

# THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF TUNISIA: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

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## THE TUNISIAN NATIONAL LIBRARY PROJECTS

The Tunisian National Library is under a radical change since it has taken up the challenges of the technological revolution or rather integrated its key tools to develop its sphere of activity, to improve and widen its services and extend them to the regional libraries readers and net surfers. The removal of the Tunisian National Library in 2004, into new headquarters which are being built, is in accordance with this policy. To answer this national priority it was necessary to implement the above-mentioned change.

The National Library treasures had to be developed and preserved (manuscripts, monographs, periodicals). Besides, it is also necessary to look for new tools of preservation to protect this precious heritage in order to enable access to documents and to achieve its durability. Which means should be used? How to protect in peril documents?

### 1 SETTING UP THE DIGITAL LIBRARY:

The very mission of the librarian requires the dealing with written documents such as: hand written, printed or digitized documents. The E-book doesn't mean the tolling of the book itself. The electronic publishing has just started and hasn't yet proved its worth. Owing to the different tools involved, the digital technology allows better conditions of distribution of handwritten and printed documents and extends obvious preservation possibilities. The CD Rom is not, indeed, a reliable mode of conservation because of the limited duration, compared to microfilms, and the technological instability of the process. However, digitizing manuscripts or rare books allows the providing of copies when needed.

The National Library is involved in the globalization since it allows the extension of reading rooms and the creation of cyberspaces owing to the on line distribution.

The digital Tunisian Library reveals priority options we have defined previously.

[www.bibliotheque.nat.tn](http://www.bibliotheque.nat.tn) is our website. Net surfers may have access to bibliographical resources and get informed about the whole collection and the main Tunisian works.

**The intranet** which is being carried out is meant:

- To give access to the National Library readers to the digital library
- To extend these facilities to the regional libraries integrating them to the reading rooms of the headquarters.
- To ensure free choice and on request exchanges with other libraries.

Building up the virtual library implies digitizing at first the main national heritage works and at the same time meeting the different readers' requests.

As for the manuscripts the National Library has decided temporarily to produce CD ROMs to be consulted.

## **2 COMPUTERIZING AND GRADUAL CONVERSION**

The National Library, which has started the general computerization of its bibliographical data in 1997, has undertaken the retrospective conversion of the ancient catalogs and files dating back to the end of 19th century.

Thus, the National Library will have a unique multilingual catalog including ancient and recent documents to be used for research, communication and preservation of the collection.

Files reveal the importance of French works (including books published between 1500 and 1830) and even Italian, German, English, Latin, Spanish...

The National Library has, then, built up a laboratory retrospective conversion and called up a house team supported and supervised by an external librarian at the start phase to carry out the preparation of the files and set up a plan of activity then to start the operation itself in April 2002. Some 10 temporary agents have been recruited for data capture which is supposed to end in 2004. But, considering the importance of the file size, we need a significant financial support in the framework of cooperation and / or foundation projects to be defined to carry out this project.

## **3 EDITING MULTIMEDIA CD ROMS**

**Two (2) CD ROMs** have already been edited:

- 1 The Arab classical literature achieved with UNESCO support- introducing 9 master pieces of the Arab literature
- 2 «Aperçu pittoresque de la Régence de Tunis » by Charles de Chassiron which is a very precise description of Tunisia in 1849 (written text and images) may be considered as a rare specimen.

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