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Report on the second week of instructions in simple preservation techniques to the people of the manuscript project of Dr. Anne Regourd in Zabid, Yemen Republic, and conclusion after the two training periods.

Failing to receive my travel permit in time for leaving on Saturday I left Sanaa for Zabid in the morning of Sunday, December 6th, 2009 and arrived there in time to start the first session at 4pm, taking place, as the last time, in the library of Arafat Al-Hadhrami.

This time only Arafat Al-Hadhrami, Farag Abu Al-Kheir, and Yasser Khalil, the translator, participated in the three days of the second training session. I had to return to Sanaa in the morning of December 9th.



In the time since the last training session in November Farag had folded the remaining boxes, cleaned all the manuscripts (101) and some of the photocopies, and had put them into the archival bags which were then placed in the boxes. I checked every manuscript put in these bags and this showed that there were some problems which had to be solved and which I will discuss at the end. The checks also showed that the cleaning had been done very satisfactorily.

Arafat had marked the boxes on the outside with the number of manuscripts contained in the individual boxes and the titles of the manuscripts (photo). The bags inside had only the numbers 1, 2, 3, etc., written on them, depending how many were in one box. I suggested that in addition to the titles of the manuscripts the signatures already allotted to them in the process of cataloguing were also to be written on the outside of the boxes. And both —titles and signatures— should as well be put on the bags inside so that one could see at a glance which manuscript they contained without having to remove them from the bags, therefore limiting the necessary handling of the manuscripts. It remains to be decided if all the bags should be given continuous numbers —as the boxes already

have— after a final order has been established. But one has to keep in mind that some of the bound manuscripts in good condition were not put into bags before being placed in the boxes because this was not necessary.

The following two days we worked in the mornings as well as in the afternoons because there was so much to do. I found that some boxes were not filled to capacity, and since Arafat confirmed that there was no distinct order or sequence for the manuscripts we changed them around and thereby gained a few more empty boxes which then could be used. There were also a lot of things which had to be sorted and were, so far, only stored in a big metal trunk or stuffed in plastic bags: letters, documents, maps, photocopies, newspaper clippings, etc.



Some of the documents were put into the pouches with clear plastic on top. But since these did not fit exactly into the boxes they had to be cut down. (The bigger boxes measure 23 x 32 cm and the pouches measure 25 x 31 cm.) I think many more of these pouches are necessary since they are especially useful to hold the documents, etc., because these can be seen through the clear plastic cover. They are much more appropriate for single leaf documents than the archival bags. Certainly, several, but not too many related objects can be put in together, but since the pouches are obviously constructed to contain only single leaves this is very restrictive. At the moment too many items were stuffed into these pouches since there were only 50 available and no bags left. This can only be a temporary solution, for permanent storage this is certainly not acceptable.



I would suggest that at least 200 or 300 of these clear-topped pouches would be necessary to comfortably house the various items. It follows therefore, that some 20 to 30 of the bigger boxes will also be necessary if one can estimate approximately 10 pouches per box. Another cupboard for all these boxes will then be necessary as well.

The collection in the library also contains a lot of photocopies of manuscripts, and quite some of them don't exist anymore in the original and are, therefore, very important.

Some of these photocopied manuscripts are already bound or at least stapled together. Approximately 10 of the bigger boxes would still be necessary.

But several of the photocopies measure up to 26 x 38 cm, so they are bigger than the boxes so far provided. Are there bigger boxes available from Stouls? If there are and they are also 6 cm thick, as the others are, then at least 7 (10) of these would be needed. If nothing of this size is available already fore-fabricated, then some acid-free cardboard should be provided and I could teach Farag how to make the appropriate boxes. One long metal ruler, a metal “right angle” device, one or two cutting knives with safety lock and removable blades (spare blades as well), and some bone folders (for ruling the bends without cutting them) would be necessary for this action.

A note about the archival bags. I have mentioned already in my last report that they are very problematic for the storage of unbound manuscripts. As I have found when I checked the already stored items several of the thinner manuscripts were folded over when the bag was folded, and in some cases the corners were bent when the manuscript was put inside. Since some of the manuscripts have frayed edges it is really dangerous to move them in and out of these bags since there is always the danger that pieces are caught by the sharp edge of the bag and the page torn. Even I myself, with a lot of experience in handling manuscripts, have to be extremely careful and have to struggle to manage to put them in without damage. I also emphasized again that the bags should be put flat on the table surface and the manuscript slipped in horizontally and not by holding the back vertically and let the manuscript drop inside! But if this advice will be followed in the day-to-day handling of the manuscripts is very questionable....

Because of the way the bags are constructed for a certain thickness of the contents there is always a fold-over at the bottom with very thin manuscripts which creates an uneven build-up in the box. If the manuscript is somewhat thicker, but not as thick as the width of the bag, then one cannot really fold-over the bottom and the manuscripts drops all the way down which creates problems with the corners. Also, since the biggest bags are bigger than the boxes they have to be folded not only on top but also on one side —very ungainly and ugly. We had to cut open some of the bags on one side and fold-out the bottom corner in order to have a more satisfactory envelope for the manuscript. It should be discussed if this should be routinely done to all the bags!! —it would certainly make the handling much easier and alleviate the danger to the manuscripts to a great extend.

I had wanted to document these problems at the end with photographs, but we had an electrical black-out again and I did not trust that this would work with the flash of the camera alone. I hope to be able to have some pictures taken at my next visit.

Unfortunately, Arafat had failed to start with the monitoring of the temperature inside and outside of the cabinets in his own and the Al-Ash'aer Library with the new digital

thermometer delivered at the last session due to the Eid holidays and the birth of a new son to him. He promised to start with the monitoring right after the training session. He supposedly is going to come to Sanaa soon and I told him to bring the results gained so far so I could send them on to Dr. Anne Regourd.

The conclusion after these two training sessions is that there certainly is a great improvement in the storage of the valuable manuscripts in the Arafat Al-Hadhrami library and that the use of simple but effective preservation techniques has gained a wider understanding.

More boxes and one more cabinet will be needed to finish the storage, and some problems have to be discussed and solved at the next visit of Dr. Anne Regourd.

A few photographs of the second training session are provided as well.

Ursula Dreibholz

6. January 2010

List of photographs to be attached to the report:

(second session Dec. 2009)

1, 4, 3, 5, 7, 2, 6, 8 - I think these should be attached to the report in this order

1. putting envelope with MS into a box
4. counting filled-up boxes
3. cabinet with filled MS-boxes – state at my arrival in December. Arafat had already marked all the boxes containing manuscripts with numbers and noted on the outside how many MSS were inside and of which content.
The unmarked boxes at the bottom contain photocopies.
5. the cabinet with the boxes after rearranging
7. the cabinet with the boxes after rearranging;
the unmarked boxes at the bottom contain photocopies
2. further material to be sorted – mainly documents, correspondence, observations, photocopies, newspaper clippings, etc.

6. more material to be sorted

8. sorting the MSS by size for evaluation of how many boxes and which sizes were further needed.

(9 and 10 only show U taking notes)

We were plagued by electricity black-outs, so I could not have Arafat take all the pictures I wanted – for example the problem with the envelopes. But this could possibly be done at a later time.