

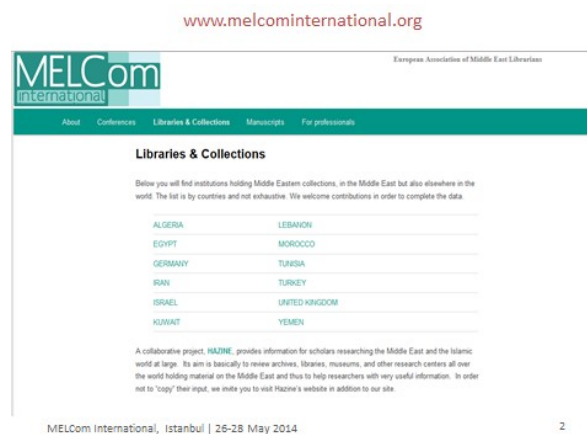
# “Middle East Collections” in the Middle East: Preliminary Impressions of a Survey

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## « Middle East collections » in the Middle East : preliminary impressions of a survey

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Mapping primary and secondary sources on and from the Middle East has been one of the main tasks of MELCom International although this mission is not (yet?) stated among the aims and scope of the Association. However, with the new layout of its website, the ambition of becoming a platform of reference is modestly pursuing its way, thanks to collaborative contributions.



Indeed, we are gathered here within the frame of the European association of Middle East librarians and in so doing, we take for granted that the Middle East as a geographical, but also as a cultural area, is a subject of study. Our interest, as librarians, biographers, scholars, vendors, focuses on the sources and resources that enable those who aim to explore and analyse this part of the world. Our task as librarians is to provide researching and/or teaching tools that help instructors to train students and scholars to find out what they want to know but also what **can be known** --and I insist on this second part--on the area.

We also know that the academic interest in the study of the languages, religions, cultures and history of the pre-Modern Middle East, as we understand it today, has begun in Europe as Orientalism and that it was pursued, in North America. A significant number of books and articles have been devoted to the genesis and the development of Middle Eastern studies outside the Middle East. Critiques have been addressed leading to intellectual and also emotional debates, discussing the interpretation and even the legitimacy of such an object of study by « the other », and inevitably by « the self » too, since the scholars as well as the guardians of the resources are not only Europeans or North Americans, at least not anymore. Nevertheless, to my knowledge, university departments and collections devoted to the Middle East, under this label, are found in countries are not located in the Middle East.

Middle East collections in the Middle East : preliminary impressions of a survey

Initial aim and scope :

Mapping primary and secondary sources

The development and organisation of Middle East collections in university libraries in Israel

MELCom International | Istanbul | 26-28 May 2014 3

If Middle East as an entity is studied “outside its boundaries”, then the case of Israel which is “inside” geographically and culturally, indeed in the heart of the region, with academic and research units and library collections devoted to the Middle East under this very designation, is an interesting one that aroused my curiosity and I ventured to find out about this “exception”.

Israel is a young country, that stretches only over some 20 000 km<sup>2</sup>, and houses hardly over 8 million people. The official languages of the country are Hebrew and Arabic, with one fifth of the habitants being native speakers of the latter, if we do not include Jews from Arab countries, most of them belonging to older generations. It is home to a very dynamic publishing activity *per capita* -- only second after China -- in Hebrew, Arabic, English and for the last couple of decades in Russian as well.

Its geopolitical situation is particular whereby its neighbors, both immediate and more distant, are countries with no diplomatic ties, indeed in latent war, except for two of them, and it occupies territories where 3 million Palestinians live.

What began as the study of classical Arabic and Islam by Germany trained European scholars in the Pre-State epoch is now approached by Israel born Orientalists, both Jews and Arabs. What has happened in the last century as far as the professional identity of the Orientalist (*mizrahan* in Hebrew) is concerned? What can be said about the scope of the research? Is Middle East a geographical or a geopolitical definition? Is the specialists' objectivity challenged? Is their legitimacy questioned and if so why? I ended up being more interested in these questions and in some more while surveying the resources at their disposal but this will certainly be a topic I will work on in the future.

**MEISAI (1949-)**  
The Middle East & Islamic Studies Association of Israel

1. Lectures, colloquia, conventions, seminars, annual conferences, etc.;
2. Scientific publications among which the annual Hebrew-language periodica המזרח החדש and the English-language bi-annual electronic journal רוח מזרחית or *Sharqiyya*
3. Coordination between academic departments and graduate students of Middle East Studies across the country;
4. Cultural contacts with Middle Eastern countries.

+ Association of Middle East and Islamic librarians

MELCom International, Istanbul | 26-28 May 2014 4

To start with I visited the website of The Middle East & Islamic Studies Association of Israel – MEISAI-- that introduces itself as an “independent, apolitical, non-profit association, which was founded as the *Israel Oriental Society* more than half a century ago, in the autumn of 1949 in Jerusalem, by professors affiliated with the School of Oriental Studies at the Hebrew University (now named "The Institute of Asian and African Studies")”. Its aims are “to stimulate interest, to disseminate knowledge, to promote research of the larger Middle East, and to cultivate cultural relations and amity among peoples of these areas”. It engages in four activities the third of which listed below is indirectly of primary interest to my survey:

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the country; and

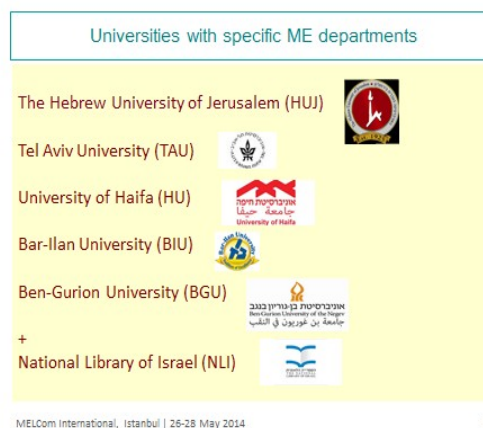
#### 4. Cultural contacts with Middle Eastern countries.

It may be added here that MEISAI has a sibling association of Middle East librarians, yet crawling, which so far met only once in 2012 and I have benefited from its mailing list to establish contacts with local colleagues.

Before visiting the colleagues, I also read the 2011 reports of the Committee for the evaluation of Middle Eastern programs commissioned by the Council of Higher Education where both departments and library resources are examined by five experts three of whom were from universities abroad (Dorham College, University of Washington and Columbia University). These reports served as backdrop to my survey.

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There are eight universities and over forty academic colleges recognized by the Council of Higher Education (CHE) in the pre-1967 borders (i.e. I do not include institutions in the West Bank). Out of the eight universities, two of them are institutes of technology and science, and do not deliver degrees in Humanities or Social sciences. Of the six left, only one, the Open University, does not have a department of Middle Eastern studies, while the five other do. With the exception of one of the five universities left, they all have separate departments of Arabic language and literature.



As I said earlier, my initial aim was to explore the MENA library collections in these five universities, to find out how they articulated with each other, what aspects of Middle Eastern Studies they developed, and how they stood against the National Library of Israel which has a whole department of Islamic and Middle East collections.

The country being small where commuting is easy, the library budgets shrinking as elsewhere in the world, not to mention the difficulties inherent to the acquisition of library material from other Middle Eastern countries, I wondered if these facts led to specific arrangements in and between the target institutions,.

To find out the answer(s), I planned to visit the five university libraries as well as the National library and interview the librarians in charge of Middle Eastern collections in these institutions . One thing leading to another, I ended up visiting 20 libraries, interviewing 24 librarians and a dozen academics.

Among the libraries I surveyed altogether, there were the six I aimed initially plus seven research institutes', four teachers training colleges', two museum as well as two waqf libraries and one municipal library, the three latter being located in East Jerusalem. We shall go over them each, probably too superficially, in order to meet the speaking time allotted to this presentation.

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Before giving an overview of the libraries, some background information may be useful : While German Orientalism was strong in the foundation of Middle East studies in Israel, today, academic staff are also economists, political scientists, anthropologists and literary scholars specializing in the Middle East, drawing their theoretical guidance from their separate disciplines. Some changes in the focus of the field have arisen from events in the contemporary world. This called for country-specific coverage which now is giving way to an expanded geography and new focus is initiated to study regions such as Central, South and Southeast Asia as well as Muslim diaspora in Europe and North America.

Likewise, teaching and research on Palestinians began, in some departments, at a later stage too while other disciplines as political sciences or international relations were already dealing with the topic. Similarly, Islam has been studied from the historical and theological angles for long, but with religion appearing as a factor in the public sphere, modern Islam has gradually been incorporated in the curricula and is now being addressed.

English and Arabic are languages taught at secondary level in Hebrew schools and Hebrew and English are taught in Arabic schools. Thus, library materials in the universities--not only for Middle East but also for a number of other disciplines-- are mostly in these three languages. At university level, Arabic remains as the basic requirement for Middle Eastern studies while Ottoman Turkish

and Persian are also taught to undergraduates and graduates alike. However, other “Middle Eastern” languages such as Kurdish, Uzbek, Azeri, Pashto, etc. lag way behind, if at all. Faculty and advanced graduate students have more difficult time locating books, journals and newspapers in these less commonly taught languages.

University and academic college libraries as well as selected research institutes and governmental libraries and the National library are all logged to ULI, the union catalogue which contains bibliographic records in the international MARC21 format for all the items except for offprints and journal articles. The Union list of serials and the union list of e-journals are separate additional tools. Finally, all the items are catalogued in original script, may they be in Latin, Arabic, Hebrew and Cyrillic alphabets and transliteration is applied from these languages to Hebrew in certain cases.

Haifa University Library is in charge of the Index to Hebrew Periodicals and the National Library of the index to articles on Jewish studies as well as the Name Authority database, part of VIAF, The Virtual International Authority File.

Another cooperative activity of the libraries is of course interlibrary loan and more recently includes the subscription or the purchase of electronic material. As far as disciplinary or linguistic share of acquisitions is concerned, given the priority commitment of each university library towards its academic staff, I have not been able to find statements of acquisition policies specific to the Middle Eastern collections, except for the National Library whose mission is different than that of the other institutions. However the newborn Association of Middle East librarians is aiming to reach a common ground for this purpose, a recommendation clearly stated in the final report of the Committee for Evaluation mentioned above. Obviously, universities are in competition with each other, and the decision for shared acquisitions should come from the Council of Higher Education to University authorities and down to librarians.

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And now the overview of the major institutions visited during my survey:

Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies  
Department of Arabic language and literature  
**The Bloomfield Library for the Humanities and Social Sciences**

*The H. S. Turman Institute for the Advancement of Peace*  
**The R. & S. Bogen Library and Documentation Center**

*Institute of Asian and African Studies*

*The N. Levtzion Center for Islamic Studies*

*The Rothberg International School*  
**Judah L. Berger Memorial Library & Mekler-Benenson Families  
Reference Library**

The Institute of Oriental Studies was one of the first academic units of the **Hebrew University of Jerusalem** founded in 1925. It opened in 1926 with scholars trained in Germany and focused on Arabic philology and pre-Ottoman history and Medieval Islam. In 1962 it was renamed the Institute of Asian and African Studies to reflect broader coverage. Interest in later historical periods led to the creation of the Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies alongside the Department of Arab Language and Literature. Currently the former is the largest department in the Faculty of Humanities in terms of the number of registered students. These two units benefit from the Bloomfield library's holdings that include 15 000 books related to the Middle East, and from the rich resources of the National Library, we shall deal with later, previously part of the University. Moreover, other related research institutes were founded in the campus, the most significant being, in 1968, the Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace with a very rich library that has a unique collection of textbooks used in Arab countries in the 70s, PLO pamphlets, personal archives of some orientalist and diplomats.

Tel-Aviv University (TAU)

Middle Eastern and African History  
Arabic and Islamic Studies  
Semitic Linguistics  
**Sourasky Central Library (Faculty of Humanities and Arts)**

*Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies*  
**Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies Library**

*The Alliance Center for Iranian Studies*  
*The Tami Steinmatz Center for Peace Research*  
*The Center for Mediterranean Civilisations*  
*The W. Lebach Institute for Jewish-Arab Coexistence through Education*

MELCom International, Istanbul | 26-28 May 2014

7

**Tel-Aviv University** opened in 1963 and offered, from the very beginning courses related to Islam and Middle Eastern history. The Shiloah Research Center, which later was baptized Dayan Center, focused on contemporary affairs, particularly the Arab world. While the Central Library of the Faculty for Humanities and Social Sciences of the University develops its collections that amount to 25 000 volumes, the Dayan Center assembled a unique database with more than 300 000 entries of articles from journals, think tanks and institutional publications as well as a collection of newspapers and other documentary materials, including an important one on the Economy of the region. The Center for Iranian Studies was added in 2005 to the university

The University of Haifa (HU)

Department of Middle Eastern History (1966)

Department of Arabic language and literature

**Younes & Soraya Nazarian Library**

*Ezri Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies*  
*The Jewish-Arab Center*  
*The Schumacher Institute for Research of the Christian Presence in Palestine in the Modern Era*  
*Center for Iraq Studies*  
*Center for Research on Peace Education*

MELCom International, Istanbul | 26-28 May 2014

8

**The University of Haifa** was also established in 1963 while its Department of Islamic History was founded three years later, changing its name to Department of Middle Eastern History in 1974. The Ezri Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies and the Center for Iraq Studies are affiliated to this department. There is a single central library, which has ever since made the acquisitions of Middle Eastern collections, particularly in Arabic, its high priority. It is considered to be the richest such collection with some 90 000 titles of books of which 2500 are in Turkish and 1700 in Ottoman



Turkish. One of its projects is the digitization of the Druze archives it holds.

Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (BGU)

Department of Middle Eastern Studies  
**The Zalman Aranne Central Library**

The Ch. Herzog Center for Middle East Studies and Diplomacy  
**The Herzog Library**

*The R. H. Arnow Center for Bedouin Studies and Development*

MELCom International, Istanbul | 26-28 May 2014 9

Founded in 1966, the University of the Negev was fully accredited as **Ben-Gurion University of the Negev** in 1973. The Department of Middle East Studies was established some twenty years later, in 1994, including teaching and research in all aspects of Arabic language and culture. The department houses many Ottomanists and develops a center of excellence in African studies. The Central Library has relatively recent collections on the Middle East, the highlight of which is Modern Islamic Law, and they plan to develop both scope and quantity as of this year, with the arrival of an area specialist librarian.

Bar-Ilan University (BIU)

Department of Middle Eastern Studies (2003)  
**The Central Library**

Department of Arabic  
**The Arabic Seminar Library**

*Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies*

*J. Burg Chair in Education for Human Values, Tolerance and Peace*

MELCom International, Istanbul | 26-28 May 2014 10

Finally, although **Bar-Ilan University** was established in 1955, it has the youngest Department of Middle Eastern Studies which opened in 2003 even if the Department of Arabic is over fifty years old, with focus on Islamic religion and thought. Two of its libraries --the Central Library and the Arabic Seminar Library both on the same campus – offer 40 000 books mainly on classical Arabic and Islam.

The National Library of Israel

*Founded in 1892*

*The Jewish national and university library in 1925*

*The National Library of Israel in 2011*

*Department of Islamic and Middle East Collections*

MELCom International, Istanbul | 26-28 May 2014

11

Established in 1892, **The National Library**, was, until 2011, The Jewish National and University Library, part of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Today a separate institution, it has kept its historical collections and now has the mandate to serve not only Hebrew University but also all students, faculty and independent researchers in Israel (and beyond). The Bloomfield library mentioned earlier is more undergraduate-oriented. The Islam and Middle East collection of the National Library date from early 1920s, beginning with the purchase of Ignaz Goldziher's private book collection, and today includes books, periodicals, manuscripts and archival material, as well as small collections of Arabic ephemera and music. The library's special collections, such as its 1,900 manuscripts in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, were acquired primarily by donations from manuscript collectors and scholars. The Library also holds material « collected » from abandoned/empty Palestinian homes in 1948-49, including 5approximately 8,000 volumes of books, numerous periodicals and 600 manuscripts. The material is not considered the property of the Library, but is under the jurisdiction of the Custodian of Absentee Property and held on deposit at the Library at his behest. All the materials were catalogued as a separate collection (known as the "AP collection") and are accessible and available for use in the building. This collection will be the topic of a paper tomorrow.

Since the beginning of the National Library's renewal program, the Library has focused increasingly on preserving and making accessible cultural material important to the Arab population of Israel, and has embarked on several digitization projects of collecting and digitizing Arabic posters/ephemera, early Palestinian newspapers, and Islamic manuscripts (80 of them are online). While the National Library collects books via the Legal Deposit law, some self-published material in Arabic and East-Jerusalem publications do not necessarily follow this procedure. The Library historically has bought small quantities of books and periodicals in Persian and Turkish and has started to increase the Persian collection in particular.

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After the major State-funded academic and research libraries, I will briefly deal with some independent research institutes that have Middle East related library material :

Research institute libraries 1/2

*Ben-Zvi Institute*  
for the study of Jewish communities in the East  
**Library and archives**



*The H. S. Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace*  
**The R. & S. Bogen Library and Documentation Center**  
(The Hebrew University of Jerusalem)



*Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies*  
**Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies Library**  
(Tel-Aviv University)



MELCom International, Istanbul | 26-28 May 2014 12

Yad **Ben Zwi** is a research institute founded in 1947 that explores the Jewish communities of the Muslim world. Its library and archives hold rich collections on these groups as well as their countries of origin.

Research institute libraries 2/2

*Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism information Center (Gilot)*  
**Library and Documentation Center**



*Givat Haviva Jewish-Arab Center for Peace (Hadera Area)*  
**Library**



*Van Leer Jerusalem Institute*  
**Library**



*The Bahà'i World Center (Haifa)*  
**Library and Archives**



MELCom International, Istanbul | 26-28 May 2014 13

Founded in 1949, **Givat Haviva** which is an initiative of the kibbutz movement and advocates peaceful co-existence and dialogue between Jews and Arabs, developed a library, as of 1963, devoted to this purpose. The collections highlight various Palestinian-Israeli partnership activities such as audiovisual archives of personal and community narratives. The digitization of one of the richest Palestinian newspaper collection amounts to 35 000 pages, but it has been interrupted in 2005 due to severe budget cuts and will possibly be pursued by the National Library.

The library of the **Terrorism and Intelligence Information Center** founded in 2002 has a computerized data center that houses the greatest concentration of unclassified information about terrorism in Israel and elsewhere. The library has 50 000 books in English, Hebrew and some in Arabic, as well as gray literature, captured documents and videos on security issues in many more languages.

The **Van Leer Jerusalem Institute** is a leading intellectual center for the interdisciplinary study and discussion of issues such as the Israeli Civil Society, and the Mediterranean Neighbors. Its library is quite rich ,but it no longer aims at serving as a resource center for the Middle East projects of the Institute's fellows.

The **Baha'i World Center's Library** and Archives in Haifa are extremely well equipped with books and journals, theses, photos, maps, conference recordings, etc. arriving as gifts according to an affiliated scholar who still conducts research there. The library and archives serve as a sort of worldwide deposit of all the publications that deal with the Baha'i faith one way or the other and has more than 90 000 books on the topic. Access is extremely selective and difficult.



There are more than forty academic colleges in Israel, with a significant number of them teaching some or all disciplines in Arabic. Yet, I visited only four of them that have libraries with important holdings in Arabic. **Beit Berl** in Kfar Saba and **David Yellin** in Jerusalem are prestigious institutions that have separate Arabic libraries, mostly on language, literature and education, but also on Middle East history and Islam. Beit Berl's Arabic library holds 50 000 monographies but few periodicals. Yellin, on the other hand, provides access to Arabic literature databases. The **Haifa Arab College** and **Al-Qasemi Academy** in Baqa'l-gharbiyya teach all disciplines in Arabic and

have well established and rather rich libraries focusing on teachers' training. The former houses some 70 000 titles in Arabic. The latter is a more recent Sufi institution founded in 1989 and has inherited the Islamic « book center » active since the 1950s. The library, apart from its 72 000 printed books, offers access to an impressive number of Arabic e-books and data bases, full text journal articles and digitizes, on demand, older material.



Two museums with libraries devoted to **Islamic art** and archeology, both in Jerusalem deserve to be mentioned, even briefly. Their books and journals are all in European languages and in Hebrew. They each have a very small amount of Islamic manuscripts, held in their museum collections.



I will not dwell on the rich and mainly manuscript collections of the **Al-Aqsa Mosque** library and the **Khalidiyya**. A lot has been written on both and they deserve separate presentations. Their catalogues have been compiled. Some of the Palestinian newspapers held by the Mosque library have been digitised and they may be viewed via the British Library's “Endangered archives programme” website.

Finally, I also had a chance to visit the once Jordanian **East Jerusalem Central Library** which serves the local public with emphasis on pedagogical activities oriented towards children and young pupils. Its general purpose collections are almost solely in Arabic although one cannot qualify them as focusing on the Middle East.

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As was said earlier, this series of visits to libraries and interviews with both librarians, curators and academics left me with the awareness that some questions remain to be asked, extra issues require to be addressed. For instance, following an interview with a PhD student who had done his MA thesis on archives in Israel, the summary information he provided remains still to be explored. Hopefully, this will be the topic of another survey, most probably to be conducted by someone else. The *Hazine* project (a guide to researching the Middle East and beyond : [hazine.info](http://hazine.info)) founded by two graduate students , is already offering us very successful examples.

Apart from a more comprehensive report I am in the process of writing to submit to my institution which has allowed me to carry out this survey, I also hope to post brief factual information on the MELCom International website. To conclude, I suggest that similar resource “mapping” surveys be conducted in all countries and findings be presented in future annual conferences, with a special session devoted to this topic.

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