
Islamic Libraries in the Triangle Area

Jessica Cleveland Watson

In the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill area, there are approximately 2,500 Muslims including university students and immigrants and their families. This is a heterogeneous group of individuals from all over the world, united only by their religious belief. Several types of centers which have collections of books for, by, or about Muslims and Islam serve the interests of this group in the area. They include academic, mosque, and private libraries.

In a university collection the subject of Islamic studies cannot be treated in isolation because it encompasses many academic interests. For example, all of the following topics deal with Islam—the religion as well as history, politics, etc.: the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan; the oil crisis in the Middle East; the question of Lebanon; the question of Palestine; and the war between Iran and Iraq. Since this is such a multidisciplinary field, it is difficult to verify the number of books in any academic "Islamic" collection. For example, books which deal with comparative economics would be considered useful for the researcher in Islamic studies if they include Islamic ideas. Despite these constraints there are identifiable Islamic collections at three Triangle universities: Duke University, Shaw University, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

According to Avinash Maheshwary, the librarian in charge of Duke's collection for Islamic and Arabian Development studies, the Duke holdings represent the largest collection of material on Islam, Islamic architecture, and Islamic history in North Carolina. Although the general policy is to place the books in Arabic and those pertaining to Islam and Muslims with the collections in Perkins Library, pertinent materials can also be found at the Divinity School Library and several other branch libraries. The main card catalog in Perkins indicates in which library a specific item will be located. Materials relating to Islamic art and architecture, for example, are housed in the East Campus Library, and, although there is a Music

Library, audio recordings of Sufi chants or Quranic recitation are kept with the religious materials at the Divinity School Library.

Duke has received many of its Islamic materials through the Public Law 480 program.¹ Books judged to be unsuitable for an academic collection have in turn been donated to the local mosque and to the Durham County Public Library. Mr. Maheshwary feels that in this way the greatest number of people benefit from the materials.

Primary users of the Duke collections are those students and faculty involved with interdisciplinary courses at the undergraduate level. Areas of interest include comparative religions, Islam, Arabic, politics, and the Middle East. Most of the materials are in English, translations from Arabic, and other languages. Yet, there are also books in French, German, Spanish, and Russian, as well as others written in Arabic, Urdu, Bengali, and Persian.

Another resource for Islamic information on the Duke campus is the Center for Islamic and Arabian Development Studies which was established in 1977. At the Center's location in a house at 2114 Campus Drive, a friendly staff oversees a selection of instructional materials pertaining to Saudi Arabia and Islam. The materials are available for loan to teachers.

At Shaw University there is an International and Islamic Studies Center which includes a mosque. Since 1966 the University has offered a degree program in International Relations. The multimedia collection supporting this program was begun then and has continued to grow. This multidisciplinary "Islamic" collection is made up of 1400 to 1500 items including books, periodicals, films, slides, and newspapers. These materials are housed in Shaw's main library; however, several copies of the Quran are shelved within the mosque.

The third academic collection in the area is that of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Faculty developed this collection from the turn of the century through the 1920's. Then and now the History Department has had the greatest influence on the collection. During the 1980's,

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university press publications have comprised the major source of additions to the collection. Most of these are English-language titles; however, French as well as German materials on Islam are also collected. In 1978 the BP's (Islam in the Library of Congress classification scheme) were designated as an area for systematic development. At that time the BP collection contained only 206 items. During the next eight years, the BP's grew to a collection of over two thousand. According to Pat Dominquez, Humanities Bibliographer at UNC's Davis Library, the increase in the BP collection reflects the growing influence of Islam in the world and the creation of a graduate program in religion at UNC. Ms. Dominquez encourages public use of these materials and welcomes any proposals for acquisitions.

The UNC collection, from a scholar's viewpoint, is strong in standard nineteenth and twentieth century orientalist's works. Most of these are original editions which are no longer in print. Within the collection are bibliographies, grammars, and dictionaries. The collection is also strong in the areas of history, literature, and grammar written in English and western European languages. A noteworthy item in the collection is a first edition of the *Islamic Encyclopedia* with its beautiful binding.

Those who study Muslims and Islam are fortunate to have available the collections at Duke, Shaw, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. With interlibrary loan and cooperative borrowing policies, these collections are readily accessible to serious students of Islam and related issues.

Although most people are familiar with church or synagogue libraries, many may not realize that there are also mosque libraries. The mosque has historically served as the center for the individual Muslim's life. *Salat*, the five required daily acts of worship, are performed in the mosque which also serves as a center for learning for the community. The first word received by the prophet Mohammed was "read." Based upon that and subsequent verses in the Quran, the Muslim considers it a religious obligation to be knowledgeable in religious matters. Muslims and students of Islam are concerned with the Quran, translations of the Quran (*Tafsir*), the sayings of the prophet Mohammed (*Hadith*), Islamic laws and jurisprudence (*Fiqh*), biography of the prophet (*Sirah*), books on telling others about Islam (*Da'wah*), and the explanation of the Muslims' faith (*Aqi'dah*).

The only library journal article pertaining to mosque libraries in modern times is one by John

Harvey and Shahr Musavi.² After presenting their findings from case studies of several Tehran mosque libraries, the authors compare and contrast the mosque libraries with American church libraries. Several of the characteristics of the mosque libraries, as discovered by Harvey and Musavi, follow. Mosque libraries are created to serve the religious educational needs of the community in which the mosque is located. The majority surveyed did not use widely accepted classification systems nor did they have card catalogs. Segregation of the sexes often occurred in days of use and in seating arrangements. The majority of the staff members were volunteer teenage boys. Collections consisted primarily of books on Islam. A small fee was usually charged for use of materials. Some of the libraries advertised their services. Closed stacks seemed to be the rule for Tehran mosque libraries. The mosque libraries surveyed usually had books in various languages. Library hours included two to three hours Saturdays through Thursdays, but libraries were closed on Fridays. (Fridays in Islam are days of religious observances, as are Saturdays for Judaism and Sundays for Christianity.) As Harvey and Musavi comment, there is a considerable body of literature about church and synagogue libraries; however, there has been no research about mosque libraries.

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More can be learned about mosque libraries by studying the two which are located in the Triangle area. The mosque library in Durham is located in a rented building, presently serving as a mosque, about four blocks from North Carolina Central University. The Muslims of West Raleigh are currently meeting in an apartment. Both groups are in the process of planning or building Islamic centers. Each plan includes a special room which will serve as a library. There are no budgeted funds for the libraries, and both rely on donations and contributions.

The acting librarian of the West Raleigh mosque is not a professional librarian but a graduate student at North Carolina State University. The library's borrowers are approximately one hundred men who frequent the mosque for *Salat*.

For the Muslim, Islam is a way of life, not merely a part of the whole, but permeating every moment of his or her life. Books on Islam and copies of the Quran are essential to the Muslim as a guide to correct living.

At this time women do not have direct access to the collection which consists of approximately fifteen hundred books and several uncataloged magazines. The majority of the books are in Arabic; about fifty are in English, and three are in Swahili. One list serves not only as a card catalog but also as a shelf list. The classification is a simple division of books into five main groups and one "catch-all." Each book is given an Arabic letter (the corresponding letter in English is used in the following discussion). 118 books make up the "Q" section which is Koran interpretation. 136 books are given "H" for *Hadith* which means the sayings of the prophet Mohammed. The "B" section, *Aqi'dah* (on belief), has 288 books. *Fiqh*, Islamic law, is given "F" and contains 194 books. The "K" section, a general "catch-all," contains 533 books which for the most part are books on D a'wah, the spreading of Islam, and Arabic literature. Each book in this library is marked with the letter representing the division to which it belongs and a number which is assigned according to the date acquired. If there is already a copy in the collection, a subnumber is assigned.

The Durham mosque library is smaller than the one in West Raleigh. The collection is in the process of being cataloged according to the Dewey decimal system, but the scheme may be altered to fit the collection and the needs of the patrons. The collection is made up of three hundred books. One third of these are in English; the remainder are in Arabic. The collection is intended primarily for the use of the adult community served by the mosque; there are no children's books in the collection. The majority of the books are an explanation and description of Islam. There are also books of *Hadith*, sayings of the prophet Mohammed, books on Islam and western culture, and books about *Sirah*, the life of the prophet.

Visitors are welcome to see either collection if arrangements are made in advance. Interlibrary loans and the lending of books to individuals out-

side the mosque communities may be possible, but all such decisions are made on an individual basis.

As was mentioned earlier, Muslims consider being knowledgeable about their religion a sacred obligation. Consequently, individuals develop their own private collections of books on Islam in areas in which they are particularly interested, Islam and women or Islamic economics, for example. In private collections, as in mosque libraries, materials of a more general nature are also found: Qurans, translations of the Quran, books on *Tafsir* and *Sirah*, books concerning *Hadith*, and books that explain and describe Islam.

The largest private collection in the Triangle area of which this writer is aware contains more than two thousand books, including some rare editions. At present there is no card catalog or shelflist; the collection is arranged in a style similar to that of the West Raleigh mosque. In Arabic there are Qurans, books on *Tafsir* and *Hadith*, books of *Sirah*, and books about *Fiqh* and *Aqi'dah*. There are also books on the history of Islam, politics, and the Middle East. Two or three hundred books are in English and include titles in the following areas: politics specifically Palestine and the Middle East; the history of the Middle East, Islam and Western civilization, and *Tafsir*. The collection also includes four to five hundred audio tapes in Arabic covering the same subjects as the book collection, one hundred seventy-six slides on the history of Palestine, and five video tapes on the Islamic history of Palestine. There are also some books and video tapes in Arabic for children. Future plans for the collection include enlarging it by adding four to five thousand books from Egypt. It is also anticipated that the collection will become more accessible to the public. At present, the owner of the collection is willing to allow individuals to borrow books and/or view the collection if arrangements are made in advance.

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demic, mosque, and private collections which have been described here provide an introduction to Islamic thought for residents of the Triangle area.

References

1. This program was begun in "1962, when appropriations authorized by an amendment to Public Law 480 (of 1954) enabled the Library of Congress to begin to use foreign currencies from the sale of surplus agricultural commodities for buying and distributing to American libraries current books, periodicals, and related materials." Edwin E. Williams, "Farmington Plan," *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science*, vol. 8 (New York: Marcel Dekker, Inc., 1972), p. 365.

2. John Harvey and Shahr Azar Musavi, "Tehran Mosque Libraries and a Comparison with American Christian Church Libraries," *International Library Review*, vol. 13 (1981), pp. 385-395.

Interested readers may wish to consult the following article: A. Ezzati, "Treasure Chambers of Learning," *Afkar Inquiry: Magazine of Events and Ideas*, vol. 2, no. 7 (July 1985), pp. 26-31.

APPENDIX A

To visit the two mosque library collections and the private one, please contact:

Librarian
Muslim Student Association
North Carolina State University Chapter
North Carolina State University
P.O. Box 5362
Raleigh, N.C., 27650

Masjid Ar-Rahman
Jamaat Ibad Ar-Rahman, Inc.
P.O. Box 1590
Durham, N.C.
Attention: Library
(919) 683-5593

Islamic Library (private)
P.O. Box 5622
Raleigh, N.C., 27650

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