

## **RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PERSIAN CATALOGING TASK FORCE**

### **Basic rationale for all recommendations**

Surveys conducted by or through the MELA Cataloging Committee in 2006 and 2007 of Middle East collections in the U.S. revealed that an overwhelming majority of the libraries (32 out of 34) collect materials in Persian language to some degree, or were about to begin collecting in it. However, only slightly less than half (14) of the libraries indicated that they actually had catalogers or para-professionals on staff who knew Persian and who therefore could handle Persian language materials and create original cataloging records. Even fewer had staff members exclusively dedicated to Persian language materials. Most indicated that they did only copy cataloging, relying on libraries that do employ knowledgeable people; but some indicated that they attempted to catalog materials regardless of the fact that they had no staff person with a knowledge of the language. The first practice shows that most libraries are reliant on catalogers who specialize in Persian; the second shows that there is great potential for many erroneous records to enter the database. In fact, it is clear from the personal experience of task force members as well as the endless discussions on the MidEastCat listserv, among others, that errors abound. These faulty records are a great source of annoyance to librarians and users and are endlessly reproduced by catalogers who are not familiar with the language.

Many rules in AACR2 (e.g., rule no. 22.22) for establishing Persian names are problematic for many catalogers of Persian materials as they are heavily geared to the Arabic language, even though the rules usually state "Arabic script" rather than "Arabic language". Since Persian is an Indo-European language rather than a Semitic language, it has its own set of rules and forms which are arranged according to their grammatical functions. The usage of these forms can be very different than their usage in Arabic, even though in some cases their origins are in Arabic. There is a large Arabic element in Persian which is an indispensable part of the spoken and written language, but this element has become Persianized and imposing Arabic language requirements on it is problematic; it creates difficulties for catalogers and gives way to numerous misunderstandings and confusion when using the ALA-LC Romanization tables.

### **Recommendations**

The Persian Cataloging Task Force believes that the following four recommended activities and projects can and will go a long way in helping to alleviate these problems. However, some degree of error is unavoidable unless institutions make commitments to not catalog in languages they don't know or employ staff who are not properly trained.

#### **1. To create a Persian NACO funnel and encourage Persian catalogers to contribute name authority records.**

##### **Rationale**

As with all non-Roman script languages, there are discrepancies and variations in the way Persian names appear in English sources (academic publications, the media, etc.). There are, as well, a great many names which never appear in English language sources at all. Additionally, there has been a long-standing historical problem with the way the ALA/LC Romanization Table for Persian has been viewed or even accepted and applied by catalogers in North America.

Modern Persian names include many compound forms and up through the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century titles were often used as names. The inclusion of titles continues to appear in many publications and it is often confusing when a cataloger has to determine whether they are actually a part of the name or not. Of course, as with other Middle Eastern languages, the problems with the various elements of names used for persons from the classical period present their own problems. In addition, there are many names which have never been submitted for inclusion in the NAF, but exist in various unauthorized forms in the databases. All of these problems can be very confusing to the uninitiated.

As the Cataloging Committee surveys show, there are only a small number of catalogers who are familiar with Persian names. Because so many of our libraries rely on that small number of specialists, we propose that the establishment of a NACO Persian funnel will bring the necessary language and cataloging expertise into the active establishment of Persian names, thus increasing the number of entries as well as following established norms for Romanization and cross-references (i.e., familiarity with the construction of Persian names and variant spellings) and the knowledge of the necessary sources for establishing them.

### **Method of procedure**

The first step will be for the MELA Cataloging Committee to recruit a person to be the coordinator of a Persian NACO funnel. Since the community of Persian language catalogers is quite small and not well endowed with “certified” NACO contributors, it may be necessary to find someone willing to undergo training by LC as an independent NACO contributor. Additionally, the coordinator of the Arabic NACO funnel has expressed a willingness to act to some degree as a mentor. Technically, the only member of the funnel who is recognized as an independent contributor is the coordinator. However, he or she may designate others as independent. The requirements for the coordinator of the funnel are:

- Has a solid working knowledge of Persian language
- Is an independent NACO contributor (or, if necessary, willing to receive such training)
- Is willing to commit to approximately 3-4 hours a week (the amount of time required depends on the size of the funnel, how active it is, and how well-trained or independent the contributors are. Consequently, this is only a base estimate)
- Has the support of his/her institution to function as coordinator
- Possesses skills as a trainer and a reviewer
- Is willing to commit to receiving funnel coordinator training from LC
- Is willing to provide training to members of the funnel, although other options may be possible
- Is willing to review the work of funnel members in a timely fashion
- Is willing to distribute NACO documentation in a timely fashion (including LCRIs or the DCM Z1 “yellow pages” supplement to the *MARC 21 Authority Format*)
- Is willing to act as a resource to other catalogers who are not members of the funnel

Once selected, the coordinator, the Cataloging Committee, and the MELA Executive Board will be responsible for making an application for the Persian NACO funnel to the Library of Congress.

## **2. To establish a Persian cataloging discussion group in order to share information and exchange ideas**

### **Rationale**

Recognizing that all persons working in Persian language cataloging, both the experienced and beginners, often come across situations for which answers in standard sources are not clear, or that a cataloger may have minimal knowledge of the language or little cataloging experience and therefore may be confused, the Task Force recommends that a regular venue be established for the discussion of such problems and issues.

### **Method of procedure**

Persian catalogers will be encouraged to join MidEastCat as the primary discussion forum rather than establishing a separate listserv. This also gives opportunity to those not working with Persian language materials to be aware of or involved in the discussions. Much discussion has appeared already on this listserv.

The Task Force proposes that a coordinator be recruited to keep regular discussion going on issues of interest to those in the Persian language community. That might include putting forward specific issues and inviting discussion. It might also include drawing up memos of discussions which would be presented to the Cataloging Committee for awareness or possible action.

### **3. To develop a Persian Cataloging Manual (PCM) to be hosted on the MELA website.**

#### **Rationale**

Cataloging Persian language materials can be complicated and confusing to many catalogers who do not have adequate background in Persian language or experience in cataloging Persian material. A good knowledge of Persian grammatical rules and forms, plus familiarity with the development of Persian personal names are basic requirements for making proper decisions for choosing accurate access points for bibliographic records or establishing personal or corporate names in Persian. The presence of Arabic in Persian language texts also adds to the confusion when no direction is provided on how to resolve the linguistic conflicts, particularly in Persian and Arabic bilingual texts. The variations in records in the databases reveal the fact that the AACR2 rules and ALA-LC Romanization tables do not effectively respond to Persian cataloging needs. Recognizing these problems, the Persian Cataloging Task Force recommends the compilation a Persian Cataloging Manual (PCM). In addition to helping inexperienced catalogers, it is also important for knowledgeable and experienced Persian language catalogers to be following the same standards as much as possible within the concept of "cataloger's discretion". Therefore, the PCM will be a benefit to all catalogers of Persian language materials. The Persian Cataloging Manual will serve as a supplement to AACR2 (RDA) and the ALA-LC Romanization tables for cataloging Persian material.

#### **Method of procedure**

The first task will be to establish a coordinator and/or a team to oversee the compilation of the Persian Cataloging Manual. The Task Force recommends:

- The use of the Princeton University Library Persian Cataloging Manual as a base document

- The gathering and studying of relevant documents and written practices already in use in libraries as possible additions to the PCM

- Commissioning specific sections which should include, among others: Reference tools and resources for cataloging Persian language material (e.g. Muin, Sukhan or other dictionaries); a List of preferred Romanization of problematic words; Tips for understanding and using affixes, izafah and hamzah (this might include a brief Introduction on their function and usage in Persian); Guidelines for cataloging non-book materials (e.g. serials, films, music, blogs, web sites, and digitized materials); a List of frequently used affixes in Persian names (this might include a brief introduction to Pre-Islamic and old Persian names, Islamic names; Persianized Islamic names, and modern compound names), as well as general Guidelines for establishing Persian names; Guidelines for assigning appropriate subject headings and making (and encouraging) proposals for new subject headings through the MELA SACO funnel); Guidelines for using original scripts in all fields of bibliographic records, including tips and pointers on how orthography affects script input (e.g., non-joining letters, special marks, etc.).

- Coordinating the on-going compilation of the PCM with the ACM ([Arabic Cataloging Manual](#)) so that it follows similar structure, as well as to find issues, topics or practices which are common to both languages.

#### **4. To prepare and conduct a Persian Cataloging workshop during the MELA 2008 annual meeting**

Cataloging Persian material not only requires good knowledge of Persian language and grammar, it also requires familiarity with Persian cataloging tools and accurate usage of these tools. Given the large number of libraries collecting Persian language materials and the fact that many of them do not have skilled Persian catalogers but need to provide copy and original cataloging to their users, the Persian Cataloging Task Force believes that organizing workshops and mentoring programs can be highly beneficial and advantageous to these libraries. In general, providing cataloging help and training to those catalogers in need will definitely improve the quality of Persian cataloging and it will also reduce the number of erroneous records regularly appearing in the databases.

##### **Method of Procedure:**

The Persian Cataloging Task Force strongly recommends the organization of workshops during annual MELA meetings, specifically 2008. The first step will be to designate or recruit a planning committee. The task of the workshop committee will be to suggest participants; recruit qualified and knowledgeable presenters; establish topics; communicate with the MELA Program committee, through the Cataloging Committee, for meeting times, places, and the coordination of fiscal issues; and to publicize the event by targeting the groups which would benefit most from it (i.e. all interested in Persian cataloging). The requirements for the committee members are:

- Be knowledgeable in Persian cataloging practice and issues. However, every effort will be made to determine the needs of all Persian catalogers and to include or involve the less experienced in the planning process either as members of the committee or as regular advisors

- Be willing to commit time to organizing the workshops and communicating with the people involved

- Help the presenters with topics, resources, and set-up

- Have the support of his/her institution to serve on the committee

##### **Additional Note**

Although they are not recommendations, the PCTF also includes an additional note suggesting continuing awareness and involvement in two projects of the Library of Congress which will be of interest to the Persian language library community.

The Task Force is aware of the concern of Persian and other Middle Eastern language catalogers regarding the addition of original script to authority records and revision of the *ALA/LC Persian Romanization Table*. After investigation, the Task Force has found out that the Library of Congress is working on both of these issues. The Task Force would like to recommend that discussions on these issues continue, especially through organized venues, and that the MELA Cataloging Committee be involved in any discussions, in order to reach consensus and to be prepared to respond when asked for input.