

Ancient Angkor - library buildings.

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Angkor is since December 1992 a UNESCO World Heritage Site exposing the rich history of arts, religion and philosophy dating back to the ninth and tenth centuries. The body in charge of Angkor's monuments is the Apsara Authority, created by UNESCO in 1995.

Included in several of the ruins are the remains of what once may have been temple libraries, as researchers have not reached a consensus on the use of these buildings. Some argue that the buildings have been shrines of some kind, perhaps used to store the sacred fire, rather than repositories of manuscripts. They are usually found in pairs on either side and in front of the main entrance to a temple, or the entrance to an enclosure.

In this presentation the buildings will be dealt with as repositories of sacred palm leaf manuscripts, all of which have now disappeared leaving inscriptions on steles the sole archives on the ancient Khmer. These library structures are by now dilapidated, but once they were symbols of the grandeur of the Khmer people.

Angkor Wat

Constructed 1080-1175 as a funerary temple for Suryavarman II (1113 - c.1150). In honour of Vishnu, it has a westward orientation, west being the direction of death. Angkor Wat is with its three-quarters of a square mile the world's largest religious monument and a completely realized microcosm of the Hindu universe. The complex replicates the spatial universe in miniature, the central tower being Mount Meru and the architectural design a metaphorically travelling back in time to the first age of the creation of the universe.

The complex contains three pairs of library buildings.

1. On either side of the outer enclosure's western causeway are two large library buildings with four doorways at the cardinal points. The northern library building was being restored 2000 by the Japanese government team for safeguarding Angkor (J.S.A.) who has been the most generous donor and already spent a total of \$21 mio. Japan is currently overseeing the largest concentration of monuments within the walled city of Angkor Thom.



2. The enclosure of the second level is entered through N and S doorways and contains two more library buildings:



3. The upper enclosure also has a pair of library buildings:



The Bayon

A state temple dating late 12th to late 13th centuries. A most powerful religious construction using a mass of face-towers, most carved with four faces, to create a mountain of ascending peaks. Bayon is placed in the centre of Angkor Thom, the largest of all Khmer cities.

The Japanese has spent an estimated \$4 million researching and restoring one small monument - the Bayon north library, with the identical southern library building flanking the eastern terrace entrance to the temple. Both libraries are elevated with steep stairs leading to the top from east and west, and both are from the late phase of the construction in the second half of the 13th century.



Ta Prohm

A temple monastery from late 12th to 13th centuries in a partly collapsed state with trees entwining the ruins. It has been chosen by the École Française d'Extrême-Orient to be left in its 'natural state' illustrating how most Angkor looked like at its discovery in 19th century. The French institute has over 100 years restored some 50 monuments, but also taken out treasures for French museums. A large library building is found in the south-eastern corner of the temple's inner enclosure.

Banteay Srei

Located 20km north of Angkor the temple's beauty stands out and compares with a near-total

decoration of its surfaces to little else in Angkor. Two decorated library buildings carry particularly fine pediments. On the eastern pediment of the south library the demon Ravana is shaking mount Kailash, and on the north library's east facing pediment Indra, God of the Sky, is riding an elephant and creating rain.

Ta Keo

A steep temple mountain built late 10th to early 11th century and the first temple to be build entirely of sandstone. Within the second enclosure are two sandstone libraries facing west and with false windows on the recessed upper storey.