

The Treasures of Danzan Ravjaa

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Supervisor	Jody Butterworth, Endangered Archives Programme Curator & Burkhard Quessel, Curator for Tibetan collections
Department, Location	Endangered Archives Programme - St Pancras, London
Start date/timeframe	This placement can take place any time between May 2019 and April 2020. A mutually convenient start date to be agreed with the supervisors.
Duration	3 months (or part-time equivalent).
Remote-working	Some aspects of the project could be carried out remotely, but ideally, access to the images should be done on site.
Context for placement	
<p>The Endangered Archives Programme (EAP) is a grants giving programme, funded by Arcadia and administered by the British Library, with the aim to preserve archival material from around the world that is in danger of destruction, neglect or physical deterioration. Since 2004, the programme has provided 350 grants to successful applicants to locate endangered archival collections in over 90 countries, arrange their transfer to a suitable local archival home where possible, create digital copies of the material, and to deposit the copies with local institutions and the British Library. We currently have 7 million images online that are freely available for research purposes.</p> <p>In the very first grant round, EAP supported a project to digitise the Buddhist manuscripts from Dornogobi province, Mongolia. In 1938, during the suppression of Buddhism under the communist regime, Danzan Ravjaa's works were hidden in the mountains along with the rest of the monastery's artistic and intellectual heritage. A map was passed down from father to son in the family of the monastery's gatekeepers. After the transition to democracy in 1991, the present gatekeeper, Altangerel, unearthed 24 crates of manuscripts and artefacts which he housed in a small museum in Sainshand, about 740 kilometres south of the capital Ulaanbaatar. The manuscripts were digitised as part of EAP031 but due to the lack of metadata that accompanied the digital surrogates, the material continues to remain hidden; the material has not been entered into the British Library's catalogue (Integrated Archives and Manuscripts database). This has had the knock on effect that the images are not available on the EAP website.</p> <p>The Buddhist manuscripts are in both Mongolian and Tibetan. In the past, two specialists have worked on the material (one focussing on Mongolian material the other on the Tibetan). As this is a large amount of material, it has not been completed. Most of the Mongolian manuscripts have appropriate descriptions, the Tibetan manuscripts have not been completed and there are some manuscripts without any descriptions/titles. There are also some discrepancies such as using Mongolian terms for Buddhist deities in the Tibetan language manuscripts. Ideally, to be consistent and improve discoverability within the entire EAP collection, we would like to rectify this by using controlled vocabularies.</p>	
Expected tasks and outcomes	
<p>The main focus of the placement is to enhance the current metadata we have regarding these manuscripts.</p> <p>The PhD placement student will liaise closely at the outset with the Curator of the Endangered Archives Programme and the Curator of Tibetan Collections. Using the Excel cataloguing template, the PhD placement student will check the current metadata with the images of the manuscripts and input missing data fields. The expected outcomes would include adding titles in original script, enhancing the metadata and creating entries for manuscripts that have not been identified.</p> <p>During the course of the placement, the student may work with the British Library supervisors to develop additional plans, where feasible, to publicise and promote the collection to relevant researchers and other audiences. This might be through workshops, social media, the EAP blog, conference presentations, public talks etc. – all depending on the interests of the student.</p>	

Training and experience expected to be gained by student through the placement

The student would be an integral part of the EAP team during their time at the Library and would be welcome to participate in any broader EAP activities, such as EAP/BL Curatorial Board meetings, webinars, Panel meetings etc.

The placement would be an excellent introduction into cataloguing standards and specific tools for Tibetologists. There will be an opportunity to learn about algorithms for converting transliterated text to Tibetan script, cataloguing in TEI and ISAD(G). The placement will also get a sense of the cataloguing work carried out by the EAP team, and the discussions that are had to try to improve the discoverability of the material.

During the placement, the student will have access to training and events offered by the Library, such as the talks and workshops offered in the Library's 'Digital Scholarship' and '21st Century Curators' staff training programmes.

The student will gain a detailed understanding of the processes involved in cataloguing manuscripts to international standards (using both ISAD(G) and TEI). The Curator of Tibetan Collections is on the Board of the Tibetan-Mongolian Rare Books and Manuscripts Project and is the Library's expert in the use of TEI (Text Encoding Initiative) so will be able to provide invaluable guidance.

EAP's content is all IIIF (International Image Interoperability Framework) compliant and the student will also gain an awareness of the benefits of this image-based resource and the growing community that uses it.

More generally, this placement offers an opportunity to gain a first-hand 'behind-the-scenes' insight into the activities of a major research library and cultural organisation, with a particular focus on digitisation programmes, cataloguing and international engagement.

Required knowledge and skills

This placement would suit a candidate with good knowledge of Tibetan and the Buddhist canon. Some of the manuscripts are in classical Mongolian, which may be of interest but a knowledge of Mongolian script/language is not essential as the bulk of this material has been catalogued.

This is a training and development opportunity open to current PhD students only. It is not intended to lead to a permanent post at the Library. Please note that the Library is unable to provide a stipend for PhD research placements. Applicants must obtain the support of their PhD supervisor in advance and, as part of their process, consult their HEI to ascertain what funding is available to support them.

Application deadline: 5pm on Monday, **18 February 2019**. Information on how to apply is available on our website: <https://www.bl.uk/news/2019/january/phd-research-placements-2019>