Preface

This edited volume is the outcome of several years of interdisciplinary and international collaboration on ritual practice, heritage, state formation, and social transformation in the Kathmandu Valley. The research was conducted primarily under the auspices of two long-term initiatives: the Nepal Heritage Documentation Project (NHDP, 2018–2026)[1] and the Research Unit "*Documents on the History of Religion and Law of Pre-modern Nepal*"[2] (2014–2028). The broader intellectual and institutional background of these projects is elaborated in the Introduction that follows. The idea for the present volume emerged from the participating scholars' sustained engagement with diverse aspects of the Buṅgadyaḥ Jātrā (Yātrā) and from a shared recognition of the considerable potential in revisiting and updating earlier scholarship through a multilayered approach—one that attends simultaneously to historical and contemporary dimensions as well as to regional and social positionalities. The decision to deepen and further interweave our research through collaboration builds on newly generated data from the two aforementioned large-scale projects in Heidelberg and Patan, as well as on decades of ethnographic fieldwork that has, until now, largely remained unpublished. Most contributions to this volume evolved through collective processes of reading, documenting, and interpreting the procession and its associated materials, which were assembled over several years (since 2019) in internal and public workshops, reading groups, joint fieldwork, and database-related activities.

The Nepal Heritage Documentation Project (NHDP) is a joint venture of Heidelberg University, the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, the Department of Archaeology of Nepal, and the Saraf Foundation. It is supported by the Arcadia Fund (Lisbet Rausing

1 To access the DANAM database, visit the sites https://danam.cats.uni-heidelberg.de/index.htm and https://www.fid4sa.de/en/themen/nepal-heritage-documentation-project-nhdp.

2 Visit this site to access the *Documenta Nepalica* database: https://nepalica.hadw-bw.de/nepal/.

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and Peter Baldwin). NHDP documents and disseminates comprehensive records of Nepal's endangered historical and cultural monuments through its online database, the *Digital Archive of Nepalese Arts and Monuments* (DANAM). DANAM's searchable datasets provide structured information on monuments—including location, historical background, architectural features, and associated religious and social practices—and are complemented by historical and recent photographs, maps, plans, drawings, and inscriptions. NHDP also develops the NepalHeritageApp and thematic heritage walks curated by specialists from Nepal and abroad. Project teams operate in Patan (Lalitpur) and Heidelberg.

The Research Unit "*Documents on the History of Religion and Law of Pre-modern Nepal*" at the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, in collaboration with the National Archives of Nepal, investigates Nepal's extensive corpus of historical documents and administrative and legal records from the pre-modern period (1767–1951). Among its central aims is the study of processes related to Himalayan state formation, including the restructuring of social institutions and the expansion of Hindu rule. With research units in Heidelberg and Patan, the project systematically examines this unique textual material and makes selected documents accessible through digital scholarly editions accompanied by translations. *Documenta Nepalica*, the project's open-access digital database, constitutes a pioneering contribution to South Asian documentary studies. Research based on this corpus contributes to broader scholarly debates on rulership, political unification, nation-building, legal codification, and elite cultures, thereby offering a more nuanced understanding of Nepal's socio-cultural transformations from the late eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century. Many of the monuments and related resources—such as inscriptions and archival documents—referenced in this volume can be traced to these two databases and are cited or hyperlinked in the respective contributions.

The first public presentation of the book project took place in a panel entitled "*Stasis and Motion in the Processional Culture of the Kathmandu Valley: The Buṅgadyaḥ Yātrā Revisited*" at the European Conference of South Asian Studies (ECSAS) in Turin in 2023. The two projects subsequently curated the exhibition "*Buṅgadyaḥ: The Rain-Making God*" in connection with ECSAS in October 2025. Hosted by the Heidelberg University Library (CATS branch), the exhibition showcased maps, photographs, film footage, and records from heritage walks, thereby extending scholarly dialogue into a public-facing format.

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