

History in Nepalese Chronicles: Report on a Workshop in Nepal (9-22 March 2013)

Astrid Zotter

This workshop, which was made possible by funding from the Excellence Cluster 'Asia and Europe in a Global Context' and the Collaborative Research Centre 'Ritual Dynamics' (both at Heidelberg University), was related to a research project on the so-called 'Wright-chronicle' or *Naipalika-bhupa-vamshavali* (hereafter, 'Vamshavali') currently being carried out at the South Asia Institute at Heidelberg. The workshop was initiated and organised by the members of this project: Manik Bajracharya, Niels Gutschow and Axel Michaels.

In order to develop new approaches to the understanding of South Asian historiography, and especially to the Nepalese chronicles (*vamshavalis*) written in the 19th century, an interdisciplinary study group (in addition to the project staff consisting of the historians Madeleine Herren-Oesch, Bernd Schneidmüller and Gerald Schwedler and the Indologists Jörg Gengnagel and Astrid Zotter) went to Nepal. In eight working sessions, each with a special thematic focus, various places within and around the Kathmandu Valley were jointly visited. Each of these visits went along with a close reading of related text passages from the Vamshavali, which were made available by the above-mentioned project as an edited Nepali text and a new translation. This fieldwork experience was judged especially fruitful by the participants as a way of understanding the textual vision of the valley as a sacred landscape inhabited by gods and humans and making sense of the many textual references to concrete spaces and places, and even buildings and inscriptions.

The tour around the valley started in Patan, where Buddhist monasteries and institutions whose legends figure prominently in the Vamshavali were visited. The Buddhist character of this particular text is most obvious in its opening account of the creation and origin of 'Nepal', i.e. the Kathmandu Valley, as an inhabited space. Locations relevant for the vision of a sacred topography as attested to by this text were inspected in a tour to the Svayambhunath stupa and the Jamacva hill, one of the four mountains surrounding the Valley. Myths about and temples around

Pashupatinath formed the topic of a session at Deopatan. The textual depiction of Pratapa Malla as a paradigmatic king of the late Malla dynasty was discussed during a day in the old city of Kathmandu. At Bhaktapur, some of the many inscriptions quoted verbatim in the Vamshavali were inspected *in situ*. In the text, Mahamandapa, a hill east of Bhaktapur, which was explored on the last of the thematic walks, is associated in the text with the legend of Manjushri.

The final two-day working session at Nagarkot reconsidered the insights gathered at the various places visited and resumed discussions among the participants. The combination of the re-reading of the text, field research in Nepal, and methodological considerations led us to identify points that seemed most relevant for approaching both the Vamshavali under consideration and other South Asian historiographical texts. Methodological thoughts pertaining to the process of editing and translating included the issue of how a new critical edition might enable faithful access to the text for both Nepali and English speaking readers. Regarding the content of the text, it was asked what kind of narrativity we faced in the text and how its alternative concepts of time and space can be adequately understood and mediated in Western academic discourse, in spite of prejudices against non-Western forms of telling the past that still loom large. How does the text and its depiction of Nepalese history relate to earlier works produced in the Kathmandu Valley? Furthermore, the circumstances under which the text came into being were reflected upon. What roles did the different persons involved, such as Munshi Shiv Shankar Singh, Pandit Gunananda, and Daniel Wright play in producing the text, translating it into English and popularising it in the West? What other actors were involved in this project, but remained unacknowledged? How did the so-called 'Wright-chronicle' become the most often reprinted and thus one of the most influential texts on Nepalese history and how does a transcultural approach help us to understand this process? The results of the workshop will be published in a collaboratively written article in due course.

Himalayan Connections: Disciplines, Geographies, Trajectories

Austin Lord, Andrew Quintman and Sara Shneiderman

A workshop on 'Himalayan Connections: Disciplines, Geographies, Trajectories' was held from 9-10 March 2013 at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut. The workshop was convened by Andrew Quintman (Religious Studies) and Sara Shneiderman (Anthropology), both Yale faculty members. It brought together a diverse group of researchers and practitioners to consider the interdisciplinary connections that might shape new approaches to Himalayan Studies; to recognise the diversity of perspectives that characterises Himalayan scholarship; to consider the processes of change that affect ideas about the Himalaya; and to initiate dialogue towards future collaboration.

The event began with a series of interrelated questions: How do we as scholars committed to the production of knowledge in and about the Himalayan region see the same spaces differently? How might dialogic and interdisciplinary approaches contribute to the de-centering necessary for new forms of scholarship? Is it possible to reformulate a contemporary Himalayan Studies that elaborates and improves upon past efforts? When does the spatial and temporal scale of study shift – why and what for? How can we best understand the issues that Himalayan peoples face?

'The Himalaya' has been invoked as an analytical category by a range of actors over time, from scientific, social scientific, humanities, and applied backgrounds. A 'Himalayan' framing has long served as a valuable heuristic for understanding the sweep of histories, societies, and environments that connect the region. Yet that same framing has recently emerged as a problematic of scale: focusing on commonalities obscures difference, and thus diversity; focusing on difference obscures commonalities, and thus region-wide affinities. Does using 'Himalaya' as a broad regional signifier invoke an ecological or cultural determinism that de-emphasises the specificity of political history? Or does it legitimately recognise the webs of ecological, economic and cultural connectivity that have bound together complex entities over time? New Himalayan scholarship, oriented toward connectivity and inclusion, empowered by

new collaborations and analytical tools, might learn from its past legacy and ultimately move beyond it. How can new voices thus be included to express greater diversity in Himalayan Studies?

Himalayan Connections considered the nature of these transformations through six themed panels: Disciplinary Trajectories; Scales of Connectivity; Identities; Everyday Religion and the Environment; Visual and Literary Representations; and States and Borders. Each panel consisted of three or four speakers and a discussant. Presenters were invited to respond to a set of framing questions, drawing upon the empirical content of their research in and about the Himalaya, as well as their personal reflections on the experience of conducting it over time. Guiding questions included: How has the study of the Himalaya been guided by disciplinary concerns; how have those concerns changed over time? How has the Himalaya been mapped across disciplines and over time? How has the notion of 'Himalayan identity,' broadly defined, been understood across the disciplines? What do the Himalaya and its people teach us about the study of everyday or lived religion? What do we see when we look at the Himalaya? What kinds of strategies and techniques have people in the Himalaya used over time to represent themselves, their aspirations, beliefs, identities, etc? How have different disciplines recognised, or not recognised, the importance of political histories for understanding dynamics of change across the Himalaya? Is there value in considering an unbounded trans-regional Himalaya as a unit of analysis; what is gained or lost?

Responses to these questions were as diverse as the participants, who came from a broad range of disciplinary backgrounds, including Anthropology, Art History, Conservation Biology, Demography, Environmental Studies, Geography, History, Literature, Political Science, and Religious Studies. They have worked in equally varied corners of the Himalayan region, ranging across Pakistan, China, India, Nepal and Bhutan, as well as the Tibetan cultural and historical worlds that traverse these contemporary nation-states.

The workshop was punctuated by a keynote panel that brought together Charles Ramble (EPHE-Paris) and James Scott (Yale University) to reflect on the links between studies of the Himalaya and Asian Studies writ large. Both speakers emphasised that the scope of Himalayan Studies is defined by the questions asked, rather than any political or biophysical

boundaries. The co-evolution of borders and border crossings is an extremely important set of processes within the Himalayan region, and careful empirical attention to these dynamics in the Himalaya can yield important insights for broader discussions of state formation, boundary dynamics, and the ritual production of power in Asian Studies and beyond.

The conference built upon Yale University's historical connections and trajectories in the Himalayan region. These begin with personal relationships to the Kings of Nepal and Sikkim through Yale alumni on official business in the region in the 1940s and 50s, and through the development of Himalayan materials in the libraries and archives across Yale. Established in 2011, the Yale Himalaya Initiative has built upon this legacy, forging connections between faculty working across the university, the disciplines, and various subregions of the Himalaya. Yale's engagement in the Himalayan world continues to expand through contemporary partnerships between units such as the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, the School of Public Health, and the departments of Anthropology and Religious Studies, with colleagues and institutions in the region. Such connections have been fostered by a series of summer workshops held in the Himalaya (Dehradun, India in 2011; Kathmandu, Nepal in 2012; and Thimphu, Bhutan in 2013), which have generated a set of ongoing conversations and collaborations that complement those emerging from the Himalayan Connections workshop at Yale.

A full conference report and the video proceedings of the event will be published online at: <http://himalayanconnections2013.common.yale.edu/>.

For further information about the Yale Himalaya Initiative see: <http://himalaya.yale.edu>

Himalayan Connections workshop: List of participants

Elizabeth Allison	California Institute of Integral Studies
Ken Bauer	Dartmouth College
Robert Barnett	Columbia University
Kamal Bawa	University of Massachusetts, Boston
Gunnel Cederlof	Uppsala University
Geoff Childs	Washington University, St Louis
Anil Chitrakar	Himalayan Climate Initiative
Gina Drew	The New School
Paul Draghi	Yale University

David Germano	University of Virginia
David Holmberg	Cornell University
Shafqat Hussain	Trinity College
Michael Hutt	School of Oriental and African Studies
Mahendra Lama	Jawaharlal Nehru University
Mahendra Lawoti	Western Michigan University
Todd Lewis	College of the Holy Cross
Rob Linrothe	Northwestern University
Kathryn March	Cornell University
Saul Mullard	EPHE, Sorbonne
Peter Perdue	Yale University
Andrew Quintman	Yale University
Charles Ramble	EPHE, Sorbonne
Geoffrey Samuel	Cardiff University
William (Bo) Sax	Heidelberg University
Kurtis Schaeffer	University of Virginia
James Scott	Yale University
Tsering Shakya	University of British Columbia
Eklabya Sharma	ICIMOD
Sara Shneiderman	Yale University
Kalyanakrishnan 'Shivi'	Yale University
Sivaramakrishnan	
Joëlle Smadja	CNRS, Paris
Jeremey Spoon	Portland State University
Mark Turin	Yale University
Chris Vasantkumar	Hamilton College
Mimi Yiengpruksawan	Yale University
David Zurick	Eastern Kentucky University