

# Digital library of ancient Thai manuscripts

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Manuscript Chest. Credit: Wat Phan On/2015 David Wharton, Digital Library of Northern Thai Manuscripts (CC BY-NC 4.0).

The University of Pennsylvania and the National Library of Laos have launched the [Digital Library of Northern Thai Manuscripts](#) bringing thousands of ancient manuscripts out of monastic temples and making them available as open source material online.

The digital library contains images of approximately 5,000 manuscripts of ancient Thai literature, codes of law and history, which can be searched and viewed online or downloaded for free at

[lannamanuscripts.net](http://lannamanuscripts.net). More materials with related resources from the region will be added to build the database out to more than 7,000 manuscripts.

Justin McDaniel, professor and chair of the religious studies department is principle investigator for the project working with the National Library team in Thailand led by Harald Hundius, David Wharton and Bounleut Thammachak.

McDaniel has spent much of his career working with manuscripts in monastic libraries in rural areas of Thailand and Laos, reading, translating and helping to preserve them. He said he is thrilled that these materials are now being preserved and made accessible to people all over the world.

"This is a huge project to preserve, make accessible, catalogue and scan the entire corpus of Northern Thai manuscripts," McDaniel said.

"Anyone from students and researchers to monks and nuns can now read this preserved literature of an entire people."

Much of the original content is being shared online for the first time. Most of the texts were written on palm-leaf and have been stored in the libraries of Buddhist monasteries and in private collections.

"It's mostly Buddhist material, but also scientific material, historical material, botany, astrology, grammar, folk tales, philosophical tales, a massive corpus going back from 1410 to the 1950s when print became more popular," McDaniel said.

The database also contains material from the Preservation of Northern Thai Manuscripts Project, with permission of Chiang Mai University Library, digitized microfilms and handwritten copies of manuscripts made in the early 1970s as part of research conducted by Hundius, the

project's head digitizer, as well as digitized [manuscripts](#) made during the current Digital Library of Laos Manuscripts project implemented by the National Library of Laos.

Provided by University of Pennsylvania

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