventoried in a "Preliminary Checklist of Uncataloged Manuscripts in the Princeton University Library" (2004). For scanned versions of the printed catalogues of Arabic manuscripts, as well as the checklist and lists of recent accessions, go to <http://www.princeton.edu/~rbsc/departement/manuscripts/islamic.html>

In order to improve access to these rich collections and share them worldwide through digital

technology, the Library has recently embarked on the Islamic Manuscripts Cataloging and Digitization Project, a four-year project under the overall direction of Don C. Skemer, the Library's Curator of Manuscripts, and made possible by generous support from the David A. Gardner '69 Magic Project. The project is producing accurate and consistent MARC-format cataloging, searchable through Web-based bibliographic utilities, thus replacing the existing patchwork of printed catalogers. Two full-time Near Eastern Studies project catalogers have been recruited. Approximately 500 bibliographic records had been created before the project began. Between February 2006 and October 2007, a total of 1,230 manuscript volumes were cataloged online, including 1,836 separate texts. Approximately 7,770 volumes remain to be cataloged. Bibliographic records for Islamic manuscripts are now searchable in the Princeton University Library's online catalog. For access, go to: <http://catalog.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?DB=local&PAGE=First>

The Princeton University Library is also digitizing an initial group of 200 manuscripts as part of this project. The Library's digital studio began imaging in April 2007 and have digitized 104 volumes. Eight of these are already online. Camera work should be completed by May 2008. Programmers from the Library's Systems Office are putting the images online in a user-friendly browser, while project catalogers are responsible for the creation of structural metadata—a detailed breakdown of each manuscript by component parts (e.g. individual texts, folio numbers), so that one can easily navigate the digitized manuscript online. Digitized Islamic manuscripts can be viewed either by going to the relevant bibliographic records in the Library online catalog and clicking on the link "Digital version," or by going to the Library's Digital Collections website:

http://diglib.princeton.edu/xquery?_xq=getCollection&_xsl=collection&_pid=islamic

The brief bibliographic descriptions accompanying digitized manuscripts in the Library's Digital Collections have a link "View catalog record," which leads to more detailed bibliographic records in the online catalog. For more information, contact Don C. Skemer, at dcskemer@princeton.edu

8. Summary of aims of the Cataloguing Sub-Committee of The Islamic Manuscripts Association (TIMA) (David Hirsch and Lesley Forbes)

The sub-committee (one of four in TIMA) had so far met three times since its establishment in 2006 and had members from Egypt, Germany, Iran, Ireland, Lebanon, Netherlands, Turkey, UK, USA. Its aims were to establish across the TIMA membership what were the prevailing standards as regards transliteration (concentrating on Arabic, Persian and Turkish), cataloguing practices for Islamic manuscripts, and particularly for name authorities, and also to share expertise between colleagues. A Wiki had been set up to disseminate information about reference works, scanned catalogues, samples of catalogues records etc. between members. The TIMA Cataloguing sub-committee also wanted to establish numbers of catalogued and uncatalogued Islamic manuscripts in member institutions, and planned to organise an Islamic manuscripts cataloguing workshop possibly in 2009.

TIMA Cataloguing Committee Resources page, with links to online catalogues of Islamic manuscripts:

<http://www.islamicmanuscript.org/resources/cataloguing.html>