

## **Charlotte Kramer: Each manuscript has a great story behind**

**By Hamad Alduraihim.**

**T**oday, facsimiles of manuscripts play a crucial role in bridging ideas between different nations. Müller & Schindler Publisher aims to make ancient manuscripts more accessible to the public by making unique edition facsimiles. I interviewed Charlotte Kramer, director of Müller & Schindler Publisher, to talk about the world of manuscripts, the relations of Müller & Schindler Publisher with museums and libraries around the world, and other points that relate to the world of manuscripts.

**Recently, “Müller und Schindler “is cooperating to reach out of Europe. What are the reasons that made you decide to expand to work in other regions? How do you balance between increasing the high demand for reproduction of manuscripts around the world and keeping the quality that you have?**

Müller und Schindler sees its mission as a cultural ambassador, propagating different cultures by making them accessible in various ways, not only as facsimiles. Intercultural exchange and collaboration are fundamental in order to dive into other cultures and live together in a thoughtful and respectful way. We also think that for other regions where the tradition of facsimile publishing has not been known until now, we can give important support and insides regarding this specific and fascinating book type.

Treasures of Islamic art in Arabic and Central Asian cultures have to be promoted, preserved and spread worldwide.

We are committed to highest quality; that's why we efficiently organize our workflow, logistics and human resources, focusing especially on hiring and training specialized collaborators for certain projects. The final quality check is always up to me. Only after complying with our most rigorous quality criteria, a facsimile project will be approved and realized.

**Each museum and library around the world aims to keep its manuscripts exclusively to attract visitors from around the world. How do you describe the relationship between Müller und Schindler with museums and libraries around the world, especially in reproductions of manuscripts?**

Our relationship, network and reputation are excellent. As the world leading facsimile publisher, we are known for our extensive experience and know-how, as well as for the quality of our reproductions and scientific analysis.

In recent years, institutions have been gaining more awareness of the rising interest among the general public for ancient manuscripts. Therefore, museums and libraries are putting much more effort in making their cultural heritage approachable by organizing exhibitions, issuing publications and facilitating digital access. In the context of these projects, they often rely on our support and expertise.

**The Central Asia region is rich-full of manuscripts. How do you see that region compared with other regions of the world? Is there any vision from Müller und Schindler for that region related to its manuscripts?**

Indeed, Central Asia has brought to life so many unique, fascinating and important manuscripts with wide-ranged contents: science, religion, literature and history. A lot of them have been spread all over the world and are held nowadays in many different institutions, museums as well as in private collections. Over the centuries, Central Asia has been under various and shifting political and religious influences, which has led to a splendid output and unique heritage.

Our vision is to conserve, study and share these treasures of human heritage. For this reason, we have included in our portfolio a manuscript about astronomy, created in Samarkand under the Timurid emperor Ulugh Beg because it laid the bases for astronomical studies not only in the Arabic and Islamic world, but also in Europe.

**Could you tell us a great story behind reproducing one of the manuscripts which you will never forget?**

There are a lot of stories; I would even say that each manuscript has a great story behind it. Maybe one of the most impressive experiences was the color check on the Leonardo da Vinci sketchbooks at the National Bank of France in a special room where you only enter after going through numerous security checks and safety doors. About 30 meters underground, you then have the wonderful opportunity to meet these unique masterpieces of the universal genius. Imagine touching pages Leonardo himself touched more than 500 years ago!

Another anecdote which comes to my mind is about a manuscript we needed in our photo studio: the librarian came by train and carried the treasure in his personal luggage. I was scared the whole time until he safely arrived with the book at our premises. Then we spent two weeks together in the photo studio working on this very fragile but just amazing book. Only when he returned to the library safe and sound and the book was restored in its place, I could finally relax.

**You have experienced cooperation in the Middle East, especially in the Gulf Countries (GCC). How do you describe that experience?**

Yes, we already did several cooperations in the Middle East. It was always a very inspiring and interesting experience and I particularly enjoyed them because I learned a lot about their culture and could broaden my mind. Sometimes the delivery time has been an issue and we had to explain why our publications need a lot of time due to the numerous necessary steps in the production that can only be done by few experts and are very time consuming.

**Some of the manuscripts could have historical sensitivity. How do you deal with that situation? What are the standards for choosing a manuscript to reproduce?**

Indeed some of the manuscripts are sensitive, but they are always a mirror of the time and space in which they were created, and serve therefore as a historical and cultural testimony. These contents have to be discussed and brought to light in order to broaden scientific discussion by taking into account all the perspectives and time-bound circumstances.

The choice whether to reproduce a manuscript is always made together with a team of experts to ensure the importance of the selected documents and to affirm the common interest in making it accessible and studying it scientifically (every facsimile edition is accompanied by a scientific treatise).

**How do you see the impact of reproduction of the manuscripts in the increase of dialogue between nations?**

In my opinion, it has a crucial impact because on one hand these books are cultural ambassadors and make contents accessible all over the world; and on the other hand, they support mutual understanding and respectful dialogue based on education, knowledge and comprehension. Furthermore, the gesture alone of bringing back a document to its original country of origin as a facsimile or giving it to other nations as a gift from your own culture is priceless.

**Is there any opportunity to transform the technology of reproduction of the manuscripts to other countries? How do you see that?**

The technologies are continually improving and we share our know-how with all our partners in order to always get the best results and deliver state-of-the-art work. We've already organized several workshops and trainings for institutions, scientists as well as customers in order to pass on our knowledge to them and help them continue with some of the work steps – mainly the digital capturing of original manuscripts – on their own.

**Regarding (Artificial Intelligence) and reproduction of the manuscripts, how do you see the relationship between them?**

AI will help us to approach these manuscripts on a different level and to open up new ways of experiencing and understanding them from different perspectives. We are employing new technologies and are also making use of AI with the goal of creating access, investigating and sharing contents with the public. In this context AI also helps us to collect information from different databases.

**From childhood, you are surrounded by the world of manuscripts. What are lessons that you have learned from this field that you want to share?**

Beauty and history are all over the place and historical documents as pillars of human culture and knowledge have their own aura and need a respectful and thoughtful treatment. Every artifact needs a specific approach and requires its specific handling in terms of technology and content.

Every book is a new story and adventure. I am learning something new from each of them - it is always a fascinating journey if you keep your mind open.

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