



International Leads

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CIRMA: A Special Library and Research Center in the Land of Maya

By Sirous Monajami

This summer, I worked as a volunteer with CIRMA (Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica) in Antigua, Guatemala, twenty-five miles southwest of the capital, Guatemala City. This experience allowed me to get a firsthand look at this library and research center that specializes in the history of Central America, and more specifically, ancient Maya civilization.

The Maya civilization dates back more than 7,000 years and is best known for its art, calendar, architecture, and hieroglyphic writing system. More than two million Maya still live in Central America. Many still use their old language (twenty-three different Mayan languages and ethnic groups are recognized). The largest Mayan linguistic group is the Quiche, who live in the highlands of Guatemala. An estimated half million people still speak this language.



An image of courtyard of CIRMA.
(Photo: Sirous Monajami, Summer 2003)

With such a rich cultural heritage, there was a growing need in Guatemala for a research center to assist researchers within the country and abroad. For this reason, CIRMA, a nonprofit organization, was founded in 1978 in Antigua. The CIRMA research center specializes in the culture and history of the Maya and the indigenous population, as well as the political history of Central America and Guatemala. CIRMA is divided into four departments: Library, Historical Archives, Photo Archives, and Bookstore/Internet Café.



Francisco Ralon Afre, the library director, at work.
(Photo: Sirous Monajami, Summer 2003)

My volunteer position as a cataloger at CIRMA gave me the opportunity to work in a beautiful library setting. The library is located in a lovely colonial house that opens into a peaceful courtyard with a fountain in the center. The CIRMA building is just one among hundreds of historically significant buildings in Antigua.

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CIRMA

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When I first met the library director, Francisco Ralón Afre (a former student of City College of San Francisco), he was very proud and pleased to give me a tour of the library and the rest of the research center. During my two months working at CIRMA, I enjoyed discovering a rich collection of monographs on the history, cultural history, anthropology, ethnology, cultural geography, sociology, politics, and art history of Central America. Most of these books were in Spanish and English but there were also materials in French, German, Italian and the Mayan language.



Library employees at work.
(Photo: Sirous Monajami,
Summer 2003)

The Library of CIRMA has 30,000 monographs, 430 periodicals, 2000 maps, 8,000 pamphlets and a considerable number of historical videos, CD's, and microfilms. The library's collection has benefited from an exchange program with other institutions and countries of Latin America. The library uses a card catalog and the LC classification system. In response to a question about the prospects of automation, Mr. Ralón Afre offered a familiar answer: "This library has the same problem as any other library in Central America: no money, no automation." The library uses WIN ISIS, a program distributed free of charge by UNESCO for searching and bibliographic retrieval.



An image of courtyard of CIRMA.
(Photo: Sirous Monajami,
Summer 2003)

Among the fifty-five employees working in CIRMA, the library has four full-time staff members: Director Francisco Ralón Afre, Librarian William Rubén Solórzano Estrada, and two library assistants, Marta Elena de Casellas and Myrna Elisama Vasquez Coloc. The staff treats each other with friendly respect and also incorporates a healthy sense of humor into their daily work. Special respect is shown by the staff towards the director whom they always address as "Licenciado", a term of honor given to highly educated people and in this case some one who finished five years of library school. Mr. Ralón Afre is constantly interrupted by almost everyone. No matter how busy he is, he never loses his sense of humor. In fact, patience and tolerance are qualities shared by all Guatemalans. I remember one day, when the afternoon tropical rain started pouring and drops of water began dripping into the room, Mr. Ralón Afre looked at the ceiling and said: "As you can see, we haven't found money to repair the roof since the 1773 earthquake."

As a volunteer, it was a welcome change for me to return to a traditional library setting, where I worked uninterrupted at a desk assigning classification numbers and Spanish subject headings in a completely un-automated environment. I enjoyed this

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shali.zhang@wichita.edu

Message from the IRRT Chair

By Karen J. Starr

Forty-five years ago, my aunts traveled to far off places, as single women, exploring the world around them. By then they were in their late 50's. They sent me postcards addressed to my name in Myrtle Creek, Oregon, with no street address and no post office box. I still have those postcards as well as the jewelry from Israel, dolls from Bolivia and Korea, and the alpaca slippers from Peru. Their interest and curiosity sparked an interest in a young child who went on to travel and work internationally.

It was a small world then and it is even a smaller world today. The ALA's International Relations Round Table (IRRT) needs your volunteer efforts to maintain, support, and enhance the international activities of the American Library Association. Why should you volunteer?

In a recent e-mail posted to ALAWORLD, an e-mail listserv of IRRT, Nancy Bolt, chair-elect of IRRT, suggests becoming a committee member give you a greater opportunity to meet and mingle with international librarians, contribute to cooperative projects with libraries in other parts of the world, and contribute to a greater understanding of world cultures. You can contribute and learn at the same time. Here are the opportunities for cooperation:

Freedom to Read Foundation (FTRF) Liaison - one person
For this appointment, you must attend ALA conferences and attend FTRF meetings. A brief report, in person or in writing, needs to be made to the IRRT Board.

International Exchange Committee - six people
For various reasons, this committee needs a lot of members. The Committee helps identify opportunities for international work and study and maintains a web site. Great early information for people who would like to travel abroad.

International Poster Committee - three people
This committee organizes the International Poster Session at ALA conferences. You get an early look at all the great idea from people all over the world.

Membership Committee - three people
The committee is responsible for developing and implementing all membership activities for the IRRT. Help IRRT become a stronger Round Table. We particularly want to attract international members.

Orientation/Mentoring Committee - four people
This committee plans an annual orientation about ALA and the conference for all the International visitors to conference. Another great chance to meet international librarians.

Program Committee - two people
This committee develops and hosts program at annual conference for IRRT members and librarians interested in international librarianship. The committee also chooses themes that address international issues and opportunities.

International Visitors Center - two people
This committee organizes the International Visitors Center and makes our international visitors welcome. The center provides advice and support for all international attendees at the ALA annual conference.

The common theme in all of these committees is the chance to make connections to different people, different cultures, different libraries. Come and join us in the exciting activity. For further information, please visit the IRRT website at www.ala.org/irrt/ and contact Nancy Bolt, IRRT Chair-Elect at nancybolt@earthlink.net or Karen Starr, IRRT Chair at kstarr@cybermesa.com



The members of Orientation/Mentoring Committee organized the 2003 International Librarians Orientation & Welcome Reception in Toronto on June 20, 2003.



2003 International Librarians Orientation & Welcome Reception

Photos by ShaLi Zhang, June 2003

OSU Libraries Hosts Visitors from Fujian Province, China

By Richard Sapon-White

For the past six years, the Oregon State Library and the Fujian Provincial Library have collaborated in the Horner Exchange, a program that fosters mutual understanding between librarians from Oregon, United States and Fujian Province, China. In odd-numbered years, an Oregon librarian visits Fujian Province while in even-numbered years two Fujian librarians visit Oregon. The Oregon State Library and Multnomah County Library (Portland, Oregon) served as hosts to Fujian librarians during the previous two visits.

In 2002, the Oregon State University (OSU) Libraries agreed to host two librarians from Fujian Province in return for having sent one of its librarians to Fujian in 2001. Mr. Chen Zhong-fang, an administrator with the Fujian Provincial Library, and Ms. Zhang Xiao-hui, a systems librarian at the Xiamen Municipal Library in Fujian Province, visited OSU Libraries from June 19 to July 14, 2002. This article describes some of the high points and difficulties in hosting foreign visitors.

A small committee of librarians and staff met often during the spring to plan for the visit. Beyond OSU's responsibilities for providing housing, food, health insurance, and local transportation for our guests, we wanted to ensure that they learned as much as possible about our library and Oregon libraries. We also wanted them to be exposed to American culture and have a chance to see Oregon's natural beauty. At the same time, we wanted to be sure that we had a chance to learn from them. Ultimately, all of these goals were accomplished, though there were some stumbling blocks along the way. The largest obstacles were their lack of English facility and cultural differences for which we were not prepared.

Previous Horner Exchangers had been provided with home hospitality to keep costs low and provide an intimate view of American life when not at work. However, since no library staff at OSU volunteered to serve as hosts, the committee opted for an off-campus apartment complex that catered to international students. Our visitors could prepare food they were accustomed to (as previous exchangers had done anyway, even with home hospitality), while living within walking distance of campus and shopping. This also afforded greater privacy during off hours.

About a week before their arrival, staff were invited to an orientation session where background about the exchange

was provided; the librarian who had visited Fujian Province briefed staff on Chinese culture and libraries, and everyone had a lesson in learning some basic Chinese words, such as "hello," "good-bye," and "thank you." When our guests did arrive, we spent a day providing them with orientation to our main library, then had a reception for them. They graciously provided us with two works of art characteristic of their region of China.

Over the subsequent three weeks, the visiting librarians spent time in each of our departments. Most departments had a two-hour block, with each day scheduled for two departments. This allowed our visitors some downtime in their office for writing and e-mail before and after each departmental visit. Reference and Technical Services each chose to host potluck lunches on the day that the librarians spent time with them, treating them to some home-style cooking. Visits were also scheduled with the state library, Portland State Library, and Corvallis-Benton County Public Library. As part of the last, our Chinese visitors sat in on a city council meeting, where our library director serves as councilor, and were officially welcomed to Corvallis by the mayor. Toward the end of their visit, our guests gave a presentation on their libraries and answered our questions about Chinese librarianship.

During off hours, and accompanied by library staff, the Fujian librarians visited the local farmers market, picked their own blueberries (an Oregon specialty),

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Richard Sapon-White, second from right, is with the two Fujian librarians and OSU library staff.

(Photo: Richard Sapon-White, July 2002)

From ALA's International Desk

By Michael Dowling

Director of ALA International Relations Office

The Annual IFLA Conference was held in Berlin, August 1-9, 2003. It was the first IFLA Conference to go under the new heading of “**World Library and Information Congress**,” a good change to highlight the nature of the meeting to those outside the profession. Overall, 4,650 participants from 133 countries attended. Participants included ALA President Carla Hayden, Immediate Past-President Mitch Freedman, and other ALA Executive Board members Nancy Davenport, Michael Gorman, and Nancy Bolt, Chair-Elect of IRRT.

Despite the heat-wave in Europe, it was a good conference. It was wonderful to see Kay Raseroka, from Botswana, inaugurated as the first non-European/North American president of IFLA. Her two-year presidential term will focus on lifelong learning, information literacy, and strengthening associations. Alex Byrne from Australia is the new President-Elect, and the IFLA Governing Board now has a good mix of representation from around the world. Three U.S. librarians will be serving on the Board: Nancy Gwinn, Edward Swanson, and Barbara Tillett. No U.S. librarians were elected during the at-large ballot and there is a need for ALA, other U.S. associations, and U.S. libraries to strategize better when making nominations. IFLA is recruiting for a new Secretary-General to replace Ross Shimmom next year. An announcement should be made shortly.

World Summit on the Information Society

The upcoming World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), which will take place in Geneva on December 10-12, was discussed. IFLA will be sponsoring a Pre-Summit in Geneva on November 3-4, “Libraries @ the Heart of the Information Society” and is asking for representatives from different countries to attend. Adama Samassékou, from Mali, who will chair the WSIS, was a plenary speaker in Berlin. Carla Hayden co-sponsored a resolution at IFLA urging library associations to advocate the values of libraries to their government representatives to the Summit and the need to address equity of access issues. ALA will be working with other U.S. associations to ensure participation in the pre-conference and to meet with the U.S. delegation to the Summit.

Resolutions Privacy and Women

In addition to the resolution on the WSIS and Iraq (noted in Nancy Bolt's IFLA report in this issue elsewhere), the IFLA Council also approved a resolution deploring the introduction of legislation which violates fundamental human rights to privacy and unhampered access to

information (such as the Patriot Act), and the need for all IFLA sections to study woman's information issues. The resolutions are on the IFLA website at <http://www.ifla.org>

Campaign for the World's Libraries

The Campaign for the World's Libraries, a partnership between ALA and IFLA to make ALA's campaign a global is moving along. In Berlin, a program highlighted activities in a number of countries involved in the campaign, including Mexico, the Republic of Georgia, Singapore, Brazil, and Japan. Over 20 countries and regional associations have begun to incorporate “@ your library” in their own languages to help promote the value of libraries. A website highlighting activities and a discussion list will be created to facilitate information sharing will be created.

“Fellowship for the Americas” Program

The International Relations Office helped to coordinate the participation of fifteen librarians from fifteen countries as part of the “Fellowship for the Americas” program sponsored by the net revenues from the IFLA 2001 Conference in Boston. The “Fellowship for the Americas” program will continue for the Buenos Aires Conference with the expectation that twenty fellows will be selected. For details on applying, please visit the International Relations Office website at <http://www.ala.org/work/international>

CIRMA

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work immensely and treasured the opportunity to get to know my coworkers. By the end of my stay, it was hard to say good-bye to the staff who had become my friends. In the last hour of my work, a sense of sadness overwhelmed us all. Mr. Ralón Afre, looking for a practical diversion from our emotions, smiled and said to me, “I would be glad to write a letter of recommendation for you, but I am not sure about our printer.” One hour later, after being suitably distracted by the technological challenges of a Guatemalan library, Mr. Ralón Afre handed me a freshly printed letter of recommendation.

The CIRMA library welcomes donations on the culture, history, politics, and social life of Guatemala and the Central America. The library director can be contacted for more information on donation at franciscor@CIRMA.ws (*Sirous Monajami is Cataloging Coordinator at Rosenberg Library, City College of San Francisco, California.*)

Report on IFLA in Berlin

By Nancy Bolt, IRRT Chair-Elect

I was pleased to attend this year's annual International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) "World Library and Information Congress" in Berlin as a member of the Government Libraries Standing Committee. One of the joys of IFLA is meeting librarians from everywhere, speaking a plethora of languages, in colorful national dress, exchanging successes and challenges about their own libraries.

The Government Libraries Standing Committee held two programs at IFLA and two committee meetings. The first program, sponsored by German librarians, focused on what happens to libraries when two governments merge, which happened with all East and West German governmental entities. Imagine merging collections, staff, government, administration, policies, equipment, and furniture – everything— from two government agencies into one.

The second program asked librarians to discuss their experience in changing government. A Kenyan librarian described the establishment of law libraries. Access to legal information is so routine in the United States that we do not recognize how important it is and how much of our civil society depends on it. For example, the availability of printed legal decisions by judges means that there can be precedent for future decisions. It curtails corruption by judges because previous legal opinions are available. It means that the law is transparent so that people know what can be expected in a future legal opinion. In Kenya, there had not been published legal opinions since 1975. Now there is a web-based index to all legal opinions since 1999.

Bulgarian librarians described transitioning from a communist government to a democracy. Under the communists, there were 10,000 librarians and funding came from the central government. Today there are almost 7,000 libraries and funding must come from local government, which does not have very much money. Libraries have to learn new skills to demonstrate the value of libraries and seek funding. Under the democracy, there are new laws being passed that guarantee the right of citizens to public information and define the role of libraries in the dialogue between government and citizens.

All IFLA programs are asked to submit presentations in advance of the conference. You can read the submitted papers at <http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla69/prog03.htm> The Government Libraries Standing Committee decided at its business meeting to develop standards for government libraries. This will be an exciting project.

The most powerful program in Berlin was by the French librarian, Jean Marie Arnoult, who recently participated in a UNESCO mission to Iraq to help evaluate the damage done to libraries and museums by the Iraq war. Suffice to say that it was both horrifying and strangely uplifting. The damage done to some libraries was horrendous. Sometimes only the walls were left. And sometimes not even the walls. All equipment, furniture, shelving, desks, files, books, magazines, media – all either stolen or burned. The slides made us cry. The Basra Public Library was completely destroyed and Arnoult wondered, plaintively, why the crowd would pick on such a small, unimportant facility. At the national library, close to a million books were burned to ashes. Nothing was left. The destruction was so complete that Arnoult concluded that some fuel had to be used.

But amidst the horror was heroism. There were 200,000 ancient Muslim manuscripts were moved before the war to an Islam mosque and protected by a Muslim sheik. They are preserved but they are stacked, floor to ceiling, with one door and no ventilation and so tightly that it was impossible to examine.

Arnoult concluded with recommendations that the national library be rebuilt and designated and protected as a national library; that other libraries also be restored; that collections be bought and that countries with duplicates donate them; that professional staff be trained; and that a stable government include formal support for libraries. Arnoult did include the slides of an academic library that had already been completely restored by the American army. During the discussion period, several people rose to offer immediate assistance of books, serials, and training. It was heartwarming. The IFLA Council passed a resolution urging governments to take action to help restore the library and infrastructure in Iraq.



2003 International Librarians Reception



International librarians from other countries and librarians from Canada and the United States gathered at the International Librarians Reception held at the ALA/CLA Annual Conference in Toronto, Canada, June 22, 2003.

(Photos: Sha Li Zhang, June 2003)



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<http://www.cies.org/specialists>



In the picture above, Thomas W. Leonhardt (left), Barbara Kile (right), Chairperson of IRRT Publications Subcommittee, and a Canadian librarian (sitting in front), were at the Reception. Leonhardt, Library Director at St. Edward's University, was selected as new Editor for *International Leads*. He has had extensive editorial/publishing experience and will start his two-year term in January 2004.

OSU Libraries

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spent the weekend at a beach house on the beautiful Oregon coast, and made visits to the Columbia Gorge and Seattle, a city in a neighboring state.

Because neither of our guests spoke English, translators were a critical component for a successful visit. With no budget for hiring translators, we relied on volunteers and two staff members who spoke Chinese with native fluency. Other volunteers included family members of staff, graduate students, and others that we knew of in the community who were willing to help out, including the proprietor of a local Chinese restaurant. One of the best sources of translators was a campus badminton club since the game is popular with Chinese students.

While we had anticipated the importance of finding translators for many scheduled events, we had not fully appreciated the focal role that language would play for making our

guests feel comfortable. As a result, cultural differences came to light during some awkward moments. Since we wanted to provide our visitors with the freedom and comfort of living on their own, we arranged for the university to provide them with a cash advance to spend on food and incidentals. According to university guidelines, all expenditures needed to be justified by receipts, something to which American librarians are accustomed. However, money matters are not generally discussed openly in Chinese society. Communicating the requirement for receipts made our guests feel as though their expenditures were being scrutinized and discussions about money were awkward. A different mechanism for handling funds would not have put our visitors in such an uncomfortable situation.

In Chinese society, extreme politeness is a highly respected value. When asked if anything was lacking in our planning for our guests, or if we could provide them with anything, the uniform response was that everything was fine and we need not trouble

ourselves. However, after our visitors went home we heard complaints, all minor, that had not been shared with us. For example, we had once asked if they would like to attend one of the summer band concerts in town, with someone from the staff to attend with them. They declined saying they had other things to do. However, one complaint we heard was that they were often bored in the evenings. The suggestion was made that we should have scheduled events for them, or been more insistent on doing things for them. Being sensitive Americans, perhaps we took the first “no” as the final answer – yet I wonder if persistence would have changed the response. (On the other hand, summer in a small town like ours provides few activities that can be appreciated without modest language proficiency.)

In spite of these small difficulties, both our guests and the OSU Libraries staff had a very productive interaction. We look forward to continuing contacts between Oregon librarians and our colleagues in Fujian Province. (*Richard Sapon-White is Catalog Librarian at Oregon State University Libraries*)

International Relations Office

American Library Association
50 East Huron Street
Chicago, IL 60611 USA

Postage