

# Digitization Work of Ghadames Society for Heritage and Manuscripts

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## Introduction

The Ghadames Society for Heritage and Manuscripts is a Libyan civil society dedicated to documenting and preserving the cultural heritage of Ghadames, an oasis town recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage site located near Libya's border with Algeria and Tunisia. This poster describes the recent documentation and digitization campaigns of the Association, including the digitization of manuscripts of the trans-Saharan, a project conducted in partnership with ASOR and the Hill Museum as well as the Manuscript Library with the support of the Whiting Foundation. This poster also describes the frontiers that our group plans to explore in the coming years.

## Ghadames Manuscripts

Ghadames was a significant religious, cultural, and commercial center. Its manuscripts are to be found in some private libraries and mosques. Most of Ghadames's ancient manuscripts are to be found in private libraries. Such collections were amassed over centuries through familial or scholarly inheritance. Some collections reflect the specific interests of a single scholar, while other collections represent efforts of several generations, or members of the same family. While many books were authored and copied locally, Ghadames scholars also imported, handed down, exchanged and copied books from other parts of the Islamic world (from Al-Andalus Spain, North Africa and the Near East).

It is estimated that more than 40,000 manuscripts and hand-written documents exist in private collections in Ghadames. The archival materials are typically composed of family papers, which can be classified into three main categories: historical, social, and commercial documents (such as trade correspondence). The manuscripts are chiefly in Arabic but also include Ottoman Turkish, and other languages of the Islamic world. It is believed that these manuscripts bring "good luck," and that dismantling them attracts misfortune. Some inhabitants consider them as a holy heritage since they often contain family secrets.



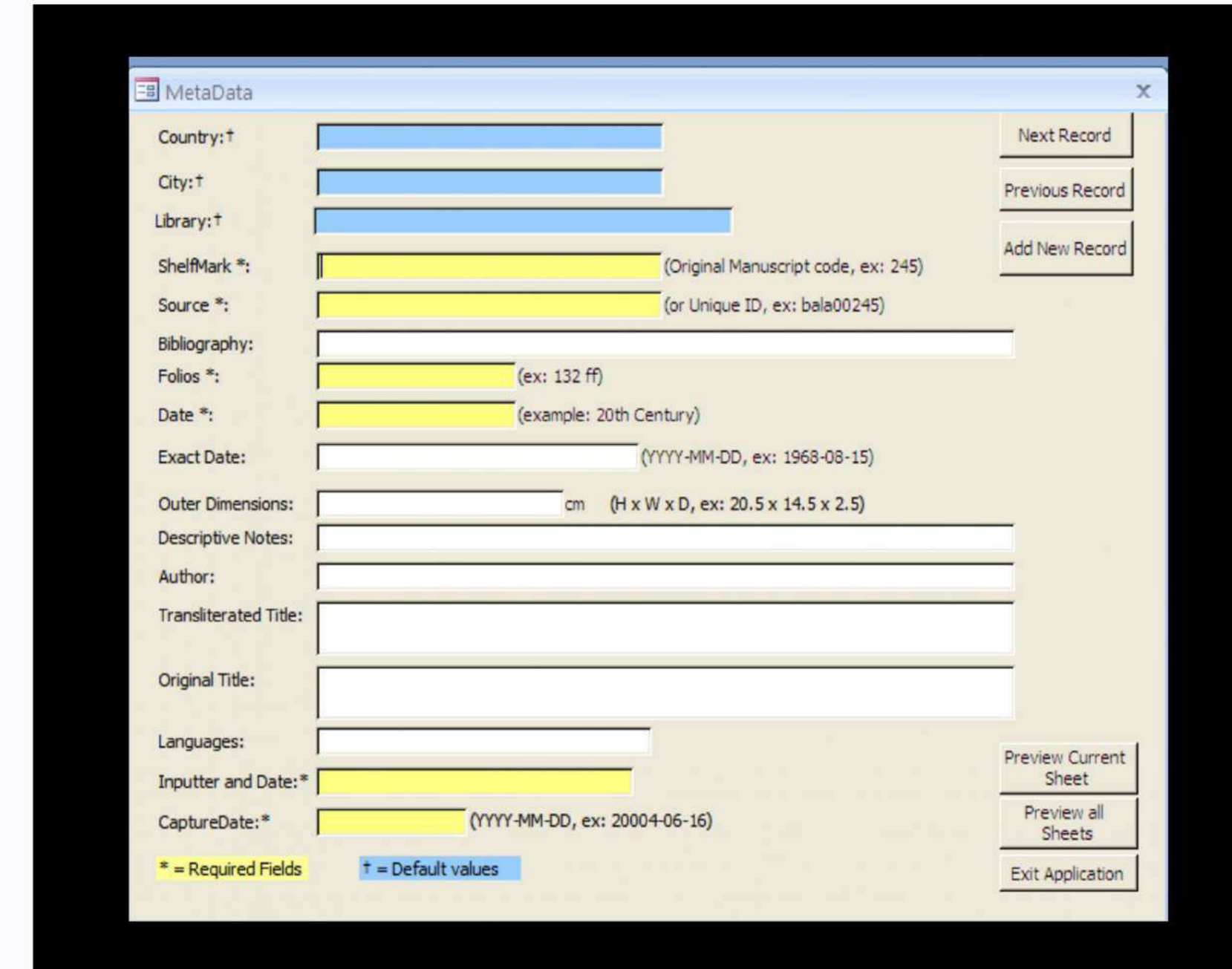
## Conditions

This cultural inheritance of Ghadames is endangered by poor preservation conditions of the manuscripts and their illegal trafficking for rich collectors. In some cases, manuscripts are stored in wooden boxes, large jars, metal cabinets, and leather cases. This is storage, not conservation. The lack of expertise and resources (both financial and technological) pose a large threat. Unless a rescue operation is taken in the immediate future, many of these priceless manuscripts will be lost.

## The Digitization of Ghadames Manuscripts

Nearly two years ago, Mr. Abulqasem Yushaa the director of The Ghadames Society for manuscripts contacted ASOR seeking assistance. With the financial support of the Whiting Foundation and the expertise of the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library (HMML), ASOR embarked on this new partnership with a digitization training workshop in Tunis in February. Mr. Walid Mourad, field director and master trainer at HMML, led the workshop for five members of the Ghadames group. Our group learned to use high quality equipment at rigorous standards to support their ongoing digitization work.

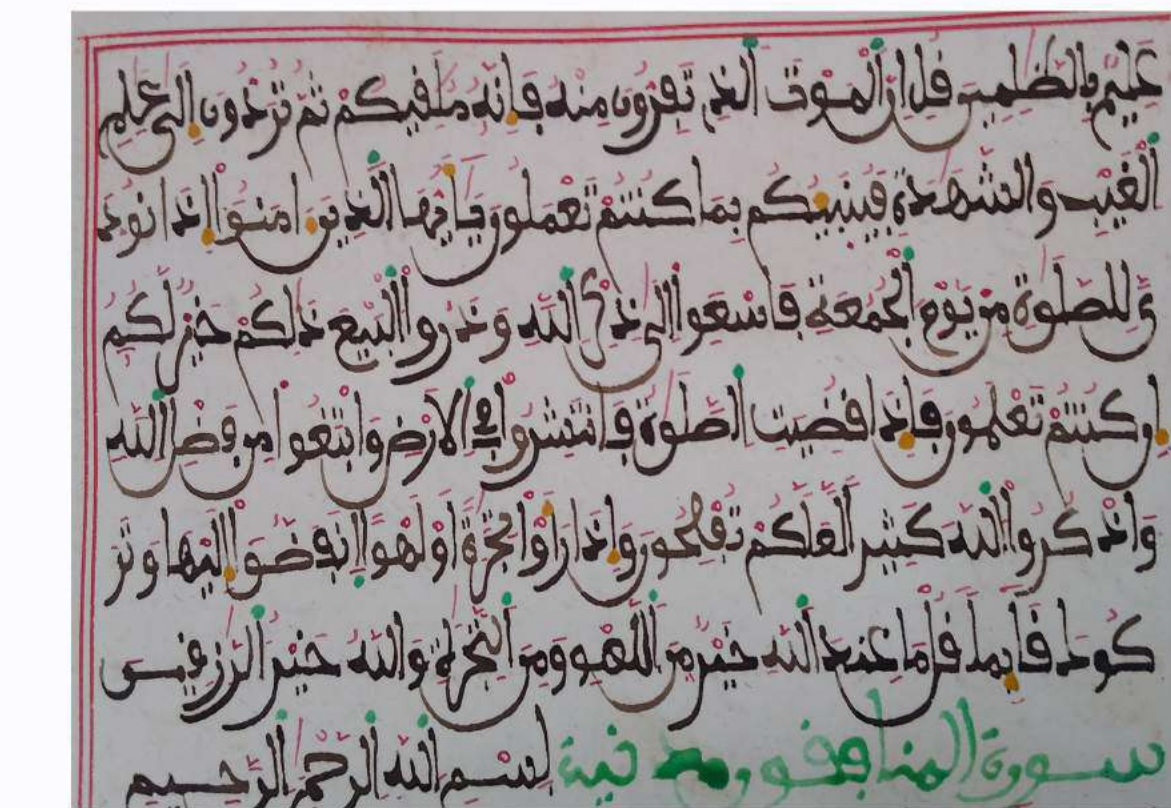
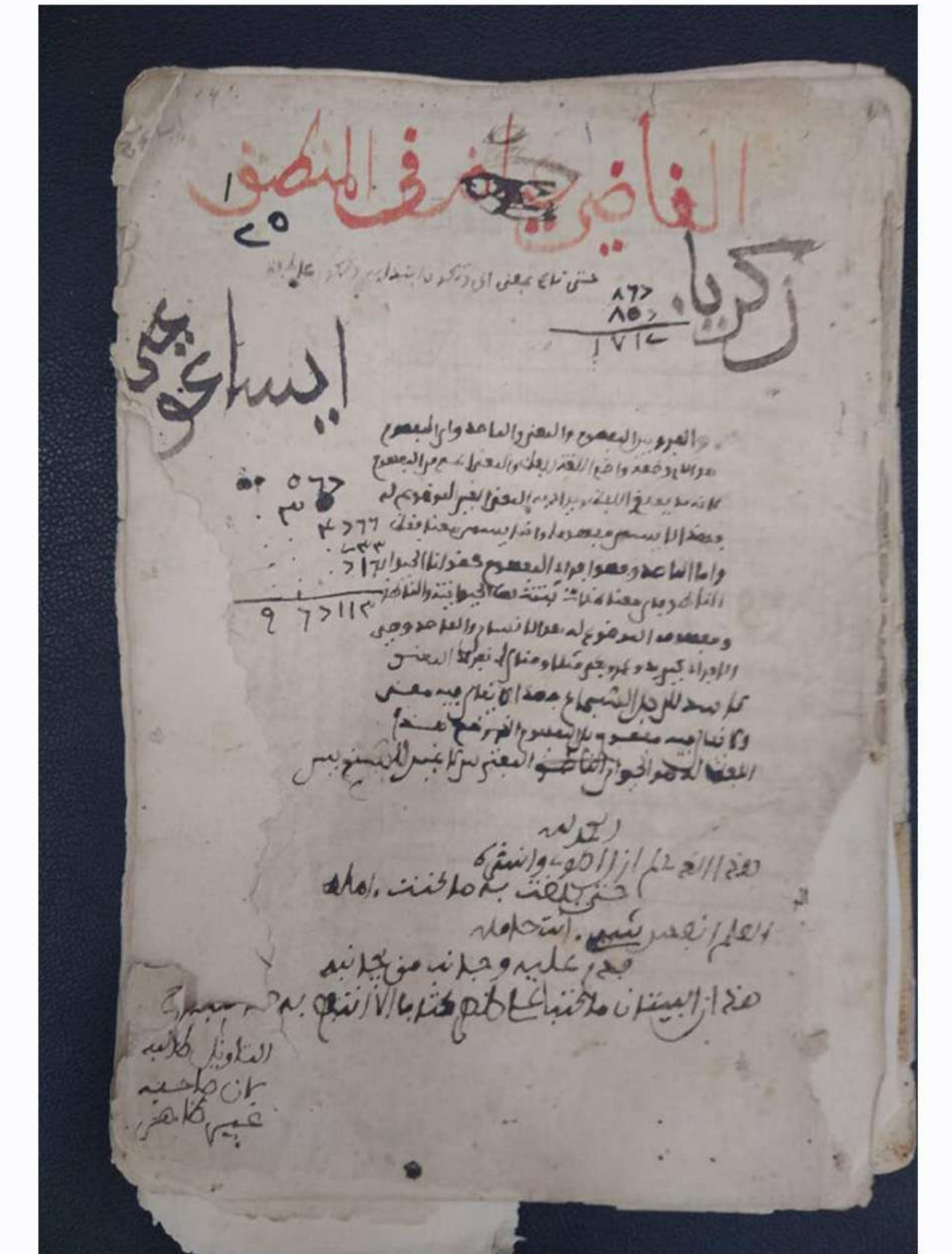
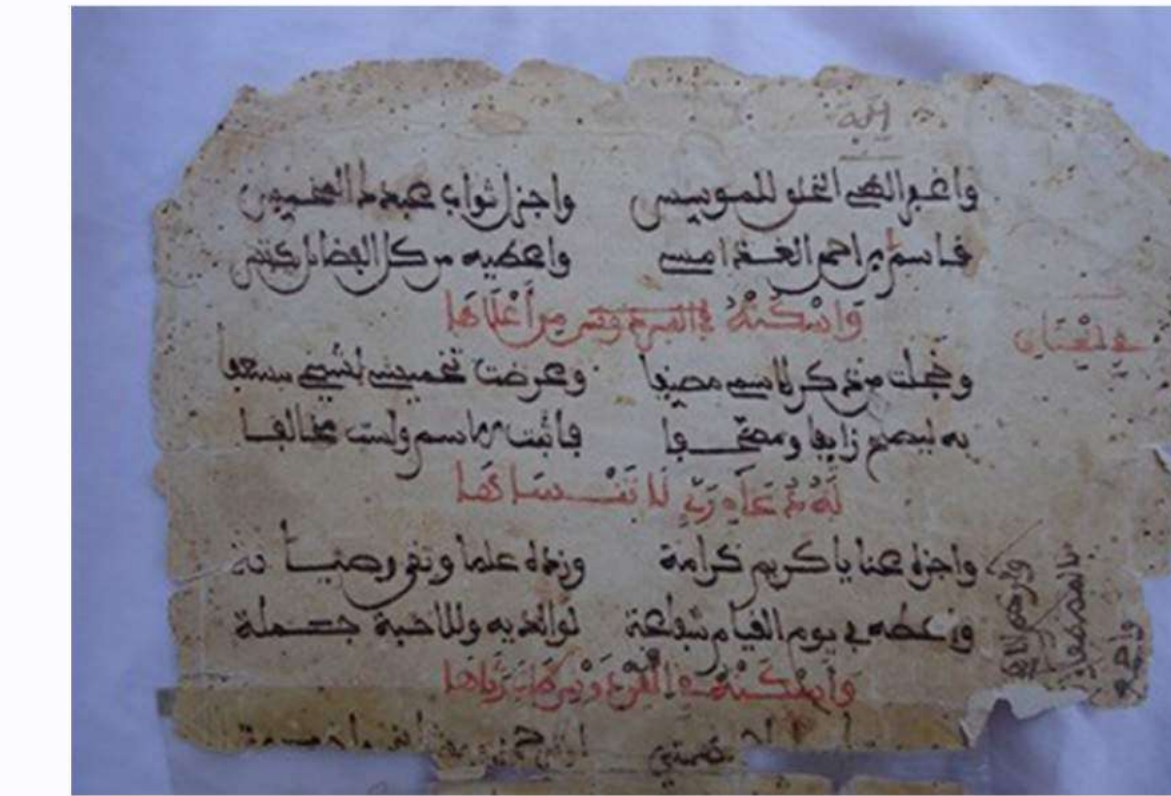
The Society continues to share the results of their digitization with HMML, one of the great global repositories of digitized manuscripts. Despite the current constraints on travel, Walid Mourad remains in regular contact with the team in Ghadames, providing encouragement and assistance as needed. ASOR continues to facilitate the digitization of these important collections of manuscripts.



## Calligraphy

The Ghadames manuscripts display a variety of languages, scripts, and calligraphic styles notably Maghribi, Naskh Qayrawani (from Kayrawan) Saharan, Sudanic, Suqi, and Oriental (Middle Eastern). In addition to numerous styles the quality of the calligraphy and handwriting varies significantly.

Included amongst these manuscripts and scripts are some of the earliest examples of the Qur'an in kufic script written on parchment (made from processed animal hides). Additionally, there are some of the earliest Quranic manuscripts and fragments dating back as far as the sixth century.



## Long term goals

1. Participating in international workshops and exhibitions.
2. Collect all private and public archives in the town of Ghadames.
3. Establish workshops in manuscripts maintenance and conservation.
4. Establish Courses in Arabic Calligraphy
5. Cooperation with local universities and international research centers in the field of documents and manuscripts
6. Collect tangible and intangible heritage in the old town of Ghadames

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- Catalogue of Ghadames manuscripts Part I) contains 406 manuscripts), published in 1986, re-published in 2011.

## Acknowledgements

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