

What's in a Name?

Archives and Special Collections at American Research Institutions in the Middle East: Repositories at the American University of Beirut, the American University in Cairo, the American Center of Research in Jordan, and New York University Abu Dhabi

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ABSTRACT

In today's Middle East, a number of institutions of research and higher education have American origins, and several maintain archives and special collections. This article offers case studies of repositories at four of these institutions: the American University of Beirut (AUB), the American University in Cairo (AUC), the American Center of Research (ACOR) in Jordan, and New York University Abu Dhabi (NYUAD). The article traces the origins of these archives and how those were shaped by the development of each one's parent organization as an American-inspired institution, as well as by the historical, social, and cultural framework of their host countries. The authors also consider the landscape of archives in the nations where these institutions are based: Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates. The evolution of the collecting program of each repository is outlined, with strategies and key acquisitions and collections mentioned. Access and dissemination methods, including digitization initiatives, are also covered. In presenting such activities, the ways in which American traditions and standards of archival practice contrast with or complement those of local archival traditions are examined. A central theme is the way that the archives at AUB, AUC, ACOR, and NYUAD go about documenting not only institutional history but also the heritage of their host countries and the challenges and opportunities inherent in that work.

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KEY WORDS

Archival repositories, Collecting repositories, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Middle East, United Arab Emirates, Universities

What's in a name? When the name is "American" (or the name of a prominent US-based university) in the Middle Eastern context of higher education or research, it signals a mission of advancing knowledge and bridging cultures. Among these Middle East-based institutions are the American University of Beirut (AUB), the American University in Cairo (AUC), the American Center of Research (ACOR) in Jordan, and New York University Abu Dhabi (NYUAD). Besides providing undergraduate and graduate instruction and conducting academic research in a variety of disciplines and supporting archaeologists and other researchers, these organizations maintain archives and special collections libraries. This article examines the origins of these repositories, their connection to American traditions and standards of archival enterprise, and how they are situated within the archival landscape of their host countries.

The goal of this article is to introduce readers outside of the region, in particular those from North America, to some of the characteristics of archival practice in the Middle East and the promises and pitfalls encountered when building archival programs in the Middle East that are patterned after American models. While several articles and books have been published during the past decade about the role of libraries at American-style universities abroad, most of these deal with the logistics of establishing and managing aspects of libraries apart from archives and special collections, or consist of general discussions about cross-cultural communication. When the establishment of archival or manuscript repositories has been covered, the treatment of this topic usually relates to narrower aspects of the collections; no coverage addresses the establishment of archival or manuscript repositories at these campuses in any substantial manner, let alone the nature of archival work in American-affiliated institutions that are not branch campuses.¹ This article attempts to bridge that gap and, in the process, demonstrate how modern archival practice is not homogeneous and how American models of archival practice have interacted with, or stood apart from, local traditions of documentation in the Middle East.

When American-sponsored institutions of higher education first appeared in the Middle East in the nineteenth century, they did not arrive into an educational vacuum. From the era of the Umayyad (661–750) and Abbasid (750–1258) caliphates onward, *madrasas* (Arabic for "schools") had been established primarily to provide religious education, but they also offered instruction in a range of other disciplines, such as medicine, philosophy, geometry, physics, and astronomy, as well as preparing students for roles in state administration.² These *madrasas* nurtured a wide network of scholars who studied the same texts, and some of these schools developed into such notable institutions as Al-Azhar University in Cairo, one of the leading institutions of Islamic education in the region to this day. By the mid-nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire, which held sway over a large expanse of North Africa and the Levant, embarked on an extensive program of administrative and political reform, which opened the door to the importation of

universities based on the European model, with an emphasis on secular, professional, and scientific curricula. Some of the first of these were Ottoman military academies, but those were also followed by colleges established by Christian missionaries, many of them from the United States, including two of the institutions profiled in this article.³ During the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, European and American research institutions were also established in the Middle East, representing another avenue for academic and intellectual inquiry.⁴ Farther east, in the region surrounding the Arabian (or Persian) Gulf, where the majority of the population were members of Bedouin tribes, primary education was centered around instruction in the Qur'an. No institutions of higher learning existed until the 1960s and 1970s, when many institutions were founded as part of the rapid transformation and nation-building that followed the boom in oil production and export.⁵

The American University of Beirut and the American University in Cairo, while independent from one another, have similar origins as colleges founded by American Protestant missionaries that have evolved into liberal arts universities with wide-ranging curricula that have had a profound impact on the countries where they are situated. The American Center of Research in Amman, Jordan, although not a degree-granting institution, has established a substantial archives and library of materials related primarily to archaeology in support of the activities of the center, but whose holdings also encompass other topics related to the natural and cultural history of its host country. New York University Abu Dhabi, one of three global campuses of New York University, is the youngest institution represented and provides a four-year, liberal arts education to a diverse population of students from around the region and beyond. While different in their origins, these repositories share their connection to American institutions, practices, and curricula, while also adapting to and deeply investing in the social and cultural environments in which they operate. These archives not only document the efforts and activities of individual organizations founded with a mission of supporting their host country, they also preserve and disseminate the heritage of these nations' histories and cultures and those of the wider region.

Corresponding to the brief outline of higher education in the Middle East, the timeline of the development of archives in this region, while more complex than can be described in this brief treatment, nevertheless bears some recognizable characteristics. For most of the locations discussed here, except for the UAE, the centuries prior to World War I saw these regions colonized by the Ottoman Empire, which had established a characteristic and unique system of records administration. The first modern state archives was established in Egypt in 1828, as one of the numerous reforms of the Ottoman governor Muhammad Ali Pasha that sought to both emulate European powers and to place Egypt on an equal footing with them. However, it was toward the end of that century that Arab historians, influenced by

the historiography of Leopold von Ranke, took a new view of the role of documents in the writing of history, one that combined the “methodology of the French school, which itself was inspired by the German hermeneutic, along with the Islamic science of the *hadith*, [which is] founded upon the *isnad*, or chain of transmitters, guaranteeing the authenticity of a hadith” (author’s translation).⁶ This notion was exemplified by scholars such as the historian Asad Rustum, who carried out some of the pioneering surveys of historic documents in the region and the publication of selected archival documents. Rustum later assisted Maurice Chéhab, the founding director of the Direction générale des Antiquités (DGA), the central Lebanese archives containing private and public records, in building what was the definitive archives of that country up until its brutal civil war (1975–1990), from which it has yet to fully recover.⁷ Despite earlier efforts, however, throughout the middle decades of the twentieth century, the notion of “archives” in the countries of this region was often closely tied to that of the state, and, according to Christine Jungen and Jihane Sfeir in their survey of modern Arab archives, private archives and the variety of records they could hold were disregarded by many scholars until the rise of social history in the 1970s led to the emergence of archival initiatives outside of centralized state-sponsored repositories.⁸

The four institutions presented in this article represent different aspects of the American involvement in archives and higher education in this region. While initially conceived as institutional archives, most of the repositories profiled here developed collecting programs that encompass a range of materials not typically found in the state archives of their respective countries, and that were more akin to the types of private archival initiatives that began to emerge in the region in the latter part of the twentieth century. The following descriptions seek to demonstrate how the archives and special collections of each of these institutions, while shaped by particular circumstances and settings, have drawn upon the philosophy, practices, and experience of the American archival tradition.

The American University of Beirut, Lebanon

The American University of Beirut was founded by American missionaries in 1866 as the Syrian Protestant College (SPC), which then featured a student body of sixteen, with seven faculty members. In 1920, the SPC changed its name to the American University of Beirut, reflecting a new identity and mission as a secular liberal arts university. With its new curriculum came a focus on service to the community and the incorporation of professional schools into its plans and vision. Today, AUB offers more than 120 programs leading to bachelor’s, master’s, doctoral, and medical degrees, and it numbers more than 8,000 students and about a thousand faculty members.

As an institution that is so long-lived, there is also a substantial institutional history to document, and, as the university's mission included the advancement of knowledge through scholarly inquiry, its administration kept in mind the obligation to preserve its own cultural and historical resources for research. For that reason, most of AUB's historical records have been kept intact throughout its existence. Although portions of the archival collections of the first two presidents, Daniel Bliss and Howard Bliss, were deposited at their alma mater, Amherst College in the United States, most of the archives of the other presidents remained in Beirut. This body of records makes it easy to retrace the history of the university through archival materials such as annual reports, meeting minutes of the faculty and Board of Trustees, and the records of presidents, such as those of Bayard Dodge (1923–1948) and Stephen Penrose (1948–1954), as well as related holdings like the administrative records of the astronomical Lee Observatory (dating from 1873 to 1979).

As AUB approached its centennial in 1966, efforts were made to collect as many university archival materials as possible. These were stored in a secure room at the library, and, although no archivist was assigned at the time to take care of the collection, researchers could consult some of these materials by scheduled appointment. In 1991, a terrorist car-bomb explosion demolished College Hall, AUB's landmark administration building, seriously damaging the adjacent library. The ensuing reconstruction of those buildings provided opportunities for a badly needed expansion of the library's space, and a full-fledged archival facility was established, with space allocated in the basement of the rebuilt College Hall. The newly formed Archives and Special Collections Department became the official repository for university records as well as the home of expanding special collections. This department began with a team of one librarian and two paraprofessional staff, growing by 2017 to a team of fourteen staff including two professional librarians. The Lebanese economic crises of the past several years, however, have resulted in reductions in staff numbers; the department currently has one librarian and six paraprofessional staff.

Today, the AUB Archives comprises almost 1,250 linear feet of materials, arranged into seven divisions. General information about the university, such as its mission, logo, and bylaws, is contained within "Generalities." The division for the "Administration" contains both academic and nonacademic archives, and the "Faculties" division reflects the history of different academic faculties and programs. "Student life" materials cover students' campus activities like clubs, societies, and elections for student government, while another division for "AUB alumni" comprises organizations like alumni chapters and branches as well as information about the role of graduates in international councils. Another segment, "Related Bodies," reflects the activities of organizations supporting the university's fund-raising initiatives ranging from the Women's Auxiliary to the Society of the Friends of the Museum and other similar organizations. These seven sections are further subdivided into divisions down to the file level, and these materials are open to researchers with

only a few exceptions; for example, minutes of meetings of the Board of Trustees and minutes of meetings of the Board of Deans are each restricted for twenty-five years from the date of creation.

In addition to preserving the official records of AUB and other materials documenting the history of the institution, the AUB Library and its Archives and Special Collections Department have embraced a growing role as repository for collections related to the sociocultural, economic, and political history of Lebanon and the Middle East. Seeking to fill a niche that other organizations in Lebanon were increasingly unable to fill (seen, for example, in the diminishing roles of Lebanon's National Archives and Library in the aftermath of civil war and economic downturn⁹), AUB librarians began to actively acquire collections, either through purchase or by approaching prominent figures or their descendants to encourage them to deposit these collections at the AUB Library, although most of these donors do not have an explicit AUB connection.

Manuscripts represented the library's earliest special collections acquisitions (predating the establishment of the Archives and Special Collections Department), the first being a manuscript donated on the occasion of the 1871 groundbreaking ceremony for College Hall. A Syriac-language Bible called the Beirut Codex, this manuscript dates from the ninth century CE, and is by far the oldest item in the library's collection. By the end of nineteenth century, two other manuscript collections were obtained to support classroom teaching and scholarly research at the Syrian Protestant College: the Naufal Naufal collection of manuscripts (1893) and more than two hundred manuscripts acquired from the Syria Mission (1897); these were augmented by the later purchases of the Isa' Iskandar al Ma'luf manuscript collection and library. Presently, the manuscript collection numbers around 1,800, mainly in Arabic, and covering subjects such as medicine, astronomy, theology, Islamic law, and botany. Of these manuscripts, nearly 1,400 have been micro-filmed, and a continuing digitization effort has resulted in several hundred digitized manuscripts.

Today, the geographic scope of AUB's Special Collections covers the Middle East and North Africa, with much of the material originating from Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, and Iraq. Holdings encompass a variety of formats and media, including more than two thousand maps, nine thousand art and political posters, over two thousand postcards, as well as the largest collection of Arab comics in the country. The department also holds rare books dating from the sixteenth century, including Arabic printed works from the earliest printing establishments in the Middle East, such as Bulaq or El-Amiriya Press in Egypt, Al Jawā'ib Press in Istanbul, and al-Maṭba'ah al-Kāthūlikīyah lil Ābā'al-Mursalīn al-Yasū'iyīn and Dār Ṣādir in Lebanon. Early periodicals from Egypt, Syria, and Palestine are also available, among them early women-oriented newspapers. The collection includes an extensive photo collection with over 125,000 images of Lebanon and the wider

region, as well as images documenting AUB's history. These originated with the E. W. Blatchford Collection, donated in 1924 by his daughter (the wife of AUB's second president), which contains images produced by many famous photography studios from around the Middle East, such as Bonfils, J. P. Sebah, Abdullah Frères, Dumas, and the Sarrafian Brothers.

The department maintains personal archival collections of prominent individuals from Lebanon and throughout the Middle East, with acquisitions pursued by networking with these individuals or their heirs. Recently donated archival collections are diverse in subjects and media types, reflecting areas like art (for example, collections of works by Zaki Nassif, Walid Gholmiyeh, Jamil Hammoudi, Hagop Kazazian, Nasri Khattar, and Mohammad Yusuf Najm), economics (the Tapline collection, Ishaq Tannous), education (collections donated by the families of Abdul Monim Talhouk and Zāhiyah Qaddūrah), social service (collections of Anissa Najjar, Emilie Fares Ibrahim, and Evelyne Bustrus), and urban planning (exemplified by the documentation of Beirut's built heritage in the Farid Trad collection). Politics is an important archival collecting area, with the archives of Lebanese politicians (like Saeb Salam, Abdallah El Yafi, Shafik Al-Wazzan, Anṭūn Sa'adah, Ibrahim Yamout, and Amīr Shakīb Arslān), along with the papers of Iraqi diplomat and AUB alumnus Amin al Mumayyiz. Researchers can also pursue study using archival holdings for genealogy and the Lebanese diaspora.

These collections are open to national and international researchers who benefit from research assistance tools such as a finding aids webpage and research guides. Beyond supporting researchers using AUB and Middle East heritage materials, the department offers orientation tours for undergraduates, facilitates visits to graduate student classes, and has initiated an internship program to train students how to handle, process, and do research using primary source materials. Another means of outreach for the AUB Archives is participating in occasions like International Archives Day each June, when archival institutions showcase their holdings to the public.

While early attempts at digitization began in 1997, in the 2010s, AUB's micro-filming unit was transformed into a digitization unit, to increase access to AUB collections and make them available to wider local and international audiences. Aimed at meeting the needs of a wide spectrum of users, digitized holdings have been generated from collections diverse in subject and media type. Digital collections celebrating Lebanese and regional heritage range in format from photographs, posters, and postcards, to early Arab periodicals. Another key heritage resource is the Palestine Oral History Archives Project, which makes available more than a thousand hours of digital testimonies of first-generation Palestinians in Lebanon. AUB's own rich history is also accessible through digital collections of theses and dissertations, yearbooks, student magazines, and other university publications. And, to ensure the preservation of collections before they are digitized or made available

for use, a Conservation Lab was established in 2015. Now staffed by a trained team of four, it engages in environmental monitoring, different types of materials repair, and training.

AUB's Archives and Special Collections Department also mounts physical exhibitions, usually developing a corresponding virtual exhibit, with fifteen exhibits that can be viewed online. Occasions for exhibitions include the receipt of a notable new collection like the Anisa Najjar collection or commemorating major milestones in AUB and Lebanese history like the centennial of the First World War. The department also has participated in several local and international exhibits outside the university by supplying digital copies of selected materials to other institutions in Lebanon and abroad, such as Beirut's Sursock Museum and the Museum of Civilizations of Europe and the Mediterranean (Mucem) in Marseille, France.

Other outreach efforts have included participation in documentary films produced by Arab and European filmmakers, such as *Finding Home: Polish Refugees in Lebanon* (2022) and Al-Jazeera's *Soft Power: The US and the Middle East* (2016). Interviews with television channels in Lebanon, Egypt, Turkey, and the United States (Alhurra Channel) have been further means to reach local and global audiences. Beyond media presence, the department has used international conferences, such as those of the Islamic Manuscript Association, the Middle East Librarians Association, and others, to introduce its holdings to scholars.

In the coming decade, the Archives and Special Collections Department seeks to build on its more than thirty years of work and earlier efforts at AUB's Libraries. Its University Archives Program aims to reinvigorate acquisition of analog and digital documents and to implement a state-of-the-art records management system. Researcher access can be enhanced through the application of Encoded Archival Description (EAD) to finding aids and increasing AUB's online presence by making more digitized collections available to the public; producing short documentary films about notable collections is another planned tactic. Increasing collaboration with regional and international institutions and archives on common projects represents another goal already begun with the recent cooperation agreement with the British Library to make AUB Libraries its hub in the Middle East. Creative programs and innovative user services will advance AUB's aim to support research and instruction based on its university history and Lebanese and regional heritage collections.

The American University in Cairo, Egypt

In September 1947, the American University in Cairo's recently retired president, Charles R. Watson, wrote a memo to his successor, John Badeau, that would have seemed unlikely to most observers of the then-twenty-eight-year-old institution. In it, Watson identified documents in his files important for revealing the development of the university. He also expressed his "hope that someday we might

have a full time historically minded Librarian who would add to his duties the conservation of such material and other that he would collect” to provide “worthy, educative, and important physical exhibitions of the past.”¹⁰

To anyone associated with AUC over its first quarter-century, its continued existence to that point would have seemed surprising, much less it being in the position to develop the kind of archives Watson was describing. The small school had been the brainchild of Watson, who grew up in Egypt, the son of American Protestant Christian missionaries. His own mission was to bring English-language, American-style higher education to Egypt, which hosted only two universities when AUC was founded in 1919, a turbulent year that saw the revolution led by Egyptian nationalist leader Saad Zaghloul against British colonial rule. In the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, AUC’s enrollment rarely topped three hundred students, as it offered degrees not recognized by the Egyptian government and, to a large extent, attracted members of minority ethnic and religious groups in Egypt.¹¹ Although AUC introduced educational innovations to Egypt in its early years, including hands-on scientific laboratory work, student athletics, and the enrollment of a female student in 1928, it constantly faced financial difficulties. In addition, its missionary roots and general “outsider” image caused antagonism in some quarters of Egyptian society, and international events like the Second World War posed challenges; for example, the advancing German Army led the faculty to evacuate to Sudan in 1942.

Watson was prescient in taking the long view, as AUC celebrated its centennial in 2019, surviving two revolutions (1952 and 2011) and Egypt’s wars in 1956, 1967, and 1973. He would also probably not recognize today’s university, which enrolls over seven thousand students and since 2008 has been based at a campus in suburban New Cairo, twenty miles from its original home at downtown Tahrir Square. Even with these changes, AUC continues to occupy a niche in Egypt as an institution grounded in the American-style liberal arts model, combined with a mission of contributing to its host country.

The library on the American University’s New Cairo campus includes the Rare Books and Special Collections Library (RBSCL) that represents in some ways the culmination of Watson’s vision in the 1947 memo. Today, the domain of the “historically minded Librarian” has come of age: RBSCL holds about fifty thousand rare books (like the multivolume *Description de l’Egypte* produced following the 1798–1801 expedition of Napoleon’s army) as well as contemporary monographs and journals about specialty areas such as Egyptology and Islamic art and architecture. Four curators on staff manage collection areas for photographs, architectural drawings, historical magazines and maps, and Egyptology holdings; research services staff assist users on-site. The university archivist works alongside Archives staff (who deal with historical AUC records as well as textual document portions of personal papers collections) and a records management team, and a Conservation Laboratory and the library’s Digitization Center provide essential support.

Rather than draw a line between the Watson memorandum and present-day archives and special collections at AUC, two lines must be traced, strands for institutional history and for heritage resources, lines that intersect along the way. Doing so illustrates how an institution with foreign roots came to play a significant role documenting national and regional history and preserving Egypt's cultural resources. The Egyptian heritage strand also begins at a foreign point of origin, the British scholar K. A. C. Creswell, who, from his arrival in Egypt during the First World War and into the 1960s, produced and collected almost ten thousand photographs of Islamic religious buildings and other monuments in the country and the wider region. His writings on Islamic art and architecture gained him renown as a seminal scholar in that field, and he built an extensive private library of rare books and related holdings. Creswell made arrangements to sell his library to the American University in Cairo in the 1950s, a transaction accelerated by the 1956 Suez War, when the Egyptian government was expelling many British residents. AUC engaged Creswell as a faculty member for Islamic art studies (thereby allowing him to remain in Egypt) and to supervise his collections, which were moved to the campus.¹² There, the library became a core resource for a new program in Arab studies, a curriculum development occurring in a climate of pan-Arab sentiment in the era of President Gamal Abdel Nasser, at a time when the university sought to reestablish its footing in Egypt amid significant political and social change. Through the early 1990s, Creswell's library and documentary collections were managed by AUC's Center for Arabic Studies (CAS) Library, a specialized unit separate from the university library. The Main Library itself housed some donated rare books and photographs under the management of a "Special Services (later Collections) Department" set up in the 1960s.

AUC's other archival strand starts with the arrival of a newly hired history professor at the university in 1972. Some efforts to document institutional history had been made over the years, with reminiscences written by early faculty members, some presidential documents moved to the library, and oral histories with alumni and administrators recorded using new cassette tape technology by AUC's alumni director in the late 1960s.¹³ But concerted action toward the creation of a university archives only took shape when new faculty member Lawrence Murphy sought to write a book on the history of AUC (the kind of project from which other university archives in the United States originated).¹⁴ Lacking a substantial source of original documents, he embarked on a survey effort that located records around campus, including some stored on the rooftop of a university building.¹⁵ Having assembled those materials in the library building by 1973, Murphy proposed to AUC's administration to develop an official university archives with an ongoing collecting program, formal policies, and staff. The library took steps in this direction, and, from 1975 through the early 1990s, the archives of AUC were the responsibility of the Main Library's Special Services Department. Its staff stored the archives in file

cabinets arranged according to a subject-based call number system, stamping every page along the way, but also taking steps to promote AUC history, such as producing a handwritten, mimeographed “Know Your University” booklet.

Only in 2001 did the University Archives emerge as a defined unit in the library, and, to the present day, AUC is the only university in Egypt with such a department; other universities have records units but not with a focus on research and heritage typical of a university archives at American higher educational institutions. This may be a function of the relative newness of most Egyptian universities’ founding (apart from the more-than-one-thousand-year-old Al-Azhar University); most of the twenty universities established before the year 2000 were formed after the 1950s, and, since the turn of the millennium, almost forty have launched.¹⁶ At AUC, functions and activities commonplace at an American university, such as promotional efforts and alumni relations, could be supported by maintaining archives, whereas these may not have been prioritized at Egyptian universities, especially public ones. That efforts to document AUC’s history finally led to a dedicated university archives is a logical outgrowth of the belief (by founding president Watson and others) that the university had a special mission in Egypt that should be conveyed to later generations.

The two archival strands at AUC came together in 1992 with the unification of the Main Library’s Special Collections Department holdings (including university archives) with the Center for Arabic Studies Library’s Creswell collections. Much of the energy behind the move came from AUC president Richard Pedersen, who, in the decade after he came to the job in 1977, had focused on increasing AUC’s emphasis on professional programs like business and engineering, but nonetheless had a deep appreciation for Egypt’s arts, antiquities, and heritage; he and members of AUC’s Board of Trustees made multiple donations of historical materials such as photographs to the library in the 1980s. When the opportunity arose to acquire a century-old villa near AUC’s campus that appeared to be tailor-made as a home for a single, dedicated special collections library for the university, it was acquired for that purpose. With restorations on the villa completed in 1992, rare books, archives, photograph collections, and other holdings were moved from the Main Library and the building that housed the CAS/Creswell Library.

This model, of a university special collections library documenting national heritage and institutional history, was then and is now mostly the exception in Egypt. The oldest universities in Egypt do house special collections, often in museum-like settings: Al-Azhar maintains centuries-old handwritten Arabic manuscripts and Qur’ans, and Cairo University’s special collections cover a variety of formats ranging from rare books to papyri to maps, and also preserves the donated collection of a Swedish botanist containing archival materials along with books and botanical specimens. But, in general, university libraries do not play a major role nationally in maintaining archives and personal papers.

In Egypt, government repositories are by far the largest. The Egyptian National Archives holds Egyptian government records and other heritage archives. Government ministries (chiefly finance, foreign affairs, interior, and defense) keep most of their own archives,¹⁷ however, and another ministry holds important Islamic records, those related to charitable property endowments dating back centuries. A number of historians have noted the challenges posed by limitations on access to holdings in state repositories.¹⁸ More accessible are holdings of the two-decades-old Bibliotheca Alexandrina, such as handwritten Arabic manuscripts and primary sources documenting the history of Egypt's second city. The Egyptian Museum of antiquities at Tahrir Square, the Museum of Modern Art, and other government-run museums like these contain some archival materials (largely photographic collections), but they are not geared toward access by external researchers.¹⁹

Besides the government entities, a variety of private institutions in Egypt maintain archival collections. The American Research Center in Egypt and the German Archaeological Institute hold records and photographs related to their antiquities' excavation and architectural preservation projects; the large library of the French Institute of Oriental Archaeology has recently been supplemented by personal papers. Among Christian institutions, the monasteries and papal and episcopal offices of the Coptic Orthodox Church are known for centuries-old manuscripts and other ecclesiastical records. The presence of churches of European origin in Egypt is reflected in archives of the Anglican Diocese and the Catholic Dominican order among others, and the successor denomination of American Presbyterian missionaries also has a documentation center at its seminary.²⁰ Institutions connected with Egypt's long-standing ethnic communities also house archives and related published materials, including the headquarters of the Greek Community of Alexandria and Cairo's Italian Cultural Institute (a division of Italy's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation).

Egypt is home to other private archival and documentation enterprises as well. Some archives remain well kept in individual private hands, an example being the family archive of Mahmoud Sabit, a historian and descendant of Egyptian royalty who has tended to and supported use of an important trove of documents and photographs in his family's downtown home.²¹ For a quarter-century, the Women and Memory Forum has pursued an extensive program of oral histories reflecting the lives of women in Egypt and maintains a documentation center with rare journals, gray literature, and the personal papers of a mid-twentieth-century feminist activist.²² Recently founded by a history doctoral candidate, Shubra Archive (known as SARD) is named after the large middle- and working-class neighborhoods of Cairo that it works to document by collecting what it calls "popular archives" such as ephemera and photographs. Important to mention are the grassroots initiatives that emerged to digitally document the Egyptian Revolution of 2011, such as Mosireen,

which built a video archive of the uprisings, or the 18 Days in Egypt project that collected images and testimonies.²³

Three decades ago, AUC's position in Egypt's archival landscape underwent a significant change. The 1992 formation of the Rare Books and Special Collections Library served as something of a launching point for building archival collections documenting Egypt. A decade earlier, AUC's Main Library had been gifted the papers of Egyptian women's rights pioneer Huda Shaarawi, but insufficient special collections staff meant it was left unprocessed and inaccessible. The key event occurred shortly after the RBSC's establishment, when the heirs of Egypt's leading twentieth-century architect, Hassan Fathy, donated his entire personal archive consisting of architectural plans and drawings, photographs, writings, correspondence, and other documents, a library, and artifacts. Reflecting his study and application of traditional Egyptian and regional building techniques and styles, Fathy's collection complemented the library's existing strength in architecture based on the Creswell collection. The Fathy acquisition drew substantial attention and highlighted an elevated role for the RBSC in documenting Egypt's heritage via archival collections.²⁴

Significantly, in the following two decades, it attracted donations of the archives of other leading Egyptian architects, some with styles similar to Fathy and others pursuing modernism. A former curator of the collection likened this kind of collection development to the phenomena in Islamic cemeteries whereby the tomb of a holy person is eventually surrounded by those of devotees who seek to be buried close by to gain blessings.²⁵ This area of growth eventually led the RBSC to set up a unit dedicated to architectural archives, something unique in Egypt, used by local and international scholars and as a teaching tool for AUC's architecture program. Similarly, in recent years, RBSC has gone from strength to strength by becoming a leader in collecting the personal papers of Egyptian Egyptologists, building on its base rare book holdings in ancient archaeology and capitalizing on AUC's academic program and active faculty in the discipline.

Other archival acquisitions were closely connected with graduates and past attendees of AUC. This could be linked to identity; into the 1970s, ethnic and religious minorities were heavily represented in the student body, including Leon Boyadjian from Cairo's Armenian community. Eventually adopting the professional pseudonym Van-Leo, from the 1940s through the 1960s, he was considered the leading studio photographer in Egypt, producing portraits of famous actors, singers, dancers, film directors, and other celebrities. As much as for his subjects, he was admired for his cutting-edge creative compositional, lighting, and printing techniques, evident in the many self-portraits he produced in various guises. In 1998, Van-Leo looked to his alma mater when he donated the corpus of his life's work—over 25,000 prints and negatives and his personal papers and studio records—to RBSC. Beyond his personal history with the university, another consideration was finding a repository in Egypt for his collection with optimal access and use

possibilities. As a private institution, AUC offered this, given that Van-Leo's collection contained materials that might provoke controversy if housed elsewhere, such as glamor-oriented photography and personal documents in which he commented on the challenges of living in Egypt as part of a minority group.

Alumni ties continued to drive acquisitions for AUC's RBSCl. Another example are the personal papers of Aziza Hussein (1919–2015) of AUC's class of 1942, which document her involvement with national and international women's and family planning organizations and conferences (like Cairo's 1994 International Conference on Population and Development). It was a natural fit with the collection of feminist leader Huda Shaarawi at RBSCl, and the library's holdings on women's issues subsequently grew in the 2000s when two AUC alumna donated the papers of their mother Doria Shafik, who was Shaarawi's successor at the helm of Egypt's women's rights movement. Those alumna donors also happened to be members of AUC's faculty, and, indeed, faculty at the university have increasingly been key in helping RBSCl make acquisitions; in recent years, visual arts faculty have been instrumental in facilitating the growth of the library's collections of artists' archives, and Egyptology professors have done the same for archives related to the study of the country's ancient pharaonic past.

Beyond the alumni source, these acquisitions (such as the Van-Leo collection) also highlight RBSCl's role as host to archival materials lacking many other repository options in Egypt; they represent the area of civil society and nongovernmental organization documentation to which AUC as a private venue offers a natural home. Another collection demonstrating this niche is the papers of a former faculty involved in NGO work, Saad Eddin Ibrahim, whose Ibn Khaldun Center was a leader in promoting fair elections. His work with the center ran afoul of the regime of President Hosni Mubarak, leading to Ibrahim's arrest, trial, and imprisonment; it is difficult to imagine another institution that could serve as a host for this documentation and offer research access.

With ongoing collecting of gray literature and publications from active and defunct nongovernmental institutions (including via web archiving), RBSCl continues to offer an alternative for materials that would have an uncomfortable place elsewhere. Similarly, documentation of Egypt's expatriate and foreign communities, and that related to minority religious groups, also finds a home at RBSCl. The same applies to the collection built through the University on the Square: Documenting Egypt's 21st Century Revolution project, an initiative to collect signs, photographs, and artifacts from the 2011 protests against President Hosni Mubarak's regime. The core project activity, oral histories with participants in the demonstrations, relied on participation of AUC staff, faculty, students, and the contacts they provided to conduct over four hundred interviews.²⁶ AUC's status as a private educational institution allows it to serve as a stable refuge for such content.

The University on the Square project oral histories exemplify how the RBSCL in the last two decades has looked to this documentation method to amplify existing archives and to address gaps in the archival record in Egypt. This applies to institutional as well as to national history; building on the two dozen oral histories done with university personnel in the 1960s and 1970s, almost three hundred have been conducted since 2005 to reflect the history of AUC.²⁷ Beyond the revolution-related interviews, dozens of oral histories have been conducted with a variety of contributors to Egyptian life, from prominent artists and architects, to members of minority ethnic groups like Armenian Egyptians, to residents of Egyptian villages. Besides recording interviews, the library has also compiled documentation of Egyptian society by archiving collections of oral histories done by independent scholars (such interviews of members of Egypt's Greek community in the 1990s) and from AUC units, including its Economic and Business History Research Center. The latter interviews with Egyptian government ministers, business leaders, and scholars demonstrate the value of oral history for covering areas for which available archival documentation is sparse.

Archivists and librarians at the Rare Books and Special Collections Library have for many years sought to offer extensive access to its regional and Egyptian heritage and institutional history collections in a variety of ways. Collections are available to researchers from around the world via visits to the library or remote reference assistance over email or other digital platforms (a lifeline during pandemic restrictions on library visitors in 2020–2021); limitations on access for materials like personnel records and AUC Board of Trustees minutes mirror policies at university archives at US institutions. In recent years, efforts to expand access, in particular for Arabic-speaking local and regional users, has included the application of multilingual description to archival holdings. Folder labeling has for many years been provided in Arabic with transliteration and translations as appropriate, but a more recent focus has been the application of Arabic-language metadata to digital collections. This has proceeded incrementally for existing digital collections such as that of architect Hassan Fathy and intensively in the last two years via the project to provide online access to four decades of Arabic-language sound recordings from the Egypt branch of the Voice of America radio network.

For almost twenty years, RBSCL has striven to use digital technologies to broaden awareness of and access to its collections (and by extension Egypt's cultural heritage) through the efforts of its Digitization Center, curators, and archivists. Photographs dating back to the nineteenth century, architectural plans, maps, historical magazines, and audio recordings (like the sound archive of the Egypt branch of Voice of America) number among the kinds of Egyptian and regional heritage materials available through the Rare Books and Special Collections Digital Library; university materials from student newspapers to promotional films (some from as early as the 1920s) have also been digitized to showcase AUC's history.

Besides digitizing such holdings, the library has also increasingly been accepting digital donations, such as collections of born-digital images from photographers. RBSCL has also in recent years been collaborating with owners of personal and family papers to produce digital surrogates for items for which they wish to retain custody that can be used for research via the digital library or otherwise. This tactic had also been employed elsewhere in Egypt, including by CULTNAT, Egypt's governmental Center for Documentation of Cultural and Natural Heritage within the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, which has built noncustodial digital collections in this manner.²⁸

Throughout the three-decade lifetime of the RBSCL, the AUC campus community as well as the general public in Egypt have been invited to view exhibitions featuring photographs, archival documents, and other collection items at the library and at other galleries on AUC's campuses. Recent exhibitions have shown archival items related to the evolution of communications technology in Egypt, celebrated the life and work of photographer Van-Leo, used historical twentieth-century magazines to reveal media depictions of Queen Fawzia, commemorated AUC's history during its centennial, and drawn on Egyptologists' personal papers to mark the anniversary of the 1922 discovery of the tomb of pharaoh Tutankhamun. Through reproductions and loaned originals, RBSCL materials are also showcased at exhibitions throughout the world. In these ways, the library has brought international attention to Egypt's heritage.

Archives at the American University in Cairo have come a long way since founding president Charles Watson articulated his vision in 1947. The University Archives played a central role in AUC's centennial celebrations in 2019 and 2020, and, in 2022, RBSCL received the UNESCO/Jikji Memory of the World Prize sponsored by the United Nations agency and the Republic of Korea "for preserving and enabling access to Egyptian documentary heritage of global significance."²⁹ The model at AUC, of a university special collections library documenting national heritage, is largely the exception in Egypt. Its niche as a private institution, and one generally associated with openness and professional standards, has served the Rare Books and Special Collections Library well in building collections, as have the ties between AUC alumni and the school. Given the relatively small size of the university, the RBSCL plays a larger role in documenting Egypt and the region than would be expected, especially considering where its archival thread began.

The American Center of Research, Amman, Jordan

Founded in 1968, the American Center of Research (ACOR) is an international, nonprofit academic institution that advances understanding of Jordan and the region, past and present. While ACOR was founded largely as an archaeological research center (originally known as the American Center for Oriental Research),

topics supported through the library, archives, and researcher fellowships and scholarships have expanded to include a wide variety of social, natural, and physical sciences as well as the humanities and arts.

In addition to academic resources available in its library and archives, ACOR contributes to knowledge-sharing both in Jordan and internationally through lectures, publications, training programs, archaeological research, and cultural heritage programs. Over its fifty-five years of existence, ACOR has served as a conduit for cultural exchange among the public, students, and researchers. The creation of the ACOR Photo Archive (now Digital Archive) has allowed resources related to Jordan and the region to be accessed and increasingly used by people around the world, furthering ACOR's mission to advance knowledge of Jordan and the interconnected region, past and present.

Since its founding, ACOR has worked diligently to collect library and archival materials documenting both Jordan and the wider region. Historically, archaeological research has been the primary focus of the center; an incomplete list of projects supported by ACOR includes Amman Citadel, Bayt Ras, Darat al-Funun, Madaba Archaeological Park, Petra Church, Petra North Ridge, Petra's Temple of the Winged Lions, and 'Ain Ghazal.³⁰ Today, the archives holds over 100,000 photographic images, mostly as 35mm slides, but also including photographic prints, negatives, and born-digital photographs, that are valuable tools for researchers and students interested in archaeology, anthropology, ethnography, architecture, and a host of other subjects relating to Jordan and the region. In addition to visual materials, collections include scholarly works and publications, archaeological dig notebooks, and assorted other materials related to archaeological projects. Donors of collections have included ACOR directors and staff, academics, and archaeologists, as well as journalists and photographers. While the earliest photos date back to World War II, the bulk of the images are from the 1970s to 1990s, allowing users to compare sites over two or three decades. The rare books section of the library contains 250 books from between 1787 and 1950, many of which provide earlier documentation of the same sites in the archives.

In addition to personal collections, the archives contains the institutional archives of ACOR, with collections documenting ACOR-funded archaeological projects such as the American Expedition to Petra's Temple of the Winged Lions excavations and Amman Citadel projects, recordings of lectures hosted by ACOR on a variety of formats since the early 1980s, as well as 1,500 maps of Jordan and surrounding countries. In 2021, a web archiving program was begun to document Jordanian culture and daily life, tourism as well as archaeological projects and other websites that are digital extensions of physical records were captured. Using a free open-source software, namely the Webrecorder Browsertrix-Crawler,³¹ around a hundred websites have been preserved. Sites related to COVID and Jordan,

especially regarding tourism and government policies, seemed particularly relevant to capture while accessible.

Finding aids and inventories exist for almost all collections, dating back to 2012, the effort of several project archivists. Later, as part of a 2016–2020 US Department of Education Title VI grant, archivists and library staff created and updated finding aids for photographic collections related to the grant. However, the use of the large photographic collection and archival documents was quite limited; 35mm slides are not the easiest format to use. To help rectify this, the American Center has been awarded two US Department of Education Title VI grants (2016–2020, 2020–2024) to digitize, describe, and provide access to photographs and audiovisual materials.

Beginning in 2016, the first Title VI grant was used to digitize, describe, and provide access to 30,000 digitized images of slides and photographic prints dating back to World War II. Images are hosted on the ACOR Photo Archive, an online platform created as part of the grant. The collections selected for digitization were largely—but not entirely—archaeologically focused. Notable archaeological collections selected include the Paul and Nancy Lapp collection, documenting their work in Jordan in the 1960s and 1970s.³² Highlights include their aforementioned excavation of the Byzantine site Iraq al-Amir; the process of unearthing the ruins is well documented as are the various workers on the project. The collection of former ACOR director Bert De Vries highlights his excavation of Umm el-Jimal in Jordan as well as ACOR's institutional history during his tenure as director.³³ In addition to materials from archaeologists, 35mm slides and photographic negatives from journalist Rami Khouri documenting daily life in the Middle East (as well as archaeological sites) were digitized, and images from the ACOR Institutional Collection, which showcase the history of the organization, both in terms of archaeological projects and events and facilities. Besides digitization, finding aids were created for collections for the first time that provide more context about the collections and their creators.

Following the success of the 2016 grant, in 2020, ACOR embarked on another Title VI grant to digitize 20,000 more 35mm slides.³⁴ The slides to be digitized, described, and made accessible as part of the 2020 grant are from the Barbara Porter Collection and document archaeological sites, architecture, and life scenes from around the region from the 1970s to the early 2000s, photographic prints and slides from the Brian Byrd Collection related to his archaeological excavations in Jordan (most notably at 'Ain Ghazal), and slides from the Petra Church Project. Excavated between 1992 and 1998 by ACOR with funding from the United States Agency for International Development and support from the Jordanian Ministry of Tourism and Department of Antiquities, the Petra Church Project revealed an important Byzantine church. Besides the church and its famous mosaic floor, the excavation unearthed the Petra Scrolls, 140 papyri sheets documenting a wide range

of activities (particularly legal actions) in Byzantine Petra. Audiovisual materials have also been digitized, including about a hundred Betamax and VHS tapes of lectures and archaeological site visits from the 1980s to the early 1990s, as well as a similar number of audiocassettes of lectures and workshops held by ACOR in the early 1980s.

Increasing awareness and use of the ACOR Archives has been a goal since the first grant; a particularly successful strategy (used by many archives around the world) has been to link to and share content on appropriate Wikipedia pages. Today, around 10 percent of visitors to the Digital Archive come from Wikipedia. Additionally, the rich archaeological sites and history of Jordan are underrepresented relative to other countries in the region; in the past, ACOR has hosted Wikipedia edit-a-thons that have improved and increased the information available, while also linking to relevant ACOR resources when possible.³⁵ In addition to public outreach, as part of the 2020–2024 grant, nine Fellows (three per year) from community colleges or minority serving institutions are selected to utilize the Digital Archive and ACOR resources to create lesson plans. Last, an important part of the 2020–2024 grant is the creation of Arabic-language metadata for each item; this will hopefully improve access to the collections and allow ACOR to reach a wider audience. The proportion of users visiting the Digital Archive with Arabic as their browser language has happily increased.

Along with getting digitization efforts to improve access to users around the world underway, building renovations have also been recently completed, and the archives is now in the process of being physically reorganized in its new space. Efforts to acquire more physical archives from scholars is underway, though this is challenging, as most have home institutions that are also interested in their papers. While donors have been willing to donate born-digital images (and some are available in the Digital Archive), as with all archives, the challenge will be how to prioritize spending resources on collection materials that may not be especially unique. With an expanded collecting scope and increased outreach efforts, the American Center of Research aims in coming years to develop its new topical collecting areas and attract new scholars to its library and archives.

New York University Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

The youngest of the institutions represented in this sample is the Archives and Special Collections department (ASC) of New York University Abu Dhabi Library. The university was established as a partnership between the government of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi and New York University in 2007, with the signing of an agreement by university president John Sexton and Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, then the crown prince of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, who became the ruler of the United Arab Emirates upon the death of his elder brother, Sheikh

Khalifa bin Zayed, in May 2022. The university's temporary campus opened in downtown Abu Dhabi in 2010, admitting its first class of students that fall, followed by a move to its permanent, purpose-built campus on nearby Saadiyat Island in 2014. From the outset, NYU Abu Dhabi (or NYUAD) was designed to be intentionally diverse, with a student body made up of over a hundred nationalities, and with the Abu Dhabi campus comprising one part of the "global network university" made up of three main campuses (in New York and Shanghai, in addition to Abu Dhabi) and over a dozen academic centers around the world.

At the time of the move to the Saadiyat campus, library leadership at both the New York and Abu Dhabi campuses realized the potential benefits of including a special collections department within the newly designed campus library. The goal was to create a collection of primary source materials that would enrich the interdisciplinary, liberal arts curriculum of NYUAD while also providing resources of interest to the wider community, a collection that would "serve the country and region over time, without duplicating resources or competing with existing collections" elsewhere.³⁶ One of the core principles was "to provide a deep collection of historic sources for the study of the Emirates, the Arabian Peninsula and the Arabian Gulf countries, the Middle East, and the Indian Ocean region."³⁷ While such efforts initially focused on rare published materials, such as books and maps from the sixteenth century to the mid-twentieth, over time, archival collections became a growing component of the department.

In a country such as the UAE, the question of what the focus of archival collecting should be was not a simple one. The National Library and Archives of the UAE (or NLA), formally established by Federal Law number 7 of 2008 and initially known as the National Center for Documentation and Research, is the primary repository for documents generated by the government of the UAE but also has a mandate that directs it to collect all manner of documents related to the history of the UAE.³⁸ However, some of the largest known collections at the NLA consist of photocopied or microfilmed groups of records obtained from archives in other countries, such as the United Kingdom, Germany, Portugal, the Netherlands, or the United States, where materials pertinent to the history of the lands that now comprise the UAE were found. The work of locating and copying such materials was largely carried out by the predecessor body of the NLA, the Center for Documentation and Research (CDR). The CDR was commissioned by the founder of the UAE, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al Nahyan, in 1968, after he noted the absence of critical historical documents, such as treaties between local tribes and British representatives, that were important to obtain in the years leading up to the formation of the UAE.³⁹

But the notion of private archival collections, including the papers of individuals or families, was not as widely understood or established until recent times. Part of this is due to the traditional practices of the tribes of this region of transmitting

historical information orally, whether through storytelling, song, or poetic traditions.⁴⁰ Another factor was the system of governance that was prevalent in pre-oil times, and which can still be seen to some degree in the modern UAE, where the population turns to tribal sheikhs, as figures of authority, as arbitrators who settle differences or shape policies by holding court in a *majlis*, or community gathering places.⁴¹ Given this, as well as the fact that prior to the economic transformation due to the sudden influx of oil wealth in the 1960s most of the population were functionally illiterate, written records then played a minimal role.⁴²

In seeking to document the recent history of the UAE through the formation of archival collections, the rapidly changing nature of the population of the UAE must also be taken into account. Emiratis are a demographic minority in their own country, with expatriate residents comprising over 80 percent of the population at present.⁴³ For some expatriates, a work contract in the UAE may only consist of short-term employment from which they return to their home country in three to five years. But, for many, including migrants from India, Pakistan, the Philippines, Nepal, and various countries from around the Middle East (including Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, Syria, and Iraq), roots may run deep, as many migrants with secure work contracts establish families and settle down in places like Abu Dhabi or Dubai, creating multigenerational communities whose members still hold the passports of their countries of origin. In addition, smaller populations of workers from Great Britain, North America, Europe, and Africa have also left their mark on the development and growth of the UAE and, in turn, have formed communities of long-term residents there.

Given this historical and sociocultural context, how can the staff of the NYUAD Library's Archives and Special Collections department approach the task of building collections that represent this young country's history and its richly diverse population? With the existence of the NLA firmly established, what is the best way in which NYUAD can complement its work and contribute to the task of building a comprehensive and representative record of the people and history of the UAE, the Gulf region, and other historically connected regions, such as Arabia and the Indian Ocean rim? One approach has been to acquire relevant archival collections from local individuals, augmented by purchases of smaller collections available from antiquarian booksellers. Examples of the former include the collection of rare local publications and ephemera assembled by historian Frauke Heard-Bey and her husband, David Heard, a long-time employee of one of the local oil companies (MC.064); the collection of the British-born journalist and environmentalist Peter Hellyer (MC.068); and research materials and photographs of dhows, the traditional sailing ships of this region, created by the late British diplomat Paul Bergne (MC.089).⁴⁴ Collections discovered in vendor catalogs or at regional book fairs and subsequently purchased include the papers of Graham Hill (MC.052), a British Army officer who served in the Trucial Oman Scouts, training Emirati

military recruits in Sharjah in the early 1970s; the photograph album of Bernard Shaw (MC.069), a British geologist working with oil companies in Kuwait, the Trucial States, and Oman in the early 1950s; or the photograph album of an anonymous British traveler to the region prior to World War I, which includes rare images of villages in what are now the UAE and Oman, of the rulers of Dubai and Bahrain and of the sultan of Muscat (MC.070).

NYUAD faculty and visiting research fellows have also been instrumental in several key acquisitions, such as the collection of Ali Akbar Bushiri (MC.039), documenting the histories of merchant families of Iranian origin in Bahrain in the early to mid-twentieth century, which was facilitated by a faculty member, Nelida Fuccaro, who had used the collection for research while it was still in private hands. NYUAD humanities research scholars Marcel Kurpershoek, a retired Dutch diplomat and scholar of Arabian oral poetry traditions, and Giuliano Garavini, an Italian historian who has written on the geopolitics of petroleum production, both donated collections derived from their research. The Kurpershoek collection (MC.054) contains original recordings, transcripts, and research materials about *nabaṭī* poetry of central Arabia and the modern-day UAE; while the Garavini collection (MC.038) consists of copies of protocols of meetings of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) dating from the early 1960s through the mid-1980s. Such acquisitions over the past half-decade have helped raise the profile of the NYUAD archival collections, drawing scholars from abroad to use these collections, as well as putting NYUAD on the map as a potential repository for prospective archival donors seeking an appropriate home for their materials.

In reviewing this partial list of acquisitions, however, it becomes apparent that many of the collections originated from outsiders, predominantly Europeans, who lived and worked in the region, and a critique could be made of the relatively limited number of materials in NYUAD's collection that reflect the experiences of the Emirati population. Attempts are being made to address that lack, including further efforts at outreach, both to inform the general public about the existence of this archives and the opportunities to access it, and to alert students in archives and records management programs at other local universities, where the student bodies are predominantly Emirati, to possible opportunities for internships and future careers there. Such students, who are often trained for careers as archivists or records managers in governmental agencies or corporate settings, are seldom aware of the opportunities that exist within collecting repositories in academic settings, such as the one at NYUAD. A greater awareness of the existence and value of "private" archives within such settings will hopefully spur an increasing sense of the value of personal archival collections from their own communities, and corresponding efforts to preserve them, whether at NYUAD or other institutions in the region.

In addition, given the diversity of the population of the UAE, and in particular the major urban centers of Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Sharjah, there is much potential

to explore the possibility of community archives as a means of preserving the richly varied history of expatriate communities in the region. Within these cities, numerous social clubs, religious organizations, and schools are organized around countries or cultures of origin whose members may possess an extensive shared memory of their communities' histories in the UAE. Such organizations may have their own informal archives, which could provide opportunities for NYUAD to work collaboratively with these communities in preserving their own histories. As noted by Andrew Flinn, one of the leading advocates of community archives, many conditions lead to the formation of such community-based archives, but "when communities go through rapid and significant change and feel that they are in the process of losing their identity or having that identity marginalised or ignored," they are especially inclined to create such archives, in the hopes of preserving their own group's memory.⁴⁵ With the rapid transformation of the UAE during the past half-century, and the identities of expatriate communities being simultaneously transient and deeply rooted, such an approach to documenting their histories could be especially well suited to their circumstances.

One last comment can be made about the role of language in the archives. To date, all archival description has been in English, with Arabic proper names and geographic terms being transcribed using Library of Congress romanization tables. Part of this is due to the wide prevalence of English as a lingua franca in the UAE, due to the broad variety of nationalities living in the country and to the dominant role that English plays in the educational system, even among students who speak Arabic as their first language. Given that the resources that NYUAD uses for archival description are often linked to those used by its parent campus in New York, further limitations are built into that structure. Resources such as ArchivesSpace are not always well adapted to handle Arabic text and right-to-left scripts, and they are unable to properly display such text, whether it is keyed in or copied and pasted into the software. There is hope that such tools will be adapted over time to better handle nonwestern scripts and languages, and there is also the recognition of the need for translated Arabic content on the ASC's website to better facilitate outreach to a wider audience.

Conclusion

Any institution's activities are shaped not only by its own internal dynamics—founding mission, priorities, and resources—but also by the circumstances of the cultural, social, political, and economic setting in which it finds itself. In this way, the four archival repositories highlighted in this article are like many others around the world. However, each of the archival institutions profiled in this article is also distinct in the ways it has evolved to serve its host country as a repository of cultural heritage.

For archives attached to institutions that have an American affiliation, questions have sometimes been raised as to whether the presence of such institutions perpetuates a colonial mindset. While such questions are valid, the examples cited here demonstrate that if anything, such American-affiliated archival institutions bring added value to their host countries and by preserving elements of these countries' archival heritage, perform a valuable service to those countries, capturing and making accessible archival holdings that might otherwise be lost.

In the countries of North Africa and the Levant, the colonialism of the Ottoman Turkish Empire was supplanted by that of Britain and France from the late nineteenth century onward, leading to sizable groupings of records pertinent to the histories of countries such as Egypt, Algeria, or Lebanon being found in governmental archives in the United Kingdom or France, such as the Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer in Aix-en-Provence, France, where repatriated records of French colonial offices prior to 1960 reside,⁴⁶ or the contents of the "CO" record group in the National Archives of the United Kingdom, which document various British colonial agencies through 1990.⁴⁷ While these repositories have ample descriptive tools published on their websites and promote open and equal access to declassified records among their holdings, critics have pointed out the difficulty that nationals from countries formerly colonized by Britain or France (as well as Turkey) may have in traveling to those repositories and have issued calls for the return of such records to the countries where they were initially created.⁴⁸

In contrast to this, the archives of the American-affiliated educational and research institutions profiled in this article have taken an active role in acquiring, preserving, and making accessible private archives in their countries of origin, investing considerable resources in keeping such archives in those locations, with the goal of furthering scholarship and open access to such archival materials that might not otherwise have been possible. Whether in the expanded role that AUB assumed after 1990 in collecting archives of prominent cultural and intellectual figures in Lebanon at a time when other repositories were less able to do so, or in the growth of AUC's archival capacity following the RBSCL's restructuring in the 1990s and its role in preserving the papers of Egyptians whose lives and careers would likely not have been documented by official or governmental archives, the role of such academic collecting repositories has been vital to helping both countries recover and preserve significant elements of their own archival heritage and cultural patrimony.

In addition, while all of the repositories profiled seek to complement the work of the more centralized, government archives in each country, they also provide an alternative to such archives, especially for individuals who, for varying reasons, might not wish to place their personal archives with such state-sponsored institutions. This extends to offering alternative modes of documentation to supplement or address missing archival sources. Oral history represents one area, echoing the oral traditions that have long served as a source of historical memory in the Middle

East, but new modes such as web archiving have also been pursued. In these ways, these institutions serve the needs of researchers dealing with, as historian Omnia El Shakry writes, “the very material difficulties of accessing archives, which are so intensified in postcolonial contexts” and who “face the prospect of ever-diminishing access to archives and national libraries in the region in the wake of recent political convulsions.”⁴⁹

Furthermore, the notion of independent archival repositories focused on the preservation of private archives or personal papers or the records of community organizations does not appear to be as deeply rooted in many countries in this region, even notwithstanding the efforts of scholars such as Rustum and Chéhab in Lebanon, as cited earlier in this article. One look at the current membership roster of the Arab Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (or ARBICA) shows that most member institutions are centralized, government archives.⁵⁰ In a region where such central state archives often play a key role in the shaping and consolidation of a standard, historical narrative meant to benefit certain political actors,⁵¹ archives based in university and research institutions such as those profiled in this article have the potential to preserve a wide range of lesser-known voices and events.

In a profession such as archival management, practitioners often assume that the principles, standards, and best practices that they have learned through their own training and education in their country of origin can be evenly applied across cultural and international boundaries and that an archives in one country operates in a similar manner to an archives in another, except for small differences in tools used or particular approaches to an activity. As archivists working for American-sponsored institutions in the Middle East, however, the authors of this article have experienced firsthand some of the opportunities and challenges that present themselves when working in a truly international archival setting. New perspectives may emerge on commonly held traditions and practices, and one may have to adapt some of the safely held assumptions about fundamental aspects of archival practice when working in such settings. However, the benefits of cross-cultural exchanges, and the insights gained through such encounters, have often outweighed some of the potential barriers erected by differing systems of professional practice, governance, social expectations, or even languages.

While the institutions profiled in this article may have grown and changed considerably from the initial vision of their American founders, such adaptation has enabled them to serve their host countries in ways that they had not initially imagined, enriching these same countries with the resulting archival repositories and collections.

NOTES

- ¹ Examples of articles or book chapters that treat the subject of libraries at American-affiliated academic institutions overseas include Daphne Flanagan and Frieda Wiebe, "American-style Academic Libraries in the Gulf Region," in *Library and Information Science in the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. Amanda B. Click, Sumayya Ahmed, Jacob Hill, and John D. Martin III (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2016) and Yelena Luckert and Lindsay Inge Carpenter, eds., *The Globalized Library: American Academic Libraries and International Students, Collections, and Practices* (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2019).
- ² Elizabeth Buckner, *Degrees of Dignity: Arab Higher Education in the Global Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022), 23.
- ³ Buckner, *Degrees of Dignity*, 24–26.
- ⁴ Sterling Dow, "The Founding of an American Research Center in Egypt," *Archaeology* 1, no. 3 (1948): 136–45, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41662229>.
- ⁵ Zeead Yaghi, "The Perils of the Past: Living Through History in Beirut," *The Point*, October 18, 2022, <https://thepointmag.com/correspondence/the-perils-of-the-past>, captured at <https://perma.cc/7ZGA-MGCR>.
- ⁶ Christine Jungen and Jehane Sfeir, eds., *Archiver au Moyen-Orient: Fabriques documentaires contemporaines* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 2019), 8–9.
- ⁷ Jungen and Sfeir, *Archiver au Moyen-Orient*, 9; Mariette Atallah, "Distortion of Content and Endangered Archives: A Case Study of a Donation to the American University of Beirut, Lebanon," *RBM: Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* 18, no. 1 (2017): 16, <https://doi.org/10.5860/rbm.18.1.14>.
- ⁸ Jungen and Sfeir, *Archiver au Moyen-Orient*, 12–15.
- ⁹ H. al-Zein, "The National Library, a 'Luminous Face' for Lebanon without Electricity," *Independent* (Arabic), October 29, 2022, <https://www.independentarabia.com/node/386456>.
- ¹⁰ Charles Watson, letter to John Badeau, September 1, 1947, Records of Executive Secretary Ward Madison, AUC University Archives.
- ¹¹ Lawrence Murphy, *The American University in Cairo: 1919–1987* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1987), 267–71.
- ¹² Gloria Karnouk, "The Creswell Library: A Legacy," in *Muqarnas VIII: An Annual on Islamic Art and Architecture*, ed. Oleg Grabar (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), 122; Joyce Pressey Tovell, "The Creswell Library of Islamic Art and Architecture at the American University in Cairo Part One: In the Presence of the Original Owner, 1956–73," *Art Libraries Journal* 17, no. 4 (1992): 13, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0307472200008051>.
- ¹³ Murphy, *The American University in Cairo*, vii.
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