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The Role of the Research Unit in Bibliotheca Alexandrina: *A Brief Overview*

Omnia M. Fathallah

Head of Research Unit, Library Department

Bibliotheca Alexandrina

omnia.fathallah@bibalex.org

www.bibalex.org/

The Research Unit:

The Research Unit is one of two units in the “Collections and Research Section” under the BA Library Department.

The mission of the Research Unit is to run research focused on subjects of high interest to the BA within the outline of subject coverage adopted by the BA as a research institution. The aim is to fulfill the BA mission statement through openness to both national and international academic/research communities, getting continuously connected with most recent research and researchers, and give access to information processed by the unit with most up-to-date technologies and methods of information diffusion.

The BA Research Unit is ought to be entrusted with one of the BA major subjects (or more) defined and selected by the BA authorities and run both documentary and bibliographic researches on that selected subject in its narrower and broader contexts; collecting information on specialized researchers (individuals and institutions) working in this field, building extensive and most comprehensive bibliographies for all types of related intellectual production and provide access to basic information of reference nature on that subject based on BA library holdings.

It is principally planned that such activities and tasks undertaken by the unit should be reflected on developing and enhancing all different types of collections and services offered by the library to its public, especially the specialized researcher. In-depth thematic collection development, bibliographic documentation, and open contacts with key researchers are considered tasks of priority in day-to-day works carried out by the unit.

The “Research Unit” and the “Collection Development Unit”:

The “Collections and Research Section” has one other unit, which is the “Collection Development Unit”. It is concerned with the content evaluation and organization of all types

of BA library holdings and is directly responsible for the development of all subjects covered by the BA according to the collection development policy. Works of both the “Research Unit” and the “Collection Development Unit” are integrated through out many different steps of the workflow of each of the two units; whilst the Research Unit is deeply focusing on detailed and thorough coverage of a given topic with carefully and sharply defined borders—in addition to all its different related outlines and side subjects—the “Collection Development Unit” is practically covering all other subjects of interest to the BA according to its nature, defined mission statement, and users' needs.

The role of the Research Unit towards BA collections is to work on selecting new materials—not yet available within the current on-shelf collections— especially for materials of scholarly nature highly specialized in the fields being researched by the unit.

Continuous cooperation between both the Research Unit and the Collection Development Unit is not only reflected in checking newly selected collections against current holdings but also is represented in an on-going effort to cover as thoroughly as possible inter-disciplinary subject areas between the specific researched subject handled by the “Research Unit” and all other BA covered subjects being taken care of by the "Collection Development Unit".

There is also a continuously on-going cooperation between these two units and the Acquisition Unit to convert all our joint efforts into reality as new acquisitions to feed other technical services and information services units within the department targeting to reach the end user, public and researchers, with sources of knowledge in all subjects, especially those which can formulate the unique specialized characteristics of the BA and well serve researchers.

Currently under research:

As the Bibliotheca Alexandrina is the revival of the Ancient Library of Alexandria, it was decided to start the activities of the Research Unit with the Ancient Alexandrian Library, scholarship, and history to be the first major subject of interest to cover. The Research Unit was entrusted to establish the most possibly comprehensive and extensive core bibliographic database on this subject in its widest framework covering all types of intellectual production related to such a topic—from contemporary times to the ancient library and the city of Alexandria till now. It is also important to seek information on researchers working in all related fields to establish contact, receive feedback and support, and open dialog among them on related topics and make the BA the center of information on this specialized subject and an open space for the exchange of knowledge in this field as the ancient Library and the Mouseion used to be in ancient times.

Subject coverage:

- Ancient Library of Alexandria.
- Ancient Alexandrian Scholarship.
- Alexandria: The Classical city (Historical and cultural conditions in the Ptolemaic, Roman, and Byzantine periods).
- Contemporary world to Alexandria [Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine world] (Historical and cultural conditions and inter-relations).
- Roots of the ancient Alexandrian heritage.
- The Post-Alexandrian impact (the Alexandrian trace/influence/inspiration on succeeding cultures and civilizations till the revival of the ancient library and the rise of the new Bibliotheca Alexandrian).
- Alexandria in the sources.
- Topics of general background.

Topics of coverage:

- Science and technology (History of science and scholarship).
- History of libraries and librarianship.
- Literature.
- Philosophy.
- Religion and theology.
- History.
- Language.
- Archaeology and archaeological founding (esp. under water discoveries).
- Epigraphy, numismatics, papyrology, ... etc.

Bibliographic coverage:

The Research Unit seeks to follow and gather all citations and bibliographic entries that represents intellectuals works and authorship in a wide range of coverage that varies from Ancient Alexandrian texts created by ancient Alexandrian authors (texts in both original languages and translations) till recently published studies and works of reference by contemporary researchers. We take into consideration all types of documents printed and non-printed. Bibliographic entries include regular bibliographic documents (books, periodicals, maps, electronic materials, AVM materials, ... etc.) and also analytical documents of component parts from both monographs and serials.

The Research Unit team depends on many different sources of bibliographic data using all types of BA holdings and references, especially bibliographies on related subjects, book bibliographies, holdings of other libraries (especially national and international academic libraries), publishers lists, recommendations of researchers in continuous contact with the Research Unit, etc.

All entries are managed using a MARC21 database created by the BA through the cooperation between the BA LISadmin Unit, ICT Department and the Research Unit, Library Department. Bibliographic records are controlled by local data fields especially defined and structured to organize and deal with the specialized nature of covered topics and provide good control for different types of expected outputs, especially those used in collection development.

Research Unit outputs and production:

As bibliographic targets have the higher priority among the other various tasks of the Research Unit, outputs are divided into two main types; lists for internal use by BA librarians to proceed with collection development and acquisition plans. These are conveyed periodically to other Library Department units (as stated before) to proceed with the acquisition of the new materials. The other type of unit production is oriented to BA users to offer them—in both print and online on the BA website— subject bibliographies on the ancient library and city of Alexandria with notes referring to the important collections and titles in the BA library holdings.

The Unit has already published on the BA website two browsable subject bibliographies; the "On-Shelf Bibliography" and "Further Reading". The first bibliography included selective titles (app. 300 titles) from the BA library holdings covering major various topics on ancient Alexandrian intellectual heritage. The second included a selection of some important core titles in the same topics covered by the first bibliography.

The Unit has also published a very concise section in the BA web site on the ancient library providing briefly basic information on the history of the ancient library and city of Alexandria. We intend in the future to develop more the content of this section and include more information on the Alexandrians scholarship, scholars, achievements and works, chronologies, ..., and updated bibliographies with references to holdings of other national and international specialized libraries, especially those which are not yet automated nor yet have their own online catalogs, to be able to easily refer the specialized user to valuable collections that may not be well known to a majority of researchers and also interested general readers.

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