Chapter 3 : Books and Writing Materials

3.1 Books

Repositories of cultural heritage in the tropics generally face more problems than their counterparts in milder climate zones. In addition some of their holdings face specific problems because of the extraordinary nature of the writing materials or binding. Different regions have their own typical writing and manuscript traditions, often heavily influenced by religious beliefs and customs. If we want to conserve or restore such typical manuscripts we need to understand these traditions. We must show respect to the (former) owner and his beliefs, and contribute to the integrity of the object. These are the ethics of safeguarding cultural heritage both for the curator and the conservator. Besides, copying in some cultures has been the traditional way of dealing with the deterioration of manuscripts until very recently. For some of the current owners the idea of preserving this cultural heritage represents a totally new way of thinking.

3.1.1 Manuscripts

Many things can be said and indeed have been said on the production of manuscripts all over the world. Firstly, let us not forget that most major literary cultures of the world have emerged from the tropics (Giesse, 1995).

Useful knowledge about non-western manuscripts has been collected by scholars of several disciplines including codicology, study of language, study of literature, study of bookbinding, art history, and conservation science. A good example of a regional language and literature introduction is South-East Asia languages and literatures: a select guide (Herbert et al., 1988). This guide was conceived by members of the South-East Asia Library Group, a UK based group of librarians and scholars with specialist interests in the region. They felt there was a need for a concise introduction to the history, major languages, scripts, dating systems, manuscripts, and literary genres of Southeast Asia. Although almost 15 years old it is still a very useful introduction.

A project also very worthy of note is the International Dunhuang Project (IDP). It was established in 1993 following a meeting of conservators from all over the world to promote the study and preservation of manuscripts and printed documents from Dunhuang and other Central Asian sites through international cooperation. The IDP has an attractive and useful website including an interactive web database. This page gives access to information on over 20,000 manuscripts and printed documents from Central Asia in the British Library collection. The IDP has wide links with those involved in computer development in related fields and with scientists. The project produces a newsletter, which is available online, and holds a regular conference (Barnard, 1995 and 1996; Brovenko, 1996; Cohen, 1996 and 1998; Lawson, 1996; Menshikov, 1996; Petrosyan, 1996; Raschmann, 1996; Singh, 1996; Thompson, 1996; Weisheng, 1996; Whitfield, 1996).

Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation is another institution worth mentioning. Its goal is to save and preserve Islamic manuscripts. It wants to make this enormous treasure of intellectual and scholarly heritage in Islam available to the world through conducting a world-wide survey of all libraries with Islamic manuscripts; to study and catalogue collections of Islamic manuscripts that have never been catalogued; to document (imaging) Islamic manuscripts, using the best available technological means; to edit and publish a wide selection of important manuscripts. Since 1998 they have irregularly published the magazine Mansurat al-Furqan. During the third conference in London, in 1995 on Preservation and Conservation of Islamic Manuscripts the participants unanimously decided to support the foundation of the Association for the Preservation of Islamic Materials (Cooper, 1992; Dutton, 1995; Ibish et al., 1996; Teygeler, 1997).

Numerous catalogues are very helpful sources on particular non-western manuscript traditions, as well as many exhibition catalogues such as:

- the British Library catalogues;
- the German series Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland by W.Voigt (Franz Steiner Verlag, Wiesbaden);
- the Chester Beatty Library catalogues (Dublin, Ireland);
- the Danish series Catalogue of Oriental manuscripts, xylographs etc. in Danish collections by the Royal Library (Copenhagen, Denmark).

3.1.2 Printed Books

Since the 19th century more and more printed materials have been produced. Unfortunately most of these were printed on poor quality paper with high acid content (Harris, 1956; Lan, 1990). The spread of printing by Clair is an interesting series of monographs on printing outside Europe. It covers most of Asia but also Latin America and Africa (Clair, 1969). For more specifics on printing in the Americas see Oswald, 1968. The Gutenberg Jahrbuch 1988 is totally dedicated to the UNESCO symposium on early printing in Asia, mainly Korea (Ruppel, 1988).
An indispensable source of information is the *Annual Bibliography of the History of the Book and Libraries* (ABHB). The ABHB is the current international bibliography in the field of book and library history. It records all publications of scholarly value, written from an historical point of view. This may include monographs, articles and reviews, dealing with the history of the printed book, its arts, crafts, techniques and equipment, and its economic, social and cultural environment involved in its production, distribution, preservation and description. More specifically, ABHB contains information on the history of printing and publishing, papermaking, bookbinding, book illustration, typodesign and typefounding, bibliophily and book collecting, libraries and scholars. Approximately 30 countries co-operate in this project. It contains books and articles, and has been published since 1971. The editorial office has been located at the Koninklijke Bibliotheek (KB), the National Library of the Netherlands since 1990, where from volume 20, 1989, the ABHB has been accessible online at the premises of the KB. Other impressive bibliographies of a more general nature are the works on Islamic culture by J.D. Pearson (Pearson, 1958, 1966, 1971, 1975 and 1979). For Indonesia the annotated bibliography of bibliographies from Kemp is a must (Kemp, 1990).

It is not our intention to list all possible non-western traditions of writing and printing, even if it were feasible. We merely want to give an impression, albeit arbitrary, of the vast literature on some of those traditions. True, for some regions and cultures more publications have appeared than others. This was because not all cultures were initially literate and consequently did not develop a manuscript tradition. Countries where oral traditions and practices prevail over writing and documentation, have little or no archival experience (Fakhfakh, 1995). Most of these cultures took to writing, however, during the colonial eras.

For more literature on writing and printing see:

**General:** Diringer, 1955 and 1982; Plumble, 1961b; Vervliet, 1973

**Africa:** Arnoult, 2000; Glinga, 1982; Hunwick et al., 1994 and 1995; Marree, 1985; Mommersteeg, 1991; Munthe, 1982; Omoerha, 1973; Ryo, 1989; Toussaint, 1969; Wilks, 1978; (for Northern Africa see Middle East)

**Central Asia:** Cohen, 1998; Gansukh, 1997; Nebesky-Wojkowitz, 1949; Whitfield, 1996

**East Asia:** Atwood, 1989; Binh, 1992; Carter, 1955; Edgren, 1984; Kornicki, 1998; Lee, 1997; Liu Guojun et al., 1985; Needham, 1974; Tsien, 1962 and 1985; Twichett, 1994

**South Asia:** Agrawal, 1972b and 1982; Bish, 1974; Das, 1987; Guy, 1982; Losty, 1982; Richard et al., 1997; Usmani, 1986

**Southeast Asia:** Abhakorn, 2000; Agrawal, 1984; Behrend et al., 1993; Behrend, 1993; Choulean, 1992; Coedès, 1924; Dean, 1990; Gallop, 1991; Gallop et al., 1991; Ginarsa, 1975 and 1976; Guy, 1982; Hinzler, 1993; Hooijskaas, 1972; Hoop, 1940; Hundius, 2000; Jones, 1993; Khine, 1986; Kumar et al., 1996; Kuntara, 1993; Macknight et al., 1992; Marrison, 1992; Maung Wun, 1950; Ming, 1992; Meij, 1992; Molen, 1993; Mu'jizah, 1992; Mulyadi, 1992; Noegrah a, 1992; Postma, 1992; Pedersens, 1992; Raghavan, 1979; Rubenstein, 1992; Rukmi, 1992; Singer, 1993; Sudewa, 1992; Sukanda-Tessier, 1992; Teygeler, 1995; Tol, 1993; Quigly, 1956; Velder, 1961

**Middle East:** Abid et al., 1993; Arnold, 1929: Avi-Yonah, 1973; Baker, 1991 b; Beit-Arié, 1992; Chabbouh, 1995a and 1995b; Cooper, 1992; Dachs, 1982; Déroche, 2000; Déroche et al., 1990; Déroche et al., 1997; Dutton, 1995; Hussein, 1970; Khan, 1995; Maggan et al., 1991 and 1995; Pedersen, 1984; Safadi, 1972; Seguin, 1983; Stein, 1997

**Latin America:** Berger, 1989; Oswald, 1968; Pagden, 1972; Riese, 1988; Spinden, 1933; Torre Villar, 1970

### 3.1.3 Bindings

Within the literature on non-western manuscript traditions the non-western bookbindings (and their conservation) occupy a minor place. Nevertheless some literature has been published, especially on Arabic and Islamic bindings.

Because of desertification and neglect the ancient Mauritanian libraries of manuscripts, mostly privately owned, are in great danger of disappearing. A rescue operation has been underway since 1966 and continues till this day (Arnoult, 2000).

Holdings of the State Central Library of Mongolia house over one million sutras from 11th century onwards, printed and written. Those written on non-western paper and with non-paper writing materials need extra care. The main problem is to fight the dust and low relative humidity, which is a real threat in Mongolia’s dry climate (Gansukh, 1997).

In contrast to the experiences in Mongolia the National Library of Korea discovered that documents written or printed on western paper from the late 19th century to the present day face a serious preservation problem. The old books made of indigenous mulberry paper were specially treated with water and are less affected by external environmental change (Lee, 1997).

For more literature on bindings see:
China: Lee, 1929; Martinique, 1973 and 1983; Matsuoko, 1996; Nordstrand, 1967

Ethiopia: d’Abbadie, 1963; Sergew Hable Selassie, 1981

India: Bedar, 1996; Bisht, 1974; Losty, 1982

Indonesia: Noto Soeroto, 1913; Plomp, 1992 and 1993; Stutterheim, 1929

Japan: Atwood, 1987; Kojiro Ikegami, 1986; Kornicki, 1998; Thompson, 1996

Latin America: Grover, 1988