

Studying Documents of South Asia: An Introduction

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*Was ist das Allgemeine? Der einzelne Fall.
Was ist das Besondere? Millionen Fälle.
(Johann Wolfgang von Goethe)¹*

A document is a particular case opening up the general, and documents refer to particular cases, to historical events—but they are much more. They are very minute and specific, but they are also linked to society, world, religions. They connect norms, ideas and rules to practices, persons and the material world. These connections make them such exciting material. Nevertheless, documents have not been sufficiently studied, both as a self-sustained textual category and as source material for South Asian historiography.

South Asian paper documents from the 18th to the early 20th centuries, on which the papers of the present volume focus, are not isolated texts. They form a category—admittedly fuzzy—of texts that have to be studied in relation to other texts, such as inscriptions, shastric texts, chronicles, newspapers, journals, or even college curricula, pamphlets, etc. Moreover, they should not only be read, edited and translated, but studied as texts in contexts, e.g. with regard to their roles in courts, diplomacy, or administration. As such, they are a key component for understanding the “long 19th century”² that brought the “modernity package” by means of massive scientific and technological changes, industrialisation, overseas exploration, nationalism, new forms of administration and new media. They help to understand South Asia’s traditions and modernities better, because they are particularly regional, but also situated in

1 “What is the general? The particular case. What is the special? Millions of cases” (J. W. von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, 1795/6. 2. Buch, 11).

2 For a recent application of this mode of periodisation, see Osterhammel 2011: 87–88.

the intellectual space between European and South Asian modernities, in which Europe is no longer the centre point of debates on modernity, but where there is room for resistance and subversion, other social norms and intellectual values that help to overcome “such binary formulations as before/after, premodern/modern, European/Asian, national/international, or resistance/accommodation” (Dodson/Hatcher 2012: 6).

Moreover, South Asian documents are essential for studying the colonial and the precolonial context, the centre-periphery aspects, the webs of the empire, and the interconnections between regions. Especially local intermediaries or cultural brokers whose activities have often been preserved in documents, such as pandits (Michaels 2001a, 2001b and this volume), scribes (Alam/Subrahmanyam 2004; Bajracharya, this volume), administrators (Joshi/Joshi, this volume), ascetics (Horstmann and C. Zotter, both this volume) or other middlemen and their agencies have been instrumental in shaping particular forms of modernity.

Further, the language of documents deserves a study of its own. This not only concerns the formulaic aspects (see Lubin and Ramble, both this volume), but also the hybridisation in using Sanskrit, South Asian vernaculars, Persian, English or other languages simultaneously. Research on the phraseology of documents and the special terminology show the relevance of certain languages or the change of languages.

Moreover, it seems characteristic that language is employed pragmatically in documents which, therefore, pose special challenges to treating them philologically. This includes all levels of processing, from archiving and cataloguing, or the adaptation of the philological tool-kit to the peculiarities of the genre, to the challenges and chances offered by editing them in a digitised world. It seems that e-editing offers possibilities of treating documents with both flexibility and accuracy (Vogeler, this volume), as the world of digital humanities offers new tools for handling and analysing larger corpora of documents and networking them across disciplines (Sibille, this volume).

Thus, to study, edit and translate South Asian documents, no single methodological approach is sufficient. This lies at the confluence of philology (Indology, Tibetology), history, anthropology, religious studies, digital humanities and other disciplines. In bringing together experts from different fields, the present volume aims at exploring and rethinking issues of diplomatics and typology, the place of documents in relation to other texts and literary genres, methods of archiving and editing documents, as well as their “social life”, i.e. the role they play in

social and political constellations, the agents and practices of their use, and the norms and institutions they embody and constitute. Given the background of its editors, a particular local focus in this introductory paper and in the volume as a whole is on Nepal.

Definitions and Typologies

What is a document? The question is far from being trivial, given that there are very general and very particular answers to it. In the broadest sense, any “organized physical evidence” (Buckland 1997: 806) can be called a document. This understanding has been carried as far as to include an antelope in a zoo. In this case, it was argued, the fact that the animal became an object of study made it a document. Other case studies, too, underpin the claim that “the notion of objects as documents resembles the notion of ‘material culture’” (ibid.: 807). More particular concepts of documents narrow the category to written texts on material support, or “‘embodied micro-thought’ on paper ‘or other material, fit for physical handling, transport across space, and preservation through time’” (ibid.). In addition to the evidential character, which is shared by all definitions and is at the historical heart of the word itself,³ Georg Vogeler describes documents as “written pieces recording the explicit establishment of social relationships like ownership, political power, etc.” (Vogeler, this volume, p. 85). One may add that not only the creation, but also the renewal, actualisation, or dissolution of such relationships are major concerns of documents.

In the present volume, a pragmatic approach to what is or can be considered a document is adopted, guided by what the individual papers bring forth. At the most, we are aiming at a working definition. First of all, our endeavour is limited to documents written on paper over a specific time period (roughly the 16th to the 20th century) and in a specific regional context, i.e. South Asia. We take a kind of “core corpus” of typical documents as a point of departure to survey the field and extend our category in what we consider productive ways to think about this textual genre.

3 See e.g. standard definitions in *Merriam-Webster* (s.v. document 1a; <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/document>; accessed March 09, 2017) or the *Oxford English Dictionary* (s.v. document, n. †3. OED Online. December 2016. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.ubproxy.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/view/Entry/56328?rskey=oa3JeO&result=1>; accessed March 09, 2017).

First of all, it seems useful to reflect descriptions, classifications and definitions from the field of South Asian document cultures itself, which, like medieval diplomatics, relates the category of documents to their standing in legal matters and to the closely related methods of judging their authenticity. In Sanskrit Dharmaśāstra, written documents were considered to provide more evidence than oral testimonials: “It is said everywhere that only documents (*lekhyā*)⁴ are stronger (evidence) than words of witnesses” (*Smṛticandrikā* 3.1, p. 151).⁵ Such documents in the legal procedure of Hindu law were accepted on the basis of the theory of the threefold evidence (*trividha-pramāṇa*) as given in the Nibandhas and developed in the section on the nonpayment of debts (*ṛṇādāna*): written document (*lekhyā*), witness (*sākṣin*), and possessions (*bhukti*). However, the early Dharmasūtras do not acknowledge written documents in legal procedure.⁶ The *Arthaśāstra* (2.10) dedicates a whole chapter to certificates or royal edicts (*śāsana*), but does not mention written documents in civil or personal law. *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* (2.84–94 and 1.318–320), *Nāradaśmṛti* (1.115–126) and *Viṣṇusmṛti* (7.1–13) mention written documents in public or private law. Some Dharmaśāstras, especially *Brhaspatismṛti* (1.6.4–5), *Vyāsasmṛti* (as quoted in *Dharmakośa* I.1: 374–777) and *Vasiṣṭhadharmasūtra* (as quoted in *Dharmakośa* I.1: 348), contain elaborate references to documents.

In dharmashastric diplomatics, classifications and typologies differ (Strauch 2002: 19–51). A usual distinction is that between public or royal (*rājakīya*) and private or popular (*jānapada*, *laukika*) documents, made according to the issuer (see also Davis 2016: 168). On the basis of Devaṅṇabhaṭṭa’s *Smṛticandrikā*, D. Davis (ibid.: 173–174) argues that this differentiation is important. Royal documents like decrees and edicts (*śāsana*), often donations, represent political acts, implying that later kings could revoke and contravene them without allowing any form of legal recourse. Other royal documents, such as a verdict (*jayapatra*), can still be genuinely legal. The terminology attested to is, however, not consistent across texts. Thus, *śāsana* in some texts denotes royal documents in general, while in others it is made a sub-category used for royal donation deeds (see Lubin, this volume). The *Lekhapaddhati*

4 If not otherwise mentioned or evident by context, indigenous terms are in Sanskrit.

5 See Strauch (2002: 19–52) for an excellent excursus on the development of the dharmashastric discourse on legal documents in medieval India.

6 Strauch (2002: 51) proves the only exception, *Vasiṣṭhadharmasūtra* 16.10, to be an interpolation.

(2.0) mentions 46 public and private forms of documents and adds to this seventeen further categories (ibid.: Z 1–17). The *Rājavyavahāraśāstra* by Raghunātha Paṇḍita, a Persian-Sanskrit dictionary for administrative and legal terms, devotes a complete chapter, the *lekhanavarga* (pp. 92–104), to terms used in documentary practices.⁷ A still larger terminological inflation is encountered when then trying to trace these categories on the ground, where terminology adopted from Persian administrative language provides further possibilities for categorisations.

South Asian document cultures each developed their own peculiar typologies. For example, for the great variety of legal and administrative documents issued in Nepal during the Śāha period a basic classification into royal and non-royal documents seems useful. Fortunately, in many documents a self-designation is covered by the first few lines. All royal documents bear the red seal of the king and are thus collectively known as *lālamoharas* (Nep.). They can be further classified into *rukkās* (Nep.), which name themselves as such, and non-*rukkās* (Pant/Pierce 1989: 13–14). The *rukkās* (from Arabic *ruqʿa*) are usually executive orders with a short form of the ruler's *praśasti*. In contrast, the non-*rukkās* bear the full titles of the king, but “do not tell us what they are [and therefore] pose the problem of nomenclature” (ibid.: 13). The non-royal documents are again of different kinds. Letters to the central authority, viz. the king, are usually called petitions (*bintīpatra*) or supplications (Nep. *arjī*). *Purjīs* (Nep. “slip of paper, note”) are issued by government bodies in inner-administrative contexts or to individuals. Thus, the Dharmādhikārin (religious judge) issued notes for the rehabilitation of caste status (*patiyā-purjī*).⁸ In the absence of labels in the documents themselves they can be grouped according to their subjects, such as the whole range of private deeds relating to sale (*vikrayapatra*), pawn obligations (*valitapatra*, *bhogabandha*), or debt obligations (*vyavahārapatra*).

Given the fact that in archives, “historical document” is often employed as a kind of residue category to which all material is relegated that cannot be accommodated in other ‘proper’ textual categories, such as Veda, Darśana, Purāṇa, Tantra, or Dharmasāstra, there is much more material to be found than the (public and private) deeds, (administrative) files, (official and private) letters, etc., mentioned so far. We are also dealing with textual material, obviously documents

7 See also the glossaries of Gune (1953: xxii–xxvii) and Strauch (2002: 431–486) for more indigenous terms of documents; see also Thakur (1927–1928).

8 See Michaels (2005: 42) for a reproduction of such a *purjī*.

in the above sense, but lacking a proper self-designation. In the more fortunate cases, these ‘scattered papers’ bear some title or generic label, often added by a second hand, such as *tapasila* (Nep. “list”), *bahī* (Nep. “account book”) etc.

The texts dealt with in the contributions by A. von Rospatt and Y. Raj can serve as an illustrative example for such a case. As these episodic records of historical events are numerous and very similar in terms of language, format and contents, they are usually treated as a distinct genre of medieval Newari literature. Mostly, however, they do not bear individual titles and accordingly have been archived and published under various names (Raj, this volume pp. 134–135 n. 5), including *vaṃśāvalī*, *bahī*, *thyāsaphū* (“folded book”), or *ghaṭanāvalī* (“series of events”). Although such texts lack most of the formal features of other documents, such as statements of senders and recipients or purpose, they share with them the often formulaic character and the fact that they are pragmatic and bilingual texts. Moreover, they can function as documents, in the general sense of “proof”, or “evidence”, on a number of counts. First of all, they are evidence of particular events. As von Rospatt argues, as such they can acquire authoritative status for their subsequent users, therein changing from a description of past activities, in this case the sponsorship of a renovation, to being prescriptive for present and future renovations. Furthermore, as Raj argues, when looked at from the perspective of history writing, they can be evidence for forms of “doing history”, in which chronology and narrativity are far from having the same axiomatic status in history writing as in the European academic discipline.

Documents, then, should be studied in relation to other genres, such as epistolographical literature, Dharmaśāstra, inscriptions, or *vaṃśāvalīs*. These latter texts are, in style and approach, very different from documents, but they also refer to, and try to bear witness of, historical events. The term *vaṃśāvalī*, literally the “row” (*āvalī*) of “dynasties” or “lineages” (*vaṃśā*), denotes a text genre of historiography and may be roughly translated as “dynastic genealogy/chronicle”.⁹ Documents and chronicles complement one another, for example when referring to holy shrines and rituals. While documents provide information on the origin and administration of estates with whose revenues the temples were maintained and the festivals and rituals

9 For a detailed study of the theoretical implications of the *vaṃśāvalīs*, see Bajracharya/Michaels 2012, Raj 2012, and especially Michaels et al. 2016.

organised, the chronicles predominantly shed light on the mythological backgrounds. Rulers and gods appear to be intertwined with each other in both these categories.

Besides questions of typology and literary genre, the investigation of documentary cultures raises a wide array of research questions on several major issues of premodern South Asian cultural and political history. In the following we will flag a few of these areas and show how the contributions of this volume relate to them.

Formalism and Diplomatics

In Europe, diplomatics developed as an auxiliary science in medieval studies. It deals with formal features of, and conventions for, writing deeds, and its rise was intimately connected with the need to provide ‘scientific’ tools to judge whether a given document presented to justify possession, status or rights was an original or a forgery (Bresslau 1889: 11–40). In South Asia, too, standards for issuing public and private deeds and conventions for writing formal letters have been cultivated. The *Mānavadharmasāstra* (9.232), for instance, prescribes the death penalty for those forging royal deeds (*śāsana*). The high degree of formalism by which legal documents are characterised can thus be seen as a necessary safeguard against counterfeiting. These stylistic features were, however, often only one aspect of issuing a valid document. An elaborate system of procedure needed to be followed and often—as, for example, the contributions by C. Ramble and R. O’Hanlon to this volume show—a practical authentication process guaranteed that its validity was backed by a social consensus.

Epistolographical treatises in Sanskrit deal with the composition of letters and deeds, with the proper modes of address depending on the social rank of the addressee, formal features of letter-making and scribal materials. Often, they contain model letters and documents and lists of synonyms, especially for the courtly context (Banerji 1958; Strauch 2002). Major representatives of this genre include: The *Uktivyaktiprakaraṇa* of Dāmodara (12th century), the *Lekhapaddhati-Lekhapañcāśikā* (13th–15th centuries), the *Likhanāvalī* of Vidyāpati (14th century), the *Patrakaumudī* of Vararuci, the *Praśastikāśikā* of Bālakṛṣṇa Tripāṭhin (17th century), the *Lokaparakāśa*, attributed to Kṣemendra (17th century), and the *Yāvana-Paripāṭī-Anukrama* of Dalapatirāya (18th century).

Moreover, as a second major strand of South Asian diplomatics, there is a huge epistolographical literature in the Indo-Persian tradition (Muḥīuddīn 1971; Richards 1986), which developed in the Mughal Empire and cultivated Persian as the political, legal and administrative language (Weber 2007). Texts such as the *Nigarnamah-i Munshi* (“Munshi’s Letterbook”, 17th century) contain detailed sections on draftmanship (*inshā*), epistolography and examples of prominent *munshis* (Pers. *munšī*, Nep. *munṣī*) of the past (Alam/Subrahmanyam 2004: 63). The Indic and the Indo-Persian epistolographical traditions also interacted with each other. Recently, P.K. Jha (2014: 35) has provided evidence that Vidyāpati’s *Likhanāvali* drew upon the Persian genre of *inshā* literature.

D. Davis (2016) rightly argues that scholastic reflections represent a window into how documents were received at a given time in history, what meaning was attributed to them (*ibid.*: 169), and the cultural suspicion with which they were treated, as the prominent role of witnesses suggests (*ibid.*: 175). It is a future task to explore the interplay between extant corpora of documents with the contemporaneous legal categorisation of them (*ibid.*: 194). That standards codified in epistolographical and documentary literature were also put into practice has been shown for a number of issues and corpora, such as land sale and mortgage (Davis 1999: 168–170, 184 and 2004: 58–68; Kölver/Shakya 1985), slavery (Pant 1997; Jayaswal 1920), official letter writing in Rajasthan (Horstmann 1998, 1999), or diplomatic documents.¹⁰

The different sources and influences from the normative literatures and contexts played out differently in concrete local diplomatic traditions. However, there are, as T. Lubin shows in the present volume, certain threads that can be followed from Aśoka up to recent times. Moreover, and similar to documents elsewhere in the world (see Vogeler, this volume), South Asian documents can often conveniently be analysed as having a tri-partite structure with an introductory part (*protocol*), the main text (*context*), and a closing part (*eschatocol*). Latin or English terminology developed in medieval diplomatics (Bresslau 1889: 41–44) has been found useful when applied to documents from South and Central Asia and to connect to the indigenous terms in Sanskrit, Persian and the vernaculars.¹¹

10 See the special issue of *The Indian Historical Review Journal* 25 (1998) and Lubin, this volume.

11 This includes documents from Kerala (Davis 1999: 173 and 2004: 53), Maharashtra (Gune 1953: 135–136), Rajasthan (Horstmann 1998, 1999), Nepal

The introductory part (*protocol*) often begins with the *invocatio*, the invocation of a favoured deity (e.g. in Nepal: *śrī durgā sahāya*, in Marwar: *śrī paramēśvara satya chāi*). The invocation is typically followed by an empty space, in which auspicious words (*apprecatio*), such as *śrī*, are placed. The royal seal and names of deities or of other reverend beings mentioned in the text (e.g. kings' names) can be placed here, too, being marked in the text itself by numbered placeholders. The text body then may begin with a *benedictio* or sign of auspiciousness (*maṅgala*), e.g. with *siddhi* or *svasti*. The protocol often contains *intitulatio*, the statement of name, title and descent of the sender (*uddeśaka*), expressed as an elaborate panegyric (*praśasti* or *prakīrti*) in case the king or his representatives issue the document; *inscriptio*, name, title and descent of the addressee (*uddeśya*); *salutatio*, expressions for the addressee's well-being (*kuśalalekhana*). In letters from inferiors to superiors, *intitulatio* and *inscriptio* are typically inverted. In some types of letters, such as the Nepalese *arjī*, these details are relegated to the eschatocol.

The main text (*context*) covers the subject matter of the document. Often one can distinguish different parts of it; i.e. *narratio*, information on what the document is about, sometimes with reference to the history of the case, names of the parties and others involved; *dispositio*, declaration of the promulgator's will, e.g. the decision of the case and mention of punishment; *sanctio*, threat of punishment, penalties or force, in case the *dispositio* is not followed; *corroboratio*, statement of the means of validation, such as inscriptions or additional documents issued, or witnesses (*sākṣin*).

The concluding part forms the complement to the *protocol*, viz., the *eschatocol*, and can include: *subscriptiones*, the signatures (*mata*) of all parties concerned and persons involved in issuing the document, their stamps, or fingerprints (see Ramble, this volume);¹² *apprecatio*: prayer for the realisation of the deed, often in the form of blessings (e.g. *śubham*, “[May it be] auspicious”), liability clauses in order to

(Kölver/Śākya 1985: 31–51; Michaels 2010: 66; Pant/Pierce 1989), Kashmir (Weber 2007: I, 137–148), and Tibet (Schuh 2015).

12 The difference between the *corroboratio* as part of the *context* and the *subscriptiones* of the *eschatocol* is not always easily drawn. At least for Nepalese documents, however, such a distinction seems useful. In various examples the *corroboratio* mentions copperplates issued on the deed or people involved when the deed was put into practice, e.g. when the borders of a field donated were demarcated. Then in *subscriptiones* one finds further people involved in certifying the validity of the document itself.

avoid any obstacles; date and place where the document was issued, sometimes with further astronomical details; *particularia* (Arab. *taf̣ṣīl*, Nep. *tapasil*): particulars of the deed, such as fines and fees, or the calculation principles for the endowment fund.

Language, Literacy and Linguistic Identity

It is a common feature of premodern South Asian documents that different languages are used in the same text, either as a combination of a translocal language, such as Sanskrit or Persian, with one of the South Asian vernaculars, or in the form of bilingual vernacular documents. Such language use and language shift was often employed as a stylistic device to structure different parts and signal different registers. Furthermore, documents navigate between the formulaic aspect and a pragmatic approach to language, in which norms for orthography and grammar are handled with great flexibility. Thus, it is not rare to find the same lexemes in different spellings in a single document. This multilingualism is not a distinctive characteristic of document cultures, but was already present in ancient and medieval inscriptions and copperplates. In a recent contribution on premodern Indic legal records, T. Lubin (2013: 411–412) has used the term “functional diglossia” for this phenomenon differentiating between two forms of diglossia: one, in which Sanskrit serves as an acrolect and is primarily used for expressive and ceremonial ends (as in the *protocol*), the other referring to a Sanskritised and formulaic register of the vernacular language itself. Especially the latter aspect shows that the influence of Sanskrit was not only due to its symbolic value as an expression of Brahmanical high culture, but also due to the practical utility of its legal and administrative concepts and terms. Lubin’s observations underline the importance of studying the documentary register, not only for investigating processes of vernacularisation, but also to develop a more nuanced understanding of Brahmanisation and the implementation of shastric norms. Before coming back to this point, we will try to outline how documents can facilitate a better understanding of the increasing role of literacy and the formation of linguistic identities.

Over the last two decades, South Asian linguistic and writing practices have attracted attention, especially in their relationship with the formation of polities and regional identities. S. Pollock (1998: 28) argued in a seminal paper that from the first centuries of the second millennium

CE onwards South Asia underwent a process of vernacularisation in which the socio-literary space of the cosmopolitan language of Sanskrit was gradually diminished by regional languages. Even though vernacularisation marked a tremendous shift in the history of culture, power and identity in South Asia, this new cultural framework built on literary resources of the vanishing cosmopolitan model. The regional languages appropriated the aesthetics of the Sanskrit language, adopted its classical literature and localised its political imagination. Vernacular languages had been used for “documentary” purposes before, but “a vision of power and culture made possible only by the elaboration of a literary corpus” (Pollock 2006: 24) was essential for vernacularisation.

The expansion of documentary practices in the course of the early modern introduction of paper-based administration poses an interesting case for Pollock’s narrative. Did paper documents in the regional Hindu kingdoms of that time follow the models of an Indic diplomatic culture for which Lubin has given an outline in this volume, or is the Persian influence predominant? The vernacular documents from that period draw to a great extent on administrative terminology from Persian, the second premodern cosmopolitan language of the subcontinent (see Horstmann and O’Hanlon, both this volume). Besides the literary vernacularisation grounded in the aesthetics of Sanskrit, is there another documentary vernacularisation in which the “language of political Islam” (Alam 2004) represents the model case? Consequently, is only the literary idiom instrumental for the imagination of vernacular polities, or can the documentary idiom itself provide expressive and aesthetic resources for the creation of political identities? For example, M. Hutt (1988: 41–47) has highlighted the important role which the adoption of Nepali as the language of law and administration played as a unitary bond for the newly-formed Gorkhali kingdom in the second half of the 18th century, and for establishing Nepali as a national language. For this research axis, it will be vital to examine the role of royal chanceries in the process of standardising vernacular grammar, orthography and lexicology, which are crucial features of the collective experience of being part of a language community. C. Ramble’s contribution to this volume reminds us that Nepali did not replace existing administrative idioms at one stroke; rather, its increasing usage was an incremental process in which Nepali slowly trickled down into local languages. That documents facilitate socio-cultural integration beyond the establishment of a shared language becomes visible in A. Zotter’s study on the Dasaī festival in 19th-century Nepal. She presents evidence

for how records and documentation of the practices of a state ritual contributed to the symbolic integration of the polity and the imagination of a collectively shared temporality.

Pollock (2007) drew attention to another pivotal factor in the consolidation of premodern language identities: the South Asian manuscript culture. Long before the advent of the modern “print-capitalism”, a dense network of scholars, poets, scribes, teachers, priests and royal patrons created a cultural and intellectual economy in which manuscripts circulated widely in a pan-Indian market—a phenomenon for which Pollock aptly coined the phrase of “script-mercantilism”, and which became especially important in the early modern period (ibid.: 87–90). The impact this increasingly literate world had on earlier oral forms of political communication and legal administration in early modern South Asia, still deserves more research. Did the introduction of norms laid down in writing cause local actors difficulties in that it narrowed their room to negotiate state interference? The example of allocating gambling licences in Rāṇā Nepal, discussed by S. Cubelic in this volume, speaks to the contrary. In her paper on the history of the Maratha judicial body of *majālis*, R. O’Hanlon (this volume) shows that, despite the importance given to the documentation of litigation in paper form and the introduction of bureaucratic principles, throughout the 17th century the *majālis* still remained highly embedded in local social networks and communal ethics. Usually elites, such as scholars, poets, kings or courtiers, are identified as the main agents behind these processes of language change, spread of literacy and language identity formation. However, large-scale document production gave rise to an intermediate professional class whose influence on changes in governance, social norms and identity may have been equal in importance as that of elite initiatives.

The Ascendance of Scribal and Administrative Elites

Documents are often read as products of the agency of institutions or the political actors ordering them. Their real ‘authors’, such as clerks, scribes, or translators, remain unknown. R. O’Hanlon and D. Washbrook (2010: 441) rightly state that, despite the fact that written documents are the major sources for historians of South Asia, we know but little of the scribes who produced them. Especially from the early modern period on, scribal elites emerged as key actors in the political

and economic transformation of the Subcontinent. The introduction of new methods of paper administration, originating in the Islamic and Persianate sphere, created new opportunities for scribes in bureaucracy, commercial accountancy and legal administration (ibid.: 441). Some of the groups were already specialised in administrative duties, such as the Kāyasthas, while others came from the ranks of religious specialists of Hindu and Muslim communities. S. Bayly (1999: 64–96) extensively studied the important role Brahmin communities played in the consolidation of the Maratha Empire. In the Maratha polity, Brahmins were found in such diverse fields as state contractors for tax-privileges, as scribes and administrators and in high military posts. Brahmins recruited other Brahmins and consequently, non-Brahmanic communities adopted Brahmanic values in order to gain access to state positions. Additionally, Brahmins in the legal administration implemented the categories of *varṇa* and *jāti* in social practice which increased the importance of Brahmanical ideology in the early modern and even more in the colonial period.

However, the ascendance of scribal groups requires a careful regional contextualisation, even though trans-regional migration patterns or institutions for managing status conflicts between rival groups like *dharmasabhā* were of great importance (O’Hanlon 2007; O’Hanlon/Minkowski 2008). Fortunately, first studies are now available for Bengal (Chatterjee 2010), South India (Fuller/Narasimhan 2010; Guha 2010) and Western India (O’Hanlon 2010), as well as for particular groups of scribal elites such as *munshis* (Alam/Subrahmanyam 2004). For Nepal, the research on scribal and administrative elites is still at the beginning (see Bajracharya/Cubelic/Khatiwoda 2016, 2017). As the contribution by M.P. Joshi and M.M. Joshi reveals, the fluctuation of Nepal’s southern borders in the early 19th century profoundly influenced the restructuring of local elites, who had to serve different masters.

The systematic study of larger bodies of early modern documents might help to elucidate the social processes behind the establishment of paper-based administration and to shed light on the following questions: which groups served at which level of the bureaucratic hierarchy? Which linguistic background was desired and how did the scribes navigate between the different discursive realms? What was the educational background of a scribe? Did individual merit or personal loyalty exceed group affiliation? To what extent could scribal skills be translated into political power or control over economic resources?

Did scribes use their access to state power to push through the norms of the social and religious groups they originated from, or did they develop a new scribal ideology with a particular moral code? These questions can only be addressed by bringing the traces of the scribes in the documents themselves into dialogue with sources coming from the scribal lifeworlds, including training manuals, family chronicles, or even visual material such as portrait paintings. M. Bajracharya's contribution in this volume takes such a path by delineating the career of Munshi Lakṣmīdāsa Pradhāna during the first half of the 19th century. The influential role of this *munshi* not only translated into wealth, but the assertion of his increased status and his professional ethos is also reflected in cultural artefacts, such as paintings and family chronicles. Munshi Lakṣmīdāsa's vita is also interesting from the viewpoint of analysing processes of cultural mimesis, as it also provides an early example of taking over, and being assimilated to, the cultural habitus of the dominant elites, which was to become a major career path in the Nepalese state.

Norms and Legal Practice

Scholars of classical South Asian legal history face a dilemma. Although the Dharmaśāstra represents a rich and highly sophisticated jurisprudential tradition which also provides detailed regulations on deeds for private transactions, as well as reflections on their validity as proof in litigation (Strauch 2002), the number of extant deeds and documents is small, at least in fields other than land grants, revenue arrangements and transactions of substantial property. The question, then, is to what extent the corpus of Dharmaśāstra texts shaped or mirrored the legal practice, if at all. An influential proponent of an idealistic reading of Dharmaśāstra literature is L. Rocher, who argues that Smṛti texts consist of Sanskrit translations of vernacular free-floating verses which initially were a record of legal customs of different regions. Afterwards these texts were turned into frozen sacred knowledge and became the object of Brahmanical exegesis and scholasticism, largely detached from the socio-legal realities (Rocher 1993: 267; Rocher 1984: 41). It was only the colonial state which confused *dharma* and law, something which has been a source of misunderstanding and conflict up to this day. Yet, for R. Lariviere (2009: 190), Dharmaśāstra literature remained open towards the living law during its entire history. Although

Lariviere agrees with Rocher to the extent of Brahmanical ideology exerting an influence on the textual norms (ibid.: 196), he stresses the manifold instruments of Dharmaśāstra to integrate changing societal norms into its textual tradition, especially through the reference to an unspecified law of the learned and cultivated, *śiṣṭācāra*, or the inclusion of apocryphal verses into the later digests and commentarial literature. Therefore, according to Lariviere, Dharmaśāstra literature is a reliable source for the history of Hindu law, and not only for its jurisprudence.

More recent approaches try to moderate between these two positions by distinguishing between Hindu law, on the one hand, and Dharmaśāstra on the other. For D. Davis (2008), Dharmaśāstra texts primarily served the cultivation and transmission of a jurisprudential tradition. However, this still implies that societal actors that had received training in that scholastic tradition and internalised its norms could try to implement them as far as their access to social and legal institutions allowed (ibid.: 317). Hindu legal cultures are shaped by the dialectics between exegetical tradition and legal practice, and their ‘Hinduness’ is a matter of degree depending on the weight given to dharmashastric norms in a given context (Davis 2010: 13). In a similar vein, A. Michaels (2010: 77) has defined premodern Hindu law by its “relational character”, which means that its substantive law depended to a great extent on local, temporal and socio-political exigencies, especially the distribution of power among elite groups. For T. Lubin (2015: 251), Dharmaśāstra functions as a non-state model of a “rule of recognition” by which customary laws are validated, even if historical sources do not explicitly refer to this textual resource. However, there are also cases in which legislation abolished customary standards or officially recognised them (ibid.: 250). Therefore, legal documents are crucial to understand how custom and legislation within a premodern Indic legal system were prioritised and how they interacted with each other. Taking these more recent approaches to the study of Hindu law seriously, it is only legal records which can show whether the legal practice in a specific historical constellation prioritised translocal shastric norms, followed the local legal pluralism of the different *deśa-*, *jāti-*, *kula-* or *śreṇīdharmas* (regional, caste, family or guild laws)—even if they were opposed to the injunctions of the Smṛti—applied both bodies of rules at the same time, depending on the respective spheres of socio-cultural practice, or drew on the Dharmaśāstra as a hidden resource.

D. Acharya in this volume provides us with an example of dharmashastric regulations on the law of debt, such as a son’s liability for the

father's debts or certain procedures for debt clearance, being put into practice. As the contributions to the legal history of Nepal in this volume suggest, legal documents help to carve out conflicting impulses even within the context of the same legal system. Whereas R. Khatiwoda (this volume) shows that the *Mulukī Ain* of 1854 represents a legal code which deviates from basic principles of the Dharmaśāstra, A. Michaels presents a case in which the Nepalese prime minister contacted a traditional assembly of scholars of Hindu law to receive advice on ritual practice. Khatiwoda, gives evidence that the law on homicide in the *Mulukī Ain* was put into practice, while S. Cubelic refers to an example showing that the government still possessed instruments to suspend its regulation. In this respect, the debates outlined in the field of Dharmaśāstra have salience for other premodern Indic knowledge systems or normative codes of ritual practice.

Divine and Human Rule

Kingship has been a fundamental institution of, and ordering principle for, South Asian societies. Connected to or disconnected from the actual power to rule, a king or kingly figure typically occupies the centre of his realm. He is the “turner of the wheel”, the *cakravartin*, of his sphere of rule, his *maṇḍala*. Rulership was often clad in ideological terms one tends to call religious, though the concept of *dharma* with the king as its foremost protector and propagator, encompasses the social and the cosmic, the religious, political and legal spheres alike. South Asian kings' schemes of governance were therefore bound to implementing and thus guaranteeing the order of cosmos, world, and society. They were committed to the “cohesion of the world” (Horstmann 2009).

The rule of South Asian kings has been studied as “divine kingship”, because the sovereignty of the ruler commonly depended on, was derived from, or was even shared with a deity. The latter could be conceived of as the realm's or king's *śakti*, the personified “might” or “capacity” to rule (Gupta/Gombrich 1986). The deity could be represented as the real ruler with the human king surrendering his kingdom and sovereignty and acting as on his command (Kulke 1981; Sax 2006), or the deity could stand as a sole ruler, whose will was typically channelled through mediums or represented by groups of people (Lecomte-Tilouine 2009; Sutherland 2003). The king himself not only acted as the deity's premier servant and central sacrificial patron in exclusive

roles in rituals; his special status was underlined by homologising, sometimes even identifying him with royal deities, typically with Indra as king of the gods or as Viṣṇu, the famous upholder of *dharma* and enemy of demons. Thus, according to popular opinion echoed by scholars and journalists alike, the king of Nepal was regarded as an incarnation of Viṣṇu.¹³

The king as a semi-divine being not only depended on his tutelary deity and other divinities of his realm, whom he had to serve and propitiate by e.g. building temples, performing rituals and bestowing property, he also entertained mutual dependencies for legitimacy and empowerment with Brahmins and ascetics. These other “human gods” (Burghart 1987) blessed the king and increased his merit as receivers of gifts and privileges. They were his consultants and ideologues (Michaels, C. Zotter, both this volume).

Different kings ruling over centre-oriented realms were engaged in constant processes of negotiating relations with their neighbours. Ever since B. Cohn (1962) coined the term, and following the ground-breaking studies of B. Stein (1980) and N. Dirks (1987), the level of the “little kingdoms” especially has attracted scholarly attention (Schnepel/Berkemer 2003). These kingdoms existed within the protection of larger kingdoms, or as H. Kulke’s integrative model of state formation shows, “jungle kings” adopting Hindu ideologies of state-craft could become “little kings” or even “great kings” over other little kings (Berkemer/Frenz 2003). The charisma of the “little king” was grounded on a system of traditional acts of loyalty and was expressed in the king’s privilege to bestow or grant titles, medals, land and benefices, or to found or support temples as transregional pilgrimage places. This situation makes it impossible to reduce power to governance (Michaels 2007). Accordingly, the notion of rituals and Hindu ideologies as mere tools serving political ends has been challenged, and royal rituals especially have started to be conceived of as entities in their own right (Sax 2006: 8–10; Schnepel/Berkemer 2003: 17).

Together with other textual material produced in the context of little kingdoms, historical documents have been singled out as important, but under-researched sources to mirror such ethno-historical aspects and developments and to see Hindu kingship not just from an ideological plane, but also in its historical existence (Schnepel/Berkemer 2003: 18). As B. Schnepel and G. Berkemer rightly stress, even if

13 See Mocko (2016: 4–6) for a problematisation of this often quoted phrase.

... these sources, too, are more often than not idealising and ideological in character[,] ... studying this material more deeply enriches our view of the ideological and intellectual side of Indian life, since it will make us more sensitive to the fact that ideas and ideologies in South Asia were not monolithic dogmas but dynamic matters of negotiation and contestation. (ibid.)

More than this, documents provide windows into other, often neglected aspects of enacting and maintaining sovereignty through religious practices, such as the establishment (*pratiṣṭhā*) of deities (Bledsoe 2004) or ritual gifts (*dāna*). Royal endowment charters often not only cover details of the land grants for supporting the deities' cult, or of the rituals, but also draw attention to the organisation, logistics and material culture (A. Zotter, this volume).

Nepal under Śāha rule and its document culture certainly poses a special case. There, kingship with an explicitly Hindu agenda flourished when elsewhere on the subcontinent kings were left without political power. The Gorkhali kings not only relied on the traditional concepts of rule just characterised, they also engaged with forms of governance, administration, and military strategy which they had their state agents closely observe beyond their southern border (Bajracharya/Cubelic/Khatiwoda 2016, 2017). With a view to the British rulers, they established the ideological notion of them being the “cow-protectors” (*gorakṣa*) and last bastion of pure Hindu conduct against the British “cow-eaters” (*gobhakṣa*) (Kölver 1986a; Michaels 1997). Two papers in the present volume show that the enactment of the king's position at the apex of his realm as a ritual system was central to the integration of the Gorkhali state. A. Zotter's paper highlights that the festival of Dasaī was a cornerstone of the master narrative of the Śāha dynasty of achieving and maintaining victorious rule through the worship of the warrior goddess and demon slayer Durgā. In synchronising and reformulating existing rituals, the Śāha state struck a delicate balance between continuity and appropriation of the ritual practices of earlier rulers and their little kingdoms, which underlines the close relationship between rituals and state formation. In his article on the Śāha kings' interaction with the Nātha Jogīs and Sannyāsīs, C. Zotter points out that rulers integrated ascetic institutions into the polity in two ways: by granting them rights over donated land and judicial authority. On the one hand, certain charismatic figures such as Bhagavantānātha were powerful agents in the cultural politics of the Śāha state. On the other

hand, the administrative control enabled the state to increase its revenue. Equally crucial to the consolidation of the Gorkhali polity as the appropriation of rituals and the integration of religious institutions was the co-optation of local elites. M.P. and M.M. Joshi provide the instructive example of the *Seṅṅ* *Jośīs* who played a decisive role in establishing orderly rule in the Kumaon region.

The Nepalese case also shows that a regicentric perspective alone does not do justice to the often-competing power situations and that there is always a “dialectic relationship between ... ideologies and ‘factual matters’” (Schnepel/Berkemer 2003: 18). Thus, the successors of *Prṭhvī Nārāyaṇa Śāha*, the “little king” from Gorkha who became a “great king”, were mostly too young or weak to wield power. Between 1799 and 1950, almost no king ruled alone. He was surrounded and represented by regents and prime ministers, queens, queen mothers, brothers and illegitimate sons of second wives or concubines who all sought to ascend to power. In the *Rāṅṅ* period (1847–1950), the king was even reduced to his ritual roles. Contrary to palace rhetoric and ideology of absolute rule, the *Mulukī Ain*, the legal code promulgated under the *Rāṅṅ*, subjected the person of the king himself to law (Cubelic/Khatiwoda 2017).

Additionally, apart from the never-ending power games within the palace, the ethnic diversity, the geographic fractionalisation and the polycentric distribution of power led to the establishment of an anxious administration that entailed a quantum leap in the production of paperwork. The administration of the highly fragile territory, which until the 20th century was a set of territories and groups of people conquered by the Gorkhals, rather than a national state with a common identity, relied on a political strategy that was characteristic of the little kingdom (Schnepel/Berkemer 2003: 14–15). On the one hand, it needed “big men” in order to collect taxes and represent his majesty’s government on the local level (see Krauskopff, this volume). On the other hand, these “little kings” posed a constant threat to the central government, though one bridled by a system of annual reappointment (Nep. *pajanī*). When using the authority granted from above to empower themselves locally, they could become too strong, enough either to rival the palace in Kathmandu, or to eschew its authority (Burghart 1984; Ortnor 1992: 94). However, as G. Krauskopff’s account of the Tharu farmers (this volume) shows, during the *Rāṅṅ* period the Nepalese state undertook several attempts to expand its governmental control and resource extraction by bureaucratisation, redefinition of proprietary relations,

increased taxation and cadastral surveys, which diminished the agency of the Tharus considerably.

Archiving and Digitising Documents

From medieval and early modern times onwards, South Asia has offered rich examples of archival institutions and document collections, both private and public, which to a large extent are still unexplored. Besides Nepal, which will be discussed here in more detail, comprehensive studies on premodern South Asian documents are especially available for Kerala,¹⁴ Maharashtra,¹⁵ and Rajasthan.¹⁶ Though documents, first on palm-leaves, then on paper, have existed at least since the late 10th century in Nepal (Kölver 1981: 133), with the rise of the Śāha dynasty

- 14 In Kerala over a million documents are preserved, dating back to the 14th century. But only a few collections, containing the records and chronicles from various temples (Davis 2004: 30–32), have been published: *Vanjeri Grandhavari* (1987), *Koodali Granthavari* (1995), *Chronicles of the Trivandrum Pagoda* (n.d.), or *Peruvaranam Kṣetra Granthavari* (1979). Similar documents have been published in modern historical works: Logan (1995 [1887]), *The Travancore State Manual* (1940: II), or Krishna Ayyar (1938). A valuable source is also the collection of letters and records by the German missionary Hermann Gundert (Skariah 1996). The Vanjeri records are mostly mortgages, contracts of loans or land-tenures, statements of accounts, or other civil transactions between two parties which prove the decisive role of the Namputiri Brahmins as mediators for the appropriation of Dharmaśāstra into the local legal system (Davis 1999: 198). The Tellicherry Documents contain a great deal of information on criminal law.
- 15 In Maharashtra, earlier research focused mainly on the judicial institutions of the Marathas, especially the studies by Mountstuart Elphinstone (1973 [1872]), Surendranath Sen (1925) and Vithal Trimbak Gune (1953). Gune provides the analysis of judicial documents, *mahzars* (public attestations or statements laid before a judge) and deeds or other documents (*nivāḍapatra*, *watanpatra*), orders pertaining to crimes and criminal cases, and documents pertaining to sins and expiations. Chronologically, the subject is focused on the periods between Shivaji and his successors (1550–1750) and the Peshwas (1750–1818), when the Maratha power came to an end. Other collections (see O’Hanlon, this volume) are found in V.K. Rajwade’s Bharat Itihas Samshodak Mandal, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Deccan College Postgraduate and Research Institute, or in the Pune Record Office. Further document-based research has been carried out by S. Guha (1995), who focuses on 18th-century criminal law, and by R. O’Hanlon, who sheds light on local institutions, such as *gotas*, *majālis* and *panchayats* (this volume), and Brahmanical institutions, such as *dharmasabhās* (O’Hanlon/Minkowski 2008).
- 16 In Rajasthan, document collections of religious institutions during the early modern and colonial period have been studied by M. Horstmann (1998, 1999, and this volume); legal documents have been studied by S. Bhansali 1993. The documents provide important insights into documentary practices in the confluence of Indic and Persianate diplomatic traditions and administrative cultures.

and the establishment of Nepal as a territorial state from the middle of the 18th century onwards paper documents as major ‘currency’ in the administrative and legal practice of the state achieved a new quality. Given the wealth of documents in Nepal, only a limited number have been published and analysed so far. Pioneers of the field include the scholars of the Nepalese research group *Samśodhana-Maṇḍala* (Mahes Raj Pant, Dinesh Raj Pant and Naya Raj Pant, Gyan Mani Nepal, Dhana-vajra Vajracharya) and others such as Baburam Acharya, Krishna Kant Adhikari, Madhav Lal Karmacharya, Bernhard Kölver, Yogī Naraharinātha, Dilli Raman Regmi, Mahes Chandra Regmi, Hemraj Shakya, and Govinda Tandan.¹⁷ Their studies explore selected topics (e.g. economy, Rāṇā administration, certain ethnic groups, monasteries, temples) or regions (e.g. Mustang). Documents have also been recorded in catalogues (Dangol 1991–1992; Śarmā 2000). As a larger corpus, however, the Śāha documents have so far not been studied systematically.

The rich stock of Nepalese documents forms the only larger corpus of non-colonial documents from South Asia. More than one hundred thousand documents have been microfilmed by the *Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project* (NGMPP) conducted by the German Oriental Society from 1970–2002,¹⁸ in particular the documents preserved in the National Archives Nepal (NGMPP DNA-series, 23 reels); in the Guthi Samsthāna, an organisation established in 1964 by the Nepalese state to administer the funds from royal endowments for religious institutions and public welfare¹⁹ (K-series, 720 reels); documents microfilmed at the Paśupatiṅgā Temple and Paśupati Gośvāra (PN-series, 37 reels); and documents in private possession, notably the *Mahesh Chandra Regmi Collection* (over 100 reels in the E-series). In collaboration with the National Archives Nepal in the aforementioned research unit on Nepalese documents of the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (www.hadw-bw.de/nepal.html), the material microfilmed by the NGMPP is being systematically catalogued for the first time and selected editions and translations are being published, both in digital and printed form.

17 For an overview, see Slusser 1982: 423–425 and Pant 2002 to which may be added Adhikari 1984; Dhungel 2002; Karmacharya 2001a, 2001b; Kölver 1981, 1981/82, 1986b, 1993, 1995, 1996; Kölver/Shakya 1985; Michaels 1994: 328–380; and Tandan 1996/1999. Haenisch 1959 provides editions and translation of documents in Chinese, Mandschu and Tibetan language on the prehistory of the Sino-Nepalese War (1788–1792).

18 See <https://www.aai.uni-hamburg.de/en/forschung/ngmcp/history/about-ngmpp.html> [accessed 28 February 2017].

19 See <http://www.guthisansthan.org.np/eng/index.php/about-us/introduction> [accessed 28 February 2017].

Other significant document collections that have not or have only partially been microfilmed or digitised include the Asha Archives (Āśā Saphū Kuthi, www.aioiyama.net/ask/index.html), the Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya (www.madanpuraskar.org), those of former or still existing Nepalese government institutions (Amatya 1988–1989), those of community-based archives (Kunreuther 2017; Ramble, this volume), or documents from the Hodgson Collection in the British Library and other institutions (see Waterhouse 2004; Whelpton/Hutt 2011), which have been catalogued under the supervision of Ramesh K. Dhungel.²⁰

Although there is increasing awareness that the nature of premodern documents has to be interrogated, the social spaces of their physical presence remain rather neglected. Far from being natural sediment of the collective memory of a society, state archives are highly political institutions. What, why and how something is preserved inevitably reflects the interests of certain social groups and state elites to legitimise their claims on property, power and status, or to stabilise hegemonic political narratives. It is thus not surprising that archives in South Asia have become an object of postcolonial critique. In this regard, N. Dirks' (2001) thoughts on the colonial archive and the formation of colonial knowledge are paradigmatic. Dirks (*ibid.*: 81) points out that the establishment of archives was a necessity for the colonial state, which had to engage with the records of precolonial history for revenue settlement and military expansion, as well as social, religious and political intervention and governance. Accordingly, archives were a crucial part of the colonial informational regime (*ibid.*: 116). But besides this pragmatic aspect, archives played a fundamental role in the colonial state's search for legitimacy. Since colonial rule did not rest on political representation, bureaucracy was the building block of the colonial regime (*ibid.*: 123). Therefore, archives as direct manifestations of the documentation project of bureaucratic rationality are mirrors of the colonial governmentality and the colonial sociology of India (*ibid.*: 105). Non-British voices, actors and truth regimes were marginalised, silenced and relegated to footnotes:²¹

20 <http://catalogue.socanth.cam.ac.uk:8899/exist/servlet/db/Hodgson/hodgson.xq> [accessed 28 February 2017].

21 However, another strand of scholarship tries to circumvent the official truth embodied in the colonial archive and to recover local histories of popular resistance, subversion and human agency by reading between the lines of colonial documents (see Stoler 2002: 99–100, also for a critique of this approach).

The archive, that primary site of state monumentality, is the very institution that canonizes, crystallizes, and classifies knowledge required by the state even as it makes this knowledge available to subsequent generations in the cultural form of a neutral repository of the past. ... Colonial conquest was about the production of an archive of (and for) rule. (ibid.: 107)

However, another strand of research has highlighted that the colonial archive rested at least partially on precolonial techniques of knowledge gathering, enumeration habits and bureaucratic procedures (see Peabody 2001). Therefore, studying pre- and non-colonial archives as manifestations of the state imagination of society and governing strategies provides insights not only into the emergence of colonial rule, but also into the different modes of precolonial or early modern governmentality. For South Asia and even for a non-colonised state like Nepal, this raises a number of questions: was the institution of the archive an emulation of similar institutions in British India or did it emerge out of earlier practices? Which hidden vision of society and collective identity is embodied in the Nepalese archives? Which forms of knowledge were privileged and sanctioned? How did state archives in Nepal interact with religious and community-based archives and what can this tell us about the local and regional webs of power?

Several contributions in this volume address these questions. A. von Rospatt shows that in Nepal archival traditions flourished outside the ambit of the state and palace. Such grass-root practices contributed to the stabilisation of community identity and created precedents and models for the organisation of collective tasks. G. Krauskopff's article demonstrates that even records from state or colonial archives can be read against the grain, bringing to light the manifold practices of everyday resistance of marginalised and subaltern groups in the course of consolidating and centralising state power. Comparable observations can be drawn from other regions treated in this volume. The Bālānandī Maṭh of Jaipur, a seat of Rāmānandī Nāgās, increasingly resorted to practices of documentation in order to keep judicial autonomy from colonial agencies in issues of authority and ownership within the religious lineages (Horstmann, this volume). R. O'Hanlon shows that practices of documentation in early modern Maharashtra were not imposed top-down, but flourished in localised settings where the rules of the judicial administration were negotiated within the different communities. The documents from local archives of a Tibetan-speaking

enclave in Nepal's Mustang district, presented by C. Ramble, reveal that, despite the overall tendencies of unification of state power, communities maintained their local diplomatic tradition for community affairs and developed a hybrid documentary register when dealing with central institutions.

Not only the strong presence of non-state archives, but also the advent of new digital methods in archival practice requires new thinking about power and knowledge in the context of the archive. The universal accessibility of the material of a "digital archive" allows hitherto excluded social actors to re-appropriate hegemonic categories or challenge dominant narratives embodied in state archives. On the other hand, the same universal accessibility poses new moral dilemmas, especially when it comes to community-based archives. What if the restricted access to such document collections is part of a community identity and its public display alienates the community members from 'their' artefacts? To what extent can the modern scientific demand for transparency in these cases itself turn into a hegemonic strategy?

Building up databases of historical documents has become a worldwide trend, as G. Vogeler shows in his paper in this volume. He stresses that "the genre fits very well the intellectual scheme of a database" (p. 89), with each document and its metadata conveniently filed as a dataset. With new ways of digitally conserving large document corpora and providing easy access via online databases, fresh challenges emerge. The production of such "big data" circumvents the problem of having to determine what is important and what is not. What certainly is an advantage, as it does not apply a necessarily biased filter and leaves the question open to be answered differently by different research approaches, can also become a liability. One may become 'lost in the archive' without ever scrutinising whether and why archiving as such might be a useful activity, or whether the new databases are just the digital appendix of a collecting mania born of the Western post-enlightenment preoccupation with categorising the world. Should all human cultural productions be conserved or is there also a right for them to be forgotten?

The Heidelberg project on Nepalese documents has opted for a two-track digital concept. On the one hand, by aiming at cataloguing all documents available, it makes them known to a wider community and facilitates access. On the other hand, by digitally editing selected specimens, the target is to explore the potential of the corpus along the lines of content-related research questions. Employing and

developing digital editing methods involves adapting the philological tools to the genre. As documents are usually singular codices and, as we have argued, exhibit a special language style, the apparatus of textual criticism can be reduced in comparison with other textual genres. The stress here is more on detecting and reproducing orthographical, grammatical, and lexical peculiarities than on correcting and standardising texts. To provide sustainably open data that remain true to the textual material they represent and allow for use beyond the limits of a singular project, however, calls for definitions of standards for digital annotation, coupled with a careful calculation of the cost-benefit-ratio. Even if, luckily, predefined standards, notably of the *Text Encoding Initiative* (TEI), already exist, these have to be tailored to the needs of an individual project and have to be constantly discussed in new forms of collaboration, both within research teams and in the larger scientific community. In the long run, such an approach allows gaining a considerable increment value of digital editing in comparison to analogue editing. On the basis of a number of initially manually annotated digital texts, self-learning computer-based tools, e.g. a lemmatiser, or optical character recognition (OCR) software, can be developed to facilitate the editing process. The identification of entities, such as persons or places, and their networking within and beyond single corpora is another desideratum of digital research in documents. As C. Sibille (this volume) shows, the competing meta-approaches to handling data about persons each has its advantages and disadvantages. She argues for the careful maintenance of entity-related data within projects and a general openness to new developments, especially to future possibilities of the semantic web.

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