

جامعة نيويورك ابوظبي



“Is there a Place (and Space) for Archival Programs at Universities in the MENA Region? A Case Study of NYU Abu Dhabi

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Introduction and outline



One archivist's career....several types of archives

- Public library
- Presidential Library
- Academic collections
- Museum collections



First impressions of the archival landscape of the UAE

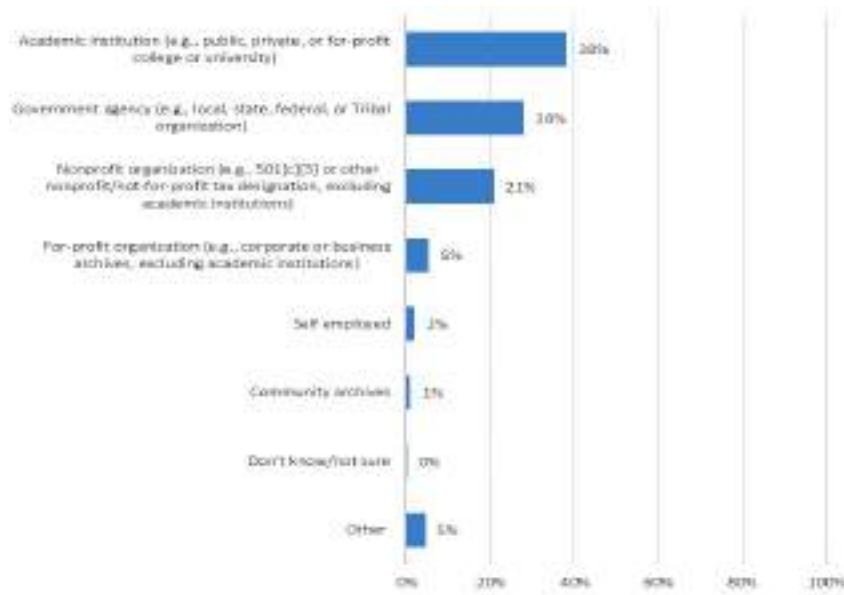
When I arrived in 2017, what struck me was:

- deep impact of oral traditions in Emirati culture
- role of records of foreign countries in telling history of UAE
- role of expatriate communities in the UAE
- urgency of preservation of documents
- private archives are key



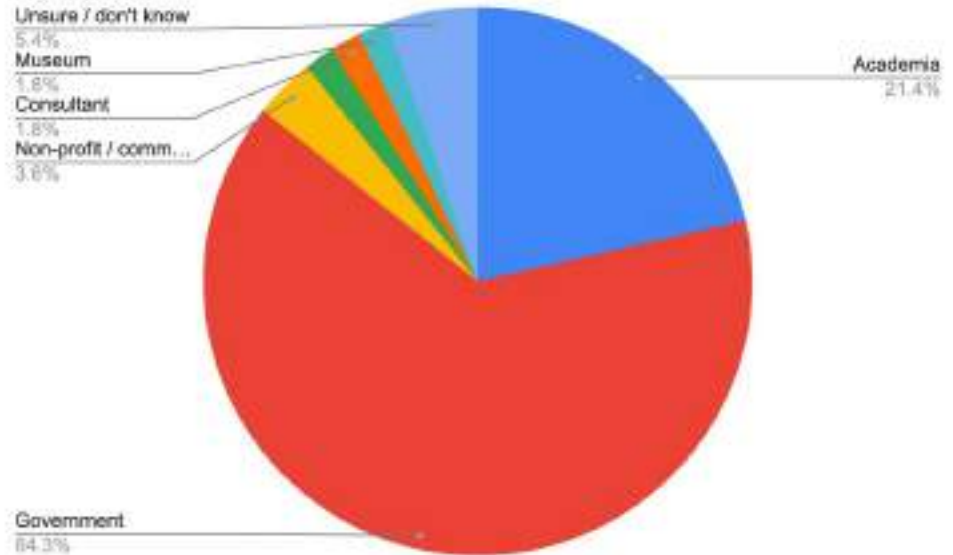
Percentage of archivists working in academia: US

- Surveys in the U.S. (2004, 2021)
- Largest percentage in academia
- Academia = private archives
- Significant portion of workforce



Percentage of archivists working in academia: Arab World

- ICA-Arbica members (n=56)
- Only 21.4 academia
- Of those, only 3 fit definition of Special Collections



Introduction: NYU Abu Dhabi Archives and Special Collections

- What is it?
- Planning the library
- Collecting areas: initial focus
- The addition of archives
- Geographical scope: radiating outward from AD
- Current size of holdings



Private archives at NYUAD: faculty-related papers

- Marcel Kurpershoek papers
- Salwa Mikdadi papers
- Ali Akbar Bushiri family collection



Private archives at NYUAD: purchases

- Graham Hill papers
- Muscat photo album
- Bernard Shaw album



Local donations: Frauke Heard-Bey and David Heard collection (MC.064)

- Largest collection: 25 linear meters
- Printed materials covering a half-century
- Cultural organizations
- Scholarly programs
- Petroleum industry
- Early UAE government publications
- Most-used collection



Photo credit: The National,
October 24, 2024

Local donations: Peter Hellyer papers (MC.068)

- Reports and memoranda of ADIAS
- Emirates Birds Record Committee records
- Natural history activities
- The media in the UAE

Photograph courtesy of Perihan Hellyer



Local donations: British Business Group of Abu Dhabi (MC.145)

- Recent acquisition
- Business relations between U.K. and U.A.E.
- Complete meeting minutes, 1995-2021
- Extensive photographs
- V.I.P. visits to the U.A.E.



Local donations: Paul Bergne papers (MC.077)

- British diplomat, based in Abu Dhabi
- Time period: 1972-1974
- Interest: construction of dhows
- Maritime heritage of the Gulf



Research use of the collections: recent visitors

During the past academic year (2024-2025), have hosted:

- Approximately 20 researchers spending 74 days onsite
- Countries represented: UK, USA, Egypt, India, Lebanon, France, Austria, and of course, the UAE
- Institutions represented: MIT, Georgetown University, University of Michigan, Harvard, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Rutgers University, CEDEJ (Cairo), Bibliotheca Alexandrina (Alexandria), Sorbonne-Paris, University of Edinburgh, Leibniz-Zentrum (Austria), the University of California and several independent researchers from the UAE.

Research use of collections: recent topics

- History of banking and finance in the Gulf
- the effects of the pearling industry on Bahrain
- the role of the Trucial Oman Scouts in shaping aspects of the culture of the UAE
- reflections of life in the UAE in official government photography
- design and construction of mosques in the UAE
- the evolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict during the Mandate period
- depictions of the date palm as a representation of the culture of the UAE
- the history of the petroleum industry in the UAE
- The Egyptian poet Ahmad Zaki Abu Shadi and his views of Islam in the modern world

Gaps in the archives: Emirati stories

- Emirati family papers
- Family Business Histories
- Other potential areas

Sheikh Zayed, ca. 1964
Photo credit: J. B. Kelly collection (MC.058),
NYU Abu Dhabi Library



Concluding thoughts



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Thank you!

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<https://nyuad.nyu.edu/en/library/collections/archives-and-special-collections.html>