
**TOWARDS ESTABLISHING AN INTERNET-BASED DATABASE
FOR FOLKLORE STUDIES IN
THE GULF STATES**

By
Dr. Hesham Azmi
Department of Library & Information
Science
Qatar University

Introduction :

The study of folklore constitutes a vital source for research into the social history of any community, nation or region. Folklore in the Gulf is remarkably authentic and deeply rooted in history. It has successfully survived for centuries and affected life in several aspects, Particularly the social and cultural ones.

The last thirty years have witnessed a growing interest for the study of folklore in the gulf region. This has been indicated by a noticeable number of contributions from scholars and researchers in the field. A large number of books, articles, and research papers, covering a wide variety of topics, have been published.

However, it has been noticed that the efforts to document these resources have been very modest, hindering them from

being readily accessible by researchers and scholars. Al-Fuhail points out that there is a widening gap between the scholarly work and recipients. (Al-Fuhail, 1998, p. 9).

It should be noticed, however, that few efforts to collect define and document folklore studies have been conducted, resulting in a number of bibliographic tools. Nevertheless, a thorough study of these tools would reveal the following remarks :

- * The majority of these tools have focused on books and periodical articles as their primary concern. Other types of resources, namely research papers, dissertations as well as audiovisual material have been excluded.

- * In addition, bibliographic tools have focused, principally, on Arabic materials; materials dealing with the subject but written in non-Arabic languages, have been also excluded.
- * Most of the information in these tools has been derived from previous bibliographic tools. Hence, all the drawbacks in these tools were, naturally, reflected in the new outcome.
- * This has led, consequently, to inconsistency with regards to the amount, depth and accuracy of the descriptive information on the materials. While some of these materials were described in full details, including an abstract for the prescribed item, others lacked the very basic identification data.
- * The majority of the existing tools are incomplete, as regards to the comprehensiveness of their coverage. This is due to the fact that a huge amount of time and effort is needed to achieve a comprehensive coverage of all resources. It has been clearly stated in these tools that such coverage is beyond any individual's capability.

Aim and Purpose :

As the application of new technology in various aspects of the documentation

process has introduced new prospects for scholars and researchers in the field, this paper aims at proposing and planning for the establishment of an internet-based database for folklore and folklore studies in the Gulf States. The proposed database would serve all those individuals and institutions, involved in studying and working with folklore.

It is well acknowledged, that bibliographic tools are considered essential for research in any given field, as they aim to collect and identify information resources, thus providing scholars and researchers the means to locate those resources.

In addition to its attempt to overcome the drawbacks mentioned earlier, the proposed database will serve the following purposes :

1. To assist students, researchers and scholars in the field of folklore, especially those interested in studying folklore in the gulf region, identify various information resources on the subject.
2. To help in formulating plans regarding future research in the field. This is to be accomplished through revealing various gaps in some areas in the subject. Hence, efforts would be directed to encourage writings and research in those areas.

3. To provide the foundation for a future work to be done, on establishing a folklore database for the entire Arab region.

In the light of the above mentioned goals, the paper attempts to answer the following questions :

1. Could various information resources on folklore in the gulf region be identified ?
2. What are the topics to be included ?
3. What are the types of sources to be covered ?
4. What are the different resources that could be examined to gather information about the required information sources ?
5. How could these sources described and analyzed ?
6. Is it feasible to establish an internet-based database for folklore in the gulf region ?
7. What are the requirements to establish such a database ?
8. What are the advantages of disseminating this information on the internet ?

Methodology :

In order to achieve the above-mentioned goal, the study will cover four

main phases. These could be summarized as follows :

1. Definition of scope :

One of the major steps in this proposal is to determine the nature of information sources to be included. It has been mentioned that a wide variety of topics are covered under the broad subject of folklore. Hence, these have to be selected and defined. In addition, the different types and formats of these sources are to be determined; there are published materials, unpublished materials, paper-based documents, and audio-visual materials, to name a few.

2. Identification of resources :

For the purpose of collecting relevant information sources, various resources have to be identified. These include libraries, archives, specialized and research centers in the field of folklore and heritage. Bibliographies, indices, catalogues are also to be examined. Different specialized centers on the national and regional levels in the Gulf States will be considered to determine how they can contribute in this respect.

3. Documentation :

In this phase all sources are to be catalogued, classified, analyzed and indexed, leading to the creation of a full

bibliographic record for each item. The record structure as well as fields definitions are all to be covered. A data dictionary is also to be created for the database. Various formats of information sources collected will be also considered i.e. books, articles, sound recordings and videotapes, leading to the possibility of establishing multiple files within the database.

4. The Proposed Database :

The possibility of uploading the database on the internet is to be examined, outlining the numerous advantages of establishing an internet-based database for folklore studies, such as facilitating accessibility, downloading and exchange of bibliographic records to researchers and interested bodies in the gulf region and the world at large.

Data collection :

Data collection for this study was based on field visits paid to the Gulf Corporation Council Folklore Center (GCCFC), in January and February 2000. Interviews with the General Manager of the center, as well as with the Head of Information and Publication Department.

Bibliographic tools were consulted for writing the literature survey section.

Literature Survey :

Efforts to document folklore and studies in the Arab world started modestly on national basis. Egypt, Iraq and few others were among the leading Arab nations in this respect. However, it was not until the early seventies that efforts to document these sources on regional level actually took place. Some of the worthy mentioning in this context, are the following :

The first serious attempt to document folklore studies in the Arab world dates back to 1972 and was published in 1983. (Al-Gowhary, 1983), this bibliography contained 4175 titles representing all what have been published about folklore sources and studies until 1971. It covers publications. The bibliography was mainly limited, however, to printed materials : books and periodical articles, manuscripts and the like.

In 2000, a continuation of the previous work was implemented, resulting in a huge work (Al-Gowhary, 2000) that documents research papers and studies regarding folklore in the Arab world. Folklore works and sources have been excluded from this bibliography which includes about 6600 entries.

As regards to attempts to document folklore sources and studies in the Gulf

region, some efforts to document one or more aspects of folklore have taken place. Worth mentioning in this context is the "sources of study for folklore traditions in the Arab Heritage" (Al-Najar).

However it was not until 1993, when the first complete work covering all aspects of folklore in the Arab Gulf States has been published (Nasr, 1993). This bibliography was published by the Gulf Corporation Council Folklore Center. Nevertheless, this tool was also restricted to printed materials only.

Scope :

The study investigates the possibility of establishing an Internet-based database for the Gulf states, namely; Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates. The information and data gathered are valid until February 2000.

1. Definition of scope :

One of the main aspects to be tackled in this proposal is to identify the scope of the proposed database. The following elements are to be examined :

- a) Subject coverage.
- b) Types of materials to be included.
- c) Date limitation.
- d) Geographical limitations.
- e) Language limitations.

a) Subject coverage :

There have been many attempts to define the subject area of folklore. In his classic work "The science of folklore", (Al-Gowhary, 1980) has pointed out that different approaches have been followed to define the subject matter. Those were based on culturological criterion, sociological criterion, psycho-sociological criterion and ethnological criterion. He concluded by suggesting the following six main sections :

- * folk traditions.
- * folk beliefs
- * folk customs
- * folk literature
- * folk arts
- * material culture

(Al-Gowhary, 1978, p. 36-38, p. 53)

However, a thorough examination of the literature will reveal that most scholars and researchers in the field would agree on a classifying works on folklore under one or more of the following categories :

1. Folk customs and traditions :

This includes, among others :

Lifecycle (Birth – Marriage – Death).
Feasts and annual occasions (Religious occasions – National feasts ... etc.)

The individual in the society (Social protocols – Family relations – Eating and drinking habits – Daily routines ... etc.)

2. Folk Beliefs :

Topics included in this category are :
Dreams – Magic – Metals and Stones –
Animals – Time – Directions – Numbers
– Spirits – Creatures – Colors – Numbers
– Places – Firsts – Folk medicine ... etc.

3. Folk Literature :

This includes :

Proverbs – Tales – Riddles – Jokes –
Anecdote – Acts – Songs – Myths –
Fables – Ballads – Mawaliya ... etc.

Those could be further divided according to occasions, groups ... etc.

4. Folk Arts :

This category includes three main areas : folk music, dancing and drama. Those are further divided into the following :

Folk Music :

Which contains the following :

a) Music :

1. Accompanying songs such as those for birth, work, weddings ... etc.
2. Accompanying dance.
3. Pure music.

b) Musical instruments :

Folk dance and folk games :

This includes :

- a) Dancing,
- b) Folk games.

5. Material Culture :

This subject area covers the following aspects :

Handcrafts – Household tools and appliances – Agricultural tools –
Cosmetics – Costumes – Ornaments –
Furniture – Tattoo – Drawings ... etc.

Needless to say, the above mentioned classification is neither comprehensive, nor enumerative of all subjects involved. Rather, it attempts to draw some guidelines regarding the broad subjects to be included in the proposed database.

Moreover, folk material might be widely scattered in a variety of sources. According to some researchers, writings in the following categories might be of great value for the study of folklore :

- * Bibliographies
- * Encyclopedias
- * Religious works
- * Historical resources
- * Geographical works.
- * Literature and folk literature works.
- * Social sciences works.
- * Applied science.
- * Newspapers
- * Journeys

It is believed that these works would contain valuable information on various aspects of folk traditions and customs. This wider view of the subject field, should not be neglected.

b) Types of material :

It is worth mentioning in this context that works covering the subjects specified earlier fall in two groups :

1. Folklore works :

These works represent different subjects and forms mentioned above. Examples of those include, among others, Poems, folk tales, folk epics and the like. It should be noted, however, that there are thousands of unpublished materials as well as manuscripts in this category.

2. Folklore studies :

These are works compiled by scholars, academics and researchers in the field to study, analyze and criticize works in the first group. A large portion of these works, however, might include parts of the cited works.

Since the proposed bibliographic database is to provide for a comprehensive coverage of information resources on folklore and folklore studies in the Gulf States, both groups should be considered for inclusion.

Following the determination of the nature of works to be included, it is essential to define the types of information sources for the database. Most of the existing tools have focused primarily on books and periodical articles. Unfortunately, other types of sources have been repeatedly excluded. Although, it is important to focus on books and articles, as they do represent a major source for information in any field, it is equally important to include other sources. Folklore is among the few subject fields, where various information sources are considered vital to researchers. Audio-visual materials – namely sound recordings and video tapes – and pictures provide valuable information to scholars, which are very unlikely to be offered by other sources.

Therefore, it is suggested that the proposed database would encompass the following information sources :

1. Books
2. Periodical articles
3. Dissertations.
4. Manuscripts.
5. Sound recording.
6. Video recordings / films.
7. Picture collections and slides.

Each of the above mentioned types will dictate different levels of description. This will be dealt with in

details, when addressing the structure of the proposed database in the final section of this paper.

c) Date limitations :

Although works and studies on folklore in the gulf have proliferated in the last forty years or so, there are some writings that could be dated back to the beginnings of the century. As the proposed database is meant to be comprehensive in coverage, no date limitations would be applied, thus, all works regardless of their date of publication will be included.

d) Geographical limitations :

The main purpose of the proposed database is to act as a major information repository about folklore and folklore studies in the six Gulf states. Hence, it would include all works about the subject regardless of their place of publication.

e) Language limitations :

Works in both Arabic and other languages are to be considered for inclusion.

2. Identification of Resources :

There are two approaches to collect data about the information sources selected for inclusion in any database. First, the examination of existing

bibliographies, catalogues and indices, both general and specialized ones; second the consultation of the information sources themselves in order to extract the necessary information for the bibliographic description.

However, it has been pointed out that one of the major drawbacks of the existing bibliographic tools, is the lack of comprehensiveness, consistency and accuracy. This problem could be largely attributed to the fact that, the vast majority of these tools have been dependant on bibliographies and similar indirect resources. This has led to a repetitive series of unavoidable mistakes.

In order to achieve the optimum possible, the second approach for collecting data is highly advisable. Nevertheless, this is a huge task that dictates good coordination and planning from the specialized institutions in the Gulf States. Due to the wide variety of topics and media involved, gathering of data will require the consultation of the following institutions :

1. National libraries.
2. University and academic libraries.
3. Specialized national and regional centers.
4. Television and radio archives.

National libraries :

National libraries do acquire, organize and disseminate literature, which reflect the heritage and culture of their respective countries. Therefore, the examination of holdings acquired by national libraries in the Gulf States will be of a considerable value for the purposes of this project. The majority of the holdings in these libraries, however, are in printed form, accordingly, they would serve as a good source for books, manuscripts, periodicals and other printed sources.

University libraries :

University and academic libraries would also provide good subject coverage, especially those universities that offer academic degrees in folklore or related disciplines. Those will be a good source for books, periodicals and dissertations.

National and regional centers :

Specialized national centers or bodies in the six Gulf States are to play an exceptional role in this respect. The following institutions represent a starting point in this direction :

Bahrain :

- * The Culture National Center / Heritage Administration.

Kuwait :

- * The Culture National Center / Heritage Administration.

Oman :

- * Ministry of Culture and National Heritage.
- * Ministry of Information.

Qatar :

- * Ministry of Culture / Heritage Administration.

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia :

- * Ministry of Education.
- * Arab Society.

United Arab Emirates :

- * Ministry of Information.
- * Zayed Center for Heritage and History.
- * Emirates Heritage Club.

This list is not meant to be enumerative. Nevertheless, the above mentioned institutions do represent the major reservoirs of folklore in their respective countries. Other institutions should be also considered.

ALECSO has published a directory listing heritage and folk centers in the Arab world. Though not comprehensive, the directory points out to some of these centers in three of the Gulf States. (ALECSO, 1998).

In addition to national centers, the Folklore Center attached to the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (G.C.C.F.C.) has a vital role to play in this context. The center was founded in 1982 to "collect, document and classify folklore of the member states" among other objectives. It is recommended that this center would play a leading role in coordinating the efforts among other institutions on the national level.

The center houses a good collection of books and periodicals on folklore. In addition, the center holdings of pictures and slides reaches some 60.000 items, probably the largest among other centers in the gulf, reflecting most aspects of traditions and customs in all gulf states. Also, the center's holdings from sound and video recordings represent another valuable addition, with an estimated 2500 hours of recorded sound for the former and around 100 hours of moving images for the latter.

Television and Radio Archives :

Television and radio archives are among the very important resources that have been neglected in any bibliographic compilation. Existing bibliographic tools on folklore are no exception. Although some of the specialized centers may possess some types of sound and video

recordings, the holdings of television and radio archives are entirely different in nature. Typically, these works would cover a wide variety of folk aspects, ranging from programs on folk music and songs to narrative programs about crafts and costumes. There is a wide consensus that radio and television programs do reflect cultural, social and heritage aspects of any nation. By definition, all these aspects would be of an interest to any researcher of folklore.

One of the major problems in dealing with television and radio programs, is the fact that they are inaccessible to the public. What adds to the problem, is the lack of definition tools necessary to document this valuable information. It is highly recommended that the proposed database would identify and document relevant materials held by television and radio archives in the Gulf States.

It is expected that each of the institutions mentioned above would apply various standards as regards to both the bibliographic description and subject analysis of the collection it holds. For the sake of standardization, a data worksheet should be adopted, listing all the necessary data elements for each medium. A detailed description of these elements will be discussed in the final section of the paper.

In addition to the previous direct resources, the following indirect tools should be also examined :

National bibliographies :

Representing the major information resources for literature in any nation, all national bibliographies for the six Gulf States should be examined. A thorough examination of these bibliographies is suggested, as folklore related topics could be scattered under different subject areas. It has been mentioned that a wide variety of topics could be involved.

Subject bibliographies :

Existing bibliographies in the field should also be examined, this will be useful to fill any gaps that might arise when consulting direct resources. The bibliography issued by the G.C.C. Folklore Center "**Folklore in The Gulf : An Annotated Bibliography**" is a good example in this category.

Periodicals directories :

This would provide information about periodical titles, with full bibliographic coverage. Most of these directories will also provide a subject index for the periodicals covered.

The following are just a few examples of the above :

- Directory of Gulf Journalism (GCC, 1998).
- Catalogue of the Periodicals in The National Library (The Cultural Foundation, 1990).
- Catalogue of Arabic and Non-Arabic Periodicals in the University of Qatar. (University of Qatar, 1988).

Databases :

Despite of being precious few, Arabic on-line databases, they should be considered for consultation. One important resource in this respect is the **bibliographic database** developed by the Information and Documentation Center of the Arab League.

Also, regional databases in some of the Gulf States might be consulted. The National Scientific and Technical Information Center (NSTIC), in Kuwait has developed the "Arabian Gulf Information File" as well as the "Arabic Catalog of Books". Both files are available on-line. (Abdul Mu'ti, 1998, pp. 92-93).

Most of the above mentioned resources will provide information about Arabic literature on folklore. Hence, it is suggested that other foreign resources should be consulted. The Internet web-based OPACS could provide an

excellent tool in this respect. The Library of Congress on-line catalogue (catalog.loc.gov) would offer good information about its holdings on the subject.

A very basic search about folklore in the gulf has resulted in a hundred of hits as shown in (fig. 1).

3. The Proposed Database :

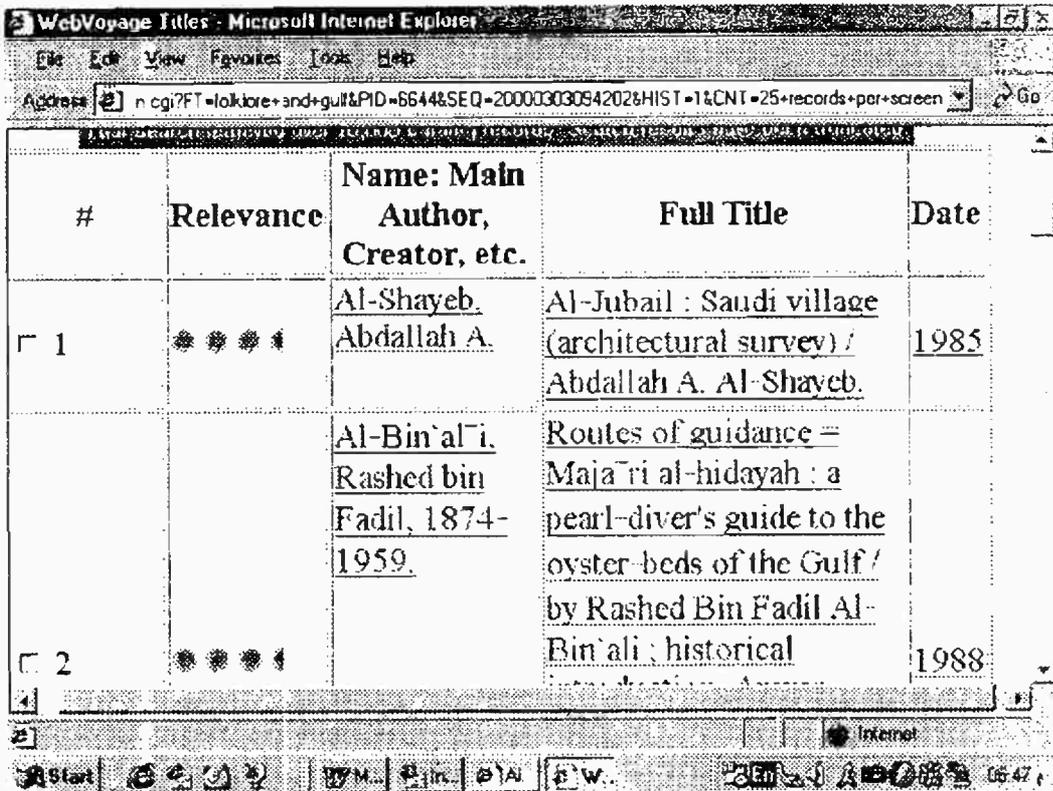
This section investigates the possibility of establishing an internet-based database for the folklore sources in

the Gulf States. The following aspects will be addressed : documentation, database structure and requirements, software issues, implementation and finally the Internet proposed database.

(a) Documentation :

It has been pointed out that the gathering of data from different resources will result in a huge amount of information. In the documentation phase, it is essential to provide the following :

Fig. 1 : Library of Congress Online Catalog sample search.



1. Data fields :

These are essential to identity various information sources in the database. One option is to adopt a standard cataloging rules such as the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR2). However, the possibility to adopt some data fields to better suite the needs of different formats involved, should be also considered. The data dictionary, discussed shortly, could give some guidance in this context.

2. Authority lists :

In order to achieve some sort of standardization with regards to the indexing and subject analysis, as well as name formats for authors, institutions ... etc., the following authority lists are required :

Name authority list : for determining the most appropriate form for names of individuals and organizations.

Keywords (descriptors) : this is essential for subject retrieval from the database. It is highly recommended to develop a standard list to accommodate all concepts and terms of folklore. Some existing tools could cater for this purpose. Worth mentioning in this context is the work by El-Shamy (El-Shamy, 1995) in his attempt to compile a guide to motif classification.

Although the work intended to provide a scheme for classification of folk traditions, the terms used could be examined. Moreover other lists used in specialized centers in the Gulf States should be also consulted.

Genre : this list will help in assigning various genres denoting folklore aspects in the gulf. There has been some efforts to develop such a list; worth mentioning in this context is the "Classification and Indexing of folklore genres in Arabic heritage sources", one of the projects undertaken by the GCCFC.

(b) Structure of the database :

Variations in the physical form of the information sources dictate the development of a multi-file database. Each of the files denotes a specific information source(s) sharing common data elements. The following files are suggested :

1. Books, manuscripts, writings and dissertations.
2. Periodical articles.
3. Sound recordings.
4. Video recordings.
5. Pictures and slides.

The Data dictionary :

In an attempt to establish some guidelines regarding the level and depth

of description for the selected information sources, a data dictionary was compiled (Tables 1-5) for each of the materials listed above. A data dictionary is a table

in a database that stores the names, field types, length, and other characteristics of the fields in the database tables.

Table (1) : Data dictionary for books, manuscripts and dissertations.

Field	Type	Length	Characteristics
Title	A	60	Title proper as drawn from title page
Author (s)	A	40	Author, co-author, translator and other responsibilities
Edition	AN	2	As drawn from title page
Place of publication	A	10	City of publication
Publisher	A	20	Name of first publisher
University	A	30	In case of dissertations
Date of publication	N	4	Year of publication
Ruler	AN	5	For manuscripts
Pages	N	4	Pagination in pages, vol. ...
Illustrations	A	10	Maps, pictureas, drawings etc.
Series	AN	20	Series title and number
ISBN	N	14	
Notes	A	30	Important information not mentioned in previous fields, especially links to other items.
Keyword (s)	A	40	As drawn from the approved authority list.

Table (2) : Data dictionary for periodical articles.

Field	Type	Length	Characteristics
Title	A	60	Title of article
Author (s)	A	40	Author
Source	A	20	Title of periodical where the article was published
Publication data	AN	10	Issue no. , volume, year of publication
Pages	N	8	Page unumbers
Keyword (s)	A	40	As drawn from the approved authority list.

Table (3) : Data dictionary for Sound recordings.

Field	Type	Length	Characteristics
Title	A	60	Title of recorded item
Type of recorded work	A	10	Song, musical, narrative etc.
Presenter	AN	40	As drawn from recording
Narrator (s)	A	40	Oral history and the like
Singer (s)	A	40	As drawn from recording
Musical group	N	40	As drawn from recording
Place of recording	AN	20	Location of recording
Date of recording	N	8	dd./ mm/ yy
Duration	AN	6	Given in min. and sec.
Sound quality	A	6	Mono, stereo... etc.
Holdings	A	30	Name of library or Archive
Genre	N	15	As drawn from approved list
Notes	A	30	Important information not mentioned in previous fields.
Keyword (s)	A	40	As drawn from the approved authority list.

Table (4) : Data dictionary for video recordings.

Field	Type	Length	Characteristics
Title	A	60	Title of recorded item
Type of recorded Program	A	10	Song, musical, narrative etc.
Presenter	A	40	As drawn from recording
Director	A	40	As drawn from recording
Singer (s)	A	40	As drawn from recording
Musical group	N	40	As drawn from recording
Narrator (s)	A	40	Maps, pictures, drawings etc.
Duration	AN	6	Given in min. and sec.
Place of recording	A	6	Mono, stereo... etc.
Date of recording	AN	20	Location of recording
Sound quality	N	8	dd./ mm/ yy
Holdings	A	30	Name of library or Archive
Genre	N	15	As drawn from approved list
Notes	A	30	Important information not mentioned in previous fields,
Keyword (s)	A	40	As drawn from the approved authority list.

Table (5) : Data dictionary for Pictures.

Field	Type	Length	Characteristics
Title	A	60	Title
Genre	A	10	Subject of the photograph
Photography	A	40	
Location	A	20	Name of exact location
Date	N	8	dd./ mm/ yy
Physical description	A	40	Color, Dimensions etc.
Keywords	A	40	As drawn from the approved authority list.

Software issues :

The question as to what software to use to accommodate the proposed database should be addressed. Many packages have been developed in the last few years to deal with Arabic data. **MINI/ISIS and CDS/ISIS** are among the very famous packages that have been used by a wide variety of Arab foundations. However, many other institutions have developed in-house systems to cater for their specific needs. Although discussing software specifications is beyond the scope of this paper, two general considerations should be well thought of :

- The selected s/w should have very powerful search and retrieval capabilities. These will include among others, field search, the use of Boolean operators (AND, NOT, OR), controlled truncation, stop words, etc. Therefore, an IRS based s/w would likely be a better choice than traditional library housekeeping system.
- Since the proposed database is likely to be a part of larger network, compatibility with MARC records is a must. This includes the ability to import, export and the automatic ordering of MARC fields.

Implementation :

Needless to say, the time and effort needed to gather and document information from the resources mentioned earlier is beyond any individual's capabilities. Once again, coordination of efforts in this respect is vital. It is suggested that the Folk Center of the GCC mentioned earlier would act as the coordinating body for this mission.

One of the main objectives of the GCC Folklore center was **"to establish a central information section well equipped with techniques and methods to qualify it to be a database for scholars."** This is yet to be achieved.

It is of great importance that the center, with the assistance of other centers in the Gulf States, should take the necessary steps towards the establishment of establishing this regional database. It is assumed that the proposed database will constitute the foundations for an Arab folklore database.

In the light of the above, the center should assume the following responsibilities :

1. Coordination with the member states as regards to assigning teamwork of professionals to collect, define and document information sources in their respective countries.

2. Adopting the required standards for bibliographic description and subject analysis, necessary for documentation.
3. Investigating the possibility to adopt/adapt one of the software packages used in any of the specialized centers in the gulf states. On the other hand, it should study the developing of tailored-made software after a thorough study of the current and future needs.
4. Formulation of a supervising committee, to follow up the implementation process, tackling any problem the working teams may encounter.

The proposed Internet database :

In the previous sections, the possibility of establishing a folklore database for the Gulf States has been discussed, outlining the needs as well as the requirements for such a database. After the completion of the database, it is recommended that it to be uploaded to the Internet. The numerous advantages of developing an online database and uploading it to the Internet, could be outlined below :

- * The on-line database will contribute to the overall Arabic efforts towards establishing the long awaited Arab

Information Network. It is worth mentioning in this context, that one of the three subsystems proposed in this network is the SIS-NET dealing with specialized information in some subject sectors.

- * The database will facilitate the standardization of record structures among the contributing institutions, thus, facilitating possible exchange of bibliographic records, not only across the gulf region, but also the rest of the Arab world and the world at large.
- * On-line bibliographic databases offer a wide variety of search options. Records could be retrieved by any data element. The use of logic (Boolean operators) would also enhance the search capabilities, enabling users to manipulate the data in different ways.
- * The easiness by which the database will be updated and modified.
- * Uploading the database to the Internet is seen to be very advantageous on the long term. There is a wide consensus that the Internet is the publishing medium of the future, enabling thousands of researchers and scholars from around the globe to gain access to the database.

* The availability of the database on the Internet is coinciding with a current tendency among many institutions in the region, to publish information of many sorts on the Internet. The **Cultural Foundation** in UAE has developed a homepage on the web (www.cultural.org.ae/) offering access to an online library for audio, video, books, a Poetry encyclopedia and Al-Waraq, the huge online encyclopedia comprising about 9 million pages about Arab heritage in all fields. Moreover **Zayed Center for Heritage and History** is constructing a homepage on the web (www.zayedcenter.org.ae), emphasizing the importance of the new medium.

* The use of multimedia on the web represents yet another advantage. Some of the information sources in the database, namely sound recordings; video recordings and pictures could be played and displayed on the screen, providing users with a far different experience.

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