

Preservation of Manuscripts in Cambodia: A long standing effort

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As a result of the devastation of protracted war, the libraries of 83 percent of the monasteries of Cambodia, and an estimated 98 percent of the manuscripts, have been completely destroyed. With the traditional repositories of the country's literary heritage so critically decimated, measures to protect and preserve manuscripts deserve the highest priority.

The objective of this project, which was inaugurated fifteen years ago by the Fonds pour l'Édition des Manuscrits du Cambodge de l'EFEO (EFEO-FEMC) is to restore manuscripts physically and then to replicate the text photographically. From 1990 to the present, the team has visited some 1,000 temples in Cambodia (that is one temple out of four), and has inventoried nearly 10,000 bundles. The EFEO-FEMC team has taken altogether 130,000 pictures, and prepared duplicate sets of the films for the Khmer authorities. Since 1993, the EFEO-FEMC has enjoyed the royal patronage of King Sihanouk.

In the field, the team first locates the monasteries that still possess manuscripts. The next step is to reassemble individual manuscripts: to gather together the dispersed leaves of individual bundles, or the dispersed bundles of individual works. This is followed by physical restoration: re-inking, binding the leaves together with new cords and enclosing the manuscripts in new wooden covers. This is followed by identification, registration (assignation of an inventory number) and microfilming. Measures taken to ensure the future safety of manuscript collections include repairing monastery libraries and installing proper cabinets. These operations must all be conducted on the spot in the various monasteries without displacing even a single manuscript from its home monastery.

For the first nine years the EFEO-FEMC laboratory was housed in the Silver Pagoda in Phnom Penh, within the grounds of the Royal Palace. It is now hosted by His Holiness the Mahā Saṅgharāja in Vatt Unnalom. There the team develops and duplicates the long films that are used (250 frames against the normal 36, black and white Kodak Technical Pan, Kodalithe for duplication), prepares computerised lists and catalogues of titles, and enters texts that have been selected for study or editing into the computer in the original script.

Each manuscript receives an “alphanumerical” inventory number, which shows (a) its location, and (b) its type or class. The computerised registration of the corpus of

manuscripts that has been microfilmed makes up the “Provisional Inventory of Manuscripts in the Monastic Libraries of Cambodia” (*Inventaire provisoire des manuscrits des bibliothèques de monastères du cambodge*). The first part of the inventory, “Provisional Inventory of Manuscripts in the Monastic Libraries of Kandal and Phnom Penh,” was published in 2004 as the third volume of the *Materials for the Study of the Tripiṭaka* series, under the double auspices of EFEO and of Fragile Palm Leaves. The inventory gives the location of each manuscript, its literary class, its condition, the number of the corresponding microfilm, and tells whether or not the manuscript is complete.

In addition, since 1992, the FEMC has organised and administered the Bibliothèque Preah Vanarat Ken Vong, which is named after the late Venerable Abbot of Vatt Saravan, who in 1979 collected what was left of the ancient manuscript collection in Phnom Penh. The Venerable died in 1994 leaving behind 3,900 manuscripts, by far the largest and most significant manuscript collection in Cambodia (the National Library holds only 1,500). An inventory of the content of this major library, together with the inventory of the manuscript collections of the National Museum, the National Library, the Silver Pagoda and the Royal University of Phnom Penh, is to be published in 2005 as the second part of the “Provisional Inventory,” under the title “Provisional Inventory of Manuscripts in the Institutional Libraries of Phnom Penh.”

In november 1996, the FEMC team had the unexpected luck to discover, in Kompong Cham province, what is possibly the only monastic library in the entire country which managed to survive the years of terror in an intact state, the manuscripts having been hidden by the Deputy Abbot after the Khmer Rouge takeover. It took the EFEO-FEMC team more than six months to transform around 50,000 jumbled palm leaves into 2,537 bundles. The EFEO-FEMC team is at present preparing a complete catalogue of this very unique collection. The content of this major library, together with the list of manuscript surviving in less fortunate monasteries of the same province, will be published as the third volume of the “Provisional Inventory.”

A new and significant phase of the EFEO-FEMC mission is taking place in the framework of a European funded project led by the *Société Asiatique* in Paris, the national archives of Portugal *Torre do Tombo*, and the *Buddhist Institute* of Phnom Penh. This is the “Rescue of ancient khmer manuscripts by digitisation,” to begin actively in 2005, after a fruitful preparatory period in 2003-2004. The most visible output will be the digitisation of all the approximately 130,000 images already made of restored manuscripts, and their installation on a website for free access by any Khmer or international researcher or student, with the three volumes of the “Provisional Inventory” being made available as a digital database.

Expertise in the field of restoration and identification of dispersed and often dilapidated and incomplete manuscripts has been acquired with time and pain by the EFEO-

FEMC team. I may state without boasting that members of this team now have “in their body” – “*knañ khluon*” as the Khmers would say – a knowledge equal to none. At the same time, since EFEO has no vocation to proceed indefinitely with restoration and inventory of manuscript in all monasteries of all provinces in a country which is now sovereign and at peace, the time has come to teach to others how to carry on this task which still remains urgent. This may lead to another new phase, the setting up of a summer school in the renovated precincts of the Bibliothèque Preah Vanarat Ken Vong in Wat Saravan, Phnom Penh.

In the specific case of Cambodia, with its background of war and devastation, conservation and preservation were essential first steps, before any sustained research could begin. Indeed, philological analysis of manuscript writings is, as a rule, unable to enlighten about their inner meanings, end even less their social significations. In order to be effective, textual collation must be complemented by a systematic enquiry into a text's ritual and social utilisation.

Let us consider, for example, in the text entitled *saṅgāyanā grè bī* (“Council [recited from] three [preaching] chairs”). There is nothing in the engraved palm leaves to inform us that the text is in fact the vernacular libretto of a theatrical re-enactment of a “canonical” event, entailing a compulsory and precise liturgy involving the participation of seven monks. In this quite very static theatralization, three monks represent the three major protagonist in the council of Rājagṛha. Among the three, the senior-most monk, representing Mahā Kassapa Thera, sits on a chair installed inside the vihāra, at the West, facing North; the second monk, embodying Upāli Thera, sits on a second chair, placed at the East, also facing North; a third monk, embodying Ānanda Thera, sits on a chair placed at the North, facing South. The monk personifying Mahā Kassapa reads to the one personifying Upāli Thera questions about *Vinaya*, then he asks the one personifying Ānanda questions related to *Abhidhamma*. When Mahā Kassapa and Upāli have finished with their exchanges of questions and answers, the four remaining monks, called in this occasion the four “Mahā Nāga Theras,” their faces hidden behind their “screens” (*phlit*), start chanting passages of the Pāli Vinaya which are not part of the written text of the *saṅgāyanā grè bī* but are relevant to the answers of Upāli Thera. In the same way, when Mahā Kassapa and Ānanda have finished with their exchanges of questions and answers, the four “Mahā Nāga Theras” recite the stanzas of *Abhidhamma* related to the answers of Ānanda that are not included in the written text.

One could use many further examples which cannot be fully understood without indications regarding their socialised or ritualised uses, but the great difficulty to gather information derives of course from the small number of reliable informers, the number of which, in such a traumatized country as Cambodia, is rapidly decreasing with the passing years.

Annex I: Khmer texts as found in Phnom Penh monasteries and in Kandal Province monasteries

	Title	Number of complete or incomplete copies
1	abhidhamm 7 gambīr	135
2	abhidhamm 9 paricched	38
3	abhidhamm mūl braḥ kammaṭṭhān	1
4	abhidhamm saṅkhep	1
5	abhidhamm traitriṅs	9
6	abhidhammatthādhippāy	1
7	adhiṭṭhān spaṅ' cībar saṅghāṭī	1
8	āgār vināy	2
9	ānisaṅs bhlōṅ	1
10	ānisaṅs bitān	1
11	ānisaṅs bodhi	1
12	ānisaṅs braḥ	3
13	ānisaṅs braḥ dhamm gorab	16
14	ānisaṅs braḥ kammaṭṭhān	2
15	ānisaṅs braḥ trai piṭak	1
16	ānisaṅs braḥ Uposath	1
17	ānisaṅs braḥ vihār	4
18	ānisaṅs camlaṅ puṅy	15
19	ānisaṅs chāk mahā paṅsukūl	2
20	ānisaṅs cramm khandhak	3
21	ānisaṅs cūlek sāṭak	1
22	ānisaṅs dān bhlōṅ	2
23	ānisaṅs dās dān sahāy dān sāmī dān	3
24	ānisaṅs daṅ'	2
25	ānisaṅs dhamm	1
26	ānisaṅs dīen braḥ vassā	3
27	ānisaṅs guṅ niṅ dos	1
28	ānisaṅs kaṭhin dān	11
29	ānisaṅs khmoc	6
30	ānisaṅs khsāc'	2
31	ānisaṅs mahā piṅḍ	2
32	ānisaṅs mahā saṅkrānt	1
33	ānisaṅs mahā vessantar jātak	5
34	ānisaṅs nānā	1
35	ānisaṅs pāy	1
36	ānisaṅs paṅcuḥ sīmā	2

37	ānisaṅs paṅgan'	6
38	ānisaṅs phnuos	2
39	ānisaṅs piṇḍ	5
40	ānisaṅs puṇy pucchā vissajjanā	1
41	ānisaṅs sabb dān	9
42	ānisaṅs sabb sūtr	12
43	ānisaṅs sālā	2
44	ānisaṅs sīl	2
45	ānisaṅs sīl 5	2
46	ānisaṅs sīl 8	1
47	ānisaṅs trai piṭak	3
48	ānisaṅs vāluk cetiy	2
49	ānisaṅs ṭaṅ dan'	1
50	anāgār vināy	3
51	anāgatavaṅs	5
52	anattalakkhaṇasutt	1
53	antar dhān	1
54	ariy draby 7 prakār	1
55	ariy puggal	4
56	ariy sacc	5
57	ariyadhan sūtr	1
58	aruṇ vatī	3
59	aṅguttaranikāy	4
60	atīt nidān	2
61	avasānakicc avijjāniddes	1
62	avijjā	2
63	aṭṭhakathā braḥ nigam Uposad	2
64	aṭṭhakathā vimān vatthu	2
65	babec ñī jhmol	1
66	bāhuṃ	4
67	bejr cintā	1
68	bhadrakalp viṅ-suṅ	1
69	bhāvanā kathā	1
70	bhikkhuppāṭimokkh	14
71	bhin suvaṇṇ	2
72	bhog kul	1
73	bodhipakkhiyadharm	4
74	brahm sūtr	1
75	braḥ buddh ghosācāry	3
76	braḥ buddh guṇ panlè	18
77	braḥ buddh ratana aṭṭhakathā vaṇṇanā	1

78	braḥ dhamm saṅgaṇī, ākāravatār sūtr, girimānand sūtr	1
79	Braḥ guṇ kèv piṭak	3
80	Braḥ pād vijaḍhar	4
81	Braḥ pād vinā	3
82	Braḥ pād yasakerti	3
83	Braḥ rāj baṅsāvatār braḥ mahā ksatr	1
84	buddh daṃṇāy	3
85	buddh nimitt	1
86	buddh ratanapañhā	1
87	buddh ratanasūtr	1
88	buddhāphisek	2
89	buddhajāy maṅgal prè	1
90	camp"ā thoṅ	1
91	cand ghāt	1
92	cand gorab	3
93	cand suk giri sūtr	4
94	cand sīsamudr	1
95	caturāriyasacc	4
96	Cau Aom nān bau	1
97	Cau krabat	2
98	cetanā bhedā	8
99	chabbaṇṇ raṅsī	2
100	cod chlōy tām nimitt	1
101	cpāp braḥ dhamm	1
102	cpāp' abhidhamm kūn go	1
103	cpāp' bāky cās'	3
104	cpāp' dīk lok sraṅ'	2
105	cpāp' gopāl	1
106	cpāp' hūy	1
107	cpāp' ker kāl	4
108	cpāp' kesa camp"ā	1
109	cpāp' kram	8
110	cpāp' kram pariyāy	1
111	cpāp' kíñ kantrai	1
112	cpāp' kūn cau dham	1
113	cpāp' lpök thmī	1
114	cpāp' mai paṇḍit	1
115	cpāp' rāj paṇḍit	2
116	cpāp' sī	2
117	cpāp' thmī	1
118	cpap' braḥ dhamm	1

119	das jātak	96
120	das jātak dāṃṇ 10	1
121	das jātak rapīep rīṇṇ desanā	1
122	dasavaṅs	4
123	devadūt dhaṛṃ	1
124	devavaṅs kumār = sradap cek	3
125	devoroḥaṅ sūtr kathā	1
126	dhātu vandanavatthu	1
127	dhamm cakk	1
128	dhamm dhātu	3
129	dhamm dhātu dāṃṇ 7	1
130	dhamm nibbān	1
131	dhamm ratana vaṇṇanā	3
132	dhamm vinayānusāsan	1
133	dhammacakkappavattan sūtr	1
134	dhammapadaṭṭhakathā	25
135	dhammatā mahā anantagaṇ	8
136	dhanañjāy	1
137	dhaṛṃ bhāṇvāra kanlah khè	1
138	dībv saṅvār	2
139	dukkh ariy sacc	2
140	dukkh nirodh gāminī	1
141	dve gaṇ	1
142	gāthā makuṭ bejr	1
143	girimānand sūtr	4
144	gaṇ kèv dāṃṇ pī	1
145	gaṇ kèv dībv sot mūl kammatṭhān	1
146	hā ray jāti	1
147	hai anak svaḥ svèṇ	1
148	jāv gaṇ	1
149	jap lakkhaṇ rām lakkhaṇ	1
150	jāy datt	6
151	jāy Isī	1
152	jinavaṅs	3
153	jīvidān	1
154	k-èk sa	3
155	kammatṭhān saṃvarasuddhasī	1
156	kammatṭhān, vipassanā, braḥ abhidhamm, braḥ samatha, braḥ buddh gaṇ, braḥ asubh	1
157	kaṅ kap	1
158	kassapatther suor gambīr braḥ vināy nīn braḥ kau hāy	1

159	khuddakanikāy aṭṭhakathā jātak Ekādasanipāt	1
160	khyaṅ sāṅkh	3
161	khyaṅ sāṅkh silp jāy	1
162	kicc anak puos	1
163	kiccavatt dāṃṅ 10, bhikkhu vīer sāc' dāṃṅ 9 prakār, jamrah āpatti dāṃṅ 7 kaṅ, kālik 4 prakār, lah paṅ' nissaggiy dāṃṅ 30	1
164	kiccho manussappaṭilābho	1
165	knuṅ mahā ṭhān dāṃṅ 7-8 knuṅ nidān	1
166	kpuon braḥ guṅ kèv	1
167	kpuon dhutaṅg dāṃṅ 13	1
168	kpuon kaṃṅōt satv	1
169	kpuon lakkhaṅa: ṭèl paṅcuḥ knuṅ khluon braḥ aṅg	1
170	kpuon paṅcuḥ sīmā	1
171	kpuon Utpāt	1
172	kram cpāp'	2
173	kruṅ mahā jumbū rājādhipatī	5
174	kruṅ subhamitt	1
175	krīty kram (cpāp' praṭau kāby bāky 7)	1
176	ktām	1
177	laksanavaṅs	2
178	lokanāy	3
179	lpök ak	2
180	lpök bāky breṅ	1
181	lpök juc	4
182	lpök kammaṭṭhān	2
183	lpök mahā rāj pārḥ	1
184	lpök srī vijāy	1
185	māghapūjā visākhapūjā	1
186	mār bāndhan	3
187	mātā pitu Upaṭṭhān kathā	2
188	mātu grām	1
189	mātugūṅ sūtr	19
190	maggalī phal	1
191	mahā duggat	1
192	mahā lāy	1
193	mahā moggallānatther parinibbān	1
194	mahā paṭṭhān	1
195	mahā vessantar jātak	69
196	mahājāy, jāy dis, jāy Isī	1
197	mahāmetrī niṅ jīvidāna	1

198	maraṇ saṅgrām	1
199	maraṇamātā	6
200	maṅgal dāṃṇ 38 prakār	11
201	maṅgal sūtr = maṅgal saṅkhep secktī	1
202	maṅgal sūtr = maṅgal sūtr trai saranagaman	1
203	maṅgal vivād	4
204	maṅgalatthadīpanī aṭṭhakathā maṅgal sūtr	35
205	matak sūtr	1
206	milindappañhā	11
207	mūl braḥ abhidhamm	1
208	mūl braḥ dhamm trai	11
209	mūl braḥ kammaṭṭhan	13
210	mūl braḥ visuddhimagg	2
211	mūl nagar	1
212	nānā jātak	1
213	nagar kāy	1
214	navahārādiḡuṇ	1
215	nibban sūtr	8
216	pabbajjāvidhī Upajjhāyaggahaṇavidhī	1
217	paññās jātak (samuddaghos jātak)	1
218	paramatth	1
219	parivās	8
220	pavāraṇā ceṅ braḥ vassā dve Uposathakamm	1
221	paṭham prañapti	2
222	paṭham sambodhi	60
223	paṭham trās'	19
224	paṭham trās' saṅkhep kathā	2
225	paṭham viñ-suṅ	9
226	paṭiccasamuppād	2
227	paṭisambhidāññāṇ dassan visuddhi	1
228	paṇḍit sdör bhlön	1
229	pet vatthu	7
230	pet veṇī	15
231	pitugūṇ sūtr	4
232	prasiddh dhnū	2
233	prasnā trai guṇ	2
234	prè knuṅ braḥ pālī mettāy	1
235	prè knuṅ pālī samṭhèn āpatti	1
236	prè namo	1
237	pubb sikkhā vaṇṇanā	2
238	pucchā vissajjanā	1
239	rāj krīty kram bal deb	2

240	rāj krīty kram das bhariyā	2
241	rāj krīty kram praṭau cau kram	2
242	ras dhaṛm niñ bāky breñ	1
243	raṃlak guṇ	1
244	sabb siddh	1
245	sāratthasaṅgaha:	5
246	samādān	1
247	samaṇagotam	3
248	sarup das jātak gī jātak dāṃṇ 10	1
249	saṅgāyanā grè 2	2
250	saṅgāyanā grè 3	55
251	saṅgāyanā grè 5	21
252	saṅgh ratana	1
253	saṅkh patt	1
254	saṅruom braḥ sārīrikadhātu	3
255	saṅruom maṅgalatthadīpanī	2
256	sati mahā paṭṭhān	2
257	sati sambojjhaṅg	4
258	sattavipākā	2
259	saṃvar vināy	1
260	sāṅkh patt	2
261	sāṅkh silp jāy	5
262	siddhakāry tamrā pūjā bel mān jaṃṇītamrā kumār ṭan'tamrā thṇāṃ pamruñ gaṛbh kūn kṇuñ phdai	2
263	siddhikāry diñ dūkmöl jīb carṭaṃṇuol thṇaimöl thṇai dāṃṇ 7 khè 12 car yātrāyām sūryakraḷā	1
264	siddhikāry sraṭī belā jān'chāydaṃṇāy tām khè niñ thṇaikruñ bālīsiddhikāry ṭaṃṇuol	1
265	sikkhā pad vaṇṇanā	3
266	sirasā	1
267	slutī tūc	1
268	sodattaki	1
269	stec kmeñ	1
270	sudhan kumār jātak	2
271	sugandh thoñ	3
272	supin kumār	4
273	suppiy paribbājak nidān braḥ pād ajāt satrūv niñ brahmadatt māṇab	1
274	surabbh	4
275	surendr vatī sirī vijāy	3
276	suvaṇṇ bilāp	1

277	suvaṇṇ haṅs	1
278	suvaṇṇ khyaṅ sāṅkh	1
279	suvaṇṇ kumār = haṅs yant	2
280	suvaṇṇ phalā	1
281	suvaṇṇ sirisā	1
282	suvaṇṇ haṅs	1
283	sūbhāsīt	2
284	sūravāt	4
285	sūryavaṅs varavaṅs	2
286	sūtr mant phdaḥ	1
287	sīl sār sūtr	4
288	tamrā braḥ gāthā	1
289	tamrā cāk' phsaṅ	1
290	tamrā thnām	1
291	tamrā ut	1
292	tamrāp' lokanāy	1
293	tikanipāt	1
294	tirokuḍḍasūtr	2
295	traī bhed	3
296	traī bhūmī	13
297	traī kūṭ dhaṛm	1
298	traī lakkhaṅ ṅāṅ	1
299	traī lok vinicchay dev kathā	1
300	traī lok vinicchāy	1
301	traī lok vitthār	4
302	traī saraṅagaman	2
303	traṅam sīl sāmāṅer	1
304	Upasampadākamm	1
305	Uposathakamm kathā	1
306	varanetr varanuj	10
307	vaṅṅanā	2
308	vaṅṅanā pubbasikkhā	1
309	vimān cand	2
310	vināy (fragment)	1
311	vināy - samṅṅēṅ bī kālik dāmā 4	1
312	vināy bhikkhu	1
313	vināy dukkaṭ	1
314	vināy pabbajjā khandhaka:	1
315	vināy pālī laḥ paṅ' nissaggiy	1
316	vināy pāṅimokkh samvrasīl	1
317	vināy paṅṅham praṅṅṅpti	1
318	vināy pucchā vissajjanā	1

319	vināy sikkhāpad vaṇṇanā	1
320	vināy subhog	1
321	vinicchay nissaggiy	1
322	vipassanā (traī saraṇagaman, traī lakkhaṇañāṇ)	1
323	vipassanāñāṇ	2
324	vipassanāñāṇ niṇ vijjāñāṇ	1
325	visuddhimagg	17
326	vividhadhamm saṅgaha:	4
327	yasodharā bimbā nibbān	9
328	ṭāv rīṭh	1
329	īddhi sèn	1

37	mahāsatiṭṭhāna	1
38	mahāvagga	2
39	mahāvessantaragāthā bān' vaṇṇanā	1
40	majjhimanikāyamūlapaṇṇāsa	1
41	maṅgalatthadīpanī aṭṭakathāmaṅgalasūtra	18
42	mesūtraniddesa	1
43	mūlakaccāyana	43
44	nettiḥāravibhāvinā	2
45	nettipakaraṇa	1
46	nissāyamūlanāma	1
47	nissāyamūlasandhi	1
48	pāṭimokkhasaṃvarasīla	5
49	pakavatta	1
50	parābhavasūtra	1
51	parivāra	2
52	parivāsa	1
53	paṭhamasārattadīpanīṭīkā	1
54	paṭhamasārattadīpanīṭīkāpaṭhamasamanta p"en plāy	1
55	paṭhamasamantapāsādika aṭṭhakathā ādikamma	1
56	paṭhamasamantapāsādika aṭṭhakathā braḥ ādikamma	1
57	paṭhamasambodhi	2
58	ṭṭhāna	1
59	ratanabimbavaṅsa	2
60	sāratthasaṅgaha:	8
61	sāratthasaṅgahapakāsīnī aṭṭhakathāsaddāyatanasaṃyuttanvāta	1
62	sahassanaya bāhuṃ yathā sabbabuddhā	1
63	samodhānaparivāsa	1
64	samtèn āpatti	1
65	sarajjaṃ	1
66	sattabojjhaṅga	2
67	satipaṭṭhānasūtra	1
68	sattakanipāta aṅguttaranikāya	1
69	sattappakaraṇābhidhamma	1
70	suvanṇathambhānisamsaṃ	1
71	sūtr kaṭhèn	1
72	traī piṭaka ānatrai	1
73	vicitrasāraṭīkābālapaṇḍicca	1
74	vijjābuddhika aniyatakaṇḍa	1
75	visuddhimagga	4

76	yojanā aṭṭhakathā braḥ mahāvagga	1
77	yojanāṭīkāsaṅgaha:	4
78	ṭīkābālapaṇḍiccanāma	1
79	ṭīkāgaṇṭhābharāṇa	3