



Smithsonian

National Museum of Natural History

Guide to the Mary Shepherd Slusser papers, circa 1950 - circa 1995

National Anthropological Archives
Museum Support Center
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Collection Overview

Repository:	National Anthropological Archives
Title:	Mary Shepherd Slusser papers
Date:	circa 1950 - circa 1995
Identifier:	NAA.1983.0407
Creator:	Slusser, Mary Shepherd
Extent:	7.5 Linear feet
Language:	English .

Administrative Information

Related Materials

The Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress holds an oral history interview with Slusser in the Society of Woman Geographers records, 1905-2015. The Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives also holds a copy of the interview.

Preferred Citation

Mary Shepherd Slusser papers, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution

Restrictions

Access to the Mary Shepherd Slusser papers requires an appointment.

Biographical Note

Mary Shepherd Slusser (1918-2017) was born in Canada and became a naturalized citizen of the United States in 1934. She was educated at the University of Michigan and Columbia University (Ph.D., 1950). The main focus of her graduate work was on archaeology. She also studied at the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University, and she took archaeology courses at Harvard University.

In 1951-1958, Slusser worked for the United States Department of State, responsible for anthropological reports concerning Latin America and then Southeast Asia. Following her husband's posting in Vietnam, she was stationed in Saigon beginning in 1954. While there, she produced basic ethnological studies of Vietnam and Laos.

In more recent years, Dr. Slusser accompanied her husband on other assignments. For five years she lived in Yugoslavia, then West Africa, and finally more than six years in Nepal. At the request of the Department of Anthropology of the National Museum of Natural History, on her arrival in Nepal in 1965 she made for them a small ethnographic collection from the Kathmandu Valley. Confronted by a dearth of basic works on Nepalese history and culture, she began research that would continue the next twenty years and lead to the publication of *Nepal Mandala: A Cultural Study of Kethmandu Valley*, 2 volumes, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1982. Her bibliography also includes numerous academic papers and two more books devoted to Nepalese art and culture.

Returning to Washington, D.C. in 1971 she worked for the privately founded Museum of African Art (which later fused with the National Museum of African Art) and completed the writing of the above mentioned two-volume study. In 1989 she received a Post-Doctoral Fellowship from the Freer and Sackler Galleries of the Smithsonian Institution which led to a position as Senior Research Associate. Also in 1989 she was invited to Kathmandu to oversee the establishment of the Patan Museum devoted to the art of Nepal. She was a member of the Society of Women Geographers for which she recorded an oral history in 2012.

Scope and Contents

The papers relate to three phases of Mary Slusser's life: archaeological study; her life and work in Vietnam and Laos; and her work in Nepal. The latter is fairly narrowly focused on her scholarly work, particularly on her Nepal monograph. The Southeast Asian material more broadly concerns her life in Southeast Asia, including personal letters and journals.

Please note that the contents of the collection and the language and terminology used reflect the context and culture of the time of its creation. As an historical document, its contents may be at odds with contemporary views and terminology and considered offensive today. The information within this collection does not reflect the views of the Smithsonian Institution or National Anthropological Archives, but is available in its original form to facilitate research.

Arrangement

The collection is organized into 3 series: (1) Arctic Archaeology, A possible culture connection between the Eurasian Steppe and the Ipiutak Site of northern Alaska, with photographs, photograph of Helge Larsen; (2) Laos and Vietnam, including alphabetical file, ethnographic notes, manuscript on Vietnam people, and photographs; and (3) Nepal, including correspondence, subject file, maps and plans, and writings.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Places:

- Arctic regions
- Ipiutak Site (Point Hope, Alaska)
- Laos
- Nepal
- Southeast Asia
- Vietnam