Documents form a unique textual category, which deserves scholarly attention in its form-, content-, and context-related dimensions. Although over the last decades, the “government of paper” (Matthew S. Hull) in colonial and post-colonial bureaucracies has received considerable scholarly attention, the practices of documentation in pre-modern societies in South Asia still largely remain unexplored. The study of such documents is therefore a challenging field. It opens up new perspectives in the study of South Asian religions and societies which until now have only rarely been explored by Indologists and other textual scholars of South Asia.

Usually documents exhibit formal features that are highly specific, depending on their historical and local surroundings. However, to a considerable extent, they follow common principles and standards. Documents in pre-modern South Asia, for instance, are often multilingual and influenced by the different trans-local administrative traditions, Persian or British, of the sub-continent. Regarding their contents, such documents can cover a large range of topics, which could be called in modern Western terms juridical/legal, administrative or religious without, however, exhibiting neat separations between these fields.

The proposed conference is organized under the auspices of the project “Documents on Religion and Law of Pre-modern Nepal” (www.haw.uni-heidelberg.de/forschung/forschungsstellen/nepal/projekt.en.html) conducted since 2014 by the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities. It aims at bringing together experts for the study of documents in pre-modern societies, with a special focus on South Asia, but also including insights gained with material from beyond this regional context.

Cover picture: Royal document, dated 1846, with the hand print of King Rajendra Vikram Shah, National Archives Kathmandu. (Photo: Manik Bajracharya)
PROGRAM

SUNDAY, 4 OCTOBER 2015

18:30 WELCOME
RECEPTION FOR CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS

MONDAY, 5 OCTOBER 2015

9:30 WELCOME ADDRESS
BERND SCHNEIDMÜLLER

Panel I: Chronicles and Records
Chair: Axel Michaels

9:45 YOGESH MISHRA
Waking History Up from the Chronological Nightmares: A Perspective from the Medieval Newari Historiography

ALEXANDER VON ROSPATT
Recording the Collective Sponsorship of the Renovations of the Styanambhüciyati of Kathmandu in the Later Malla Era

DISCUSSION

11:00 COFFEE BREAK

Panel II: Legal Practice 1
Chair: Kerstin von Lingen

9:45 AXEL MICHAELS
Are Hindu Women/Widows Allowed to Establish a Śiva Temple? A Question Asked in a Letter to Janḍa Bahadura Raṅa Raṇḍa Dated 1863 CE

RAJAN KHATIWODA
Documented Evidence on the Implementation of the (Muluk) in mid-19th Century

SIMON CUBELIC
The Legal Status of Gambling in Early 20th Century Nepal: The Case of the Annapūrṇa Temple in Asan, Kathmandu

DISCUSSION

11:00 COFFEE BREAK

Panel III: Legal Practice 2
Chair: Monika Boehm-Tettelbach

14:00 POLLY O’HANLON
In the Presence of Witnesses: Documents of Property Rights in Early Modern Western India

TIMOTHY LURIN
Towards a South Asian Diplomatics: Cosmopolitan Norms and Regional Idioms in the Use of Documents

DIWAKAR ACHARYA
A Debt-clearance Certificate from the 17th century Mithilā

CHARLES RAMBLE
Procedures for Solving Tibetan Covenants and Other Documents in Highland Nepal, 19th–20th Centuries

DISCUSSION

16:15 COFFEE BREAK

Panel IV: Digitizing Documents
Chair: Madeleine Herren-Oesch

16:30 GEORG VOGELER
Digital diplomatics – the Evolution of a European Tradition or a Generic Concept?

CHRISTIANE SIBILLE
Networking Digital Documents – a View from “Beyond”

OLIVER HELLWIG, AXEL MICHAELS, CHRISTOF ZOTTER
The Digital Infrastructure of the Project “Documents on Religion and Law of Pre-modern Nepal”

DISCUSSION

18:15 END OF PANEL IV
19:00 CONFERENCE DINNER

TUESDAY, 6 OCTOBER 2015

Panel V: Administration
Chair: Jörg Gengnagel

9:00 CHRISTOF ZOTTER
Ascent in Administrative Affairs. Documents on the mulukamandala

MONIKA BOEHM-TETTELBACH
Revenue Grants from Rajasthan (17th–19th Century)

GISÉLE KRAUSKOPF
The Use of Written Archives in the Study of Migratory Practices of an Ethnic Minority, the Tharu of Nepal … Or How Archives Illuminate the Tarai Peasants’ Links to the Cultivated Land and Their Strategy of Resistance to State Control.

DISCUSSION

10:45 COFFEE BREAK

Panel VI: Documents and the Palace
Chair: Hans Harder

11:00 MANIK BAJRACHARYA
Newars in the Court of Early Shah and Rana Rulers

RAMESH DHUNGEL
PM Jangabahadur’s Letters to Hodgson on Progress in Nepal and Assistance to British India

ASTRID ZOTTER
What Can Documents Tell about Rituals? The Example of Royal Nepalese Durgāpujā Practices

AXEL MICHAELS
Concluding Remarks

13:00 LUNCH BREAK

14:00–16:00 MEETING OF THE ADVISORY COMMISSION