

Maja Kominko, ed., *From Dust to Digital: Ten Years of the Endangered Archives Programme* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2015). xviii + 651 pp. ISBN: 978-1-78374-062-8 (Paperback; £29.95), 978-1-78374-063-5 (Hardback; £44.95), 978-1-78374-064-2 (PDF; £5.95), DOI 10.11647/OBP.0052 (online).

Ten years have passed since the Endangered Archives Programme was called into life. The grant programme funded by the Arcadia Fund, as a logical continuation of the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme (see Barry Supple, 'Preserving the Past: creating the Endangered Archives Programme', pp. xxxix–xli), allows scholars who know of archives in danger of disappearance to digitise them in order to make sure that at least the content remains preserved—and eventually accessible to research through the web service of the British Library. The understanding of 'archives' is extremely broad, their content ranging from inscriptions to folklore recordings, from early photographs to historical radio broadcasts. Yet, understandably, a significant amount of grants was awarded for digitising manuscript collections, many among them being within the thematic scope of the COMSt initiative.

Just some examples (according to the EAP website <<http://eap.bl.uk/>> (last accessed 10 March 2016) are: EAP025: Transfer of Mosseri Genizah Archive from Paris to Cambridge University Library and its digitisation (with metadata), storage and accessibility; EAP141: Ibadi private libraries in the Mزاب Heptapolis, Algeria; EAP399: Historical collections of manuscripts located at Al-Jazzar mosque library in Acre; EAP254: Preservation of the historical literary heritage of Tigray, Ethiopia: the library of Romanat Qedus Mika'el; EAP269: Preliminary survey of Arabic manuscripts in Djenné, Mali, with a view to a major project of preservation, digitisation and cataloguing; EAP286: Digitising and conserving Ethiopian manuscripts at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia); EAP336: Preserving the *lay bet andemta*: the Ethiopian intellectual legacy on the verge of extinction; EAP340: Photographic preservation of the manuscript collection in the monastic church of Ewostatewos at Däbrä Särabi (Tigray, Ethiopia (interrupted)); EAP357: Identifying endangered monastic collections in the Säharti and Enderta regions of Tigray (Ethiopia); EAP401: Safeguarding the Ethiopian Islamic heritage; EAP432: Documenting the written heritage of East Goğgam: a rich culture in jeopardy; EAP466: The manuscripts of the Riyadh Mosque of Lamu, Kenya; EAP488: Major project to digitise and preserve the manuscripts of Djenné, Mali; EAP526: Digitisation of the endangered monastic archive at May Wäyni (Tigray, Ethiopia); EAP690: Project to digitise and preserve the manuscripts of Djenné and surrounding villages; EAP704: Dig-

itisation of the monastic archives of Marawe Krestos and Dābrā Abbay (Shire region, Tigray Province, Ethiopia).

The ten years anniversary of the Endangered Archives Programme was marked by the publication of a collection of papers, edited by Maja Kominko, which resulted from the digitisation projects funded by the initiative. The papers are grouped into five chapters, each dedicated to a particular type of archive. Thus, Chapter 1 (with one single paper by Stefano Biagetti, Ali Ait Kaci and Savino di Lernia) is dedicated to recording Inscriptions (rock inscriptions in Tifinagh from Libya). Chapter 2 groups five papers on Manuscripts. Six papers in Chapter 3 describe digitising Documentary Archives. Chapter 4 offers four case studies on Photographic Archives. Finally, three papers in Chapter 5 offer an insight into the preservation of Sound Archives.

Manuscript preservation and research sponsored by the Endangered Archives Programme in the book (Chapter 2) was illustrated by case studies from India ('Metadata and endangered archives: lessons from the Ahom manuscripts project' by Stephen Morey resulting from grant EAP373 and 'Unravelling Lepcha manuscripts' by Heleen Plaisier, grant EAP281), Ethiopia ('Technological aspects of the monastic manuscript collection at May Wäyini, Ethiopia' by Jacek Tomaszewski and Michael Gervers, grant EAP526), Kenya ('Localising Islamic knowledge: acquisition and copying of the Riyadha Mosque manuscript collection in Lamu, Kenya' by Anne Bang, grant EAP466), and Mali ('In the shadow of Timbuktu: the manuscripts of Djenné' by Sophie Sarin, grants EAP269, EAP488, and EAP690).

Both case studies dealing with the Islamic manuscript traditions of Africa pay considerable attention to the history of manuscripts and the personalities of their various owners and copyists. In her thoroughly researched and compellingly written contribution (pp. 135–172), Anne Bang successfully illustrates the network behind the Islamic book culture of East Africa. Many of the manuscripts in the collection of the Riyadha Mosque of Lamu (Kenya) originated in Ḥaḍramawt, home of the 'Alawīyya *tarīqa*, the Sufi brotherhood of the founder of the mosque, Šāliḥ b. 'Alawī Ḡamal al-Layl. Some were purchased in Mecca, among them, surprisingly for a Šāfi'ī legal sphere, a Ḥanafī text (p. 148). Other manuscripts found their way to Lamu through Zanzibar, Mombasa, Comoro islands, and even Indonesia (MS EAP466/I/29, p. 150). Among those copied locally, many were produced by scribes bearing markedly Ḥaḍramī, Brawanese, Comorian, or even Somali names (p. 155).

Quite differently, the manuscripts of Djenné (Mali), digitised and surveyed by Sophie Sarin (pp. 173–187), appear of predominantly local production (pp. 179, 180). While many manuscripts are relatively recent, some date

from as early as the fourteenth century (p. 178—unlike the Ryadha collection with all manuscripts dating from the nineteenth and early twentieth century).

Both African collections feature manuscripts with Arabic texts both common in Islamic tradition generally and typical for local culture. Among locally produced manuscripts, there are several examples of the use of Arabic script for local languages (*‘aḡamī*): Swahili *‘aḡamī* in the collection of the Ryadha Mosque (see catalogue pp. 167, 169, 171), Fulfulde, Songhai, and Bamanan in Djenné (p. 179).

Sarin describes in detail the problems a researcher can face when trying to organise digitisation in Africa, connected with both objective logistical lacks (need to import and install equipment, materials), state of preservation of manuscripts, and, most of all, the complex dynamics in local communities that may interfere with the success of a mission (see p. 181 on hiring, p. 183 on the conflict with a local religious authority).

Similar problems are also mentioned by Jacek Tomaszewski and Michael Gervers, who used the Endangered Archives Programme funding for digitising the manuscript collection of the monastery of May Wäyni, located c.50 km south of Mekelle in the Tigray region in northern Ethiopian highlands (pp. 89–133; see pp. 92 and 94 on the examples of problems encountered by the digitisation team).

In their case study, Tomaszewski and Gervers focused on the state of preservation of the manuscripts and a study of their technological aspects. They examined the parchment, the binding boards, the binding inlays, the binding decoration, and the quire structure of the ninety-one manuscripts of the collection. They tried to show the relationship between the size and the structure of manuscripts and the texts they contain, offering a table, in which the manuscripts are grouped by their ‘title’ (Table 4.1 pp. 110–113). While it does give an overview of the collection (though it is not clear why the manuscripts, while arranged and grouped according to the ‘title’ of the main text, are still sorted in the order of shelf marks and not alphabetically), the table does not take into account the complexity of the text-label relationship or the situation with multi-text manuscripts, and can therefore be only used as a first—still very helpful—guidance in this little studied subject.

There is no information on the provenance of manuscripts; however, we do have testimony of international links reflected in the manuscript tradition. This time it is precisely the codicological analysis of the bindings that bears witness to such links. Many manuscript bindings preserve fabric inlays. These textile fragments show patterns that can often be identified with cloths imported from India or Persia (pp. 119–120).

Basic cataloguing metadata for the collections described in the volume is available from the programme website.

Not only is the collection *From Dust to Digital: Ten Years of the Endangered Archives Programme* a valuable addition to any academic library, it is an important proof of the importance of the funding programme itself. It remains to be hoped that many more collections can be successfully digitised, and that, as envisaged, the images shall be made fully available online.

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