



# 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 19<sup>th</sup> century  
W. Kirkpatrick, 1811. *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepaul.*

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 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> 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 This database will unite references to both edited and published documents and unpublished ones, and will enable complex searches within the data sets.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 19<sup>th</sup> century. This will help to form a more nuanced picture of Nepal’s socio-cultural transformations between the late 18<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## MATERIAL

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 (e.g., Asha Archive, Kathmandu; Hodgson Collection, British Library, London). 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 19<sup>th</sup> century'.



Red seal of the  
Nepalese kings  
(*ālmohar*)



## DOCUMENTA NEPALICA

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 end of 2020 the number had grown to about 60,000. The number continues to increase, the aim being to cover all

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  
[?]विस्वदावतिविराजमानमानोज्ञतश्रीश्रीश्रीश्रीमहाहा  
राजाधिराजराजराजेन्द्रविक्रमसाहवाहादूरसम्भेरजङ्गदेवानाम्  
सदासमरविजयीनाम्

5 अगेचौतरियाभिमविक्रमसाहचौतरियाकर्णेतवीर  
विक्रमसाहप्रतिभिमिह्रुकोर्मछुषातिरगा...पंजाप  
ठाइवक्साकोछभंजादेशतचौठोआउन्या...गरन्ति

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

relevant NGMPP documents (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 ...<sup>1</sup> 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

- the development of elite cultures,
- the formation of public order and state administration,
- the history of law, legal practice, and land rights,
- forms of religious life, e.g. religious rituals, festivals, temples, and deities,
- the role of ascetics,
- diplomacy and foreign policy



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

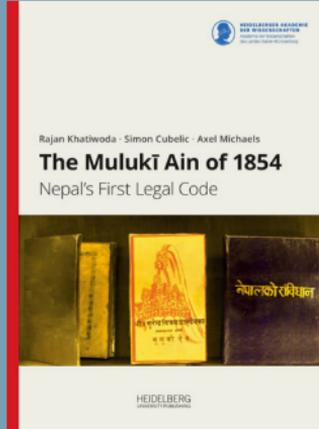
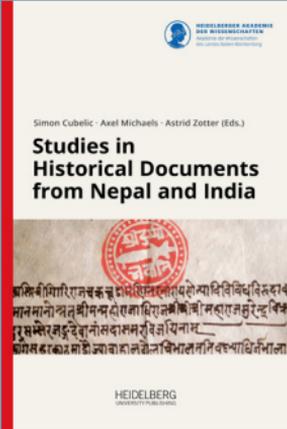
The database development and the publication of the documents are realized in cooperation with the Nepalese National Archives (Rashtriya Abhilekhalaya, Kathmandu). Cataloguing and digitization are carried out in coordination and close cooperation with the German Oriental Society (*Deutsche Morgenländische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

The project's cooperation partners also include the Heidelberg 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 Heidelberg Historic Literature Digitized (DWork) used for the publication of the project's digital editions. This platform can also be used for the necessary dissemination of the project's results within the scientific community, in particular with respect to digital resources (e.g. CrossAsia). The research project cooperates with the Nepal Heritage Documentation Project (NHDP, Heidelberg) and takes part in the initiative *Heidelberger Forum Edition*.



## PUBLICATIONS

The research project publishes the printed publication series “Documenta Nepalica – Book Series” in Open Access (CC BY-SA 4.0). The volumes are also available as print-on-demand.



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](http://www.hadw-bw.de/nepal)

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

## ACADEMIES PROGRAMME

The collective research programme of the academies of sciences – the Academies Programme – serves to study, preserve and communicate global cultural heritage. It is currently the largest long-term research programme in Germany for foundational research in the humanities and social sciences and is coordinated by the Union of Academies. The programme and its research projects are executed by the eight academies under the umbrella of the Union as well as by Leopoldina, the German National Academy of Sciences.

The project “Documents on the History of Religion and Law of Pre-modern Nepal” based at the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities was included in the Academies Programme in 2014.

## **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. Astrid Zotter (Deputy Project Leader)  
Dr. Christof Zotter (Head of the Editorial Program)  
Dr. Manik Bajracharya  
Dr. Simon Cubelic  
Ramhari Timalina  
Dr. Sabine Tittel (Digital Humanities, Semantic Web)

### **TEAM PATAN (NEPAL)**

Frederic Link (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](http://www.hadw-bw.de/nepal.html)

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