



MELCom International 39th annual conference
Cambridge University Library | 3rd July – 6th July 2017



CONFERENCE REPORT

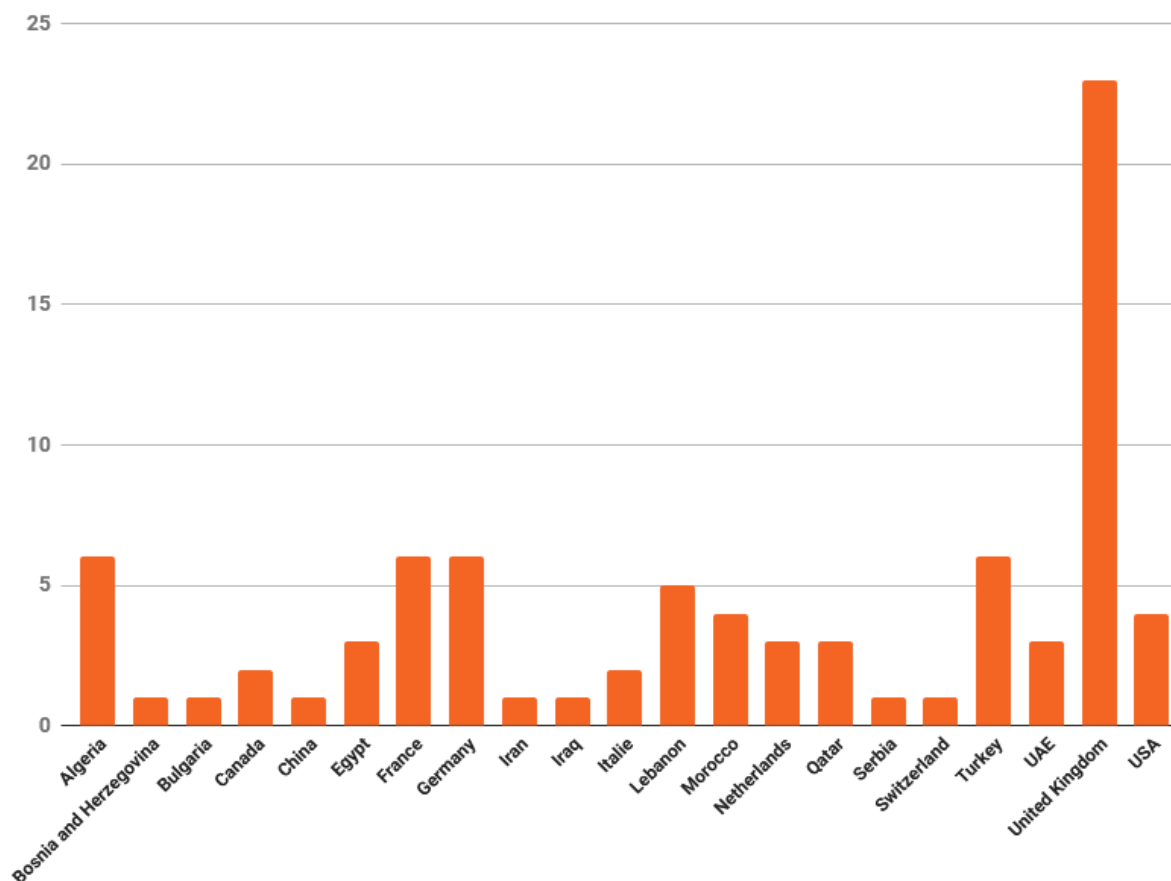


On the 17th June 1967, the first meeting of the Middle East Libraries Committee was held at Cambridge, under the auspices of J. Derek Latham, J. David Pearson, R. Bidwell and Derek Hopwood. A dozen years later, this then exclusively British association crossed the English Channel, expanded the circle to other Middle Eastern librarians in Europe and the MELCom International association was born. This dynamic group of librarians and academics devoted to bring forth the art and craft of Middle Eastern librarianship succeeded in establishing one of the most flourishing associations of specialist librarians: thanks to their passion for their field of work and research, new members continued to flock in and became regular attendees.

Fifty years on, the current chair of the Melcom UK and Head of Oriental Collections at Cambridge University Library, Yasmin Faghihi, hosted the thirty-ninth annual conference of the MELCom International, which was the occasion to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the MELCom UK with the participation of some of its original members and founders, in its very birthplace.

This special conference attracted the registration of 83 professionals across 21 different countries of work (with a large proportion of Britain-based participants), ten of whom were commercial attendees. Among our founding and longest-standing members, we had the pleasure of having with us this year Derek Hopwood, Paul Auchterlonie, Diana Grimwood-Jones and Peter Colvin. The conference was held at the Runcie Lecture Theatre in the Faculty of Divinity on Sidgwick site, nearby the Cambridge University Library.

Number of participants vs Countries of work



List of attendees:

Abu Baker, Muneer (UAE) | Adam, Volker (Germany) | Akhoun-Schwarb, Dominique [MI Secretary] (UK) | Al Baghdadi, Mohammad (UAE) | Al Marri, Falwa (Qatar) | Al-Rajab, Ibrahim (Iraq) | Ansorge, Catherine (UK) | Auchterlonie, Paul (UK) | Bali, Nedim (Turkey) | Benkaid-Kesba, Teboura (Algeria) | Bensaadoun, Nozha (Morocco) | Bernardini, Michele (Italy) | Bezirci, Pervin (Turkey) | Bolliger, Claudia (Switzerland) | Bouanaka, Souad (Algeria) | Bouderbane, Azzedine (Algeria) | Chaabane, Zouhour (France) | Chalvin, Mariéva (France) | Chebani, Basma (Lebanon) | Colvin, Peter (UK) | Demir, Güler (Turkey) | De Mowbray, Julia (UK) | Dols, Teddi (Netherlands) | Drechsler, Andreas (Germany) | du Grandlaunay, René-Vincent (Egypt) | Ebtehaj, Mastaneh (UK) | El Haddad, Yasmina (Netherlands) | Emami, Mohammad (UK) | Faghihi, Yasmin [Local Organiser] (UK) | Farooq, Waseem (UK) | Faust, David (USA) | Fawzy, George (Egypt) | Gamouh, Nadjia (Algeria) | Gianni, Celeste (UK) | Guesdon, Marie-Geneviève (France) | Hopwood, Derek (UK) | Hussain, Shah (UK) | Hussein Moustafa, Laila (USA) | Jovanović, Marko (Serbia) | Kalin, Cihan (Turkey) | Karimine, Zahra (Morocco) | Kattoura, Antoinette (Lebanon) | Kenderova, Stoyanka (Bulgaria) | Kentel, Koca Mehmet (Turkey) | Khayrallah, Myrella (Lebanon) | Kuntz, Blair (Canada) | Lagan, Jessica (UK) | Langella, MariaLuisa (UK) | Lavent, Tine (Egypt) | Lowe, Daniel (UK) | Maoulainin, Namaa | Melville, Charles (UK) | Melville, Firuza (UK) | Menz, Astrid (Turkey) | Moussa, Amine (Lebanon) | Muratgia, Antonella (Italy) | Pehlivanian, Meliné (Germany) | Rebhan, Helga (Germany) | Rezaei, Asma (China) | Rodriguez, Nathalie (France) | Saker, Susanne (Germany) | Salamon, Anaïs (Canada) | Schippers, Arie (Netherlands) | Schwarb, Gregor (UK) | Seeger, Stefan (Lebanon) | Sekulova, Wassilena (UK) | Shambayati, Masumeh (Iran) | Sims-Williams, Ursula (UK) | Soudous, Roumeissa (Algeria) | Steinberg, Amanda (USA) | Vrolijk, Arnoud (Netherlands) | Weech, Edward (UK) | Weheba-Khairi, Iman (Qatar) | Wright, Lydia (UK) | Yontan, Sara [MI President] (France) | Zareie, Farzaneh [MI Treasurer] (France) | Ziegler, Tammy (USA) | Zutic (Kadic-Zutic), Fatima (Bosnia-Herzegovina).

The scientific programme featured twenty-eight presentations, three of which (session 2 (no.7), session 3 (no.1) and session 7 (no.6)) were cancelled at the last minute for imperative reasons. Two extra presentations were delivered during the Business Meeting as part of the forthcoming conferences announcement and the professional announcements. The full [programme of the conference](#) is to be found online on the MELCom International website.

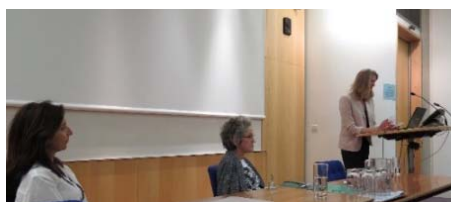
This year the programme featured prominently a special panel in celebration of the Melcom UK Jubilee.

MELCOM as a committee first convened in 1967 in Cambridge as a small group of bibliographers, librarians and academics from around the UK. In 1979 ; MELCOM international was founded as a separate European committee convening at a 3-4 days travelling annual conference while MELCOM UK continued to co-exist as a group within the British Isles. Thus 2017 marked the 50th anniversary of the commencement of MELCOM.

For the 95th meeting of Melcom UK in July 2017, both branches have joined in MELCOM's "birthplace" for the occasion of celebrating 50 years of a successful association of librarians around the world, with special recognition given to the founders. A special celebration of the founding members was intended to express our gratitude and respect to their work and personalities and reflect upon our current roles and activities. The Pearson Memorial Lecture was delivered in three separate talks by founding MELCOM members in a "jubilee" panel entitled **“Melcom UK: 50 years of Middle East librarianship“**, incorporated in the MELCom International conference academic programme. These talks delved into MELCOM’s past and present, highlighting aspects of change and our role as Middle Eastern librarians, on the example of Exeter University and SOAS University of London.

[Derek Hopwood](#) (MELCOM UK founder and its Chairman and Secretary from 1967 till 1985, MELCom International President 1980-1990), Paul Auchterlonie (MELCOM UK Chairman 1985-2010, and founding Secretary of MELCom International) and Peter Colvin (MELCOM UK Secretary 1995 -2008) gave us insightful, entertaining and invigorating perspectives on the development of Middle Eastern librarianship in the UK.

This special panel was followed by a round table discussion animated by the current Chair of Melcom UK, Yasmin Faqhihi.



The sessions of the programme on either side of this Melcom UK Jubilee panel were tightly linked with the theme of Middle Eastern librarians as socially and politically engaged agents of change, through their mission of facilitating research and knowledge of the Middle East region and countries, and engaging in cross-regional and international cooperation to bring out ever better study and research resources.

The first session on the topic of Arabic early prints collection was dedicated, but in name (at the expressed request of the person who was to be honoured) to Geoffrey Roper, in reconnaissance of his life-long immense contribution to the field of Middle Eastern librarianship.

Manuscripts collections across the Islamicate World, cataloguing intricacies and cutting-edge electronic resources and digitisation projects were further examined in all the other sessions.

The programme included a rich programme of cultural visits:

- Launch of the Royal Asiatic Society Persian manuscripts in the Cambridge Digital Library: <https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/ras>
- Tour of the Genizah Collection Exhibition in company of Ben Outhwaite, Head of the Genizah Research Unit in Cambridge University Library
- Visit of the Cambridge University Library led by Yasmin Faghihi and Catherine Ansoorge



This was further completed by our traditional dinner, which was set in the most exquisitely bucolic settings of the Madingley Hall, a 16th century country house located a few miles off Cambridge.



This very “Cambridge college life” experience was explored further during our excursion through Cambridge on Thursday 6th June, which saw us through a walking tour of Cambridge (from the King’s College Chapel to the Round Church), a deeply enjoyable traditional punting cruise, followed by lunch at the DoubleTree Hotel on the bank of the River Cam, a visit of the Fitzwilliam Museum (and its current exhibition of Indian paintings “From Kabul to Kolkata”) to finish by a very British strawberries-and-cream reception in the beautiful gardens of the Ancient India and Iran Trust in the company of one of its trustees, and speakers of the conference, Dr Ursula Sims-Williams.



BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES

I. The President's report [Sara Yontan] :

"Thanks to everyone for coming, thanks to those who have stayed until the end of the conference but also to those who had to leave before the end.

As usual, or maybe more so, the papers of this conference reflected the rich variety of the activities that make up our different professions, as librarians, as researchers, as vendors and as information organisers /providers. As a whole, if I may allow myself to judge, the talks were of very good quality.

We thank our speakers for their efforts to have made their presentations attractive and concise. Thanks for their discipline that made it possible to us to listen to everyone and ask questions, make remarks.

If presentations were attractive, the exchanges we had in between, i.e. during coffee breaks and meals were as interesting and fruitful. Not all off-conference discussions were professional and this is what makes MELCom International special: the human beings that we are.

This year, much as the previous years, we covered different topics and wide spans of time, from old Bibles to hi-tech electronic content; from work achieved and in progress to future projects. What was particular to this year was our wish to have a couple of "special" sessions, like the inaugural one addressing our esteemed colleague Geoffrey Roper's area of interest (prints in Arabic script), or the panel dedicated to MELCOM UK's jubilee anniversary, commissioning memories, thoughts and reflections to those who were present then. There was also the thematic slot questioning or asserting the political and social involvement of librarians, with special interest in the unquiet MENA region.

Yes, I believe this was a very successful conference, both for its scientific and its socio-cultural programmes which will be pursued tomorrow [Thursday 6/7] during the excursion.

On behalf of all MELCom International participants, we particularly want to thank our local organiser Yasmin Faghihi and all those who have helped her for all their efforts to offer us such a venue and so many possibilities to enjoy this event."

II. The Secretary's report [Dominique Akhoun-Schwarb]:

[see the Conference report]

III. The Treasurer's report [Farzaneh Zareie]:

Balance brought forward as of 30th June 2016 = ca. 8,262 €

- Income from MI 39th conference (2017) derived from conference fees = 2,820 €
79 participants among which:
 - 9 commercial participants
 - 12 students and guests
- Expenses = 2,715 €
 - 5 Grants = 2,500 €
 - Other expenses (website hosting, stationery, miscellanea) = 215 €
- Balance = +105 €

Balance brought forward as of 5th July 2017 = ca. 8,370 €

IV. Forthcoming conferences

2018:

The 40th MELCom International conference will be convened by 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.



The meeting will be held at [Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences](#) on 19th-23rd June 2018 in Budapest (Hungary). Dates will be confirmed in the first circular.

A video presenting the host institution was diffused during the Business meeting and met with much appreciation and enthusiasm by the attendees. See the invitation video at: <https://videotorium.hu/hu/recordings/16843>

2019:



Dr Antonella Muratgia and Professor Michele Bernadini invited the MELCom International to their institution, the Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale" in Naples (Italy) for its 41st conference in Spring 2019 on behalf of its Rector: Professor Elda Morlicchio. They presented their institution and their collections, and won the unanimous approval of the MI members who accepted their invitation wholeheartedly. This invitation was gladly accepted by the Board and present members. Dates will be confirmed in due course.



V. Elections

After six years in office, the second mandate of both the Secretary Dominique Akhoun-Schwarb and the Treasurer Farzaneh Zareie came to an end, and their positions were offered to elections.

The newly elected Secretary is MariaLuisa Langella, Librarian at the Middle East Centre at St Antony's College in Oxford (UK), and the newly elected Treasurer is Andreas Drechsler, Subject Librarian at Bamberg University (Germany), both very active and engaged members of the association. With their elections, the constitutional rule stating that members of the Board must hail from different European countries of work has been duly re-established.

Out with the old...

...in with the new Board!



The MELCom International President, Sara Yontan, paid tribute to the contributions of Farzaneh Zareie and Dominique Akhoun-Schwarb, in the following terms:

“**Dominique Akhoun-Schwarb**, as most of you know, has been MELCom International's dynamic and devoted secretary for the last six years. She actually stepped in when I left and I remember how anxious she was about not meeting the expectations. I must admit with some humility that she has been incredibly efficient and delivered more than expected. I found her overwhelming as a secretary but also as a person.

After two terms, Dominique decided it was time to move on and leave her demanding position to "new blood". I for one regret her decision but respect it most profoundly. On behalf of MELCom International, I express my formal and personal thanks for all the work she has put in, especially for the preparation of each and every annual conference. I wish to express my admiration for the perfection she has aimed at *and reached* in her work, and for the good humour that has accompanied her sense of precision. *Merci beaucoup ma chère Dominique de nous avoir accompagnés avec ta bonne humeur et ta patience sans bornes!*



Farzaneh Zareie, our discrete treasurer who has worked silently backstage for the last six years, has nevertheless always been on the front line, with her excellent and very pertinent remarks whenever necessary. Her only drawback has been her modesty! Allow me to thank her in French for her rigorous work and wonderful company.

Ma chère Farza, comme dit le message de ton portable "quel dommage..." tu ne seras plus là avec tes conseils et avis, toujours précieux et sages. Merci de nous avoir apporté ta rigueur et ton sens de l'humour qui ont rendu nos réunions de travail en réunions amicales."

Sara Yontan also introduced the new members of the Board, as follows:

“**MariaLuisa Langella** is at present Middle East Centre Librarian at St Antony's College, Oxford. She received a *Laurea* in Near and Middle Eastern Studies from the Oriental Institute in Naples, Italy, an MSt in Hebrew and Jewish Studies from the University of Oxford, and a PhD with distinction in Arabic sociolinguistics from the University of Aix-Marseille in France.

Prior to coming to St Antony's in 2016 she held library positions in Islamic and Hebrew studies in Oxford and taught Arabic in France and Italy. Her survey of “Jewish Writing in Arabic in Arabic Characters in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries” appeared in *Approaches to the History and Dialectology of Arabic in Honor of Pierre Larcher* (Brill 2017). She is member of MELCom UK since 2011 and acts as its secretary since 2013. She joined MELCom International in 2012 and has been since a regular attendee.



Well known to steady MELCom International participants, **Andreas Drechsler** is the Middle East librarian at Bamberg University library.

Having studied Orientalistik, i.e. Middle Eastern studies with a focus on Iran at Würzburg, Andreas pursued his MA there and got his Ph.D. from Bamberg in 1996. In the meantime, between 1991 and 1993, he was trained as a librarian at the Munich Library School, one of the two institutions that train academic librarians in Germany.

He started working in Bamberg as a subject specialist for Middle Eastern Studies in

1993 and has been with Bamberg since, having left his alma mater for two positions abroad: Once in 2006-2007 to act as the Head Librarian of the German Oriental Institute in Beirut and later in 2014 to conduct a development project that aimed at training librarians in Toloqan and Kabul, Afghanistan (of which we all benefited via his report).

Andreas Drechsler has highlighted our MELCom International meetings with his talks, announcements and very pertinent questions from the floor. He was elected MELCom International secretary in 1997, served as such for two years and launched our first website that was hosted by Bamberg University during his office.

His professional knowledge, curiosity and precision mixed with his much appreciated sense of humour and sociability makes Andreas a perfect candidate!"

VI. Professional Announcements

MariaLuisa Langella presented the celebrations organised for the 60th anniversary of the Middle East Centre at St Antony's College, Oxford. The event will be held on **15-16 September 2017**.



See the programme of the event here:

https://www.sant.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/reunion_brief_programme.pdf

Dominique Akhoun-Schwarb mentioned the centenary celebrations held at SOAS throughout the academic year 2016/17. More information is available on the dedicated webpage at SOAS, University of London: soas.ac.uk/centenary



Marie-Geneviève Guesdon announced the launch of the trilingual web portal Bibliothèques d'Orient (1800-1945). See <http://heritage.bnf.fr/bibliothequesorient/homepage>. The project had been presented at the last MELCom International conference in Leiden.

VII. Any other business

- **Regarding the organisation and running of the conference:**

1. **Yasmin Faghihi** queried the option of advance payment for the conference fees and the optional activities (conference diner, excursion) as last-minute cancellations were creating too much financial and organisational stress for the organisers. **Sara Yontan** responded that this issue had been raised in the past and will be reviewed again. The main obstruction to this option had been mainly of a logistic nature so far, as attendees from some countries were unable to make bank transfer payments in Euros. It was remarked that in their vast majority, registered attendees kept to their commitment once they returned their firm registration form, so this applied really to a small fraction, and very often for compelling reasons rather than a sudden change of mind. It is recognised however that late cancellations put organisers under undue pressure towards caterers and other clients they are working with, and attendees ought to be made aware of this.

2. **Sara Yontan** put forward a request to address the issue of late comers on the day of registration, as this had consistently prevented the Treasurer and her helpers to attend the opening and first panel of the conference, which is unfair since they are all attendees in the same right. We may have to devise a solution by which late comers would have to wait to register at the coffee breaks or lunch break before joining the conference room.

- **Regarding the MI website:**

Stoyanka Kenderova suggested that we integrate a page on cataloguing issues. **Dominique Akhoun-Schwarb** pointed out that a tab already existed on the MELCom International Website (https://www.melcominternational.org/?page_id=388), but that it referred indeed to two active webpages and forums of discussion: the AuteursArabes' [shared links](#) and the [MELA Committee on cataloguing](#) , that MELCom International members could consult/join.

The conference concluded with renewed and special thanks to our hostess Yasmin Faghihi, and all who allowed this conference to run as smoothly as it did: present and former colleagues at the Cambridge University Library (Rosie Maxton, Catherine Ansoerge and Asma Rezaie), the Board members of both associations: Sara Yontan, Dominique Akhoun-Schwarb, Farzaneh Zareie, MariaLuisa Langella and Waseem Farooq, the various MELCom members who pitched in to help during the conference (Andreas Drechsler and Zouhour Chaabane among others) and of course all our various generous academic and commercial sponsors which made this event altogether possible, and first and foremost, the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at Cambridge University.
