

LIBRARY REPORT

For the period September to December 2019

Digitization

The Society arranged the digitization of 18 Malay manuscripts following a request from the National Archives of Malaysia, with the project to be funded by the NAM. We also provided them with copies of six manuscripts that were already digitized. We hope to put the newly-digitized manuscripts on the Digital Library in the New Year.

In early November, the Society welcomed a delegation from the NAM to visit and see some of our manuscripts. Video footage from the visit was used in a two-minute news segment on Malaysian national television.

The Society also digitized three manuscripts from the Tod Collection, as part of the fundraising and publicity efforts for the Tod publication project.

The Society arranged for on-site photography of 18 Indian artworks in response to a request from Dr Giles Tillotson, who is curating an exhibition for the DAG gallery in New Delhi. The cost of the digitization will be met by the DAG.

Prof. Almut Hintze (SOAS) proposed that we continue to digitize the E.W. West collection of Zoroastrian manuscript notebooks, which was begun last year. Accordingly, two doctoral students spent a week at the RAS and were able to digitize most of the remaining material.

A selection of the Society's lantern slides has been added to the Historical Photographs of China website, hosted by the University of Bristol. This is a high-profile image database which will mean more exposure for selected images that are already available on the RAS Digital Library.

Digital Library

We added 50 new photographs to the RAS Digital Library, comprising C19th topographical views from India, China, and Hong Kong.

The Digital Library received 2,100 visits from 1,700 users between September and December, almost exactly the same as the period from April to August, with half of the traffic again coming from the same four countries (UK, USA, India, Malaysia). Our digital manuscript collections were the most popular material on the site.

In 2019, the Digital Library received 23,719 page views from 4,381 users, an increase from 2018 (20,000 views from 4,000 users). This year, just over half of the users were from the UK, USA, India, and Malaysia; the proportion of traffic from India increased from 8 to 11%, and that from Malaysia and Indonesia from 6 to 11%. A further 7.5% of traffic came from China and Japan, and 4% from Nepal. The most appealing content seems to have been the

same as last year – our online manuscript collections, the Manning Archive, the Hodgson drawings, and our film of the Nineveh excavation.

We hope to add new collections of recently-digitized Indian and Malay manuscripts (see “Digitization”, above) to the Digital Library in the coming months.

RAS Archives

More than 60 catalogues have been added to Archives Hub. Some of the catalogues are for personal papers, including that of founder member, Sir Alexander Johnston. However, the majority of the catalogues are for the various societies and conferences with which the Royal Asiatic Society has been involved through its history, not only the allied branches, but many other ones with which the Society communicated (a total of 55 catalogues). This means that this section of the Society’s institutional records is now catalogued except for the International Congress of Orientalists (a 2020 project).

The Oral History Project intended to document the history of the RAS has begun to take shape. Currently, Amy Riach is drafting Agreement Forms and Letters of Invitation as well as sourcing the necessary equipment. We hope to begin interviews in 2020.

There have been no further problems with the blog. The number of Twitter followers continues to grow and have now gone well past the 7000 mark.

Nancy Charley

A.C. Graham Library and Archive

The A.C. Graham Library has now been installed in the second floor office, and cataloguing of the library and archive will commence in 2020.

Hippisley Collection

A graduate student from the Shandong University International Sinology Research Center visited to catalogue the Hippisley Collection according to Chinese rare book standards. He said that three of the works are important early Ming-era editions. We should be able to get access to the catalogue information in the New Year, with which we can supplement our existing records.

Users and enquiries

The library received 63 visits from researchers between September and December, up from 55 last year. We replied to 122 remote enquiries during this period, up from 111 last year.

The total number of researcher visits in 2019 was 202 (2018: 233; 2017: 189), while the total number of remote enquiries continues to rise, this year reaching 378 (2018: 350; 2017: 318). The increase in enquiries is likely due to the progress of our cataloguing efforts, which makes the collections better-known.

The collections which received the most interest were RAS Archives, Indian art, Persian manuscripts, the Tod Collection, and the Sir John Turner Collection.

Cataloguing

We added 748 records to the online catalogue between September and December (2018: 565). Most of the new records described oversized books and photographs. In total, during 2019 we added 1685 records to the library catalogue.

A second collection of glass slides was also added to the catalogue after being identified and repackaged. These were donated by the widow of Dr K. Blond, in 1964, depicting scenes from Ashkabad, Constantinople, Samarkand, and Turkestan.

Volunteers

We continue to benefit from the work of interns and volunteers. Over the past few months we were delighted to host two internships for Alphawood scholars, Sonetra Seng and Vuthyneath Khut, from the SOAS Southeast Asia Art Academic Programme. Between them they completed the packaging and cataloguing of the Quaritch Wales photographic collections (over 50 individual collections) and the scanning, packaging and cataloguing of his glass slide collection. They also catalogued the Papers of Professor E.H.S. Simmonds, and finished the cataloguing of a large collection of photographs of Indonesian antiquities.

Ian Scholey continues to list letters reproduced in an early book of Correspondence from the beginnings of the Society. Ian Herbertson continues with the audit of our artwork, and another volunteer continues with the Papers of Dennis Duncanson. Lily Colgan has begun volunteering with us and she is working on the detailed portfolios of Edward William West and his brothers, documenting Indian archaeological remains.

Roger Parsons continued with the cataloguing of our oversized books, and we also received several visits from our NADFAS conservation team to carry out book repairs.

On 10 December, we held a Christmas party to thank all our volunteers for their hard work this year, which was well-attended.

On 17 March, we will hold the next RAS Collections Evening, with presentations from Camberwell conservation students Rebekah Harbord and Arantza Dobbels, and Alphawood intern Sonetra Seng.

Conservation

In October, we held an event to celebrate the conservation of RAS Burmese 86 and its *sazigyo*, open to backers, volunteers, and other supporters of the Society's work, where attendees enjoyed a presentation from the conservator, Jessica Burgess.

Reprographic services

There were 673 digital images taken from RAS collections between September and December, 329 of which were made by library staff. We charged £419 for these services.

Visits and conferences

Between September and December, the Library welcomed a number of group visits to see the collections in our Reading Room. This included two groups from the Courtauld Institute to see Persian manuscripts, the delegation from the National Archives of Malaysia, and a group from SOAS to see Malay and Indonesian manuscripts.

In October, the Librarian gave a lecture on digitization for the Association of Pall Mall Libraries at the Royal United Services Institute. He also agreed to give a lecture for the Athenaeum Club in July 2020 on the Society's collections and the Thomas Manning archive.

Loans to exhibitions

Raffles Java 7 is on loan to the British Museum for the Raffles and Java exhibition, due to finish in mid-January. We have arranged for its collection on 17 January.

The Tod astrological Panchanga was loaned to the Design Museum in October. The current loan is due to finish in February, but may be extended for the next leg of the exhibition.

We provided images of 33 artworks from the Society's collections to Dr Giles Tillotson, who is arranging to display copies of these artworks in an exhibition at the DAG in New Delhi.

Edward Weech
Librarian