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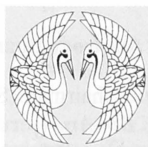
Front cover:

Embroidery design of a dragon. The Qing imperial credentials of the Emperor Xuantong to the Russian Tsar Nicolas II, accordion binding cover. The collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, 34,5×22.0 cm.

Back cover:

Embroidery design on a *tao*. Same credentials, 34,5×22.0 cm.

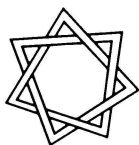
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LIBRARIES AND NEW INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES

Towards an exchange network of Arabic authority records Round Table (part I)

In May 2002, MELCOM International, the European association of Middle East Librarians held its 24th annual meeting in Paris. The growing interest witnessed during the St. Petersburg conference in 2001 was confirmed in Paris thanks to an impressive amount of participants joining the Petit Auditorium of Bibliothèque nationale de France from over fifteen countries. The programme announced some thirty speakers covering areas ranging from digital libraries and automation in multiscript environment to manuscript studies and collection building of multimedia documents (for details please see <http://www.uni-bamberg.de/unibib/melcom/paris.html>).

As the convener of the Conference, I sincerely found each and every contribution equally enriching me. However, in terms of future projects involving almost all the community of the Middle East librarians, the "Round Table on Arabic authority records" will certainly have more impact than all the other presentations.

Bearing in mind the importance of the topic, we decided to devote a whole afternoon to it. However this was not enough: the speakers had just time to deliver their survey and experience while the attendees were eager to know more and offer their point of view. We soon discovered that the circumference of the table had to be increased by spreading the debate and the exchange of information beyond the Paris conference. The contributions of varying lengths and depths, are thus posted on the Website mentioned above and published herebelow.

Since almost all the speakers gave their talks in French, we decided to stick to the original version. This is true except for two colleagues: Martha S. Plettner and Manal Amin, both from Egypt. As far as Ms Plettner is concerned, the full paper in English will be published in the next issue of ICBC* and can be found on the website of MELCOM International while the organizer of the Round Table, Ms Annick Bernard, has translated the content into French for us. On the other hand, Ms Amin's brief presentation was a series of screens commented orally that are not reproduced on paper here. Nevertheless, Annick Bernard shares with us her notes, so to speak. We do invite the interested reader, however, to consult the electronic version which includes all the screens and exemples projected during the conference.

The contents, as well as the Round Table organizer's full report and the introductory remarks of the moderator, have been translated into English for the comfort of those who master this language better than French.

We thank Ms Annick Bernard's original idea and efforts that made this project come true and express our gratitude to *Manuscripta Orientalia* for the platform it offers to the topic of Arabic authority records. Last but not least, as the saying goes, we hope to mark a milestone of many others to follow in what we expect will be a federating debate toward a network of exchange.

Sara Yontan Musnik,

Local organizer,
Melcom International Paris Conference,
Bibliothèque nationale de France

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PROPOS LIMINAIRES

OPENING REMARKS

Ces débats ont tenté de faire avancer la réflexion et surtout d'ouvrir des perspectives de coopération autour d'un domaine passionnant et épineux, celui des vedettes d'autorités auteurs et titres arabes.

Nous disposions de peu de temps, et avons été frustrés par cette contrainte. Il nous a d'ailleurs paru nécessaire de prolonger nos travaux, d'une part par la constitution d'un groupe de discussion et de travail, d'autre part par la reprise de ces travaux lors du prochain congrès du MELCOM International, qui se tiendra du 26 au 28 mai 2003 à Beyrouth.

Deux ou trois choses devaient être dites pour cerner le champ du débat.

D'abord, nous parlons bien des "autorités auteurs et titres arabes", il ne s'agit d'évoquer, en principe, ni les vedettes matière, ni les autorités relevant d'une autre aire culturelle.

Et pourtant, des différentes difficultés que nous avons tous rencontrées ou au moins pressenties quand nous avons réfléchi à ce problème de la création, de la maintenance et d'un partage des fichiers d'autorité arabes, certaines sont spécifiques à l'aire que nous étudions, la grande majorité sont pourtant communes à toutes les entreprises de ce genre. Je voudrais en établir un bref inventaire, sans prétention d'exhaustivité:

- définition du champ du travail;
- choix du support;
- choix du ou des alphabets utilisés;
- choix et application des normes, de translittération, de catalogage, de codage des caractères, des données et métadonnées;
- choix et nombre des éléments retenus pour la vedette, des éléments rejetés, de leur structure, des formes de renvoi;
- recensement et choix des outils disponibles;
- niveau de contrôle des catalogues par un, ou plusieurs, fichiers d'autorité;
- attribution des compétences et des responsabilités;
- difficultés à s'entendre sur tous ces choix, parfois dans le cadre d'un même établissement, a fortiori entre établissements différents, entre pays différents;
- difficulté à faire reconnaître l'existence même et la spécificité du problème par les différentes tutelles;

Our discussions tried to move forward and to open perspectives of cooperation on this fascinating and thorny subject of Arabic title and author authority headings, records and files.

We had very few time to spend on it, and were frustrated because of this restraint. We felt it necessary to prolong our work in two directions: first, to set up a discussion group and, second, to resume our work in the next conference of MELCOM International, which is to be held in Beirut on 26—28 May 2003.

One or two things had to be said, though, to clarify the aims of this Round Table.

First of all, we are dealing with "Arabic author and title authority headings", which means we are leaving out Subject headings, as well as headings related to other cultural areas.

However, of the various difficulties we all have met some day or another, or at least imagined when thinking over this problem of creating, maintaining and sharing authority files, some are specific to the area we are working on, while most are common to any similar enterprise. I would like to give a short survey here without pretending to be exhaustive:

- defining a scope of work;
- choosing a medium;
- choosing one, two, or more scripts;
- choosing and applying standards and rules for transliteration, cataloguing, character encoding, data and metadata;
- choosing the right parts of the names and titles, and the right number of them, and their order, and the parts to be rejected;
- listing and choosing available tools;
- defining levels of control for the catalogues by one or more authority files;
- assigning competences and responsibilities;
- difficulties in finding an agreement on all these points, either inside a single library or between several institutions, or better still across countries;
- difficulties in struggling to have the issue recognized as such, and as a specific one, by supervising institutions, for as you know Arabic headings are

car les autorités arabes sont une goutte dans l'océan des autorités à gérer;

- difficulté à appréhender le problème dans son ensemble, avec ses tenants et aboutissants, et à définir les moyens intellectuels et matériels pour un travail efficace et surtout utile.

Nous pourrions sans doute en trouver d'autres, et il est clair que nous n'avons eu ni le temps ni les moyens de faire le tour de la question. Néanmoins tous ces aspects du problème, ou au moins une bonne part d'entre eux ont été évoqués à partir d'interventions, certaines très brèves, d'autres plus étoffées, qui ont servi de support à un débat.

Après une mise au point effectuée par Marcelle Beaudiquez sur les principes généraux à préconiser pour l'échange des autorités, nous avons abordé successivement:

- des réalisations existantes, utilisant pour la plupart les caractères originaux, effectués par des institutions diverses dans des contextes divers;
- puis des projets et travaux en cours.

Dans les limites du temps disponible, l'assistance était appelée, après chaque série d'interventions programmées, à intervenir à son tour pour ajouter à notre connaissance des réalisations et projets en cours, puis pour débattre des démarches exposées.

Dans la dernière partie de nos travaux, nous avons tenté d'ébaucher une démarche commune dans un cadre à définir, afin d'avancer dans la voie de cette coopération qui paraît en effet indispensable, l'intérêt suscité par l'annonce de cette Table Ronde en est un signe.

a drop in an ocean of headings in non-Arabic speaking environments;

- difficulty of seizing the topic in its whole, with its ins and outs, and of defining the right intellectual and material means of an efficient work, worse, of a useful one.

More can be said, but we clearly lacked time and means to make a complete survey of the question. Nevertheless, all these aspects of it, or at least most of them, were evoked in the different talks, some shorter than others, and we used them as a support for a debate.

After a clarification by Marcelle Beaudiquez about principles to be promoted for the exchange of authority records, we successively tackled:

- existing realizations and experiences, most of them using original characters, carried out by various institutions in various contexts;
- projects and work in progress.

The audience was requested to intervene after each sequence of papers, to add to our knowledge of related works and projects, and to discuss the displayed approaches.

During the last part of this session, we tried to sketch out a collective action in a frame still to be outlined, towards a cooperation which actually seems indispensable, as the interest aroused by this Round Table makes it clear.