

The oriental manuscripts collection of Sir William Jones (1746-94)

Reference: 2019-18-SIM

Supervisor	Ursula Sims-Williams, Lead Persian Curator
Department, Location	Asia and African Collections - St Pancras, London
Start date/timeframe	Any time from May 2019. To be negotiated with the successful candidate.
Duration	3 months (or part-time equivalent). For a part-time placement, the student would be required to spend a minimum of 3 days/week on site at the Library.
Remote-working	For the majority of the placement the student would need to be onsite to have access to the collection, although some of the project, particularly in its initial stages might be done remotely, if required.
Context for placement	
<p>The Library has a collection of ca 25,000 Arabic and Persian manuscripts of which many represent individual collections of East India Company and other officials. One such is the collection of the philologist/writer Sir William Jones (1746-94). During his 11 year career in India he founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal and wrote extensively on Indological subjects. His collection of 118 Arabic and Persian volumes and 69 Sanskrit were sent for safekeeping to Sir Joseph Banks in 1792 to be presented to the Royal Society in the event of Jones' premature death which occurred in 1794. They were transferred to the India Office Library in 1876. The collection includes literary, historical, legal and philosophical works, some of which include Jones own annotations and were used for his own writings</p> <p>As part of our ongoing cataloguing and research into manuscript cultures and collection provenance, (including, for example, a current cataloguing project on the Delhi Persian collection and research into the library of Tipu Sultan) we would like a PhD student to help us by undertaking a detailed study of the collection.</p> <p>The primary task would be to enhance and transfer the printed catalogue descriptions to the Library's electronic catalogue. Arising from cataloguing we should like to explore questions relating to the content and context of Jones' manuscripts: What works did he acquire? Did he commission any new works? What were his sources and to whom did these manuscripts belong previously? Several volumes include marginalia in Jones' hand which could give additional insight. Answers to questions such as these would shed light on collection practice in the late 18th century in the context of the age of 'enlightenment' besides revealing more about earlier historic Indian collections. This would align well with ongoing research in the UK HE sector, including Warwick University's Leverhulme Trust project on "Oriental Poetry, Latin Scholarship and the European Enlightenment: The Case of William Jones".</p> <p>This placement would be based in the Persian Section of the Library's Asian and African Collections Department. The focus of this project is on the 118 Arabic and Persian manuscripts but there is the potential to also include the 69 Sanskrit manuscripts should the opportunity arise (i.e. depending on the applicant's expertise and the staff capacity of relevant curatorial colleagues).</p>	
Expected tasks and outcomes	
<p>Using the existing printed descriptions, the student would update the information for inputting into the Library's Integrated Archives and Manuscripts catalogue system (IAMS).</p> <p>As part of the project, the placement student would examine the volumes for marginalia, previous owners' inscriptions, purchase statements and seals etc. This information would be recorded in the catalogue descriptions. The student would also supplement the catalogue record with study photos. Research into the paratextual elements of the collection would require some contextual research and would be informative for both the student and the Library as we have virtually no information</p>	

about these aspects of the collection.

Alongside this activity, the student would be expected to contribute to the Library's Asian & African Studies blog. We would also encourage the student to explore opportunities to present on the subject at internal Library talks and/or relevant external conference presentations or equivalent.

Training and experience expected to be gained by student through the placement

The student would have weekly mentoring with the lead Persian curator which would include instructions on cataloguing as well as more general guidance. They would also work with other curators in the Persian section and across Asian and African Collections and be integrated into the day-to-day working environment of the team. The student will be invited to all team meetings, usually held monthly, throughout the placement. This will give greater insight into the work of the team, and how this project relates to this work.

During the placement, the student will additionally have access to all appropriate staff training and public events offered by the Library. This may include, for example, events in the Library's 'Digital Scholarship' and '21st Century Curators' staff training programmes. Throughout the placement, there will be opportunities for the student to meet other research fellows, placement students and collaborative doctoral researchers based at the Library.

This placement offers an opportunity for the student to understand the role of research in a large cultural institution. Through the application of hands-on experience and a methodology requiring meticulous attention to detail, the student will acquire practical skills invaluable as a basis for more theoretical research. Working with full access to the collections provides a unique opportunity to explore the materials and gain insights into their research potential and significance. This experience would be invaluable both in the context of future research in an academic environment and also if the student is thinking of working professionally in libraries, archives or museums.

The student will also benefit from the opportunity to communicate research to professional colleagues and additionally to a wider public by contributing to the departmental blog with the possibility of presenting in one of the Library Research Seminars.

Required knowledge and skills

This placement would be suitable for a historian or linguistic specialist in Middle Eastern or South Asian Studies, but would be equally interesting to a more general specialist on the 18th century.

The student would need to have at least a very basic knowledge of Arabic or Persian but could expect to get help from colleagues.

This is a training and development opportunity open to current PhD students only. It is not intended to lead to a permanent post at the Library. Please note that the Library is unable to provide a stipend for PhD research placements. Applicants must obtain the support of their PhD supervisor in advance and, as part of their process, consult their HEI to ascertain what funding is available to support them.

Application deadline: 5pm on Monday, **18 February 2019**. Information on how to apply is available on our website: <https://www.bl.uk/news/2019/january/phd-research-placements-2019>