

ORIENTAL MANUSCRIPTS AND NEW INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES

Hala Kaileh

THE CREATION OF THE ARABIC MANUSCRIPTS METADATA BASE

One of the major difficulties which confront those who study Arabic manuscripts lies in the determination of necessary metadata for the digitalized manuscripts' description. The metadata is considered to be the key search element by which the user is able to make search of manuscripts or their different fragments. The present article aims at the determination of a set of data applicable to Arabic manuscripts: it directly addresses manuscripts' users to facilitate their manuscripts' using and searching, and to define possible needs in this domain.

As a first step in this direction, a questionnaire has been compiled to be distributed among the specialists in Arabic manuscripts at the MELCOM conference in Venice (May, 2000). A number of questionnaire's copies were also distributed at the Bibliothèque nationale de France by the responsible for the Bibliothèque's Oriental Manuscripts Department. Unfortunately, the number of the questionnaires returned was not large and to get more information

we had to put the questionnaire on the Internet through the discussion group list — "List-Middle East" [*LIS-MIDDLE-EAST@JISMAIL.AC.UK*]. As a result of all these attempts, we have received 15 answers which can be considered quite exploitable. In the present article, we shall try to analyse the answers received thanks to the questionnaire in order to present important data the 15 answers contain.

First, we provide here information about our respondents: their nationality, profession, age and sex. Then we shall attempt to analyse the contents of the respondents' answers concerning the investigation of manuscripts from the viewpoint of typology, codicology, palaeography, etc. In the article we also treat the problems and perspectives of information search relating to Arabic manuscripts. Finally, the article deals with the problem of the digitalisation of Arabic manuscripts in the light of their users' expectations in this field.

Table 1*

Respondent	Nationality	Profession	Users' age					Sex	
			20-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	60-	F	M
Q 1	Français	Prof. d'université			×			×	×
Q 2	Américain	Bibliothécaire			×				×
Q 3	Grecque	Maître de conférences (arabisante)			×			×	
Q 4	Canadien	Erudit				×			×
Q 5	Palestinien	Chercheur, études islamiques	×						×
Q 6	Tunisien	Directeur de recherches					×		×
Q 7	Belge	Maître de conférences		×					×
Q 8	Anglais	Conservateur de bibliothèque		×					×
Q 9	Allemande	Bibliothécaire, spécialisée en littérature arabe			×			×	
Q 10	Français	Directeur de recherches				×			×
Q 11	Marocain	Maître de conférences			×				×
Q 12	Français	Chercheur CNRS				×			×
Q 13	Italien	Chargé d'enseignement		×					×
Q 14	Française	Etudiante	×					×	
Q 15	Français	Maître de conférences				×			×

* Q1, Q2, Q3, etc. are used to indicate the respondents. The general numbering was made without any particular order. We also preserve in this Table the French variants of nationalities and professions of the respondents as they define themselves.