Chapter One

Introduction

Historical context

Lebanon sits firmly on the eastern flanks of the Mediterranean, and because of its geography, the country has always played an important bridging role linking East and West. It is an ancient land, geographically and historically as well as culturally. Over the centuries, the land and its people have had to adapt in the face of challenges, caused mostly by foreign forces and empires. These struggles have had a direct influence on domestic dynamics, both positively and negatively.

Lebanon prides itself on having stunning ruins from Roman times, the most recognisable being the three Roman temples at Baalback in the West of the country, as well as many others, scattered along its territory of 10,452 square meters. With a temperate Mediterranean climate, the country was able to preserve these historical reminders of its links to empires across the seas. In addition to the majestic ruins in situ, the country still has a plethora of objects from that period and from the earlier period of the Phoenicians, as well as from every period from then till modern times.

Like the rest of its neighbours in the region, Lebanon was part of the Ottoman Empire from the beginning of the sixteenth century to the demise of the empire until the beginning of the First World War in 1915. During these centuries, three main and separate periods of governance extended over the country. First came the period of what is known as the Emirate, from the second half of the sixteenth century until 1841, when the country was ruled by local emirs, with a relative degree of independence. The governors, known as the
*Hakims,* governed the different regions, inheriting, along with those serving under them, their titles and responsibilities from their fathers and forefathers, passing these responsibilities onto their offspring.

The second period from 1842 to 1860 was known as the period of the *Qa’immaqamat,* from the Arabic word, *qa’imaqam,* which means someone who acts on behalf of the Ottoman Sultan. When the country was split into two such *qa’imaqamat,* each was headed by a *Qa’imaqam* appointed by the Sultan. Archival material from this period was largely held in the private hands of the *Qa’imaqams* and their descendants, making it very difficult to trace them, especially as many were damaged or lost over the centuries.

The third period under the Ottoman Empire was the *Mutasarrefiyya,* known alternatively as the Autonomy Trust, which stretched from 1861 until the fall of the empire in 1915.¹ Again, the country was divided into districts governed by pashas, similarly appointed by the Ottoman Sultan. Official archives were produced, with many of them still held in Turkey at the General Directorate of State Archives, as the Ottoman Empire was known for its precise record-keeping and preservation.

As the Ottoman Empire collapsed at the end of the First World War, and the Treaty of Versailles was concluded in 1919, both France and Britain declared their occupation of Palestine-Lebanon-Syria, in their Franco-British declaration of November 1918, to ‘establish national governments drawing their authority from the initiative and the choice of the native population.’² Both Lebanon and Syria were included under the same French mandate,

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with one high commissioner appointed for both. In 1926, Lebanon was declared a republic and adopted a constitution, which to a very large extent is still in place today. It stipulated the appointment of an elected president and parliament, with the president drawn from the Christian Maronite community, the Prime Minister from the Muslim Sunni community and the Speaker of the House from the Muslim Shiite community. All matters pertaining to personal affairs and status were kept, as they had been until then, under the jurisdiction of the religious authorities.

Whilst the official and semi-official government archives may not have survived the centuries, it is the officially recognised religious communities that have each shouldered, to organisation and sophistication, the responsibility of archiving and preserving the documents, art and other materials related to their communities. The drive of these communities to do so relates to the fact that each community knew what they were dealing with and appreciated the importance of preserving these archives for posterity. Lebanon is considered the most diverse religious country in the Middle East, with Muslims constituting 54% of the population (27% Sunni Islam, 27% Shiite Islam), Christians representing 40.5% (includes 21% Maronite Catholic, 8% Greek Orthodox, 5% Melkite Catholic, 1% Protestant, 5.5% other Christians denominations including Greek Catholics, Syriacs and Chaldeans), the Druze constitute 5.6%, a very small number of Jews, Baha’is, Buddhists, and Hindus. For the Muslim community, the *Awqaf* and its clerks are attached to the Council of Ministers and the muftis are paid by the government and overseen by the Prime Minister. The link between Islamic institutions and the government

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3 Index Mundi, ‘Lebanon Demographic Profile’
[https://www.indexmundi.com/lebanon/demographics_profile.html](https://www.indexmundi.com/lebanon/demographics_profile.html) (January 22 2020)

4 Religious endowments, *awqaf*, are similar to common law trusts where the trustee is the mosque or individual in charge of the *waqf* and the beneficiary is usually the community as a whole.
also underscores the strong links between the Houses, or Dars of Fatwa, and the government. This is a relic from Ottoman times when state and religious institutions were linked and not infrequently, functioned in tandem. In Lebanon, all religious, personal and family matters are handled by the relevant religious courts and authorities, and there are no civil courts for these matters.

The records and archives of the Christian communities – whether from the Maronite Catholic Church, the Greek Orthodox Church and all other Christian denominations – were managed and kept at the Christian institutions.

Kamal Salibi, one of Lebanon’s established historians, explains that General Fuad Chehab, the country’s President from 1958-1964, sought to focus primarily on promoting a sense of national unity, at a time of considerable upheaval in the region. He made the entry system into the civil service and public appointments based more on merit than on religious affiliations and other considerations, while recognising the need to maintain the existing balances. His restructuring of the country’s institutions included ministries and specifically the Ministry of Tourism, which was and still is responsible for the restoration and preservation of the country’s historical and cultural heritage, which includes the national archives.

Another Chehab, the Emir Maurice Chehab, who was the head of the General Directorate for Antiquities (DGA) for nearly thirty years, successfully gathered archives and

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5 Dar Al Fatwa is the Muslim Sunni religious establishment with the authority to issue religious pronouncements
collections from private families and started the process of creating inventories. He was successful in publishing the correspondence and archives he gathered from different sources, including those of the French from the period of the Mandate until 1943, when Lebanon became fully independent, and published them in a number of volumes, which detail the history of Lebanon’s and the neighbouring countries, from the seventeenth century into the 1970s.

A decade after Fuad Chehab’s presidency, UNESCO undertook a review of the country’s archival preparedness and the institutions involved in archiving the country’s historical and administrative material. The report was written by Giovanni Fontana Antonelli in 1974, after he had reviewed the country’s ministries and institutions and made several recommendations. Sadly, the recommendations were presented a year before the outbreak of the civil war in 1975. Amongst the recommendations was training of cadres, and the need for closer coordination and collaboration between government institutions, tasked with archiving on the one hand, and the religious institutions. This is because the religious institutions tended to safeguard their own archives. He further recommended more connectedness to understand what was in the religious archives.

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Missionaries and educational establishments

On the educational front, the Jesuits were the first to establish a European high school in the country in 1734 in the Kisrawan region. The Maronite College in Rome had been established by Pope Gregory XIII in 1584, and it taught a cadre of Maronite clergy, whom, on their return to Lebanon, took up roles in the church. Some were instrumental in the introduction of Oriental studies in a number of European educational centres. Of renown were Jibrail al-Sihyuni and Ibrahim Al-Haqili. Both were fluent in Arabic and Syriac, the former having contributed to the Paris polyglot Bible, which included both Arabic and Syria. The first Psalms to be published in Arabic, using Syriac script, were in 1610, by the Imprimerie Catholique in the Qazhayya region. The Greek Orthodox monastery in Beirut printed in 1751 the Psalms in Arabic, and the Maronite monastery in Tamish had also started printing religious publications using Arabic script in 1855. The historian Philip Hitti writes that all three monasteries would have brought their printing presses from Rome.10

The American Mission Press was established in Beirut in 1834 by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM). The press had initially been set up in Malta in 1822, but the Board saw the need for proximity with the countries in the Near East for easier distribution of its printed material, so moved it to Lebanon.11 The press, along with the establishment of schools and subsequently a university in Beirut, which became known as the American University of Beirut, was considered one of the most effective contributions

of the American missionaries to Lebanon and its neighbouring countries, whose influence continues to this day across the Middle East.\textsuperscript{12}

The late nineteenth century saw an increased presence and activity by missionaries, both from Europe and the United States in Lebanon. It is worthwhile noting that the single largest Catholic missionary presence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Lebanon were French and dominated by the Jesuits. The increased presence of French Jesuit missionaries was in response to the Protestant missionary arrival and work, especially amongst Lebanon’s Maronite communities, whom the Jesuits saw as their natural adherents.\textsuperscript{13}

\textbf{Figure 1. Machine Room, American Printing Press. Source: H.H. Jessups, Fifty-Three Years in Syria, 1910.}

The Syrian Protestant College was established in Beirut in 1866, after the State of New York granted a charter for an academic institution, to be administered separately from the ABCFM with a separate endowment.\textsuperscript{14} This academic institution later became the

\textsuperscript{12} Antakly, W.G., \textit{American Protestant Educational Missions: Their Influence on Syria and Arab Nationalism, 1820-1923} (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1976).

\textsuperscript{13} Idem, Salibi, K., p.153.

\textsuperscript{14} American University of Beirut, ‘History’, \url{www.aub.edu.lb/aboutus/Pages/history.aspx} (January 22 2020)
American University of Beirut (AUB). The University Saint-Joseph (USJ) was initially funded by French government subsidies and operated with permission from Lebanon’s Maronite patriarchate and with Vatican support. As soon as the American missionaries established their printing press in Beirut, the Jesuits followed suit by establishing their own press in the Lebanese capital Beirut in 1841, to compete with the Syrian Protestant College. The American press created what became known as the American Arabic typeface, which was designed by the ABCFM missionary Eli Smith. In time, even the Jesuit printing press adopted this typeface, which was clear and easy to read, as well as the general print style favoured by the American press.\(^\text{15}\)

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religious orders and their educational branches, (i.e. the schools and universities they established) took charge of developing, retaining and archiving their own documentation and religious heritage. This thesis will look at the adoption of digitisation in the country as a means to safeguard and preserve cultural heritage. It will be focusing on three of the academic institutions, the American University of Beirut (AUB), the Universite Saint Esprit de Kaslik (USEK), and the University of Balamand (UoB), who have all embarked on digital humanities programmes in order to build capacity in the country beyond their immediate task of preserving their archival material.

The civil war which erupted in 1975 and lasted for nineteen years had, as all wars do, a very destructive effect on the country and its people. Lebanon is a small country and the wide geographic spread of the areas of conflict shifted over the years, affecting different regions at different times and to varying degrees. The physical damage to both buildings and institutions was extensive, however, and the long duration of the war also meant that academic institutions, which were largely unharmed, were also able to make arrangements
to shield their archives, where possible, or to move them to locations in which the conflict was kept at bay. The war also led to a brain drain, as over the course of the two decades it raged on, hundreds and thousands of Lebanese emigrated to other countries, taking with them their education and expertise. Whilst some were to return when the war ceased, many would never do so. The war also led to the emergence and growth of both the USEK and the University of Balamand, both in regions far from the capital Beirut, where the AUB and the USJ are located. During the civil war, the Kisrwan region, where USEK is located is in the Christian area, as was the Balamand, in the North of the country, where the university was established along an old Orthodox monastery.

Figure 5. Aerial view of the University of Balamand. Source: www.balamand.edu.lb

The building of the National Archives itself was severely damaged during the war and many of its paper archives were harmed, and some are thought to have been lost, as the archives had to be moved to other locations. The humidity had also affected them adversely. The French National Archives provided support in going through the packed archives after the war. However, while a big portion of the archives has been preserved physically, much is still on the process of being restored. The National Archives are not yet in
a position to commence digitising their documentation. The State of Qatar funded the new location of the National Archives in Beirut.

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 6. USEK campus, Kisrwan. Source: www.usek.edu.lb**

As a follow-up to the 1974 review and report done by UNESCO, the institution followed up with a EUROMED Heritage conference and workshop held in Paris in 2008, drawing in the relevant institutions and researchers involved in their countries’ archives from all the countries included in what the EU calls the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, including Lebanon. As this was more than a decade ago, digitisation had not yet taken hold. However, the recommendations of the workshop were expanding the heritage concept and its role in modern society, promoting legislation and improving regulations on heritage policy. In addition, it recommended enlarging the field of institutional and public actors to include more involvement of the communities as well as increased multi-disciplinary collaboration; developing and training researchers and those working in the field of archives in the technologies and skills, which were new at the time. It is worthwhile to note that Lebanon was represented by an independent expert, reflecting the fragmentation of the

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archival endeavour nationwide and the lack of a single coordination body, whereas the rest
had sent institutional representatives from the relevant ministries.

In many ways, and as had happened many times over the centuries of Lebanon’s
history, it is no coincidence that the academic institutions have stepped into the role of
guardians of the country’s cultural, and specifically its religious heritage, albeit that each
institution, with the exception of the AUB, had tended to focus on its own religious heritage.
The AUB is clear that digitisation of its vast library documentation, in different formats, is
driven first by scholarship demands, and more generally, in answer to wider Lebanese
national cultural heritage preservation.

![Aerial view of the AUB campus. Source: www.aub.edu.lb](Figure 3. Aerial view of the AUB campus. Source: www.aub.edu.lb)

The USEK kicked off its digitisation programme in 2003, with the clear objective of
preserving the heritage of the Lebanese Maronite Order (OLM). A decree then emanated
from the OLM allowing USEK’s library to collect the manuscripts, books, archives, and
records from all the monasteries, convents and churches of the Order. In 2008, its library
changed from being an academic library to what the university refers to as a “research
library”, enabling it to work more closely with researchers and scholars and with a focus on
acquiring special collections and manuscripts, both to preserve the Maronite, as well as the country’s, rich cultural heritage.

The University of Balamand has embarked on several digitisation projects that are also aimed at preserving the heritage of the Orthodox church in Lebanon, as well as Syria. For the most part, these digitisation projects have been done in collaboration with a number of European universities, with the added benefit of exposure of both sides to the archives, as well as the training of the university’s faculty and staff in digitisation, positioning the university to apply for and secure additional funding for these programmes. The collaboration with scholars is also at the heart of the university’s drive, and these include scholars from within the country as well as those from other international institutions. The university has focused on digitising its archives, developing databases and corpora in the area of Humanities as well as using innovative technologies in the areas of cultural and artistic heritage.

Using digitisation as a tool to help in preserving Lebanon’s cultural heritage is unfortunately not on the agenda of the country’s relevant governmental institutions, the Ministry of Tourism. There is a lack of coordination from a government perspective. Although collaboration does take place between the various academic institutions to some extent, more could clearly be done. The international donor organisations and foreign diplomatic missions in the country have recognised the country’s rich cultural heritage and have made available loans, grants and the training of those involved in digitisation efforts in the country, but there is not one government institution pulling this together and it is unlikely this will happen in the near or even the medium-term future.
The questions the thesis will cover are the following:

• With the increasing need from researchers for access to the digitised collections, what could the academic institutions mentioned do, building on what they have already put in place?

• Other academic and research institutions internationally have laid down guidelines and foundations, based on their first-hand experience in this field. What are their recommendations and what can the Lebanese academic institutions learn from those recommendations?

• Digital scholarship: what can these Lebanese academic institutions do to widen the efforts to train scholars and expand digital scholarship in the country’s efforts to safeguard and preserve its cultural heritage through digitisation?

• Open Access: some of the digitised collections held by the Lebanese academic institutions are easily accessible, especially those related to the digitised photographic collections of the country’s history. The institutions are happy to cooperate with scholars and researchers and make their digitised collections accessible. What can be done to further broaden this access?

• Collaboration and cooperation at a country level: in the absence of a government-led effort to put a strategy together on preserving the country’s rich cultural heritage, what additional efforts can be made to ensure that more collaboration between all the relevant Lebanese academic institutions is more established? Is there a role for international donor countries and organisations to push the country through grants, loans and other initiatives, to bring it in line with international guidelines in this area and their application?
Chapter Two

Digital Scholarship

The area of academic research has seen a change in the last thirty years as connectedness in the area of scholarship has become a reality. This was brought on mainly by the changes that came through with the incremental introduction of technology into scholarship. Though initially incremental, technology is now central to scholarship, and in the case of the Humanities, that has led to some clear changes, which had been a reality long before in the area of STEM (Sciences, Technology, Economics, Maths).

Some authors writing about Digital Scholarship question the need to preface scholarship with the word digital, inferring that scholarship remains scholarship, with or without the digital aspect. Others also recognise that the digital reality is such that there is in fact no need to mention it when referring to scholarship, as it has become so ingrained.

The term ‘Digital Scholarship’ has been defined in many different ways. Lindsey Martin, for instance, argues that ‘there is little in the way of a shared understanding of what Digital Scholarship is, and that rather, it is different terminologies with a variety of definitions dependent upon discipline and values, further complicating the ability to define what it means to be a digital scholar in practice.\textsuperscript{17}

Edward L. Ayers, in his book \textit{Does Digital Scholarship Have a Future?} explains that while the phrase sometimes refers to issues surrounding copyright and open access and sometimes to scholarship analysing the online world, Digital Scholarship, which he attributes to emanating from Digital Humanities mainly describes discipline-based scholarship produced with digital tools and presented in digital form.\textsuperscript{18}

Lindsay Martin again refers to an argument made by Martin Weller, who argues that three elements are needed to make up digital scholarship: digitisation of content, networks (peers and content) and openness – both technical (open source software, APIs, standards)

\textsuperscript{17} Mackenzie, A; Martin, L, ed. Developing Digital Scholarship, Emerging practices in academic libraries. Part 1, The University library and digital scholarship: a review of the literature, p.3-22.
and values led (sharing of ideas, materials, data, discussions). The impetus to promote digital scholarship stems, to a large degree, from a conviction that scholarship ought to be open and transparent. Initiatives aimed at fostering digital scholarship may be said to have certain ideological components. Weller goes on to discuss the fact that the discussion around digital scholarship being seen as an ideology relates to the split amongst scholars, between those who are not as keen on openness across the board and others who see technology as facilitating that openness, but are fundamentally for sharing their work in open platforms.

**Related terms**

1. **Digital Humanities**

   The term Digital scholarship is connected to other terms such as Digital Humanities (DH). In the book *Digital Humanities and Librarians*, the authors describe DH as a rapidly expanding and increasingly important area of scholarship that leverages digital media and its associated methodologies and pedagogies across the humanistic fields of inquiry. Another description is that DH is research concerned with the cross-disciplinary teaching and creation of digital, humanistic scholarship through computational technologies. The growing importance of computational methods within humanities research also has consequences for academic librarians, amongst others. Lindsey Martin also refer to a ‘Digital Humanities state of mind’ as a new way for librarians to look at the resources and services they already provide, as well as think about new ones that are needed by researchers.

   The discussion of potential services focus on a broad spectrum of possibilities, ranging, from the very basic services, focused solely on providing access, to the more complex, such as delivering metadata through crowdsourcing, enhancing research annotations with geospatial data. Digital humanists who work with primary sources often refer to their digital products as archives.

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21 Idem, Hoeve, Pankl, Crosby, p. 128.

22 Elliott, C; Feeney, M; Kollen, C; Reyes-Escudero, V, A Digital Humanities State of Mind, Chapter 7, pp.132-155,
2. e-research

The term is e-research is also associated with Digital Scholarship. According to a blog on the University of Western Sydney’s website, ‘e-Research refers to the use of advanced Information and Communications Technologies to support research.”23 The themes listed under e-research are, Data driven research; Computationally intensive research; and collaborative research across geographical and discipline boundaries.

Terry Anderson and Heather Kanuka, in their book on e-research, explain that in designing e-research, the process followed is very similar to research not based on the Net. The four steps for e-research, explained by Martin Weller, are similar to those of researchers before the Net, are:

- Planning – researchers establish their research question through iterative exposure, using social networks and blogs. They seek feedback and ask for relevant experience.

- Collect data – researchers continue to use online information sources for their literature review. They create an online database and seek user contributions, seeded by requested contributions from peers in their network. An online survey is then created.

- Analyse – researchers use online analytics to examine traffic data and survey analytics to analyse responses. They use data visualisation tools to draw out key themes in responses.

- Reflect – reflection occurs throughout the process by means of a series of blog posts and video interviews.24

In all these steps, librarians increasingly play a supporting role, helping researchers achieve their goals.

Key approaches to Digital Scholarship:

1. Open Science Agenda

Idem, Supporting Digital Humanities for Knowledge Acquisition in Modern Libraries


24 Idem, Waller, M, Chapter 5, p. 57
As was noted, digital scholarship is typically based on a conviction that the final and the intermediate results of scholarship ought to be available in open access. A clear and simple definition of Open Access is ‘the removal of price and permission barriers to scholarly research. Open access means peer-reviewed academic research work that is free to read online and that anybody may redistribute and reuse, with some restrictions.’

Martin Paul Eve in his book, *Open Access and the Humanities*, further explains that for academic research to be termed ‘open access,’ it must be available for anyone to read digitally at no additional cost than the use of the internet, and the removal of price barriers. In practice, this also means that open access allows peer reviewed material to be available on the world wide web. It also means that people could reuse the material beyond the prerequisites of copyright, for as long as the author of the work is credited.

Open access was defined in three influential documents written around the turn of the millennium: the Budapest Open Access Initiative (2002), the Bethesda Statement on Open Access Publishing (2003) and the Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and the Humanities (2003). All three of these definitions, referred to as the BBB, spell out the need for ‘user’ freedom beyond simply being able to read (i.e. they specify the lowering of permission barriers) and at the same time, all three also specifically put the attribution of the author at the heart of their principles.

The Open Data approach to scholarship means that increasingly, funding bodies require researchers to present data management plans when they put in grant proposal requests. Additionally, as Mackenzie points out, ‘researchers who share well managed and curated data can expect an increase of up to 69% in the number of citations they receive compared with those who do not.’

George Burton explains, in a blog written in 2009 argues that the Open Scholar does not simply allow free access and reuse of his or her traditional scholarly articles and books but that the Open Scholar is someone ‘makes their intellectual projects and processes digitally visible and who invites and encourages ongoing criticism of their work and secondary uses

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26 Idem, Mackenzie & Martin, p.11
of any or all parts of it—at any stage of its development.” He argues that working in an Open Access framework allows more collaboration between scholars and a wider audience, something that had not been possible before when scholars only communicated with their peers, whose expertise and views they valued.

One additional and key argument in favour of Open Access is that of funding, and specifically taxpayer funding. Universities and researchers are paid for through taxpayer funding and therefore access should be made available freely and openly to all, as they contribute directly, or indirectly to funding the research. Closely associated with the phenomenon of Open Access is that of Open Licensing. As explained by Martin Paul Eve, ‘Open Licensing refers to the conditions under which a copyright holder allows others to reuse material in ways that go beyond those specified within the fair use (or fair dealing’) provisions of copyright law.”

2. FAIR Principles

Also related to the concept of Open Access are the FAIR principles for scientific data management and stewardship, which stand for Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable. According to an article published in Nature magazine online, the authors explain that the elements making up the FAIR Principles are related, but independent and separable. They are taken into consideration before the implementation stage, and do not specify technology, standard, or a solution for implementation. Nor are the principles to be considered in themselves, a standard or a specification, rather, ‘they act as a guide to data publishers and stewards to assist them in evaluating whether their particular implementation choices are rendering their digital research artefacts Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable.’

Organisations like EUROPEANA, which act as aggregators, sourcing digitised cultural heritage material from more than 3700 institutions make the link between the FAIR

principles and their ways of providing accessing to researchers. Their own principles of ‘Usable, Mutual and Reliable’, in place for the last decade are aligned with the FAIR principles.  

Digital scholarship has also brought on a change in the way libraries and librarians approach scholarship as well as the new roles they now play in supporting researchers and scholars.

**Analysis of Libraries:**

**Cultural Change**

Having seen the changes brought on by a push to have more accessible research data available to all, coupled with the technological advances, what are the main challenges facing scholars and librarians. The main challenge that Mackenzie and Martin refer to for digital scholars is less to do with the technological advances and the skills needed to keep up, but rather the need to develop a mindset of resilience. By resilience, Mackenzie and Martin refer to regularly changing ways of working brought on by digital advances, which are increasingly used and implemented by researchers and scholars and which librarians are keen to learn and constantly develop. Resilience is seen as one the main attributes needed in order to be adaptable, outward looking and forward thinking.

Librarians increasingly play a role which Mackenzie, in her book, *Developing Digital Scholarship, Emerging practices in academic libraries*, refers to as ‘enablers of digital scholarship.’ This is in recognition of the changing landscape in scholarship and the tools used, which librarians are now expected to develop, to better support researchers.

**Librarians’ skillsets**

According to Charles Inskip, of University College London’s Department of Information Studies, a survey given to heads of service, university librarians or other members of a senior management team responsible for the strategic direction of the library services, it found six key literacies that were needed. These are computer literacy; information literacy;

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31 Idem, Mackenzie & Martin, p. 175.
media literacy; communication and collaboration, digital scholarship and learning skills.\(^{33}\) The survey results showed that one of the findings around skills development in the area of digital scholarship was not seen as essential, though it was recognized as being an area of growing importance. Respondents were also able to provide many examples of how they supported digital scholarship, with some expressing keenness to develop further digital skills.

**Library support to researchers**

1. **Information support & collaboration on grant proposals**

   Heritage institutions such as libraries play a key role as the repository of large collections, which constitute the primary source of research for scholars. Until two decades ago, these collections were in print format. With the introduction and increasing importance of digitisation, libraries continue to act as the custodians of these collections, with all information about digitised collections and their metadata on the libraries’ websites. Researchers regularly seek help and support from librarians in searching for and finding research material they are looking for, as well as new or additional ones they may not be aware of.

   Additionally, librarians help researchers prepare and write grant requests. An example was given by Dr Elie Kahale and Mrs Samar Mikati, at the American University of Beirut who explained that he and the Head of Archives at AUB helped the Fouad Debbas Foundation write their grant request to the British Library for the digitisation of the Maison Bonfils photography collection from the 18\(^{th}\) and 19\(^{th}\) centuries, and which was successful.\(^{34}\)

2. **Support with downloads and aggregation of images**

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As librarians now provide access to institutional repositories and the digital collections mentioned earlier, the items requested may come in different formats which include audio-visual material, photographs, printed material and ephemera. Catalogue and metadata librarians, have as a result, developed knowledge and skills in different metadata schema and database systems, which scholars, working on digital humanities project find helpful. Lisa McFall explains that ‘metadata and catalogue librarians who work with digital collections are open to innovations and creative problem solving to accommodate the specialized needs of digital objects and their metadata, including adapting familiar metadata schemas and controlled vocabularies.35

Another skillset which librarians are developing is that of project management, as libraries and librarians form partnerships beyond the confines of the library itself. Examples of partnerships are given in the paper written in the College & Undergraduate Libraries publication, which demonstrates how project management skills were put to good use by librarians working on a project with the wider community, leveraging its digital collections36. Partnerships also infer new and potentially different sources of funding and the ability to demonstrate a project was well managed is key to the disbursement of the money.

3. Digital hubs/labs

Many scholars have written about the increasing prevalence of digital labs or digital hubs, hosted in libraries. These reinforce the role libraries play and are expected to play in digital scholarship and bring researchers and scholars closer to librarians and other library staff involved in these labs or hubs. The digital spaces depend on the technological infrastructure in place in these libraries to be established, as well as the ability of the libraries to upgrade to new technologies when needed. Besides the technologies, skilled staff is of course a requisite in order for the digital space to be an effective support to scholars.37 Brian Sinclair argues that the library can be seen as a centralised cost centre which could help duplication in physical space, hardware and overhead spending. ‘By

35 McFall, L. Beyond the Back Room: the role of metadata and catalog librarians in Digital Humanities. In Sacco, K., Supporting Digital Humanities for Knowledge Acquisition in Modern Libraries. pp. 21-43
37 Bergstrom, T, ‘Digital Scholarship centres: converging space and expertise’ in Mackenzie and Martin pp. 105-120.
combining campus resources, we can better facilitate team-based research from multiple areas in one centralised facility.' He gives the example of Georgia State University in the United States, where different units in the university came together to jointly fund a digital space they call CURVE, used by researchers, scholars and students and university staff from different faculties, recognising that the initial budgetary cost will be mitigated in the longer term through its multiple use. Examples of digital hubs and labs at universities in Lebanon will be given in Chapter three.

4. Bulk downloads, APIs

Libraries, whether in their dedicated digital spaces, or otherwise, also allow researchers to access large collections of items, such as bulk downloads and APIs as they have the technical set up and infrastructure to facilitate such access. They can also act as aggregators, as in the case of the British Library for example which provides digital access to users through its own collections, as well as the collections it has helped digitize or with whom it has established the right to do so. An example is the collaboration between the British Library and Qatar’s National Library, where more than 900,000 images of archives, photographs, maps and other documents relating to Qatar and its history and geography, have been digitised or are in the process of being digitized and the link is provided both on the British Library as well as Qatar’s National Library websites in Open Access to view these digitised archives.

5. Librarians’ networks

A key initiative in Europe is LIBER (Ligue des Bibliothèques Européennes de Recherche – Association of European Research Libraries) which is a network representing four hundred and fifty university and other libraries. Its stated strategy for 2018-2022 is Copyright Reform, Digital Humanities, Open Access, Metrics, and Research Data Management. LIBER has five Working Groups which are tasked with executing its strategy, along with international partners. LIBER brings the community together in a conference on an annual basis.

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basis to review progress in these key areas. Part of the mission of LIBER is the development of digital skills and services which librarians need to develop and offer. It helps to position them as current and future effective partners to researchers and in DH projects. The Research Infrastructure of LIBER is aligned with the FAIR principles and focuses on the following areas: Research Data Management (RDM), Semantic Interoperability, Data Stewardship, Disciplinary Partnership and Architecture (related to the physical space and layout of libraries). LIBER presents a clear structure to what a network of libraries, whether across one or many countries as it seeks to prepare libraries and librarians to the new needs expected of them by Digital Scholarship and could form the basis for a similar network beyond Europe.

6. Librarians as part of the community

The role of the librarian as a facilitator or enabler becomes key with digitisation. Special collections, housed in libraries have been given a new lease of life in many ways through digitisation. One of the key skills Charles Inskip, who conducted a survey of librarians in a number of libraries in the UK, for was media literacy, and in an increasingly connected world where social media plays a growing role, librarians, through their partnerships with scholars, have started to leverage their expertise through these new tools, reaching a far wider audience than any number of visitors to special collections could ever reach.

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The new designs for libraries reflect their changing and expanding roles, where they are venues well for lectures, workshops and meeting spaces for researchers, scholars and students. Additionally, many libraries now have dedicated exhibition spaces for the wider community beyond the university. The Qatar National Library, designed by the well-known Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas, has taken this concept further, benefiting from having been built very recently in 2018, and incorporating new requirements, both by researchers, scholars, and students as well as the wider community. It has built on the traditional role and space which libraries have traditionally had, to include a department for its Digital Library team, an amphitheater hosting lectures and cultural events, reading areas for students as well as meeting rooms for lectures and workshops, it even boasts a knitting area and a cafe for the wider community.

Finally, preservation and restoration of heritage collections is an important department which not all academic libraries are able to afford or house. The connectedness of libraries ensures that the skillsets of librarians and staff working on manuscripts and book restoration occupies a space usually close to other departments such as the digitisation scholarship department and digitisation hubs. This is the case at the library of the University of Leiden. The proximity makes it possible to close the loop, especially when it comes to donations of private collections and archives, if in need of restoration and care, will be administered, then digitised, facilitating the knowledge sharing in a more efficient way to researchers as well as the wider public. This will be discussed in Chapter Three, with examples given from the libraries of the universities of the American University of Beirut, the Universite Saint Esprit de Kaslik and the University of Balamand in Lebanon.

Figure 5. Wall panel of Gibran Khalil Gibran's digitised manuscripts of his writings and drawings at the USEK Library exhibition area. Picture: S. Bardawil

Chapter Three

Digital Scholarship Case Study: Lebanon

National and International Academic Infrastructures:
Over the centuries, various academic institutions in Lebanon have all aimed to preserve parts of the country’s cultural heritage. The country, as explained in Chapter 1, distinguishes itself from its geographical neighbours by its unique societal fabric woven from the mainly Christian and Muslim faiths. Because of the absence of a strong state throughout the country’s long history, academic institutions, which initially had been affiliated in different ways to religious institutions, took it upon themselves to preserve and build on their valuable heritage. While two of the main universities, the American University of Beirut and the Universite Saint Joseph were established by Protestant missionaries and the Jesuits, the intention was always to have them as academic institutions, open to all, and covering all topics of learning with the relevant faculties established for that purpose.

The academic institutions which will be considered in this chapter are the American University of Beirut (AUB), the Universite Saint Joseph (USJ) and specifically its Librairie Orientale, the Universite Saint Esprit de Kaslik (USEK) and the University of Balamand. A fifth academic institution, the Near East School of Theology (NEST), which is, in essence, a Protestant seminary will be covered briefly, as will the Juma Al-Majid Centre for Culture and Heritage. The academic institutions understood that the advent of digitisation would be the latest tool for them in their efforts to preserve their heritage. Having a long tradition of scholarship and education, these institutions also understood the need to preserve digitally copies of their valuable collections. Having gone through a long civil war which damaged a large part of the country’s own archives, as well as those of religious institutions, the universities knew that this latest way to capture manuscripts and archives would be very helpful.

All four universities were approached, and they were willing to share their experiences so far on their road to digitisation and their awareness of the need to build a digital scholarship for researchers and scholars. The libraries and librarians in the universities have all been closely involved in the digitisation efforts and programmes which each institution has been following, working closely with relevant faculty members.

I did a field research trip to Lebanon, visiting the academic institutions and meeting with the relevant academics, librarians and staff who are involved in the digitisation efforts of their respective institutions. For the Near Eastern School of Theology, the information was gathered through email exchanges and a telephone conversation with its Librarian for
background on the digitisation efforts at the American University of Beirut. I also had an
email correspondence with Dr Borre Ludvigsen, who had worked on the early digital
platform for the university. Before discussing the details of the four main academic
institutions, I shall consider national and international infrastructures available to Lebanese
institutions, such as the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library (HMML).

In all my meetings and interviews with the academic institutions, I followed the
questions I had put together for the purpose of research for this thesis. The names and
positions of those interviewed are in Annex I. The questions that were posed to them are
shown below:

- Can you give some background information on the institution, its history and its library
- What are the priorities for the library?
- What role or importance do scholars and researchers have?
- When did the institution start digitising its collection/archives?
- Whom did the institution work with on digitisation?
- What is the purpose for digitisation the archives/collections? Do you work with scholars
  and researchers to prioritise which material will be digitised?
- Does the institution have a digitisation hub/lab/studio? Who uses it?
- Does the institution have a preservation and restoration department?
- Are they intended to be available for all?
- Is there any form of collaboration with other institutions/academic institutions?
- Is there any coordination at a country level on digitisation and cultural heritage
  preservation?
- What would be your thoughts/recommendations on future collaboration at a country
  level?
- Should all digitised material be Open Access?

Hill Museum & Manuscript Library (HMML)
History of the institution

The early proposal for digitisation was done by the University of Brigham Young, based in Utah, in the United States, which had approached several universities to start using what was in the early 2000s still a very new and unfamiliar tool, that of digitisation. With the events of September 11 in 2001 and resistance by many of the universities approached to work with a university associated with the Church of the Latter-Day Saints, Brigham Young handed over its research to date and contacts with some of the universities as it decided not to pursue further activities in Lebanon.

Brigham Young University handed over its work, which it had started with the University of Saint Esprit Kaslik (USEK) and the Notre Dame University (NDU) in Lebanon to the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library (HMML) at Saint John’s University, based in Collegeville, Minnesota. HMML had first been invited by Issam Fares, former Lebanese Deputy Prime Minister and former member of the Lebanese parliament and a leading businessman in the country who has supported several philanthropic initiatives and is one of the Trustees of the University of Balamand. Mrs Fares had approached HMML in 2003 to help in digitising the manuscripts held by the University of Balamand.

As background, the Saint John’s University is a Catholic university, based in Minnesota in the USA. Its Hill Museum and Manuscript Library (HMML) holds the largest archive of manuscript photographs in both microfilm and digital format for manuscripts globally, according to its own estimate. HMML has a track record of working on the preservation of manuscripts in several countries in the Middle East, and Lebanon was one of its early ventures. The initiative to digitise manuscripts in collections in the Middle East came from Father Columba Steward, known as Father Columba, who has been a Benedictine monk in Saint John’s Abbey since 1981. He became the Executive Director of HMML in 2003 and embarked on traveling throughout the Middle East and North Africa region, establishing contacts with the communities holding historic manuscripts from the early medieval to the modern periods. In Lebanon’s case, as mentioned earlier, these were mainly the Christian religious communities, with whom Father Columba engaged. He was appointed in 2009 to the International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, in recognition for his work and for him
being considered an ecumenical and theological authority. HMML estimates it has digitised more than 200,000 manuscripts from ‘ranging in size from large codices of hundreds of folios to brief documents consisting of just a few leaves.’ The manuscripts are held in collections and institutions in the Middle East, the Caucasus and South Asia, and are made available online through their Virtual HMML platform.

HMML was established in 1965 as the Monastic Microfilm Library initially to photograph Benedictine monasteries in Germany and Austria. With the memories of World War II still fresh two decades on, the Library feared another war would destroy the treasures held by the Benedictines. It expanded in the 1970s to include other religious libraries across European countries and further expanded into Ethiopia and then the Middle East, in 2003 and then India.

Main digitisation projects and approach followed

The approach which HMML has adopted was explained to me by their Lebanon Field Director, Mr Walid Mourad. It is also clearly explained in the HMML newsletter which demonstrates a very cost-effective approach as HMML has developed a mobile digital studio system, which includes a digital camera, a customised copy stand, strobe lights, a book cradle system and PC computer equipment. The computers are bought locally for each of the projects which means that the mobile kit can be shipped globally at relatively little cost. Once the kit arrives, the local team works with the institution which holds the manuscripts and trains their teams in the use of the equipment and in the digitisation process. It is worth nothing that the starter kit costs between $7,000 and $8,000 which HMML covers and donates to the holding institutions and libraries, in addition to covering the cost of training staff working on digitisation at each institution.

In terms of the process and the handling of the data is concerned, the images that have been scanned/photographed are saved. One copy is given for HMML and the other to the holding library. HMML then makes a copy of the digital data onto its sophisticated

44 Virtual platform for the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library containing the digitised copy of manuscripts https://www.vhmml.org/ (22 January 2020)
storage serve at Saint John’s University Information Technology department. Periodically, backup tapes are made of the data on these storage systems. In this way, the data resides in four different places: the disks at the holding library, the disks at HMML, the storage server at IT and in backup tapes that are stored off-campus. HMML has estimates that it has archived almost 475,000 digital images since the summer of 2003. It is worth nothing that HMML has focused on digitising manuscripts only from all the holding libraries and institutions. It has been recognised for digitising valuable manuscripts and bibles from Iraq and Syria which were saved despite the conflict and damage done to religious archives in those countries. The Arcadia charitable fund donated $7 million to HMML in 2011 after the Arab Spring to help in the digitisation and preservation of manuscripts from the Middle East, especially the Christian manuscripts. The priceless manuscripts from the fourth century monastery of Mar Behnam in Northern Iraq, destroyed by Daesh in 2015. HMML had photographed the collection in 2012 and the digital copies are the only remaining record of this collection.

An early model of digital repository

The HMML has acted as an early digital platform for the manuscripts drawn from most of the available Lebanese collections, whether held at academic institutions or religious institutions, such as monasteries and churches. The digitised material is available online for everyone after registering on its own VHMML website and once access it given, researchers and scholars can access and view these digitised manuscripts. It would be helpful to have a link on the websites of all the academic institutions, and a reciprocal one on VHMML’s linking them up together for awareness and access.

The academic infrastructures:

The American University of Beirut (AUB)

a. History of the institution and description of the collection:

The universities we will be considering all cooperated with HMML but some, like the American University of Beirut chose to follow its own programme, having initiated the digitisation of some of its archives earlier, in 1997. AUB started what is called in 1997 the
‘Digital Documentation Centre’ (DDC) project, initiated at the time by Nabil Bukhalid who was the then Head of the Computer and Network Services who approached Dr Borre Ludvigsen, then Professor of Information Architecture at Ostfold University College in Halden in Norway, now retired. The work resulted in a digital platform, which in design, was based on the platform created by Dr Ludvigsen, called Al Mashriq, which is a non-political, non-sectarian and non-commercial webserver covering the culture and ways of life in Lebanon and the Levant region. The Al-Mashriq webserver was started in 1993 by Dr Ludvigsen and Dr Berthe Choueiry, now an Associate Professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and moved in 1994 to the University of Ostfold’s World Wide Web serve where is continues to reside and is updated by a team of students.

![Image](image)

*Figure 6. AUB, College Hall, the Library entrance is behind this building. Picture: Dailystar.co.lb*

In Faculty Minutes of Meetings from as early as November 1\textsuperscript{st}, 1867, from what was then known as the Syrian Protestant College, there was a mention of a meeting in the Faculty Library, a year after the establishment of the College. It is thought that a dedicated librarian was appointed in 1870 to the then College library. Since then, the university libraries have grown to include libraries of faculties as well as the main library, called Jafet Memorial Library, which houses the Archives.

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AUB has put researchers and scholars at the centre of its drive to digitise parts of its archives. Their interests as well as the areas of scholarship they are working on has served as a good way to prioritise the digitisation programme. According to Dr Elie Kahale, he estimates that they are still at twenty-five percent of the overall digitisation goals they would like to reach, which is not surprising considering the figures below. The university has one of the largest collections in the country with more than 425,000 print books and 5,500 periodicals in 175,000 volumes. It owns an estimated 144,000 periodicals as well as 800 journals available on microfilm, of those 600 are in Arabic. It has 36 kilometers of archival material. It also includes 1800 manuscripts, the majority of which are in Arabic and others that are considered rare copies. Additionally, it holds 11,500 posters, related to old movies and tourism, 1200 postcards, 2000 maps as well as 100,000 photographs, which include 20,000 negatives. These are considered of a unique historical value, both to Lebanon and the region.

b. Main digitisation projects and existing expertise:

The AUB’s DDC started initially with digitising a scientific paper on potable water solutions and then Dr Ludvigsen worked with the then Head of Archives, Asma Fathallah on the university’s Archives and Special Collections at Jafet Library. The current Head of Archives, Samar Mikati has built with Dr Elie Kahale on the digitisation efforts so far to include some of AUB’s vast collection of archives and manuscripts.\textsuperscript{48} Out of all the academic institutions visited and engaged with, AUB maintains the broadest scope in terms of its

\textsuperscript{48} American University of Beirut, ‘Special Collections’, \url{http://ddc.aub.edu.lb/} (22 January 2020)
digitised collections. Whilst the other institutions have focused on digitising their mainly religious manuscripts, the AUB, by being a repository of religious, historical, artistic and journalistic archives, has distinguished itself by having the largest remit. This has allowed the university to leverage its collections and to make them available to researchers as well as a wider public interested in them.

In its efforts to digitise parts of its vast collection of books, AUB has joined a number of global initiatives which has allowed it to put its scholarship and expertise to use beyond its own institution, as well as broaden the reach of its own collections.

![AUB, Part of the Digitisation Lab. Picture: S. Bardawil](image)

These collaborations include the Arab Collections Online (ACO) which is a publicly available digital library of Arabic language content in the public domain. It currently has 11,566 volumes drawn from collections of several research libraries, including Arabic language works from the AUB collection, all published before 1965 for copyright purposes. The project was established and is supported by the New York University Abu Dhabi with a grant from the Arcadia fund established by Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin as well as the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Its aim is to digitise and feature 23,000 volumes from the various libraries taking part. Many Arabic books are out of print or in fragile condition and the aim of this project is to pool together these works that cover literature, philosophy, law and religion, amongst others, and avoid duplication efforts to digitise by the various institutions and libraries taking part. These institutions are New York University, Cornell University, Columbia University, American University in Cairo, and the United Arab Emirates
National Archives, as well as AUB. The site is Open Access and allows the free download of material. It is managed by the libraries of NYU Abu Dhabi and NYU New York.

A unique collection is the Palestinian Oral History Archive (POHA) which will be digitised. It is an archival collection with more than 1000 hours of recorded testimonies with Palestinians who are considered of the first generation who came to Lebanon after the 1948 Arab Israeli war, as well as interviews with other Palestinian communities in Lebanon.

c. Support to research:

Along with the University Saint Esprit de Kaslik (USEK), which will be discussed later, it also has a digitisation lab as part of the university’s Jafet Library. The digitisation studio or lab is well equipped with expert staff. Because of the university’s academic reputation, it has been approached by several private collection owners to hold their archives, and in several cases, to digitise them. This is the case with the archives from the estate of the late Lebanese politician, Kamal Joumblatt, which the library is working on establishing the Kamal Joumblatt Digital Library to include both primary and secondary resources on the late politician which will be accessible to researchers and scholars as well as the wider public. AUB also received the private collection of Lebanon’s well-known music composer, Zaki Nassif and the university had established in 2004 a music programme in his name.

Despite the long civil war, the AUB library was spared damage, that is except for one of its rooms being destroyed when a bomb exploded in the adjoining building in 1991, but the collection was untouched. The Jafet library at AUB has benefited from a generous budget it receives annually, though efforts for increased digitisation and collaboration with external institutions would also require additional funding. The AUB has an online catalogue for its archives, however, with the exception of what has been already made available online through its website, researchers and scholars still need to come in person to view the additional material needed for their own research.

49 Arabic Collections Online (ACO), ‘Home’, http://dlib.nyu.edu/aco/ (22 January 2020)
d. Evaluation:

Of all the academic institutions considered, the American University of Beirut, due to its legacy, endowment and its educational mission is the one that started the process of digitisation the earliest. It also has always benefited from collaboration links with other international academic institutions. Its position in Beirut and its long history also ensure it receives valuable private archives and collections, donated either to be digitised or just archived, for researchers and scholars. It also has a good number of qualified librarians to continue with the plan of digitisation. The distinguishing feature of AUB’s collection is that it is very broad and covers subjects from religion, history, archaeology, sciences, philosophy, and geography, amongst many others. It also has one of the largest library collections in the country and has managed it for more than a century and a half very effectively. Its academic reputation, beyond Lebanon, is well established and it could play a larger role in helping the country build on its expertise of digital scholarship as it has the faculty and library to help it in achieving this goal. It continues to attract large numbers of scholars and researchers, both from the country and beyond it who visit its library for access to its collection for their research. It is also distinguished from having a large number of librarians who are qualified and able to offer support to researchers from preparing grants, for digitisation for example, as cited earlier, to help with research as well as explaining the metadata of its digitised collection. Increasing the digitisation programme and making the additional material available on Open Access should help in building digital scholarship. Additional funding would also cover research grants and attendance at conferences around Digital Humanities, helping to raise the country’s profile in this area.

The Librairie Orientale, the Universite Saint Joseph (USJ)

a. History of the institution and description of the collection:

The Bibliothèque Orientale (BO) was established in 1875, the year the Universite Saint Joseph (USJ) was founded by the Compagnie de Jesus, the Jesuit Order. It is also one of the oldest and valued libraries in the country and the region, with more than 250,000 books, 1800 periodicals, and a valuable collection of Arabic newspapers that go back to the early days of the Arabic press in the mid-19th century. The library also has more than 2400 maps, 3500 manuscripts as well as 100,000 historical documents and archives. As with the AUB,
the library’s collection covers a broad range of subjects from archaeology, theology, philosophy, Islamic studies amongst others.

Figure 4. Reading Room, Bibliotheque Orientale. Picture: S. Bardawil

b. Main digitisation projects and existing expertise:

Similarly to the AUB in terms of international scholarly collaboration, the BO is joining forces in 2016 with the Bibliotheque Nationale de France (BNF) in capturing on their website digitised copies of manuscripts and other material under the ‘Bibliotheques d’Orient platform of the BNF.’ Other partner libraries include the Dominican Institute for Oriental Studies in Cairo, the Institute Francaise d’Archeologie Orientale, also in Cairo, the Centre d’Etudes Alexandrines, in Alexandria, the Ecole Biblique et Archaeologique Francaise de Jerusalem, the Institut Francais du Proche-Orient and the Institut Francais d’Etudes Anatoliennes. The digital platform has more than 10,000 documents that have been digitised, pooled from the libraries of these institutes.

The BO has been cooperating with HMML to digitise its manuscripts collection, however, unlike the AUB or the USEK, it has still the initial basic equipment donated by HMML for the digitisation. HMML also has sent one of their experts to do the digitisation. The BO joined forces with the University of Balamand’s library in purchasing the material made up of acid-free paper and carton and had all their manuscripts measured and the custom-measured boxes for each manuscript in the BO’s collection was made at a monastery in Syria as few years ago. Researchers and scholars who wish to study the manuscripts in the collection can apply and have access to them at the library. Researchers

have been given access to the library’s vast collection throughout the years, these included scholars form Lebanon and many from abroad. The digitisation of its manuscript collection will make research easier in terms of access.

![Digitisation by HMML of one of the BO's manuscripts. Picture: S. Bardawil](image)

In 2014, the BO signed a partnership agreement with the Boghossian Foundation in Brussels to help in cataloguing and organising its valuable and vast photographic collection which has an estimated 70,000 photographs of historical and archaeological value covering Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Armenia.52

![Illustrations in a Syriac language grammar book manuscript, BO. Picture: S. Bardawil](image)

**c. Support to research:**

Initially an independent library for the Jesuit Order, the Bibliotheca Orientale was merged with the USJ’s library in 2000 although it has its own separate building next door to

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the university buildings. Scholarship and expertise of the Middle East region, especially its archaeology has always been a differentiator for the BO and its early directors, who were Jesuits, were keen to build the library’s collection of books, maps and manuscripts to reflect this scholarship. The library has a valuable collection of Armenian manuscripts, as well as Turkish manuscripts, in addition to most of its Arabic manuscripts, including some in Syriac.

As was the case with the AUB library, the BO was also spared during the war years, despite it being located very close to one of the critical crossing points during the war. Its collection was intact as was its building, which had been designed by the French architect Rogatien de Cidrac and which had been built in 1939.

In 2006 an Association of the Friends of the Bibliotheque Orientale was established by Lebanon and French supporters of the library to both raise its profile internationally amongst cultural, academic and scholarly institutions as well as to help raise funding for it. Since becoming part of the USJ’s main library, the BO will need separately-earmarked funding to help it preserve and protect its collection but also potentially build on its digitisation efforts, which currently is limited to one unit, dedicated to the digitisation of manuscripts.

d. Evaluation:

For a library with such a valuable collection, increased visibility and access will be needed, as will be the increased open access to its digitised collection, currently only available by signing up to HMML’s platform, Virtual HMML, as well as parts of the collection through the BNF website and dedicated webpage, Bibliotheques Orientales, as mentioned earlier.\(^{53}\) The BO’s catalogue can be consulted online, though consultation of its collection requires on-the-ground access at its premises. It is also surprising that unlike AUB, which was established ten years before the USJ was established, that the Bibliotheque Orientale with its valuable collection does not have additional plans for digitising more of its archives, but it is as well a matter of funding. The BO, as will the USEK, be of interest especially to scholars interested in Syriac history, religion and publications. Both universities have very rare and valuable collections in Syriac as well as Garshuni or Karshuni (which are Arabic writings using the Syriac alphabet), of interest to scholars and researchers. Additionally, the

\(^{53}\) BNF, Idem, [https://heritage.bnf.fr/bibliothequesorient/fr/exposition-ima (22 January 2020)]
BO has a sizeable collection of Armenian manuscripts. Whilst all the manuscripts have been digitised, the BO would benefit from digitising much of the books, maps and photographs in its special collection. Digital scholarship is still at a very early stage, but the BO is part of the USJ, which like AUB, has a very well-established academic reputation and could potentially make funding available for increased digitisation and research.

The University of Balamand (UoB)

a. History of the institution and description of the collection:

   Founded in 1988 by Patriarch Ignatius IV, Patriarch of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Church, on a site next to the historic Monastery of Our Lady of Balamand, founded by Cistercian monks in the 12th century in the north of the country. At the time of its founding, the north of Lebanon did not have any university of its size and despite it being established by the Orthodox Church, the university is open to students of all religions, mainly drawn from the north of the country. The monastery itself has a long history of learning and scholarship and boasted one of the earliest printing presses in the country.

   Building on the monastery’s long tradition of scholarship, the university places research at the centre of its approach and boasts several research centres. These include, in addition to several STEM-focused centres, the Centre for Christian Muslim Studies, drawing on the monastery’s tradition of dialogue between the Orthodox Church and Islam; the Institute of History, Archaeology and Near Eastern Studies IOHANES; and MA3BAR, the Arab Support Centre for Free and Open Source Software.

b. Main digitisation projects and existing expertise:

   The Centre for Antioch Studies was established in Beirut in 1987, a year before the university was founded. Its aim and its role were to collect and conserve the heritage of the Orthodox Church, mainly its written heritage, made up of manuscripts and archives. Through an endowment and funding, the centre started publishing catalogues of the Greek Orthodox written heritage, both from Lebanon and Syria. The Centre was later integrated into the university’s Institute of History, Archaeology and Near Eastern Studies (IOHANES).54

The archives from the Greek Orthodox monasteries have been published, in printed format and the aim is to turn these archives into digital format.

![Digitisation Lab](image)

*Figure 7. University of Balamand, Digitisation Lab. Picture: S. Bardawil*

The IOHANES Institute has four departments: The Department of History and Archives; the Department of Religious, Architectural and Artistic Heritage; the Department of Archaeology and Museums and the Department of Digital Humanities, known as the Digital Humanities Centre (DHC). The Digital Humanities Centre, headed by Dr Elie Dannaoui, has been very active in leveraging digitisation of the university’s valuable collection but also in establishing helpful partnership with European universities to deepen scholarship and research as well as give the university and its students and faculty training and exposure.

The DHC has key areas of focus: Digitisation, focused on ensuring the university’s archives of documents, journals, photographs and manuscripts are digitised in databases for the use of researchers and scholars. The digitisation has included the archives of journals and newspapers published in Lebanon and Syria in the 19th and 20th centuries, especially those edited by Greek Orthodox editors and Greek Orthodox publications. The digitisation also includes other publications covering artistic, intellectual life. One of the other projects is the SYRUM, the Syrian-Rum Orthodox Heritage project which focuses on preserving the relatively unknown Syriac-speaking part of the Rum (Greek) Orthodox Christians and their cultural heritage. To that effect, the DHC has been working the digitisation of the

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manuscript collections of churches, parishes and private collections in the North of Lebanon and makes them available online. This project is done with the collaboration of the Catholic University of Eichstatt-Ingolstadt in Germany, which awarded Balamand a grant, allowing it to cover the cost of additional research done by graduate students of the university.  

The second area of focus is Developing Databases and Corpora in the Humanities, opting for an open source approach, considering ‘databases as the backbone of digital humanities project’. One of the main projects is the PAVONe Platform of the Arabic Versions of the New Testament, which the DHC has been working on. This is a digital platform which includes the digitised and transcribed Arabic manuscripts of the four Gospels copied between the 9th and the 19th centuries. The project seeks to highlight the early translations of the Gospels in Arabic, allowing better knowledge and understanding of the diverse translations and linking this to the relations between the Christian and Muslim communities in the region, by including the citations or references to the Gospel verses in the works produced by both Christians and Muslims in the first millennium. The database allows researchers and scholars to study all the Arabic texts in one place, it also allows for the comparative research in the geographical locations of the various scribes and writers as well as the dates of translation. The platform and research behind it have been welcomed by various faculties of Theology and Middle Eastern Studies in several universities, which have included it in their library databases. These include, the University of Calgary, Cornell University, the University of Michigan and McGill University, who all have either Theology or Middle Easter Departments of which this is of interest. The project is listed on the European Association for Digital Humanities (EADH) website as done by the University of Balamand, as a partner.

58 The PAVONe project ‘Home’ www.pavone.uob-dh.org (22 January 2020)
Cornell University ‘Arab Collections Online’ link, https://newcatalog.library.cornell.edu/search?q=Arabic+Collections+Online+%28ACO%29 (22 January 2020)
60 The European Association for Digital Humanities, ‘Projects’, http://eadh.org/projects#block-views-project-list-block-1 (22 January 2020)
Other projects under the area of Developing Databases and Corpora for Humanities are depositories, such as the one dedicated to the 175\textsuperscript{th} Patriarch of the Orthodox Antiochian Church, Patriarch Ignatius IV, who was elected in 1979, where all his legacy from books, sermons, correspondence, interviews and other material are stored digitally. A second project, also focusing on cultural and religious preservation is the online platform, SynaxOr, dedicated to the study of Easter Christian hagiography. The Synaxarion, referred as the Book of Martyrs in Europe, and lists the saints celebrated by the church. During the Byzantine times, the Eastern Churches followed the Synaxarion of Constantinople, which came into use in the tenth century. This project is being done in collaboration with the French Institut de Recherche et Histoires des Textes (IRHT). The IRHT is an independent institute within France’s Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) which focuses on research in medieval manuscripts and early printed books, working on written works in the major languages of the Mediterranean Basin (Latin, romance languages, Hebrew, Greek, Coptic, Syriac, Arabic)\textsuperscript{61}.

The third focus area of the Digital Humanities Centre is Using Innovative Technologies in the Areas of Cultural and Artistic Heritage. This area and the projects under it, differentiate the University of Balamand from the other universities in Lebanon in their efforts to leverage technology to preserve and push the frontiers in cultural heritage. An interesting project is done with Lebanon’s Ministry of Culture and the Academie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts (ALBA) to develop the country’s first virtual museum dedicated to modern art. The museum showcases the works of Lebanon artists, both painters and sculptors and offers visitors virtually, through a mobile application and website, developed by Balamand’s DHC the ability to roam the museum virtually and learn about the artists and their works.\textsuperscript{62}

Another innovative project is restoring digitally the Medieval church of Saint Phocas in the city of Amioun, in Northern Lebanon. This project is under way and will allow virtual visitors to see the churches recognised wall paintings and interior, architecture and iconography. The aim is to aid in the digital restoration of the church based on existing

\textsuperscript{61}Institut de Recherche et Histoires des Textes, ‘Home’, \url{https://www.irht.cnrs.fr/?q=en/who-we-are/w...-irht (22 January 2020)}

\textsuperscript{62} The Virtual National Museum website (Lebanon) ‘Home’, \url{http://artmodernemv.gov.lb/} (22 January 2020)
c. Support to research:

Finally, in addition to the earlier mentioned partnerships with some European universities and research centres, the University of Balamand also has partnerships with the University of Munster to collaborate in the studies of Gospels heritage as well as the Martin-Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, where an agreement was signed with Balamand to establish cooperation in the areas of planning and conducting joint scientific research projects, the exchange of scientific staff, students and literature, as well as presenting their joint work at conferences and cultural events.

The University of Balamand’s Digital Humanities Centre includes a Digital lab where staff and experts work on the digitisation of the manuscripts and other archives of the university.

In addition to the work of the University of Balamand, the Monastery of Our Lady of Balamand is also involved in the restoration and digitisation of its own archives and manuscripts. Father Arethae Ibrahim is the Director of the St Joseph Damascus Manuscript Conservation Centre, close to the DHC. A Mechanical Engineer by background, father Arethae has worked closely with the Greek Orthodox churches and parishes in Syria to inventorise the archives and material as well as icons to ensure that there are records of them as many were destroyed in the war and by Daesh. For those that had been taken out to safeguard them from Daesh and the war, they were digitised and returned to the country as they are considered national heritage treasures.
Father Arethae has ideas to have a study done on all icons in Greek Orthodox churches in Lebanon studied and digital copies made as they would be very helpful in the research into the evolution of iconography in the country, focusing on the icons depicting Saint George. Father Arethae also works with a small team on the restoration of valuable manuscripts and as mentioned earlier, the Monastery joined forces with the Bibliothèque Orientale in jointly ordering the relevant acid-free paper for custom-measured boxes for all their manuscripts, which was done in a monastery in Syria.

**Evaluation:** The University of Balamand has focused on building expertise and sharing their collections through collaborating with mainly European academic institutions. This has served to raise its profile and open doors for its researchers as well as those interested in its collections from these universities. It also benefits from already having a Digital Humanities faculty and digitisation hub with a clear agenda for building digital scholarship.

The Monastery of Our Lady of Balamand has done invaluable work in preserving manuscripts and historic and valuable collections both form Lebanese as well as Syrian archdioceses and churches. Its centre for the restoration of manuscripts and their digitisation is unique for the Orthodox church in both countries and acts as a digital memory to these valuable historical and religious archives, as many have been destroyed in the war in Syria. As with the other academic institutions in the country, additional earmarked funding will be required to continue the valuable work both the university as well as the

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63 Based on an interview done with Father Arethae at the Monastery of Our Lady of Balamand on December 6th, 2019.
monastery are doing in terms of digitising their collections. Father Arethae has already identified topics which could benefit the study of Orthodox icons, by focusing on doing research after digitisation of all the icons of Saint George in all the Orthodox churches in Lebanon, and Syria. Interest from Russian academics specialising in the Middle East and especially in the Orthodox church, has been expressed. Additionally, the monastery could benefit from having scholars and researchers working on the manuscripts and archives it managed to salvage from Syria and which had to be returned to the country, as they are deemed national treasures. With the continued conflict in the country, it may prove that the records and any digital copies of the valuable archives are the only remaining representation.

Any potential additional funding would also help the university faculty involved in digitisation to be able to represent the university at academic conferences and engagements outside the country to showcase the digital collections but also allow them to publish on themes and topics of interest to scholars working on theology, the Eastern church and inter-faith studies, as an example. The university has already focused on establishing links with a few European universities, they would benefit from a wider network so that they become recognised for their scholarship. Additional funding would also help support researchers from Lebanon and abroad, encouraging the university to build up its reputation as a centre for digital scholarship.

Figure 10. Balamand Monastery, preservation and digitisation studio. Fr. Arethae and Dr. Dannaoui with one of the monastery’s manuscripts. Picture: S. Bardawil
The Universite Saint Esprit de Kaslik (USEK)

a. History of the institution and description of the collection:

The Holy Spirit University of Kaslik or the Universite Saint Esprit de Kaslik (USEK) is a private Catholic higher education institution, which was founded by the Lebanese Maronite Order (LMO) in 1938. Initially established as the main seminary for the Maronite order, the institution grew into a university. It follows in the long tradition of teaching which Maronite monks have held over centuries. Many Maronite monks went on to study at the Vatican and established the Maronite College there.

The University, which is in the heart of the area known as Mount Lebanon, has grown significantly since it was established and now has eight thousand students. The university is open to students of all religions.

The university started expanding its manuscript collection in 2002, gathering all the archives from the LMO and trying to gather them from all the monasteries until 2003 when a decree was issued by the LMO facilitating the task of having them at the USEK library.

b. Main digitisation projects and existing expertise:

USEK started working with Father Colomba of HMML, at the time in 2003 to digitise the manuscripts in the collection. In parallel, it also started expanding its digitisation efforts and now has one of the most advanced digitisation centres in the country. The USEK’s library started also working with the Basilian Chouerite Order of Saint John the Baptist, a Melkite Greek Catholic order established in Mount Lebanon in 1696 by monks who had initially been at the Balamand Monastery. In 1733 the first Arabic press with moveable type was used at the monastery.
In 2006 the Phoenix Centre for Research was established, as part of the library. Its Director and Curator is Father Joseph Moukarzel who has been at the forefront of building the library, archives and the digitisation centre. Initially, the Director had the idea of it being a Maronite library. However, with the loss of so many archives and manuscripts in the country’s main archives because of the war, he decided to establish a research centre to preserve the archives that still existed and to share them. The Library has its own Special Collection of manuscripts and valuable books and archives and in 2008, the library changed its focus from being an academic library to a research library. Its focus is the acquisition and preservation of special collections, manuscripts, and archives especially in the subjects of Lebanese heritage and history. The library also has its own manuscript and book restoration department.
The Digitisation Development Centre is part of the library and has built up its technical capabilities in terms of equipment and people over the years and its reputation beyond the university. In 2012, the centre digitised the archives of the Municipality of Jezzine, a large city in the south of Lebanon. It has been approached by several other municipalities in Lebanon to digitise their archives and records and is working with the Ministry of the Interior on a project to digitise its records.

In 2014, the Ministry of Culture approached the Digitisation centre to safeguard the archives of the country’s main National Museum as a result of floods that affected its own archives. USEK also agreed to digitise the Museum’s archives.

The Digitisation centre also kicked off a unique project in 2015, working with Lebanese diaspora communities in South America, in countries such as Mexico and Brazil, to start working on a project to digitise their archives. As background, Lebanese communities emigrated to several countries in South America more than a century ago, escaping wards, famine and young men being drafted into the Ottoman army at the time. These communities maintain their links to Lebanon and share a long history with the mother country.

As with the AUB, the USEK library has been the beneficiary for the safeguarding and preservation of the private archives and collections of several the country’s men of letters, politicians and religious personalities. Most important of these are the private archives of Lebanon’s former President, General Fouad Chehab. As a result of these bequests, the library has established its Institutional Repository and regularly features manuscripts and digitised copies in exhibitions in its premises. The Sursock family, a prominent family from Beirut also worked with the digitisation centre to digitise their private collection before rehousing it in their own archives and museum. The archives of the famous Lebanese writer, Gibran Khalil Gibran, who wrote The Prophet, and who has a museum in his name in his native town in the North of Lebanon, also worked with USEK to digitise the archives.

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A unique project were the archives of the mutassariffiya, mentioned in the first chapter, which was the effective government under Ottoman rule. The remaining archives, still held by different entities in the country, are now being digitised by USEK. A team from the Digitisation centre also obtained copies from the archives in Istanbul to complement the material held by the government.\(^{66}\)

As with the AUB, the USEK has also valuable photography archives, also being digitised, as well as a trove of audiovisual material donated by a German film producer who filmed the country over fifty years. As a result, the Digitisation centre has acquired a new equipment to transfer the various audio-visual archives digitally.

**c. Support to research:**

The USEK has focused on research and has shed the image of it being a religious institution and the growing archives and digitisation means that for the purpose of research, scholars whether from Lebanon or abroad, working on the country will be able to find unique material. The head of the digitisation studio at USEK explained that depending on the agreements signed with the owners of the material that has been digitised by the university, this will advise on what material they can share and on what basis. Dr Moukarzel, Director & Curator of the Library and the Phoenix Centre for Research explained that they have increasing number of scholars coming to the university to study especially the historical archives. They are looking at digitising more of their material, especially with the

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additional equipment in the studio, however, as with the other universities, most researchers, unless consulting the material available on VMML, will come in person to USEK for research.

d. Evaluation: The USEK grew as a university, along with its northern neighbour, Balamand, especially during and after the civil war in Lebanon. It has also expanded significantly its digital hub and studio and has been approached by various ministries and government institutions for its digitisation expertise. This, in addition to the private collections that have been donated to be preserved and digitised. It has capitalised on its expertise within Lebanon, beyond just the academic and private collections and is broadening its reach to the diaspora. It still does not have as strong a website as the other academic institutions in terms of access to its collections, and as with the others, access to its archives is done on its premises. With strong support from Father Moukarzel, who is the Director of the Library who completed his doctorate at the Sorbonne, and a very competent staff at the library in terms of digitisation and research skills, there is keenness and appetite to expand the links further with academic institutions outside the country. USEK has the advantage of having an expanding digitisation hub, which it will be able to leverage, as it has been doing beyond the university. As in the comments for the other universities, expanding its links and academic cooperation will be helpful to build on the university’s early digital scholarship. Its collection of manuscripts in Syriac and Garshuni, as is the case with the BO, and its collection related to Lebanon’s history needs further work by researchers, who would welcome grants to be made available for them to completed their research and publish their work.

The Near Eastern School for Theology (NEST)

The Protestant Seminary was established in 1932 by merging the School for Religious Workers in Beirut and the School of Religion in Athens. It has built on the history of evangelical theological education in the Near East which goes back to 1835. The theological school is based in Beirut, very close to the American University of Beirut. The HMML worked with the seminary to digitise its archives in 2009, which include early bibles, brought over by the first missionaries who settled in Lebanon, including the founders of the American University of Beirut.67

67 Correspondence with Ms Liza Titizian, Librarian, NEST
The purpose of the digitisation effort is mainly to preserve Protestant heritage in the Middle East and the NEST’s collection has 2000 archival items, including some 400 manuscripts, 1000 rare books and 200 photographs and maps. The manuscripts include the 1890 original manuscripts by Cornelius van Dyck, one of AUB’s first founding missionaries, as well as the notes from other missionaries at the time such as Ely Smith.

NEST was recently given additional funding for its project called ‘Preserving Protestant Heritage in the Middle East’ (PPHME) which was started in 2013. The project covers ‘the churches of the Reformed, Anglican, and Lutheran traditions, as well as other Evangelical denominations, Protestantism in the Middle East is diverse and multifaceted. Its influence reaches beyond that of church institutions, as Protestants have played important roles in the founding of influential schools, hospitals, and printing presses all over the region of the Middle East.’

The funding allowed NEST to buy additional equipment for the preservation and archiving of the collection. Whilst it is mainly a seminary and a teaching school, NEST is also open to researchers and scholars and makes digital copies available for those not able to visit the centre in person. In addition to their own collection, NEST receives archives and other documents from Protestant churches around the country.

Islamic cultural heritage preservation: Juma Al-Majid Centre for Culture and Heritage

The interviews and the visits to the main academic institutions in Lebanon showed that the universities, which were all established as academic centres in the region, at

different periods, were building on a strong tradition of scholarship. Their archives contain manuscripts of both Christian, as well as valuable Islamic texts. Preservation of the country’s cultural heritage has included all faiths. There is no dedicated academic or independent institution in the country which is focused solely on preserving Islamic texts however several of the institutions, are proud to include in their own collections several valuable Islamic manuscripts. One non-Lebanese institution was mentioned by HMML as well as by the Monastery of Our Lady of Balamand to have reached out or them being aware of its work in digitising archives. This is the Dubai-based Juma Al-Majid Centre for Culture and Heritage, founded in 1989 by one of the leading business figures in the United Arab Emirates, wanting to ‘be a cultural reference, attracting researchers and lovers of heritage.’\textsuperscript{69} The Centre has been working with a team to digitise many of the manuscripts in countries such as Mali in Africa, as well as in the Middle East, including Syria. They have also been acquiring rare manuscripts, mainly Islamic texts. The Al-Majid Centre offered to digitise manuscripts and other archives for example at the Balamand monastery. Father Atherae visited the centre in Dubai on being invited, Balamand as mentioned earlier, has a centre for Christian-Muslim Dialogue. Digital scholarship however also needs a strong element of scholarship in order for it to be differentiated from just being a digital process, which seems to be the case for now for the Al-Majid Centre, however it is doing valuable work to help institutions and countries digitise archives they would not be able to do otherwise on their own.

There is a long tradition of Christian scholars studying Islamic texts and in fact Christian scholars were the early translators into the Arabic language of many of the Greek texts. It is therefore in line with this tradition that the academic institutions in Lebanon considered here all value and include in their Special Collections unique copies of Islamic texts or are given such texts for preservation and conservation by private collectors or institutions.

\textsuperscript{69} Majid Al-Juma Centre for Culture and Heritage, ‘Home’, \url{http://www.almajidcenter.org/page.php?pid=our-center}. (22 January 2020)
ANNEX

A field trip was carried out on December 4-7\textsuperscript{th}, 2019 to Lebanon. Meetings and interviews were done with the following staff and institutions:

- **The American University of Beirut**
  Mrs Samar Mikati, Head of Archives and Special Collections, Jafet Library
  Dr Elie Kahale, Director of Digital Initiatives and Scholarship

- **Librairie Orientale, Universite Saint Joseph**
  Mr Karam El-Hoyek, Head of Manuscripts

- **Universite Saint Esprit de Kaslik**
  Father Joseph Moukarzel, Director & Curator of the Library and the Phoenix Centre for Research
  Mr Joseph Habshi, Supervisor, Centre for Reprography and Digitisation
  Mrs Maya Nazzal, Associate Librarian

- **University of Balamand**
  Dr Elie Dannaoui, Head of the Centre for Digitisation and his students

- **Monastery of Our Lady of Balamand**
  Father Arethae Ibrahim, Director, St Joseph of Damascus Manuscript Conservation Centre

- **Hill Museum and Manuscript Library (HMML)**
  Walid Mourad, Country Field Director
  - Additional correspondence with Dr Borre Ludvigsen, former Professor of Information Architecture at Ostfold University College in Halden in Norway, retired

- **Near East School of Theology (NEST)**
  Ms Liza Titizian, Librarian
Chapter Four

Conclusions
The preservation of Lebanon’s cultural heritage has evolved over the centuries through the scholarship and expertise mainly of its religious institutions and their academic branches. It is no surprise that in the absence of strong government institutions dedicated to preserving the country’s archives, that religious institutions and universities stepped in to act as caretakers of the country’s heritage.

We looked at the infrastructure currently in the country through the lens of four academic institutions, most, established in the 19th century. They were all established by their respective Christian churches, the Protestant, the Jesuit, the Maronite Christian and the Orthodox Christian churches. A number of these institutions also had early printing presses which were ably used to print bibles and other Christian literature to their communities in Lebanon and neighbouring Syria. The scholarship developed over the centuries by the priests and academics affiliated with these institutions was built on by the generations of academics who are now in place. The two largest universities, the American University of Beirut and the Universite Saint Joseph, though founded by Protestant missionaries and Jesuits respectively, were always intended as centres of learning and academic excellence, open to all students and offering a wide range of subjects of study. All the academic institutions considered are now secular in nature and open to students and scholars of all faiths and denominations. Their archives, each held physically on the premises of the academic institutions do not just contain religious manuscripts and materials, but archives of historical and pictorial heritage related to Lebanon as well as the Middle East region, especially the Levant countries.

It is very unfortunate that a large part of the country’s archives, which were held at the National Archives building in Beirut, were destroyed during the civil war years. Almost two decades after the civil war ended, the National Archives are still being restored and catalogued, with the support and help of international donor institutions and countries, however no digitisation by the National Archives has taken place, however, though the government has approached one of the universities to help in digitising some of its material. Luckily, and despite the fact that both the American University of Beirut and the Universite
Saint Joseph’s campuses are also in Beirut, both managed to survive the war years without damage to their archives and special collections. The universities of USEK and Balamand grew during and after the civil war, located away from the capital in the Mount Lebanon region and the north of the country. Both were initially established to serve their respective churches, the Maronite Church and the Orthodox Church, founded alongside monasteries belonging to these churches.

**Digitisation**

Based on the interviews done with librarians and staff at these academic institutions, the picture that emerges is that there is still no clear approach by the Lebanese government on how to manage the country’s archives, let alone clarity on establishing a policy for digitisation. There is also no initiative in place connecting the archives currently held by the universities, nor those in churches and monasteries. What has emerged from the discussions is that there are currently, as there have always been, initiatives between the universities for collaboration, based on recognition for each university’s academic achievements and reputation. In fact, most of the universities considered in this thesis, worked closely with the Hill Museum and Heritage Library (HMML) to digitise their collections of manuscripts. To date, HMML’s virtual platform is the main digital repository for the manuscripts held at these academic institutions as well as those in some churches and parishes in the country, with the exception of those held at the AUB.

The civil war in Lebanon saw the country divided into different regions and areas, making it difficult for scholars, researchers and students to have access at times to the archives of the institutions if they were located in parts of the country that did not allow them to cross at times of heightened insecurity. One of the positive changes which digitisation has achieved, with the end of the war of course, is the breakdown of any physical or other types of barriers between the academic institutions. However, funding remains a challenge for all these universities, with some benefiting from higher endowments than others. The priority therefore for all was to digitise their valuable manuscript collections. This was also the focus of HMM’s digitisation programme, both in Lebanon as well as in the other countries in which they are present in. Once the technology was made available, some of the universities were able to build on it and acquire more, while others are still using the equipment donated by HMML. Once their manuscript
collection was digitised, they widened the scope of their digitisation programme. This included historical manuscripts, photographs, maps as well as archival material from private collections. What is interesting is that the digitisation expertise developed in the academic institutions, has attracted interest and requests from private collections and government institutions keen to digitise their own archives for preservation.

**Digital scholarship and partnerships**

All of the academic institutions discussed in this thesis place research and scholars at the centre of their digitisation efforts. All are very aware of the need to preserve, capture and share the material they have more broadly, especially to the scholars, researchers and students, both in the country and abroad. The libraries in all the universities have developed digital expertise helping researchers and building on the digital scholarship in the country, though it is done separately by each institution.

Collaboration with academic institutions in Europe and the United States has been a very helpful way for the universities to build expertise, provide training for their librarians and academics as well as share their collections through digitisation initiatives and projects. These initiatives have also served to shine a light on the country’s valuable collections, now in digital form. These joint projects have also opened up the libraries and special collections of the universities in a way that was not possible before, especially now that the manuscripts have been digitised.

**Recommendations**

All universities discussed in this thesis have expressed their keenness to do more in the area of digital scholarship and increasing collaboration between each other in order to achieve this. The relevant faculty and departments involved in digital scholarship are all keen to raise their university’s profile as well as that of the country in this area, building on the years of academic scholarship. Interestingly, while the civil war played a big role in restricting physical access and limited cooperation, there has also been some element of historical competition and at times, sensitivity amongst these academic institutions, preventing them from opening their doors more widely and cooperating more effectively amongst each other.
The Netherlands has an excellent digital platform created for all medieval manuscripts held in Dutch collections, which is hosted by the Koninklijke Bibliotheek. In Lebanon’s case, the VHMML website is to a large extent very similar in content. However, collections, such as those from the AUB are not included on its website. The country would benefit from following a similar approach which would establish a digital repository containing all its digitised manuscripts, on an Open Access basis. This will allow researchers and scholars, but also the wider public, to search for, locate, as well as at least view a digital copy of these manuscripts in an easy manner online. Follow up visits to the respective holding institutions will, of course, still be possible to study and view the actual manuscripts.

What could encourage a collaborative approach between most universities is likely to come potentially from outside the country, acting as a catalyst for all the academic institutions and other holding institutions, to come together in a joint initiative, to the overall benefit of the country. In practical terms, this is likely to be through the involvement and association of one of the leading European universities, with established academic scholarship and expertise in Middle Eastern affairs, and especially in Christian religions of the Eastern churches, as well as those interested in the broader development of city states and nationalist movements in the Middle East, reflecting the archives held by the universities. It is also worthwhile to note that while most of the digitised manuscripts held in the Lebanese universities discussed were Christian texts, most of the institutions, including the AUB, the USJ’s Bibliotheque Orientale as well as to a much smaller extent the University of Balamand, also have Islamic texts in Arabic as well as Ottoman and Turkish. These would be of interest to scholars and researchers working on Islamic texts and would be available to them in a digitised format. Based on the interviews with several of the academics, such an initiative would be met positively by all universities. They are all very proud, and rightly so, of the academic scholarship they have all built up over the centuries and unless they join hands and open their collections through digitisation to a wider audience, few besides the experts, will recognise that scholarship.

70 Medieval Manuscripts in Dutch Collections ‘Home’, www.mmdc.nl (January 22, 2020)
At a time of continued political and security flux in the Middle East region, it is worth considering that all these universities have weathered similar, if not worse, storms over the centuries. They also all were very much aware of the role they had to play as guardians of their cultural and religious heritage, safekeeping it for future generations and helping scholars in writing history based on the manuscripts and other archival documents they all preserved well. It is time to leverage the digital scholarship which is being built in these universities in a region, which for the most part has the funding in the Gulf states, but not the long-established academic track record. What also emerges from the discussions with the academics and the institutions, especially the religious ones involved in digitisation, is that they also are fully aware, additionally, of the role they play in preserving rare and valuable heritage collections from destruction and damage wreaked by wars.

A joined-up approach instigated by a European and, or an American academic institution will serve as a rallying effort and will encourage international and local donors, drawn possible from academic, governmental or philanthropic institutions to support such an initiative. After all, HMML was able to do that through a modest donation of equipment and expertise to digitise Lebanon’s manuscripts, having learnt the lessons from Europe during the second World War. Building on this established initiative should not be impossible. In fact, it is likely to draw the interest and funding of international institutions keen on preserving the region’s rich heritage, having seen the destruction of priceless manuscripts and legacy collections in countries like Iraq, Syria and Libya.

Academic exchanges between the universities in Lebanon and their counterparts in Europe and the US, as well as the newcomers in the Gulf region, which are in place currently, could be further developed through digital scholarship. Lebanon is still ahead of the rest of the region in terms of academic excellence in large part, as a result of its academic institutions. Its main asset as a country has always been its people and key to that has been education. Due to its historical and geographic position, the country has also played the role of a bridge between East and West and digital scholarship, could be its latest advantage, minimising divisions and breaking down barriers, whether national or regional.
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