

MELCOM International24th annual Conference**Round table****Toward an exchange network of Arabic authority records****28 May 2002****ANONYMOUS CLASSICS IN ARABIC LITERATURE**

Nadine Boddaert

Bibliothèque nationale de France

We are contributing to this round table not as specialists in Arabic literature, but because we are in charge of authority uniform titles at the Bibliothèque nationale de France and steering a project initiated by the Cataloguing Section of IFLA.

As far as we know, to this day there are no international tools which librarians could use to help them catalogue the anonymous works in Arabic literature - which we call “anonymous classics” – such a tool would help us choose a uniform title of international value, spot variant titles without having to search indefinitely, construct the proper authority record thus identifying the works precisely and once for all. In fact, the IFLA document published in 1964 entitled “*Liste des vedettes uniformes pour les classiques anonymes = International list of uniform headings for anonymous classics*” doesn’t cover literature in the Arabic language (neither does it deal with Chinese or Japanese literatures) because no library at the time would take responsibility for such works as *Sīrat 'Antar*, *Sīrat Banī Hilāl*, *Sīrat Baybars*, *Kalīla wa-Dimna*, etc.

Until now, libraries which have standardized the access points of the bibliographic records in their catalogues with uniform titles (whether or not they have authority files) establish them according to criteria which can vary according to the individual library, the country, and the reference tools they use.

Within the framework of the projected new edition of the list of “anonymous classics”, the Cataloguing Section of IFLA has decided to divide the task according to wide cultural areas, and to phase it in several successive stages so as to end up covering as many kinds of literatures as possible and to gather Persian-Arabic literatures and Turco-Mongolian literatures in a subgroup.

A certain number of partners are necessary to carry on such a project and bring it to fruition. The Bibliotheca Alexandrina has agreed to be responsible for establishing a first list of works, to suggest uniform titles which could be used as authority uniform headings of international value – i.e. Arabic titles used as headings together with their transliterated form according to ISO 233 –, to inventory variant titles of different editions and manuscripts. This proposal for collaboration has been presented to the Standing Committee of the IFLA Cataloguing Section in Boston, on the 24th August 2001. When this phase of the project is achieved, the national libraries in the countries belonging to all the concerned cultural areas will be asked to review the first draft of the list, point out their remarks and corrections and also to suggest other works known locally which should deserve to belong to the list because of their many different editions. Libraries specializing in Arabic literature could volunteer to participate in this second phase of the project.

We hope that, thanks to the collaboration of many of you, this project will be accomplished within a reasonable time frame and that an invaluable tool which has been so far terribly lacking will become at last available to the whole professional community via the INTERNET.

Contact

Nadine BODDAERT

Bibliothèque nationale de France

DSR/SCB - IFLA Anonymous classics

Tél. + 33 (0) 1 53 79 86 66

Fax + 33 (0) 1 53 79 81 50

nadine.boddaert@bnf.fr

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