

MELCom International 38th annual conference

Leiden University Library | 30.05-02.06.2016

Business Meeting Minutes & Conference Report



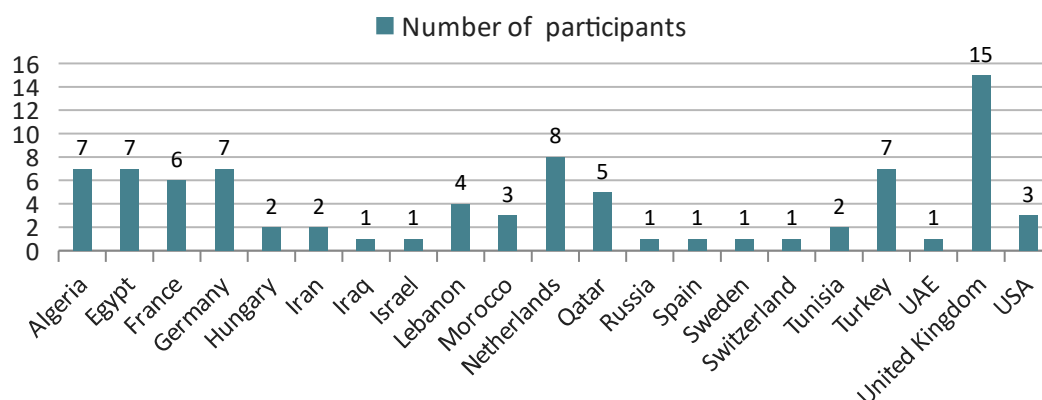
Conference Report

Twenty-one years ago the MELCom International annual meeting was held in the both delightful and venerable settings of Leiden in the Netherlands and it was with much anticipation that long-standing and newer members of the association convened again in the charming Dutch university town.

The thirty-eighth annual conference of MELCom International was convened by Birte Kristiansen, Librarian of the Middle East Collections at Leiden University Library and Arnoud Vrolijk, Librarian for Oriental Special Collections at the ULL.

The conference attracted a large crowd of professionals: 85 registered persons came from 21 different countries of work, ten of whom were commercial attendees. Among founding members, we had the pleasure of having with us this year Derek Hopwood, Geoffrey Roper and Françoise Barrès-Kotobi.

Attendees' countries of work repartition MI 2016



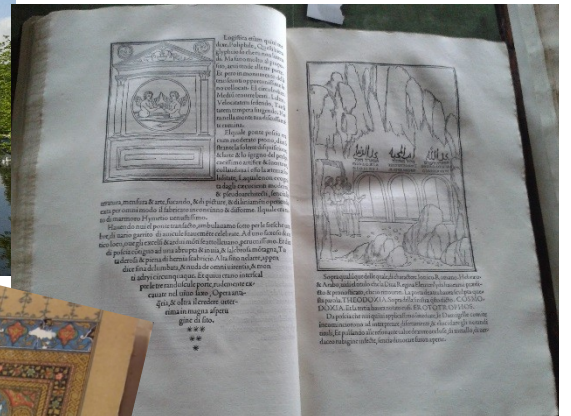
COUNTRIES OF WORK

The scientific programme included twenty-seven presentations, six of which were in French. One presentation was cancelled for imperative reasons at the last minute. They covered a large array of the librarianship field (see programme), from manuscript, print and digital collections to cataloguing standards, libraries and librarians' past and recent history, as well as a whole panel devoted to publishing trends in Middle East countries. The geographic and historical breadth of the presentations was particularly striking this year, taking us on a panoramic tour of the Islamic, Arabic, Persian, Ottoman and modern Turkish collections and projects associated with them in France, Germany, Great-Britain, Croatia, Spain, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Qatar, the UAE, and the USA.

Three guided tours and workshops were offered on Monday afternoon, delegates could sign up and attend up to two. Arnoud Vrolijk gave a much appreciated and lively tour of the Oriental special collections, which he is heading, with a focus on the Arabic collections. Karin Scheper, conservation specialist at Leiden University Libraries, delivered a fascinating presentation on Islamic bookbindings, on the subject of which she is the leading expert (see her [webpage](#)). And concurrently Paul Hoftijzer, Senior University Lecturer at Leiden University and book history specialist, offered us an inspiring visit of the Bibliotheca Thysiana, the only Dutch book collection from the seventeenth century which is housed in the original purpose-built library. These visits were followed by a buffet graciously offered by the Brill publishers, as a welcoming gesture to their hometown. The traditional diner was kept in the same bibliophile vein, as it was held in the *Het Prentenkabinet*, a beautifully restored and repurposed medieval Dutch press and library. The conference concluded as usual with a business meeting on Wednesday afternoon, whose minutes are to be found below.

The conference was followed by an excursion on Thursday 2nd June, which consisted of a walking tour of Leiden on the theme of "Leiden and the Arab world: 400 years of history" led by our local organisers, followed by a cruise on Leiden's canals with Moroccan lunch on-board and concluded by a choice of visit of either the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden (which had two fantastic exhibitions going on then: one on Hajj and the other on Buddhism) or the Dutch National Museum of Antiquities (with its exquisite Egyptian collections).

For illustration purposes, please find a few pictures of the conference below.



Business Meeting Agenda/ Ordre du jour de l'Assemblée Générale:

Meeting held on 1st June 2016, 4-5.30pm

- 1. President's assessment of the conference (Helga Rebhan)**
- 2. Secretary's report (Dominique Akhoun-Schwarb)**
- 3. Treasurer's report (Farzaneh Zareie)**
- 4. MI's Website (Sara Yontan)**
- 5. Future conferences**
- 6. Professional announcements**
- 7. Renewal of the MI Board (Helga Rebhan)**
- 8. Any Other Business**

1. President's assessment of the conference (Helga Rebhan)

Helga Rebhan thanked the Leiden University Library President, Kurt de Belder, for receiving the MELCom International congregation in the most hospitable manner, re-affirming the strong ties that have linked the MI and Leiden University for the past decades. She warmly acknowledged the formidable effort deployed by the local organisers, Arnoud Vrolijk and Birte Kristiansen and all their colleagues and friends involved in the organisation and smooth running of this conference. She highlighted the fact that this was all the more remarkable as Arnoud Vrolijk ploughed on through serious ill-health during the preparation of the conference. She did not fail to highlight the contribution of the Secretary and Treasurer, Dominique Akhoun-Schwarb and Farzaneh Zareie. She presented the hosts with a symbolic gift on behalf of the Board and all attendees.

2. Secretary's report (Dominique Akhoun-Schwarb)

See Conference Report above.

The Secretary commended the local organisers for their amazing efficiency, professionalism and never-failing friendliness and patience, which have eased the organisation of this conference immeasurably.

Publication of papers

Finally, the Secretary asked the speakers to send in their papers in electronic format (Word, Powerpoint, PDF, etc.) to melcom.international@gmail.com in order to have them posted on the website and gave end of September 2016 as a reasonable deadline. She also asked those submitting their presentation to please make sure to add some explanatory text if they choose to send their presentations slides.

Pictures of the conference

Dominique A-S. also asked attendees who wished to share their pictures of the conference on the website to send them to her (melcom.international@gmail.com) or directly to the MI webmasters (1sara.yonatan@gmail.com).

Pictures of the conference will be made available on a Flickr album, which will be circulated to the conference attendees.

Discussion list

As in previous conferences, Dominique also urged everyone to subscribe to the group list "[lis-middle-east](#)" (and advertise it to colleagues) in order to be informed of the annual conferences, among other information on MI. She reminded that people can also refer to the MI website, which will host all information regarding the association's activities.

3. Treasurer's report (Farzaneh Zareie)

Farzaneh Zareie, the Treasurer of MI, reported on the financial standing of the association.

The balance brought forward on the MELCom International account on 30/05/2015 was **7332.70 €**. / Au 30 mai 2015 le solde du compte MELCom International était créditeur de **7332.70 €**.

The following is a short account of the conference collected fees, expenses that MI had to bear, and the amount to carry forward.

Income = **3,180 €**

The current conference received 89 participants among which 10 were from the publishing sector, and 3 were registered as students (free).

Expenses = **2,500 €**

The conference had to bear the following expenses:

- a. 4 grants : €1700 ;
- b. miscellaneous expenses (account maintenance; website hosting costs; guests at the conference dinner; stationeries; etc.) : ca. €800

There was a positive balance of 680 Euros this year. The balance brought forward as of 30th May 2015 = **8012.70€**

7332.70 €	(balance brought forward on 30/05/2015)
+ 3180 €	(conference fees collected in May 2016)
- 2500 €	(total of expenses occurred in year 2015-2016)
8012.70 €	(balance brought forward on 30/05/2015)

4. MI's Website (Sara Yontan)

Sara Yontan, who maintained and develop the MI website together with David Musnik (unable to attend the meeting for health reasons), reminded everyone to keep an eye on the MI website for updates, new features and most importantly announcements concerning MELCom International: www.melcominternational.org .

The attendees were asked to make remarks and suggestions concerning the website. Sara Yontan took notes of the suggestions that were made as following:

Iman Khayri:

- Make the contents searchable

Yasmin Faghihi:

- Update the „About“ page
- Change the tab title for “Professionals” – no suggestion was advanced.
- Introduce a bilingual or multilingual interface (Sara Yontan appealed to volunteers for translation)

Birte Kristiansen:

- Introduce a new section gathering information about various national grants available to international audiences for projects, etc.

Dominique Akhoun-Schwarb:

- Introduce a reserved forum space for prospective and past hosts to exchange tips and experience about hosting a MI conference.
- Introduce a search box and make the contents searchable, especially past conferences presentations, programmes and reports.

5. Future conferences

MI 2017

The 39st conference will be convened by Yasmin Faghihi, Head of Oriental Collections, at the Cambridge University Library and the prospective date is end of June 2017/beginning of July 2017. Confirmation of the date will be provided as soon as possible.

MI 2018

Dr Kinga Dévényi, Senior Librarian and Curator of Arabic Manuscripts at the [Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences](#) and Reader in Arabic and Islamic Studies at the [International Studies Institute, Corvinus University of Budapest](#) on behalf of the Director of the Institute [Zsolt Rostovanyi] invited MELCom International to Budapest for its jubilee 40th conference. This invitation was gladly accepted by the Board and present members.

6. Professional announcements and AOB

Joachim Gierlich highlighted the Qatar Digital Library Project in partnership with the British Library. See <http://www.qdl.qa/en>

David Hirsch announced a series of forthcoming conferences:

- MELA conference at MIT on 15-17th November 2016 (shortly before MESA). Theme of the conference was to be on “Partnership”.
- TIMA conference in Cambridge (UK) on Sept. 13-15th, 2016. Focus of the conference to be on Sufi Manuscripts.

He also reminded the attendees of the on-going International Treasury of Islamic Manuscripts Project: <http://www.manuscript-treasury.net/content/index.xml>.

[Andreas Drechsler](#) announced the completion of the cataloguing of the 4500 titles of the private library of the Iranian writer Bozorg Alavi, bequested to Bamberg University Library. See his presentation about this collection, in Istanbul in 2014 [http://www.melcominternational.org/wp-content/content/past_conf/2014/2014_papers/Drechsler.pdf].

7. AOB

[Muneer Abu Baker](#) proposed that vendors could sponsor more actively the conference, providing income for extra-activities or administrative costs to develop aspects of the website for example.

[David Hirsch](#) seconded that notion saying that MELA holds vendors panels where they get fifteen minutes to show their products and services, in exchange for a fee of 400-500€.

The Board took this suggestion on-board and will give it consideration for future conferences. At the moment, MELCom International is charging a higher fee for commercial participants, and leave the local organisers to deal with sponsorships proposals as they arise.

8. Renewal of the MI Board (Helga Rebhan)

Renewal of the Board & Election of a new MELCom International President.

After eight years in office, and to prevent a complete renewal of the Board with no solution of continuity in 2017 when both the Secretary and the Treasurer's mandates would also come at the end of their three-year term, the current president Dr Helga Rebhan expressed her wish to stand down from her office.

Sara Yontan was nominated for the presidency by the Board and unanimously elected during the MI business meeting by way of an open-vote as the MI new President. Sara Yontan is Curator for the Turkish Collections at the French National Library (Bibliothèque nationale de France), a long-standing and engaged member of the association. Sara Yontan was the host of the MELCom International conference in 2002 before she held office as the MI's Secretary between 2005 and 2011. From 2011 onward she has been actively developing the Association's website with the technical support of David Musnik. We wish to the new MELCom International's President all possible success and satisfaction in her new functions.

Sara Yontan addressed her thanks for the unanimous vote and expressed her gratitude to Helga Rebhan, and Arnoud Vrolijk before her, for the exceptional work they performed as Presidents of MI: under their presidencies, the MELCom International flourished, firmly establishing itself internationally as a favoured point of meeting for Middle Eastern Librarianship professionals. She also recalled Françoise Barrès-Kotobi who was MI's secretary for having recruited her, back in 1993.

The MI Secretary and Treasurer, Dominique Akhoun-Schwarb and Farzaneh Zareie, also paid tribute to the admirable work that President Helga Rebhan has performed over the last eight years and expressed to her their gratitude for her untiring dedication to her role and for leading this association with such diplomacy and academic acumen, not to mention her delightful sense of humour and open-mindedness.

Due to the unusual circumstances and for simply the most practical reasons, an exception has been made as regard to the MI constitution's rule, according to which the three members of the Board must hail from three different European countries of work. Return to the constitutional rule is envisaged with the upcoming elections of the new Secretary and Treasurer in 2017.

The conference was then concluded with renewed and special thanks to Birte Kristiansen and Arnoud Vrolijk who did a wonderful job as local conveners.

Final thanks are due to Helga Rebhan who led MELCom International through eight stimulating and enriching years. We hope she has found her tenure an interesting one and wish the new President, Sara Yontan, all the best in her new functions.
