MIDDLE EAST LIBRARIANS ASSOCIATION

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MELA NOTES 16, February, 1979

TRIBUTE

     Back in November in Ann Arbor I asked Jim Pollock to have dinner with me. I knew my predecessor only from his writing and from his pithy remarks that stuck like darts in my neophyte mind. Over nondescript fish, vaguely broccoli, hard rolls, and coffee -- are editorializing and teetotalling behavioral facets of a common syndrome? -- we chatted about MELA and MELA Notes. I suppose I was seeking tricks of the trade, but what I got was the truth that editing requires persistence and composure. Pollock had a sense of accomplishment over a job well executed, but certainly no pride. Enthusiasm and competence without illusions of grandeur characterize his helmsmanship and writing, especially the no-nonsense mirth that bubbles forth from a Calvinist hunch that human endeavor runs its course in a very large arena. From our conversation and from rereading his pensées that appear in numbers 2 - 15 of MELA Notes, I gather that Pollock wants MELA to do limited tasks well. Grandiose plans stir within him the suspicion that perspective is giving way to pride and fanciful thinking. While some of us have been prone to advocating intergalactic missions, Pollock kept MELA Notes in tight orbit. No danger of unscheduled descent and earthbound detritus with him at the controls!

     The first 15 numbers, totaling 368 pages, of the Notes are the oeuvre of a steady hand, disciplined mind and selfless spirit. The contents sustain rereading and Pollock's own prose still prods. I suspected in Ann Arbor that his would be a tough act to follow and now months behind I feel a little bit like one of the corps de ballet called to replace a prematurely retired Nijinsky. The "best" of Pollock (so far at least -- there's more to come from the fields of Indiana?) includes cooperation as a "benevolent bazaar, with enthusiasm and fatigue competing for the tourist's attention" (6, Oct. 1975), hamzat al-wasl as a "coughless comma floating above the prow letter Alif" (7, Feb. 1976), and the "What now is your alpha-bet?" (8, May 1976) call to gamblers at the romanization table. I can't quite see bibliophilism "careening through the social body" (3, Oct. 1974), but the "ripple of ambivalent coughs" that break forth whenever cooperation -- at NYPL we know it as another RLG meeting -- trots out is a familiar sound. A true ringmaster, Pollock saved an orotund chuckler for last. Now that he has left center ring to inspect the egress (15, Oct. 1978), we owe him a hearty bravo. We can fittingly honor him by rereading the corpus past, pondering matters present, and communicating via MELA Notes forthcoming.

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REPORT TO THE MEMBERSHIP by Edward Jajko

     My first job as president was to express, to the Library of Congress, MELA's opinion about LC's proposal to present all non-roman script cataloguing in romanization only. LC made its proposal public just before our last annual meeting. We had the opportunity to discuss the proposal thoroughly at the meeting, and to vote in favor of informing LC -- which had requested

comments and suggestions -- that we opposed total romanization. The MELA
Committee on Machine-Readable Arabic-script Data (COMRAD) was instructed to
draw up a set of principles outlining MELA's position, and I was given the
task of turning those principles into a letter to be sent to Mr. Joseph
Howard, head of LC's Processing Department. COMRAD and comrades met in
the map library of the University of Michigan the day after the MELA meeting,
and debated for more than an hour. Chris Filstrup, acting chairman of COMRAD,
drew up the list of principles which came out of the debate, and later sent
it to me. It took some time to translate Chris' concise and pithy statements
into the form in which I sent them to Mr. Howard. The resolution taken at
the MELA meeting had stipulated that I send all MELA members a copy of my
letter before sending it to Mr. Howard, so that the members could respond
to me or COMRAD members with further suggestions, criticisms, etc. We ran
into some difficulty here, since I was able to send the original to Marsha
McClintock only just before Christmas; because of the holidays, Marsha was
unable to send out all the copies earlier than the end of December. All
worked out in the end, however. Marsha deserves our thanks for a superb
job of getting mailings out on very short notice.

Joseph Howard agreed to meet with a MELA delegation on 11 January 1979,
right in the middle of ALA Midwinter week. About thirteen of us met in his
office in the Thomas Jefferson Building of the Library of Congress, along
with the usual division chiefs and section heads, and a guest, Leonard Gold,
head of the NYPL Jewish Division. The meeting lasted for two hours. At
the end I felt that I had never attended a worse, a more depressing meeting.
We presented MELA's case against total romanization, and some of us gave
our individual arguments against it. LC's people spoke for it, presenting
us with very blunt arguments about Congressional funding, LC's needs to
automate its systems, the advantages of on-line romanized cataloguing, and
so on. We were there as representatives of MELA, presenting MELA's expert
opinion as voted by a majority of members present at the November 1978 annual
meeting. The Library of Congress, however, quizzed us about what our in-
dividual libraries had decided to do, i.e., to romanize or not? I left
that meeting convinced that LC had made its decision to romanize long before,
and that everything was so much public show and window dressing. A little
more than a month later, I returned to Mr. Howard's office -- indeed, to
the very same chair -- for a special meeting of the Council of Archives
and Research Libraries in Jewish Studies. All of us were there ready and
able to argue against romanization of Hebrew-alphabet cataloguing. And all
of us had our thunder stolen by Mr. Howard, who opened the meeting by
announcing LC's decision not to romanize Arabic and Hebrew alphabet materials.
The dire consequence of this decision was stressed to the Council members,
as its possibility had been to the MELA delegation: that the non-LC, non-
roman cataloguing records would not be printed in NUC. But, as David
Partington said in his letter to Mr. Howard, considering that LC has made
no effort to include that information in NUC in the past, that's not much
of a threat.

The most recent issue of the Library of Congress Information Bulletin carries a notice saying that LC will begin totally-romanized cataloguing, for several listed languages. Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, and Yiddish are specifically excluded.

I wouldn't say that MELA, its sister organizations, and all those who wrote LC opposing total romanization, won a victory. We are not engaged in battle, and the issues are ultimately not all that momentous. But we did score some significant points. For one thing, the growing importance of two young library associations, MELA and the Council of Archives and Research Libraries in Jewish Studies (CARL), has been underscored. Further, the Library of Congress was made to back off from a decision which would have been advantageous to LC, but was quite clearly objectionable to many outside LC. The one thing I cannot understand, and which makes me raise my eyes to the heavens in despair, is the inclusion of Ottoman Turkish in the list of languages to be totally romanized. Our arguments against total romanization of Arabic and Persian were based to a great extent on the difficulty of romanizing -- the possibilities of ambiguity, of misleading the reader rather than directing him to his goal -- and I think we would all agree that the difficulties are even greater in Ottoman. The news carries more and more stories about federal government mix-ups: of Social Security funds paid faithfully, month after month, to people who are not qualified or don't want them and who regularly return the monies, with letters of explanation; of revenue-sharing monies paid to communities which don't want them. News-paper columnists and 60 Minutes have a field day with such stories. (Does anyone know what a "field day" is?) Perhaps it is our turn now to have our national library hand us such a present.

Still on the subject of our national library: You are all no doubt familiar now with the report made to us a few years ago, at one of our annual meetings, by George Atiyeh, who told us that the NUC does not file Arabic-language reports from outside LC, but sends them on to George's section for inclusion in the Near East catalogues. The lack of non-LC reporting in the printed NUC's is, of course, a major reason behind the Near East National Union List project now under way at LC. What will interest you -- and your directors as well -- is that for a number of years those cards have not been forwarded by the NUC office. After the March meeting mentioned above, I looked into the Hebrew and Yiddish catalogues of the Hebraic Division. Those catalogues will be published soon, and I wanted to see how Yale was represented. To my surprise, I could find no Yale cards. Dr. Weinstein assisted, and found a few. But the format and classification showed that they were reports more than a decade old. Dr. Weinstein and one of the other staff members reported to me that no Yale cards had been received in the section within memory. Yale sends reports in on a regular basis, and those reports for the last nine years have included several thousand titles, at least 5,000, of Hebrew and Yiddish, and more than 6,000 Arabic. Dr. Weinstein agreed to inquire about our missing reports. I have since corresponded with the head of the Hebraic Section,

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Dr. Lawrence Marwick, who has informed me that Dr. Weinstein located more than 20,000 cards which had not been forwarded to the section by the Catalog Publication Division, which is in charge of the NUC. Only a few hundred are Yale reports, and there are still more cards to be located and transferred. At Yale, we have made arrangements to continue reporting to the Catalog Publication Division as before; but all Arabic-alphabet reports are separated out, to be sent directly to George Atiyah, and all Hebraica reports are separated for direct mailing to Lawrence Marwick. In addition, we are making arrangements for reproduction of relevant portions of our shelf list, so that the Near East and Hebraica Sections might have some record of our holdings. The problem here is not, of course, that the NUC has failed to publish non-LC reports of NE and HE cataloguing. We've all known about that, have accepted the NUC's as incomplete and unreliable, and work around them. The second set of the Arabic Script Union Catalogue, sponsored by MELA, is now in press, and is an outstanding example of being able to work quite nicely without the NUC. The problem here is that the Catalog Publication Division failed to forward all those tens of thousands of reports; that the results of your work have been, so to speak, sitting in a shoe-box in some closet; and that this situation has existed for some seven years. George Atiyeh may be sending you a letter about this problem, since it does have an effect on NENUL. But if you don't hear from him, if you handle Hebraica, if you are wondering what has happened to all those reports you have sent in to LC's Catalogue Publication Division, I suggest that you get in touch with George and Dr. Marwick.

ASSOCIATION CHRONICLE:

Minutes of the Executive Board Meeting, November 7, 1978 - Campus Inn, Ann Arbor, Michigan

Present were Fawzi Khoury, President, Edward Jajko, Vice President-Program Chairman, James Pollock, Editor, and Janet Heineck, Secretary-Treasurer.

The brief Executive Board meeting was called to prepare an agenda for the next day's business meeting. Changes in the mode of U.S. library acquisition of Middle East publications required by the discontinuation of the Special Foreign Currencies program were discussed.

Edward Jajko described the makeup of the report he planned to give the following morning on the visit by a group of MELA members to the Library of Congress in July. At key points during the main report, topical reports on CONSER and on the Middle East National Union Catalog project were to be given.

Fawzi Khoury voiced for the record his disapproval of the composition of the committee to visit LC, saying that the Ivy League institutions of the East Coast were overrepresented. He did, however, approve and commend Mr. Jajko's organizational work on the project.

Michael Albin's report on the demise of the PL-480 program was moved from the late afternoon to the morning to follow that of Mr. Jajko, the two of which would then make up one long "LC report" to begin at 9 a.m.

The business meeting would consist of officers' reports, election of new officers, possible discussion of an increase in MELA dues, and discussion of the Library of Congress' plans to romanize their Arabic and Persian cataloging.

Minutes of Ed Jajko's Report on MELA's 6-7 July 1978 meeting with LC

⌐The tape from which I transcribed and edited these minutes upholds a venerable tradition of crumbling clay tablets and water damaged manuscripts. I have filled in lacunae where my memory speaks confidently. Lest I encourage scholastic glossing, I have omitted suspension points. Ed.⌐

When I was elected Vice President and Program Chairman I gave a great deal of thought to the kinds of programs I wanted to present. I had attended all the annual meetings of the Association since and including the one in Binghamton. Having heard all the programs and panels I developed a feeling that MELA needs to have more awareness of what is going on in Middle East librarianship at LC. At the 1977 meeting we had a report from an LC staff member, Jack Crawford, then assistant director of the overseas operation. This was a brief and general survey of the state of LC's Near East operation at the time. His report was useful. He had gone to a lot of trouble to gather the information at LC. But it was evident that despite his serious-ness of purpose, care and good will, Mr. Crawford had not been entirely successful when in listing the backlogs at LC he mentioned that only a few hundred volumes were being held in the processing department and that cata-loging was almost current. In fact, the true picture was almost 10,000 volumes backlogged in the Near East section.

I decided the best program for this year would be one which one way or other actively involved LC. I would like to sit here and say that I pulled a tremendous coup, but I didn't really. My first choice was to have LC people doing the work of the program by answering previously submitted questions and engaging in a dialogue with us. I wrote this to the Librarian of Congress in December 1977. William Welch, replying to the letter, made a counterproposal more or less identical to the plan I accepted. This was that MELA members go to LC.

He expressed LC's eagerness to meet and cooperate with us. Frank McGowen, LC's head of overseas operations was designated LC's coordinator.

Once it was established that MELA members would go to LC, I began selecting the group. From the beginning I felt it necessary that the MELA group be small -- five to ten people. Since it would be the first meeting of its type, at least for the Near East, I decided larger and older libraries should be there. I also tried for some geographic balance. Not all invited accepted and there were some unexpected volunteers. The end result was Near East librarians largely from the Northeast: Brenda Bickett (Georgetown), Fawzi Khoury (Washington), Francine McNulty (Harvard), Eric Ormsby (Princeton) and myself. Participants either paid their own way or were assisted by their respective libraries. More geographic representation proved impossible. I asked for questions from the membership. Not as many came in as I would have hoped, yet we had more than enough material.

The agenda. I presented our questions. LC rearranged it so they could group people together. We had three sessions -- Thursday morning on general topics; Thursday afternoon on cataloging and automation; Friday morning on acquisitions.

In the first session we discussed the Near East National Union List (NENUL), LC budget, automation, increased cooperation between LC and MELA, LC's overseas operations, MELA's position vis-à-vis LC and the rest of the library world. Dr. Atiyeh reported on NENUL. He stressed that although it will be romanized, no decision had been made for LC cataloging. NENUL will follow MARC format and will be issued on tape. G. K. Hall has expressed interest in publishing it. The cut-off date may be as late as 1975. The project is six months old and is expected to last three years. The card files are not yet in a single alphabetical order. The principle of superimposition is followed. Some corporate bodies may be entered differently according to different cataloging codes. These will be connected by SEE ALSO references. Various editions also are connected by notes. Reports sent from NUC may vary much in format. Trying to reconstruct an original title page which is itself not accessible for checking can be difficult.

Problems. 1) Publications are reported by some libraries in Arabic script, by others in romanized form. NENUL would like to enlist form cooperation in romanizing these entries. 2) Some reports are inadequate, making identification impossible. NENUL would like to return such reports to libraries for review. 3) Some reports represent incomplete sets. NENUL would prefer not to mention incomplete holdings unless important for other reasons. 4) Are there institutions wishing to correct or update reports already sent to NUC; who cares to forward reports of previously unreported works? 5) NENUL needs in formation from reporting institutions as to: a) field covered by reports as forwarded to NUC and b) lists of catalogs published and covering holdings already reported to NUC. Finally NENUL welcomes questions and suggestions on these and other matters.

The next thing we discussed in our morning session was budgets. LC's had been cut by 5% by Congress and it was assumed the Senate would concur. Computerization will be cut. A number of people complained about LC inconsistency. LC catalogers disagreed; no conclusion. Then we went to the operation of Albin's office in Cairo. LC explained why certain materials and accession lists are for limited distribution or for LC only. The Cairo office buys one copy and catalogs it, then acquires 25 more for distribution.

Questions were asked about LC area priorities. Response was, none in theory. LC does consult ARL when necessary about priorities. Some criticized LC for being too dependent on ARL. LC countered by stating that as an advisory group MELA should make its needs felt. Finzi mentioned there should be more area studies librarians in ALA. MELA responded that ALA is too large, difficult to work within, overorganized and that MELA is smaller and more effective.

Thursday afternoon -- cataloging, classification, computerization. Lucia Rather chaired. LC catalogs 250,000 titles per year. A title goes through 25-30 pairs of hands. This assembly line procedure may create a backlog at many points, even after a title has left the card section. Number of catalogers: 3 Arabic, 1/2 Turkish, 1/2 Armenian, 1 Greek, 2 Hebraic, 1 Persian. Lengthy discussion of cataloging priorities. Arabic, Yiddish, and Hebrew are generally in priorities 4 and 6, Turkish and Persian in 6 and 7. LC groups its materials by language, not content, so that particular items are not necessarily pushed through. Rather said that there had been discussion of changing to a content priority system. (Priority 3 is current foreign research material, legal works, rare books. 4a is non-current materials selected for research value; 4b is current serials not included in current priorities.)

The Near East Section has a 10,000 item backlog. These are accessible. If sent to cataloging, these titles would not be available to users.

Established names are put into a tape authority file even before cataloging is completed. The tapes are available for use. For establishing names, LC uses various sources, no preference given to any -- BM catalog, Brocklemann, Kahhalah, Encyclopedia of Islam 2d ed, Encyclopedia of Islam 1st ed.

LC has asked two Turkish learned institutions to comment on romanization tables.

Middle East law materials in LC's law library are not classified and there are no plans to develop a classification schedule. LC is open to cooperative projects and suggestions on how to classify.

The second part of the cataloging session was devoted to automation. Surprisingly brief. LC had not made a final decision on the degree of romanization and other aspects of computerization. McNulty noted contribution of Harvard. Many opinions in opposition to full romanization. Crawford supported full romanization since it would allow LC to catalog more titles. Finzi supported vernacular scripts: we should reflect international character of catalog. Others at LC said totally romanized cataloging is cheaper and available now. ⌈It should be noted that by the end of the discussion on romanization the prevailing LC stance had altered markedly. Many became chary of romanizing vernacular scripts off the face of the catalog map. The big issues were not fluff and apple pie dreams, but the stuff of purpose and credibility. Ed.⌋

CONSER at Harvard by Francine McNulty

On the afternoon of Friday, July 7, I met with Dorothy Glasby, CONSER Operations Coordinator in LC's Serial Record Division. This meeting gave me an opportunity to inquire about what special procedures, if any, LC has for inputting Middle Eastern language serial records to the CONSER data base, and what, at that point, had been the extent of their input. I also wanted to alert their CONSER staff to indexing errors in LC records, and to share some observations of a more general nature concerning both the Middle Eastern Department's participation and the project as a whole.

Before launching into the specifics of this meeting, I thought it would be helpful if I gave some background information on the CONSER project so as to provide some context for both the Middle Eastern Department's participation and the LC meeting itself. While CONSER is probably not yet of immediate or direct concern to anyone here today, the eventual by-products of the project will some day be of great interest to us all. Therefore, some insight into and understanding of what the project entails and particularly how it has evolved can assist us in making intelligent, informed decisions about such by-products in the future.

CONSER is an acronym that stands for Conversion of Serials. That is one of the few points on which there is unanimous agreement, for exactly what that conversion process seeks to achieve is not entirely clear. The documention for the project has changed considerably, and the emphasis of the project has shifted somewhat in the past few years. Originally, CONSER was envisioned as a file building project of limited duration for serials bibliographic records that could be used by the generators and maintainers of union lists for serials. Anyone who has had any experience in serials cataloguing or acquisitions can no doubt list numerous reasons why more rigorous bibliographic control of serials is necessary. By the early 1970's several institutions across the nation had already started work on independent

serials data base projects in an effort to implement such control. Of utmost concern to the people behind the CONSER project was that independent and mutually incompatible projects fail to satisy the need for a unified, com- prehensive data base. Therefore, rather than allowing the situation to develop to the point where these institutions became too firmly entrenched in their local systems, it was deemed necessary to immediately begin co- ordinating bibliographic control of serials on a national level.

After the 1973 ALA Conference, an ad hoc discussion group on serial data bases met to identify problem areas in existing serials data bases, and the requirements of a national serials data base. The result of these discussions was that the guidelines for CONSER project were established. CONSER was formally announced at the 1974 ALA Midwinter meeting. While the Council on Library Resources was designated temporary manager of the project, two types of centers of responsibility were appointed to monitor the content of the records. As bibliographic centers, the Library of Congress and the National Library of Canada are responsible for the bibliographic portions of records, while the National Serials Data Program, based at LC, and ISDS/ Canada authenticate the ISDS elements (i.e., ISSN, key title). Because LC was unable to assume administrative responsibility in November 1977, the date originally set for transferral of this function from CLR, OCLC accepted the role in March 1978.

THE CONSER RECORD

The CONSER record represents an expanded version of the MARC-Serials format, with modifications to accommodate some of the data elements of the CAN MARC (Canadian) format and of ISDS, and the punctuation and arrangement of elements prescribed by ISBD-S. In other works, the CONSER record attempts to reconcile five different standards (including LC's interpretation and application of AACR) which have unique and occasionally conflicting require- ments. (As an example, the key title has assumed a prominent role in the bibliographic portion of a record, due to a recent decision to express linking titles in terms of key title, rather than bibliographic title. The implications for non-roman alphabet records are increased complexity and decreased intelligibility of records, for while most of a record is romanized according to the LC standard, the key title, because it is an ISDS element, will follow the ISO standard of romanization.)

PROCEDURES FOR FILE BUILDING

Speed and size seem to have been the two most important criteria in determining the original procedures for file building. To promote the goal of establishing a file of 200,000 - 300,000 records of current serial titles in just two to three years, three existing files were merged and tape loaded into OCLC in 1976. The largest of the three, the Minnesota Union List of Serials (MULS), containing 75,000 titles, was selected on the basis of both size and compatibility with the LC MARC-S format. LC and NLC, as centers

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of bibliographic responsibility, each contributed its existing serials files, numbering 26,000 and 3,000 titles, respectively.

Fifteen institutions, chosen on the basis of the quality of their serials cataloguing and their financial capability to support a CONSER staff and in-house facilities, are currently full CONSER participants. While any OCLC member institution can contribute a serials record to the CONSER data base, only CONSER participants have the capability of editing serials records on-line, or reporting errors and modifications for records which have been authenticated and "locked" by a center of responsibility.

Regardless of who inputs a record, however, it must satisfy the requirements of the Minimum Data Element Set, as prescribed in the CONSER Manual, to be considered a standard CONSER record. Quality control is further achieved through agreement among CONSER participants concerning their rights and limitations with respect to modifying each other's records, and by authentication by the various centers of responsibility.

CONSER AND THE MIDDLE EASTERN DEPARTMENT

The groundwork for the Middle Eastern Department's participation in the CONSER project was begun about five years ago, when the Department undertook an extensive serials recataloguing project. Early in 1977, the head of the Harvard University Library Office for Systems Planning and Research ascertained that funds could be obtained for converting these records. In the spirit of cooperation, particularly fostered by RLG, the Department agreed to participate in CONSER. In April 1978, the project, funded by a grant of $15,000 from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, was officially launched. The grant enabled us to hire a full-time serials data editor, who works in conjunction with the Middle Eastern Department and the HUL Office for Systems Planning and Research, and is principally responsible for transliterating, tagging, and inputting records, in addition to gathering surrogates and reporting holdings.

Our original goal was to enter all 1,400 of our retrospective and current titles in Arabic, Turkish (both modern and Ottoman), Persian and Urdu to the data base. Numerous unforeseen problems which have manifested themselves in the course of our involvement in the project have forced us to significantly modify these goals, and to concentrate our efforts on just Arabic, modern Turkish, and possibly Urdu or Persian. Among the most pressing of these problems are the machine loaded records, discussed above, which require much time to upgrade, and indexing errors. Furthermore, certain requirements and standards of serial cataloguing have changed since the Middle Eastern Department began its recataloguing project some five years ago. Thus, records that incorporate such obsolete practices as dashed on indexes or truncated titles must be updated to reflect current standards before they can be entered to the CONSER data base.

HOLDINGS

At the Harvard University Library, a machine-readable file to record the holdings of the more than ninety units that comprise the University Library was developed locally. This holdings file is linked to our CONSER records. The Middle Eastern Department has written an appendix to the holdings file manual which gives us the capability of recording our holdings in more than just one calendrical system. Such an accommodation is extremely useful when a non-Gregorian calendar, be it Hijri shamsi, Hijri qamari, or the now defunct Iranian imperial, determine the publication schedule and hence volume designation of a periodical. This also partially circumvents current AACR ruling which stipulates that a Gregorian date in the holdings is preferred in the bibliographic record over a non-Gregorian date when a title bears both. (The non-Gregorian date is supplied in a note, if at all.)

PROBLEMS

One of the most serious difficulties encountered thus far is that of retrieval of records in the data base, due, primarily, to the inadequacy of the OCLC search strategy for Arabic language records. (Straightforward indexing errors are serious to the extent that they can be very difficult to identify, but once spotted can be easily corrected. Indexing problems caused by the search strategy, however, have far graver implications in terms of record retrieval.) In a report submitted to OCLC in June 1978, our Middle Eastern Serials Data Editor identified two major areas of difficulty in Arabic language records. First is the problem caused by the initial article "al". Fields 110 (corporate author as main entry) and 710 (corporate author as added entry) have no indicators to suppress non-filing elements. Thus, the search keys for al-Jami ʿah al-Miṣriyah lil-Dirāsāt al-Nafsiyah are ALJAM, ALM. Second, and far more serious, is the problem of medial articles, which are considered part of the word they qualify and as such become part of the search strategy. Therefore, to search for the title al-Kitāb al-sanawi--al-Jāmi ʿah al-Miṣriyah lil-Dirāsāt al-Nafsiyah, the keys ALK,AL,AL,A are used. These are the very same keys that would be used by most any other yearbook called "kitāb al-sanawi" in Arabic, and linked, following ISBD convention, to the issuing body. The aim of this convention, i.e., to render a title more specific and thus enhance its utility as a point of access, is defeated by the OCLC search strategy. Stoplists for common first words of titles, such as majallah, nashrah, and kitāb, might temporarily help to improve the effectiveness of a search, but fail to address the problem of the medial article, which becomes an increasingly larger obstacle to efficient retrieval with the growth of the file.

There are of course problems which affect all types of records, regardless of language. Two of the most troublesome, insofar as their potential effect on the integrity of the records and their suitability for union list activities are superimposition and the existence of both latest and successive entry cataloguing.