

Report on Participation in the MELCom International and MELA Annual Conference, Cairo (January 2026)

I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the support that enabled my participation in the Annual Conference of MELCom International and the Middle East Librarians Association (MELA), held in Cairo in January 2026. The conference provided a valuable platform for scholarly exchange, professional networking, and engagement with current developments in the fields of Middle Eastern librarianship, archives, and heritage documentation.

The conference brought together a diverse group of scholars, librarians, archivists, and heritage professionals working across different regions and institutional contexts. One of the most valuable aspects of the event was the opportunity to engage with ongoing projects related to the preservation, cataloguing, and digitisation of collections from the Middle East and Islamic world. Several panels addressed methodological challenges in archival access, metadata standardisation, and digital infrastructures, which are directly relevant to my own research interests in spatial documentation and heritage preservation.

In addition to attending panels, the informal discussions that took place during breaks and social events were equally significant. These conversations facilitated exchanges on practical issues such as access to collections, institutional collaboration, and the challenges of working with fragile or under-documented materials. The conference environment was collegial and conducive to establishing new professional connections, particularly with scholars and practitioners working on similar themes of documentation and preservation.

For colleagues who have not previously attended MELCom/MELA conferences, I would strongly recommend participation, particularly for those engaged in library sciences, archival studies, or heritage-related research in the Middle East. The conference offers not only a venue for presenting research but also an important space for understanding institutional practices, emerging tools, and collaborative opportunities across the region.

From an organisational perspective, the conference was well structured, with a balanced programme that accommodated a range of topics and formats. The venue in Cairo provided a contextually meaningful setting, given the city's central role in the history of scholarship and cultural production in the region. The logistical arrangements were generally smooth, and the schedule allowed sufficient time for both formal sessions and informal engagement.

As a suggestion for future editions, it may be beneficial to further integrate sessions that bring together technical specialists (e.g. in digitisation, GIS, or database design) with librarians and archivists, in order to encourage more interdisciplinary exchange. Additionally, providing more structured opportunities for early-career researchers to present work-in-progress could further enhance the conference's role as a platform for emerging scholarship.

Overall, participation in the conference was highly beneficial for my research and professional development. It provided both intellectual input and practical insights that will inform my ongoing work in documentation and heritage-related research. I am grateful for the opportunity to attend and look forward to future engagement with the MELCom and MELA communities.