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# Among Harvard libraries - Harvard librarians abroad: The challenge of collection in an uncertain world

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## Among Harvard's Libraries

### HARVARD LIBRARIANS ABROAD: THE CHALLENGE OF COLLECTION IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD

On 8 May 2003, the Harvard Librarians' Assembly convened to hear four colleagues discuss their work building foreign-language collections at Harvard. After Dan Hazen's introductory remarks, Michael Hopper, Head of the Middle Eastern Division in Widener Library, spoke about the challenges of acquiring scholarly resources in the Muslim world. Ray Lum, Asian Bibliographer in Widener and Librarian for Foreign Languages in Harvard-Yenching Library, told of his misadventures among booksellers, government agents, and hotel employees while on the hunt for books in Asia. Finally, Andràs Riedlmayer, Bibliographer for Islamic Art and Architecture in the Fine Arts Library, discussed his ongoing work documenting the destruction of libraries and other cultural resources during the Balkan Wars of the 1990s. From these far-ranging perspectives emerges an image of the academic librarian: learned, cosmopolitan, intellectually aware, and politically engaged.

#### *Introduction* Dan Hazen

THIS PROGRAM FOCUSES on the challenges of building research library collections that fully represent the geographic, linguistic, and cultural range of contemporary scholarship. Research libraries engage with international materials as they support individual scholars and students, and also as they contribute more generally to the academic endeavor. The reasons for special attention to international collecting, however, may not be immediately apparent. Our session will both discuss and demonstrate this case.

A library like Harvard's supports international scholars and global scholarship in at least three ways:

Our bibliographers bring materials to

Cambridge from all corners of the world. Like everyone else, we're constrained by our budgets, and by the imagination and inventiveness with which we act upon the opportunities we perceive. Nonetheless, a basic and enduring objective is to ensure that our students and scholars enjoy access to the broadest possible range of scholarly resources.

The library, along with other units throughout the University, also seeks to consolidate, stabilize, and make accessible resources that are held in other places. The David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, for instance, hosts a program that provides small grants for Latin American libraries and archives to catalog their collections, conserve their holdings, and tackle targeted projects for microfilming or digitization. These awards obviously help the recipients. They also benefit Harvard scholars and students conducting international research, since most of these often unique materials will never leave their place of origin. The example of Iraq's vandalized libraries and archives, among too many similar cases, of course also suggests the limitations of any efforts that focus only on fixed collections of physical objects.

Harvard also supports other repositories in less direct ways, for instance through the local research and development work that results in standards and procedures that can then be generally applied. Thus the Library Digital Initiative, as it implements a broad range of projects and develops the corresponding technical capabilities, documents its findings for the community as a whole. Many other instances of locally defined techniques, processes, and procedures are similarly available beyond the institution. Our research, development, and demonstration activities obviously work to our own advantage. They also benefit other scholars and institutions.

Finally, we share the materials that we bring to Cambridge, in the first instance through interlibrary loan. Reformatting projects—preservation microfilming and digitization—

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also make selected holdings available over time and across space. Scholarships, travel grants, research exchanges, and other study opportunities enable scholars and students to consult Harvard's holdings firsthand.

This session's focus on the library's international collecting efforts, however, returns us to our initial question. Why does this process warrant special consideration? Are we talking about anything more complicated than routine business transactions? Four or five circumstances, all of them particularly commonplace within the developing world and non-Western settings, make the international acquisitions process both conceptually and operationally different from what we're accustomed to in North America or Western Europe. A brief overview will help set the stage for the case studies and examples to follow.

International collecting in the first instance reflects disparate systems of bibliographic control. Most of us are accustomed to national bibliographies and *Books in Print* compilations that describe the overwhelming majority of a country's new and expected publications. These resources allow us to know what's out there so that we can then react (with our purchase orders) as appropriate. In some countries, however, these tools simply don't exist. Many nations have enacted legal deposit laws that oblige every publisher or printer to provide some official agency, often the national library, with copies of everything they've produced. But compliance tends to be sporadic and incomplete, and the resulting compilations are necessarily flawed. The "books in print" products sponsored by publisher associations and bookseller groups are likewise uneven. In many countries, we simply can't grasp the full universe of current publications and information resources. Special measures to triangulate on a country's information output are essential in order to identify the full range of materials and then decide what we'll acquire for Harvard. Our selectors are inventive in devising and then applying these techniques.

A second set of international collecting challenges, in various ways related to the first, reflects different understandings of cultural products. The Western (or developed, or "globalized") world, the world we know, perceives most cultural artifacts as commodities to be bought and sold. Books, music, film, paintings, and other expressive and scholarly creations are typically produced with an eye—sometimes two—to making a profit, or at the very least covering costs. However, this preoc-

cupation is by no means universal: there are many places and circumstances in which cultural artifacts are produced for entirely different purposes. An object produced without regard for the market, though, is very difficult to locate and acquire by those beyond the immediate circle of distribution. Our bibliographers, once again, have devised a host of responses.

Unexpected business procedures can also complicate collecting efforts. (Some procedural and system-based impediments, of course, are of our own design.) Standard practices and customs in other parts of the world intrude as well. The byline, once again, is flexibility.

Different regulatory structures, for instance those pertaining to export licenses and shipping, can also intrude. Some Latin American countries, for example, have gone through phases during which any printed materials more than ten or twenty years old had to be registered with and reviewed by a national patrimony agency before they could leave the country. Posting books through the mail was, sometimes in the same countries, during long periods the only practical way to ship them abroad. A common experience was to line up at the post office "parcels" window, official paperwork and boxes of books at the ready, to first receive final approval for the shipment and then be issued a burlap bag, needle, and thread to sew up the bundles. The thumb-wearying specifics have changed, but things have not always improved.

Finally, international information resources are, too often, targets for censorship or suppression. Sensitive materials may never enter the marketplace, or may be withheld from international commerce. Our own "trade with the enemy" restrictions can prevent some materials from entering the country. Ingenuity and desire will as a rule be trumped by practical concerns for legality and personal safety.

Harvard has been unusually successful in collecting international materials. Our efforts to then share these holdings place us in the midst of domestic and also global networks of scholarly exchange. Our collecting efforts also reflect a continuing preoccupation with understanding and adjusting to the specific and often unexpected patterns of scholarly and cultural production that we find in the international arena. We see all these dimensions in the case studies that follow.

*Censorship, Bureacracy, Scholarship:  
Acquiring Middle Eastern Books*

Michael Hopper

THE MIDDLE EASTERN DIVISION, which is responsible for the Middle Eastern, Central Asian, and Caucasian collections in Widener Library, is a part of the Area Studies Department, which also includes the Judaica and Slavic Divisions. The Area Studies Department collects materials from some sixty countries as well as from the diaspora communities in which immigrants (and their descendants) from these sixty countries have settled. Thus, in addition to collecting from the countries of the Middle East and Eastern Europe we collect Kurdish publications from Sweden, Turkish from Germany, Ukrainian from Canada, Hebraica from Argentina, Arabic from England, and Persian from California. We collect in some fifty languages—from Arabic to Yakut—written in a variety of alphabets; and an increasing proportion of the materials that we acquire tends to be unique to the American research library community.

For the Middle Eastern Division, acquiring research materials from Egypt illustrates some of the challenges which we face in our work.

Wherever possible, the Middle Eastern Division tries to have a dealer in each country who supplies material based on a profile. In some cases a dealer may provide coverage for two or more countries. Because of the nature of publishing in this part of the world—little or no bibliographic control, short publication runs of titles, the ephemeral nature of certain publications—this system works very well. If the Middle Eastern Division waited to select publications from a national bibliography (often non-existent or published many years behind schedule), then we would miss a majority of the publications.

In Egypt we have a dealer who acquires books, periodicals, videos, and other types of research material for Harvard. The problems he faces are considerable. First of all, our dealer must have the approval of three separate government agencies to send material out of Egypt. Shipments may be subject to random searches depending on the whim of the particular agency. As is well-known in the case of Egypt a little baksheesh helps to turn the wheels of bureaucracy, so this expense drives up the cost of acquiring material.

With little bibliographic control, publishers and bookstores may not even be aware that a particular title is in stock. More than once our

dealer in Cairo has sent a buyer to a bookstore to acquire a specific title only to be told that the title is not in stock. Then the buyer begins a search of the shelves and discovers that the book is on the shelf. With the advent of the Internet, information about certain publications may be more readily available, but this information is not always accessible to the dealer. Many times we have discovered new titles on the Internet unknown to our dealer and have had to provide him with contact information for the publisher even though the publisher is located in his own city. This happened most recently with a Shiite journal published in Beirut.

Censorship may rear its ugly head in various countries. In one country our dealer had to send the official journal of the ruling party tucked in between other volumes in a shipment since the party forbade the export of the title. To make the subterfuge complete and delude the inspectors, the title appeared nowhere on the official packing list. And I don't think I will do any harm if I tell you that this is the official organ of the Syrian Ba'athist party.

When the Egyptian scholar Saad Eddin Ibrahim was arrested by the Egyptian government for espionage and for receiving funds from foreign sources without proper authorization, his research institute, the Ibn Khaldoun Center for Development Studies was closed. All the Center's publications were halted by the government, including a journal dealing with civil society and an annual on minorities in Arab countries.

Also in Egypt, the 13th-century mystic Ibn Arabi's major treatise on Sufism has been banned by the censors at Al-Azhar. Ironically, the publisher of this work is a government agency: the Egyptian General Book Organization. The precariousness of these government agencies often comes into play. For example, our dealer imported two copies of a book dealing with the Qumran texts published by E.J. Brill. Despite our dealer's arguments to the contrary, both copies were confiscated because the censor said that the book dealt with Quran texts. Two hundred copies of an Arabic edition of the Moroccan Mohamed Chukri's *For Bread Alone* were destroyed upon import because the book was said to be "too political." An issue of a cultural periodical from the United Arab Emirates was recalled by the government. Supposedly the ban had something to do with photos of the former ruler of Qatar. Finally, shortly after the

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fall of the Shah of Iran, our Iranian dealer had to cut the picture of the Shah out of any publication in which it appeared and mail these pages separately to avoid having the publication confiscated.

Journals have always presented their own particular problems for libraries. This is even more the case with journals in our area of collecting. In many countries there is no such thing as a subscription to a journal. The dealer must send a buyer either directly to the publisher or to a street vendor to obtain a copy of the latest journal issue. Publication patterns can be irregular. A journal may suddenly cease publication without warning. The dealer never knows when or if publication will resume. Nevertheless he must send a buyer to the publisher every month to check to see if publication has resumed or he risks missing an issue which will be in scarce supply upon publication. Of course, this adds to the cost of particular titles even though the cover price of a journal may seem relatively inexpensive by standards in this country.

Bureaucracy can also rear its ugly head with the distribution of journals. Last year a student needed the Lebanese journal, *BAAL: Bulletin d'archéologie et d'architecture libanaises*. This annual began publication in 1996, but no library seemed to own the title. When we asked our dealer in Beirut to investigate, he responded that the person in charge of BAAL refused to sell or distribute the journal until the Ministry of Finance authorized its distribution. [Note: In February 2004 the library finally began to receive this title].

For a library wanting to fill in lacunae in journal collections other problems exist. Very often the dealer will have to send a buyer directly to the publisher to obtain back issues. The buyer can be met with a certain amount of stonewalling: the person in charge is not available right now, the back issues are stored elsewhere, no copies exist even though they do, etc. One might say the old Egyptian rule of IBM prevails. *Insha'allah*—God willing, *Bukra*—tomorrow, and *Ma'alesh*—it doesn't matter. Thus, God willing the back issues will be available tomorrow and if not, it really doesn't matter!

Our dealer in Egypt routinely deals with these difficulties when trying to fill in gaps in our journal holdings. Imagine having to send someone across Cairo in bumper-to-bumper traffic to obtain one missing issue of a journal. While the cover price of the journal may be as little as thirty cents, the dealer has

had to tie up one person's time for four hours to obtain one missing journal issue.

Numbering of journals is its own particular nightmare. Very often issue numbers will be repeated or skipped all together. Titles which bill themselves as quarterlies are in reality annuals. The volume numbering on the cover will disagree with the volume numbering on the title page. In other cases, the same volume number may continue for two years or more. The librarian must then determine if this is intentional and should they supply the "correct" numbering for the user in the catalog.

Once the dealer has acquired material for a library, shipping the material is an added layer of difficulty. For many countries in the Middle East there is no equivalent to surface mail, and therefore packages must be sent airmail. Because the price of books is relatively inexpensive, the airmail charge for a shipment may exceed the cost of the books. The postal systems of certain countries can be unreliable, compelling the dealer to use commercial shippers which are somewhat more expensive but provide much more reliable service.

For example, when the Lebanese government privatized the postal system, contracting it out to a Canadian company, service deteriorated significantly: packages never arrived, packages were broken open with books damaged or missing, videos were crushed, books were damaged by various substances including ink, and packages were shipped to wrong destinations. Replacing missing titles can consume a great deal of a dealer's time and increase the expense of materials. When only eight volumes of a 23-volume set arrive and the dealer must replace the missing volumes, he usually has to buy a complete new set from which to resupply the missing volumes. Given this situation, our Lebanese dealer was forced to use the commercial shipper DHL which offered more efficient and reliable service, but at a cost.

As you might imagine the political situation in the Middle East can have an impact on acquiring materials. For years the civil strife in Algeria prevented us from obtaining most Algerian imprints. An arrangement with a librarian at the Algerian National Library to act as our vendor fell through after we had invested hours upon hours determining our holdings of books and periodicals and then placing orders with him. Each year we hoped that the Algerian bookdealers would make an appearance at one of the national bookfairs in the Middle East. This year for the first time in

many years they were at the Cairo Book Fair in February, and our vendor in Cairo obtained a number of current and retrospective Arabic- and French-language Algerian publications for the library.

We are all aware of what has transpired in Iraq in regard to libraries and museums during the past month or so, but what you may not have realized is that since the Gulf War in 1991 the US embargo against Iraq made it illegal for anyone in this country to acquire Iraqi imprints, period. The law did not discriminate: it did not matter if the material were available in Jordan, London, southern California, Detroit, or even Northern Iraq which was effectively no longer under Saddam Husayn's control. It did not matter if not one cent of the money ever reached Saddam Hussein. It is still illegal. However, this morning's news reports a partial lifting of the sanctions by the US and we hope to resume our collecting activities from Iraq. One has to wonder though how a measly few thousand dollars spent by a library on Iraqi imprints would have bolstered Hussein's regime.

Recent events in Palestine and Israel have delayed shipments from Palestine for months. Our dealer in Ram Allah can no longer travel to Jerusalem to ship materials, thereby delaying shipments even more. Political unrest in Islamabad has had an impact on our vendor's ability to acquire and ship Urdu-language materials from Pakistan. In the case of Libyan materials it is easier to obtain them via a dealer in Germany than directly from Libya.

Timeliness is also crucial. One must strike while the iron is hot. We were able to acquire our collection of election ephemera from the first Palestinian election in 1996 only because at the time of the election someone was on the spot collecting the material. Shortly after September 11th, we were able to obtain a haunting Bin Ladin poster from our vendor in Islamabad. I say haunting because the Urdu text at the bottom reads "Hundreds of Osamas will emerge from every single drop of my blood." We also acquired a recent video produced by al-Jazirah called "Bin Ladin speaks" which seeks to answer the questions of "who is he and what does he want."

In this part of the world where vendors are usually individuals or families, the importance and cultivation of personal relationships cannot be emphasized enough. This I think is crucial to our success. For example, we have used the same family for the majority of our Persian-language acquisitions for the past 40 years

beginning with the father and now his daughter and her son. When one source reported that several books by a Zoroastrian scholar were out-of-print, our dealer in Tehran found his phone number and visited him. When he heard that Harvard wanted his books, he gave our vendor most of them. In order to obtain the publications of the Armenian, Assyrian, Jewish, Kurdish, and Zoroastrian communities in Iran, our vendor visited each of their community centers or tracked them down by phone.

Our Palestinian dealer in Ram Allah is also a very good example of these relationships. Because of the contact with her over the years, she more than any of our other dealers has understood the variety of materials which we want to collect. Of course, it doesn't hurt that she happens to be a librarian! Every invoice includes a final page of free publications whether it is a gift from a publisher, ephemera she picked up at an NGO operating in Palestine (bumper stickers, posters, or educational brochures, and the like), or even an issue of a newsletter which her cousin gave her (which then leads us to obtain the title from our Jordanian dealer).

Her regular invoice also includes a variety of non-traditional items, and it is these very items which serve to help make our collection unique. For example, we have a poster produced by a women's organization in Ram Allah dealing with the issue of violence toward women. We also acquired a number of wonderful Palestinian children's books as a result of her efforts on our behalf. Children's literature from the Middle East is rarely collected by research libraries in this country, and yet it can be a very telling barometer of society and culture. A recent article in the *Cairo Times* debated issues of morality, religion, and language in Egyptian children's literature and argued that the literature was not "subversive" enough.

At the beginning I touched on the publications of Middle Eastern diaspora communities. You may be surprised to learn that the center of Kurdish-language publishing happens to be in Sweden, although the Kurdish areas in northern Iraq will play an increasingly important role in this area. We currently hold examples of the Kurdish-language output not only from Sweden but from other Kurdish enclaves throughout the world. Another instance of the complexity involved in our collecting from émigré groups is that of the Assyrian community. The Assyrians—not to be confused with

Syrians—are one of the Christian minority communities in the Middle East. As their publications document, the Assyrians have emigrated to all parts of the globe. Most of these titles are outside mainstream publishing and therefore take extra diligence to obtain.

Finally, I would like to mention that we often ask travelers to spy out the land in search of new or unknown publications. Our Turkish language bibliographer recently took a vacation to Australia and brought back a most surprising find. Who would have imagined that a Maltese newspaper has been published in Australia for the past 42 years?

Our task—complex yes, difficult yes, never-ending yes, but extremely rewarding and we hope a service to researchers not only today, but for generations to come. I close with a paraphrased saying of the Prophet Muhammad: Obtain books, even if you must travel to the four corners of the earth. This we shall do.

### *Bringing the East Back Home*

Raymond Lum

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THE TITLE OF THIS PIECE makes reference to one of the slogans of the Peace Corps, adopted long after I had served as a volunteer in Sarawak, a Malaysian state on the island of Borneo: "Bringing the World Back Home." A recruiting slogan of the Peace Corps continues to be "The toughest job you'll ever love." It should be, instead, "*One of the toughest jobs you'll ever love.*" There definitely are others; acquisitions travel to Asia is one of them.

My acquisitions trips to Asia, mostly Southeast Asia, which I make every other year if I can, require, at a minimum, three things:

Stamina, because I travel during the season of highest heat and humidity and move to a new city or another country every three days;

Chutzpah, because I have to be prepared to hold my own in unusual and unimagined situations, to cajole, convince, and contrive;

And cash, because cash is SO good, so much better than plastic.

Why do I go to Asia to get books for Harvard? The question reminds me of what the 1930s American bank robber Willie Sutton replied when, upon his capture, he was asked by a reporter why he robbed banks. "Because," he replied, "that's where the money is." I go to Asia because that's where the Asian books are. Scholarship in Asia that is produced for international consumption is

most often published in English, and those are the books that I buy, although I also acquire books in Chinese by and about the overseas Chinese. The book trade in much of Asia is not well developed, so it is necessary to go there to find the books that Harvard needs to support teaching and research. My agents on the ground in Asia have never worked, taught, or studied at Harvard so they do not fully understand what our faculty and students need. I also go so that I can converse intelligently with faculty and students who study Asia and generally expect me to know what they are talking about. And because I love Asia and nobody else will go where I will.

I was asked why I don't simply use approval plans as others do. But I do. We have approval plans for South Asia and for Southeast Asia—administered by the Library of Congress—and I have agents on the ground in Vietnam, in Laos, in Malaysia, in northern Thailand, but all of their selections need to be supplemented by selections from catalogs and flyers but also by my acquisitions trips to ferret out publications that never find their way into the local, much less the international, book trade. Much of Asian publishing is very local in nature and some of the most important works are issued by research institutes, museums, university departments, government agencies, tourist bureaus. Oddly enough, one of the best places to find local publications is in the bookshops occupying space in the lobbies of tourist hotels. Another is the offices of NGOs, many of whom distribute their publications only to other NGOs—unless someone shows up asking for them. Local maps and much of popular culture never make into even local book trades.

Some of the interesting episodes that transpired during my acquisitions trips illustrate the situations in which I find myself in my quest for books for Harvard's libraries.

Once, my frequent travel companion—a Southeast Asia bibliographer from another university—and I went out from a bookshop in Bangkok and crossed the street only to find a large wad of paper money lying on the sidewalk. We picked it up, of course. But just as we stooped to pick it up, a well-dressed Thai man appeared and handed us another huge wad of bills and then walked away. My companion, who is a bit superstitious, declared that the man was an apparition and that we had to give the money to charity. So we found a Buddhist temple and put the money into the collection box. After that, every time we left

one country we found a temple in the next in which to give up our spare change.

In Malaysia, I was once prevented from touching books in an Islamic bookshop in the nation's capital because I am not, or so the shopkeeper decreed, a Muslim. It's true that I am not a Muslim, but I do regret not being able to get those books for Harvard.

At the Burmese embassy in Thailand, where I had gone to get my visa, I was screamed at by the Second Secretary of Embassy, who jumped out of his chair and banged on his desk when my travel companion asked if we could visit universities in Rangoon (now Yangon). The universities, hotbeds of anti-junta activity, had recently been closed by the government. The Second Secretary declared—in American English—that if I ever wanted to visit universities on future trips I would have to get his personal permission, although I did not even know what his name was. The embassy kept my passport for two days, during which time I was not able to travel because I needed my passport to buy airlines tickets, to check into hotels, to cash travelers checks. I have never since surrendered my passport—or carried travelers checks.

After I did get to Rangoon, on my third day in the hotel the service person on my floor informed me that I had been drinking the beer out of my room's mini-bar. I told her that that's why the beer was there and that I had paid for it. No, she explained, that beer was overpriced so I should go to the nearby shop and replace the beer with cheaper beer. When I thanked her for that insight, she replied, "My name is Mary. I'm a Christian."

In Brunei, the fabulously wealthy and incongruously tiny sultanate on the island of Borneo, I was detained by immigration officers at the airport because my travel agent had failed to tell me that at that time Americans needed visas to enter the country. My travel companion, a citizen of one of the countries that form the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), of which Brunei also is a member, was allowed free entry, so we arranged that she would scout the bookshops in town and I would do the two in the exit lounge of the airport and meet up before I was expelled. My detainers were not pleased when I told them that no one would want to sneak *into* Brunei, but became very hospitable when I told them that I wanted to telephone the American embassy.

While I waited in the exit lounge for my flight back to Malaysia, sitting alone, a man

came in to wait for the same flight and asked me what I was doing there. When I explained, he became mildly outraged that his country could treat me so shabbily. He demanded to know why I hadn't phoned him to seek his assistance. I explained that I had never seen him before then. So he pulled out his business card, revealing him to be a Dato'—perhaps equivalent to a knight in England—and advised me to let him know when I would be making my next, legal, visit to Brunei. A week after I came home I received an email from him asking for my assistance in getting his son into Harvard. It turned out, much to my satisfaction, that the best bookshops are in the airport exit lounge and I had gathered more books there than my friend had found in town.

Vietnam is a beautiful country and the people are lovely. On my first visit to Hanoi, not long after the war, I visited the Ho Chi Minh museum and was greeted by the director who wanted to give me a personal tour of the museum. She told me that the war was with the U.S. government, not with the American people. Indeed, I have rarely experienced any animosity there because of my citizenship. It did happen once, when I visited the Ho Chi Minh mausoleum. A rifle-toting guard asked me where I was from, and when I replied "Canada" he asked to see my passport, at which point I stepped out of line and went off to buy books. And once I was mugged in the unruly open market by five women with conical hats concealing their faces. I reacted, a bit shaken, by going to an Italian restaurant for dinner and pretending that I was not in Asia at all. Years later I went back to the market, with both confidence and defiance, but nothing untoward transpired.

But on my most recent visit, I was arrested, or at least detained, by local security in a village and escorted to the security office. My book dealer had taken me to a village where his new father-in-law taught animal husbandry. We ate lunch in a bamboo hut in the field, surrounded by ducks, padi, chickens, pigs, and a VCR. The local security officer came to dine with us and joked with me through sign language and translations. He then left, but returned within the hour to demand that I accompany him to the security office, which I refused to do unless accompanied by my book dealer. So off we all went, followed by friends and relatives of the book dealer, a single-line parade walking atop the levees that separate rice fields, through a banana plantation, straight through a pig pen,



on through someone's kitchen. At the small security office atop a hill, I was told to get into the security officer's car, which I again refused to do. Eventually, after much conversation that I could not understand, my book dealer and his relatives drove me to the central security office, where I was told to wait in the car while they held an hour-long conversation in the office. As I waited in the car, I wondered how I would tell Barbara Halporn, head of Widener's Collection Development Dept., where I was. I even wondered if Barbara *cared* where I was.

After the hour passed, everyone came out of the office laughing. The security officer asked to see my passport then indicated that I was older than he was (this happens to me a lot these days). I replied, in the little Vietnamese that I speak, that he should call me "uncle." He liked that. He was, in fact, a very charming person. My book dealer got back into the car and said "Let's go," and off we went, back to Hanoi.

What *was* going on? It turned out that my book dealer's relatives were supposed to have registered my visit in advance with the security office but had neglected to do that, so we were in violation of the law. But law was not the issue. *Face* was the issue. The local security office was charged with showing visitors the delights of socialist progress in the villages, but they had been pre-empted and thus had lost face.

At the government printing office in Vientienne, the capital of Laos, I was told that publications on display could not be looked at because the key to the glass display case was not available until the next day. When I visited the next day I was told that the publications were not for sale. My suggestion that, then, they must be free, was met simply with a glare. The person in charge invited me into his office for tea and I was told there that if I were to leave money on the table next to my tea cup, in suggested amounts, the books might just be removed from the locked cases. We now have those books.

In Hong Kong, my book dealer called to tell me that we were making a stop before going to dinner, and to wear a tie. The stop was at Government House, where I had been included in a reception given to foreign correspondents by the Chief Executive, Tung Chee-hwa. When I was introduced to Mr. Tung, he told me that he used to live in Brookline, MA, when he worked for Gillette. A Chinese couplet that hangs in the Common

Room of the Harvard-Yenching building translates as, "Cultural influences, both new and old, can be mutually beneficial. The human mind, whether of the East or the West, is basically similar." I thought of this simple truth as I stood in the sumptuous ballroom of Government House chatting with a man who was once a guy from Brookline.

What to do with all those books? In the early days I carried tape, labels, markers, scissors, etc., so that I could have boxes made, label them, carry them to the post office, fill out customs declarations, pay the postage and only hope to see the books again. Mailing books was an act of faith. Some of the post offices in Asia require the untested sender to realign his sense of space and service. In Kuala Lumpur's main post office, I spent a good while stuck between floors in an elevator. In Bangkok, where the postal clerks sit on low chairs behind glass windows with holes for conversing through, a clerk kept saying something and I kept saying, louder and louder, "I can't hear you." Then, at last, I heard what he was saying: "I wasn't talking to *you!*" Some memories are not good sources for nostalgia; I now use an international mailing service where I can, or the bookshops themselves when I can't. As often as not, however, I buy bags or suitcases *en route*, stuff them with books and carry them to the next city or country—or even the one after that—where there is either a reliable postal service or an international mailer, or even a friend who will mail the books for me, eventually.

Someone once asked me about the difficulties of acquisitions travel in Asia. Except for SARS, avian flu, postal and transport strikes, local riots and civil wars, there have been no insurmountable obstacles. I must say that except for bureaucratic ineptitude and the occasional mugging, no one has ever mistreated me or been overly rude to me in Asia, and I hope that I have always responded in kind. But today the very real possibility of terrorism makes me employ caution where earlier I eagerly threw caution to the wind.

I have been mugged, I have been bugged (with real bugs), I have been fêted, I have given gifts and received gifts, I have eaten the most unusual fare, and I have acquired thousands of books for Harvard's libraries. Would I go again?

My bags are already packed.

*International Librarianship  
in the Public Interest: Documenting  
Cultural Destruction*  
András Riedlmayer

ALTHOUGH MY TALK is about getting books for Harvard from the Balkans, I don't do most of Harvard's book acquisitions from Balkans. That task falls to our colleagues in the Slavic Division, in particular to Hana Pyro and, before her, Susannah Nagy, with whom I've worked with great pleasure over the past ten years. My job at Harvard is actually acquiring books on Islamic books and architecture, Islamic art and architecture, of which the Balkans forms a small, although significant, part. I became involved in the Balkans as a result of events in 1992, when the siege of Sarajevo began.

Sarajevo, in addition to its modern part, is also a very beautiful, historic town. Unfortunately, during the three and a half years of the siege, it suffered terribly. More than 12,000 of its inhabitants, including 1500 children, were killed. Many more people were wounded. And among the casualties were books.

I started paying attention to the war in part because it's an area which I studied in graduate school, where I've traveled and where I had personal contacts; in part because there was also, in addition to the destruction of people and the destruction of books, a systematic destruction of art and architecture. And so the first thing I wanted to do was to document it. During the war, there was nothing I could do to go there and document it, so I tracked down publications. One important example is a book put together by a Serbian journalist, a native of the Bosnian town of Banja Luka and something of a local historian, who was very upset that the nationalist extremists, his fellow Serbs, were blowing up all the mosques in Banja Luka. So he went around taking pictures secretly, then fled with his family when he had death threats. And at his own expense, in exile in Croatia, he printed hundreds of copies of his book. He sits on them to this day. Harvard was one of the very few places that bought any of them. I found out about it on the Internet, tracked them down through his son in Germany and managed to get several copies of the book and distributed some to colleagues elsewhere. It's now also used as documentation in the International War Crimes tribunal.

As the war ended in late '95, it became clear that access was going to be available and I

wanted to go to the area to do my own documentation, and headed off for the Balkans in the summer after the war. The National Library's building was getting reconstructed but meanwhile the librarians had set up shop across town with a handful of saved books. And throughout the war, Harvard librarians, among others, had been organizing assistance for Bosnian libraries, in part to get money so they could feed themselves and their families but also to address the terrible cultural disaster. And one of the things that we tried to do was to track down photocopies and microfilms of originals that are now destroyed, and to put them on the Web. In addition, Harvard took part in the rebuilding of the active collections of the library, which is refounded from the ashes. A group of us, led by my colleague, Jeff Spurr, approached Harvard's President Rudenstine, who then, as a member of the board of Harvard University Press, proposed that Harvard University Press donate copies of every book it had in stock, toward the rebuilding of the National Library. Once Harvard did that, the Association of American University Presses took up the challenge and first Yale and then more than twenty other university presses participated in this effort, which has sent tens of thousands of books to the rebuilding of the library in Sarajevo. At the very beginning there was a fortunate misunderstanding: the National Library in Sarajevo is called the National and University Library and the university presses misconstrued that to mean two libraries, the National Library and the University Library, so everybody started sending two volumes. Well, this was wonderful because the extra volumes are now distributed to other libraries in Bosnia.

And even though it has had to rise like the phoenix from the ashes, in 2000, the library celebrated its 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Similarly, in Sarajevo, the Oriental Institute, the largest repository of manuscripts and Ottoman documents in the region, was also destroyed by Serbian shelling. And once again, Harvard benefits by doing good. We have managed to collect over 1200 pages of images of burnt manuscripts made before they were burned; Harvard has a copy of all the scanned images and there's also now a website (when it works) run by the Library School at the University of Sarajevo for the Oriental Institute. In addition, Bosnian publishing continued throughout the war and the first summer after the war, when I arrived in Sarajevo, I was directed to a gentleman who had managed to organize book fairs under siege and who said he would be glad to

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supply Harvard with books. I got his catalogues, I got his email address and in turn he directed me to other publishers. The end result has been that, whereas our buying activities have pretty much ceased as of 1992, after 1996, we gradually re-established connections with the Balkans. I still remember our colleagues in the Slavic Division showing me, early in 1992, an envelope with one of those HOLLIS print-outs, a claim slip for an exchange journal that had failed to arrive. Somebody had thoughtlessly stuffed it in an envelope, mailed it off. It returned with a great big purple stamp on it saying *état de guerre*, state of war, delivery not possible.

Besides being a tragedy and, of course, an interruption of acquisitions, what happened in Bosnia and elsewhere in the Balkans in terms of destruction of culture is also a war crime. And part of my motives for collecting the documentation was not only to aid scholarship but also to contribute to the work of the War Crimes Tribunal. And sooner or later—this was in the summer of '99—I made it there, accompanied by a Harvard architecture student who also joined me on a trip to Kosovo where the same thing was happening as in Bosnia in the spring of '99. We had a grant through the Center for Middle Eastern Studies and over three weeks we managed to document more than 325 sites where houses of worship, libraries and archives had been destroyed. The documentation, in turn, was presented to the War Crimes Tribunal. As a result of my documentation activity, I was asked to testify in Milosevic's trial in the spring of 2002. I was there for two days on the stand and felt that it was one of the best uses of my training as a scholar and a librarian, to use this documentation in the service of justice.

Book collecting accompanied this documentation effort, even though it wasn't officially a buying trip. When I first arrived in Pristina, one of the places I visited was the headquarters of the Islamic community. And the director there told me they had just put together documentation of their destroyed buildings and were publishing it in the first post-war issue of their magazine. But it was still in press, so he took me down to the printing plant and, racing around, he pulled pages from various stacks and put together a copy of the magazine, which is still unbound. Being a librarian, I asked him, was there any way of getting back issues? Well, he said, they burnt our headquarters but I'll ask around. My students may have extra copies. So the next time

I came, he gave me a full run. It's the only one outside of Kosovo, I think.

Of course, the war generated a number of new publications by NGOs and other agencies, many of which I have collected along the way. CD ROMs were being produced on the spot by UN aid agencies; they contain maps, statistics, everything you would want for reconstruction of Kosovo. When IFLA asked me to consult on the reconstruction of libraries, they gave me a copy of their report. The EU sponsored a publication, very glossy, of contemporary art from Kosovo so naturally I brought a copy as well as catalogues from exhibitions of medieval art in Belgrade and elsewhere—including one from the Kosovo Museum, which had been abducted to Belgrade on the eve of the war and, of course, has never been returned. So that catalogue is also now an exhibit in a lawsuit seeking the return of the taken museum objects.

Also, while in Pristina, I worked with the Institutes For the Protection of Monuments, who provided me with documentation on destroyed monuments. I also asked them for issues of their journal we were missing.

So I want to close with a document. I mentioned that sad envelope with a stamp saying delivery impossible. Well, last month I got another piece of mail. I had sent an order to the University of Sarajevo Press, via email, asking for a book. Three weeks later, the book arrived with a normal invoice, which we then paid through HOLLIS. So times have turned around and it's a return to normalcy—though not quite, because late in 2003 I went to The Hague for another round with Milosevic, this time on cultural property in Bosnia. But in the end, I think all this demonstrates that one can do good for the world while doing good for Harvard's libraries.