

**MELA Committee on Iraqi Libraries, Report
Washington, D.C., 30 November 2011**

Members of the Committee:

Brenda Bicket, Georgetown University

David Hirsch, Abu Dhabi National Library

**Charles E. Jones, Institute for the Study of the Ancient World,
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Shayee Khanaka, University of California, Berkeley

William Kopycki, Library of Congress

Falah Rashid, Simmons College

Jeff Spurr, Sabre Foundation (Chair)

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The status of Iraqi libraries and archives continues to be a matter of concern in a country still subject to chronic instability, and in need of much further development. In some respects, the report this year provides updates to the substantial one last year, which was published in *MELA Notes* No 82, 2009 thanks to the determination of its editor, Marlis Saleh, to see that it happened.

I will touch upon (1) MELA website issues, (2) the current status of the Iraq Virtual Science Library (IVSL), (3) new efforts to document Iraqi academic libraries, their history and current circumstances, (5) the present status and new developments at the Iraq National Library and Archive (INLA), and (6) the status and prospects for seized Iraqi documents.

1. MELA-Iraq Website issues

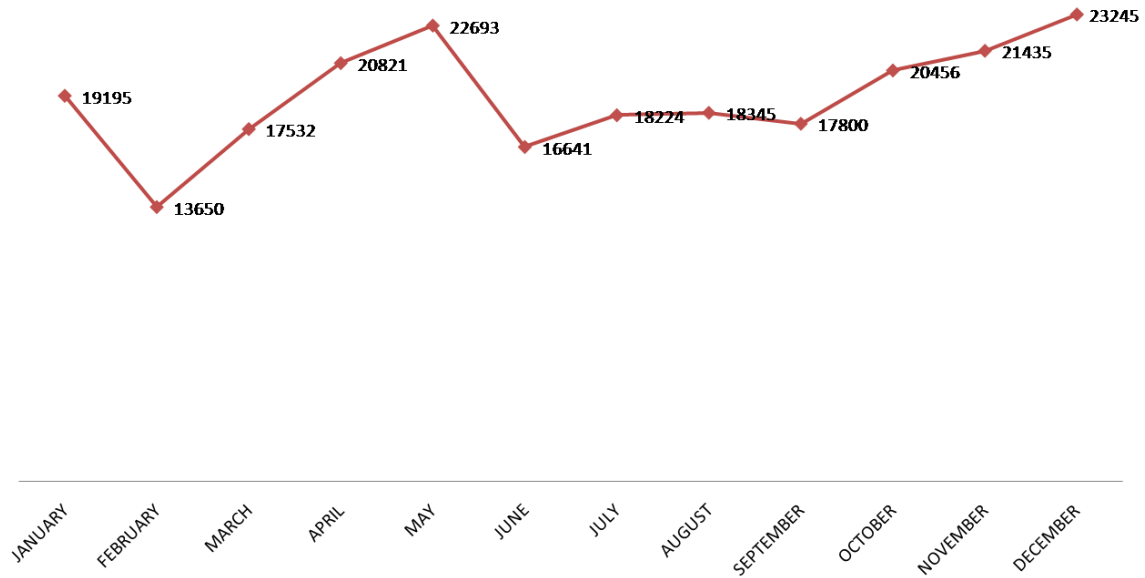
A link for Iraqi Libraries was placed in plain sight on our homepage this year. This is a welcome and substantial improvement regarding access to all previously posted materials. Due to inaction on my part, I did not get annual reports antedating that of 2010 (specifically, 2007, 2008 and 2009) to Patrick Visel, our new webmaster. I will remedy that before the end of the year, at which point the complete 2011 report can be posted there as well.

2. IVSL (Iraq Virtual Science Library)

Dr. Bahaa Kazem, whose role as Iraqi point person began while the IVSL was under development, has now become a consultant to the Iraqi IVSL team, which, in turn, was developed under his supervision. He reports that it is now functioning well and doing excellent work. It is situated in the Research and Development Department of the Ministry of Higher Education, which fully funds it, considering it a critical achievement in the promotion of university-level education. Dr. Kazem also reports the development of a new web design, an additional Arabic interface, new features for user registration, and a federal-level search engine for all databases that is available for users. He states that the number of registered users, principally students pursuing Masters of Science and PhD degrees alongside faculty, has jumped to approximately 25,000 from the 8,933 active and 656 pending users of only a year ago. These are all very welcome developments.

Lingering problems include logjams related to the party at each institution responsible for registering new users, and inadequate information regarding particular users. Dr. Kazem also reports that a very low awareness of the IVSL still afflicts some universities. He states that the team undertook a series of workshops and training programs for new users at the University of Baghdad, a model that should be followed at all institutions. They also created a printed guide for new users. They also hope to create a comprehensive database for all faculty, students and staff as a next phase in the development of the IVSL. The reported usage for 2010 in terms of downloaded articles was described by Kamran Naim in last year's report as having reached 31,000 per month, however, the statistics for the same year are reported by Dr. Kazem as totaling about 230,000, which works out to an average of something over 19,000 per month, ranging from a low of 13,650 in February to 23,245 in December (see graph below). This contradiction was not explained. No statistics are available for 2011.

عدد المقالات والبحوث المحملة لعام ٢٠١٠ ما يقارب 230000 مقالة
about 230000 totally 2010 Articles Downloaded per Months
articles



3. New efforts to document Iraqi academic libraries

This year we have seen the beginnings of an effort to assess the status of academic libraries throughout Iraq. I sent a series of questions to Shayee Khanaka, Falah Rashid and William Kopycki in an effort to jumpstart the process of a systematic review. An updated version of the questions I asked follows. The intent was for our colleagues to elicit such information for the libraries of each university or institution of higher learning in Iraq, with the aim of addressing basic issues of staffing, collections, equipment, and systems.

1. Are all holdings in one central library, or does the university have specialized libraries?

- 2. If the latter situation obtains, what are the specialized libraries?**
- 3. Number of staff members of all sorts at each library.**
- 4. Number of staff members with library degrees.**
- 5. Number of staff members with advanced degrees.**
- 6. Number of staff members with advanced degrees from outside of Iraq.**
- 7. Number who have received special training, and, if so, of what sort.**
- 8. Development needs regarding staffing and training**
- 9. Size of the student body, broken down as available and relevant**
- 10. Whether there is any sort of binding and/or conservation facility at the library or university.**
- 11. Extent to which any looting and damage that may have occurred in April 2003 or later has been repaired or compensated for.**
- 12. Degree of automation of library records and/or status of card catalogue.**

- 13. Likelihood that the university in question will support the adoption of a common cataloguing platform for Iraqi university libraries.**
- 14. Number of computers available to the staff.**
- 15. Number of computer terminals available to users.**
- 16. Extent and quality of internet access.**
- 17. Degree to which users can get internet access at the library.**
- 18. Whether the library or university has effective access to the IVSL (Iraq Virtual Science Library), and who gets that access (faculty, staff, students)**
- 19. Extent of presence of other critical equipment, including such basic furniture as adequate stacks.**
- 20. Development needs regarding equipment and systems**
- 21. Status of collections at the library, particularly of books:**
 - total number,**
 - degree to which they are up to date, and, if so, in which disciplines,**
 - degree to which they are fully catalogued, whether in automated or paper environment, and on the shelves.**

22. Extent to which donations from the Sabre Foundation or other serious parties have reached the library/ies.

23. Development needs regarding collections by fields and formats

This is a long-term effort. Our colleague, Falah Rashid, has produced a survey of the resources and staffing of libraries in agricultural colleges in Iraq (Baghdad, Basra, Mosul, Anbar, Tikrit and Kufa). He has also written a report on the staffs of the central libraries (totals in parentheses) of universities in Baghdad: University of Baghdad (115), The University of Mustansiriya (46), University of Technology (37), and the University of Al-Nahrain (13), broken down by specialties and indicating their levels of educational attainment, ranging from doctorates all the way down to “reads and writes.”

In a related effort, Amed Demirhan has written a so far unpublished paper documenting the history of library training in Iraq, commencing in the 1950s, “Iraq Academic Library Development and Staff Training.” It includes recommendations for the future. Many people, including MELA members, and institutions have been engaged in the training of Iraqi librarians, archivists and conservators, and a broad measure of the need was presented by William Kopycki in the 2010 report.

Similarly, Ms. Shler Salih Faraj has written an article on the ancient, historical, and modern history and present circumstances of libraries at

all levels in Iraqi Kurdistan. It will be published as a chapter in a volume on world libraries by Scarecrow Press. It also includes an extended description of the Kurdish National Archive, situated in Sulaimani.

Un ponte per, an Italian NGO has been actively engaged in the support of Iraqi libraries, particularly the Iraq National Library and Archive in recent years. This October, the third meeting of the “House of Books — Dar al-Kutub” (HoB) Project it supports was held in Erbil. William Kopycki was unable to attend, but did pass on a brief document reporting on the event:

(quote) The conference is the third meeting of the “House of Books – Dar al-Kutub” (HoB) project, organized by UPP (an Italian NGO) and the Iraqi National Library and Archives (INLA), aimed at improving access to Iraqi cultural heritage and protection. UNESCO and the European Union are among the funding agencies. The conference was held October 2-3 in Erbil, Iraqi Kurdistan.

Participants:

Iraq National Library and Archive - Digital Center of Oriental Manuscripts of the Dominican Fathers in Mosul (Iraq) - National Library of Jordan - American University of Beirut - Iraq National Museum - Sunni Waqf Library - Central Library of Erbil - Ministry of Education in Erbil – Ms. Patricia Sleeman, digitization and preservation consultant from the University of London.

Highlights:

[] Relevant for Iraq:

- **INLA continues to digitize according to international standards and has started the OCR of Arabic digitized text using Sakhr software. Guidance and partnership is provided by the Library of Congress and the World Digital Library. [more below].**
- **Digital Center of Oriental Manuscripts (Mosul) has already digitized more than 4,000 manuscripts belonging to monasteries and personal collections. Now it is focusing on collecting personal collections. Guidance and partnership is provided by Hill Museum and Manuscript Library. (unquote)**

Dr. Saad Eskander has informed me that a Father Najib leads this initiative of the Dominican Fathers in the work of the Digital Center of Oriental Manuscripts. He says that Father Najib is doing a very good job on two fronts: digitalization and restoration. His small team digitizes the private collections of local Christians and then the originals and a digital copy are returned to the owners.

Dr. Eskander indicated to Father Najib that the INLA was willing cooperate and coordinate with the Centre, and asked him to send a digital copy of their very important journal, *Ma'a al-Ward*, first published in the 1860s in three languages, so that he could post it on the web-site of the World Digital Library. Dr. Eskander says that Najib has sent the INLA a collection of his journals (in Syriani language), which they will digitize soon

4. Iraq National Library and Archive (INLA)

As we have come to expect, significant progress continues at the INLA under the direction of Dr. Saad Eskander.

Staff

Staff levels, presently at 390, are somewhat down from their height of 435 in 2007 due in significant part to retirement. The guards, at 39 in 2007 toward the very end of the worst period of civil conflict, are now down to 20 due to the decline in overt threat to the INLA, although the general level of violence remains deplorable. The guards fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior, not the Ministry of Culture. That said, Dr. Eskander undertakes every means possible to sustain and augment his staff. He was able to hire fifteen new employees on a permanent basis this year. Furthermore, he has requested that the Ministry of Culture notify him if other directorates have “surplus” employees whom he might be able to put to productive work.

The staff includes 29 librarians who have BAs in library science and 15 librarians with Diplomas in library science (an Iraqi degree below the level of a BA). In addition the INLA has 6 archivists who have a Diploma in archiving and documentation. Only two staff (an IT technician and an archivist) have MAs, in history and political geography respectively.

The staff for the new Generation Library (devoted to children) will initially come from that of the main library. In due order, Dr. Eskander will seek appropriate specialists. However, he notes that “the main challenge is that Iraq is in need of well qualified people in almost all cultural and educational spheres.” Some of this dearth can be laid to

the huge brain drain caused by the severe internecine conflict of the post-invasion period.

Staff development:

Aside from the workshops associated with The Digital Library Project (see below), Dr. Eskander was able to send two of his restorers to Istanbul where they participated in a restoration course, and to send the head of the Restoration Laboratory to Beirut so that she could participate in a photograph preservation course. Two staff members have been in London this autumn, receiving training at the British Library. The training course is funded by the British Council and the British Institute for the Study of Iraq (formerly the British School of Archaeology in Iraq). The staff members are learning the skills necessary for the development of the Digital Sound Archive.

The Digital Library Project & Building:

The Digital Library Project included four workshops: two in Florence, one in Amman and one in Erbil, capital of Iraqi Kurdistan (mentioned above). So far three workshops were organized featuring experts from the The Library of Congress, University College London, Florence National Library, The American University of Beirut, and the Jordanian National Library. Representatives from the EU and UNESCO also participated. The participants also included librarians from a number of Iraq universities, state-run and private cultural institutions.

Very soon, foreign and Iraqi companies will submit bids for the construction of the Digital Library Building, the latest addition to the complex going up in association with the original INLA building. It will be four stories high apart from the basement, which will be used as a car park. It will cost around \$20 million.

A new initiative, the Digital Sound Archive, is under development. It will involve setting up a website where scholars, students and ordinary people can find every sort of Iraqi music, folk songs, and other significant recorded material. Its two purposes: cultural preservation and cultural education.

Equipment and materials:

Dr. Eskander was able to persuade the Council of Ministers and his Ministry (Culture) to grant him 90.000 Euros to purchase Japanese paper (for conservation) from abroad, plus some tools and materials as well as brand new microfilm process. The shipment was expected in mid-November 2011.

Collections:

Dr. Eskander has been soliciting and receiving the libraries of Iraqi scholars for the INLA. The most important of the three donated this year is the invaluable collection of an Iraqi scholar who was professor of English Literature. The donor's name is printed in each book. The

INLA also encourages Iraqis to donate their collections to any appropriate cultural or educational institution.

The Iraqi Army sent to the INLA 1200 books in English, principally novels, originally donated to them by the American. The INLA continues its commitment to provide its readers with the best and the newest publications in the social sciences.

Although Dr. Eskander had been in conversation with Swedish Embassy staff for eighteen months, the large donation of children's books they had promised for the Generation Library has never materialized.

Outreach

The INLA now has direct relations with all Iraqi universities, and thus receives copies of all MA and PhD theses, plus their own publications. The coordination is accomplished by INLA representatives who serve in all eighteen provinces. These representatives also visit all educational, cultural and governmental entities with the aim of:

- (1) Educating their staffs concerning current Iraqi legislation related to libraries and archives.**
- (2) Doing any administrative work on behalf of these institutions and individuals, such as providing the serial number for the deposit publication and collecting five copies of it.**
- (3) Participating in any cultural events**

(4) Cooperating and coordinating with private cultural institutions, such as the exchange of publications, manuscripts, records, etc. as well as arranging for training.

Only two of these representatives actually have offices at present: those of al-Qadisiya (Diwaniya) and Ninaw (Mosul).

Publications:

The INLA was able to publish its Annual Report, in addition to new National, Theses, Law and Children's bibliographies.

Use:

The average number of daily readers has risen to 80 (which Dr. Eskander compares with the number of the readers who daily visit the Jordanian National Library: not more than 5 or 6). The INLA's statistics show that readers come from all 18 provinces including the Kurdistan region, a new phenomenon. To accommodate this continuous increase in use, a second reading room is being renovated. Users have been access to the internet free of charge. Two terminals are presently available, and more will be added if required.

Construction of the new National Archive building, and the Generation Library

By early 2012, the construction of the Generation Library will be completed. By the end of the year, it will be fully furnished and stocked

with appropriate publications. The Federal Government has been the primary funder.

[Information as of May 2012] Due to delays caused by incompetence on the part of the contractor, the construction on the National Archive building will only be completed by the end of 2012, at which time the transfer of the staff from the original building will take place. The administrative structure will remain the same, but this development will free up desperately needed space for the National Library and its several departments. The new space will be able to absorb all of the documents of prior, present and future regimes for the foreseeable future.

Special events:

(24) The INLA continues to organize cultural activities with well known writers, poets, even sportsmen. It also organizes charity events from time to time to support orphans and other poor children.

Electricity:

The INLA's situation has improved markedly over 2010 in regard to electricity. Dr. Eskander persuaded the Ministry of Electricity to provide his institution with power throughout its working hours, a dramatic improvement over all previous years. In addition, the INLA has three large generators that can be engaged when necessary.

5. Seized documents

Since the relatively positive developments described in the 2010 Report, the question concerning the principal categories of seized Iraqi documents remains in limbo. They remain three basic classes: (1) those seized by the American military and reported to be stored at the huge American base outside Doha, Qatar (although others reportedly still warehoused in the Green Zone, Baghdad); (2) those appropriated by the Iraq Memory Foundation (IMF) with the assent of Paul Bremer, head of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in Iraq in 2003. These documents were secretly flown out of Baghdad courtesy of the US military in 2005, and have resided at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University since 2008. (3) The Iraqi Jewish Archive, still warehoused with the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).

One question that was fully sorted out over the course of the last year was that the ultimate responsibility for all documents of national interest resides with the Ministry of Culture, and, within it, the INLA functions as final repository.

Generally speaking, the purposes of governments and institutions have nothing to do with reason, justice or fairness, and everything to do with power, possession and inertia (The INLA under the direction of Dr. Saad Eskander being a remarkable exception to this rule). When pressed, any sort of obfuscation or feeble excuse will do. The behavior of all of these actors opposed to the right of Iraqis to their own documents makes this manifest. Despite various positive statements by the US

Department of State and Department of Defense at the series of meetings in April 2010 with an Iraqi delegation including Dr. Eskander, and at others in June of that year involving Saad Eskander alone, no progress whatsoever has occurred in the meantime. The same holds true for those millions of documents held by the Hoover. NARA representatives refuse even to communicate with the INLA. Direct contact between the INLA and the American Embassy ceased as of late July 2010.

Various efforts were attempted by the Iraqi government through the US embassy in Baghdad; however, with no positive feedback forthcoming, the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs has sent diplomatic notes to the US Department of State in late summer 2011 urging the resumption of talks with the aim of achieving the certain return of all documents. There has been no reaction so far. Dr. Eskander makes clear that the Iraqis have been seeking to make the issue of the Ba'ath archive an integral part of one general issue between Iraq and the US, not as an issue between a private US institution (the Hoover) and the INLA. They made it clear to the State Department's officials that the Iraqi Jewish Archive, the records seized by Pentagon and CIA and the Ba'ath Archive are one issue which had to be the focus of any negotiation between the sides. Dr. Eskander recently went to the Iraqi media to publicize American intransigence regarding even talking, let alone the actual return of records.

I presented a talk, “On Seized Iraqi Documents and the Right of Possession” at a conference, *Human Rights and Cultural Heritage: From the Holocaust to the Haitian Earthquake*, at Benjamin Cardozo School of Law, Yeshiva University on 31 March 2011. It provided me another venue in which to present arguments for the Iraqis right to their own documents. Among other things, I stated:

(quote) Effective control over its own archival documents is a hallmark of a well-ordered government, and definitional of sovereignty. Dr. Eskander has repeatedly articulated the basic idea that such documents are commonly and rightly regarded as an integral part of any nation's cultural heritage, and that, collectively, they are the embodiment of a people’s historical memory, broad knowledge of which is presently scant in Iraq given the ways of the dictatorship. For such reasons, the principle of safeguarding national cultural and documentary property has been enshrined in international law, notably in UNESCO’s 1970 Hague Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property.

In the articulation of what constitutes cultural property, Article 1 (b) of the 1970 Convention covers:

“property relating to history, including the history of science and technology and military and social history, to the life of national leaders, thinkers, scientists and artists and to events of national importance”

Article 1 (h) covers:

“rare manuscripts and incunabula, old books, documents and publications of special interest (historical, artistic, scientific, literary, etc.) singly or in collections”

And Article 1 (j) further covers:

“archives, including sound, photographic and cinematographic archives”

Regarding restitution, Article 13 (b) requires that States Parties undertake

“to ensure that their competent services co-operate in facilitating the earliest possible restitution of illicitly exported cultural property to its rightful owner”

while 13 (c) requires them

“to admit actions for recovery of lost or stolen items of cultural property brought by or on behalf of the rightful owners”

and 13 (d) further states

“to recognize the indefeasible right of each State Party to this Convention to classify and declare certain cultural property as inalienable which should therefore ipso facto not be exported, and to facilitate recovery of such property by the State concerned in cases where it has been exported.”

My reading suggests that this broad definition of cultural property subsumes archival documents from any period, critical to the understanding of the history, politics and society of a nation. The United States is a signatory to this convention, and should act according to its dictates. While Iraq is not at present, both are signatories to the 1954 Geneva Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the event of Armed Conflict. (end of quote).

The US government presents no public arguments for its continuing possession of vast millions of Iraqi documents long after their putative utility for finding non-existent weapons of mass destruction, non-existent ties between the Saddam Hussein regime and al-Qaeda, and getting the goods on principal actors in that regime have been rendered moot. They do so despite the fact that — much like those millions of documents at the Hoover Institution — most or all of those held outside Doha have been scanned. Kanan Makiya's off repeated argument for why a right-wing institution in far-off California should have what is the rightful possession of the Iraqi people is that the situation of the INLA is too insecure. In manifest contradiction to this assertion, the INLA has survived and thrived under difficult circumstances, the worst being long over. Bad as it is from the point of view of an American city, the situation is better, and there is hope for better still. Even then, no logical argument other than sheer mean-spiritedness explains why the INLA is deprived of digital copies in the interim. What we have is a patronizing, neo-colonialist point of view triumphing — for the moment.

Respectfully submitted by
Jeff Spurr, Chair,
30 November 2011