

MEMORY OF THE WORLD

THE TREASURES THAT RECORD OUR HISTORY
FROM 1700 BC TO THE PRESENT DAY



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**Memory of the World: The
treasures that record our history
from 1700 BC to the present day**

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From Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, priceless documentary heritage records the diversity of languages, peoples and knowledge that has influenced humanity from the early days of human history to the present. This heritage documents important events, discoveries or inventions that have transformed the world. The UNESCO Memory of the World programme was created to preserve these recorded treasures of humanity and mobilize resources so that future generations can enjoy this legacy which is preserved in the major libraries, archives and museums across the globe. This book is a full listing of all entries on the official UNESCO Memory of the World international register:

- Unique list of documentary heritage from around the world
- Photographs and descriptions for 244 precious documents
- All entries identified by the UNESCO International Advisory Committee and endorsed by the Director-General

Entries include:

- 42-line Gutenberg Bible, printed on vellum
- Archives of the International Prisoners of War Agency, 1914-1923
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- The Wizard of Oz (Victor Fleming 1939)
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- The Battle of the Somme documentary
- The Atlas Blaeu-Van der Hem

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by Irina Bokova
Director-General of UNESCO



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UNESCO launched the Memory of the World Programme in 1992 to protect and promote the world's documentary heritage through preservation and access – access to encourage protection, and preservation to ensure access.

This vision was vindicated a few months later, when on 25 August 1992, 1.5 million books in the Bosnia National and University Library in Sarajevo were destroyed. With this, a chapter of the history of humanity vanished. Too much of our heritage is lost like this in the heat of conflicts and through the twists and turns of history. Too much also lies hidden and inaccessible in libraries, museums and archives. This documentary heritage carries the memory of human experience. It is a vehicle for identity and a wellspring of knowledge and wisdom. For twenty years, UNESCO has worked to capture and to share this wealth for the benefit of all.

The UNESCO Memory of the World Registry contains today 245 documentary items from all parts of the world – from clay tablets, manuscripts and films to photographs, maps and web pages. This Register is our flagship to preserve, raise awareness and promote access to the documentary treasures of humanity. Preserving this heritage is important for maintaining the cultural heritage and identity of all societies. It safeguards our memories as a force shaping us as social beings in a common humanity.

The Memory of the World encourages every country to establish a national register and propose items for the international register. Heritage can be recorded on any of the carriers used to safeguard memories. These range from listings of archives relating to historical figures, such as Nelson Mandela and Alfred Nobel, to major historical events, voyages of exploration that have transformed the world, and the records of scientific discoveries and anthropological recordings. The scope is as vast, indeed, as is human experience.

Anne Frank's Diaries or the Epigraphic Archives of Wat Pho need little explanation today. However, other items on the Register, such as the Sakubei Yamamoto collection and the 1824-1897 Royal Archives of Madagascar, may be less well-known but are no less emblematic of human ingenuity.

This book reveals this heritage in all of its diversity. For twenty years, the Memory of the World programme has gone from strength to strength. We must now take it ever further – by increasing nominations from all countries and by raising the visibility of preserving sources of knowledge of outstanding significance. Memory of the World is coming of age at a time when preserving our documentary heritage is more important than ever.



[The emotional power of documents](#)

Roslyn Russell PhD

Chair, International Advisory Committee

UNESCO Memory of the World Programme

Among the 245 inscriptions on the UNESCO Memory of the World Register is the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum archives from Cambodia. One photograph in the archives shows a young mother cradling a baby. It is an image that brings to mind countless others of the same subject – a mother and child – especially images of the Madonna and the Christ Child, the essence of serenity and spiritual grace.

But learning of the fate that met this particular mother and child can evoke an almost unbearable pain in the viewer – for these two individuals, after having been meticulously documented in this photograph, were taken out and killed, as were the other subjects of the photographs in the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum archives. These documents form a historical record, to be sure, but they also deliver a powerful emotional charge – and remind us of things that never should be forgotten, or repeated.

World significance, provenance and authenticity, and rarity and uniqueness are key values when assessing the suitability of a nomination of documentary heritage for inscription on the UNESCO Memory of the World Register. However, we must never forget the reasons why documents are so important to us, and why we believe so passionately in their preservation.

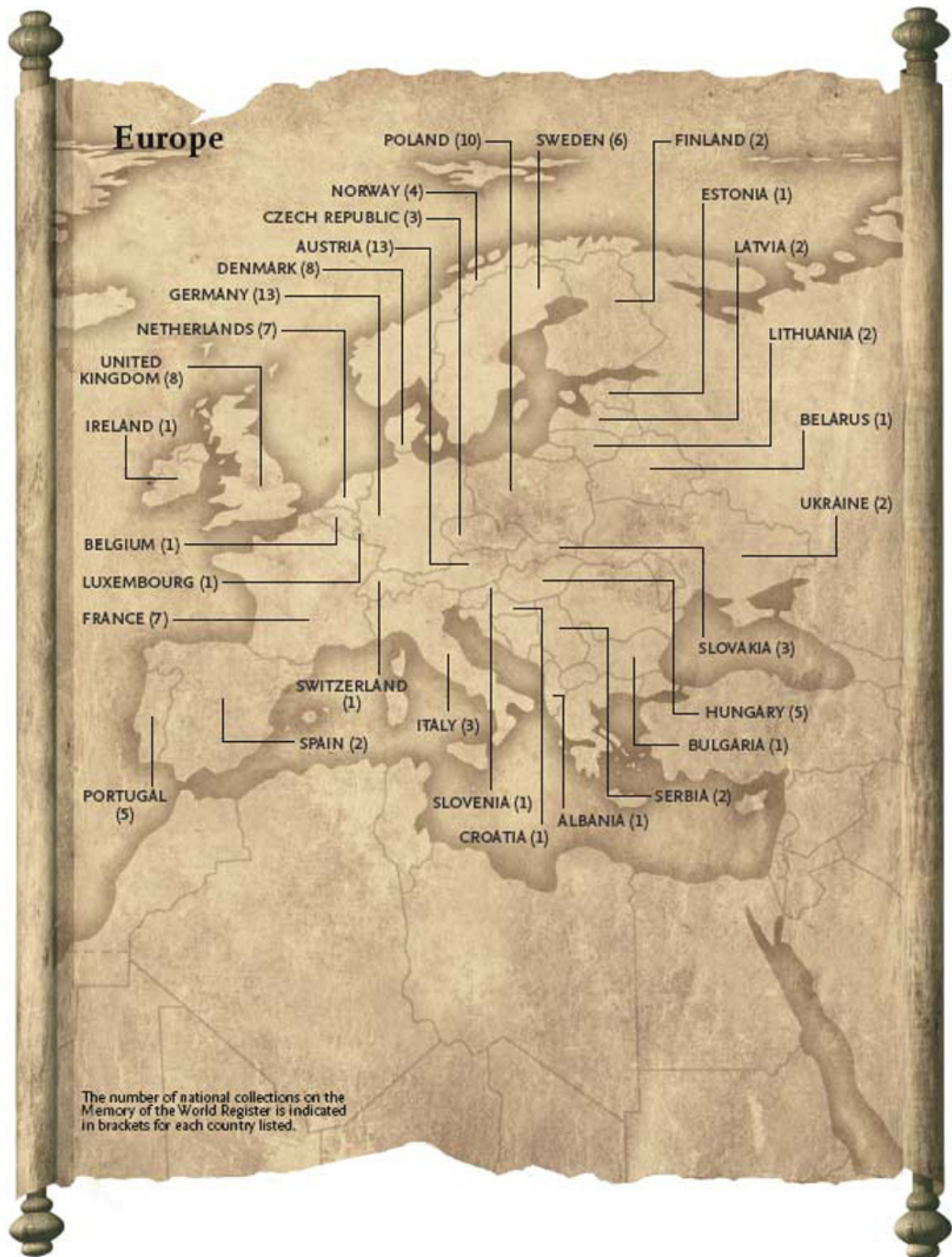
The historical evidence that documents convey is one reason; others are the beauty and craftsmanship, or the technical innovations some documents display. The capacity of documents to engage our emotions and connect us to people and events in the past is another.

Archivists, librarians and museum curators who work with collections relating to Indigenous people can testify to the powerful emotions that flow when these people find their families mentioned in documents, or see photographs or film footage of their ancestors, or hear recordings of voices speaking their language.

Holy books and writings can also evoke strong emotional responses in members of particular faith systems. For a believer, a document associated with a saint or a prophet is not just a physical object; it possesses a spiritual power over and above its historical significance, or its value as an original, rare or unique item.

The popularity of exhibitions of documents indicates how compelling these can be in connecting people with the past. An exhibition curator explains why visitors flock to see displays of letters by writers, artists, scientists, philosophers, inventors, and political figures: 'We see the writers' words directly, unfiltered. The manuscripts give a sense of the authors' daily lives, friendships, concerns and ambitions, their work and their leisure.' Original music manuscripts can have the same emotional power, as the viewer sees the erasures, the corrections and the resolutions that lie behind a finished score. Even the pen strokes can convey the passion and intensity of composition. There are few objects of material culture that are more imbued with the personality of their originators than documents such as these.

It is the task of the UNESCO Memory of the World Programme to ensure that future generations will be able to access these documents and experience their emotional power, as well as to learn about the historical memories that they convey, or appreciate their beauty and craftsmanship.



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Silver men: West Indian labourers at the Panama Canal *
Paraguay
The Archives of Terror
American colonial music: a sample of its documentary richness *
Philippines
Philippine Paleographs (Hanunoo, Buid, Tagbanua and Pala'wan)
Presidential papers of Manuel L. Quezon
José Maceda collection
Radio broadcast of the Philippine People Power Revolution
Poland
Codex Suprasliensis *
Radziwills' Archives and Niasvizh (Nieśwież) Library collection *
Nicolaus Copernicus' masterpiece 'De revolutionibus libri sex'
The Confederation of Warsaw of 28th of January 1573
National Education Commission archives
The masterpieces of Fryderyk Chopin
Warsaw Ghetto archives (Emanuel Ringelblum archives)
Archive of Warsaw Reconstruction Office
Archives of the Literary Institute in Paris (1946–2000)
Twenty-One demands, Gdańsk, August 1980
Portugal
Corpo Cronológico (collection of manuscripts on the Portuguese discoveries)
Treaty of Tordesillas *
Letter from Pêro Vaz de Caminha
Arquivos dos Dembos / Ndembu archives *
First flight across the South Atlantic Ocean in 1922
Russian Federation
Codex Suprasliensis *
Ostromir Gospel (1056–1057)
Archangel Gospel of 1092
Khitrovo Gospel
Slavonic publications in Cyrillic script of the 15th century
Radziwills' Archives and Niasvizh (Nieśwież) Library collection *
Tolstoy's personal library and manuscripts, photo and film collection
Collection of 18th-century maps of the Russian empire
Newspaper collections, Russian Federation

The Historical Collections (1889–1955) of St Petersburg Phonogram Archives
Russian posters of the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries
Saint Kitts and Nevis
Registry of Slaves of the British Caribbean 1817–1834 *
Saint Lucia
Silver men: West Indian labourers at the Panama Canal *
Sir William Arthur Lewis papers
Saudi Arabia
[Earliest Islamic \(Kufic\) inscription](#)
Senegal
Fonds of the Afrique occidentale française (AOF)
Serbia
Miroslav Gospel – manuscript from 1180
Nikola Tesla's Archive
Slovakia
Illuminated codices from the library of the Bratislava Chapter House
Bašagic collection of Islamic manuscripts
Mining maps and plans of the Main Chamber – Count Office in Banská Štiavnica
Slovenia
Codex Suprasliensis *
South Africa
Archives of the Dutch East India Company *
The Bleek collection
Criminal Court Case No. 253/1963 (The State versus N. Mandela and Others)
Liberation Struggle Living Archive Collection
Spain
Santa Fe Capitulations
Treaty of Tordesillas *
Sri Lanka
Archives of the Dutch East India Company *
Suriname
Dutch West India Company (Westindische Compagnie) archives *
Archives of the Middelburgsche Commercie Compagnie *
Records of the Indian indentured labourers *
Sweden
[Codex Argenteus – the 'Silver Bible'](#)
Stockholm City Planning Committee archives
Emanuel Swedenborg collection
Alfred Nobel family archives
Ingmar Bergman archives
Astrid Lindgren archives
Switzerland
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Geneva and Neuchâtel collections
Tajikistan
The manuscript of Ubayd Zakoni's Kulliyat and Hafez Sherozi's Gazalliyt
Tanzania
Collection of Arabic manuscripts and books
German records of the National Archives
Thailand

The King Ram Khamhaeng inscription
Epigraphic archives of Wat Pho
Archival documents of King Chulalongkorn's transformation of Siam (1868–1910)
Trinidad and Tobago
Registry of Slaves of the British Caribbean 1817–1834 *
Records of the Indian indentured labourers *
Constantine collection
C.L.R. James collection
Derek Walcott collection
Eric Williams collection
Tunisia
Privateering and the international relations of the Regency of Tunis in the 18th and 19th centuries
Turkey
[The Hittite cuneiform tablets from Bogazköy](#)
Kandilli Observatory and Earthquake Research Institute manuscripts
The works of Ibn Sina in the Süleymaniye Manuscript Library
Ukraine
Radziwills' Archives and Niasvizh (Nieśwież) Library collection *
Collection of Jewish musical folklore (1912–1947)
United Kingdom
Magna Carta, issued in 1215
Hereford Mappa Mundi
Dutch West India Company (Westindische Compagnie) archives *
Registry of Slaves of the British Caribbean 1817–1834 *
Silver men: West Indian labourers at the Panama Canal *
Historic ethnographic recordings (1898–1951) at the British Library
The Battle of the Somme
The Appeal of 18 June 1940 *
United States of America
Universalis cosmographia secundum Ptholomaei traditionem et Americi Vespuccii aliorumque
Lustrationes *
Dutch West India Company (Westindische Compagnie) archives *
Silver men: West Indian labourers at the Panama Canal *
The Wizard of Oz (Victor Fleming, 1939), produced by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
John Marshall Ju/'hoan bushman film and video collection, 1950–2000
Landsat Program records: Multispectral Scanner (MSS) sensors
Uruguay
Original records of Carlos Gardel – Horacio Lorient collection (1913–1935)
Uzbekistan
[Holy Koran Mushaf of Othman](#)
The collection of the Al-Biruni Institute of Oriental Studies
Venezuela
Colombeia: Generalissimo Francisco de Miranda's archives
General Archive of the Nation: Writings of The Liberator Simón Bolívar
Collection of Latin American photographs of the 19th century
Vietnam
Stone stele records of royal examinations of the Le and Mac dynasties (1442–1779)
Woodblocks of the Nguyễn dynasty

Other

Christopher Okigbo Foundation (Africa) Christopher Okigbo collection

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Archives of the International Prisoners of War Agency, 1914–1923

United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) League of Nations archives 1919–1946

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) UNRWA photo and film archives of Palestinian refugees

* Joint Inscriptions between 2 or more countries.

MEMORY OF WORLD DOCUMENTS

ORDERED BY THE DATE THEY WERE RECORDED

The Hittite cuneiform tablets from Bogazköy

Inscribed 2001

What is it

Ancient Hittite texts preserved in cuneiform on 25,000 clay tablets.

Why was it inscribed

The Bogazköy archive of cuneiform tablets is the only source of information on the Hittites as well as on the social, political and commercial activities of the area. The archive sheds light not only on that area and period, but also on the history and the civilization of human kind as a whole.

Where is it

Archaeological Museums of Istanbul and Anatolian Civilizations Museum of Ankara, Turkey

Anatolia forms a bridge between Europe and Asia, and the area has been the cradle of many civilizations. The Hittites ruled here for nearly 600 years in the 2nd millennium BC, after moving from the Caucasus. They established a powerful state within a bend of the Kızılırmak river (the ancient Halys) with its capital at Bogazköy. The civilization of the Hittites was advanced in its military achievements, political organization, legislation and the administration of justice. Their military, political, social and commercial relations with neighbouring countries were all recorded and kept in archives meticulously.



Ancient Hittite cuneiform script

The state had a federal structure, and the central government was headed by the king who was also the commander of the army, the supreme judicial authority and the chief priest, though he was never actually deified. In fact, the Hittite king, for the first time in the history of the ancient east, possessed no divine attributes.

Excavations from 1906 to 1970 at Bogazköy (ancient Hattusas) uncovered thousands of cuneiform clay tablets in the Great Palace and in the Great Temple. The Bogazköy archive consists of nearly 25,000 cuneiform clay tablets and is the only extant material about the civilization of the Hittites. The tablets are mostly on political, military, social, commercial, religious and artistic topics relating to the Hittites and the neighbouring nations. The archive also includes sets of tablets on law codes, national and international treaties and correspondence.

The archive includes tablets of the Treaty of Quadesh signed between Hittites and Egypt. This well-known treaty of 'eternal peace' guaranteed harmony and security throughout the area for a considerable length of time. Now a symbol of the movement for peace, the Treaty of Quadesh adorns the walls of the United Nations Building in New York.

The archive includes tablets of many literary works, chiefly of an epic and mythological character; some of the most important of these tell the story of the exploits and quarrels of the gods. The tablets show the existence of eight different languages, illustrating the polyglot nature of the Hittite Empire.

The correspondence and other documents in the archive have a universal importance since they contain important information not only on the Hittite Empire, but also on the political and civil life of other neighbouring states and cities. Most of our knowledge relating to that period of history in Asia Minor and partially in the Arab region comes from the cuneiform tablets found at Bogazköy.



Sphinx Gate of Hattusas, Turkey

[Rigveda](#)

Inscribed 2007

What is it

Thirty manuscripts of the Rigveda, the oldest of the four Vedas which are the Hindu sacred texts of scripture. The Rigveda contains a collection of Sanskrit hymns and prayers and is believed to date to between 1700 BC and 1100 BC.

Why was it inscribed

The Vedas are among the first literary documents in human history but their significance goes beyond their scriptural importance. The Rigveda is considered the source of the culture that spread beyond the subcontinent to South, Southeast and Central Asia.

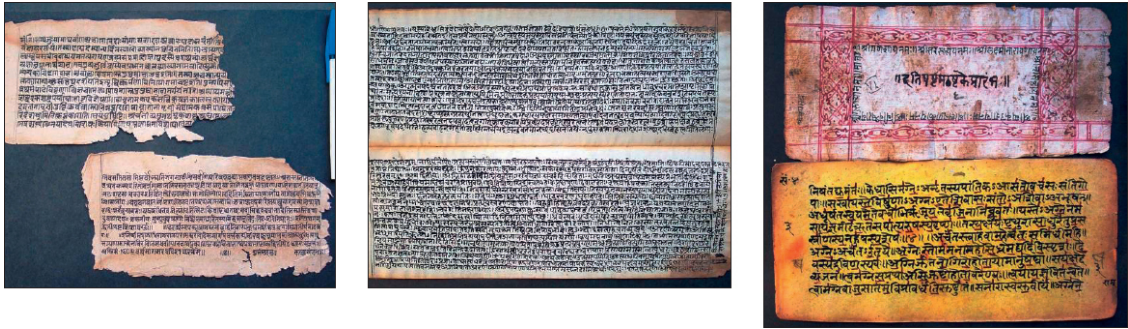
Where is it

Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune, India

The Rigveda is a book of Sanskrit prayers, songs and hymns and is more than 3000 years old. The songs' composers represent the origins of different families which are considered as the ancestors of the Hindus.

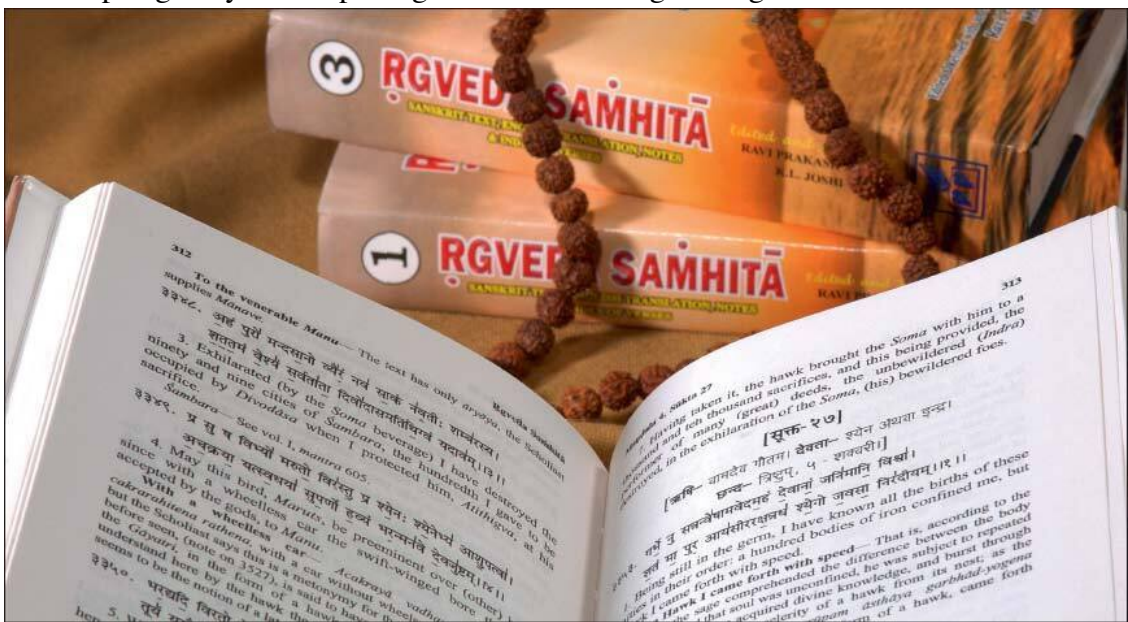
The hymns of the Rigveda vary in nature: most are written in praise and petition to different gods, while others are pieces of poetry. Some are connected with sacrificial rituals, and others accompany specific ceremonies, including marriage and funeral rites. Hymns of creation also feature together with beautiful descriptions of nature and considerations of various aspects of human behaviour.

The language in the Rigveda suggests that it is not a single, unitary work but instead is comprised of earlier and later elements. In fact, the manuscripts are believed to be the composition of several generations of poet-priests over a period of centuries. The songs and prayers also belong to different geographical regions, mostly on the Indian subcontinent, as illustrated by the variety of natural phenomena they mention.



The Vedic culture spread across Central and South Asia and was a significant contributor to the growth and development of Asian civilization. Some scholars also claim the culture extended as far as Europe in prehistoric times. So as well as its place as a sacred text of the Hindus, the Rigveda is considered an important text in studies of comparative religion and mythology, ritual, anthropology, prehistory and poetry.

The Institute holds thirty manuscripts of Rigveda from across India. Of these, twenty-nine are written on paper and one, from Kashmir, is on birch bark. Several of the manuscripts contain the complete intact text of the Rigveda, which is rare. Nevertheless, all are important in the cultural and social heritage of the world. Thirteen manuscripts contain one of the oldest available commentaries on the text, while another five have the Padapatha, the traditional word analysis of the text. These aids have helped greatly in interpreting and understanding the Rigveda.



A modern-day printing of the Rigveda

[Papyrus Erzherzog Rainer](#)

Inscribed 2001

What is it

A collection of around 180,000 written objects: papyri, parchment and paper; wooden tablets; ostraka, or pieces of inscribed pottery; cloths; and leather scrolls. The items date from the 15th century BC up to the 16th century AD.

Why was it inscribed

This collection of writing materials and languages is one of the most extensive in the world. Many of the important languages of the ancient world are represented in written form, including

Egyptian, from hieroglyphics to Coptic; Greek; Latin; Hebrew and Aramaic; and Arabic. The papyri material covers a wide range of subject matter, from school and legal texts to writings on medicine, war and magic. Together, they allow insights into societies and cultures which have long since disappeared.

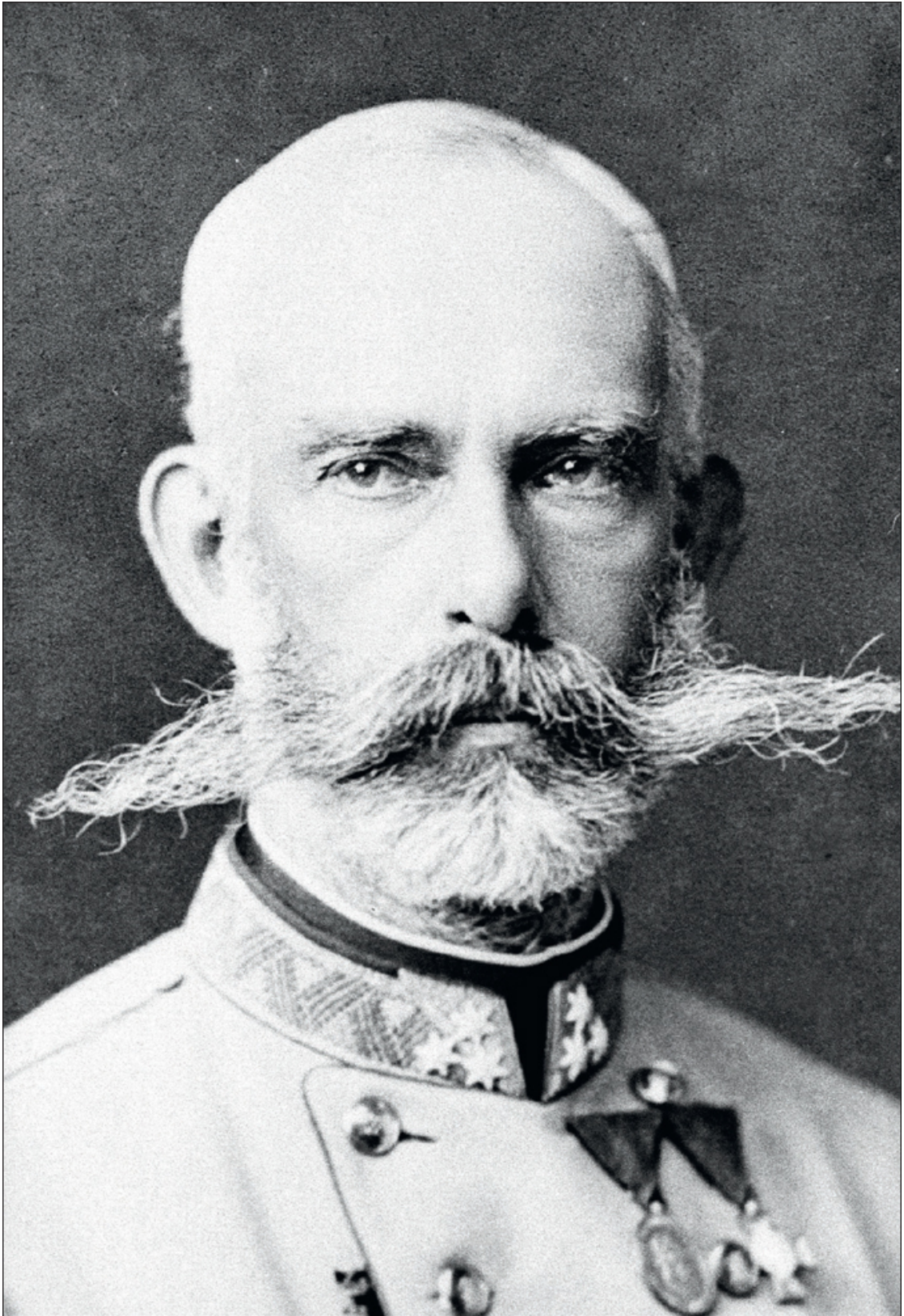
Where is it

Austrian National Library, Vienna, Austria

The collection was begun by Austrian historian and Orientalist Professor Josef von Karabacek, who was among the first to realise the importance of the papyri found at the Fayum oasis in Egypt in the late 1870s and early '80s. Together with his collaborator Theodor Graf, Professor von Karabacek imported thousands of the finds into Austria. Archduke (or Erzherzog) Rainer, a former prime minister and a member of the Habsburg royal family, bought the collection in 1883.

Material continued to come from Egypt and the collection grew to almost its present size within a few years. In 1899 Professor von Karabacek became head of the Imperial Court Library and that same year the archduke gave his collection as a birthday gift to the Emperor Franz Josef I, requesting that it be placed in the Court Library.

The material in the papyri covers every aspect of life: literature, school texts, magic, religion, the afterlife, legal affairs, financial transactions, military matters, medicine, books and writing. Together, they offer a direct insight into the world as it was known at the time. For example, many of the cities, villages, churches and temples of ancient Egypt are known through these papyri. Byzantine tax receipts form a large part of the records, allowing the reconstruction of aspects of the social and economic history of the Byzantine Empire. Roman military papers reveal aspects of governance in Egypt and beyond. Family archives from various periods also feature in the collection.



Erzherzog Rainer, who acquired the collection in 1883.



The Fayum oasis in Egypt, where the papyri were first found in the 1870s.

Among the most important items are the Greek papyri from the period between the end of Byzantine rule and the start of the Muslim control in Egypt in the 7th century AD. The period was one of upheaval, and the contents of the papyri document this. Other items include the oldest written Arabic text and a receipt, written in both Greek and Arabic, dating from the start of Muslim rule in the country.

The collection's treasures include some unique religious texts of great importance for the documenting of the ancient Egyptian religion, Christianity and Islam. These include Books of the Dead (including one with gilded pictures), rare New Testament papyri and the oldest-known fragment of the biography of the Prophet Mohammed.

Also among the vast wealth of material are individual special items of particular interest. Included is possibly the only surviving piece of the Library of Alexandria, as well as the oldest-known fragment of an ancient song. The works of many ancient writers and poets are represented here.

Many of the most important languages in the Old World exist in original writing in the collection. Examples include the Egyptian languages in their different forms: hieroglyphics, hieratic, demotic and Coptic, as well as Latin, Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac and Pehlewi (Middle Persian). Most numerous are the texts in Arabic and Greek, which was the language of the establishment and of administration for almost a millennium from around 300 BC onwards.

The Austrian National Library has a separate Papyrus Museum which features some highlights of the collection and allows an insight into the lives of some of the people who lived in the Nile Valley over a period of 3000 years.

[Commemorative stelae of Nahr el-Kalb, Mount Lebanon](#)

Inscribed 2005

What is it

A series of commemorative stelae (carved stone tablets) depicting Lebanese history from the 14th century BC to the present through the inscriptions left by successive armies.

Why was it inscribed

Situated on a strategic north-south road, the stelae, carved with inscriptions in different languages, evoke the history of Lebanon and testify to its relations with the rest of the Middle East and the West.

Where is it

Nahr el-Kalb, Mount Lebanon, Lebanon

The commemorative stelae of Nahr el-Kalb, the Lycus or Dog River, on Mount Lebanon are a series of stone tablets depicting Lebanese history from the 14th century BC to the present through the inscriptions left by successive armies: Pharaonic, Assyro-Babylonian, Greek, Roman, Arab, French and British. Situated at a difficult and very steep crossing point on an important north-south road, the stelae were carved into the rocks with inscriptions in different languages. They evoke the history of Lebanon and testify to its relations with the rest of the Middle East and the West.

The hillside where the stelae are carved forms a strategic location, protected by a water course and steep escarpment that commands the coast road which links the south of the country to the north. From the time of the Old Kingdom in Egypt, the road was taken by the Pharaonic armies for two reasons: to ensure easy, rapid access to the timber of the Lebanese cedar (*Cedrus libanus*), a rare and valuable commodity in Egypt; and to block the road to invaders from the north, in particular the Mitanni and the Hittites. The first stele was built by the pharaoh, Ramses II. Likewise, the Assyro-Babylonians, coming from Mesopotamia, planned their incursions to gain free access to the Mediterranean in order to spread out in all directions. Later conquerors, the Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Mameluks, Ottomans, French and British, followed suit, marking their passage with stelae which remain the best evidence of their presence.



Commemorative stelae have been carved into the hillside since prehistoric times, marking the passage of armies through the dangerous pass of Nahr el-Kalb, near Mount Lebanon. The stele illustrated here commemorates the passage of French troops in 1861 during the rule of Napoleon III.



This stele marks the passage of French troops under General Gouraud in July 1920, on their way to Damascus.

The stelae are carved in soft, chalky limestone. In all there are twenty-two stelae, carved in many languages, including Egyptian hieroglyphs, Assyro-Babylonian cuneiform, Greek, Latin, English, French and Arabic. The series of stelae, unique in number and style, are in imminent danger of erosion, on the one hand, and vandalism on the other, making protection and conservation measures a matter of necessity and urgency.

[The Phoenician alphabet](#)

Inscribed 2005

What is it

The Phoenician alphabet, developed in 13th-century BC Phoenicia, is a non-pictographic, consonantal alphabet.

Why was it inscribed

The Phoenician alphabet is the writing system that is regarded as the prototype for all alphabets of the world today.

Where is it

Stele no. I is in cadastral lot n.35 that falls within the municipality of Zouk Mosbeh. Stelae nos. II–XXII are located in plot n.98 that belongs to the Order of Antonine (Wakf St Joseph – City of Dbayeh)

The Phoenician alphabet was developed in the 13th century BC in Phoenicia, an area that spanned much of the eastern shore of the Mediterranean in the region of Canaan, the zone of the Middle East known as the Fertile Crescent. Phoenicia was a seafaring nation with trading links mostly along the southern shores of the Mediterranean, and by the 13th century BC it was the foremost maritime power in the region.

Trading and cultural links brought the Phoenicians into contact with the writing systems used in Egypt and Mesopotamia, the two major powers of the time. The Phoenicians used both these alphabets – hieroglyphics and cuneiforms – but in the 13th century they devised their own system.

What made the new alphabet so innovative was that it used the sounds of the contemporary Phoenician dialect and represented them in letter form. Unlike pictograph-based writing systems, a phonetic alphabet cut down on the number of characters needed for expression, thus simplifying the language and making it easier to use. Their writing system spread into the western and eastern worlds.

There were twenty-two letterforms in the Phoenician alphabet, which was an abjad – that is, all of its letters were consonants. It is widely seen as the precursor to most of the major alphabets in use today. As Greece became the economic and cultural powerhouse, so the Phoenicians' alphabet gradually gave way to the Greek; furthermore, some letters were modified to function as vowels. However, traces of the Phoenician alphabet can still be found in the Roman era in the 1st century AD.



The sarcophagus of King Ahiram of Byblos bears the oldest example still extant of the full Phoenician alphabet, from around 1200 BC.



Monument to the Phoenician alphabet at the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Byblos, Lebanon. The oldest example still extant of the full alphabet dates from around 1200 BC and is engraved on the sarcophagus of King Ahiiram of Byblos, a Phoenician city.

[Huang Di Nei Jing](#) **黄帝内经** ([Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon](#))

Inscribed 2011

What is it

The earliest and most important written work of traditional Chinese medicine. It was compiled over 2200 years ago.

Why was it inscribed

It contains the two basic theories of Chinese medicine, the theories of Yinyang and the Five Elements, and is regarded as the fundamental medical text from which traditional Chinese medicine was systematically recorded, standardized, developed and now applied by and to people of different countries and races.

Where is it

National Library of China, Beijing, China

The Huang Di Nei Jing was compiled some 2200 years ago and it laid down the foundation and inspired further development of traditional Chinese medicine, not only in China but also in neighbouring countries and beyond. Based on the theoretical principles of Yinyang, Qi (or life force) and the Five Elements (or phases), it provides a systematic summary of the relationship between physical and mental activities and the pathological changes in the human body, covering internal medicine, surgery, gynaecology, pediatrics and infectious diseases.

The Huang Di Nei Jing was the first medical text that departed from the old shamanistic beliefs that disease was caused by demonic influences. It expounds the concept of health with the philosophical thinking of Taoism and Confucianism. It sees diseases as closely related to diet, emotion, lifestyle, environment, age and heredity. Emphasis is placed on the unity of man and nature, and the holistic idea of body and mind. Accordingly, human activities should be in conformity with the regular changes in nature, including climatic changes of the four seasons, alternation of day and night and the cyclic phases of the moon. At the same time, emotions should be adjusted and desires restrained, with ethical considerations given to high moral value, an essential element of self-control. The book discusses the principles and prescribes methods of diagnosis and treatment of diseases. A large number of 'modern' diseases such as malaria, gout, diabetes, coronary heart disease, rheumatic arthritis and cerebrovascular problems are mentioned in the book with detailed analyses and treatment methods.



The earliest-surviving printed copy of the Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon, dating from 1339, over 1000 years after the text was first written down.

The book is written in an interlocutory pattern, with the Yellow Emperor (Huang Di) raising questions on medical issues and his sage physicians, Qibo and Leigong answering by explaining medical theories and principles with illustrations of clinical experience and practices. The text is written in lively and yet poetic rhyming language, which demonstrates the rich medical knowledge and refined literary culture in China at the time.

Many scholars believe that the Huang Di Nei Jing was not compiled by a single author within a limited period of time; rather, it was the fruit of the joint efforts of many experienced and dedicated physicians over the centuries. The major part of the book was completed with various editions in the Warring States period of Chinese history (475–221 BC) with supplements and revisions made in the Qin dynasty (221–206 BC) and Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 220). The original Huang Di Nei Jing had been copied onto bamboo slips, silk scrolls and paper until it was officially published during the 9th and 10th centuries AD. It was further edited by the government-authorized Bureau of Revising Medical Works of the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127). The National Library of China's copy was printed in 1339 by Hu's Gulin Sanctum using woodblock printing and is the earliest and the best-preserved version in existence.>

[Ancient Naxi Dongba literature manuscripts](#)

Inscribed 2003

What are they

The collection contains 1000 volumes on a variety of subjects dating from c.AD 30 to the Tang dynasty (618–907) in a pictographic script using more than 2000 characters. It is the only surviving script of its type in the world.

Why were they inscribed

These documents represent a unique form of script and written culture which represent an important part of the heritage of mankind.

Where are they

Dongba Culture Research Institute, Lijang county, Yunnan, China

The Naxi people are the descendants of the ancient Qiang tribe, who inhabited the Huang He and Huang Shui valleys in northwest China. After constant nomadic migration, the early Naxi finally settled down in eastern and western areas along the upper reaches of the Jinsha river. Today approximately 300,000 Naxi live at the junction of Yunnan province, Sichuan province and the Tibet autonomous region.

Despite the extremely difficult environmental conditions and the lack of material wealth, the Naxi still managed to create a unique and distinctive ethnic culture. As a consequence of being handed down through a religion whose priests were called 'Dongbas', this ancient culture acquired the name of 'Dongba culture'. Thus, all the pictographic characters, scriptures, ritual dancing, artworks and utensils related to this culture are prefixed by the word 'Dongba'. What is a continual surprise to many people and what makes this culture remarkable is the fact that the Naxi ancestors were able to create a system of writing with more than 2000 characters, using a particular pictographic script to write down their customs and scriptures. The scripts for writing the ancient Dongba literature are of great value for studies of the origin and development of written languages. It holds an irreplaceable position in the history of the development of the written languages, and is more primitive than the inscriptions on bones or tortoise shells of the Shang dynasty. It is the only surviving script of this type in the world.

The collection records all the aspects of the Dongba culture, ranging from the creation of the world through philosophy, economics, military affairs, culture, astronomy and farming to the social life of the Naxi people, and is an encyclopedia of their ancient society; it also covers every aspect of their religious rituals including praying for blessings, sacrificial offerings for exorcising evils, funerals and divination. The scriptures were written on the tough local paper with bamboo pens and were bound with threads. Written in a unique way and style, all the scripts in Dongba literature look like beautiful paintings. They are also of great value for comparative studies of the techniques of

papermaking and binding of literature in ancient times. As they cannot withstand natural ageing and incessant handling, the challenge of how to safeguard this rare and irreproducible heritage is under study. Dongba literature, except for that which is already collected and stored, is on the brink of disappearing, and Dongba culture itself is becoming dispersed and is slowly dying out as a result of the impact of other powerful cultures. There are only a few masters left who can read the scriptures.

There is insufficient evidence to set accurately the time and place of creation of Naxi ancient literature and the Dongba script. However, it is of great value for studies into the origin of classical Chinese, and quite possibly, as Tibetan Buddhism also had a great influence on the Dongba religion, the origins of ancient Naxi Dongba literature may lie not only in the southwest of China, but also in some of the bordering countries.



A modern example of the Dongba pictograms used by the Naxi people in Yunnan province in southern China.



Dongba pictograms used by the Naxi people, the only system of pictograms still in use today.
[Mashtots Matenadaran ancient manuscripts collection](#)

Inscribed 1997

What is it

A collection of around 17,000 manuscripts from every sphere of ancient and medieval science and culture in Armenia.

Why was it inscribed

The Matenadaran collection is one of the foremost and most important sets of ancient and medieval manuscripts in the world. The collection covers a broad subject range.

Where is it

Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, Yerevan, Armenia

The Matenadaran (which in Armenian means ‘manuscript repository’) holds a collection of priceless medieval manuscripts that are rare in themselves and are exceptional in the scope of their subject matter. The collection covers religion, history, geography, philosophy, grammar, law, medicine, mathematics and literature, as well as manuscripts in Arabic, Persian, Greek, Syriac, Latin, Ethiopian, Indian and Japanese.

The Matenadaran was founded at Etchmiadzin at the start of the 4th century AD by the first catholicos (the supreme patriarch) of the Armenian Orthodox Church. It was a centre for the preservation of Greek and Syriac manuscripts and, from the 5th century onwards, the main translation centre in Armenia.

Its position in the Caucasus left Armenia vulnerable to invasion and the country suffered repeatedly. By the start of the 18th century, what had been a rich manuscript collection was reduced to a small percentage of its previous size. Greater stability came when Eastern Armenia was incorporated into Russia in the early 19th century and the collection began to grow again. In 1939 the Matenadaran was transferred to Yerevan where research work is still a major activity today. The treasures of Armenian culture, spread around the world, are still being actively sought and donated to the immense collection.

The oldest relics of Armenian literature date back to the 5th and 6th centuries. Only fragments from this period have survived, often as flyleaves to the bindings of manuscripts. Medieval bookbinders often sewed in leaves of parchment of older or no-longer-used manuscripts between the cover and the first page of a book to protect the writing from coming into contact with the binding. Thanks to this practice, specimens of those earlier works have been preserved. Other pages have been found in caves, in ruins or buried in the ground.

The collection contains the work of the church fathers and other Armenian translations from Greek or Syriac of the 5th century AD, the originals of which have disappeared. These include Six Hundred Questions and Answers about the Book of Genesis by Philo of Alexandria; a body of works of spiritual revelation by Hermes Trismegistos; writings by Basil of Caesarea; and the Chronicon by Eusebius of Caesarea, a vital source for the history of the first three centuries of Christianity.

The oldest binding and miniatures in the Matenadaran date back to the 6th century. The oldest complete manuscript is the Lazarian Gospel, written in AD 887 on parchment, while the oldest extant Armenian paper manuscript is a collection of scientific, historical and philosophical work dating back to AD 981.



St Mesrop Mashtots, after whom the institute and its collection are named, devised the Armenian alphabet in AD 405.

[Saiva manuscripts in Pondicherry](#)

Inscribed 2005

What is it

This collection of 11,000 palm-leaf and paper manuscripts in Sanskrit, Tamil and Manipravalam focuses mainly on the religion and worship of the Hindu god Siva in southern India.

Why were they inscribed

It includes the largest collection in the world of manuscripts of texts of the Saiva Siddhanta, a religious tradition whose primary deity is the god Siva, which spread across the Indian subcontinent and beyond, as far as Cambodia, but which, from the 12th century, became restricted to southern India.

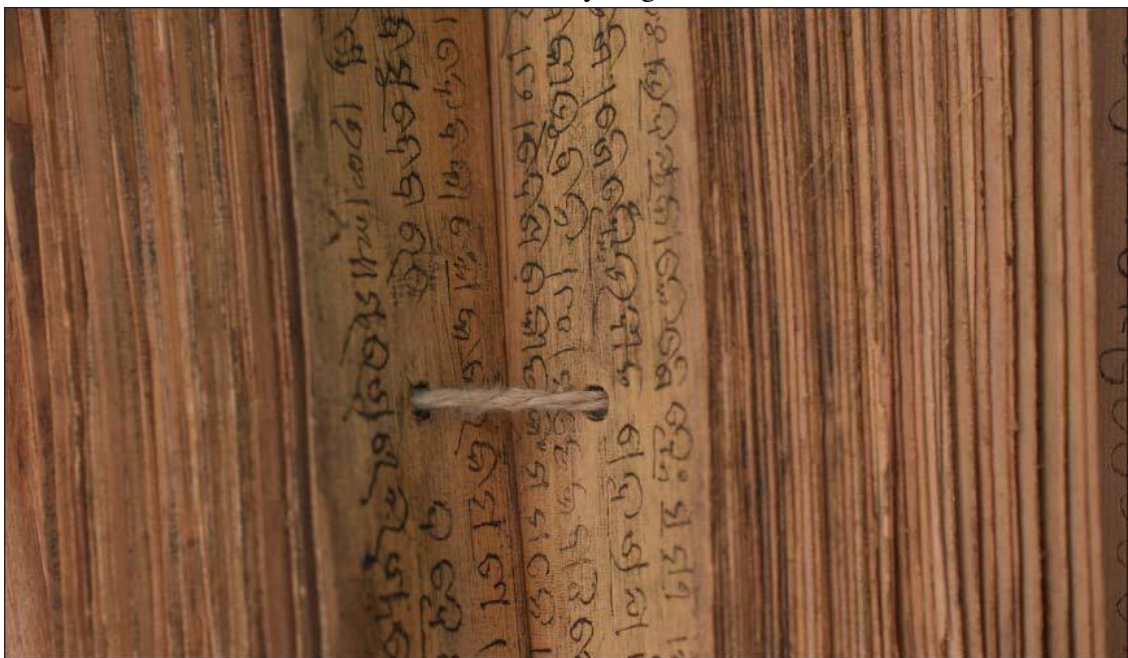
Where are they

French Institute of Pondicherry and the École française d'Extrême-Orient, Pondicherry, India

The Sanskrit scriptures of the Saiva Siddhanta were widely spread over the whole of the Indian subcontinent ten centuries ago. The influence of the Saiva Siddhanta can be found in Cambodia and Java and in the ritual traditions of all the Tantric and subsequent theistic traditions in India. After a period of wide-reaching influence, this religious tradition fell into abeyance everywhere but in Tamil-speaking southern India: there is no evidence of adherents of the Saiva Siddhanta outside that area after the 12th century. Surviving post-12th-century ritual treatises, commentaries and other religious literature of the school all appear to have been written in the Tamil-speaking area.

Two large collections of palm-leaf and paper manuscripts of Sanskrit, Tamil and Manipravalam texts are preserved in French research institutions in the south Indian town of Pondicherry. The 1662 palm-leaf bundles at the Pondicherry Centre of the École française d'Extrême-Orient belong to a single collection from the Tirunelveli district in the south of India. More than a third of this material (about 650 bundles) relates to the cult of the Hindu god Visnu and at least sixty of these Vaisnava manuscripts transmit texts that have never been published. The major collection, however, is that of the French Institute of Pondicherry, which includes 8187 palm-leaf bundles and 360 paper codices. The manuscripts have been collected from every area of the Tamil-speaking south of India and the collection contains texts of every branch of pre-colonial Indian learning. Nearly half of the material relates to the worship of the god Siva. The surviving texts, the majority of them unpublished, were originally written from the 6th century to the colonial period.

Although some of the texts are of very great antiquity, these South Indian manuscript copies belong for the most part to the 19th century. Palm-leaf manuscripts kept in South India can perish extremely rapidly and no surviving examples are known to be older than three centuries. As for the paper manuscripts of the collection, they have tended to be much more regularly consulted, being much easier to read, and the most used are now very fragile.



An example of a palm-leaf manuscript showing how the text is written on to palm leaves and how the bundles of leaves are joined together.

[Codex Argenteus – the ‘Silver Bible’](#)

Inscribed 2011

What is it

The Codex Argenteus – the ‘Silver Bible’ – is a remnant of a liturgical book of the four Gospels written in the Gothic language for Arian Christian Church services in the early 6th century.

Why was it inscribed

The ‘Silver Bible’ contains the most comprehensive extant text in the Gothic language and is one of the world’s best-known remaining artefacts from Gothic culture. Its historical value lies in its contribution to the spread of Christianity.

Where is it

Uppsala University Library, Uppsala, Sweden

The Codex Argenteus is a book for use in religious liturgy that contains the selected portions of the Gospels to be read during church services. The book was written in the early 6th century in northern Italy, probably in the city of Ravenna.

At that time, Ravenna was the capital of the Ostrogothic Kingdom which stretched from modern-day southern France across to Serbia and took in all of Italy. However, in AD 553 the Ostrogoths were defeated after a long and costly war by the forces of the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire which was then at almost the greatest extent of its power. As a result, Gothic language and culture largely disappeared.

The Codex Argenteus contains the most comprehensive still existing text in the Gothic language. It is part of the 4th-century translation of the Bible from Greek into Gothic by Bishop Wulfila, an Arian preacher who had converted the Germanic tribes and was said to have constructed the Gothic alphabet specifically for the translation. Wulfila is also the oldest known non-mythical constructor of an alphabet.



Codex Argenteus – the ‘Silver Bible’



Christ's baptism, depicted on the ceiling of King Theodoric's Arian Baptistery in Ravenna.

A beautiful and impressive object in its own right, the Codex Argenteus was thought to have been made for the Ostrogoth King Theodoric the Great (AD 454–526) and intended to be admired in a central place in a church, probably the Gothic Arian cathedral in Ravenna. The pages are high-quality coloured vellum inscribed in a decorative script in silver and gold ink – a degree of ostentation and decoration that suggests a royal connection.

Today the Codex Argenteus is held at Uppsala University Library. Its whereabouts after the fall of the Ostrogothic Kingdom were unknown until it emerged in the 17th century in the Benedictine Abbey of Werden in Essen; from there, via the royal library in Prague, it arrived in Sweden as a donation to the university library in 1669. The Codex was bound in silver by the royal court's goldsmith in Stockholm.

[Codex Purpureus Beratinus](#)

Inscribed 2005

What is it

Two Gospels found in Berat, Albania, dating from the 6th and 9th centuries.

Why was it inscribed

The two Beratinus codices are masterpieces of religious art and important evidence of the development of Christian thought. They represent one of the most valuable treasures of the Albanian cultural heritage.

Where is it

Albanian National Archives, Tirana, Albania

‘Codex Purpureus’ refers to manuscripts written in gold or silver lettering on parchment dyed purple, originally restricted for the use of Roman or Byzantine emperors. The Beratinus Codices are two Gospels found in Berat, Albania: ‘Beratinus-1’ dates from the 6th century, and ‘Beratinus-2’ from the 9th century.

They are two of the seven ‘purple codices’ written from the 6th to the 18th centuries that survive today. These are of global importance, illustrating the development of ancient biblical, liturgical and hagiographical literature.

‘Beratinus-1’ is a 6th-century uncial illuminated manuscript Gospel written in Greek. It is one of the oldest examples of the New Testament and is an important reference point for the development of biblical and liturgical literature throughout the world.

The ‘Beratinus-1’ manuscript, containing non-standard pre-canonical Gospel passages, has true global importance as it is an indispensable reference point for international research on literary textology. It is also extremely valuable in terms of the history of handwriting and the calligraphic elements of applied figurative art.

The letters and words are not separated from one another (*scriptio continua*). The letters are silver and the initials gold; the manuscript is on parchment. It contains several gold abbreviations, typical of ancient Christianity. It comprises 190 pages.

‘Beratinus-1’ contains the majority of the texts of the Gospels according to St Mark and St Matthew. It is thought that the other two Gospels probably also existed.

‘Beratinus-2’ dates back to the 9th century and was found in a church in Berat. The codex contains simple miniatures (Gospel portraits) and comprises 420 pages. The origin of this manuscript has been and remains the subject of much debate. It includes all four Gospels. The letters are all gold and the manuscript is on parchment. The text is from the standard text period and includes some semiuncial letters.



An example of a Codex Purpureus from the Museo Diocesano di Rossano, Calabria, Italy.



Codex Purpureus Beratinus

This manuscript is an essential landmark in evangelical literature and Christian culture in general. It is a unique record of the development of the world's ancient evangelical and liturgical literature and a model of evangelical writings in minuscules.

In 1967, after a long period during which they were thought to have been lost, the two Beratinus Codices were found and were handed over to the National Archives in 1971. They are of universal importance as examples of the spiritual heritage of nations and as treasures of the global heritage.

[Vienna Dioscurides](#)

Inscribed 1997

What is it

A Byzantine illuminated manuscript of *De Materia Medica* by Dioscorides, a Greek physician, pharmacologist and botanist of the 1st century AD. The manuscript was written in the early 6th century and has 491 folios of parchment with more than 400 colour pictures of plants and animals.

Why was it inscribed

The Vienna Dioscurides can be considered as the most important pharmaceutical source of the Ancient World. It was used from early medieval times into the early modern period as a dictionary for medical practitioners. It forms the basis of medical herbal therapeutic knowledge and is possibly the most important, enduring and comprehensive work on herbal and other remedies in the West.

The manuscript itself is a masterpiece of the book art from later Classical Antiquity.

Where is it

Austrian National Library, Vienna, Austria

The Vienna Dioscurides is the oldest and most famous copy of Dioscorides's 1st century AD work, *De Materia Medica*. It was copied in the early 6th century for Juliana Anicia, daughter of Flavius Anicius Olybrius, emperor of the Western Roman Empire, in recognition of her patronage in building a church in Constantinople. This same copy passed through many hands that made annotations in Greek, Arabic, Turkish and Hebrew. In 1519 the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian II bought the book for the Habsburg Imperial Library.

De Materia Medica was the most important pharmaceutical source of the Ancient World and through medieval times. It was in active use for 1000 years as a pharmacopoeia and reference work for medical practitioners. There are indications that it was first regarded as a luxury copy and later as a medical textbook in daily use in a Constantinople hospital; these changes in use throw some light on social and cultural progress through the centuries. The information it contains also reveals how plant and herbal remedies were used from antiquity through to early modern times.



Dioscorides with a student seated at his feet.

Written 'on the preparation, properties and testing of drugs', the book lists more than 1000 natural substances and their medicinal properties. Most of these are botanical, although some mineral- and animal-based remedies are also included. There are more than 400 colour illustrations, the vast majority being of plants; each illustrated plant appears on a page facing the description of medicinal properties. Other full-page illustrations in the book feature Anicia and Dioscorides himself, both in an author portrait and seated among seven noted physicians.

The Vienna Dioscurides also contains five supplementary texts including Dionysius's Ornithiaca, describing more than forty birds, with illustrations.



[Earliest Islamic \(Kufic\) inscription](#)

Inscribed 2003

What is it

An Arabic inscription, dated 24 Hegira (equivalent to AD 644), engraved on a rock located near al-Ula in the northwest Saudi Arabia.

Why was it inscribed

The inscription, in Kufic script, is the first and oldest dated Arabic inscription in the world and the earliest Islamic inscription.

Where is it

Near al-Ula, Saudi Arabia

This inscription, from the 7th century AD, was carved into a block of red sandstone located south of Qa'a al Muatadil and north of Sharma in northwestern Saudi Arabia. The rock stands on an ancient trade and pilgrimage route that connected the early Islamic city of al-Mabiyat with Madain Saleh, a city known to the Romans as Hegra and which was originally part of the Nabatean kingdom in the 1st century AD, their second city after Petra. By the time the inscription was carved, Madain Saleh was on the pilgrimage route to Mecca further south.

The inscription itself reads: 'Bismallah Ana Zuhair Kataba zaman maout Omar sanat Arba Wa eshrain', which translates as, 'In the name of God I Zuhair wrote the date of the death of Omar the year four and twenty (Hegira)'.

The Omar mentioned in the inscription was Omar or Umar bin al-Khattab, the second caliph to rule after the death of the Prophet Mohammed. He is also named in the Sunni Muslim tradition as one of the four rightly guided, or righteous caliphs who succeeded the Prophet. Although he ruled the caliphate for only 10 years from 634 until his death in 644, his military and political prowess brought the vast expansion of Muslim lands, ultimately including the conquest of the Persian Empire.

Omar also established the Muslim calendar. Its start date was taken to be AD 622, the year the Prophet Mohammed moved from Mecca to Medina. Omar was stabbed and mortally wounded in an assassination attempt. He died on the last night of the month of Dul-Hajj of the year 23 Hegira, and was buried next day on the first day of Muharram of the new year 24 Hegira (corresponding to AD 644).



The inscription is in Kufic script, in a style without dots and in a relatively early or crude form of the script. The term 'Kufic' relates to the Muslim city of Kufah which was founded in Mesopotamia (in modern-day southern Iraq) in AD 638, although the script was used in the region before the city was established and may have taken its name because the style was developed there. Kufic script,

which fell into disuse around the 11th or 12th century, was generally used as a display script on metal and stone, on coins and in mural inscriptions and, in this instance, on rock.

Holy Koran Mushaf of Othman

Inscribed 1997

What is it

Known as the Mushaf of Othman, it is the earliest extant written version of the Koran. The manuscript is 250 pages long and is written on animal skins.

Why was it inscribed

One of the world's major and most influential books of religion, the Koran has played a significant role in shaping world history. The Mushaf of Othman is the earliest written version. Compiled in Medina in AD 651, it supersedes all other versions.

Where is it

Muslim Board of Uzbekistan, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

The Koran, which Muslims believe was divinely revealed to the Prophet Mohammed, was transcribed by his followers onto various materials, such as pieces of wood and camel bones. After the Prophet's death, the first caliph to succeed, Abu Bakr (c. AD 573-634) ordered that scribes should record in writing all such verses, or suras. His later successor Othman (c. AD 579-656) ordered that the suras should be compiled into a book with the help of the four best contemporary scholars of the Koran.

In 651 this first, definitive version of the Koran was transcribed at Medina, the Muslim capital and power base, and was known as the Mushaf of Othman. A 'mushaf' is a collection of written pages or book, here of the Koran, and the mushaf was named after the caliph who ordered its creation. This version was declared as a standard, substituting all other versions. The manuscript is written in large black letters in the Arabic Kufic script.

Caliph Othman was assassinated while reading it and the manuscript is believed to be stained with his blood. The succession to the caliphate after the death of the Prophet was a source of conflict among his followers, and Othman's assassination and its repercussions precipitated the schism into the Sunni and Shia denominations of Islam which has divided the Muslim community ever since.



Mushaf of Othman

Conflicting accounts explain how the Koran arrived at Uzbekistan. According to one, the book was brought by a relative of Othman during a period of disorder in Medina; while another states that Othman's successor, Ali Ibn Abi Taleb, brought it to Kufah, from where the Uzbekistani leader and warrior Amir Temur brought it as a trophy to Samarkand after a military campaign during the 14th century.



The Khazrati Imam complex in Tashkent, where the Holy Koran Mushaf of Othman is kept. In the 19th century the book went to Russia, but several years after the Russian Revolution of 1917 it was returned to Uzbekistan where it stayed in a museum until the fall of Communism in 1989, when it was handed over to the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan.

The Koran, an acknowledged masterpiece of Arabic literature, contains a code of conduct and correct living. It records the creation of the world, the stages of divine revelation and the place of humanity in the universe and in relation to the Creator.

[Lucca's historical diocesan archives](#)

Inscribed 2011

What is it

The extensive archives of the Archdiocese of Lucca, which date back more than thirteen centuries. The inscribed documents date from AD 685 to 1000.

Why was it inscribed

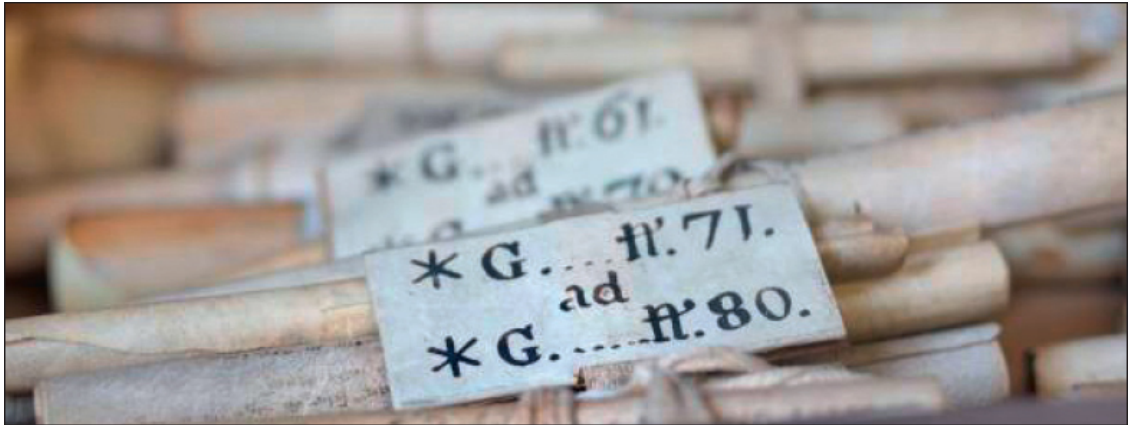
Lucca's Historical Diocesan Archives are among the biggest and most ancient archives in the world. Five codices in the collection preserve 13,000 documents dating back to AD 685 and among these, 1800 documents are earlier than AD 1000.

As church and state were intertwined during the Middle Ages, the archives present a unique and valuable resource of the religious, economic, agrarian, civic, cultural, social and political history of a diocese and its community that was at the religious and geographic heart of Europe.

Where is it

Archives of the Archdiocese of Lucca, Lucca, Italy

The Lucca archdiocesan archive is one of the largest archives in the world from the Early Middle Ages. During the time the archives cover, Lucca, in Tuscany, was ruled by the Lombards and was part of the Carolingian Empire. Its geographical situation placed it at a strategic point in the heart of Europe, along the Via Francigena pilgrimage route which connected Canterbury and Rome.



Parchments from the archives

The wealth of material in the archive dating from the Dark Ages makes the collection exceptional in Western Europe. The documents show the activities of the clerics and laymen who ruled Lucca during this time and their secular as well as religious activities, including relations with the papacy and the imperial powers. Many of the most important characters in early medieval Europe are mentioned in the papers, including Charlemagne, Otto I, king of Italy and later Holy Roman Emperor, and his successors, Otto II and Otto III.

The papers show the changes and evolution of the community and its territory, which were also closely related to the growth and development of Italy and Europe through the four centuries.



Lucca today



Detail of a codex from the archives



Volto Santo de Lucca

The history of the local people, their society, economy, culture and other aspects such as demographic patterns can all be traced through the documents. Lucca was a rich community and imperial and papal privileges and provisions, agrarian and commercial contracts, sales, loans and donations are all recorded.

The community's religious and spiritual expression is particularly notable in the edification of churches and the development of the cult of the Holy Face, the town's patron. The Holy Face, or Volto Santo, is a wooden crucifix believed to have been sculpted by Nicodemus, a friend and contemporary of Christ, and brought to Lucca in AD 742. Bound up with religious expression is the city's artistic outflowing, in the wealth of religious buildings, the decoration of its churches and in the production of its silk factory, used to make religious vestments.

The documents reveal further changes, both through the centuries and in different geographical areas, in practices in handwriting, parchment and miniature preparation and the use of colours and gold in manuscripts.

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