

## Comments: MELCom-MELA Joint Annual Conference 2026

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The 47th Annual MELCom Conference took place in Cairo in January 2026. Although I had already been able to watch some of the presentations from the 45th conference in London via livestream before my 'library career' began, the event in Cairo was the first professional library conference I had the opportunity to attend. For me as a newcomer, the conference offered an excellent opportunity to gain an overview of the field, develop a sense of the professional community, and meet future colleagues.

### **The venue**

The conference took place on the campus of the American University in New Cairo. Although the venue was situated some distance from the city centre, it offered a number of advantages. On the one hand, despite the size of the campus, the conference activities were largely concentrated in a single area of the campus, which made it easier to interact with different participants and helped to keep the focus on the presentations; on the other hand, the leafy and peaceful grounds also offered the opportunity to step away briefly between sessions.

### **The programme**

Following registration and a brief breakfast buffet, the first day began with the first joint session involving all participants. The opening remarks were followed by a presentation on previous MELCom conferences and the network that has emerged from them. This gave me as a newcomer a good insight into how the conferences and organisations operate. This was followed by presentations of collections and projects, which gave a good impression of the thematic range of topics to be covered over the coming days.

Due to the large number of presentations, there were two parallel sessions on the following day. As the seating and doors in the lecture theatres were particularly noisy, the organisers asked participants not to move between rooms between the presentations within a session. The individual sessions were grouped together in a relatively broad manner in terms of content, which on the one hand provided variety, but also meant that I tended to make my choices based on individual presentations rather than the thematic focus of the session.

On the third day, all participants came together again for joint sessions. In these, some very interesting examples of the use of AI were presented, whilst in the afternoon the focus shifted to archival aspects.

### **The book fair**

A unique feature of the MELCom-MELA Joint Annual Conference 2026 was that it took place at the same time as the Cairo International Book Fair. This also gave conference participants the opportunity to visit the book fair. I was able to visit the book fair on the 24<sup>th</sup> of January, which was of great value as it gave me an insight into the depth and diversity of the contemporary Arab publishing industry. In addition, I had the opportunity to visit the office of a leading bookseller. There, the managing director gave us a tour of the premises and explained the way the business operates and the current challenges it faces.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, I found attending the MELCom-MELA Joint Annual Conference 2026 in Cairo to be a hugely enriching experience. This is due in no small part to the atmosphere at the conference, which I found to be very friendly, encouraging and welcoming. The variety of presentations was very inspiring and, combined with the subsequent discussions, proved very instructive for me in terms of gaining an understanding of different perspectives. Furthermore, it was truly fantastic to get to know so many colleagues from MELA during the Joint Annual Conference. Finally, the conference catering deserves mention. Even if vegetarian options and the coffee were sometimes a bit limited the catering was good and tasty. The generous support of the sponsors, who provided the catering throughout the conference, is gratefully acknowledged.

Overall, attending the conference was a fantastic professional as well as personal experience. The wide range of presentations provided valuable insights into current developments in Middle Eastern librarianship, while the discussions and informal exchanges offered important opportunities for networking and learning from colleagues in the field. I am very grateful for MELCom's generous support in enabling my participation and I very much look forward to attending future conferences.