

Annual Meeting 2003 Anchorage

MELA Business Meeting

Thursday November 6, 2003
Anchorage Hilton hotel, Anchorage, Alaska

MELA Members in Attendance

Midhat Abraham, Muhamamd al-Faruque, Mohammad Bakhti, Leonard Chiarelli, Paul Crego, Mark Day, Christine Dykgraaf, John Eilts, Hikmat Faraj, George Fawzi, Meryle Gaston, James Gentner, Janet Heineck, David Hirsch, Michael Hopper, Omar Khalidi, Shayee Khanaka, William Kopycki, Peter Magierski, Suad Muhammad-Gamal, Christopher Murphy, Andras Riedlmayer, Jonathan Rodgers, Simon Samoeil, Arthur Smith, James Weinberger, M. Lesley Wilkins, Gamil Youssef.

Minutes

The 2003 Annual Meeting of the Middle East Librarians Association convened at 9:00 a.m., Thursday November 6, 2003 at the Anchorage Hilton hotel, Anchorage, Alaska. President David Hirsch greeted the attendees. The minutes of the 2002 meeting as published in MELA Notes number 75-76 (fall 2002-spring 2003) were accepted. David asked all present to identify themselves and their institutions. David thanked the vendors who generously helped to underwrite our meeting expenses.

Secretary-Treasurer Janet Heineck gave her report, which was accepted.

Jonathan Rodgers gave the MELA Notes editor's report. He described the contents of the current issue, number 75-76, Fall 2002-Spring 2003, which is in press. Jonathan will secure the membership directory, to make it safe from Google searches, in a subdirectory to which only members with an ID and a password will have access. Jonathan commended Rachel Simon's hard work in assigning and collecting MELA Notes book reviews, which has provided the editor, for the first time ever, a backlog of articles and book reviews. These will be published in first-in first-out order. There was no progress during the

past year on the MELA Notes back run conversion project. John Eilts and Jonathan expect to resume effort on this project in the year ahead. Up to now, more than thirty issues have been digitized, of which twelve or thirteen issues have been converted to fully searchable PDF format. As the images are produced and converted to PDF and searchable text put behind them, the entire run of MELA Notes will be digitized as such. As always, Jonathan urged the membership to submit articles and to encourage colleagues to do so also.

On behalf of the George Atiyeh Prize committee, and in the absence of Dona Straley and Robin Dougherty, David Hirsch introduced Anne O'Shea, the winner of the 2003 George Atiyeh Prize and presented her with her award. David also welcomed back Christine Dykgraaf, a former Atiyeh Prize winner.

The next agenda item was the MELA Committee on Iraqi Libraries report. To preface that, David did a sight translation of an Arabic letter he had received that morning from al-Muthanna Library in Baghdad describing the current state of the book trade and libraries in Iraq and the problems facing them. According to the writer, Asas Qasim Rajab, the three recent wars have greatly reduced the number of books being published and which used to be purchased and read by Iraq's highly literate middle classes, whose incomes are now greatly reduced. Even used book prices are out of reach for many people. However, dozens of new newspapers and magazines have appeared, as publishers exercise new freedom of expression. al-Muthanna has distributed books and serials in Iraq and worldwide since 1936 and, despite difficult daily circumstances, they hope to continue to make items available to libraries in the US and throughout Iraq. Mr. Rajab sent greetings to the members of MELA. David has a copy of the letter and can e-mail it in Arabic to anyone who is interested.

David invited Andras Riedlmayer to present the report on the MELA Committee on Iraqi Libraries.

Andras said that the first news of the looting and burning of Baghdad's national library and archives center evoked shock and then a great effort to obtain accurate information on what was destroyed, what could be salvaged, and how groups could help. Information from the press was often contradictory, both because the press went in with no expertise of its own and because of the various kinds of spin meshed with the accounts. As the emotional response grew, so did the confusion.

The MELA Executive Board asked Andreas to organize and chair a committee on Iraqi libraries. The members are Aseel Nasir Dyck, recently retired from Portland State University, Chuck Jones of the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute, Shayee Khanaka of UC Berkeley, Simon Samœil of Yale, Brenda Bickett of Georgetown, Jeffrey Spurr of Harvard, and Andras. David Hirsch later joined *ex officio*.

The committee's initial charge was to gather information, to be the public voice of MELA's stance, and to determine how MELA could aid those who were launching initiatives to help. Although MELA's small size precludes major initiatives on its own, much has been done.

As a public statement, MELA was one of the signatories of a joint letter submitted by a large number of American cultural organizations which decried the disruption of cultural heritage in Iraq and called for measures to address the destruction. Andras was invited by the Washington Post to submit an op-ed piece on the destruction of libraries, signing himself as chair of MELA's Middle East Libraries Committee, which drew inquiries about what MELA is doing. Chuck Jones set up a website for the MELA Iraqi Libraries Committee (<http://www-oi.uchicago.edu/OI/IRAQ/mela/melairaq.html>), now a major resource.

The committee capitalized on members' database skills to compile or contribute to bibliographies organized to help discover what was in these collections originally and to recover information about stolen or destroyed items that might be replaced in the form of microforms or other facsimiles from holdings elsewhere. Shayee Khanaka, with assistance from other members, assembled a large bibliography of manuscript catalogs. The Oriental Institute, with assistance from several MELA members, created a database of published objects, mainly from the Iraq Museum, with many item illustrations scanned and mounted on the web. These images are being used by police authorities and others trying to track the more than four thousand stolen objects through the international art market to Europe, Russia, the Middle East, and the United States.

In addition, the committee has been collecting images of ownership marks from Iraqi manuscript libraries. Some were contributed, and the committee has sought out others. Thieves usually remove obvious marks but, since libraries place these ownership stamps in various places in a book or manuscript, thieves may be too hasty or unskilled to remove all of them before the book appears in the art or used book market, thus potentially allowing the item to be identified.

MELCOM's annual meeting was to be in Beirut in May, and our vice-president Lesley Wilkins planned to attend. The committee put together a statement to be read at that meeting of goals and purposes expressed to emphasize its commitment to working together with colleagues internationally on this issue. MELCOM officially acknowledged and endorsed the committee's initiatives. Contacting Iraqi colleagues directly through letters such as the one David read has been harder work, but the foundation has been laid.

What next for the Committee?

The committee continues to gather as much information as possible for posting on the website fully or through links. The aim is to keep all colleagues with a need to know, IFLA, and MELCOM informed of everything that comes the committee's way. Andras said that from past tragedies of this sort, it is known that there is usually a tremendous amount of good will later wasted in duplication of effort. The committee works to prevent that from happening here.

Michael Hopper, at Andras's invitation, described the Harvard committee set up to look at ways Harvard and other US libraries can cooperate to help Iraq's libraries. Two ideas have emerged. One is for a Harvard-Simmons College library school joint training program for Iraqi librarians. The other is the compilation of university-level sets of books on particular topics, such as environmental studies and political studies, and seeking donations of these titles from their publishers to make them available to Iraq's university libraries. This would provide each library with full runs of periodicals. Perhaps text could be provided on cd-roms for which reasonable security could be provided by libraries with even severe infrastructure problems.

Andras offered the further idea that OCLC and other library utilities' strengths could be drawn upon to produce union lists of holdings of Iraqi imprints—periodicals and monographs in North American, European, and other libraries. Iraqi librarian colleagues could specify from them their own desiderata, the originals of which could then be refor-

matted by filming or scanning and supplied to all Iraqi libraries. In the case of serials, this would provide each library nationwide with full runs in place of its earlier, perhaps fragmentary holdings. The texts could be provided on cd-roms for which reasonable security could be provided by libraries with even severe infrastructure problems.

The committee welcomes input, ideas, suggestions, and information from anyone. Andras is proud of the way “this very small community” has responded to the terrible situation. MELA and its committee is mentioned by bigger players in terms that suggest an organization far larger and with greater resources than it actually is. Andras thanked everyone for their help and support.

John Eilts said that consulting with Iraqi colleagues about what they need is both critical and difficult. Talking to people going to or returning from Iraq is one means. The recent Library of Congress mission, whose report is soon to be published, was another. Before John Russell, head of cultural affairs in ORHA [U.S. Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance], went to Baghdad, Jeffrey Spurr, Keith Waterpugh, and John had a brainstorming lunch session with him in Boston. Through Mr. Russell, the committee has been in touch with Wishyar Muhammed, who is serving in the equivalent of the Ministry of Culture and is coordinating library affairs, and with whom they remain in e-mail touch.

John added that another idea of the Harvard-Simmons project is to invite Iraqi librarians to a strategizing session, perhaps in Amman, early next year to determine more precisely their ideas, needs, and priorities.

David Hirsch said that communication is slowly improving lately with some limited internet access from Iraq, with the UAE’s al-Thurayya satellite phone service occasionally available, and with the mails working again. Soon after the committee was formed, David had contact with the former president of the Iraqi libraries association.

David invited Paul Crego to give the report from the Library of Congress.

Paul spoke as representative of Sarah Ozturk, team leader of LC’s Middle East and North Africa cataloging team. He distributed a list of sample subject headings and classifications developed during the past year. During fiscal year 2003, the MENA team and Paul cataloged over 10,500 items in Amharic, Arabic, Armenian, Ge’ez, Georgian, Persian, Turkish, and in western languages on Middle Eastern subjects. In-

creases over fiscal year 2002 are: full level records produced, 36%; and name and series authority creation, 76% and 93% respectively. Receipts continue to increase, particularly in English and Western languages dealing with subjects about the Middle East.

The MENA team was augmented during the past year by three newly hired catalogers and by one cataloger transferred within the regional and cooperative cataloging division. Dr. Michael Chyet was hired to work with Arabic books and the Kurdish backlog. An-Chi Hoh Dianu, one of last year's George Atiyeh Prize winners, was hired as an Arabic cataloger. Allen Maberry was hired from the University of Washington Libraries. Sami Kotbi transferred from the cooperative cataloging team. MENA's cataloging staff now numbers twelve. They expect full cataloging output to increase as new staff becomes fully trained.

Progress is being made on cataloging the Thomas Kane collection, Armenian and Georgian serials complete with online holdings, and remote electronic resources both in English and Arabic. The MENA section has begun to catalog materials in KBP and expects large increases in this area in the coming year. Discussions on the Kurdish romanization table are about to begin, and the cataloging of Kurdish materials will begin this year.

David invited Lesley Wilkins to speak briefly on the MELCOM meeting she attended in Beirut in May.

Lesley said that the only other American attending was the woman who directs the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library project, which is actively microfilming manuscripts in Lebanese monasteries. The program was attended by many Lebanese librarians despite the fact that there is still no library school in Lebanon. There is talk of establishing one, however, and also of re-establishing the national library essentially destroyed during the civil war. Librarians attended from about six European and several Middle East countries, the Lebanese contingent being by far the largest. The meeting's topic, manuscripts, was reflected in many papers, reports, and visits. Books exhibits were not large. Lesley read the resolution of Andras's committee, which was accepted and endorsed. Lesley heard a rumor about a German initiative to train Iraqi librarians, but does not know whether anything came of it. There was one rumored initiative of a Scottish group trying to put together book sets to go to Iraq, but she knows no more about it. Next year's MELCOM conference is in Munich at the end of May. In 2005, they will try to meet in a Middle Eastern city, and many hope it will be

Istanbul. Lesley was impressed by how much Beirut, which has grown enormously since she lived there, has come back from the civil war.

David thanked Lesley and encouraged everyone who can to attend MELCOM if possible. Next year's Frankfurt Book Fair will emphasize the Arab world. Perhaps we can plan a MELA group to attend.

After Lesley's report, the election of new officers took place. The candidates were introduced: for President, Lesley Wilkins; for Vice President/Program Chair, John Eilts; and for Member-at-Large two nominees, Muhammad Faruque and Omar Khalidi. There were no further nominations from the floor for these offices. Ballots were marked, collected, and counted after the break. MELA's new officers are: president 2003–2005, Lesley Wilkins; vice-president/program chair 2003–2004, John Eilts; and member-at-large 2003–2005, Omar Khalidi.

After the break, Chris Murphy gave the LC acquisitions report. He announced the arrival of several new staff members. LC will soon have an exhibit of Arabic manuscripts from Timbuktu. Chris has been working with Islamic institutions in Mali regarding LC acquisitions of more Arabic manuscripts. LC will be cataloging more Middle Eastern-language newspapers, whose holdings will be entered into LC's OPAC. Planning continues to digitize and mount on the web "calligraphy pieces"—manuscripts parts of which are held by LC and other institutions—in a virtual reassembly of the complete manuscript under study. The position of Near East Section head, formerly held by George Atiyeh, will be posted soon. Chris asked MELA members what we are all doing about digital archiving: the archiving of items that have no paper aspect. Members are encouraged to send descriptions of their practices to Chris at cmur@loc.gov.

Chris gave some details from the report of the recent Library of Congress mission to Baghdad in which Mary Jane Deeb, Michael Albin, and others participated. [Mary Jane Deeb posted the mission report in a November 28, 2003 message to MELANET-L.] The national library suffered arson fires on April 10 and April 14. Destroyed were all microfilm holdings and all archives from 1977 and later. After the first fire and before the second, librarians sealed the stacks, thus preserving most of the books, most of the newspapers in hard copy, all theses and dissertations of all Iraqi universities, and archives from 1920–1970. Between the two fires, mosque officials moved fifty to sixty thousand books to Sadr City. About four thousand rare and "forbidden" books were destroyed in flooding, of which four hundred to five hundred are

irrecoverable. A new book storage building has been built in the national library's garden. Before the war there were about 160 employees: 70 librarians and library technicians and 90 guards and administrators. Most of the librarians want to return to work. The manuscripts and archives division and the national library were one institution beginning in 1988. The report recommended that they now be separate institutions. All manuscripts are in Dar al-Saddam and all are filmed. The report will be published in its entirety in a coming issue of the Library of Congress Information Bulletin.

Simon Samœil, Near East Collection Curator at Yale University, described the OACIS Project (<http://www.library.yale.edu/oacis/>), of which he is the hard-working project manager. (The prototype OACIS ["Online Access to Consolidated Information on Serials"] system was launched on November 10, 2003, the Monday after our meeting.) At present, eight major universities, both OCLC and RLIN members, submit Middle Eastern vernacular serial records to the project, from which the system extracts MARC elements to create an elegant, searchable, online union catalog which, uniquely, includes holdings. Simon is working to invite an ever greater number of libraries in the Middle East to contribute their online serial records to OACIS and expects that, after the US Dept. of Education's funding period for this project comes to an end, Yale University will extend OACIS funding indefinitely.

David invited John Eilts to speak about the problem of the current lack of a useable Kurdish romanization scheme. John described the hope for the early development of a romanization that normalizes Kurdish irrespective of script. Paul Crego said that Sarah Ozturk and Michael Chyet have been meeting with Barbara Tillich, head of CPSO, at LC about this and are likely to follow Dr. Chyet's recommendation.

Likewise, the problem of the Turkish word "bir" is still unresolved. John is now a member of ALA's Committee on Cataloging: Asian and African Materials. He will put both of these issues onto that committee's agenda at the upcoming ALA Midwinter Meeting in San Diego in January in an effort to keep working toward a resolution of these long-standing problems.

David went on to bring up before the meeting the problem of skyrocketing prices for serials in our subject area. He handed out a list of titles he funds, comparing their prices when they were published by small societies to their much higher prices now that they are handled by commercial publishers. David asked what we can do as an orga-

nization to combat this. Do faculties understand how this is affecting serials funding in the humanities and the social sciences? David had to make a seven-percent cut in his serials budget, involving some of his major journals. David described recent negotiations among the UC system, the California Digital Library, Elsevier, and Taylor and Francis. He also mentioned a recent well-attended meeting of the UCLA librarians, the UCLA university librarian, and UCLA faculty on this problem of scholarly communications. Mark Day said that the big ten universities are jointly working on this problem as well. John said that MELA as a whole organization cannot take any particular position on this, but Shayee Khanaka said that at least we should make all our faculties aware of the problem.

Lesley announced our lunch and that we would reconvene at 2:00 p.m. for the MELA program. David thanked everyone for coming and thanked our participants.

After a convivial and delicious lunch, we gathered for the afternoon's excellent program.

**Secretary-Treasurer's Report
November 6, 2003**

INCOME

Dues, subscriptions	\$5,929.84
Mailing list sales and MELA Notes advertisements	350.00
Atiyeh Prize contributions	695.00
Total	\$6,974.84

EXPENSES

MELA Notes no. 73-74 printing and shipping	\$1,478.67
Three 2002 Atiyeh Prize awards and MESA registration fee reimbursements	\$957.00
Today's non-member guest speakers' MESA registration and reception fee reimbursements	\$394.00
Postage and supplies	\$352.75
2003 Atiyeh Prize and MESA registration fee reimbursement	\$315.00
2003 MESA meeting-in-conjunction fee	\$150.00
National Arbor Day Foundation donation in memory of Walter Oiler	\$100.00
Refund to EBSCO for Tokai University sub.	\$30.00
Photocopying	\$8.16
Cash for change at today's meeting	\$300.00
Total	\$4,085.58

Checking account balance November 4, 2003: \$12,365.57 Savings account balance November 4, 2003: \$3,742.35

As of November 4, 2003, we have 161 personal members, 30 library subscriptions, and 24 subscriptions handled through vendors.

Respectfully submitted,
Janet Heineck
Secretary-Treasurer

**Editor's Report
November 2003**

During the year 2003, one issue of MELA Notes, number 73–74 (Fall 2001–Spring 2002), was published (in print and electronically: <http://www.lib.umich.edu/area/Near.East/MELANotesIntro.html>) and distributed to the membership and subscribers. MELA Notes 7374 consisted of 69 pages (two articles: “Islamic Political Video Tapes” by Fawzi Abdulrazak and “A Report on a Trip to Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan” by Mary St. Germain; and 11 book reviews). Additionally, the minutes of the 2001 Annual Business Meeting (Nov. 17th, San Francisco) appeared in this number. The printing of this issue cost \$1478.67 plus postage.

This next issue of MELA Notes is nearly ready for press. Proofs of articles will be distributed shortly to authors for corrections which then will be incorporated before the issue finally goes to press and is converted for the electronic version on the web. Among the contents more precisely, occupying nearly the entire contents of this number, is “A Guide to Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Urdu Manuscript Libraries in India” by Omar Khalidi. Note that this year’s program includes a contribution by Omar Khalidi on the collections in India.

You might recall that in the distant past, the membership directory of MELA was printed in issues of MELA Notes. For some time, the directory has been published in one form or other on the MELA Notes web page. The editor is well aware of privacy concerns raised by the members at the prospect of exposing through the membership directory so published sensitive and personal information to the world of shameful mailing list compilers, disrespectful hackers, unbridled spammers, assorted wackos, and other lowly miscreants. With these concerns in mind, I have moved the directory to another subfolder of the server, removed entries of those who have requested strict privacy, and have almost finished setting up restricted access mechanism to the directory. One or two steps remain before I can completely secure the page. The goal is: Only members equipped with an ID and Password to be distributed may view the online directory. Please be patient; my local web authorities are unavoidably involved, and it takes time to set up the security mechanism (htaccess).

We are extremely grateful for the hard work of Rachel Simon, Book Review Editor, who continues to attract a healthy quantity of books from publishers and reviews from sometimes reluctant contributors,

and for the much appreciated service of our Secretary-Treasurer, Janet Heineck, who takes care of the distribution of the issue, and pays the bills.

There is unfortunately no progress to report on the MELA Notes back run conversion, as it has been in suspension since last meeting for a variety of good reasons.

As always, the editor urges the membership to submit articles and encourage colleagues to do so also.

Respectfully submitted,
Jonathan Rodgers
Editor