

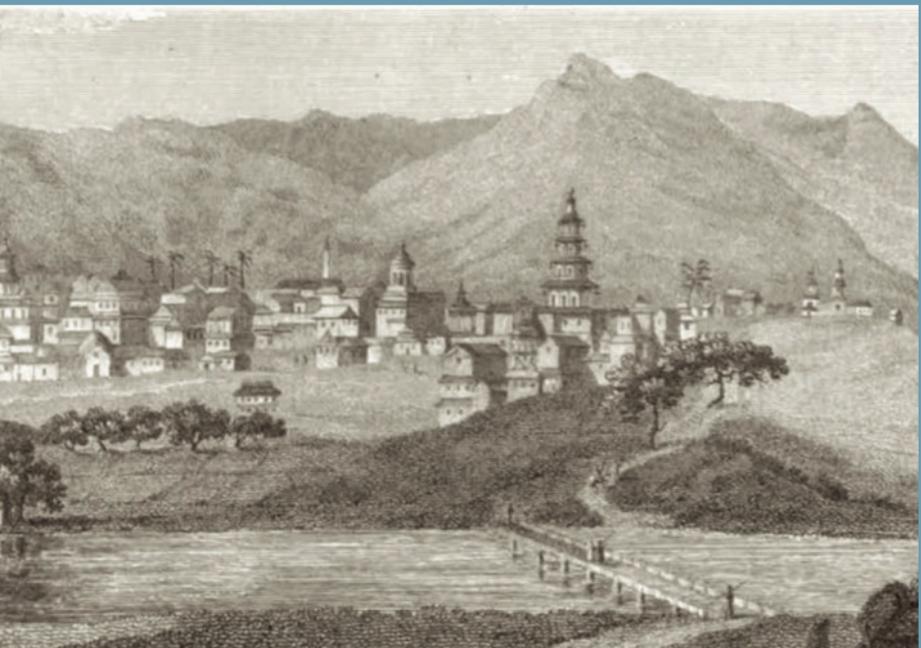


Documents on the History of Religion and Law of Pre-modern Nepal



**HEIDELBERGER AKADEMIE
DER WISSENSCHAFTEN**

Akademie der Wissenschaften
des Landes Baden-Württemberg



Kathmandu in the early 19th century
W. Kirkpatrick, 1811. *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal*.

Title: Royal document of 1846 with the handprint of King Rajendra Vikram Shah (National Archives of Nepal)

Documents on the History of Religion and Law of Pre-modern Nepal

As a result of its territorial expansion and emergence as a nation state, Nepal experienced a rapid and extensive increase in the deeds and other documents produced in it in the 18th and 19th centuries. Within the state administration, in temples, in the execution of law and in economic life, textualization reached unprecedented levels.

The project “Documents on the History of Religion and Law of Pre-modern Nepal“ aims at investigating the country’s rich textual material, consisting of historic temple documents and administrative and legal documents. It wishes, among other things, to understand developments entailed by the formation of the Himalayan state, such as the restructuring of social institutions and the expansion of Hindu rule. With research units in Heidelberg and Patan, Nepal, the project will study this unique textual corpus systematically; it will also make selected documents accessible in digital scholarly text editions, accompanied by translations. The centrepiece of the academic endeavour is the creation of a digital open access database, a pioneering work within research on South Asian documents. This database will unite references to both edited and published documents and unpublished ones, and will enable complex searches within the data sets. Moreover, the research based on the textual corpus will connect to wider scholarly discussions on, for example, the legitimation and affirmation of rulership, political unification and nation building, the importance of the textualization and codification of law, and the development of elite cultures in the 19th century. This will help to form a more nuanced picture of Nepal’s socio-cultural transformations between the late 18th and first half of the 20th century.

MATERIALS

The research is based on a corpus of documents available in public and private archives of the Kathmandu Valley. Many documents held by the National Archives of Nepal and other governmental institutions were microfilmed by the German Oriental Society (Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft) as part of the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project (NGMPP; its successor being the NGMCP). However, only very few documents have so far been edited, translated, or studied. Based on a bilateral agreement between His Majesty's Government of Nepal and the Federal Republic of Germany, copies of the microfilms are stored in the National Archives of Nepal and in the Oriental Department of the Berlin State Library (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, SBB). The current project, in close cooperation with these institutions, aims to successively catalogue and digitize NGMPP material, consisting of over one hundred thousand historical documents that had previously been explicitly closed off to cataloguing initiatives. Thus, the project will make a substantial contribution to the preservation of what for South Asia is doubtless a unique microfilm collection.

Documents in the National Archives of Nepal
(photograph: Manik Bajracharya/HAdW)



In addition to the documents microfilmed by the NGMPP, documents from other collections will be included over time. The corpus is particularly wide-ranging, covering temple documents and legal documents of different kinds, among which particularly well represented are those relating to religious institutions (such as edicts, land grants, contracts, foundation charters, and letters) and to legal and administrative practice (such as caste regulations and court decisions on moral conduct). Not only will the corpus be catalogued, but its content will also be made accessible through search functions. Early findings already show the potential value of the Nepalese documents for furnishing fields of study for future generations of researchers. The temporal focus of the current project is on the early Śāha (1769–1846) and Rānā (1846–1951) periods, i.e., on Nepal’s “long 19th century”.



Red seal of the
Nepalese kings
(*lāmohar*)



THE DATABASE

The digital infrastructure of the project, named “Documenta Nepalica”, consists of two interrelated parts: “Catalogue” and “Editions”. The former aims at bringing together information about published and unpublished historical documents from Nepal, while the latter is the platform for digital (XML) editions of documents selected from the catalogue. Once an edition exists, links will guide the user from the search list and the catalogue entry to the respective XML edition.

The **catalogue database** was originally designed to record handwritten documents that were microfilmed by the NGMPP but have so far not been processed further; document holdings from other archives and from private collections are gradually integrated without any difficulty. When the database was launched in May 2016, the catalogue already comprised about 19,000 entries; by the beginning of 2024, the number had grown to about 80,000. The number continues to increase, the aim being to cover all relevant NGMPP documents

Home Catalogue database Search Editions My list Login

Display mode
Diplomatic

Display in transliteration

Show bibliography and terms

Refresh!

A pañjāpatra from King Rājendra requesting Cautariyā Bhima Vikrama Śāha etc. to return to Kathmandu
ID: DNA_0016_0086

Document edited by Rajan Khatiwoda in collaboration with Simon Cubelic, Christof Zotter
Created: 2015-08-17, Last modified: 2017-01-26

Abstract
This pañjāpatra from King Rājendra is an official, albeit reassuring-sounding summons to Cautariyā Bhima Vikrama Śāha and Cautariyā C...

Diplomatic edition

[1r]
श्रीदुर्गाज्यूसहायः
[palm-seal of the king]

1 स्वस्तिश्रीगिरिराजचक्रचूडामणिनरनारायणेश्यादिवि
[?]विरूदावतिविराजमानमानोज्ञतश्रीश्रीश्रीश्रीमहाहा
राजाधिराजराजराजेन्द्रविक्रमसाहवाहादूरसम्भेरजङ्गदेवानाम्
सदासमरविजयीनाम्

5 अगेचौतरियाभिमविक्रमसाहचौतरियाकर्णेतवीर
विक्रमसाहप्रतिभिमिहुरूकोर्मछुषातिरगा...पंजाप
ठाइवक्साकोछभंजादेशतचौठोआउन्या...गरन्ति

Screenshot: The digital edition of the document with King Rajendra's
handprint.

(more than 100,000 entries) as well as the subsequently integrated collections by the end of the project in 2028. The metadata contained in the catalogue can be enriched by bibliographic information relating to previous editions, translations, and studies of individual documents. Catalogue records of documents that have been edited are linked to their respective editions.

Documents are selected for editing by project staff on the basis of their individual research; they are edited and made available as XML-files compliant with standards of the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI). They are accessible on the **editing platform**. For each edition, the user interface displays facsimile, texts, and translations side by side. Versatile search functions ensure the browsing of both datasets “catalogue” and “editions”, jointly or separately, and with respect to content criteria.

[Editorial Principles]

andu (VS 1903)

Colonel Vira Vikrama Śāha, who had fled from the kingdom after the Kot massacre.

Translation

[1r]

May venerable Durgā help [us].

Hail! [A decree] of him who is shining with manifold rows of eulogy [such as] ‘The venerable crest-jewel of the multitude of mountain kings’ and *naranāryaṇa* (an epithet of Kṛṣṇa) etc., high in honour, the venerable supreme king of great kings, the five times venerable great king, Rājendra Vikrama Śāha, the brave swordsman, the divine king always triumphant in war.

To Cautariyā Bhīma Vikrama Śāha [and] Cautariyā Colonel Vira Vikrama Śāha

I am [there for] you. We shall honour (*khātira*) [you]. The *parijā[patra]** has been sent by [us]. Come [back here] as soon as you receive it (lit. as soon as you see the *parijā[patra]*, come back [here]).

Tuesday, the ...¹ day of the dark fortnight of Vaisākha in the [Vikrama] era year 1903. [May it be] auspicious.

RESEARCH

The corpus has great potential to give rise to questions of a philological and broader cultural nature. In exploring the extensive thematic spectrum of the documents, the members of the project focus on specific topics related to their background and areas of research, including

- development of elite cultures
- formation of public order and state administration
- history of law, legal practice, and land rights
- forms of religious life, e.g. religious rituals, festivals temples, and deities
- role of ascetics
- diplomacy and foreign policy
- procession cultures and pilgrimages
- inscriptions
- slavery and unfree labour
- ethnicity and local customs vis-à-vis the state
- Himalayan borderlands



Royal Palace in Patan, Nepal
(photograph: Astrid Zotter/HAdW)



Prime minister Bir Shumsher J.B. Rana (standing left, 1852–1901) with his wife and two daughters who were married to King Prithvi Bir Bikram Shah (sitting, 1875–1911)
(photograph: Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya, Patan)



COOPERATING PARTNERS

The database development and the publication of the documents are realized in cooperation with the Nepalese National Archives (Rashtriya Abhilekhalaya, Kathmandu). Cataloguing and digitization are carried out in coordination and close cooperation with the German Oriental Society (Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft, DMG) and the Oriental Department of the Berlin State Library (Orientabteilung der Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, SBB).

The project's cooperation partners also include Heidelberg University's South Asia Institute, which ensures the administrative and spatial integration of the workplaces in Heidelberg and Patan (Nepal). Furthermore, the Heidelberg University Library provides the platform Heidelberger digitale Editionen (heiEDITIONS) used for the publication of the project's digital editions, ensuring the long-term availability of the research outcome. The project is actively involved in the initiative Heidelberger Editionen und Texterschliessung (HEDIT). It also closely collaborates with the Nepal Heritage Documentation Project (NHDP, Heidelberg) and with the Specialised Information Service South Asia (FID4SA, Heidelberg).



FID4SA
FACHINFORMATIONSDIENST
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UNIVERSITÄTS-
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NEPAL HERITAGE
DOCUMENTATION PROJECT



Staatsbibliothek
zu Berlin
Preußischer Kulturbesitz

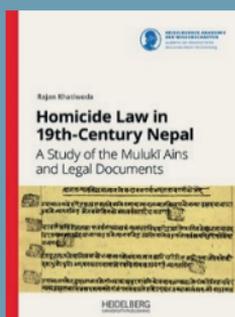
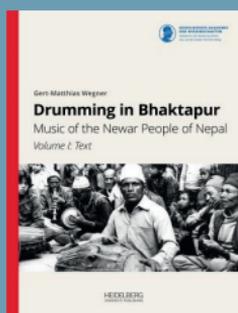
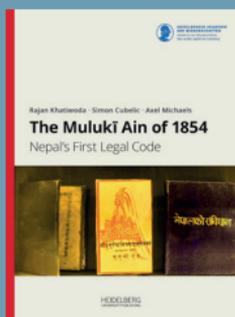
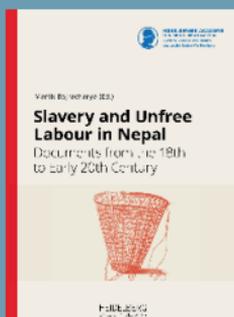
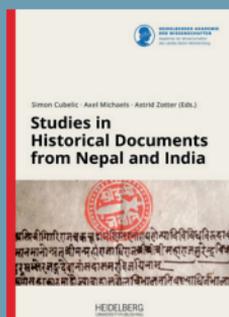
SAI

SÜDASIEN-INSTITUT
SOUTH ASIA INSTITUTE

PUBLICATIONS

The research project edits the book series “Documenta Nepalica” with Heidelberg University Publishing (heiUP). The books are available for free download under an open-access (CC BY-SA 4.0) license. Alternatively, they are available as print-on-demand.

To download/order the books, please visit the site https://heiup.uni-heidelberg.de/catalog/series/hadw_dn



The digitally edited documents are published on the edition platform, see <https://nepalica.hadw-bw.de/nepal/editions>

Since February 2017 they have also been obtainable in open access through the Heidelberg University Library; see “Digital Resources” on www.hadw-bw.de/nepal

Direct access to the catalogue database: <https://nepalica.hadw-bw.de/nepal/catitems>

ACADEMIES PROGRAMME

The Academies Programme is a programme jointly funded since 1979/80 by the German federal and state governments to support long-term research projects in the humanities and social sciences. Through the Academies Programme, which is coordinated by the Union of German Academies of Sciences and Humanities, the Academies carry out Germany’s largest research programme in the humanities, which serves to explore, preserve and interpret global cultural heritage. The research project “Documents on the History of Religion and Law of Pre-modern Nepal” is funded through the Academies Programme.

HEIDELBERG ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

RESEARCH PROJECT

Documents on the History of Religion and Law
of Pre-modern Nepal

HEAD OF RESEARCH PROJECT

Prof. Dr. Axel Michaels

TEAM HEIDELBERG

Dr. Manik Bajracharya (Deputy Project Leader)
Dr. Christof Zotter (Head of the Editorial Program)
Julia Shrestha, M.A.
Dr. Ramhari Timalsina
Marija Grujovska, M.A.

TEAM PATAN (NEPAL)

Dr. Monalisa Maharjan (Local Administrator)
Rabi Acharya
Pabitra Bajracharya
Yogesh Budhathoki

POSTAL ADDRESS

South Asia Institute (SAI)
Heidelberg University

Voßstr. 2, Building 4130 | 69115 Heidelberg
Phone: +49 (0) 6221 / 54 15207
E-Mail: nepal@hadw-bw.de

For more information, see
www.hadw-bw.de/nepal.html

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which coordinates the Academies Programme.



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