News from the European Alliance for Asian Studies

The articles on the "News from the EAAS" pages in this edition represent the desire to study transregional entanglements across Asia and beyond. The first contribution is on the "Shaping Asia" network, coordinated by Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka (Bielefeld) and Christiane Brosius (Heidelberg). The second introduces the newly funded research collaboration "Heritage as Placemaking," headed by Sabin Ninglekhu (Kathmandu), Sasanka Perera (Delhi), Stefanie Lotter (London), and Heidelberg. The last section assembles recent research and teaching initiatives on and with Nepal at Heidelberg, including digital documentation and research-based teaching that bridges comparative work on urban transformation in Nepal, India, and Germany. The EAAS pages have been compiled by Christiane Brosius and Axel Michaels, who joined the European Alliance of Asia Scholars (EAAS) for the Centre for Asian and Transcultural Studies (CATS) at Heidelberg University in 2015.

Fig. 1: "Historical" photo studio specialised on 1920s and 1930s Shanghai, Sinan Mansions, French Concession, Shanghai (Photo by Christiane Brosius, 2017).

Shaping Asia: Connectivities, Comparisons, Collaborations

Christiane Brosius, Claudia Derichs, Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, and Ursula Rao

Set up in 2018, the network initiative 'Shaping Asia: Connectivities, Comparisons, Collaborations' seeks to push humanities and social science research on Asian societies and cultures more radically beyond a methodological nationalism and localism. The initiative takes on broad new themes, concepts, and methods in order to better understand interconnections within and beyond Asian societies and cultures, today and in the past. Asian Studies requires profound knowledge of languages, historical sources, and cultures, which,

unfortunately, has often inhibited transregional scholarship. Through building new transnational collaborations and encouraging interdisciplinary relations, this network would like to radically broaden the scope of knowledge production. 'Shaping Asia' takes up the challenge of jointly grasping complex connectivities that shape (or have shaped) dynamics across Asia in diachronic and synchronic perspectives. This way, it aims at coming to terms with Asia's positioning and circulations in a globalised world. The network encourages scholarship on various Asian historical trajectories, regions, and locales, based on the command of Asian languages and intimate ethnographic knowledge of cultural, political, and religious particularities. This rigorous research is additionally mostly obtained through prolonged field studies, which further sustains and deepens the field. This combination of approaches and aptitudes contributes to theorising 'from the Global South', in which connectivities and comparisons are taken seriously in scholarly cooperation.

Funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) and – to a lesser extent – by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the network is comprised of scholars from 16 German universities. Currently, the main locations of activity are the Universities Bielefeld, Heidelberg, Humboldt (Berlin), and the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology (Halle). Our international partners are at the National University of Singapore, the University of Tokyo, Jawaharlal Nehru University, IIIT Bangalore, the School of Planning and Architecture in Delhi, and Kathmandu University. We hope to further expand the network and would like to invite colleagues interested in this initiative to get in touch. We are particularly grateful to IIAS and The Newsletter – an organ with a long tradition of publicising trans-regional research – to afford us this space to provide an overview of a few key ideas that ground our research collaboration. After a short theoretical introduction, we would like to highlight our work through a short description of two exemplary projects: 'Knowledge production and circulation' and 'Making of new infrastructures'.

Connectivities, comparisons, and collaborations

Scholars of critical area studies,[1] transcultural studies,[2] and postcolonial enquiries[3] have helped overcome the confines of established academic cultures and colonial traditions of studying Asia within nation-states and along culturalist boundaries. We follow this path to study multiple entanglements and positionalities across larger spaces, and currently work on topics of urban transformation and placemaking, gender and religion, knowledge production and circulation, and the distribution of new infrastructures.[4] Our projects trace continuities and connectivities between countries and traditions, as well as focus on ruptures and inequalities.[5] They seek to better understand connections and power asymmetries between regions, intellectual trajectories, and political cultures. The term 'connectivities' – as opposed to 'connections' – draws attention not just to the connection between two entities, but also their potential entanglement and the transformation that

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Fig. 2: Wall painting during Delhi Street Art Festival in the urban village of Shahpur Jat, South Delhi (Photo by Christiane Brosius, 2014).

results from the contact. The concept of relationality increasingly impacts research in the humanities and social sciences. However, this must also include attention to disconnectivities or erasure.

The focus on interconnectedness confronts us with important methodological challenges.[6] Why, how, and what should we compare? The questions remain unsettled and are at the centre of methodological discussions of this network, which organises dialogues between scholars educated and working in different countries in Europe and Asia, as well as between people trained in different disciplines and familiar with different countries. Our collaborations force us to reflect on our assumptions and on the limits of particular theoretical or empirical claims.[7] Building comparison into our research helps establish but also critically rethink what we consider as being different and similar, and helps conceptualise and demarcate specific or unique constellations.

We are committed to fostering more and broader collaborations. For this reason, the network 'Shaping Asia' includes collaborations as one of its three main methodological pillars. On the one hand, we acknowledge that researchers profit greatly from sharing and collaborating, also by using forums such as the International Institute of Asian Studies (IIAS) in Leiden, the Centre for Asian and Transcultural Studies (CATS, Heidelberg), the European Alliance of Asia Scholars (EAAS), the Global Asia Initiative (Duke University), and the Asia Research Institute (NUS, Singapore). On the other hand, we posit that the modalities of collaboration need to be an object of academic inquiry and scrutiny as well. After all, knowledge production and circulation has been shaped and is shaped by striking power differentials, by academic extractivism,[8] and by blatant silencing. The modalities through which knowledge is and can be co-produced require self-reflexivity and different forms of dialogue. To elaborate, we will delineate a selection of topics of inquiry that our network partners attend to.

Knowledge production and circulation

Collaboration embedded in this comprehension of knowledge production has started in a number of projects currently funded in the 'Shaping Asia' network initiative.

One thematic current that embraces a couple of projects is 'knowledge production and circulation.' In this current, scholars draw from large areas of research (e.g., postcolonial critique) while proposing novel avenues based on their strengths and addressing their shortcomings. Asia is conceived of as a region in which (post)colonial domination and the manifold ways in which it has been studied are linked to the very nature of knowledge production and circulation.

The quest for a fundamental reappraisal and reorganisation of knowledge production is a demand that the network strives to service. With a better understanding of the assumptions behind the (re-)production of knowledge about the world, and with the suggestion of alternative ways of producing and circulating it, chances to shape the world in more constructive and inclusive ways increase. Here, these alternative ways of shaping the world are taken to be relational, situated, and empowering. Collaboration evolves by way of different actors in Asia reflecting on how the views of the world are structured in the overall organization of knowledge generation, learning, and knowledge dissemination.[9]

The 'knowledge' current aims to trace scholars' attempts to uncover, support, and develop forms of knowledge considered to be relevant. Along this vein, it is imperative not to ignore the tacit ways of knowing and knowledge transmission that are carried out in everyday human actions. The projects in said current give primacy to conscious, reflexive dealings with knowledge in the quest to uncover how Asian actors seek to actively influence their sociality and culture. Following this principle, one of the projects addresses Muslim women in Asia who use their acquired religious knowledge in various professional activities – or for professionalization in a certain field, as it were. At the juncture of work and beliefs, businesses catering to the needs for halal products, for instance, are growing. One´s faith and religious knowledge informs one's professional ethics. Muslim women often apply the principles of shared religious knowledge and societal norms in their practical professional life. The project aims at mapping the intersecting field of religious knowledge and Muslim women's professionalism in Asia, providing, among other benefits, a platform to discuss how Muslim women express their connection with

religion while engaging in various occupations. It maps the multiple creative fields in which religious knowledge is at the basis of Muslim women's pathways to professional fields in the global economy, in the realm of social activism, education, welfare, and the like. It researches how faith, identity, piety, and notions of belonging are articulated by women in their professional lives.

Making of new infrastructures

Investment in new infrastructures contributes significantly to the current rapid transformation of Asia. The 'Shaping Asia' network also supports projects interested in the recursive processes by which new investments shape the social texture of Asian societies and vice versa. We propose comparison as an ideal tool to map contrasts and similarities across different countries and understand the role of inter-Asian relations. We study parallels and differences in local experiences of new techno-developments as they occur on the ground and the role of political culture and power dynamics for framing their implementation. The three focus areas consider (1) the way new digital systems for the management of populations are situationally adapted to different localities in Asia, (2) the streamlining effects of global engineering solutions for costal protection in South and Southeast Asia, and (3) the character of international collaboration in trans-border infrastructure projects.

Acknowledging the negotiated character of building infrastructures, we focus on three types of adjustments that permit new developments to settle into a place and shape actors' engagement with the evolving consequences. Situational *adaptation* helps universal forms to be fitted to local contexts; *orchestration* is an ongoing process of mainstreaming that tries to bring in line diversity with the needs of standard solutions; and *cooperation* helps to implement complex projects that require coordination between multiple stakeholders. Each project will lead the theorizing of one of these social dynamics.

The first focus area considers local negotiations of digital solutions. In an effort to improve the management of resources and populations, Asian countries are pioneering new digital solutions for streamlined delivery of services and stringent surveillance of

behaviour. Their roll-outs in different social, physical, and cultural terrains leads to many practical difficulties. These are solved through *adaptations*. This project studies the kind of adaptations adopted in India, Pakistan, and China that permit new technologies to become an integral part of everyday relations. The second focus area studies the variable implementation of standardised measures for coastal protection measures in South and Southeast Asia. In order to enhance climate resilience, many countries embrace international collaborations and build dams and sea walls using imported technologies in order to contain mobile substances, such as water. The group will consider the *orchestration* achieved by the deployment of standard solutions as well as explore limits and resistance to such homogenization. The third focus area researches international *cooperation* and co-finance in (cross-border) infrastructures. Pushed predominantly by China, there are new efforts to use investment in infrastructure as a means to increase inter-Asian connectivity. Other countries, like Korea and Japan follow suit. This project investigates co- or foreign-funded infrastructure projects in the border regions between South, East, and Southeast Asia. It considers the evolving compromises and frictions that accompany investments in energy or logistical systems that affect several states.

As wide-ranging as our projects are, the initiative 'Shaping Asia' provides a methodological framework that is vital for understanding the inter-Asian connections, ruptures, and similarities in transregional dynamics.

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For more information, see www.shapingasia.net and https://esymposium.isaportal.org/resources/resource/shaping-asia

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Left: Heritage, religion
and ritual at Vaishali,
India (Photo by Sasanka
Perera, 2018).

Heritage as Placemaking: the Politics of Solidarity and Erasure in South Asia

Christiane Brosius, Stefanie Lotter,
Sabin Ninglekhu, and Sasanka Perera

The project 'Heritage as Placemaking' investigates how places are made beyond their material construction through the formation of lasting bonds and shared care. We ask, what unites diverse, and at times ephemeral, communities in enabling or hindering the making of meaningful places with which future generations identify? The project focuses on large and medium-size cities as well as pilgrimage towns in North India and Nepal to capture how heritage placemaking constitutes an imagined, performative, physical, and geographical reorganization of space

South Asia offers a politically and intellectually potent site for this study because of the ubiquitous interrelation of religious practices, socio-cultural hierarchies, ruptured notions of citizenship, and the accelerated forces of globalisation. Rather than understanding heritage-making solely as the conservative affirmation of a past status quo that preserves and restores original history, we see heritage placemaking as a constant process of formation and association that is deeply entangled in politics. The investment into collective futures is possible through forms of commoning and through evoking the commons to claim and manage shared resources.[1] Studying the collective acting upon place allows us to explore subtle forms of 'everyday resistance' as well as the competing and complementary roles of state, market, and civil society. As such, our joint research projects explore the formative forces that enable heritage as well as those that hinder and erase it. Through critical attention to the politics of built, practiced, and performed heritage, the project examines how communal interests are steered and redirected through authorization, leadership, political will, natural or man-made

crises, or simply through the loss of interest in connectivity to and ownership of the past. We ask how and why solidarities (re)form or fall apart over the ability to root and take care of the remains of the past. We aim to understand what brings and holds people together in their aspiration to leave an intentional mark for a time beyond their own.

'Heritage as Placemaking: The Politics of Solidarity and Erasure in South Asia,' funded by the Swedish Riksbankens Jubileumsfond, is a partnership between four research institutions: Social Science Baha (Nepal), South Asian University (India), SOAS at University of London (UK), and Heidelberg University (Germany). Through thematic research groups, the project explores the importance of commoning – that is, solidaric practices of collaborating and sharing – in vernacular and performative heritage with Christiane Brosius and Monica Mottin at the Heidelberg Center of Transcultural Studies. Brosius will explore how neighbourhood life or civil society activities relate to a particular communal, arcaded architecture (satah or phalcā) to socialise or mobilise, exhibit, trade, play, or perform. Mottin's work focuses on performance, exploring layers of local, national, and global interpretations of Sita's birthplace in Janakpur, through ritual and theatre.

The team at the South Asian University (Delhi) consists of Sasanka Perera, Darshana Ashok Kumara, and Thirangie Jayatilake. The project sets out to document changes and transformations within transnational pilgrimage networks. Janakpur will also feature in this study that centers on the experiences of pilgrims who transit in groups through space. By studying the engagement of pilgrims with sites such as Janakpur, Varanasi, Lumbini, Ayodhya, and others, the work will shed light on the discrepancies between the rooted

experience of place that Mottin studies and the fleeting engagement with place that Perera explores. Perera and Kumara will concentrate on Sri Lankan pilgrims in Nepal and India to explore their religious interpretations of the sacred landscape and their interaction with pilgrimage sites, local communities, and the nation-state. Jayatilake will contribute to this discourse the dimension of virtual placemaking, exploring the material and discursive creation of pilgrimage circuits and digital spaces beyond the state's tourism efforts and local realities.

Heritage-making's bureaucracy, lived gendered experience, activist formations, and selective historicity are investigated at the Social Science Baha in Kathmandu by Sabin Ninglekhu, Monalisa Maharjan, and Binita Magaiya. Ninglekhu will study heritage bureaucracy at work at the pilgrimage sites, counterbalancing Jayatilake's work while also contributing insights into the bureaucracy at the project's sites in the Kathmandu valley, highlighting heritage governance and governmentality. Complementing Brosius' work on the public life and erasure of arcaded platforms, Maharjan studies communal water spouts (dhunge dhara/hiti) as sites of heritage activism as well as of gendered spatialisation. Erasure and loss of heritage are at the heart of Magaiya's study of ruins and their communal interpretation.

Finally, at SOAS, University of London, Stefanie Lotter and Emiline Smith will engage with the discourses of both development and repatriation, which reposition heritage in the contemporary decolonisation discourse. Lotter will work in collaboration with Magaiya on the conscious erasure of heritage through local and national agents. She will also work on the history of 50 years of international development collaboration in Bhaktapur, where heritage protection, destruction, reconstruction, and ownership have become increasingly contested. Emiline Smith will lead on questions of ownership of heritage

by contributing a criminological perspective on heritage theft. With a collaborative study on movable objects and the repatriation discourse of stolen, lost, and rediscovered artefacts, her study adds insights into the entangled nature of placemaking.

Through the project 'Heritage as Placemaking,' we open the field of heritage studies in South Asia to enquiries that evolve around questions of 'whose heritage' and 'whose rights.'[2] Together, the project team aims to create a better understanding of dynamic solidarities amongst different communities invested in the making, the upkeep, and the erasure of living and lived heritage. To this end, the project explores communal resourcefulness, political will, and bureaucratic attention critical to forming solidarities and making place for the future.

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Above: Performance of religious chanting at an arcaded platform in Cyasal, Patan, Nepal (Photo by Christiane Brosius, 2019). Right: Public interest in the Bajracharya rituals as the pinnacle at Kasthamandapa is established in Kathmandu, Nepal (Photo by Binita Magaiya, 2021).

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Studying, Documenting, and Teaching Nepal's Cultural Heritage

Christiane Brosius, Axel Michaels, Rajan Khatiwoda, Astrid Zotter, Manik
Bajracharya, Simon Cubelic and Arunava Dasgupta

Several initiatives at the Centre for Asian and Transcultural Studies (CATS)[1] – based at Heidelberg University and with the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences – bring together a particular research focus and expertise on Nepal from a transcultural, interdisciplinary, and internationally networked perspective. The projects mirror the broad and yet carefully entangled focus on digital humanities, on heritage documentation and critical heritage studies, as well as on urban transformation and state-formation in South Asia. They bring to the fore the productive cooperation across national boundaries. Nepal is a particular case because it has a long history of religious monuments and documentary texts that reflect and shape social practices up to the present day. Evidence extant in architectural structures, inscriptions, and documents is especially dense from the medieval period onwards and continuing into the present.

Due to having remained largely untouched by both Muslim conquest and British colonial rule, in Nepal Hindu kingship and its related forms of rule and social organization continued thriving long after they ceased elsewhere on the South Asian subcontinent. Its geopolitical location as a high-altitude and hard-to-access country between the Indian and Tibetan/Chinese cultural spheres favored Nepal as a repository and archive on the one hand, but also as a contact zone where external influences and local developments were negotiated in unique ways. Here, we present glimpses on four interdisciplinary initiatives that engage Nepal in larger fields of current research – ranging from the digital documentation of built and performed cultural heritage in the Kathmandu Valley to the exploration of urbanization in South Asia: (1) the Nepal Heritage Documentation Project (NHDP); (2) the Documents on the History of Religion and Law of Pre-modern Nepal (Documenta Nepalica) project; (3) the Anthropology of Inscriptions project; and (4) a multilateral partnership that combines research and teaching about urban transformation in Kathmandu, Delhi, and Heidelberg.

Preserving heritage digitally: The Nepal Heritage Documentation Project (NHDP)

NHDP, substantially supported by the Arcadia Fund of Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin, was started in 2018. It provides an open access approach to extensive heritage documentation in Nepal, with a particular focus on the Kathmandu Valley and West Nepal. In Germany, the NHDP is run collaboratively by the Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies (HCTS) and the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (HAdW). Key partners and representatives in Nepal include the Saraf Foundation of Himalayan Traditions and Culture and the Department of Archaeology of the Government of Nepal. NHDP's first commitment is to historical monuments that are spread across the Kathmandu Valley. These monuments still play important roles in active social and religious habitats, be it in the old towns of Patan, Kirtipur, Kathmandu, or Bhaktapur, or in more remote places (beyond the Kathmandu Valley) like Nuwakot, Jumla, or Solokhumbu. Most of the heritage sites documented are impacted by massive transformations in the city fabric, be this related to the aftermath of the 2015 earthquakes, to gentrification or informal densification, through encroachment or erasure. Others are affected by changing infrastructures (e.g., roads, airports) and changing trade patterns. Thus they reflect heritagisation and urbanisation processes that can be witnessed across Asia and beyond. NHDP aims at documenting the historical and anthropological 'biographies' of such monuments as well as their current states and uses.

NHDP is even further enriched by the spirit with which many researchers and institutions have shared their (mostly unpublished) material related to tangible and intangible heritage. This includes close interaction with the impressive data collection of the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT)

as well as ties with the digital and open access John C. and Susan L. Huntington Photographic Archive of Buddhist and Asian Art. Moreover, the legacies and support of architects, architectural historians, and researchers (e.g., Niels Gutschow, Wolfgang Korn, Ulrich von Schröder, Bruce Owens and Carl Pruscha) further thicken the fabric of NHDP's database, the Digital Archive of Nepalese Arts and Monuments (DANAM).[2] All of DANAM's content is available to the public for free and can be accessed online. Its visual and textual materials are transferred to Heidelberg University Library for sustainable storage in its repositories of research data, heidICON[3] and heiDATA.[4]

Datasets include structured information about the monuments' histories. This is comprised of architectural, art historical, anthropological, and historical data; descriptions of monuments in English and Nepali; photographic documentation of monuments, objects (e.g., sculptures), and inscriptions; architectural details and measurements together with site plans, elevation drawings, and location maps; and maps of ritual processions and other thematic entries for heritage walks. These digital heritage walks, sometimes visualized in short videos, connect a set of particular architecture types, such as monasteries, arcaded rest-houses, or water architecture across the urban or rural space. They present selected thematic narratives that evolve around a particular procession through a neighbourhood, also bringing in a timeline of change, detailed documentation of rituals and routes. Moreover, NHDP aims at transferring the findings to wider publics, for instance, by explaining how tangible and intangible heritage are condensed in 'heritage focus areas' – e.g., palace squares or special city quarters – to highlight the social, religious, and historical connectivity of sites across a particular locale instead of promoting individual sites as if they were contained and isolated places.

Over its running time of eight years, NHDP aims to document and inventory more than 1500 monuments, 2200 inscriptions, and 7000 objects, producing around 23,000 photographs and 1900 architectural drawings. Beyond this, it also highlights the unique intangible cultural heritage associated with the structures: rituals, festivals, and other historical, social, and religious events and practices. Thus, DANAM comprises four databases: an architectural monument database, an art objects database, a historical database with inscriptions, and an anthropological database. The last of

these is crucial for the understanding and documentation of intangible heritage and how it is intrinsically connected to built structures in Nepal.

NHDP's team consists of architects trained in heritage documentation (Bijay Basukala, Bibek Basukala, Anil Basukala, Thomas Schrom), archaeologists (David Andolfatto), Indologists and historians who sometimes also work as anthropologists (Bharat Maharjan, Pankaj Nakarmi, Rajendra Shakya, Ravi Shakya), photographers (Yogesh Budhatoki), IT experts (Ashish Gautam, Bishwo Shah), geographers (Elias Michaels), an administrator in Nepal (Roshan Mishra), and a chief administrator in Heidelberg (Radha Malkar). The team is led by Christiane Brosius, an anthropologist specialising in visual and media ethnology in urban India and Nepal, and Axel Michaels, an ethno-Indologist specialising in South Asian rituals and religions, as well as Rajan Khatiwoda, an Indologist who coordinates the documentation work.

One example shall be sketched to highlight NHDP's work: the Bhīmasena Mandira,[5] located at the northern end of Patan Durbar Square in Lalitpur's historic city. It serves as an exemplary case because its documentation not only created awareness and motivation to initiate the post-earthquake renovation process in 2018 but is also assisting its actual restoration work through the systematically recorded information in the DANAM. For example, the elaborated maps and plans drawn and published under the NHDP have been used by the local government and other institutions during the rebuilding process. The temple, dedicated to the deity Bhīmasena, was not destroyed in the 1934 earthquake but sustained heavy damaged during the 2015 earthquakes. Its carvings are remarkable, such as in the principal façade of the first floor or the struts supporting the broad overhanging roofs, displaying images of different deities. Bhīmasena is a mythological character of Hindu mythology, worshipped as the god of trade in Newar society. The temple is lively, much frequented, and considered one of the 'eight jewels' on Patan Durbar Square. Constructed during the early Malla era (ca. 1200 CE), it was reconstructed in 1627 and 1681 CE by King Siddhinarasiṃha and King Śrinivāsa Malla, respectively. Smaller and larger rituals are still taking place here, underlining the the complementary relation of built and ephemeral heritage, its relevance for local residents rather than for tourists.
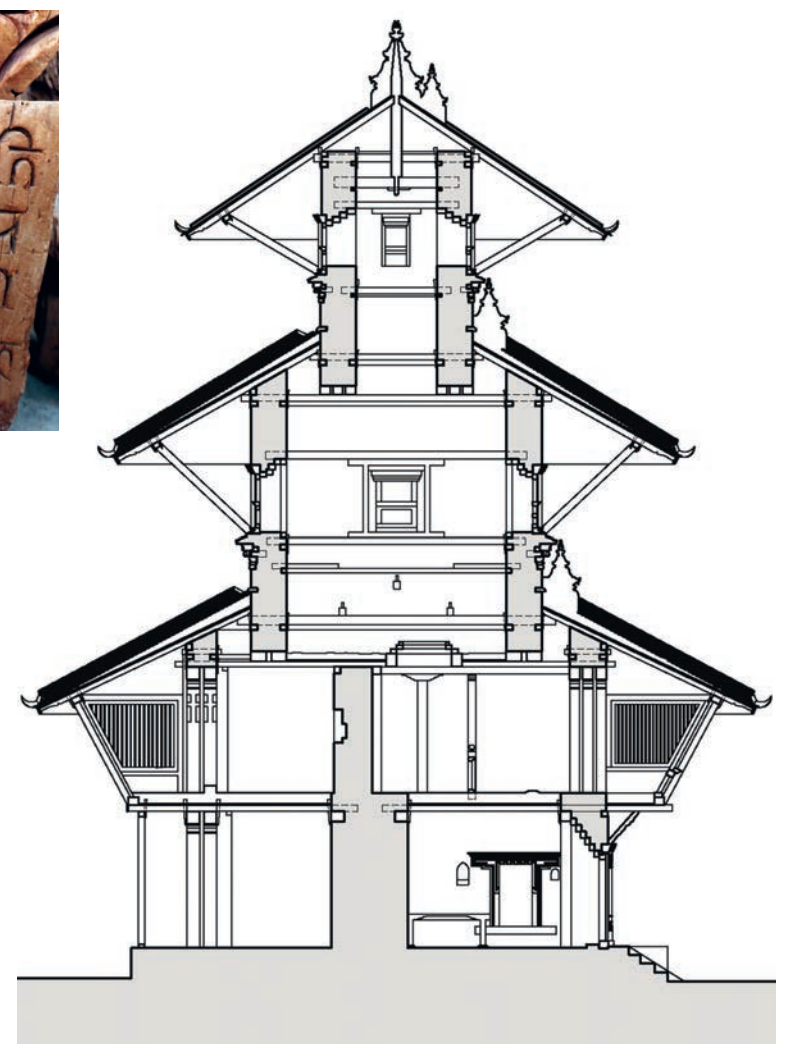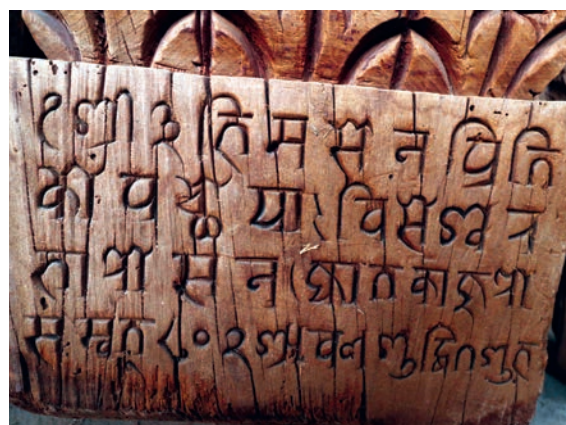
Fig 1 (above): Bhimasena temple, current view, scaffolded for renovation (Photo by Yogesh Budathoki, 2019).

Fig. 2 (right): Historic photograph of Bhimasena temple by Bourne and Shepherd, ca. 1970.

Fig. 3 (above right): Strut inscription from 1682 CE (NS 802) (Photo by Yogesh Budathoki, 2019).

Fig. 4 (far right): Section drawing of Bhimasena temple by Anil Basukala (September 2020).

Fig. 5 & 6 (top left): Book covers: *The Muluki Ain of 1854* and *Studies in Historical Documents from Nepal and India*

Fig 7 (top centre): A ritual vessel (*kalaśa*) with an inscription. The vessel is said to contain the Newar deity Buṅgadyaḥ (Photo by Monalisa Maharjan, 2021).

Fig 8 (top right). Micchu Bāhā, statues of Lokeśvara and other deities, with stone inscription (Photo by Yogesh Budathoki, 2019).

Fig 9 (right): Roofscapes of Lalitpur's heritage city center (Photo by Christiane Brosius, 2019).

Cataloguing and editing documents of pre-modern Nepal (Documenta Nepalica)

From the late 18th century on, Nepal experienced a rapid and extensive increase in the production of paper documents serving the needs of the growing administrative and legal apparatus of the emerging nation-state formed in the wake of the conquests of the Shah kings of Gorkha. The huge corpus – unique for South Asia and still extant in public and private archives throughout the country and abroad – includes hundreds of thousands of documents and offers a true kaleidoscope of officially administrated life. It seems as if each human activity and every settlement, however remote it may have been, was captured by paper. The material spans from royal edicts (land grants, regalia, caste regulations, tax rules), court decisions, and documents for the organisation of religious institutions and festivals to trivial blurbs, such as orders to feed buff instead of dog meat to tigers in the royal zoo; from reports of Nepalese envoys about military facilities in British India to complaints about irregularities in issuing gambling licenses.

The development of digital methods and tools to make this wealth available in the form of a catalogue, and in scholarly editions and translation is a pioneering work. The philologically treated texts form the basis for tackling larger research questions including the legitimation and affirmation of rule, political unification and nation building, Hinduization, the textualization and codification of law, or the development of elite cultures.

The centre-piece of the academic endeavour is an open access and freely accessible database, called Documenta Nepalica.[6] It features a catalogue with metadata for documents held by public institutions and private holders. The lion's share within these data sets, whose number is growing steadily (currently over 60,000), are those that have been documented under the earlier Nepal German Manuscript Preservation Project (NGMPP) and which have been worked on in cooperation with the National Archives in Kathmandu, the German Oriental Society, and the State Library of Berlin. Documents selected on the basis of the researchers' thematic foci are hosted as xml-coded digital editions compliant with the standards of the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI). The digital infrastructure, which has been designed within the project using open source programs and data formats and is programmed by Oliver Hellwig, features further components, providing tools for textual processing and analysis. The editions can be linked to a bibliographic database and a glossary of technical terms, both of which are collaboratively fed. Names of persons and places tagged in the digital editions feed into the ontological database with the aim to make the information retrieved from the documents reusable in broader ontologies, controlled vocabularies, and the semantic web.

The latest addition to the digital architecture is the development of a lemmatizer that is trained to analyse the texts morpho-syntactically and thus contributes to the study of the lexicography and grammar of the still under-researched Nepali language. In a substantial number of cases, the data of Documenta Nepalica and NHDP are cross-referenced.

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6   https://nepalica.hadw-bw.de/nepal

Fig. 5 & 6 (top left): Book covers: *The Muluki Ain of 1854* and *Studies in Historical Documents from Nepal and India*

Fig 7 (top centre): A ritual vessel (*kalaśa*) with an inscription. The vessel is said to contain the Newar deity Buṅgadyaḥ (Photo by Monalisa Maharjan, 2021).

Fig 8 (top right). Micchu Bāhā, statues of Lokeśvara and other deities, with stone inscription (Photo by Yogesh Budathoki, 2019).

Fig 9 (right): Roofscapes of Lalitpur's heritage city center (Photo by Christiane Brosius, 2019).

Cataloguing and editing documents of pre-modern Nepal (Documenta Nepalica)

From the late 18th century on, Nepal experienced a rapid and extensive increase in the production of paper documents serving the needs of the growing administrative and legal apparatus of the emerging nation-state formed in the wake of the conquests of the Shah kings of Gorkha. The huge corpus – unique for South Asia and still extant in public and private archives throughout the country and abroad – includes hundreds of thousands of documents and offers a true kaleidoscope of officially administrated life. It seems as if each human activity and every settlement, however remote it may have been, was captured by paper. The material spans from royal edicts (land grants, regalia, caste regulations, tax rules), court decisions, and documents for the organisation of religious institutions and festivals to trivial blurbs, such as orders to feed buff instead of dog meat to tigers in the royal zoo; from reports of Nepalese envoys about military facilities in British India to complaints about irregularities in issuing gambling licenses.

The development of digital methods and tools to make this wealth available in the form of a catalogue, and in scholarly editions and translation is a pioneering work. The philologically treated texts form the basis for tackling larger research questions including the legitimation and affirmation of rule, political unification and nation building, Hinduization, the textualization and codification of law, or the development of elite cultures.

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