Online Resources in Islamic Studies

Users' Perceptions and Needs

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University of Exeter

December 2008
Background

- Islamic Studies designated a Strategic Subject in June 2007
  - “Islam at universities in England” - June 2007
  - “Islamic Studies: the way forward” - April 2008
  - “International Approaches to Islamic Studies in Higher Education” - June 2008
Digilslam Project

- JISC call for bids to undertake project on “User Requirements for Digitised Resources in Islamic Studies” in December 2007
- Exeter’s bid accepted February 2008
- Project runs March to May 2008
- Report submitted June 2008
Review of User Requirements for Digitised Resources in Islamic Studies

JISC

University of Exeter

May 2008
Aims and Objectives

- Landscape existing resources for Islamic Studies
- Identify gaps
- Recommend and prioritise improvements to digital provision
Methodology

- Questionnaire
- Focus Group and Telephone Interviews
- Reading List and High Use Book Project
- UK Theses Project
- Gateways and Portals Project
Questionnaire I : Use of Online Resources

- 145 academics and librarians in 35 institutions
- 53 responses (36.5% response rate)
- Over 90% use online resources
- Most heavily used resources:
  - Online Journals in English (94.7%)
  - Online Reference Works in English (88.9%)
  - Primary Texts in Translation (75.6%)
  - Primary Texts in Islamic Languages (72.2%)
Questionnaire 2: Most Highly Rated Online Resources

- Backsets of Journals in English (78%)
- Online Reference Works in English (73.2%)
- Current Journals in English (70.7%)
- Resources in Islamic Languages (32.5%)
- E-Books in English (23.1%)
Questionnaire 3: Priorities for Digitisation

- Research monographs in English (53.8%)
- Bio-Bibliographies (43.6%)
- Translations of Primary Texts (41.0%)
- Primary Texts in Islamic Languages (38.5%)
- Islamic Manuscript Catalogues (38.5%)
- Periodicals in English and Western languages – current and backsets (c. 30%)
Questionnaire 4: Priorities within Islamic Studies

- Islamic history (50%)
- Qur’anic Studies (47.4%)
- Contemporary Islamic Thought (44.7%)
- Islamic Law (42.1%)
- Hadith Studies (34.2%)
- Islamic Sociology/Anthropology (28.9%)
- Islamic Philosophy (26.3%)
- Islamic/Islamist Politics (23.7%)
- Islamic Theology (21.1%)
Questionnaire 5: Use of Websites

- Islamic organisations in English (94.7%)
- University gateways (66.7%)
- Islamic organisations in Arabic, etc. (63.2%)
- Websites created by individuals (60.6%)
- Some sites rarely used, e.g. INTUTE (never = 80.6%), Islamic Studies Resources (78.4%), MENALIB (64.9%)
- Archiving websites deemed important (81.6%)
Reading List Survey

- 10 institutions – full or partial reading lists
- 29 books appear four or more times
- Only 10 = 34.5% available digitally of which five are only available as part of a package
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**ACL E Subscription Information at**
High Use Book Survey

- Most heavily used books in Islamic Studies from SOAS (23), Leeds (20), Exeter (20)
- Little correlation between institutions – no book in all three lists
- Three titles shared between 63 high use books and 29 most popular titles from reading list survey
Recent Doctoral Research

- 860 PhDs awarded in Islamic Studies, 1997-2006
- Almost half the total awarded in past 100 years
- 97 institutions involved, but 10 universities account for 43.5% of recent theses
- Top subjects among top ten universities (374)
  - Islamic Sociology/Anthropology (50)
  - Islamic Law (44)
  - Islamic History (37)
  - Islamic Politics (28)
  - Islamic Finance (20)
  - Islamic Community in UK (20)
i) PhD Theses in Islamic Studies, 1997-2006 Top 10 universities

Table 16

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<tr>
<th>Institute</th>
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Figure 1
Survey of Existing Portals

- Gateways to Sources on the Middle East
- Gateways to Sources on Islam
- Portals of Digitised Primary Texts
- Digitised Islamic Manuscript Catalogues
- Ongoing Islamic Digitisation Projects
Middle East Virtual Libraries is a well-annotated guide to Arabic and Persian texts available online. Covers the Qur'an, hadith, fiqh and a wide variety of Islamic texts, as well as full-text electronic books in the fields of Arabic literature and Persian poetry.

Contains links to sites specialising in the Qur'an and the Hadith such as Islamicity (searchable multi-lingual text of the Quran), Hadith al-Islam (searchable texts), the USC-MSA Compendium of Muslim Texts (searchable hadith texts in English) and AlTafsir (scanned texts).

Other sites look at different kinds of Islamic materials: Al-Meshkat (huge number and variety of downloadable books as .rar files), Fiqh al-Islam (navigable fully-pointed texts), Shia Books (online text), Maktabat Sahab al-Salafiyah (downloadable .rar files), Nida’ al-Iman (scanned texts), and al-Tebyan (navigable online text of material in Arabic and Persian including Persian literature) as well as sites devoted principally to Arabic and Persian adab and belles-lettres such as al-Waraq (subscription based), and Persopedia (online texts of major poets).

The site is maintained by the Aziz S. Atiya Middle East Library at the University of Utah.

Al-Tafsir makes available full-text Arabic commentaries on the Qur'an from a wide variety of viewpoints (Sunnî, Shi’î, Sufi, Zaydi, Ibadi, Ithna’ashari) as well as works on i‘rab, asbab al-nuzul and ahkam al-Qur’an. Two commentaries are available in both Arabic and English: Tafsir al-Jalalayn and Tanwir al-Miqbas min Tafsir Ibn ‘Abbás, plus al-Wahidi’s Asbab al-Nuzul, as well as translations of the Qur’an in 24 different languages.

Arabic and Persian Texts relating to the Shaykhi Babi and Baha’i Movements contains a considerable amount of fully digitised texts, for example complete works by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Ahmad al-Ahsa’i, and Baha’u’llah.

Markaz Wadud lil-Makhtutat contains facsimiles of over 650 manuscripts in a wide variety of Islamic subjects, as well as 127 printed books. The printed books cover edited texts, manuscript catalogues and Arabic versions of Brockelmann and Sazgin. The texts can be downloaded as zipped .rar files.

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Outcomes

- How online resources are used for teaching and research
- What the gaps are & priorities in filling them
- What the most heavily-used textbooks are
- What the most popular research areas are at PhD level
- Inventory of existing portals and libraries of online primary texts
Recommendation: 1. National Gateway to Islamic Resources

- Existing resources – ebooks and journals, reference works, dictionaries, websites

- New resources
  - Gateway to primary texts
  - Digitised version of all UK Islamic manuscript catalogues
  - Electronic versions of recent Ph.D. theses
  - Open Access Repository to E-Prints
Recommendation: 2. Online Teaching Materials

- Feasibility Study into the creation of contextualised, interactive set of primary texts in Arabic and Persian for teaching
Recommendation: 3. Subsidy of Online Reference Works

- Encyclopaedia of Islam, Encyclopedia of the Qur’an, New Pauly
- Index Islamicus Online
- Oxford Islamic Studies Online
- New resources, e.g. Brockelmann and Sezgin
Recommendation : 4. Archiving of Websites

- Support organisations willing to archive
  - Islamic organisations in English
  - Websites, wikis and blogs of UK Muslim community
  - UK websites with substantial Islamic content
Recommendation 5: Against the Creation of an E-Books Observatory

- Very expensive
- Copyright problems
- Evidence shows that items would be difficult to select
- Responsibility of individual institutions and students
The Future

- Report submitted to JISC – May 2008

- JISC discussing report with HEFCE, June-Oct 2008

- HEFCE “in the process of investigating an appropriate form of intervention to support [Islamic Studies] with advice from the Islamic studies community” (HEFCE, *Strategically Important and Vulnerable Subjects : Final Report of the 2008 Advisory Group, October 2008* (p. 9))