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Qurat ul Ain Bashir Dr

Department of History and Pakistan Studies, University of Gujrat, Gujrat, Pakistan,
quratulain.bashir@uog.edu.pk

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Role of the King Fahad National Library in the Preservation of Islamic History

Abstract:

The King Fahad National Library is a ray of light in the realm of scientific and technical methods of preservation and restoration of ancient documents in Middle East. This study attempts to seek the role of library with reference to the preservation of Islamic knowledge, culture and heritage for next generations. The library is the protagonist of the idea to collect, preserve and restore ancient Islamic and cultural books, photographs, manuscripts etc. before they annihilate.

This article is a narration of initiatives taken up by the library to fulfill the above-mentioned objectives. It has been found that the library has not only preserved knowledge but also provide easy access to the people to learn about the old times of Saudi Arabia. Due to library efforts, yet the Saudi culture has started to go beyond the national territorial bounding. The library strategy to participate, organize and collect Islamic literature has aided the library to present a soft image of the country and to project Islamic culture all around the world.

Key words: Culture, Islam, Library, Manuscripts, Preservation, Quran, Restoration, Saudi Arabia

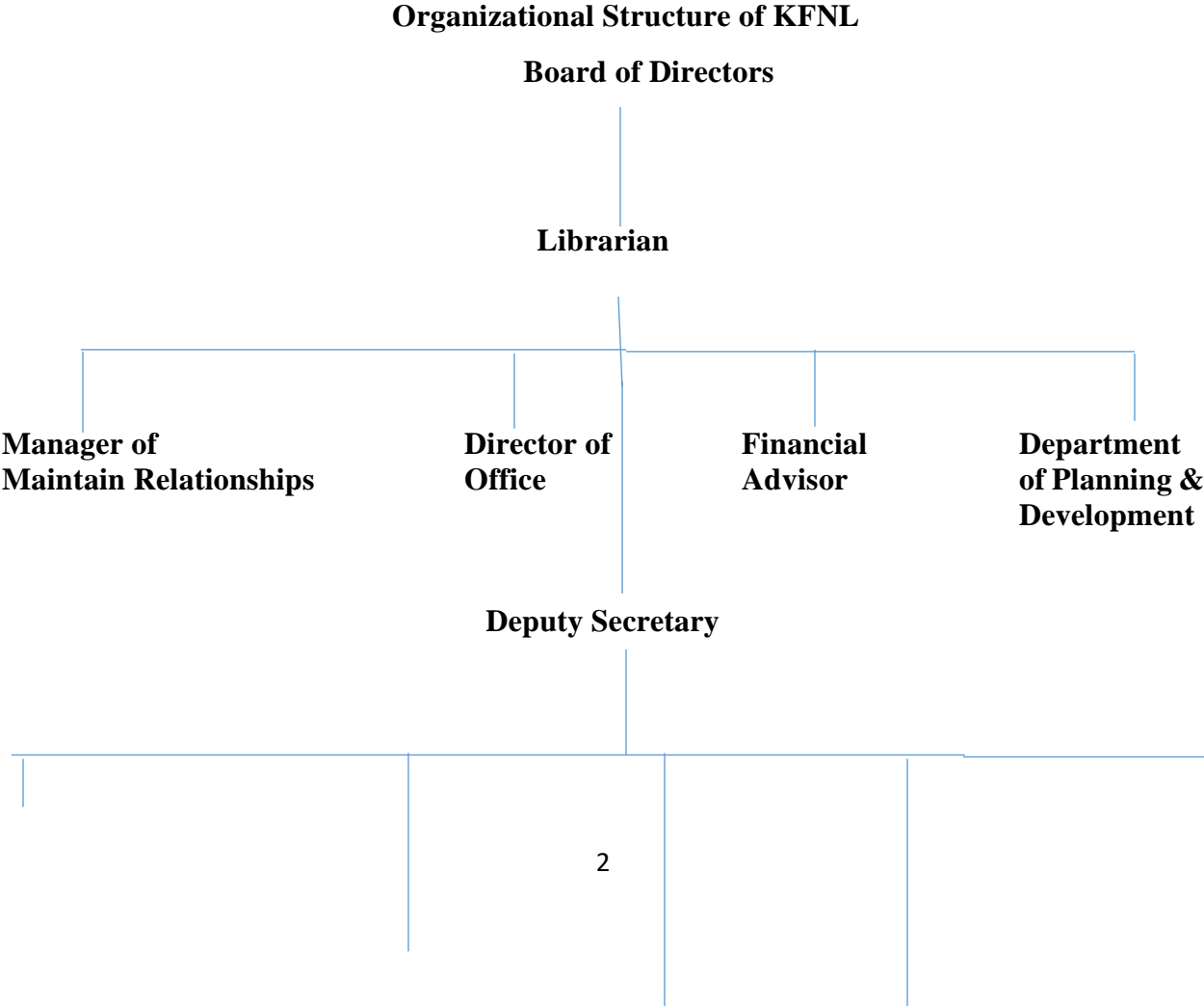
Introduction:

The King Fahd National Library (KFNL) project was commenced in 1983 under the supervision of the secretariat of the city of Riyadh when the King Fahd ascend to power. The Library was set up on the initiative of populace of Riyadh to preserve the past for the posterity that finally completed in 1986. The expansion of the three floor Library building took place thrice. Its building is contemplated as one of the important cultural building in the countries (Architekten). Since inception this library has made several successes regarding the preservation, retrieve of damage documents, manuscripts heritage safety and documentation of Islamic heritage (About Library (kfnl.gov.sa)King Fahd National Library - Home Page (kfnl.gov.sa), n.d.). The main mission of

the library is to keep the religious knowledge intact so to pass on to the coming generations. The library contains about six thousand original rare manuscripts and seventy three thousand transcripts on Islamic history. The essence of the Islamic civilization is Islam that has been descend to the people through revelation of Holy Quran and library has preserved several ancient Quran manuscripts. In the light of above discussion this article in an attempt to find out the endeavors done by the library regarding the collection and preserving the ancient Islamic manuscripts and other remnants of Islamic culture and history (Gassem).

The Organization Structure:

The organizational structure of the library is drawn below. The Organizational organs names are in Arabic and have been translated into English with the Help of goggle translator and consultation with some experts of Arabic language.



**1. General Administration
of Beneficiary Services**

**2. General Administrator
of Assistant Services**

**3. General Administrator of
Deposit and Registration**

**4. General Administrator
for Acquisition and
Information Organization**

**5. General Administrator of
Administrative and
Financial Affairs**

Source: <https://www.kfnl.gov.sa/Ar/About/Pages/OrganizationalStructure.aspx>

The Library Services:

By and large the Islamic manuscripts are set down on regular paper, but a few unique are written on papyrus, vellum and parchment. The library has established a separate unit for sterilization and preservation of manuscripts. The restoration services are of international standards and considered the best in the Middle East. The Library has simplified the process of using library sources to encourage the researchers, scholars, students and citizen to visit library. The library serves 24 hours a day generally but may vary in different seasons. It also provides online access to some sections of its resources through fourteen electronic library services available at its website (Alkhorayef, 2020). Every manuscript submitted in the library first sent to restoration and sterilization department and then added in the concerned list (Gassem). The library also assess the heritage value and monetary worth of the manuscript at the time of registering it. The library does not accept

any postal delivery regarding the submission of the rare manuscript and it has to be submitted in person by the claimer (www.kfml.gov.sa , n.d.). If someone prefers to keep the possession of his family rare manuscript then even library offers free sterilization services to increase the longevity of the manuscript. If the condition of some manuscripts are fragile that they could not tolerate the chemical treatment for restoration or preservation then expert do not recommend to send manuscript for restoration services. That document go through the process of sterilization and special treatment to seize the further process of deterioration.

The process of sending the manuscript to the restoration section is as follows:

- To fill the index card that contain following details:
 - i. Title
 - ii. Author's name
 - iii. Size of the manuscript (Height and length)

Manuscripts are placed at low temperature zone to prevent the birth of bacteria and insects that eat paper and oxidation. The insects could also damage the vellum which is used in ancient manuscript writings. The library make sure to sterilize the manuscripts after every six months to seize the process of deterioration (www10.aeccafe.com /architecture/project/king-fahad-national-library, n.d.).

The library has developed detailed data based comprised of books, periodicals and translation. These text were included in the “UNESCO” and “The Arab Organization for Education”. It also provide the statistical data to national and international readers (Al-Saleh, 2020).

Working of the Manuscripts Heritage Protection Regulation:

The library accepts the Manuscripts through “Manuscripts Heritage Protection Regulation”. The individual/ families got registered on the site in the concerned section and receive registration number and certificate regarding their ownership, transfer and preservation. The whole process is easy to perform due to which populace is enthusiastically partaking in it. (Valuable manuscripts in thousands housed in King Fahd National Library, March 10, 2020)

After technical assessment of the manuscript, a registration certificate on the owner’s name is issued that includes the details about the title of the manuscript, author and date of transcription. Saudi Arabia is rich in Islamic manuscripts, the experts in manuscripts entitled the country as “the heritage and cultural treasures that document the past by linking it to the present and the future.” (www.spa.gov.sa/viewfullstory.php?lang=en&newsid=2086339, n.d.).

Moreover, the library also offers services to the owners of the original manuscripts like as "sterilizing the manuscript to increase its longevity, extracting its name, its author and the date of its transcription as well as its details in terms of its cover material and its lengths. (htt4)

The Kufic Holy Quran:

The Kufi Quran is the ancient of all the scripts, penned in Kufi style of calligraphy with angular form of Arabic alphabets used in the old style of Quran writing. This Quran is written in 3rd century Hijra. The origin of the Quran is Kufa, a city in southern part of Iraq. In early period of Islamic history it was the center of knowledge. This script is written in deer skin. The script of the Quran is delicate and beautifully presented. The verses were written in horizontal side of the deer vellum fibers, as per the common writing customs of that era. Red, yellow, green and black colors were the common used colors in writing Quran in the 3rd century Hijra. The text is written with black ink whereas the symbols related to short vowels were illustrated with red ink. Hamza (an Arabic

letter) is denoted with yellow ink and *shaddah* is (sign/symbol related to Arabic grammar) is mentioned with green color. The Kufi Quran commenced with Surah Iman's verse fifty and ends at Surah Abbas (Saudia Arabian Holidays, 2020)

The Quran's text and leather was original but recently it is covered with new binding to preserve it from dirt, humidity, bugs etc. and to increase its lifetime. This Quran had reached at library approximately twenty years ago. The conducive environment has been assured by the institution to keep it safe (Tschannen, 2020). The library also offers the glimpses of several origin Quran version of Safavid, Mamluk, and Andalusian times and remnants of Sahih Al-Bukhari and a copy of Al-Faryabi (Al-Saleh, 2020). The copy of Sahih Al-Bukhari is written on vellum and was written in Andalusia in 570 Hijra (Shahzad, 2020).

Khate Naskh Style Script of Holy Quran:

The Quran written in Khate Naskh style script is also preserved in the library which is estimated to be written in 10 century Hijra. The copy was prepared by the Sherif Al- Mumin bin Muhammad Naseer Al- Quummi. The Quran was decorated with the embellishments made up of floral and geometrical designs. The name of the Surah is written with red ink with the tint of golden color. The margins of the Quran are beautify with floral, plant and other botanical forms. It is written on 165 leather sheets. This manuscript was acquired in intact form and has been preserved by the library. It is placed in the reference section in a glass frame through which audience could get a sight (Shahzad, 2020)



Photo of the Original Khat Naskh Style Script of Holy Quran

Source:

<https://www.kfnl.gov.sa/en/mediacenter/Pages/PhotoLibrary.aspx?folderID=d88a742c-3538-424b-8202-147249b6bfc>

Microfilms:

Several manuscripts have been scanned and preserved in the microfilms. Furthermore, the library is seeking to keep transfer the data on Safety Data Sheets (SDS) and hard disks. Through this the record would remain safe and available in different forms and more people can make use of rare, precious manuscripts.

The electronic services is another landmark in the history of utility of library resources in Saudi Arab. Due to more access of common man to internet technology, the people are now also using vast range of library electronic services. Through this service a reader can request any rare manuscript, photograph or book to include in this work. This electronic service is available to both the national and international community just by making the login on the library's official website (htt2). Some of the record of the other libraries have also been transferred to the KFNL on the order the King Suleiman. 792 rare manuscripts of Riyadh Library's "Dar Al-Iftaa" section are now incorporated in the KFNL (htt1). The substantive Arabic manuscripts are acquired from Princeton University Library and American Jewish University (US) in the form of microfilms (Alkhorayef, 2020).

Al-Ignaa Litali al Intifaa:

The author of this book is Moussa Bin Ahmad bin Al-Hijjwai and transcribed by Abdullah bin Suleiman bin Ahmad. This book was written in 1901 and its style of writing is *Naksh* it is the very first script of Islamic calligraphy in which administrative documents and Quran was written because of its easy legibility). This book is comprised on two volumes. The edges of the first volume preliminary pages were damage which was restored via adhesive tape. The title of each chapter is written with red ink whereas the text is of black ink (Gassem).

Rare Collection of KFNL:

As one of the library primarily mission is to collect, save and pass on documents and intellectual insight of Islamic and Arabic culture to the Saudi nation. The library is trying to establish itself as a cultural heritage site which could demonstrate all the shades of Saudi culture. So, to acquaintance the nation with the traits of the culture it is utmost important to keep its culture alive, record cultural

course and patterns and to present it to the national and international readers. This initiative has been taken up by the library by attempting to acquire as much Islamic knowledge related to ancient and modern manuscripts as possible. The library has preserved some rare ancient manuscripts which could only be accessed through its system. Let's discuss some of its rare Islamic culture collections:

1. Ibn Daqiq Al Eid's book "Ahkam Al-Ahkam fi Ahadith" was written in the fourteenth century. Al- Eid is one of the great scholars of the Islamic Jurisprudence. This book is placed in a glass box for audience sighting.
2. Yatimat Al-Dahr is a book written by Mansur Al-Thaalibi. The origin of the writer is not known, but mostly he is considered either the dweller of Persia or Arab. This book is a collection of anthologies and epigrams.
3. The poetic work of Al-Ahnaf Al-Akbari is also available in the library which was written in Baghdad and presents a clear picture of Arab at that time. Al-Akbari died in 995 AD. This book deals with the Arab society and culture at that time when Islamic civilization was at its peak.
4. The book entitled "Book of Faith" by renowned Islamic Scholar Al – Imam Ibn Taymiyyah is considered as remarkable collections on Hadith, fundamentals of Islam and faith. It is indeed an embellishment in the Islamic collection of the library. This 13th century book highlights the features of Islamic state and religion in most part of the Arabia. The original script of the said book is preserved by the library and its scanned copy could be acquired by submitting request ([http3](#)).
5. The book entitled "Riyadh Al-Saliheen" is a book that deals with selection of hadith compiled by the Imam Yahya ibn Sharaf an-Nawawi. This book is most read and consulted

book by Muslims all around the globe for acquiring the knowledge of hadith form of Islam due to its easy and practical understanding. This collection is used in all the tiers of Islamic academics cum education too and one of the most requested books. The original manuscript is written with golden and black inks having circular and rectangular shapes. The margins of the book are doubled lined and decorated with some shapes like small circles, whereas the floral patterns are also used to beautify the book. The library has also develop the skills and acquire the technology to preserve the writings having gold in them.

The book contains almost 1900 hadiths on following subjects:

- i. ethics
- ii. manners
- iii. worship
- iv. knowledge
- v. Other topics compiled from the Six Books of hadith (Riyad as-Salihin - Sunnah.com - Sayings and Teachings of Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه و سلم), n.d.).
6. The original script of book “Sahih” of Imam Muhammad al Bukhari written in 256 AH, a source of hadith knowledge is also preserved in KFNL. The binding of the book is little tear up but it has been fixed by the restoration section of the library.
7. A rare book by Abu Nasr ali-Fath ibn Muḥammad Ibn Khaqan al-Qaysi written in 528 AH is restored and preserved there. This book is written in Arabic with red and black ink. The edges of the book are damaged, but this ancient book has been restored and preserved in the reference section.



“Ahkam Al-Ahkam fi Ahadith”

Source: [tps://www.kfnl.gov.sa/en/mediacenter/Pages/Photo Library.aspx?folderID=d88a742c-3538-424b-8202-147249b6bfc5](https://www.kfnl.gov.sa/en/mediacenter/Pages/Photo%20Library.aspx?folderID=d88a742c-3538-424b-8202-147249b6bfc5)

Note: Reference of pasting this image is to illustrate the nature of the ancient Islamic manuscripts

Conclusion:

The work performance of the library is remarkable in collecting and enhancing the life of ancient Islamic writings. The rare Islamic writings are now access able internationally. The library has worked to offer its services scientifically and to preserve different sources of Islamic heritage on systematic and technical grounds. The scattered literatures are now gathering under one roof that promote the Islamic research and understanding. The services of the library are improving with time and a result of which more people are getting benefits from its sources. After the formation of the library, the research and preservation domains have reached to the high level and its bringing the glimpses of back alive. The ancient origin knowledge of Islamic sources are being part of modern research and defines the course of development chosen by the Islamic culture over the period of time. Hence the KFNL is a notable institution that is working industriously on

preservation of past course of time and also striving to bridge the gap between ancient and modern Islamic knowledge.

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