Patterns of Library Service in the Middle East

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THE "MIDDLE EAST" is a term used loosely and it is not applied to any clearly defined geographical area. For the purposes of this survey of library activity, arbitrary borders are set for the area to be discussed which include the Arabian Peninsula, the United Arab Republic of Egypt and Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and the Soviet Asian Republics. It is an area that has had a vast influence on the course of man’s cultural history, lying as it does at the crossroads of the three continents of the Old World. The patient bibliophile prepared to wander the desert ways from Cairo to Samargand would expect to find libraries of great richness and he would not be disappointed. It was in these lands between the Nile and the Oxus that man began to understand the cultural necessity of keeping records of the thought and events of his times. The traveler at Persepolis can still see the foundations of a library that served the needs of the Achaemenian Empire 2,500 years ago. At an earlier date libraries are known to have existed in the Nile Valley and at Nineveh, and later in the immediately pre-Christian era, Alexandria and Pergamum came to be the world’s two great libraries, but they in their turn were destined to disappear. Much has been lost and pre-Islamic literary records are few. The history of the Middle East is often obscure away from those regions closely bordering the Mediterranean and where Christianity first flourished. How little is known, for example, of that extraordinary mingling of Greek and Buddhist culture in the Hindu Kush region of present day Afghanistan. Time after time some nomad horde destroyed all trace of civilization, leaving nothing save desolation and the ceaselessly shifting sands. The literary and artistic treasures lost in the Mongol inferno and in the sack of cities like Balkh, Herat, Merv, and Nishapur can never be replaced, but what still remains must be conserved and what remains is remarkably rich.

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In more recent times the industrial revolution and the growth of a largely literate urban proletariat, which played a decisive part in the history of the popular library movement in Europe and America, have played no part in the pattern of Middle East development. Only since 1945 has industrialization begun to have an impact in these regions and the cultural upheaval and condition of acute social stress which it is causing, and will cause, can scarcely be less than that experienced a century or so ago in western Europe. The population of cities like Cairo and Tehran during the last two decades has mushroomed with tremendous speed, making the whole educational problem daunting and complex, but not intractable. If technological advances are to be made, if the economic and social conditions of the people are to be improved, if the newly literate are to be helped to find a place in an expanding industrialized and mechanized rural economy, then the setting up of an adequate library service must be considered a first priority. Time must not be lost. An assessment of the somewhat hesitant steps that have been taken in the Middle East towards this goal must now be made and it may be possible, in making the assessment, to point up the major problems and pitfalls in the way of future development and perhaps outline ways in which they may be overcome.

Much of the economic and technological advance planned to take place in the Middle East will be dependent upon adequately trained personnel. The part that the universities must take is therefore a key one, yet many universities have been slow to adapt to the changing needs. A generalized picture of university libraries in the Middle East is a gloomy one. Small faculty, seminar, and office collections abound, leading to a debilitating fragmentation of book resources. Lack of cooperation between the various libraries, and a closed access system combined with inadequate cataloging conceals what strength a university’s total book resources may have. Personal rivalries and jealousies and lack of flexibility within the universities themselves have worked against any centralized administrative system although the advantages of this should be obvious to the more far-sighted of the academic staff. Lack of trained and full-time personnel has been only partly responsible for this unhappy situation. Those members of the academic staff who have studied abroad and used the libraries of Europe and the United States have failed to achieve any real understanding of the problems involved in the efficient running of a large research library, and have not realized the amount of behind-the-
scenes work which has to be carried out by a team of bibliographic experts. Hence pressure which has been brought to bear on the university administrations by their own academic staff has rarely been tempered with any real understanding of the problem and many professors have resorted to building their own small libraries and so perpetuating the whole fragmentary system.

Whereas in the West it is axiomatic that the library must be the center of university life, the foundation on which the original scholarship of the academic staff is based, and where the undergraduate is introduced to research method, no such axiom is manifest in many parts of the Middle East. In fact, teaching method is all too closely linked with the use of a few textbooks and lecture notes; the ability of the student being graded by his memorizing powers at examination time. Hand in hand with the development of adequate university library facilities should come a re-evaluation of teaching methods. Without access to books and a comparative and critical approach to the information and ideas they contain there can be no advance. It is difficult to see how there can be any intellectual integrity. The organic interdependence of the university library with the university teaching and research programs must be clearly understood; without this understanding a university is a university in name only.

With a general realization of these barriers that prevent an effective library service to staff and students a rational approach to university library development in the area will become possible. A time-lag is inevitable while phased training of staff who will be capable of running the libraries is carried through. In some cases a start on training and on setting up a central library administration has been made and in the 1960's significant acceleration of the process of development may be expected. An article in Library Trends in 1969, ten years from now, may have a vastly different tale to tell.

Not all university libraries in the Middle East suffer from all the deficiencies outlined above. This account has been wholly generalized and because of that specific universities have not been named. Many librarians familiar with the area will know that there are several notable exceptions. Many universities have only recently been founded and they may escape the handicaps that have afflicted older institutions. Among those founded in the postwar years are Riyadh in Saudi Arabia; Tabriz, Shiraz, Meshed, and Isfahan in Iran; Baghdad in Iraq; Bar-Ilan and Tel-Aviv in Israel; the Lebanese National University at Beirut; the University of Ankara and the Technical University of the
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Middle East, both in Ankara, the Aegean University at Izmir, the Ataturk University at Erzurum, all in Turkey (where a further Technical University is planned for Trabazon); Ain-Shams University, Cairo, and Assiut University, in Egypt; Kabul University in Afghanistan; and state universities at Ashkhabad, Frunze, and Stalinabad, in Soviet Central Asia. It is an impressive list. All these universities will have to play a considerable part in the development of the regions in which they are situated. Only in the 1960's will a preliminary assessment of their libraries be possible. Most of them are, as yet, in the purely formative stage.

Special mention should be made of two of the technical universities which, when their expansion programs are completed, should have a far reaching influence on technical and scientific development in the Middle East. They are Technion, the Israel Institute of Technology in Haifa, and the Technical University of the Middle East located in Ankara. Technion at present has a collection of some 75,000 books and receives 1,500 periodical titles. A new library is planned with a capacity of 400,000 volumes. In its early period Technion primarily trained engineers and was not regarded as an institution concerned with research, but in the postwar period much greater emphasis has been given to postgraduate work, thus creating a parallel development in the library and demanding a more specialized service. Three subject specialists are now on the library staff. Previous difficulties in obtaining trained staff should now be overcome with the founding of the library school at the Hebrew University. Plans for the Technical University of the Middle East at Ankara are on a vast scale and when the ten-year building program is completed it is estimated that there will be some 15,000 students and 2,500 teaching and research staff. Teaching is to be in English and students from any country will be eligible for acceptance providing they satisfy the entrance requirements. The Central Library of the Technical University has approximately 30,000 volumes and the collections of the faculty libraries also amount to about 30,000 volumes.

One of the most important libraries in the Middle East is the Jewish National and University Library which holds a unique position in the library world because of the two-fold function which its name indicates. It shares with the state libraries of the Soviet Republics the distinction of being one of the largest libraries in the area and if the collection on Mount Scopus be included in the total figures its holdings amount to almost a million volumes. In its capacity as a
national library it collects works in all subjects relating to the culture and history of the Jewish people, and as the central library of the Hebrew University it collects comprehensively but with particular reference to the subjects of instruction and research in the University’s program. The amalgamation of function seems to be a particularly satisfactory solution for Israel, and has resulted in a strong library upon which Israel’s smaller libraries can rely for help and bibliographical guidance. One of the chief difficulties under which it works today is the over-crowding of both books and readers. The collections are scattered throughout several buildings, but this situation will change when the new library building on the Givath Ram campus is completed and ready for occupation in 1960. The Knesset Library (Library of Parliament) and the Boorstein Public Library in Nahariya were established by and continue to receive help from the National Library.

National libraries also exist in Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey, and Iran. The function of these libraries is not always “national” in the sense that the word is normally used in library terminology. National libraries, for example, are to be found in Shiraz and Tabriz and other towns in Iran, and in Damascus and Aleppo in Syria. In Iran the provincial national libraries are closer to public libraries in their activities. The confusion arises from use of the word melli (meaning national) in their names; it is used in much the same way as “National” might be used for a bank’s name in the United States. Only in Turkey, Egypt, and Lebanon do the national libraries approximate more closely to the usual understanding of the term, and in these three countries the national libraries have considerable collections of both European and Oriental books and manuscripts.

The Egyptian National Library, oldest of the national libraries in the area, was founded in 1870. It was formed by an amalgamation of several important libraries that were especially rich in manuscripts and orientalia. Public access to the collection was first made possible in 1904 and since that time the library’s rules on public usage have become progressively liberalized. It is now wholly government controlled and financed but during its early history it was endowed with land and received a number of private donations. Its total collection amounts to over three quarters of a million books and manuscripts, and it is without doubt one of the richest libraries in the whole area, including one of the finest collections of Korans in the world. A law of deposit is in force which insures that Egyptian publishers place
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seven copies of all books published in the hands of the National Library.

In recent years the Egyptian National Library has established several branches in Cairo and outlying suburbs which are operated on recognized public library lines, using the Dewey classification system and allowing open access to their collections. The National Library itself, which suffers from severe accommodation problems in its old premises at Bab El Khale, is planning a new building in a new location with adequate space for its books and manuscripts, rooms for students and research workers, lecture halls, and facilities for displaying the many beautiful and valuable items in its collection.

Turkey's National Library in Ankara has a collection of books and manuscripts in Turkish and other languages totalling about 360,000. It also houses the Turkish National Institute of Bibliography. The National Library of the Lebanon in Beirut, has approximately 100,000 books and 2,000 manuscripts many of which are illuminated. It enjoys copyright deposit of books published in the Lebanon, and is a depository for all United Nations documents. In Iran the duties of a "national" library tend to be shared by three libraries: the Imperial Library, in which is housed a particularly fine collection of manuscripts, the National Library (the Ministry of Education) and the Library of the Majlis (Parliament). The Majlis Library has begun to construct a new large building which should be completed by the end of 1959 and which will enable it to house its collection in a more satisfactory manner than at present. Both the National Library and the Majlis Library are open to the public for research and have moderate sized collections in Farsi, Arabic, and European languages. There is, as yet, no copyright deposit in Iran.

The state public libraries of the Soviet Central Asian Republics in some respects resemble national libraries. Their administrative costs and book funds are included in the state budget, and they receive on deposit a copy of all books published in the Soviet Union. Professional assistance and advice is given to smaller libraries in the Republics, and much bibliographic and research work is carried out by the library staffs. Specialists are frequently sent to help in the organization of the smaller "mass" or public libraries. The state public libraries such as the Pushkin Library in Kazakhstan and the Navoi Library in Uzbekistan have large and comprehensive collections with many valuable and sometimes unique works. The total collections of these two libraries number well over a million books, pamphlets, and
manuscripts, and they specialize particularly in material concerning the area which they serve and in the languages and literatures of Central Asia.

Over the whole of the Middle East, bibliographic control is unsatisfactory, and national bibliographies are infrequent. In some countries a not inconsiderable effort has been made to overcome difficulties. In Turkey, for example, a National Institute of Bibliography was set up in 1952 with wide aims for making Turkey's publications more accessible. It took over the publication of the *Türkiye bibliografyası* which was begun in 1928, and founded the *Türkiye makaleler bibliografyası*, a bibliography of articles appearing in Turkish periodicals. Plans to develop a series of union catalogs have been formulated and some are in the process of being carried out. So far the Institute has been primarily engaged in achieving bibliographic control over currently published material, but it is hoped that eventually it will be able to help make known and accessible Turkey's great bibliographic strength in old printed books and manuscripts.²

Various forms of bibliographic organization are found in other countries of the area, none of which approach the minimum requirements suggested at the Unesco conference on the improvement of bibliographical services held in Paris in 1950. In Israel the Hebrew University and National Library publishes a bibliographic quarterly *Kirkath Sepher* which includes a note of Israel imprints, Judaica and Hebraica published outside Israel and articles concerned with Jewish and Hebraic subjects selected from scholarly journals. In other countries there are journals which are of some assistance in keeping in touch with what is being published. In Iran two journals, *Ketabhaye mah* and *Rahnamaye ketab*, which give useful bibliographic information, have recently appeared. *Ketabhaye mah* was started in 1957 and is published by an Iranian publishers' association; it contains articles about books generally, news items of interest to the book world, and advertisements. *Rahnamaye ketab* is primarily literary in character and reviews both Iranian and foreign publications. Notices of most of the important Iranian publications appear. In Iran it is hoped that a national bibliographic center may be set up in the future based either on the Majlis Library or on a new central university library; the latter, however, has not yet reached the planning stage. In the United Arab Republic and Lebanon aids are available. In the Soviet Republics of Central Asia bibliographic organization is largely centralized in Moscow, but comprehensive bibliographies are also brought
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out covering all books published within each Republic whether in Russian or the comparatively large vernacular literatures of Central Asia. Newspapers and periodicals are also indexed.

There are many difficulties in the cataloging and identification of materials in oriental languages, and more work will have to be done in this field before national bibliographies are finally set up in an acceptable form. Foundations have been laid, however, and to quote just one recent example of assistance in the Persian field, there is Nasser Sharify's *Cataloging of Persian Works, Including Rules for Transliteration, Entry and Description.*

No centrally organized public library system exists in any of the countries under discussion with the exception of the Soviet Republics. Libraries with very limited collections and even more limited services do exist, however, in some of the towns of the area and even in some villages. It is not without precedent to come across a room in a village where a small number of books has been gathered by the villagers (perhaps on some *ad hoc* cooperative purchase scheme) and which the literate members of the community borrow quite freely. The itinerant librarian who discovers such a library cannot but be refreshed for it indicates that comparatively uneducated people have come to realize the value and the need for books. Public library development has been sporadic in the Middle East, and some countries have been able to advance more quickly than others.

In Afghanistan, public library development has been largely the work of Unesco and is at present confined to Kabul. The library there, although still small, is operated on open access lines and will serve as an effective model for the rest of the country; most of the books are in Persian, but there is also a collection of about one thousand books in English.

In Jordan, public libraries are dependent upon municipal authorities and the Ministry of the Interior. In the Hebron district a cooperative circulating service with a nucleus of 14,000 books has begun to operate. Public libraries have been set up in Irbid and Tulkarm, both of which were assisted by Unesco. Irbid has a new library building and Tulkarm a reconditioned building. Library buildings are now being constructed in Nablus and Ramallah and plans made for the building of public libraries in Amman and Jerusalem. The Ministry of Education is responsible for school libraries, and most schools have small libraries, but the books are usually provided by subscriptions from students.
In Iraq there are public libraries in Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra and one or two of the smaller towns. Mosul's activities in the past few years have been noteworthy. Its collection totals about 26,000 volumes many of which are available for loan and are on open access. The children's section is kept in a separate room where story hours and puppet shows are sometimes held, and children are allowed to borrow from it. In 1958 Mosul had plans for a bookmobile service.\(^5\)

In Kuwait the Education Department controls a central library which in turn is responsible for the central public library and its three branches. The Education Department also aids in the distribution of books to eighty school libraries, the largest of which is the Boy's Secondary School which has 10,000 books. The Dewey classification is used in all Kuwait libraries but modified to some extent in the school libraries. Plans for a new building for the central public library are now being made and it is hoped that branch libraries will be established in all Kuwait's suburbs.

In Turkey public library development is still in its early stages although several of Turkey's towns, such as Konya, have public libraries. But their services and collections are limited; although they quite often own a few valuable manuscripts there is very little modern material. In recent years there has been a tendency to concentrate on services to children. The Public Libraries Division of the Ministry of Education has established over eighty children's libraries. The Ford Foundation has also encouraged the setting up of model libraries in some of Turkey's experimental schools, and the Library Institute at the University of Ankara has been instrumental in helping them to become established.

Rather similar situations, as far as adult public library services are concerned, are found in the United Arab Republic, Iran, and the Lebanon. Small libraries have tended to grow haphazardly in some of the towns. In Egypt progress is being made in the school library field, and the Ministry of Education has been active in promoting development.

There is a large number of public libraries in Israel, but no Israeli librarian would claim that they are sufficient for present needs; due to the lack of trained staff many quite important collections are inadequately administered or housed. There are, however, some libraries that would stand comparison with those of Europe and the United States and among these is the public library in Tel-Aviv-Yafo, the largest public library in Israel. A central library of some 140,000 books,
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together with a number of specialized collections and branch libraries throughout the city area, provide a service for the student and general reader. Books in many languages are included in the collection, reflecting the diverse backgrounds of those using the library and, incidentally, pointing up one of Israel's major problems. There is no legislation in Israel regarding library development but the Israel Library Association has prepared a draft library law and hopes that the government will be able to deal with it in the future. Libraries are maintained for the most part by local authorities; Tel-Aviv-Yafo is wholly maintained by the municipality. The history of the Tel-Aviv library is of particular interest as it has been able to incorporate within the one system a number of specialized libraries hitherto functioning separately. The advantages that have accrued from amalgamation and centralized processing and staffing are considerable. The Federation of Labour has also helped in the organization of libraries throughout the country.

In the Soviet Central Asian Republics the development of "mass" or public libraries has been little short of dramatic. Although it is sometimes difficult to get beyond the statistics which are published, these alone tell a story of remarkable achievement.9 Utilizing many outlets, including schools, collective farms, factories, and cultural centers, books of all types are made available to the people. The network of smaller libraries is backed by regional libraries and the State Library of the Republic. The state public libraries hold a significant position; in addition to acting as depositories for all works published in the Soviet Union, they act as advisers to the smaller libraries within the Republic and centralize bibliographic aids. The public libraries are general in their scope but have tended to concentrate on technical and agricultural books and journals in order to help the people become more efficient in their own particular work. Apart from the large number of static libraries that exist in all the Central Asian Republics mobile libraries and postal services are operated extensively throughout the region, and a comprehensive coverage of the population has been achieved. In few countries has the importance of library services in economic development been more clearly understood than in the Soviet Union; this factor has often been overlooked in Western assessments of the Russian library scene which have tended to emphasize the political duties of the libraries.

There are many libraries in the Middle East of a semi-private nature but generally available to scholars and research workers. Some
are associated with religious orders and others with foreign archeological missions and similar bodies. Examples include the libraries of the Oecumenical Patriarchy in Istanbul, the Institut Francais d’Etudes Arabes at Damascus, the Library of the Shrine at Meshed, and many others, often with very fine collections. The golden age of great private libraries in the western world passed many years ago, and most of the manuscripts and printed books of major significance have found their way into national, university, and public collections. The same is not true of the Middle East. Many great private libraries still survive and many of them contain valuable and unique works. In all areas of the Middle East collections of this type are to be found, but some of the richest and some of the least known are in Saudi Arabia. In the days when Islamic culture was at its height the libraries of Mecca and Medina were perhaps the most important in the area and their contents totaled hundreds of thousands of books and manuscripts; but in later years, through neglect, much has disappeared. During the reign of late King Abd al-Aziz ibn Saud there were attempts to preserve and reorganize what was left. The Maktabat al-Haram (Library of the Sanctuary) at Mecca is an instance of one of the libraries reorganized during this time. Smaller private libraries exist in Jedda, Ta’if, and Riyadh. The library attached to the Great Mosque of ibn ‘Abbas at Ta’if has been seriously depleted by manuscript hunters, and what remains is only a minor significance. Medina is still, perhaps, the city with the most valuable libraries in Saudi Arabia. It has over fifty known libraries, the three most important of which are the Library of the Shaikh al-Islam ‘Arif Hikmat al-Husaini, the Library at Bab al-Majidi belonging to the Prophet Mosque, and the Mahmudiyah Library at Bab al-Salam.

In many libraries, scholars and research workers are welcomed but unfortunately other library owners are not very cooperative. With some libraries western scholars have had little or no contact; with the libraries of Mecca and Medina personal contact has been impossible. Only in a few cases are there detailed accounts or catalogs of the holdings of such libraries, and as a consequence their collections are difficult to assess. Many of the great private and semi-private collections are without doubt of great cultural and historical importance; many of the unique items in them should be microfilmed as soon as possible if their conservation is to be assured, and for most of the illuminated books and manuscripts color photography techniques should be employed.
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Special libraries of importance in the Middle East are few. Government departments maintain small collections in all the countries of the area but in few cases are these of any real significance. Most of the main scientific special libraries are in Soviet Central Asia and Israel. One of the most important events in recent Israeli library history was the completion and opening of the Wix Library of the Weizmann Institute of Science at Rehovoth in October 1958. This is a fine example of modern library architecture in which the cooperation between architects, engineers, and the librarian has produced a building both visually exciting and functionally effective. The stack area of the Wix Library can accommodate 62,500 books and it could be doubled by addition of a deck above the present shelving. The librarian hopes, however, that judicious withdrawal of obsolete books and microfilming where conservation is necessary will make expansion of this order unnecessary. The Wix Library has photographic equipment which will help it in this program, and it expects to exploit it to the full. The library is a pointer, in fact, for scientific libraries throughout the Middle East, and anywhere else in the world where phototechniques are not used or where their potential remains unrealized.

Little experiment or research has been done in the area on the use of mechanical or electronic equipment for information retrieval, although in Cairo a system of superimposable punched cards is used successfully by the Scientific and Technical Documentation Division of the National Research Center of Egypt for the location of articles in periodicals. About 1,500 periodical titles are covered, and it has been reported that the punched card system “has been found useful both by the staff of the library and by readers, who soon learn to employ it.”

In postwar years professional assistance has been given to many Middle Eastern countries by outside agencies. Unesco, the most active, has been directly responsible for many significant developments. Its work has covered most fields of librarianship but recently it has tended to concentrate on library training and the provision of experts. The United States and Britain have also helped in several countries, the United States through the United States Information Service, the Technical Assistance programs and Fulbright lectures; and Britain through the British Council. U.S.I.S. and British Council libraries, by their policy of open access and by loans of books, have stimulated other library development and their librarians have given professional advice.
and assisted in many ways in the organization of libraries in the area. Oil companies have also been active in the library field. Armaco in eastern Saudi Arabia has built up several flourishing libraries of a technical and general nature. Their central library is located in Dhahran with branches in Abquaiq and Ras Tenura, and there are smaller collections in isolated places and in exploration camps. The libraries are backed by professional and technical help from Aramco offices in New York and other parts of the world. A real effort has been made to acquaint the Saudi Arabian staff with the services offered by the libraries; this has included the teaching of English. Aramco’s information services are not restricted to the company’s needs and informational help is frequently given to outside companies and organizations.

Professional associations have been established in only a few countries in the Middle East. Turkey, Egypt, and Israel have had associations for some years and it is hoped that a Lebanese Library Association may shortly be formed. Lack of an association in most of the other countries is a measure of the lack of cooperation and professional awareness of those working in libraries. The seminar planned by Unesco to be held in Beirut late in 1959 may help, however, to provide the necessary incentive to form professional associations in those countries which lack them.

The need for library training centers in the Middle East is now acute. Not only will librarians be required in increasing numbers in universities, but as education moves into its modern phase, librarians will be needed in the schools, in training colleges, in the cities and rural areas, as well as in special libraries serving the new industries.

Formal training at university level is available so far only in Israel, Turkey, Egypt, and the Central Asian Republics. In Israel and Turkey, the establishment of library schools is a recent development. The Israel Graduate Library School, helped in its early stages by a Unesco report, announced its opening in November 1956 as part of the Hebrew University. Its preliminary announcement and course prospectus stated that the purpose of the training would be “to develop in students an appreciation of the important role of the library in human civilization, knowledge of books and bibliographies, understanding of the needs and habits of library users—be it scholars or newly literates—and comprehension of the principles and procedures for bringing books and people together.” It was also made clear that education for librarianship must be based on a wide subject
background and that preference would be given to graduates applying for entry into the School. Only in the first few years of the School's operation would nongraduates be considered, and then only if they had a good background of library experience.

The report made by Lawrence Thompson in 1952 on Turkish library development strongly recommended setting up a library school in either Ankara or Istanbul University. Since then a Library Institute has been founded within the University of Ankara and is an accepted part of the university. The first class graduated in 1958. The Ford Foundation has helped with its establishment and the American Library Association will continue to supervise its work until 1961, by which time it is hoped that the Turkish faculty will be able to take over the teaching program. Long term technical assistance on this pattern will be necessary in those countries where library schools have yet to be established.

In Soviet Central Asia several training centers for librarianship have been established. They are staffed principally by graduates of the Moscow, Leningrad, and Kharkov State Library Institutes. The number of training centers has grown over the last few years as the demand for skilled library workers has increased. Some of the library schools are closely linked with colleges and universities, an example being the newly established Department of Library Training at the Kazakh Teacher Training College for Women.

Short training courses undertaken by Unesco and to a lesser extent by other agencies in Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Afghanistan, and Jordan have undoubtedly helped to promote library development. In Lebanon, the Beirut College for Women and the American University at Beirut hold courses for librarianship. The College for Women runs regular courses and grants a certificate. The Arab States Fundamental Education Centre at Sirs-el-Layyan, founded in 1952, has been able to show its students the importance of libraries in economic and cultural development. Part of the A.S.F.E.C. program is to establish a library system within Menoufia Province in the Nile Delta which would act as a model for development in other Middle Eastern regions with similar problems. A training program in librarianship is part of the Centre's activities and it maintains its own library. The whole question of training is a basic one and must receive priority, for libraries cannot develop without enthusiastic and reasonably able staff.

Several important problems of the area remain. They relate mainly
to the fundamental purposes of libraries, the need for many kinds of cooperation, the professional frustration experienced by some qualified librarians, and the desire of Middle East librarians to live in capital cities.

The over-riding principle of the need for conservation is felt deeply over the whole area. It is the cornerstone of much Arabic and Persian thinking about libraries and rightly so when such a valuable heritage is concerned. The principle has been projected, however, into those areas of library activity where preservation is of secondary importance, and it is inhibiting the advance towards a more dynamic concept of a library’s raison d’être in keeping with the needs of contemporary society. The idea of a popular open access library cannot easily be grasped. Traditionally, library users have been theologians or philosophers, content to base their metaphysical speculations on small, and jealously guarded, collections of manuscripts and printed books. Reading has been intensive and only rarely extensive and comparative. It is an absurd anachronism for contemporary public, university, and special libraries to concern themselves unduly with preservation and in those libraries where the librarians are responsible for safeguarding each and every item in the collection, with no power to discard and obviously no incentive to lend, a complete rethinking of a library’s purpose is necessary.

Another major problem to be faced in the Middle East is the need for cooperation between libraries. Cooperation in some cases could be extended even to amalgamation and the pooling of such professional resources as are available. Recommendations for union cataloging projects, which have frequently been made by visiting experts, could serve as a basis from which libraries and their librarians could develop a coherent over-all policy at the regional or national level. Close cooperation or amalgamation will not come easily, but where it has been achieved it has shown definite advantages, both in the service to readers and in economies of cooperative purchase and centralized cataloging.

A most unfortunate aspect of librarianship during the past few years has been the drift out of the profession of a few of the Middle Eastern librarians who have received excellent training abroad. Administrative factors, such as inadequacy of status and salary, are largely responsible for this as well as the frustrations suffered when attempting to employ newly learned skills and the constant psychological strain of the battle with entrenched ignorance. It will some-
times be necessary to create new posts in order to by-pass older and senior personnel who have had no training and who are not prepared to accept new ideas. Administrative rationalization will have to come later. It is extremely important that well-trained librarians should not be allowed to become inactive and frustrated to such an extent that they leave the profession.

A growing professional middle class brings with it social problems which will have to be faced as the number of trained librarians grows. One difficulty which is already being faced by other professional groups in the Middle East is the desire to live in the capital city. Hard won improvements in a personal standard of living are not relinquished easily, and to live in the smaller provincial towns or in rural areas in the Middle East does undoubtedly jeopardize living standards. It is possible that some form of incentive bonus system may have to be introduced at first in librarianship in many parts of the Middle East if capital cities are not to become professionally overpopulated at the expense of the provinces.

All these problems are part of the wider pattern of development in the educational and social field, and they will not be solved without paying due regard to that wider field. The contemporary significance of books, periodicals, and other communication media for economic development of a country has not been generally realized in the Middle East. Books are not turned to automatically for informational purposes, and until they are libraries will be regarded as something of a luxury. The cultural importance of storing historical and literary materials is more clearly understood. Once the related idea that the library is a primary aid in scientific and economic advance has been grasped, the Middle East can look forward to a period of considerable library expansion and consequent enrichment of the lives of all its people.

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