

library affairs and the bibliographical section of the *Bulletin* is edited by the secretary of MELCOM.

All members of MESA are very welcome as members of BSMES and, indeed, several already are. Information and application forms may be obtained from: Derek Hopwood, Secretary, BSMES, 68 Woodstock Road, Oxford OX2 6JF, England.

#### Middle East Librarians' Association

MELA, the Middle East Librarians' Association, was formally organized during the 1972 MESA meeting in Binghamton and incorporated as a "private, non-profit, non-political organization of librarians and others interested in those aspects of librarianship which support the study or dissemination of information about the Middle East since the rise of Islam." Its purpose, as stated in the bylaws, was to

...facilitate communication among members through meetings and publications; to improve the quality of area librarianship through the development of standards for the profession and for the education of Middle East library specialists; to compile and disseminate information concerning Middle East libraries and collections, and represent the judgment of the members in matters affecting them; to encourage cooperation among members and Middle East libraries, especially in the acquisition of materials and the development of bibliographic controls; to cooperate with other library and area organizations in projects of mutual concern and benefit; to promote research in and development of indexing and automated techniques as applied to Middle East materials.

For several years prior to that memorable and rainy afternoon in Binghamton, a few specialist librarians had often discussed creating an organization to serve their special interests. These librarians were employed in hastily building up large and competing collections to meet the needs—real and imagined—of the major Middle East centers of the day. At that time the American Library Association virtually ignored the problems of non-Western specialists; and even after an "Asian" section was created in ALA, the few Middle Eastern librarians who could afford ALA dues found themselves lost in a crowd of Indian and Chinese librarians.

When MESA was founded in 1967 in response to the desires of social scientists interested in Middle East studies, "library science" was included in their recognized disciplines. Indeed, a Library Panel was included in the first MESA meeting (Chicago, December 8-9, 1967). Of special interest to Middle Eastern librarians was the 1967-1968 Committee for Research and Training which, under the inspired and energetic direction of Prof. William Schorger (Michigan), set out to determine the "needs of the field." It is significant in the history of MELA that the five-member RAT Committee of 1967-68 included one political scientist/librarian, the late Labib Zuwiyya-Yamak (Harvard). A Library Subcommittee of RAT was set up and, with MESA funding, met several times during 1968, and later to outline in detail the areas in which libraries and librarians could facilitate the progress of Middle Eastern studies in this country. One of the goals was the creation of a special library organization. The four years from 1968 to 1972 saw momentum grow slowly as the workers in the field increasing-

ly realized that a separate organization could best serve to promote the private and professional interests of librarians.

From the 17 librarians assembled in Binghamton, MELA's ranks have grown to over 200 members (individual and corporate) from several countries, and include professional librarians, subject specialists, administrators and teachers. Momentum is maintained by a core of professional members who assemble annually in conjunction with the MESA meeting.

The activities of MELA reflect the two basic areas of professional concern among its members: technical librarianship and resource development, which are inextricably entwined in practical librarianship.

To keep members informed of pertinent developments, MELA *Notes* has been published twice or thrice yearly since 1973 and is included in the annual dues of \$5.00. The *Notes* has included bibliographies, scholarly articles, translations, book reviews, etc., and hortatory editorials by its first editor, James Pollock (Indiana).

In addition to the annual meetings, MELA has held a week-long Workshop (Ann Arbor, May 26-31, 1975), funded by the Joint Committee of ACLS and the SSRC. The reports of the task forces assembled for this Workshop were published in *Cooperation Among Middle East Librarians of North America*, edited by John Eilts (Michigan).

In the area of technical services, a MELA committee met at the Library of Congress, July 6-7, 1978, to provide input and gain insight into LC activities, practices and policies in ME librarianship.

MELA in 1978 issued on microfiche a *Union Catalogue of Near Eastern Vernaculars*, which represents the cataloging output of several major libraries; and a *Supplement* (1979), both prepared at Ann Arbor by John Eilts and available by purchase.

Space does not permit a detailed list of MELA activities. Suffice it to say, that MELA acts as the focus of consensus among Middle Eastern librarians and can thus act to effect changes or influence technical considerations in such groups as the American Library Association or the Library of Congress. For example, MELA played a part in influencing LC not to "romanize" the descriptive content of its printed Arabic and Persian cards. On the positive side, it recommended strongly (with MESA) that LC get its own catalogue of vernacular publications underway. MELA has worked as well to maintain the PL-480 activities in Cairo.

As time passes, the nature of MELA changes with its membership. Whereas, originally Middle Eastern librarians were mainly Orientalists with extensive subject training, the younger librarians are more professional in training and apt to be computer and information specialists. This shift of emphasis should not draw MELA away from MESA; on the contrary, as information needs increase in complexity, as the costs of building and maintaining library collections grow, the services of MELA and the contributions of its members to Middle Eastern scholarship should be ever more evident.

David H. Partington  
President-Elect of MELA, 1978-1979