

Documenting Diversity: Collections, Catalogues and Context

Sub theme: Access and Integration - working together with archives and other heritage Institutions

“Creating Archives-Preserving Heritage”:

The CA&A’s Journey as a Research and Documentation Center since 1965

We all do documentation today. None of our touristy visits are complete without hundreds of photographs of monuments, sculptures or natural sites. Thanks to the social networking sites that willingly provide a free platform to share the images online with the bonus to have a global audience for their members to admire and use their products. A few months ago the Prime Minister of India Mr. Narendra Modi started a campaign ‘Incredible India’ to promote tourism in the country. He invited people through Twitter to send their best photographs of an Indian site to demonstrate what incredible places exist in this country; afterwards we witnessed an incessant stream of tweets containing photographs of ‘Incredible places in India’ by the PM for almost a month. He must have received tons of images from the Tweeters that allowed the PMO to sift out and use the best ones for the campaign. If we require an image to illustrate our paper, study a site or a sculpture, to include in a project or just to know about our heritage, a simple Google search would retrieve thousands of results. There is a possibility that in ninety percent cases we get the image that we look for without making much effort. And, if the search is made intensive through an inquiry spread among your personal Facebook community of likeminded persons, ninety-nine percent chances are that you will be produced the required image by a FB friend. The social networking sites are flooded with photography groups, which are another great source of professionally photographed entities. While the above are some random sources of heritage documentation, there is no dearth of quality documentation online as in current times most cultural organizations have their online presence. Museums all over the world are uploading their collections online; many have made high-quality images free for download. Compared with this, the scenario in mid 20th century was just the reverse when the AIIS documentation programs were launched in India. The Center for Art and Archaeology (CA&A), established in 1965 serves as the centerpiece of this paper. This paper discusses the CA &A’s journey as a leader in India in the field of documentation of monuments and museums during the last half a century. It also underscores the value of heritage documentation taken up as a research activity by the Center that contributed immensely to the management and upkeep of cultural heritage not only in India but also in South Asia because of its wealth of archival records on Indic culture covering the vast expanse of the Indian subcontinent as well as other South East Asian countries.

Approved by Government of India, as part of the American Institute of Indian Studies, the CA&A has been dedicated to developing knowledge about India’s rich visual traditions. The American Institute of Indian Studies (AIIS), a 53-year-old consortium of 80-world class American Universities, is promoting India and Indian studies in the United States of America since 1961. The **CA&A** is an internationally recognized presence in the documentation of Indian and South East Asian art and architecture, having covered photographic records and architectural plans of more than 7000

monuments and ancient buildings in its archives. More than 3000 archaeological and historical sites are represented in the Photo-archives of the Center, and over 350 museum collections are documented. The AIIS surveyors and draftsmen have prepared some 6000 detailed measured line drawings and sketches of monuments in the Architectural archives based on their on-the-spot surveys and measurements.

The CA&A was established as a research and documentation center by a group of art historians in Varanasi, a big town of Uttar Pradesh located in north India, led by Dr. Pramod Chandra who was at that time teaching art history in Harvard University, USA. The Center, then named American Academy of Benares meant to create a visual archive of raw materials documenting built heritage and antiquities from all over the country for the academic communities, especially, for scholars of art history. There was a need for such an archive in mid 20th century as availability and access to visual materials was severely limited. The nodal cultural agencies like the Archaeological Survey of India conducted photographic surveys of monuments and antiquities in order for conservation and restoration activities. Their collections were accessible to the professional staff of the ASI. Museums maintained inventories of their collections, which were corroborated by photographs in some cases. But, the photographs were generally not easily available to scholars or other users.

In a situation like this, a group of academicians who specialized in Indian art came up with the idea of establishing a visual resource in India to facilitate research. The CA&A's documentation was thus a result of scholarly quests for knowledge about aspects of Indian art and architecture that produced meticulous coverage of museum collections and historical buildings. The initial surveys included systematic and extensive photo-documentation of monuments and museum collections in Varanasi, architecture in coastal regions of India as well as temple architecture of the county under the supervision of specialists. The specialists who led the earlier field-documentation tours such as Pramod Chandra, Jose Pareira, M. A. Dhaky and Pran Gopal Pal were teaching in leading international Universities or working as researchers in national and international cultural organizations. Several scholars from outside of the Center like Pratapaditya Pal, Michael Meister, Don Stadtner and Walter Spink also contributed to the photo-archive.

Hence, the photographs/negatives, which currently number about 200,000, were 'created' according to high scholarly and technical standards by the field-experts. The documentation teams consisted of professionally trained draftsmen and photographers who worked under the guidance of the specialists. The nature of field coverage was based on the objects of the research projects undertaken by an expert. So, while the Baroque architecture of coastal India laid stress on capturing the general image of the exterior and interior of the structures, a detailed documentation of museum objects was made considering their shape, dimension and features necessary to allow their in-depth study. An emphasis on architectural traditions (built as well as rock-cut) developed from a major project directed by Padma Bhushan M.A.Dhaky, a noted scholar of architecture and literature who served for many years as director of this Center. Fourteen Volumes of the Encyclopaedia of Indian Temple Architecture as well as a taxonomic glossary exploring the nature of temple forms resulted from CA&A's longest lasting project on temple documentation, steered by M. A. Dhaky.

The Encyclopaedia volumes spearheaded an enquiry into the development of Indian Temple Architecture necessitating visual and architectural documentation of temples of

different eras located in all regions of the country for supporting material. The project was formulated with the view of consolidating and bringing together at one place all essential historical and technical information relating to the Indian temples in their many regional and period styles. Also, an annotated and detailed glossary of architectural terms for ancient and medieval architecture was to be prepared. While the technical terms, mainly in Sanskrit, were being extracted from the many published and unpublished textual sources, their manifestations in ancient temples along with regional and temporal variations had to be produced for comparison with their citations from ancient and medieval Sanskrit works. Hence, unlike a regular documentation, which would be made to create a simple listing of a building, this coverage aimed at creating a detailed study of a temple including recording of each architectural component of the building.

An exhaustive photography of temple segments from all angles was executed. This kind of coverage produced meticulous photo-records, numbering sometimes over 300 in case of large temple complexes like Borobudur. The physical database developed alongside included the historical (patron, style, date), geographical (provenance/site,) and physical details (monument, complex, type, material, inscription, direction and architectural/sculptural component) carefully noted per a system devised by the scholars involved in creation of the visual archives. The CA&A documentation team covered in this process temples and museum collections in 22 political states of the country.

The emphasis on creation of high-quality visual material motivated the decision to deploy the best professionals and equipment for field surveys. The CA&A used black and white film photography from its inception in 1966 for clarity and longevity. Also, large format camera such as Mamiya (RB 6x7, RZ 6x7, 645), Sinar view camera (8x10, 4x5), Rolleiflex Roll Film 120(2 ¼ x 2 ¼), Linhof Technika (4x5) and Nikon (F2, F3, D 70 and D 700) were used for photo-documenting buildings and antiquities. The negatives created through documentation ranged between 2.25” to 10” on the longer side. A system for cataloguing of negatives was devised by the documentation experts wherein the large format negatives were accessioned and maintained in archival quality storage envelopes. A separate inventory of the negatives was maintained in climatically controlled negative archives whereas the prints were mounted, labeled, indexed and made freely accessible for the users in the photo-archive. In mid 60s, when access to antiquities housed in museums and built heritage was not easy, the CA&A's venture made possible creation of an open access visual archive with facilities to supply high-quality photo-prints to the users for study and publication purposes.

The photo-archives covered nearly all phases of ancient and medieval Indic art and architecture, rock-cut or built, including religious buildings pertaining to Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Islamic and Christian architecture. The museum collections were documented with the view to supplement the architecture documentation; primarily the sculptures in varied medium like metal, stone and terracotta both in museums and *insitu* were included. The museum documentation aimed at compiling a collection of ancient Indian sculptures that were originally part of a monument, in order to contextualize them with their site of origin and facilitate their proper study. Other related materials from a site, such as numismatics and miniature paintings, housed in museums were also documented. In course of intensive documentation undertaken by the Center in last 50 years a substantial collection of museum objects was made. The CA&A holding include

about 35000 records documenting museum objects in 350 museum collections in the country.

The museum covered by the CA&A included government and private museums, big and small repositories consisting of archaeological collections in the Indian sub-continent. An exhaustive photo-documentation of the entire sculpture collection of the Allahabad Museum was carried out in several different phases between 1966-75 and a two-volume catalogue of stone-sculptures in Allahabad Museum was brought out. The CA&A re-documented museum's complete antiquity collection a third time between 2010-11 for the Government of India's National-Register of antiquities. However, the scope of initial documentation survey expanded gradually and other South Asian countries such as Indonesia, Srilanka and Afghanistan were contained in an effort to cover the entire spread of Indic culture, beyond the current political boundaries of India. The CA&A experts documented the Kabul Museum, Afghanistan, Jakarta Museum, Indonesia and Cylone Museum, Sri Lanka during 70s-80s.

A library of primary and secondary published resources on Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit literature, epics and canonical texts, biographies and historical accounts, art, archaeology, architecture, sociology and epistemology was developed to support the archival collections and aid the researches undertaken by CA&A scholars. The CAA library is now one of the rare libraries of its kind in the world with 75,000 books, journals and report; it also consists of a collection of select rare books and journals numbering about 150 on art and architecture such as the ones on the Borobudur and Sanchi stupas. Also, the AIIS fellows and researchers from the field of art history, archaeology, architecture and sociology contributed their publications to the library for other users.

M.A.Dhaky's long association with the Center is vivid demonstration of cooperation among scholars, several nations and funding agencies that sustained a project that was beyond an individual effort. For initial several decades the affiliation with a foreign institution didn't go in favour of the Center; permissions to photograph the monuments and museums were difficult to obtain. To arrange the funding for running a project of this magnitude such as the Encyclopaedia of Indian Temple Architecture was an equally challenging task for the Center. The CA&A would not have overcome these challenges had it not been for the strong administrative support of the AIIS, the parent organization of the CA&A. The Director General of the AIIS in those days, Dr. Pradeep Mehendiratta ensured that the Center is able to achieve its academic goals without any administrative hurdles. With the support of AIIS administration in India necessary clearances were successfully obtained. The AIIS also arranged long term and substantial funding from Institutions like Smithsonian and Ford-foundation that helped sustain the EITA project for thirty-six years and publication of 14 volumes on Indian Temple Architecture.

Although the CA&A documentation programs were initiated to serve the scholarly communities with basic visual data on Indic art in the form of impeccable and detailed photographs of cultural heritage objects along with core research data, the materials generated through documentation programs nevertheless proved invaluable for conservation and preservation needs. In 2003, Rajasthan police collected photographs of the central ceiling of Sas-temple in Nagada from the Center's archives to verify some stolen sculptures found with an antiquity smuggler. Due to the CA&A's intricate documentation of the temple the police was able to find ten carefully shot photographs

of the ceiling with each sculpture recorded separately. The sculptures were retrieved based on this visual document that authenticated the original location of the artifacts in the temple. The Center's documentation of monuments and museums aided the restoration of earthquake damaged monuments of the Kachha region in Gujarat, brick temples of West Bengal, and Bamiyan and Kabul Museum that suffered irreparable damage in recent history due to manmade and natural disasters.

In 1971 Walter Spink, professor, art history in Michigan University, surveyed Afghanistan on behalf of the Center and documented monuments in Bamiyan valley and the Kabul Museum. The Kabul Museum housed antiquities from ancient sites like Begram, Hadda, Kakrak, Bamiyan, Shotorak, Paitawa, Tape Marendjan, Mundigak, Foundukistan, Kandahar etc. all that were at that time in display, were photographed. Between 1971 till 2001, when the museum was finally looted and pillaged by Talibans, the Kabul Museum had already faced a series of theft and pilferage. The Talibans completely devastated the collection in 2001; many objects dispersed due to vandalism and reached International market. Few years later when scholars and activists were working on compilation of an inventory of the objects originally part of the Kabul Museum, they found the AIIS photo-archives of the Kabul Museum and the Bamiyan Buddhas as a major resource for identification of the antiquities. The online presence of the AIIS images have boosted the scholarship on Indian art and architecture is proven by several instances including this that reports a group of scholars and conservators used the CA&A documentation for digital reconstruction of the Bamiyan Buddha images (http://www.idb.arch.ethz.ch/files/04_ag-remondino_zhang_photogr.record.pdf).

During the last decade, the CA&A has actively engaged in assisting the Government of India with its documentation expertise and archival collections. The Center was commissioned by the Government of Gujarat in 2004 to prepare a comparative study of the monuments damaged in the earthquake of 2001 for restoration purpose. The commission was largely granted due to the CA&A's documentation proficiency in addition to the existing archival resources that included coverage of the Kutch region in 1976 and 1987. In those two trips to the Kutch region, the Center had extensively documented monuments at 14 sites and the Bhuj Museum. The documentation in 2004 involved re-documentation and creation of measured elevation and floor plans of the earthquake damaged monuments. The earlier photographic records available in the archives of the CA&A supplemented the later coverage of the sites in Kutch.

In 2006, the State department of Archaeology and Museums, West Bengal commissioned the CA&A to document state protected monuments and museums in the State of West Bengal. The Center, besides carrying out the documentation both photographically and architecturally also created archives of visuals and architectural drawings for the archives of the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums. The two prong documentation program aided the restoration and preservation activities of the State and also helped them create their first digital and physical photo-archive of built heritage and antiquities of the region. From 2006 onwards, the CA&A documentation programs had completely switched to digital.

With the continuing mission to support the importance of preserving and fostering knowledge about the visual traditions of India, the CA&A however commenced digitization of its archives in 1998. For the Center, finding ways to make the significant visual traditions preserved in archives, better used and known was one

important task. The new generations of AIIS fellows who were associated with the Center as academic advisors like Frederick Asher and Catherine Asher, both India specialists, were mindful about the need for the collections reaching out to people globally. In 1998 they organized for the Center collaborations with the leading libraries of the USA to digitize and disseminate the photo-archives online. The CA&A began digitization of its Photo-archives under the guidance of renowned American librarians Jim Nye and Devid Magier who had formed a consortium of digital libraries from all over the world in University of Chicago, available at <http://dsal.uchicago.edu.in> The Center joined the consortium and made available its archive online in the year 2000.

As the Center cannot be comprehensive, enriching its already strong areas of architectural documentation has been the high priority for any further documentation projects that have been undertaken. In addition to new material, accumulating further information about that already in the archive is considered essential.

The CAA is now embarking on new projects and outreach programs that reflect the broader awareness of the importance of visual traditions for understanding culture, both that of the past and of the present. This effort is directed at considering the needs of various audiences beyond traditional art historical ones. A series of travelling photo-exhibition drawn from its Photo-archives are designed by the Center in order to generate interest in visual traditions and to provide window into art history for lay audiences. Center's current documentation programs also explore the possibilities of involving local communities, professionals of other related fields such as architects and teachers to raise public awareness about monuments. During a recent documentation of monuments along highways of medieval era such as the Agra-Lahore route developed by Mughals to connect their two capital cities, the Center engaged local communities of students and commoners alike to create a dialogue on heritage preservation. Such interactions are hoped to stimulate these groups to produce curriculum that highlights the value of documentation. Students will thus be able to learn to use and evaluate documents of primary evidence of the past through reading, maps, plans, and photographs as well as understanding architectural drawings.

In 2012 the Center for Art & Archaeology established a Virtual Museum of Images and Sounds (VMIS)- an online museum designed with the objectives of (a) creating greater awareness about the music and visual traditions of the country and (b) giving broader access to related materials housed in the archives of the two research centers of the AIIS - Center for Art & Archaeology (CA &A) and the Archives and Research Center for Ethnomusicology (ARCE), to users and visitors across the globe. The project was a result of the vast documentary wealth created by the research centers of the AIIS that till date are unparalleled in the country. This fact was acknowledged by the Government of India in form of a massive grant to the Center for Art and Archaeology by the Ministry of Culture in order to develop the Virtual Museum of Images and Sounds for the people of India. Through the Virtual Museum of Images and Sounds (VMIS) the CA&A is actively engaged in creating knowledge about facets of Indian art, architecture and archaeology among audiences including scholars to lay persons.

The VMIS project allowed the Center to update its existing digital cataloguing

systems using the international standards and cutting edge technology for digitization of data. The CA&A's ongoing digitization is carried out in consultation with the professionals and colleagues at ArtStor and DSAL. The digitized data is migrated to an online CMS system, which is developed using open source software. With the mission to promoting knowledge collaboration and help develop the web of knowledge into a serious resource for academic researchers and enthusiast alike the CA&A has collaborated with the University of Oxford. Together we are working on linking and sharing of data using new digital technologies such as the contextual ontology CIDOC-CRM. The CA&A will be a major contributor to this platform of mutual knowledge exchange.