

**Collection development on the Middle East  
in the British Library  
focusing on the Arabic collections<sup>†</sup>**

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**T**his paper aims to set out the British Library's approach to collection development on the Middle East, highlighting issues which differ from collection development in a university library context. I will first outline the institutional context within which collecting on the Middle East occurs, before focusing on the Arabic collections. I discuss the collaborative approach to collection development in the UK with reference to the Area Specialisation Scheme operated by some of the main Middle East studies libraries, and consider the types of users the British Library aims to serve. I then discuss the main selection criteria and the various means of acquisition of Arabic-language materials.

**The aims of collection development in the British Library**

Collection development on the Middle East comes within the Library's overall collection development policy. The four major aims of the British Library's collection development policy are to:

- build as completely as possible the UK national published archive—both current and through retrospective 'gap-filling'—both print and electronic
- collect research-level English-language material published worldwide in the humanities and social sciences, and in science, technology and medicine (STM)
- buy foreign-language printed material selectively and in consultation with higher education and other research libraries in the UK
- acquire non-print items very selectively, focusing primarily on UK heritage material, in consultation with other archives in the UK

Building the national archive is the primary aim of the Library as a national library, and resources are structured around that aim through

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<sup>†</sup> This paper was originally presented at the Annual Meeting of the Middle East Librarians Association, 18 November 2004 in San Francisco.

the legal deposit office, which works to ensure that the Library receives all UK publications, as well as the publications of US publishers with distribution networks in the UK.<sup>1</sup> The Library is the primary research library of the UK, and through its Document Supply Center, it supports the research needs not only of UK higher education, business, and health care, but also of a worldwide customer base. Collection development for the Document Supply Centre is driven by the anticipation of current need<sup>2</sup> with a strong emphasis on serials to support research in science, technology and medicine (STM).<sup>3</sup> Although the Document Supply Centre acquires STM and conference material in most major research languages, the emphasis is on English-language material, with the largest proportion of non-UK material coming from the US. Similarly in the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences the clearest mandate from users is that the Library should devote the largest share of resources to research-level English-language materials.

The result is that the acquisition of foreign language material has to be highly selective. Even in major European languages Library resources allow for the purchase of little more than 30% of in-scope publications,<sup>4</sup> and for most languages the figure is lower.<sup>5</sup> The need

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<sup>1</sup> Legislation has recently been passed to provide for legal deposit of electronic material, and although voluntary deposit of this material has operated for some time, this will vastly increase the amount of e-material held by the Library.

<sup>2</sup> In 2003 the Library satisfied 82% of requests for copies (serials and monographs) from DSC stock.

<sup>3</sup> Of the Library's overall acquisitions budget of around £15 million, £8.5 million is spent on serials. STM accounts for the largest proportion of spending (£10 million), with arts & humanities and social sciences subjects occupying a much smaller share. Document supply of STM material represents the Library's primary revenue-generating activity.

<sup>4</sup> In the British Library context, 'in scope' means materials of research level or of relevance to future research, and excludes translations, except where the translation itself is important, textbooks, and re-editions unless significant new material is added. Calculating the proportion of in-scope material acquired is beset with difficulties. The Library has compared acquisition figures in various languages for specific years with the number of items in WorldCat, but the varying participation levels of libraries in different countries can affect the results. A more reliable way, which is heavily time-consuming, is to compare actual acquisitions with national bibliographies or books-in-print listings, but this is not possible for a large number of countries/languages.

<sup>5</sup> For some years now the Library has considered the future of foreign-language

for closer selection of this material is one factor underlying the separate treatment of foreign language material. Selection work is not structured around subject divisions as in most university libraries, but rather around language or regional divisions.<sup>6</sup> In Middle East studies the main languages collected are Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, Turkish and Armenian,<sup>7</sup> and a curator is responsible for selection in each language. Selection is only one element of curatorial work and generally accounts for less than 25% of a curator's time.<sup>8</sup> Selection work is thus limited not only by budget constraints, but also by time constraints. Budget limitations also underlie the pressing need for greater collaboration at national level in the collection of foreign language material.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Area Specialisation Scheme for Middle East materials**

Libraries collecting material in the languages of the Middle East<sup>10</sup> have faced the need to coordinate resources for a considerable period,

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collecting in terms of a 'distributed national collection', in which particular libraries would undertake to collect material in specific languages or on particular subject areas and to relinquish collecting responsibilities in other areas. The difficulties are many: university libraries seek to meet the current research needs of faculty and may find it difficult to devote resources to long-term national needs; there is extreme pressure on budgets which makes it hard for them to maintain adequate collecting levels, and users want to find books in their own institution rather than to be referred elsewhere.

<sup>6</sup> The allocation of acquisitions budgets by language also serves to ensure a given level of foreign language coverage and prevents English-language purchasing from encroaching on those funds. Staff responsibility is also divided according to format (e.g., manuscripts and printed materials, recorded sound, newspapers, maps, photographs.)

<sup>7</sup> Material is also collected in Kurdish, other Iranian languages, Turkic languages, Yiddish, and other languages of the Christian Orient.

<sup>8</sup> Curatorial posts are multi-functional: duties range from selection and cataloguing to provision of specialist advice (e.g., to government), exhibition planning, and other to work related to the important manuscript collections in each language. Curators are also involved in Library-wide strategy work, etc.

<sup>9</sup> This is to be a major task of the new Research Libraries Network linking higher education with the UK's national libraries. For background see the Research Support Library Group report at <http://www.rslg.ac.uk/final/final.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> In the UK the universities with substantial teaching and research on the Middle East are Cambridge, Durham, Edinburgh, Exeter, Leeds, Manchester, Oxford, SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies, London), and Westminster. Lam-

and the result has been the agreement of an Area Specialisation Scheme under which a small number of libraries have undertaken to target their resources on materials from, or about, specific groups of countries. Though the scheme has operated since the late 1960s, it has been subject to some revision since it began.<sup>11</sup> The main practical effect of the scheme is to divide the Middle East into three main areas: North Africa (except Egypt) which is covered by the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London (SOAS), the Gulf (including Iraq) which is the prime focus of collecting for Exeter University, and Egypt and the Levant (Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, the Palestinian Authority and Israel) which the British Library aims to cover, and which has long been the core of its collecting.<sup>12</sup> The presence of the Sudan Archive at Durham University is reflected in Durham's aim to collect Sudanese material, and its Middle East Documentation Unit has long been the major locus of official publications from the region, although Exeter's Arab World Documentation Unit also collects this material.<sup>13</sup> The British Library's selection of material from the Arab world is further influenced by the collecting strengths of other libraries: because of the presence of its law department, SOAS has good coverage of publications about the legal systems of Arab states, and the Bodleian Library (Oxford University) has a good representation of editions of classical texts.<sup>14</sup>

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peter also offers Islamic Studies courses, but its library resources are not so well established. For details of these and other institutions' library holdings see the Mapping Asia website: <http://www.asiamap.ac.uk/index.php>.

<sup>11</sup> For more detail see <http://www.ex.ac.uk/MELCOM/area.htm>

<sup>12</sup> In the period to 1947 a substantial proportion of the Library's intake of Arabic material came from India under copyright legislation, but from the 1950s onwards, Egypt and the Levant, along with Iraq, have been the main sources of material.

<sup>13</sup> Until the early 1980s the British Library also maintained collections of official publications from the Arab world (mainly official gazettes, but also some financial and statistical material), but budget cuts and staff cuts, along with delays in receiving material on microfilm, have meant that the Library effectively no longer covers this area of collecting.

<sup>14</sup> The Area Specialisation scheme does not preclude libraries buying materials from other countries. In practice the British Library also acquires some material from Iraq, Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, as well as a limited amount from Algeria and Morocco. Because of the proximity of SOAS (15 minutes' walk away) it is hardest to justify duplicating works held by SOAS, although some British Library users have to pay to use SOAS, and with items going out on loan, some items held

**Main users of the British Library's Arabic printed materials.**

Collaboration with higher education libraries thus influences the sources of Arabic material purchased. The other major influence on selection decisions is the needs of Library users, present and future. This is perhaps the area which differs most from a university library. University libraries exist above all to serve the needs of faculty and thus have both a relatively well-defined set of users (with known courses and research interests to cater for) and access to concerned academics who can give advice and support (to a greater or lesser degree) to selection work. The role of the British Library is to serve national needs, both present and for future generations, and as a result, its user base is far more diffuse and includes many users who are not affiliated to any institution.<sup>15</sup> At the same time there is no faculty to advise on selection.<sup>16</sup> Curators need to assess the changing needs of different sets of user groups, and to maintain an awareness of current research trends in the field, across all subject areas.

A further difference from the university context is that most researchers approach the British Library only when they have to. This may be as a library of first call if they do not have access to other relevant libraries, or as a library of last resort for specific items. For users outside London, coming to the Library may be time-consuming and expensive, and for many, using books in Library reading rooms is less convenient than borrowing books for use at home.<sup>17</sup> The key impact of this (aside from the Document Supply Centre) is that most readers do not come to the Library for currently available material which they, or their home institution, can buy: rather, the highest use is of materials which are out of print, or of expensive sets of volumes or reference materials. This in turn affects use in subject terms in that, for foreign language material, a majority of British Library users are doing work with a historical perspective.

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by SOAS (or other university libraries) may be lost.

<sup>15</sup> The Library's resources are available to anyone with a specific need to access its collections.

<sup>16</sup> Teaching demands are such that whilst academics may recognise a duty to their home institution, very few have time to spare for the benefit of the British Library.

<sup>17</sup> Another key difference is that the British Library, unlike university libraries using controlled password access, cannot offer remote access to on-line journals and reference materials, but can only provide on-site access, because of copyright/licensing issues.

Before looking at selection criteria on subject lines, I want to say more about the main sets of Library users for printed Arabic material. Researchers using Arabic materials are very diverse, but mainly fall into five groups. The first, which makes greatest use of the Library's Arabic printed material, is comprised of Arab researchers and students based in the UK (i.e., native speakers of Arabic). These may be resident writers and journalists among the UK's over 600,000-strong Arab community, the majority of whom live in London. Some of those actively engaged in research are exiled from their country of origin (Iraq above all). Others are postgraduate students studying in the UK, but at universities with no specific Arabic resources (e.g., Reading, Salford, Kent, etc.)<sup>18</sup> Overseas students represent an important source of income for many universities, but while their home institution may have Western-language materials relevant to their subject area, few can provide Arabic materials. Such students have wide-ranging research interests, but it is likely that many are undertaking research broadly within the social sciences or education. Those undertaking research related to their own country find few English-language resources on the specific subject of their research. Thus these researchers seek Arabic books for which they depend on the British Library and SOAS.

A second group of researchers who use the Library's Arabic materials are those undertaking research on the manuscript collections, and who thus have a specific need to come to the Library. These researchers, who include Arabs and non-Arabs, UK-based and from abroad, make use of supporting resources in Arabic whilst in the Library. A third group is comprised of people who are visiting London, and who use the opportunity to come into the Library to access Arabic materials. Many are Arabs in London during the summer months who may need resources from countries other than their own, for example those undertaking comparative research or working from a pan-Arab perspective and finding a limited range of resources in their own country.

The Library's Arabic materials are also used by researchers from the UK Muslim community<sup>19</sup> for whom Arabic is not their first language,

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<sup>18</sup> A search of the Index of British Theses for theses with the keywords 'Arab' and 'politics' shows that slightly more than half of the theses (53%) were submitted in universities with no specific Middle East Studies department. Authors names also suggest that the largest part of this research is undertaken by students of Arab origin.

<sup>19</sup> Predominantly of Indian or Pakistan origin.

but who use Arabic materials to study Islam. Library users include those teaching or studying in Islamic educational institutions and needing access to Islamic texts. Although Islamic institutions have their own resources the British Library holds many rare works. Many key Islamic texts are also available in electronic form on Muslim websites, but researchers who come to the Library tend to favour printed books. These researchers may also access Library resources via inter-library loan through public libraries, as many are based outside London.

The final group, for whom the Library is an important, but less frequently used resource, comprises researchers and academics based in Middle East studies departments. Most of these researchers rely heavily on their own institution to provide resources: their low use of the British Library should perhaps be taken partly as indication that their own institutions (and the personal collections of individual academics) meet their needs.<sup>20</sup> There is also a further factor underlying the relatively low use of the Library's Arabic collection by such researchers, and that is the fact that most non-Arab students (and academics) only read Arabic materials where the same content cannot be found in English-language (or French) publications, or else in literature where their research necessitates use of original texts.

**Collection development of Arabic materials: general principles and subject coverage.**

The type of researchers using the Library and the nature of their use, informs the selection criteria used in developing the Arabic collection. With limited funding it is not possible to fully satisfy the demands of all readers, but an effort is made to balance different needs. In general terms the Library's first priority is to acquire original works based on first hand research and scholarship, ideally which represent a contribution to their field of study. Works should be about the Middle East region, or about issues or communities with a clear relevance to the Middle East or which are highly significant for Arab opinion. A second important priority is to acquire substantial (i.e., 60 pages plus) publications by Arab non-governmental organizations. These may include reports or research publications of human rights organisations, trades unions, community and professional associations. A third priority is to acquire any book which generates a significant degree of controversy

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<sup>20</sup> The Area Specialisation Scheme is not intended to prevent universities from buying materials from countries outside their agreed area of coverage, to serve the needs of researchers.

and/or media attention, or whose author is the subject of legal action because of its publication, which is likely to be the subject of continuing interest (or hostility), so that it is available to researchers in future.<sup>21</sup>

In subject terms, material is selected primarily in history, politics, sociology (including women's studies and human rights), and modern literary and cultural studies. A smaller proportion of material is selected on classical literature, Islam/Islamic studies, economics, law (particularly its social implications) and language/socio-linguistics. Reference materials, bibliographies, manuscript catalogues and works about librarianship or the book in the Arab world are also selected. For most subjects a key criteria for selection is that the work should be of a specific, rather than general, nature. For example in history, works should be studies of a specific locality, a limited period or defined aspect of history rather than a broad overview. The reason for this is that most users of the Arabic collections either have little need for general works or else would prefer to read such works in English (or French). The Library thus seeks to acquire books in Arabic offering a subject of study, or perspective, which is not available in English. One exception to this is more wide-ranging works by highly prominent or influential authors writing in Arabic.<sup>22</sup>

The aim to acquire material offering a perspective not generally available in English also underlies the selection of material which is 'popular' rather than 'academic' in some subjects. The Library's aim is most frequently expressed as being to acquire research-level material, but that does not only mean material published for an academic readership; more broadly it means anything that is likely to be of research value in future. Research trends are such that almost anything can be of value for research: a survey of attitudes and opinions, or of means of expression, could be based upon material with a broad popular appeal, and thus such material can also be deemed to be 'in-scope'. In terms of Arabic collecting, there are certain categories of 'popular' material which are collected selectively. In politics, 'popular' works about key political issues (9/11, the war on terror, al-Aqsa intifada) are col-

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<sup>21</sup> This does not mean that the Library seeks to acquire offensive or illegal material, although its collections inevitably include works which some people would find offensive. In terms of controversial items I am thinking more of the works of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd or literary texts such as '*Walimah li-a'shab al-bahr*' and the works documenting the controversy around it.

<sup>22</sup> For example Burhan Ghalyun, Halim Barakat, Hisham Sharabi.



lected as social documents, as a record of expression and experience at a given time. Books listing the ‘martyrs’ of the intifada may be of research use, less for their contents *per se*, than as examples of how events are recorded and mediated to those living through them and to others in surrounding countries of the Arab world. This seems to be an important element of collecting foreign-language material at national level, in that collections should provide researchers in the UK with resources which allow for an understanding of the beliefs, way of thought, expression and experience of people in the region.

Such materials are judged not on whether they contribute to scholarship but on whether they provide resources to support future research. The same distinction lies behind the inclusion in the selection criteria of biographical works (autobiographies and biographies). Such accounts of lived experience, not only of prominent individuals, but also of ‘ordinary’ men and women, offer a high-validity means of understanding events and issues at a micro-level.<sup>23</sup> ‘Popular’ materials are also purchased selectively in cultural studies, for example on popular music or film, where there is a relative shortage of academic study in Arabic. And under the broad heading of Islamic studies, the Library selects a representative sample of works from an Islamist perspective, which are popular in nature, although works interpreting Islamic teaching or history for a popular audience, or offering guidance on lifestyle or worship are not selected. Academic works (e.g., on interpretation of the Quran or in Hadith studies) are selected to support Islamic scholarship.

Modern literature is one area where current collecting practice differs most obviously from the practice of twenty or even ten years ago. The Library used to aim to give good coverage to literary writing (poetry and drama as well as fiction), and original literary works used to account for a large proportion of works purchased. But the volume of literary works published in Arabic, and the lack of evidence that this material is used, has meant that the Library does not now buy original literary works, except those of the most prominent authors. We currently routinely select books by only about sixty authors whose work

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<sup>23</sup> More wide-ranging digitisation in future may offer a means of selecting specific issues and themes from such works and making links between them as means of historical research. See Edmund Burke III (Ed.) *Struggle and survival in the modern Middle East*, London, Tauris, 1993, on the relevance of narratives of ‘ordinary’ individuals.

is most likely to be studied in UK universities.<sup>24</sup> The reasoning behind this is that significant literary works are more likely to be available via reprints or re-editions, and so may be purchased several years after their date of first publication, once an author's prominence is established, or in response to user requests.<sup>25</sup> This type of retrospective 'gap-filling' is undertaken regularly across all subject areas, as time allows, but is perhaps most important in literature. The Library supports research in literature through the purchase of critical studies of modern writing, as well as reference works and some anthologies.

Another area where our buying has been reduced in recent years is in 'classical' Arabic studies, that is, editions of manuscripts or textual commentary. This is partly because of cost, partly because the Bodleian covers this area well, and partly because of practical time constraints. The Library's Arabic books are listed in five printed catalogues (covering different date ranges) as well as in the integrated catalogue (from 1980). Selection of classical material is particularly time-consuming because of the need to check available titles to ensure that the Library does not buy reeditions or reprints of works already held.<sup>26</sup> Some books are selected, but on a reduced scale, and most often with the aim of ensuring that the Library holds at least the most important texts.

Another area where time constraints limit selection is the acquisition of electronic material. Material on CD-ROM (or on-line subscription) is only purchased if it is not available in print or adds value or functionality to material held in print form; if the likely use justifies the cost; and if a multi-user licence or authorisation is available from the publisher, given that the British Library has to conform meticulously to copyright regulations. In practice, the need to obtain such authorisation from publishers of Arabic CD-ROMs, mitigates against routine selection of this material.

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<sup>24</sup> Although literary writing is not routinely selected I do buy occasional examples of literary writing from across the Arab world: especially from those countries where there are fewer authors who have achieved prominence outside their own country, e.g., Palestine, Jordan, Algeria, Kuwait.

<sup>25</sup> Very few requests are received from readers, mainly because most researchers approach their own institution first.

<sup>26</sup> In practice we acquire some new editions or reprints of texts, particularly where an edition held by the Library is old, and where new editions offer clearer type and better indexes.

### Practical aspects of Arabic collection development.

I now move on to more practical issues. The budget for Arabic printed monographs is £14,500 (at current rates that equates to \$25,500 or 21,385 Euro) and this amount has been broadly constant for the last five years. Serials, microfilms, and e-materials are supported from separate budgets. (The same amount is available for the purchase of Hebrew printed books, whilst the amount for Persian and Turkish is slightly less at £13,000 for Persian, £11,000 for Turkish.)<sup>27</sup> Purchase is the main means of acquiring Arabic books (alongside legal deposit and donations). Just over a quarter of material is supplied on approval ('blanket order') and the rest is selected. Egyptian publications are mostly supplied on approval by Leila Books in Cairo; Lebanese, Syrian and Jordanian are selected primarily from Sulaiman's Bookshop in Beirut. Palestinian publications are ordered direct from individual research centres or from the Educational Bookshop in East Jerusalem. Israeli publications are also ordered from individual research centers. Some books from other countries are selected from Sulaiman's and from those available at Cairo Bookfair each year.<sup>28</sup> When possible, books are bought from Avicenne in Paris as a means of covering at least some of the more important works published in North Africa. Books from other countries are selected from various suppliers or direct from publishers.

The amount of material acquired from particular countries varies from year to year but I would estimate that the proportion of books from each country is as follows:

28%	Egypt
28%	Lebanon
12%	Jordan
10%	Syria
8%	Palestinian Authority and Israel
6%	Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UK, Iran, Algeria, UAE, Germany
4%	retrospective 'gap-filling' from any relevant country

Even given the fairly tight selection criteria outlined above, the budget allows for relatively little of what is 'in scope' to be purchased. For example, from Sulaiman's lists I am able to buy no more than 120 items per list, that is roughly 12% of what is offered each two months.

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<sup>27</sup> These figures take into account differing book prices and postage costs.

<sup>28</sup> Books at Cairo Bookfair and many Palestinian publications are identified for selection from the (MECAP) lists of the Cairo Office of the Library of Congress.

The lists contain many literary works and many other items which fall outside the Library's selection criteria, so I am probably able to select about 40% of what I deem to be in scope from Lebanon, maybe 50% from Syria and Jordan, and less than 30% from other Arab countries.<sup>29</sup>

#### **Other sources and types of materials acquired by the Library.**

In addition to purchase, the Library acquires Arabic material through legal deposit. The major impact of this is that the Library receives the full range of Arabic newspapers published in the UK, including major dailies and smaller weekly newspapers. For example, until April 2003 the Library received a range of Iraqi opposition papers published in London. The Library also receives books published by UK Arabic publishers (principally Dar al-Hikmah and al-Furqan Foundation at present, but formerly Dar al-Saqi and Riyad al-Ra'is). Legal deposit also brings in bilingual and children's literature published by educational publishers as well as magazines and journals based in the UK (primarily leisure and hobby magazines, e.g., *Sayyidati*, *Hiya*, *Winduz Magazine*). A further means of acquisition is through donation. A regular flow of Arabic donations is received from authors visiting the Library, from readers, from political or campaigning organizations, and from Islamic organizations. Occasionally more significant amounts of material are donated by other libraries.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to books the Library subscribes to a range of journals from the countries it focuses on, and in the subject areas outlined above. Serial budgets were cut in the 1990s and although funding is now available to support new subscriptions, the intake of journals cannot be regarded as being back to full strength; work in this area is a current priority. Recorded sound in Arabic (including music CDs

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<sup>29</sup> The number of items published in 2000 and acquired from each country was compared with the number of items for each country in OCLC/WorldCat for 2000. The percentage of items held by the British Library relative to WorldCat was as follows: Lebanon 19%, Egypt 16%, Syria 14%, Jordan 12%, West Bank 9% (also Yemen 18%, Iraq 11%, Morocco 9%, Algeria 6%, all others less than 5%). The Library's weakest coverage was of Tunisia (1%), which reveals a very low level of French-language selection from North Africa as well as the low level of Arabic coverage. The Library is conscious here that not only is SOAS a near neighbour, but also the Institut du Monde Arabe and the Bibliothèque nationale de France are only a train ride away. As noted, these figures are far from reliable.

<sup>30</sup> Large donations have been received in the last few years from the Lebanese Studies Centre in Oxford, and from the library of Kufa Gallery in London.

and cassettes) is bought by the Sound Archive, although the budget for international music is relatively small and does not allow for the purchase of material on video. The Library is not in a position to acquire the many Arab films and documentaries currently available on video and DVD.<sup>31</sup> The Library also continues to acquire Arabic manuscripts when funding allows. In buying manuscripts the Library only buys from auction houses and requires proof of provenance before a manuscript can be purchased. In practice a very small number of manuscripts are acquired, usually of a style, or in subjects, not already represented in the Library's extensive collection.<sup>32</sup>

#### **Middle East studies in the British Library in a national context.**

In conclusion, although Middle East Studies represent a very small part of the British Library, its current acquisitions in the languages of the Middle East make a significant contribution to the overall coverage of Middle East materials at national level. With an annual budget of over £60,000 for books in the languages of the region, in addition to a substantial intake of journals and newspapers, and collecting policies closely targeted to the differing user groups for each language, the Library represents an important resource for researchers both within and outside higher education. But this sum appears small when set against the ever increasing amount of material being published in the region.<sup>33</sup> So the need for relevant libraries to complement each other in their collecting appears greater than ever, in order that available funding is used to achieve the widest possible coverage of relevant materials. For the Arabic collections at least, it is not clear that an increase in financial resources (which is highly unlikely to be available) would in itself result in a much better offering for researchers.<sup>34</sup> In the current context a greater priority would seem to be an effort to consult more

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<sup>31</sup> The British Film Institute acquires some foreign-language films, but it is likely that only university libraries are acquiring documentary material in Arabic, and that on a very small scale.

<sup>32</sup> The Arabic manuscripts collection numbers 20,000 items in 14,000 volumes.

<sup>33</sup> For the year 2000, the WorldCat/OCLC data referred to above gives a total figure of nearly 8000 publications included in the catalogue from the Arab states. Although this includes Western-language material, it shows the limitations of a budget which can extend to no more than 1200 books (even assuming a price per book, with postage, of £12.)

<sup>34</sup> But an increase in staff resources would have an impact: the efficient service offered by suppliers such as Leila Books and Sulaiman's Bookshop may have led to

widely with users, and to focus resources more closely on the types of material they are likely to require. Avenues for consultation with specific groups of users are not as well developed as they could be, in part because of the diverse range of users the Library serves. Britain's Arab community is far from vocal in demanding Arabic resources,<sup>35</sup> and the British Muslim community generally looks first to its own institutions to support Islamic scholarship. Similarly Middle East researchers in higher education approach their own library with particular requests. Improved consultation may in turn stimulate greater use of the collections,<sup>36</sup> as users gain a sense of ownership and feel that collecting is focused around their needs. Finding ways to bring about such consultation, and in a way which both balances the needs of different sets of users and retains a long-term perspective, remains a key challenge for the Library's future collection development.

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increasing reliance on these suppliers. This has a possible downside in that there is inevitably some duplication of materials where selectors are choosing from the same range of materials on offer: what is needed is time for selectors to seek out hard-to-acquire material, e.g., non-commercial publications including research and reports of NGOs and political parties, which would result in a more wide-ranging provision for researchers.

<sup>35</sup> Possibly because the Arab communities are themselves diverse and may not be sufficiently well integrated into British society, or sufficiently empowered, to see the provision of research resources in Arabic as a 'right' they can demand from the state.

<sup>36</sup> This would itself help to raise the institutional profile of Middle-East language published resources (as opposed to manuscripts) within the British Library. While these resources may be important in a national context, relatively low use weakens their profile (and thus influence) within the Library itself.