

Final Report- Attendance at Middle East Studies Association (MESA) and Middle East Librarians Association Conferences (MELA) 2009

MESA Report

The Middle East Studies Association of North America held its annual meeting in Boston, MA on Nov. 21-24, 2009. As always, the bulk of the meeting consisted of concurrent panels: More than 100 sessions were held over 13 time blocks. Many of the panels dealt with interesting issues mainly belong to Arab countries and Middle East. Some of which were about Shiite theology and history, teaching Arabic language as foreign language, teaching Islamic studies and other different historical and political issues. However, I have tried to be attached with **TIMA** guidelines and topics; so I attended many sessions about Islamic manuscripts cataloging, editing and digitization.

The first session was including four presentations about **Ibn Asakir in Medieval Arabic Historiography** which was sponsored by Middle East Medievalists. The presentations were mainly about his role of writing the history of Damascus. The first presentation, therefore, provided a comparison between the Introduction of his book *Tarikh Madinat Dimashq* (History of the City of Damascus) and Khatib al-Baghdadi's book *Tarikh Baghdad* (Bagdad History). It explored Ibn Asakir's attitude against some thoughts such as Shiite political activities. The second presentation argued whether Ibn Asakir was historian or Hadith collector. It explored his work titled *Arba'un Hadithan fi al-Hath 'ala al-Jihad* which was compiled in the 11th century for the ruler of Syria Nur al-Din. The last two presentations were about *fada'ik al-Sham* and other specific information mentioned by Ibn Asakir, in addition, some biographies were mentioned with concentration on *Khalid al-Qasri* who was a governor of Iraq under the Umayyad caliphate.

In the **Orientalism** session *Ali Bakr Hassan* presented lecture about the early sources of Edward Gibbon about Islam. He lived in the 18th century and provided and used a great source about Islam.

Another session was devoted to discussing **Manuscripts of Magic**. This session was titled Magic, Sainthood and Music in Sufism. The first presentation was about the writing of Suhrawardi who wrote a number of devotional works, almost all unpublished and very thinly represented in the manuscript record. In the second paper was Defining Heresy in the Ottoman Empire: The Case of Bayrami-Malamis which was an off-shoot from the Bayrami Sufi order founded by the Turkish mystic Haji Bayram Veli (d. 1429). The third paper was one of the most important papers in this session. It was about the ritual purity in the Medieval Islamic magic. The paper demonstrated that the maintenance of ritual purity was consistently connected with Islamic forms and beneficial ends throughout the middle Ages. The researcher depended on Ibn Nadim's

text the *Fihrist* which elaborated the difference between good and bad magic. The last presentation introduced the manuscript of *Mazhar al-'aja'ib wa majma' al-ghara'ib* which was written by a sixteenth century female saint Agha-yi Buzurg. This manuscript was written by Agha-yi Buzurg's believer of Hafiz Basir who relates his master's ideas, teaching, and events of the final years of her life preceding her death in the Bukhara region around 1522.

A special session was dedicated for the **Iraqi Heritage Ownership** in which many questions have been argued. Firstly the current state of Iraqi museums, archaeology and artifacts was evaluated, and the question of support for the Iraqi government to get their heritage back, such as artefacts and manuscripts, was discussed. The issue of how education system and libraries could reconstruct the country's heritage was also raised.

An interesting panel was in Monday afternoon about The **Rational Science in Islam Database**. This panel presented the Islamic intellectual history with an introduction to the Rational Sciences in Islam (RaSI) database which currently under construction at the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, and co-sponsored by the Canada Foundation for Innovation, the Government du Québec and the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science (Berlin). "RaSI's aim is to investigate the scientific and philosophical traditions of Islam in a way that cuts across individual disciplines, time periods, geographical regions and political entities".

RaSI includes two initiatives, the Islamic Scientific Manuscripts Initiative (ISMI), which focuses on the mathematical sciences and on technology, and the Post-Classical Islamic Philosophy Database Initiative (PIPDI), which focuses on logical and philosophical works. Adam Gacek presented a paper about some Metadata issues for digitized manuscripts in RaSI database. This metadata that is being indexed includes descriptive information on the author of the work, on the work itself, and on the individual manuscript copies. It provides the basis for research on the bibliographical and sociological aspects of the Islamic scientists and philosophers. The data being indexed includes the contents of individual works; according to section, chapter, page or folio, and line number. The other papers presented in the panel covered technical aspects of the database itself, as well as aspects of new research that work on the database enables.

Another panel was discussing some Arabic classical works about eloquence (*Fasahah*). The panel title was **Secrets of Eloquence: Linguistic Expression in Medieval Arabic Thought and Practice**. it examined eloquence from different approaches, one of which through the close analysis of tenth and eleventh century works bearing the term *balāgha* (and the like) in their title. Also from exploring their uniqueness as regards the study of eloquence, and language as a whole, an attempt will be made to place them within the larger tradition of literary criticism.

Three of the panelists discussed eloquence in three medieval Arabic works, first of which is al-Raghib al-Isfahani's *Mufradaāt Alfāz al-Qur'ān* and his understanding of *balaghah* and *fasahah*. The second book is *Sirr al-Fasāha* of Ibn Sinān al-Khafājī. This paper showed al-Khafājī's approach toward the study of eloquence and his understanding of language. The third paper was

about of *Zamakhshari's Kashshaf* which is considered as one of the most important and famous Qur'anic interpretations.

In conclusion, although the wide range of topics were discussed in this conference; I tried to find out the most important topics related to Islamic manuscripts and matched with TIMA guidelines. I hope I was able to achieve some of the grant objectives by transferring what I have got to all TIMA members.

MELA Report

Middle East Librarian Association annual conference took place two days before MESA Conference from Nov. 19-20, 2009. On the first day many presentations were delivered; most of them were about the development of Middle Eastern collections in different libraries. The most important sessions took place in Thursday from 10.35am – 5pm. It concentrated on digitization projects of manuscripts and Middle East collections.

Digitization and Blogs

The first paper was about the Library of Congress digital projects on Iranian blogs, Iranian websites and Afghan government websites in collaboration with Stanford. As it is obviously known that the Library of Congress is trying to extend its library services to include services to the entire web. The second presenter was Jonathan Rodgers, Head of Near East Division at University of Michigan. The University needs help cataloguing its vast Islamic Manuscripts Collection which Arabic, Turkish and Persian. Consequently, they built a blog with digitized manuscripts and asked for assistance in cataloging; however, it still not available for sharing cataloging information yet. The project is available at <http://www.annarbor.com/news/u-ms-islamic-manuscripts-collection-going-online/>

By the end of this day we visited Rotch Library in MIT Building where the Islamic architecture collections at Rotch Library were presented. The exhibit was titled “Tomes and Domes”. The exhibit highlights items from the library’s extensive collection of materials related to architecture and planning in the Islamic world. It features items used in The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture (AKPIA) and includes photographs taken by MIT students supported by the AKPIA Travel Grant.

On Friday 20th many committee meetings took place. The cataloging committee which I attended was involved in the cataloging updates and news. The most important topics are RDA: Resource Description and Access which is going to replace the Anglo-American Cataloging Rules in 2010. The second topic is the Virtual International Authority File which is available online now. The presenters highlighted some MARC21 changes to accommodate RDA in cataloging and authority. The changes are available at <http://www.loc.gov/marc/formatchanges-RDA.html>

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratefulness to TIMA's Board who gave me the chance to attend the conference. I tried to attend as much sessions as I could; however, to be attached with TIMA objectives I attended many sessions discussing Manuscripts and Islamic culture.

Overall, the conference was very successful and beneficial to me. Therefore, I wish my report could be helpful for other TIMA members. Again, many thanks for your efforts and thanks to all approved this grant to me.

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