

**PRELIMINARY MISSION
FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF
THE *COLLECTIONS HANDBOOK***

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|---|-----------|
| PRELIMINARY MISSION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE <i>COLLECTIONS HANDBOOK</i>.. | 2 |
| CONTEXT OVERVIEW | 2 |
| A. ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT SITUATION | 4 |
| PRELIMINARY NOTE..... | 4 |
| A-I. THE COLLECTION | 5 |
| A-II. CONSERVATION CONDITIONS | 6 |
| A-II-1 IN STORAGE | 6 |
| A-II-1.1. STORAGE FACILITIES AND COLLECTIONS | 6 |
| A-II-1.2. CONSERVATION CONSTRAINTS | 7 |
| A-II-2 ON PERMANENT DISPLAY..... | 10 |
| A-II-1.1. EXHIBITION SPACES AND COLLECTIONS | 10 |
| A-II-2.2. CONSERVATION CONSTRAINTS | 10 |
| A-III. COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT | 12 |
| A-III-1. INVENTORY AND DIGITISATION..... | 12 |
| A-III-2. CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION..... | 14 |
| A-III-3. COLLECTIONS MOVEMENTS AND PREVENTIVE CARE | 16 |
| B. METHODOLOGICAL, OPERATIONAL, BUDGETARY FRAMEWORK..... | 18 |
| B-I. OBJECTIVES, SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE COLLECTIONS HANDBOOK..... | 18 |
| B-I-1. SCOPE AND CONTENT OF THE COLLECTIONS HANDBOOK..... | 18 |
| B-I-2. POSSIBLE EXTENSION OF THE COLLECTIONS HANDBOOK MISSION | 21 |
| B-II. METHODOLOGY | 22 |
| B-II-1. THE EVALUATION TOOL: A MODULAR GRID | 22 |
| B-II-2. THE TEAM: SPECIFIC EXPERTISE AND INTERNAL RESOURCES | 23 |
| B-III. TIMELINE..... | 26 |
| B-IV. BUDGET ESTIMATE | 27 |

PRELIMINARY MISSION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE *COLLECTIONS HANDBOOK*

CONTEXT OVERVIEW

The mission to develop the *Collections Handbook* is part of the overall feasibility study for the rehabilitation and extension of the National Museum of Cambodia. Funded by the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, this project benefits from the scientific partnership of the Musée national des arts asiatiques – Guimet.

Designed to inform decision-making by the Cambodian authorities regarding the renovation and extension of the National Museum, the final feasibility study will be structured around three components:

- **Component 1: Study of the collections and museum strategy**
 - The *Collections Handbook* prepared for use by the museographer
 - Recommendations on the distribution of artworks
 - Museum Master Plan
- **Component 2: Functional and architectural assessment**
- **Component 3: Audience development and Scientific and cultural programming**

As part of **Component 1**, the mission to develop the *Collections Handbook* is currently undergoing a preparatory phase. In line with the terms of reference, this support mission is structured around the following two components, which also define the structure of this report:

- A. **Assessment of the current situation, including an overview of available resources (human, technical, and documentary)**
- B. **Definition of the framework for the mission to develop the *Collections Handbook***
- C. **Annexes**
 - C-I. Timeline
 - C-II. Estimated Costs
 - C-III. Assessment Grid
 - C-IV. Model for Collections Handbook
 - C-V. Photographs

The **objective of this prefiguration** report is to provide a diagnostic and a set of methodological and operational recommendations, enabling the future mission for the *Collections Handbook* to:

- Achieve the **scientific and technical objectives** defined by the project steering committee
- Be carried out within the **timeframe** of the overall studies schedule, in coordination with the other components (particularly scenography programming)
- **Fully mobilize the human, documentary, and technical resources** available at the National Museum of Cambodia

A. ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT SITUATION

PRELIMINARY NOTE

The preparatory phase of the mission to develop the *Collections Handbook* included an initial assessment of the current situation. This assessment was based both on a detailed site visit of the museum and on a series of interviews conducted with various professionals from within the institution.

We would like to warmly thank all the individuals interviewed for the time they generously devoted to us, the quality of their insights, and their availability in facilitating access to workspaces and tools:

- **CHHAY Visoth**, Director
- **KHUN Sathal**, Deputy Director
within her department *Provincial Museums and Inventory Office*:
PECH Vannak, Archives Officer
- **CHAP Sopheara**, Deputy Director
within her department *Conservation, Projects, Internal Regulations*:
KEM Sanpiseth, Head of the Stone Conservation Workshop
SUONG Sokchea, Deputy Head of the Bronze Conservation Workshop
SENG Bopha, Conservator, Bronze Workshop
SUON Sreyleak, Conservator, Bronze Workshop
BE Kalyan, Head of the Ceramics Conservation Workshop
LA Sokheng, Head of the Organic Materials Workshop (Painting)
KONG Kuntheary, Head of the Organic Materials Workshop (Textile)
- **MUONG Chanreaksmey**, Head of the Education Office

A-I. THE COLLECTION

- **Disciplinary fields:** archaeology, epigraphy, architecture, fine arts, decorative arts, numismatics, militaria, ethnology, and performing arts.
- **Chronological periods:** Prehistory; Ancient Cambodia (beginning of the Common Era – 15th century); Middle period (15th–19th centuries); French Protectorate and the 20th–21st centuries.
- **Technical fields:** sculpture, metal work, goldsmithing, ceramics, furniture, basketry, silk weaving, leather, painting, photography and estampage, manuscripts, medals and coins.
- **Constituent materials:** stone, metal, ceramics, glass, wood (polychrome, lacquered, gilded, inlaid), plaster, ivory, bone, horn, leather, textile, paper, plant fibers, and plastics.
- **Formats:** ranging from miniature dimensions (coins, jewellery) to monumental formats (statuary, architectural elements, or a junk cabin measuring 5.52 meters in length).
- **Collection size** (as of November 2024): **19,491 items.**
- **Permanent exhibition: 1,428 items (7.3% of the collection)**
 - Metal: 56% of exhibited items
 - Stone: 22%
 - Organic materials (wood, textile, painting): 16%
 - Ceramics: 6%
- **Storage: 18,063 items (92.7% of the collection)**
- **Collection growth over the past decade (2015–2024):** 2,855 items (source: collection database)
 - **Growth rate over 10 years:** 17.16%
 - **Maximum annual growth:** 1,843 items (in 2020)
 - **Minimum annual growth:** 15 items (in 2018)
 - **Average annual growth:** 285 items

A-II. CONSERVATION CONDITIONS

A-II-1 IN STORAGE

A-II-1.1. STORAGE FACILITIES AND COLLECTIONS

The current storage spaces are located **on the museum site** and consist of **three rooms**:

1 – Main storage room, located in the basement beneath the museum’s original façade (excluding the 1920s extensions), covering an area approximately equivalent to the bronze display gallery.

> **Collections (by main material)**: stone, metal work and goldsmithing, ceramics, glass, wood (polychrome, lacquered, inlaid), plaster, ivory, leather, plant fibers, textile, paintings on canvas/panel, and photographs.

> **Principles of organisation**: Two main *zones*, which—despite many exceptions—can be broadly distinguished by the format of the objects, storage method, and predominant materials:

- **East aisle and entrance area**: small to medium-sized objects, mostly stored in glass-fronted cabinets; mainly ceramics, stone sculptures, and bronzes.

- **West aisle**: medium to large-sized and heavy objects, stored on open shelving and directly on the floor; mainly stone and wood sculptures, and to a lesser extent, large-format ceramics and metal objects.

- Furniture, ethnographic objects and paintings are distributed **across both aisles**.

> **Storage systems**: glass-fronted cabinets (locked and sealed with adhesive labels), secure metal cabinets (same), display cases (same), drawer units, open shelving, compartment shelves, hanging on wood panels or walls, and floor storage (generally without pallets; many statues are dowelled and/or mounted on bases). A few wooden crates are also present.

2 – Temporary storage, set up in an exhibition gallery (“*Prehistory Gallery*” on the museum map), located at the southern end of the museum’s façade, with direct access to the stone/wood conservation workshop.

> **Collections (by material)**: stone (statuary, inscribed stele), metal (bronzes), wood (polychrome, gilded, lacquered), ceramics, human remains (skull).

> **Storage systems**: exhibition display cases; floor storage (on bases, pallets or wooden crosspieces, on foam); wooden crates.

3 – “Restitution Storage”, a lightweight structure (metal frame, enclosed and roofed with sheet metal), with ground-level access, located within the museum grounds (outside the main building), near the café.

> **Collections (by material)**: stone (statuary, monumental and architectural sculpture), wood (carved, polychrome, gilded).

***Note:** This storage area also contains historical furniture (e.g. cabinet), exhibition furnishings (seating, bases), and office furniture. Empty crates are also stored here.*

> **Storage systems**: floor storage (on bases, pallets, wooden crosspieces, or bricks), some statues with plastic covers.

A-II-1.2. CONSERVATION CONSTRAINTS

In these storage areas, **the main constraints and conservation conditions** are determined by:

- The functionality of the spaces
- The accessibility of the objects
- The environmental conditions

Outlined here for their key role in the assessment of the collections prior to the renovation, these issues alone are not sufficient to evaluate the overall performance of the storage spaces. Other aspects—such as the security of the premises (intrusion, theft, fire, flooding)—are not addressed in this section, as they fall under technical and procedural considerations beyond the scope of this prefiguration mission for the collections audit.

Functionality of the Storage Spaces

> **Advantages:**

- The location of the **storage areas on the museum site** facilitates functional connections between storage, conservation workshops, and exhibition galleries. The fact that storage, inventory office, and documentation office are all located on the same site also represents a major asset for collection management and research.

> **Constraints and challenges:**

- **Insufficient surface area** in the main storage room.
- **Location of the spaces** is not well suited to collection storage—particularly for lapidary works (large format and heavy weight)—nor to the movement of works:

- Main storage located in the basement, with no freight elevator; access from the permanent galleries via two flights of stairs (approx. 15 steps, width 180 cm), limited access dimensions (main door: height 215 cm, width 200 cm), and low ceiling height (220 cm under beams).
- Temporary storage accessible from the exhibition galleries via a staircase of five steps.
- **Absence of transitional or interface spaces adjacent to storage areas**, limiting the overall functionality of the main storage:
 - No area for deliveries, transit, or unpacking/packing.
 - No quarantine room (some sculpted decorative elements are currently stored in a corridor providing access to the storage area).
 - Documentation and photo office is undersized.

Accessibility and Object Consultation

> Advantages:

- **Clear Labelling system** for storage zones and units facilitates the localisation of objects in the main storage area; all storage furniture is systematically labelled, and the system corresponds to the locations recorded in the collections database.
- Frequent—if not systematic—**object marking** ensures consistent and reliable identification.
- **Easy circulation through the central aisle of the main storage area** (currently with a maximum width of 90 cm), and generally unobstructed access in the secondary aisles (maximum width approx. 85 cm) leading to the glass-fronted cabinets.

> Constraints and challenges:

- **Limited visibility and suboptimal access to objects** due to the density of storage: glass cabinets and shelves are saturated, with objects arranged in multiple rows and/or stacked in potentially unstable conditions.
- **Some parts of the collections are very difficult to access**, being packed, crated or stored in chests (e.g. excavation material), often placed in precarious locations—particularly above cabinets and shelving units.
- **Handling and object movement risks:**
 - In the glass cabinets, high-density storage results in repeated handling, often requiring the movement of several objects to reach a specific one.

- In the floor-level storage aisles (without palletisation), limited clearance makes even basic handling difficult and rules out the use of lifting equipment.

Environmental Conditions

> Advantages:

- **Air-permeable space:** The use of open windows and fans provides ventilation, which helps reduce the risk of mould developing on the collections.

> Constraints and challenges:

- **Issues related to air leakage and natural ventilation:**
 - **Dust and pollution:** Ventilation through unfiltered open windows increases dust levels and exposure to urban pollution in the main storage area, creating biological, chemical, and physical risks for the collections. Glass-fronted cabinets do help slow dust accumulation on stored objects. However, the saturation of storage areas and floor-level storage make regular cleaning difficult.
 - **Climate fluctuations:** Uncontrolled ventilation eliminates the building's thermal inertia. As a result, the collections are subject to daily and seasonal variations in temperature and humidity, increasing the risk of physical and chemical deterioration of sensitive materials. There is currently no monitoring or regulation of the climate conditions.
 - **No grouping by material sensitivity:** There is no specific zoning to provide more stable or protected environments for particularly vulnerable materials.
- **Unsuitable storage and packaging materials in some cases:** Traces of infestation (woodworm damage) have been observed in the wooden backing of a few cabinets (though most have aluminium backs). Some shelving is covered with woven plant mats, which present dust accumulation issues, biological risks, and possible harmful interactions between humidity and metal objects. Certain types of packaging create micro-environments that encourage corrosion on metal items.
- **Unfiltered natural light:** Light levels remain generally low due to the placement of the windows (high and partially obscured by exterior balustrades). However, collections located near these openings may be exposed to unfiltered light, which over time poses a risk of physical or chemical deterioration to the most sensitive materials.

A-II-2 ON PERMANENT DISPLAY

A-II-1.1. EXHIBITION SPACES AND COLLECTIONS

The permanent exhibition is spread across **four main galleries** and the **outer galleries** surrounding the central garden:

> **East Gallery:** collection of bronzes; at its southern end and lower level, formerly dedicated to prehistoric collections (now used as storage); at the northern end, temporary exhibition rooms, and further down, a section devoted to *post-Angkorian* Buddhist collections.

> **South and West Galleries:** *Pre-Angkorian* and *Angkorian* collections, mainly stone sculptures, with a few metal objects in the “**Returning Home**” section at the end of the West Gallery.

> **North Gallery:** *Post-Angkorian* collections, decorative arts, and ethnographic collections.

> **The outer galleries,** located beneath the overhanging roofs, display elements of architectural and monumental decoration (lintels, pediments, columns, heads of Asuras and Devas, etc.).

A-II-2.2. CONSERVATION CONSTRAINTS

With regard to the permanent exhibition, the **main conservation constraints and conditions** can be briefly identified using the same criteria as for the storage areas, and always from the specific perspective of the future collections audit.

Functionality of the Spaces

> **Advantages:**

- **The dimensions of the main entrance and the width of circulation areas** are suitable for the movement of artworks and museum display furniture.

> **Constraints and challenges:**

- **Level differences** are the main constraint for both internal and external movement of collections:
 - No loading dock.
 - Main museum entrance accessible via a staircase of around ten steps; rear access to the sculpture galleries is via a seven-step staircase (doorway also of limited width).

- Inside the exhibition halls, there are several significant level changes: five steps down to reach the two rooms at the southern end of the East Gallery; four steps to access the South and North Galleries, located one level below the East Gallery and at the same level as the inner courtyard.
- **Lack of logistical spaces connected to the exhibition halls** are the main constraint for both internal and external movement of collections:
 - No area for deliveries, transit, or unpacking/packing.
 - No technical registrar’s room for storing conservation supplies, small installation tools, or handling and transport equipment.
- **A structural load-bearing assessment** of the exhibition galleries and their access routes is needed in order to optimize object movement paths and anticipate any floor reinforcement requirements as part of the architectural renovation project.

Accessibility and Examination of the Collections

> Advantages:

- **Updated object locations** recorded in the collections database.
- **Frequent—if not systematic—object marking** for identification purposes.
- **Overall, sufficiently clear access and fluid circulation** allowing for collection examination.

> Constraints:

- **Display cases must be opened** to examine the collections.
- **Equipment is required for any examination or handling at height:** at minimum a stepladder, and possibly a mobile scaffold.
- **Exhibition lighting is insufficient for detailed examination of the objects:** additional freestanding spotlights are needed.
- **No weekly closure day** to the public.

Environmental Conditions

> Constraints and challenges:

- **Issues related to air exchange with the outdoors / open bays without glazing**
 - **Dust and pollution:** Numerous large bays, without glazing, open onto the exterior of the museum and its inner courtyard, exposing the collections to increased levels of dust and urban pollution. Display cases help slow down dust accumulation on the objects they contain.

- **Climate fluctuations:** The collections are exposed to daily and seasonal variations in temperature and humidity, posing a risk of physical and chemical degradation to sensitive materials (such as polychrome wood and composite objects). No climate monitoring system is currently in place in the exhibition halls.
- **Water infiltration risk:** While the exterior awnings protect the indoor galleries from water infiltration during heavy rain, the objects displayed in the garden galleries remain vulnerable, including the statue of Ganesha (from Koh Ker), displayed under the central pavilion of the East Gallery (garden side).
- **Risk of pest intrusion:** In the absence of an effective physical barrier, the collections are exposed to pests, including insects (wood-borers, keratin feeders), rodents, and birds.
- **Unfiltered natural light:** Natural light levels are occasionally reduced by textile hangings placed in front of certain interior bays, or by closing shutters. Exterior awnings can also shield collections from direct sunlight, which otherwise poses a risk of physical and chemical degradation to the most sensitive materials. Other sources of natural light include openings located high on the outer walls, composed of (red-painted) glass bricks or narrow vertical slits.

A-III. COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT

This overview of the museum’s collections management is not meant to be exhaustive. It focuses on key aspects that are particularly relevant to the upcoming collections audit.

A-III-1. INVENTORY AND DIGITISATION

The inventory and digitisation of the National Museum of Cambodia’s collections have benefited from two cooperation projects with the **Leon Levy Foundation** and the **Center for Khmer Studies (CKS)**: the “*Collection Inventory Project*” (2004–2010) and the “*Collection Database Project*” (2010–2013).

The database, referred to as “**Sql yog wamp2.0**”, brings together the inventory of the **National Museum’s collections** and those of **six provincial museums in Cambodia**, digitised between 2022 and 2024: Angkor Borei Museum, Kompong Chhnang Provincial Museum, Kompong Thom Provincial Museum, Prey Veng Provincial Museum, Pursat Provincial Museum, and Takeo Provincial Museum.

As of **31 March 2025**, the number of records in the database is: **19,491 items** for the **National Museum** and **1,860 items** for the **provincial museums**.

At the National Museum, the **Inventory Department** holds user rights for **data entry and modification** within the database, under two distinct profiles: "*super admin*" and "*registrar*". **Other teams, including the conservation workshops, have view-only access via the limited "online catalog" interface.** The records available in this version are minimal and do not include key management information (such as object location or conservation condition).

This **centralisation of data entry and updates** implies that departments or staff members who generate new data must transmit it to the Inventory Department for formal entry or attachment in the database (e.g. condition reports, conservation treatments, location updates, or loan records).

> Advantages:

- **Nearly the entire collection of the National Museum** is entered into the database, with the exception of recently restituted.
- **Most object records include at least one image.**

> Constraints and challenges:

- The database provides a "**real-time**" **view of the collection, but does not retain a data history.** Fields designed for scholarly use (such as dating and style), as well as management-related fields (location, loans, conservation condition), were designed without a temporal component. Each update overwrites the previous entry. The lack of historical tracking limits the ability to monitor and manage the collection effectively

► **As it currently stands, the database cannot be used to plan or monitor collection movements required for the museum renovation** (such as transfers from the exhibition galleries or the relocation of storage areas). **It does not ensure traceability of object locations**, which poses a significant risk for a project of this scale. Furthermore, the absence of a hierarchical structure for location terms prevents automated counts within the database, necessitating manual counting of displayed objects.

It is therefore recommended to either significantly enhance the database's functionalities or, in the medium term, consider switching to a system tailored to clearly defined needs, with appropriate support for data migration and user training.

- **The database does not support the direct generation of tools for managing or studying the collections:** it is not possible to export a preparatory list of items in Excel format with specifically selected fields (e.g. inventory number, location, title, constituent materials, technique, dimensions). If confirmed, this

limitation would require **extensive manual data entry both prior to and after the collections audit.**

► **Export is currently only possible in Word format:** inventory number and title (in KH, EN, FR)

► **Another export format in Word** includes: inventory number, title, materials, and dimensions (in KH only) / inventory number, title, medium, period, provenance (in KH, EN, by generating a caption during the photo printing process, pending confirmation)

► **In both export formats (non-editable), location data is not included.**

- The **centralisation of data entry and updates** by the Inventory Department may limit the teams’ sense of ownership and involvement in the use of the database. This approach tends to encourage the creation of parallel files documenting key activities related to the collections—such as loan history, condition reports, and conservation treatments—which undermines both data preservation and the sharing of essential information.
- **In its current form, the database lacks both a “bibliography” field and an “exhibitions” field**, which limits its usefulness for research and publication purposes (such as scholarly catalogues or public mediation content).

A-III-2. CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION

The museum’s **Conservation Office** includes four conservation-restoration workshops located on site at the museum:

- **Stone / Wood / Estampage Workshop** (access via the façade, South Pavilion)
- **Metal Workshop** (access via the façade, North Pavilion)
- **Ceramics Workshop** (access via the North Gallery, next to the Metal Workshop)
- **Textile and Painting Workshop** (located in an annex building behind the museum)

All workshops temporarily house the collections while treatments are underway. The Stone Workshop houses inventoried estampages and includes a room used as a temporary storage space. The Textile and Painting Workshop is adjacent to a permanent storage area for collections (currently being set up).

Each workshop plans its annual conservation-restoration activities based on the allocated yearly budget. The average annual output ranges from around **10/12 objects** (for the Stone/Wood and Textile/Painting workshops) to **35/40 objects** (for the Metal and Ceramics workshops). The Stone/Wood Workshop also produces object mounts (soclage) and can build transport crates.

In addition to their work on the National Museum's collections, the workshops are occasionally called upon to provide advice or carry out conservation treatments for **provincial museums**. More rarely, they may intervene directly at **archaeological excavation sites** in Cambodia.

Each workshop keeps full documentation of its activities, both in physical and digital formats, including **condition reports, treatment reports, and photographs**. Each workshop uses its own documentation system and may rely on specific digital tools. For example, the **Metal Workshop** uses **FileMaker Pro** (since 2004), while the **Stone/Wood Workshop** organises its files (by inventory number) in a more traditional structure on a local hard drive. The (retrospective) integration of conservation reports into the central collections database—by attaching files to object records—is an ongoing process.

> Advantages:

- The museum's internal organisation includes an **in-house conservation-restoration function** for its collections.
- Curative conservation activities are accompanied by regular monitoring of the collections' condition, supporting a **long-term preventive care approach**.
- The conservation workshops have **experience in planning conservation-restoration activities**, mainly on an annual basis and for limited volumes.

> Constraints and considerations:

- In the context of the collections audit, certain **technical specialities require closer support**, particularly wood (polychrome, lacquered), textiles, and more broadly, organic materials and ethnographic objects (composite materials).
- In the longer term, supporting the museum's renovation will require a stronger focus **on the treatment of past restorations** – particularly those concerning stone sculpture. The collections audit provides an opportunity to initiate shared reflection on these issues.
- The renovation will significantly **increase the number of restoration projects**. This perspective calls for anticipating the potential expansion of workshops, and, if needed, partial reliance on outsourced services.
- All workshops face **difficulties sourcing materials and conservation products**, even basic ones. These needs are currently met in part through support from

international colleagues. A sustainable solution for importing these resources is essential going forward.

- The lack of **harmonized documentation practices** across workshops may hinder the sharing of information for management and research purposes. It risks compromising the long-term preservation of documentation and archives, particularly in the absence of a **centralised back-up system**.

A-III-3. COLLECTIONS MOVEMENTS AND PREVENTIVE CARE

Collections management and maintenance operations illustrate the **collaborative dynamics between departments** within the National Museum. In the absence of a dedicated collections logistic/management team (understood as the physical, documentary, and administrative coordination of object movements), these responsibilities are coordinated by the Inventory Department (Khun Sathal). This department works in close collaboration with the Conservation office, the relevant restoration workshops, and the Education Department, which oversees both the permanent and temporary exhibitions (Muong Chanreasmey).

The care of displayed collections (e.g., dusting with brushes) and the maintenance of display cases are part of this shared organisation:

- Collection maintenance and case openings are coordinated by the Inventory Department on a weekly schedule, with prior approval from the Museum Director.
- Cases must be opened in the presence of representatives from Inventory, Education, and Security.
- Collection care is performed by Education Department staff, supervised by the museum’s conservators.

> Advantages:

- A collaborative approach fosters the **sharing of expertise in the material care of collections** and promotes awareness of preventive conservation.
- **Regular condition monitoring of displayed collections** by the conservation workshops helps guide future treatment planning

> Constraints and challenges:

- In the longer term, supporting the museum renovation and the broader collections project will require strengthening the **collections**

logistics/management function—professionalising it and formally integrating it into the museum’s organisational structure.

- **Collection maintenance in storage** is carried out by storage staff (under the Inventory Department), with no direct involvement from the workshops. Their monitoring of stored collections is conducted independently of this maintenance work.

B. METHODOLOGICAL, OPERATIONAL, BUDGETARY FRAMEWORK

B-I. OBJECTIVES, SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE COLLECTIONS HANDBOOK

The Collections Handbook represents a key deliverable of **Component 1** (*Study of the collections and museum strategy*) of the feasibility study for the rehabilitation and extension of the **National Museum of Cambodia**.

The terms of reference for this preparatory mission clearly set out its objective: **“to centralise all information related to the museum’s artworks and objects, taking into account aspects of conservation, display, and promotion. It will be intended for the museographer as part of the design process for the rehabilitation and extension of the National Museum of Cambodia.”**

B-I-1. SCOPE AND CONTENT OF THE COLLECTIONS HANDBOOK

Interviews conducted with the project lead and members of the technical committee helped to clarify the scope and specific expectations for the *Collections Handbook*. These discussions led to the identification of the following key framing elements:

1. Works to be included:

- The selection focuses on the **objects to be displayed** in the future permanent exhibition.
- Most will come from the **National Museum of Cambodia’s collections**, with limited additions from the Angkor Conservation and provincial museums.
- The **current distribution of object categories** in the permanent exhibition will be largely maintained, with greater emphasis on prehistoric, ethnographic, and contemporary collections.
- By email dated 22 April, the project manager provided an estimate of approximately **1,600 works to be exhibited in the renovated museum**, including around 10% to 15% taken **out of storage — that is, roughly 250 works**.

- Among these **250 works from storage**, the estimated breakdown **by material/type** is as follows: Stone: 10%, Wood: 15%, Bronze: 20%, Ceramics: 15%, Ethnographic objects (textiles, paintings, composite objects, jewelry, etc.): 35%, Contemporary art: 5%.

Based on the data currently available, it is proposed to use this breakdown as a basis for estimating conservation volumes and costs:

1,600 items¹, divided into the following material categories:

- **Metal: 830 items**
- **Stone: 340 items**
- **Organic / composite / ethnographic materials: 300 items**
- **Ceramics: 130 items**

2. Specifications to be included in the Collections Handbook, for each item:

- **Conservation recommendations:** indicate the preventive and curative treatments required for exhibition. **The aim is not to provide detailed restoration specifications or plans**, but rather to identify the main types of intervention (e.g., corrosion stabilisation, structural or surface consolidation, cleaning, etc.) and specify their level of urgency.
 - **Environmental conditions for display:** recommendations on climate control target values, acceptable fluctuations), lighting (type, regulation, filtering), and, where relevant, surrounding materials (e.g. potential pollutants).
 - **Display-related conservation requirements:** mounting solutions (soclage), display furniture (platforms, bases, cases, wall mounts), and any special features (e.g. humidity-regulated cases, object distancing).
 - **Technical requirements:** handling equipment, weight-distribution platforms, and other installation needs.
- ❖ **All of these specifications are structured in a summary table provided in **Annex C-IV. Preliminary model for the Collections Handbook**.**

¹ In 2024: **1,428 items on display** – Metal: 800 items, Stone: 317 items, Organic and composite materials: 229 items, Ceramics: 82 items.

Note: Producing an illustrated record for each object is unlikely to be feasible within the timeframe. A **table format** allows for useful sorting (e.g. exhibition section, importance status, display method, preparatory work such as mounting). **A separate image folder can complement the Handbook**, and a selective export of key or anchor objects, enriched with thumbnails to support identification.

The scope of the Collections Handbook will be limited to the above-listed specifications, based on a systematic assessment of the objects to be included in the renovated exhibition. **Specifications beyond this scope may be added at a later stage**, particularly during the exhibition design phase.

At that point, it would be useful to identify, for each object:

- The **thematic section** and **sub-section or curatorial grouping** in which the art work will be displayed in the renovated exhibition.
- **Its importance level**, for example:
 - **Essential:** must be displayed and highlighted as a major piece
 - **Significant:** should be displayed and clearly highlighted
 - **Complementary:** optional display, depending on curatorial choices or for rotation purposes
- **Any specific security or protection requirements**, if needed.

3. Estimation of Conservation Volumes and Costs

The *Collections Handbook* will include, as an annex, an estimate of the intervention volumes (number of objects, number of workdays) and associated costs for the conservation of the works selected for the renovated exhibition.

Budget projections will be based on the following criteria:

- The **estimated time** required to carry out the recommended conservation interventions.
- The distribution of interventions between those that can be carried out **internally** (by the museum’s workshop teams) and those requiring **outsourcing**.
- The **daily rates** applied to both in-house and outsourced services.

Note: Internal services may be valued using a standard reference rate set by the museum for indicative purposes. Although not based on actual billing, this rate allows work volumes to be quantified and ensures consistency in budget estimates.

B-I-2. POSSIBLE EXTENSION OF THE COLLECTIONS HANDBOOK MISSION

The terms of reference define a *Collections Handbook* for the scenographer, primarily focused on selecting the objects to be displayed in the renovated exhibition. This approach, aligned with the project timeline, targets a realistic corpus suitable for individual object assessment.

However, the lack of assessment of **the objects remaining in storage**—especially regarding their conservation needs—is a notable concern given the broader goals of the project. Several factors argue in favour of including them, even at a more general level, within the scope of the mission:

- **A global approach to collection care** is consistent with the ambition of a renovation project that covers all museum functions—public, internal, and mixed-use.
- The feasibility study considers the creation of a **new storage building**, which would require the large-scale relocation of collections. This transfer would require technical and budgetary planning (timeline, resources, cost estimates).
- The *Collections Handbook* mission will involve a **team of experts** in large-scale conservation assessment and collections care in the context of museum renovation. This offers a key opportunity to address the condition and needs of the stored collections.

Within the timeframe of the feasibility study for the renovation and extension of the National Museum, an extension of the *Collections Handbook* mission could be considered, under the following modalities:

- **A condition assessment** of stored collections, based on a **sampling approach** (by main collection categories), to produce a summary of key conservation issues.
- Development of **general recommendations**, by main treatment streams, according to collection type and condition (e.g. stabilisation where required, surface cleaning, marking verification, long-term packing or repacking).

***Note:** These recommendations would be based on the examination of sample groups and extrapolated to similar objects in terms of material, format, and condition.*

- **Organisational framework:** internal teams to be mobilised, possible need for external supervision or reinforcements, estimated work volume and time required for collection preparation and relocation.
- Proposal for a **collection transfer tracking protocol**.
- **Identification of material needs** (equipment, supplies) and associated cost estimates.
- **Identification of external services** to be contracted and associated cost estimates.

B-II. METHODOLOGY

The methodology below applies to the core mission of developing the *Collections Handbook*, as defined in section B.I.1. If needed, it may be adapted for a sample-based evaluation of an additional mission focused on the stored collections, in preparation for their transfer (rather than display) during the renovation.

B-II-1. THE EVALUATION TOOL: A MODULAR GRID

A standard evaluation grid is proposed, structured into several sections to ensure a consistent assessment of each object:

- **Identification:** location, inventory number, title, materials, dimensions, and weight.
- **Handling:** identification of logistical constraints (oversized format, heavy weight) and major risks.
- **Alterations:** record of key physical, chemical, or biological alterations, based on a predefined list.
- **Conservation recommendations:** types of interventions to consider (stabilisation, consolidation, cleaning, etc., selected from a predefined list), including a priority level and estimated intervention time. The box "Fit for display as is" can be checked if no treatment is needed.
- **Mounting (soclage):** recommendations on maintaining, adapting, or replacing the existing mount.

- **Environmental conditions:** need for climate or lighting control, with recommended values to be selected.
- **Exhibition furniture:** generic type of display required (case, base, wall-mount, etc.).
- **Transport:** identification of objects requiring specialised transport for budget estimation. The box “**Transportable as is**” may be checked when no special handling is needed.

❖ This structure is detailed in **Annex C-III. Standard Assessment Grid**

***Note:** A specific grid will be developed for each material category (stone, metal, organic/composite, ceramics), particularly regarding the lists of alterations and treatment types. These grids must be finalised in advance of the evaluation, in close consultation between external experts and the conservation workshops of the National Museum of Cambodia.*

B-II-2. THE TEAM: SPECIFIC EXPERTISE AND INTERNAL RESOURCES

Developing the *Collections Handbook* as part of a broader museographic programme is a key opportunity for the institution. It promotes **knowledge-sharing, collective reflection on conservation practices**, and the strengthening of internal **methodological skills**.

While led by a team of external experts, the mission should actively involve National Museum staff throughout all phases—tool development, object evaluation, and handbook drafting. This collaboration will help ensure the **relevance of results, strengthen internal capacities**, and support full ownership of the methods used.

In this context, the expected profiles and expertise of the expert team are detailed below. They are based on the preliminary assessment (see “A. Assessment of the current situation”, p.4) and the analysis of internal resources—those already available and those requiring reinforcement.

Composition of the Expert Team

- **Heritage Curator:** Leads the mission and coordinates the expert team; drafts and presents the *Collections Handbook*. Experience in preventive conservation and collection assessment and planning is required.

- **Collections Registrar:** Oversees logistics and preventive care related to exhibitions, storage, and object movements. Experience in coordinating object transfers and managing large-scale collections projects (*chantier des collections*) as part of museum renovation projects is essential.
- **Restorers**, selected for their technical expertise and experience in large-scale collections assessment:
 - **Stone Sculpture**
 - **Metal Sculpture and Objects**
 - **Wood Sculpture and Objects** (including lacquered, polychrome, and inlaid pieces)
 - **Ceramics**
 - **Textiles**

***Note:** For objects outside these fields (e.g. canvas paintings, leather), condition assessments and photography will be handled by the core expert team, with treatment recommendations developed in consultation with external specialists as needed.*

Involvement of Internal Teams

The implementation of the mission will require the mobilisation of several departments within the National Museum. This involvement will be organised in a coordinated and task-specific manner, according to each phase of the project:

- **Before the assessment**
 - **Inventory Office:** prepare a reference Excel sheet ahead of each assessment phase (exported from the database or compiled manually), including the following key information in English: category, location, inventory number, former inventory number, title, main material, dimensions (1, 2, 3), and weight (if available).

***Note:** If a full data export cannot be completed within the timeframe, a basic set of information—**location, inventory number, title, material**—will be sufficient to launch the assessment. The remaining details can be added during the finalisation of the handbook.*
 - **Conservation Office – Workshops:** review and finalise with the experts the assessment grid templates for each material category.

- **During the assessment**
 - **Inventory Office:** ensure object access (opening of display cases, daily preparation and return of objects in storage, handling).
 - **Conservation Office – Workshops:** take part in assessment sessions according to each workshop’s area of expertise (stone/wood, metal, ceramics, textiles/paintings), and provide relevant documentation. **Staff may be scheduled on a rotating basis (half-day or full-day)**, depending on availability.
 - **Education Office – Exhibition:** contribute to assessments by providing recommendations on future display conditions/arrangements in the renovated exhibition.
 - **Museum Director and Conservation Office:** contribute to discussion sessions at each phase to review complex or sensitive conservation cases. These meetings, set up as a scientific committee, will involve the Director in key decisions. One to two half-day sessions per phase may be scheduled.
- **After the assessment**
 - **Inventory Office:** if needed, complete object information for the handbook and provide visuals of key objects for illustration.
 - **Conservation Office – Workshops:** provide any additional documentation (e.g. past treatment reports, technical files).

Summary of Internal Team Tasks

(Indicative list to be adjusted based on availability)

- **Documentation:** extract data from the database; provide access to artwork and conservation files.
- **Logistics:** set up work areas (tables, seating, lighting, and necessary equipment).
- **Object handling:** open cases, move objects, manage daily access in storage.
- **Assessment:** contribute to condition reports and recommendations.

B-III. TIMELINE

The mission can follow the phasing outlined in the terms of reference:

- **Phase 1:** August 2025 – January 2026
- **Phase 2:** March – September 2026

The estimated number of working days, both on-site and off-site, for Phases 1 and 2 is based on the volume and type of objects provided by the project coordinator (see *Objects Corpus*, p. 18-19).

The distribution of days is detailed in **Annex C-I. (TDR phasing)** and allows for the following provisional timeline:

- **Phase 1:** 15 October 2025 – 15 January 2026
- **Phase 2:** 1 March – 30 June 2026
- or—
- **Phases 2 & 3 combined:** 1 March – 30 July 2026

Note: *An alternative phasing is proposed to optimise travel costs for the specialist restorers responsible for evaluating smaller object groups (excluding stone and metal). Their assessment could be grouped into a single visit during Phase 1. The corresponding breakdown is provided in Annex **Annex C-I. (Alternative phasing)**. This option does not affect the overall project timeline.*

B-IV. BUDGET ESTIMATE

The budget estimate, summarised in Annex C-II., is based on the **projected workload expressed in person-days**—that is, the total number of days during which an expert is mobilised— required to carry out Phases 1 and 2 of the *Collections Handbook* mission.

An **additional Phase 3** (prefiguration for the relocation of storage collections) has also been costed, assuming it could follow directly after the initial phases. This would make it possible to retain the same experts and reduce costs, particularly for international travel.

To provide a **cost range** for the full mission (Phases 1 to 3), **two budget simulations** are presented. These correspond to the two scheduling options outlined in the Timeline section:

- **TDR phasing:** based on the initial division of object groups between Phases 1 and 2.
- **Alternative phasing:** evaluation of smaller groups (excluding stone and metal) is grouped into a single intervention during Phase 1. This helps lower travel costs between France and Cambodia.

Note: *These estimates are based on currently available data regarding object volumes and types. They may need to be refined once the final list of works to be assessed is confirmed, the logistical conditions are clarified, and the final terms of reference for the Collections Handbook mission are approved.*