Esmeralda Kale Named Head of NUL’s Herskovits Collection

In an announcement of Esmeralda’s appointment, Sara Pritchard, NUL’s Dean of Libraries, wrote: “Among her achievements at NUL, Esmeralda was the principle investigator of the CLIR grant to catalogue the “Africana Posters: Hidden Collections of Northwestern and Michigan State University Libraries” in 2009. She also secured two acquisitions grants from the Illinois Cooperative Collection Management Program. She has curated many exhibitions including most notably “Apartheid to Democracy” and the accompanying film series currently showing at Northwestern University Library.

“In 2012-13 Esmeralda served as Chair of the Africana Librarians Council, a coordinate organization of the African Studies Association (ASA). The ALC stands at the center of all major cooperative activities in African studies librarianship. She is a member of the ALA International Relations Committee and has served on numerous other professional association committees. Last summer Esmeralda participated in IFLA’s African Library Summit 2013 at the University of South Africa. In 2010 she was selected as one of 30 participants in Synergy, a competitive statewide library leadership program. She has a long record of teaching, presentations, reviews and special projects.”

Our congratulations go out to Esmeralda on her new position and we look forward to her continued contributions to the Africana Librarians Council and Northwestern University’s Herskovits Collection.
Streaming Africana Resources from “Eye on Africa”

“Eye on Africa” is the weekly seminar series of the African Studies Center at Michigan State University. This public seminar aims to provide academicians, policy-makers, applied practitioners, students, and the interested public with cutting-edge and highly-contextualized knowledge about the African continent. The aim of “Eye on Africa” is to capture the historical and contemporary vibrancy of Africa, and to make it available to the widest possible audience.

Some recent broadcasts include:

- “The Empire Wrote Back”: Dr. Peter Limb is Associate Professor (Adjunct) of History and Africana Librarian at Michigan State University. He spoke about how Africans challenged the (South African) Empire is generally regarded as a post-World War II phenomenon. It was then that post-colonial breakthroughs and a growing South African and global anti-apartheid movement seriously contested white rule and started to unite regional anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movements.

- This presentation, argues that from the earliest articulation of African nationalism and Pan Africanism in the 1910s and 1920s, black intellectual and leaders not only began to think regionally and coordinate nascent African nationalist ideas and programs but also began to critique both European and South African Empires qua empire. This took place alongside a continuing (British) Empire loyalty that had more to do with awareness of tougher rule under either Afrikaner or settler rule than belief in any British “liberators.” Yet if British imperial citizenship was extended to black elites under the Union Jack, it was soon used to keep them within the ALA-LC system may each be given two different ways: ‘c’ as ‘t’ or ‘re’, ‘u’ as ‘b’ or ‘he’, and ‘q’ as ‘b’ or ‘be’.

- “Entering Ethiopic Script into Library Catalog Records”:

For many African languages, the level of accuracy of bibliographic data that can be provided in a catalog derives from practices and standards that are interrelated. In the case of African languages that use the non-roman Ethiopic script, the underlying infrastructure has actually been in place on many systems since 2007. Deciding to include the script directly in records for materials in Amharic, Ge’ez, Tigré, Tigrinya and other Ethiopian languages was a step only taken in the library cataloging environment by OCLC in 2013, in consultation with relevant ALA and ALC committees.

The first electronic library record including Ethiopic script to be successfully exchanged digitally was sent from Yale University Library to Emory University on September 2, 2010 via OAI-PMH. Its title is ‘’(romanized as “Masaratawi yawurs heg maberziya‘”, or “Explanations to Fundamentals of Inheritance Law”).

For the reader of languages using Ethiopic script, learning the ALA-LC romanization method can represent a hurdle to access. Not only are there many alternative transliteration methods in use that it competes with, but the ALA-LC system carries with it some inherent ambiguities which can prove a burden to the user. In the example given above, there are three characters whose romanized values within the ALA-LC system may each be given two different ways: “c” as “t’ or ‘re’, “u” as “b” or “he,” and “q” as “b” or “be.”

Entering the script directly in production data does not itself resolve the ambiguities of romanization, but it does allow the user to overcome having to take those into account in entering his or her search for an item. For the cataloger, various methods are available to input Ethiopic characters, each with a learning curve adapted to different levels of familiarity with the script. These range from a purely visual web-based input method to ones that map the keys of a hardware keyboard to Ethiopic syllabic characters.

While workflows have been tested thus far on Voyager software from Ex Libris and on OCLC’s Conexxion, there are a number of other software environments where the same kind of testing is still needed and has yet to be done. Limited testing has been undertaken at Michigan State University on the Skyviews system. Interested catalogers or systems staff who are on other software platforms and wish to volunteer to test can contact the author.

For more information, contact the author.

1 http://people.wisc.edu/~richel/scrips/pickers/ethiopic/
2 http://keyboards.com/Hebrew/Keyboardกระทรวง_ธปMU-
3 http://www.theliberian.com/2010/03/10/how-to-use-amharic-in-win-
dows-7-without-any-extra-software/
Herskovits Library Adds Jan Vansina Papers to Collection
By Clare Roccaforte

It has been said that renowned historian and anthropologist Jan Vansina’s “academic career is virtually simultaneous with the field of African history itself.”

Now Northwestern University’s Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies -- the largest separate Africana collection in existence -- is home to The Jan Vansina Papers, which fill 136 boxes with documents that span the years 1953 to 1994.

A major figure in the study of Africa, Vansina is professor emeritus at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, where he taught for more than three decades. In his career he published 20 monographs and more than 200 articles and did extensive fieldwork throughout Africa. His methodologies and research into pre-colonial oral tradition helped found the field of African history. As a professor, mentor, author and researcher, his influence has been profound.

“Professor Vansina’s gift is among the most major gifts to the Herskovits Library in its history,” said David Easterbrook, George and Mary LeCron Foster Curator emeritus at the Herskovits Library. “Generations of scholars and African historical research will benefit immeasurably from his generosity.”

The collection is made up of working files containing field notes, correspondence, photographs, maps, manuscripts, drafts and more used by Vansina in his research, writing and teaching during his more than 50 years of professional activity. The original arrangement of his papers has been preserved.

Vansina had a relationship with Northwestern University as well, beginning when the pioneering African anthropologist Melville Herskovits offered him a job, though he was committed to Wisconsin at the time. He would later serve as a visiting professor.

“It’s an honor to have his papers as part of our collections,” said Esmeralda Kale, George and Mary LeCron Foster Curator at the Herskovits Library. “Of particular interest to researchers, I suspect, will be the materials on the ethnography of Central Africa.”

Vansina became known as one of the founders of the modern study of African history and made Central Africa his focus. He also put an emphasis on the whole of Africa in the pre-European contact era. He wrote his first book, “Oral Tradition,” about how to use rigorous historical methods to further document the historical evidence left behind by the Kuba from the Belgian Congo before there were textual records to analyze. He insisted that it was possible to study pre-colonial African history in a systematic framework using the documentation of the oral tradition. This insistence helped instill a sense of justification and self-confidence in the burgeoning field of African history.

Vansina was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1983 and was the first scholar chosen as “Distinguished Africanist” by the African Studies Association of the United States. His many books include “Paths in the Rainforest,” “Living with Africa,” “Kingdoms of the Savanna,” and “The Children of Woot,” all published by the University of Wisconsin Press.