



Near and Middle Eastern collections: a user guide

Cambridge University Library is the University's main library collection serving the needs of all students, staff and the wider academic community. It holds a collection of over eight million books and, in addition, significant collections of journals, manuscripts, archives, maps, music and electronic resources. The early part of the present building was completed in 1934, with numerous extensions since, but the collections date as far back as the early 14th century. The Library contains publications in all subjects relevant to study and research in the University.

Near and Middle Eastern collections

The Library's Near and Middle Eastern Collections include written materials originating from the countries of the Arabian Peninsula, the countries of the wider Middle East and the Islamic regions of North Africa and Central Asia. There are significant collections in Arabic, Hebrew and Persian. There are smaller collections in many other languages found in that region. Books and manuscripts in these languages have been present in the collections from the Library's early years whilst new publications are acquired on a regular basis. More detailed information on holdings and access can be found at:

www.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/departments/near-and-middle-eastern-department



Reader Registration: opening hours

Monday -Thursday: 09:00-17:00
Friday: 09:00-16:45

Saturdays: 09:00-13:00, 14:00-16:00

Library opening hours

Monday - Friday: 09:00 -19:15
(09:00 - 22:00 in Easter Full Term)
Saturdays: 09:00 -17:00

Joining the Library

In order to get access to the Library's collections you will need to obtain a readers' ticket. Details can be found at www.lib.cam.ac.uk/using-library/joining-library

If you are a visitor to Cambridge it is advisable to book an appointment with the Reader Registration Office prior to your arrival. There are further details on the web pages if you need to find out more about access to specialist collections.

Printed books and journals - locations

- publications in English and European languages about the Middle East are shelved in the open stacks and can be located using the on-line catalogue
- books and journals on religion are shelved on South Wing Floor 3
- those on history and literature are shelved on North Front Floor 6
- books and journals in all Middle Eastern subject areas in the original languages are shelved on West Four
- in addition, there are many publications stored in the closed stacks which are fetched to the reading rooms on request; request details are displayed in the catalogue
- books printed before 1950 are fetched on request to the Munby Rare Books Reading Room, located at the end of North Wing Corridor, Floor 1
- More details on the Rare books collections and services can be found at : www.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/departments/rare-books

Printed books and journals - searching

- search the catalogue via the 'LibrarySearch' page at: <http://search.lib.cam.ac.uk/> or the 'University Library and Dependent Libraries' link to 'Newton' at: www.lib.cam.ac.uk/newton/
- the 'Advanced search' option can limit search results to particular languages, dates or places of publication
- when searching for publications in original Middle Eastern languages use transliteration
- when typing into the search boxes ignore diacritics and hyphens, omit linking words and common words where possible.
- the catalogue index of names can be used to search for alternative forms of similar names
- searches in the subject indexes can be used to find related, broader or narrower subject terms
- be aware that some classical authors retain the Latin forms of their names, for example Avicenna, Averroes, Maimonides
- catalogue searches can also be carried out in the original script, but only publications added to the collections since 2002 will be retrieved

E-resources - searching

E-journal, database and e-book listings can be found in the drop-down menu at:

<http://libguides.cam.ac.uk/eresources>

Blogs about items in the Middle Eastern subject area can be found at -

<https://specialcollections.blog.lib.cam.ac.uk/?cat=9>



Manuscripts Reading Room

Readers wishing to consult manuscript collections must have a reader's ticket for the Manuscript Reading Room. More information can be found at: www.lib.cam.ac.uk/using-library/joining-library/using-special-collections

Details of procedures and regulations for using the Manuscripts Reading Room can be found at www.lib.cam.ac.uk/deptserv/manuscripts/Using.html

Manuscripts Reading Room: opening hours

Monday - Friday: 09:00 -18:50

Saturday: 09:00 -12.30 (pre-ordered manuscripts may be read in the Rare Books Reading Room from 13:00 -16:30)



Searching for manuscripts

Catalogues of the manuscript holdings are available in various formats. Printed catalogues available in the Manuscripts Reading Room and are listed at: www.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/departments/near-and-middle-eastern-department/manuscript-collection-catalogues.

Some of the manuscript catalogues are also available on-line in scanned format at: www.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/departments/near-and-middle-eastern-department/online-manuscript-catalogues

The on-line catalogue of the Arabic and Persian manuscript holdings can be found at: www.fihrist.org.uk. This can be searched by name, title, subject or collection in either the original language or in transliteration.

Selected items from the Manuscript Collection in digital format can be found in the Digital Library at: <http://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/>

Reproduction of manuscripts

Photocopying of manuscripts is not allowed but photographic copies can be obtained in various formats. More information, including the range of services offered, costs and procedures can be found at: <http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/departments/digital-content-unit>.

Orders for images can be placed on-line using the form at: www.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/departments/digital-content-unit/ordering-images Readers may also use their own cameras to take photographs of material in the Manuscripts Reading Room for research purposes only.

Manuscript Collections – history and contents

The Library's Near and Middle Eastern manuscript collections cover a wide range of literature in Arabic (over 3,500 codices), Hebrew (over 1,000), Persian (over 1,200), Syriac (around 300) and Ottoman Turkish (around 450). There are also small numbers in Coptic, Armenian, Ethiopic and Malay. The manuscripts held in Cambridge originate from far and wide across the Middle East, from Turkey, the Arabian Peninsula, Iran, Central Asia, North Africa and North India. In subject matter, they cover a wide range of religious texts from Islam, Judaism and Christianity and, along with works on grammar, medicine, history and literature, cover the full range of scholarly and literary creativity.

The contents of the Library's impressive collection of Middle Eastern manuscripts date from the very origins of the establishment of teaching and scholarship in Hebrew and Arabic in the University during the 16th and 17th centuries.

The earliest Middle Eastern manuscript to enter the Library was a copy of the Qur'an obtained in 1631 from the local Arabic scholar William Bedwell. Since that time other notable collections have come to the Library including the impressive library of the famous Leiden scholar, Thomas Erpenius, in 1632.

John Selden was responsible for the acquisition of manuscripts from the collection of Isaac Faragi in 1648 which comprised both Hebrew and Persian manuscripts. More manuscripts and books came to the Library in the 17th century from the collection of the Cambridge scholar Edmund Castell.

Since then the collection has been greatly enhanced by the legacy of numerous subsequent scholars and travellers including the collection of the missionary and scholar George Lewis in 1727. Later additions include the manuscripts of another great Arabian traveller, John Lewis Burckhardt in 1819 and of the colourful and adventurous E.H. Palmer in 1878.

In the 19th century the missionary Claudius Buchanan presented the Library with important Hebrew and Syriac.

Since then, the collection has grown by individual donations and by purchase into a rich resource tracing the history of many important texts through time. The collection also contains many wonderful examples of the art of the book, with many beautiful and interesting examples of calligraphy, decoration, painting and ornamental bindings.

More details at: www.lib.cam.ac.uk/deptserv/neareastern/Faith & Fable.pdf

