

Press Release
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YALE LIBRARY NEWS RELEASE

National Endowment for the Humanities Funds Iraq Digitization Project at Yale University Library

The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) has awarded the Yale University Library a two-year grant in the amount of \$97,060 to support "Iraq ReCollection", a landmark effort to preserve and disseminate academic journals that record, interpret, and explain the history and culture of Iraq.

Iraq has a rich tradition of publishing, and its academic journals are invaluable for humanistic and areas studies, particularly in history, literature, and politics. But library holdings of these journals in Iraq and elsewhere are limited and in some cases imperiled. Only in the last two years, through a Yale Library project called OACIS, has it been possible to know at all accurately what Middle Eastern journals exist in which collections. We know of almost 600 journal titles published in Iraq, 350 of them being uniquely held.

The NEH grant will allow Yale Library to begin a digitization project that will: (1) digitize and character-scan a select group of the most important scholarly humanistic Iraqi journals held by Yale and by the University of Pennsylvania, comprising nine titles and about 100,000 pages; these are mainly in Arabic but two contain also some articles in Western languages; (2) create an electronic archive of the digitized journals that both allows them to be accessed via the Internet and at the same time lets them be integrated into other electronic library systems, in order to make them better known and more readily available to scholars using standard tools around the world; and (3) develop in this pilot project standards and practices for digitizing Arabic and Middle-East language-based books and journals in the humanities, in order to facilitate work in the future that by adhering to standards will be as cost-effective and have as wide scholarly and general use as possible.

Benjamin Foster, Laffan Professor of Assyriology and Babylonian Literature and Curator of the Yale Babylonian Collection, said, "The project's scale is modest, but the impact of preserving and disseminating even a handful of core humanistic journals will be broadly recognized." The work will be done over the calendar years 2006-2007 and will be closely watched to see what the best next steps will be. "As a project that should lead to further projects and a developing commitment to building Middle-Eastern digital libraries, Iraq ReCollection will be a sign of the future whose importance will not be

lost on the scholarly world," said Yale Associate Librarian Ann S. Okerson, principal investigator on the project.

The Yale University Library

Yale was the first among American colleges and universities to support and encourage the study of Arabic literature and Islamic culture. For over a century and a half, Yale has developed an extensive collection of Near Eastern library materials to support Arabic and Near Eastern Studies at Yale. At present, the collection is considered among the most important Near East collections in this country, and in the world, housing more than 400,000 books relating to Near Eastern Studies in Western languages and spread over numerous libraries and collections. Over 150,000 Arabic and Persian volumes cover a wide variety of subject areas. Currently, the library owns more than 1,900 serials, of which approximately 900 are in the vernacular scripts relating to Near East studies. The current Arabic and Persian periodicals are located in a special area in the Periodical Reading Room in Sterling Memorial Library.

The National Endowment for the Humanities

Long a champion of preserving and providing access to scholarly information sources, and in the wake of disasters wreaked during the recent political upheavals upon Iraq's cultural heritage, the NEH funded a special initiative called "Recovering Iraq's Past." The NEH has also been known for its significant support for humanities scholarship to advance knowledge and understanding of Mesopotamia, the region between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in present day Iraq. The "Recovering Iraq" initiative supports projects to preserve and document cultural resources in Iraq's archives, libraries, and museums. Projects can also disseminate information relating to the materials and bibliographic records of civilization in Iraq from the earliest times to the present. Projects focus on resources, which, because of their intellectual content and value as cultural artifacts, are considered highly important for research, education, and public programming in the humanities.

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