



Doing Research on Cambodia: An Overview of Libraries and Archives

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Visit the National Archive of Cambodia on any given day, and chances are that you will find some researchers from abroad sitting on the heavy wooden tables in the reading room and pouring over manuscripts from the colonial period or documents from the *Sangkum Reastre Niyum*. Scholars from abroad spend time and often a considerable amount of money to come to Cambodia to do research in one of the major collections of documents from the 'Union Indochinoise'.

Students and researchers who are looking for material for essays, a thesis, a dissertation or other academic works could have it much worse than in Cambodia. Despite the devastations of the past and severe economic limitations in one of the poorest countries of the world, there are a good number of archives and libraries that can be consulted by researchers. The libraries in Phnom Penh might not be on par with those in Western countries in terms of technical facilities, preservation and budget. But they make up for it with a surprising wealth of material that is of interest for researchers looking for information on the history of the country, especially on the colonial period. Institutions such as DC Cam or Bophana have built up unique collections on specialized topics.

In what follows I have put together an overview about the libraries, archives and collections in Cambodia that might be of interest to researchers from any discipline, plus an overview of some select international archives and the excellent online resources that have sprung up in the last couple of years.

LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES IN CAMBODIA

National Library

Ave. 92, Khan Daun Penh, Phnom Penh

Tel: +855 (0)23 430 609

www.bibliotheque-nationale-cambodge.org

contact@bnc-nlc.info

Opening hours: Monday to Friday, 7:30 – 11:00 and 14:00 – 17:00

The National Library, housed in one of the most beautiful colonial buildings of Phnom Penh, is not first and foremost a research library, but they do have some rare material in their special reading room, including magazines and a few boxes with Khmer-language newspapers from before 1975. The Khmer Rouge used the library as a pantry and the garden to raise pigs, but surprisingly did not destroy its collection. That was left to the Vietnamese who pulped much of the sizable newspaper collection in order to have paper to print their own papers and propaganda fliers. Today, the special collections comprise over 8,000 documents, including material published in French between 1925 and 1970, plus books and documents published in Khmer between 1955 and 1975. The whole collection has recently been put in order, and is now relatively accessible. There is also a special

collection of 710 *sastra* or palm leaf manuscripts, which are available on microfilm. (For more on the history of the National Library, see Jarvis, 1995) The National Archive is currently digitizing some of its historical holdings to put them on the internet by early 2012.

National Archives of Cambodia

Street 61, Oknha Hing Pen, Phnom Penh

Tel/Fax: +855 (0)23 430 582

nacambodia.org

info@nac.gov.kh

Opening hours: Monday to Friday, 7:30 – 11:00 and 14:00 – 17:00

Despite its severe underfunding, this is the most relevant and useful archive in Cambodia. The collection includes the Fonds of the French Resident Superior, Records of the Pol Pot Regime, the Genocide Tribunal of 1979 and of the UNTAC, official journals and bulletins from various governments between 1920 and the present, the personal collection of Charles Meyer, Sihanouk's adviser and ghost writer during the 1960s (including his fantastic photo collection), maps and plans, etc., much of which can be located via their computer catalogue.

Library of the National Museum

Street 13, Sangkat Chey Chumneas, Khan Daun Penh, Phnom Penh

Tel/Fax: +855 (0)23 211 753

<http://cambodiamuseum.info>

A small, but significant collection of books and journals is hidden under the roof of the National Museum. It includes mostly books on art and archeology, and contains the personal collection of the late Ingrid Muan, co-founder of Reyum Gallery, that published some of the best books on Cambodian culture in the last decade.

Buddhist Institute

Sangkat Tonle Basak, Khan Chamkarmon, Phnom Penh

P.O. Box 1047

Tel: +855 (0)23 212 046

<http://www.budinst.gov.kh>

Founded in 1930 by King Monivong with support by the French Colonial Administration, the Buddhist Institute once was one of the prime research institutions in Cambodia, and published many important books including an unsurpassed seven-volume collection of Khmer fables and fairy tales. Today, the library of the Institute is a bit of a mess without even a card catalogue. However, given the long history of the Institute, they might have historic material at places that only truly persistent researchers will discover.

Library of the Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI)

56, Street 315, Khan Tuol Kork, Phnom Penh

Tel: +855 (0)23 881 701

<http://www.cdri.org.kh>

cdri@cdri.org.kh

The CDRI library has mostly material on socio-economic and development issues among the over 15,000 titles they hold. New titles are acquired through exchange, subscriptions,

donation and deposits from other institutions and multi-lateral organizations such as the World Bank and ADB. The CDRI also publishes its own reports and analysis. The library offers memberships to the public.

Hun Sen Library

Royal University of Phnom Penh, Russian Blvd., Khan Tuol Kork, Phnom Penh
Tel: +855 (0)23 363 261
www.rupp.edu.kh
Opening hours: Monday to Friday, 7:30– 17:00; Saturday, 8:00 – 16:00

With its new, World Bank-sponsored building just opened, the Hun Sen Library has added some attractive spaces to its formerly rather drab building. The Cambodiana Collection on the upstairs mezzanine floor has a wide range of publications by Cambodians and about Cambodia. Other special collections include the Education Research Centre, a collection of work on all aspects of education in Cambodia, and an UNTAC era survey of every village in Cambodia. The Library also has complete runs of the Cambodia Daily and Cambodge Soir, as well as the Khmer edition of the Official Gazette, covering the 20th century and earlier.

Bophana Audiovisual Resource Center

64, Street 200, Oknha Mén, Phnom Penh
Tel: +855 (0)23992 174
archives@bophana.org
www.bophana.org
Opening hours: Monday to Friday, 8:00 – 12:00 and 14:00 – 18:00; Saturday, 14:00– 18:00

Bophana has a collection of films, videos and audio material on and from Cambodia, the ranges from the shorts of Gabriel Veyre (the very first films shot in the country) to the water festival on the Mekong in the 50s, from the films of Norodom Sihanouk to Khmer Rouge propaganda radio broadcasts, from movies from the 'Golden Age of Khmer Cinema' in the 1960s and 1970s to recent television productions. The archive is constantly acquiring new material. Bophana also has a small library.

DC Cam

66, Preah Sihanouk Blvd, Phnom Penh
P.O. Box 1110
Tel: +855 (0)23 211 875
dccam@online.com.kh
<http://www.dccam.org>

DC-Cam has an extensive collection of primary documents from Democratic Kampuchea, including biographies of victims, confessions, diaries, telegrams and other official and personal documents. Unfortunately, there is no public card catalogue.

Center for Khmer Studies

Wat Damnak, Siem Reap
PO Box 9380
Tel: +855 (0)63 964 385
<http://khmerstudies.org/library/>
center@khmerstudies.org

The Center of Khmer Studies is one of the more comfortable places to do research in Cambodia. Housed in a sprawling, airy complex in Siem Reap's Wat Damnak, the collection of the Center includes periodicals such as *Kambuja Soriya*, the Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient, *Aséanie*, *Asian Perspectives* and the journals of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization's Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts (SPAFA) and the Siam Society. They also have issues of old Cambodian magazines from the 1960s, such as *Kambuja* and *Réalités Cambodgiennes*. The Institute can also be the last resort for those looking for M.A. and Ph.D. theses from overseas universities as many researchers send copies of their work to Siem Reap. The Center also maintains a collection of research papers by Cambodian university students and fellows, and they have their own publication series.

EFEO Library

Beng Don Pa, Slakram, Siem Reap

BP 93 300

Tel +855 (0)92 993 502

dominique.soutif@efeo.net

<http://www.efeo.fr/base.php?code=265&l=EN>

Opening hours: Monday to Friday, 7:30 – 12:00 and 14:00 – 17:15

The École française d'Extrême-Orient (French School of the Far East), better known by its acronym EFEO, was founded in 1900, when Cambodia was a French 'Protectorate'. It is dedicated to the study of Asian societies, with a special focus on archeology and philology. During the French colonization of 'Indochina', its headquarter was in Hanoi. The Siem Reap Office, opened in 1907, was in charge of the conservation work in Angkor Wat. After the end of colonization, the headquarter was transferred to Paris, and from there EFEO today maintains an extensive network of offices not just in former French colonies, but also in Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Beijing, Bangkok, Kyoto, Seoul and other cities in Asia.

When they reopened in 1992, they established a small library that is mostly of interest to archeologists. The library holds 1,400 volumes in French, Khmer and English, a complete collection of maps of the country, and a number of digital resources. Most of the collection consists of material from the EFEO Angkor Conservation Office archives from 1908 to 1975, that is available on microfiche or CD-ROM. They also have material on ancient Cambodian history, archaeology and architecture, epigraphy, linguistics and ethnology. Since EFEO has been one of the first research institutions that opened after Cambodia regained its independence, they also have academic reports, theses, conference proceedings and other material from the 1990s that are hard to find elsewhere.

LIBRARIES ABROAD

There are a good number of international libraries that have significant collections on Southeast Asia in general and on Cambodia in particular. They are often better kept, more accessible and sometimes even more comprehensive than what can be found in Cambodia. For instance, issues on the weekly news magazine *Réalités Cambodgiennes* from the 1960s are scattered over various libraries in Cambodia. But if you are looking for a complete run of

this magazine, you need to go to an international library such as the British Library or the German Staatsbibliothek.

Many of the most relevant collections are in France. The French National Archive, in particularly its branch Archives nationales d'outre-mer (ANOM, in english: National Overseas Archives) in Aix-en-Provence, is the must-visit place for any historian who works on Cambodia prior to 1953, as it stores the archives from the ministries in charge of all French colonies, especially the *Ministère des Colonies*. It also has large parts of the old National Archives of Indochina that were partly transferred to France from Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam after their independence. Doing research on the history of these countries is often like a complicated puzzle game, where some pieces are kept at ANOM in France, while others are in the National Archives of the respective former colony.

But researchers interested in Cambodia might also travel to other countries. Monash University in Australia – where the Centre of Southeast Asia Studies, headed by the eminent Cambodia specialist David Chandler for almost two decades – received much of the personal archive of HM Norodom Sihanouk in 2005.

Then, there are the National Archives of Laos and Vietnam that contain documents from the common 'Indochinese' past. (Unfortunately, the Vietnamese archives are almost impenetrable for foreign researchers and the collection of the National Archive of Laos is rather modest: only one reading room on the first floor without any catalogue.)

Many U.S. universities also own specialized collections with documents on Southeast Asia. A comprehensive list of all the libraries that hold relevant material on Cambodia is beyond the scope of this article. (For a list of European libraries and archives with relevance to Southeast Asia, see Karni, 2003; for an international, though slightly dated, overview consult University of Washington Libraries, n.d., or the more up-to-date VLC Sources, n.d., which, however, is in French only.)

One library, however, deserves to be pointed out as relatively accessible in terms of both distance and user-friendliness:

Institut d'échange culturel avec la France (IDECAF)

28 Lê Thánh Tôn, Quận 1, Thành Phố, Hồ Chí Minh, Vietnam

Tel: +84 (0) 8 829 5451

<http://www.idecaf.gov.vn>

mediatheque@idecaf.gov.vn

Only six hours by bus from Phnom Penh, in Ho Chi Minh City, the Institut d'échange culturel avec la France appears to be at first glance another Institut français that offers language classes, cultural events and the like. However, tucked away in their spacious, bright médiathèque is a respectable collection of books and other documents from the colonial period, including useful material such as the *Annuaire Générale* yearbook and a good number of periodicals. Some of this material is also available online at the fabulous Gallica website, more of which below, but here one can actually hold those tomes in one's hand and scan or photograph illustrations.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Gallica

Web site: gallica.bnf.fr

Gallica is the digital library of the French National Library and an absolutely incredible resource. Since 1997, the library has scanned almost 200,000 volumes and 110,000 images, a good deed that will keep many researchers from making trips to French archives. A good number of the royalty-free documents that the library has put on the Internet deal with the colonial past, and there is some very good historic material on Cambodia.

Institut national de l'audiovisuel (INA)

Web site: ina.fr

The Audiovisual Archive of France has also put large parts of its collection on the net, where the material can be viewed, YouTube-style, for free. All of the footage can also be downloaded for relatively reasonable fees. The documentaries on Cambodia go all the way back to the 1940s. Colonial documentaries, news reels from the *Sangkum* period and the Khmer Republic, Khmer Rouge propaganda movies and footage from the UNTAC period, it is all there. Whether it is the looting of the Vietnamese embassy in Phnom Penh in 1970 or Ros Sereysothea as a parachutist in Lon Nol's army, there is a lot of interesting material to be found in the slightly confusing data base. Much of the material at Bophana originally is from the collection of INA.

Southeast Asia Digital Library

Web site: sea.lib.niu.edu

Hosted by the Northern Illinois University (NIU) Libraries, the Southeast Asia Digital Library has a wide variety of materials published or otherwise produced in Southeast Asia. From Cambodia there are more than 3000 photos, many of them taken in the 1950s and 1960s as well as pictures of the same places as they looked in 2007.

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