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 fields 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The proposed conference is organized under the auspices of the project “Historical Documents from Premodern Nepal” (http://www.haw.uni-heidelberg.de/forschung/forschungsfelder/nepal/projekt.en.html) conducted since 2014 by the Heidelberg Academy of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 premodern societies, with a special focus on South Asia, but also including insights gained with material from beyond this regional context.
PROGRAM

Sunday, 4 October 2015

18:30 WELCOME
DINNER FOR CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS
(on invitation)

Monday, 5 October 2015

9:00 WELCOME ADDRESS
BERND SCHNEIDMÜLLER

9:15 Panel I: Chronicles and Records
Chair: Axel Michaels
YOGESH MISRA
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 Streyambhakesiya of Kathmandu in the Later Malla Era

DISSUSION

10:45 COFFEE BREAK

11:00 Panel II: Legal Practice 1
Chair: Prabin Banskota
AXEL MICHAELS
Are Hindu Women/Widows Allowed to Establish a Siva Temple? A Question Asked in a Letter to Janga Bahadur Rana dated 1843 CE

RAJAN KHATIWODA
Documented Evidence on the Implementation of the (Molah): A Case in mid-19th Century

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

DISSUSION

Tuesday, 6 October 2015

9:00 Panel V: Administration
Chair: Jörg Gengnagel

CHRISTOF ZOTTER
Ascetics in Administrative Affairs, Documents on the mahantamanḍala

MONIKA BOEHM-TEITTELBACH
Revenue Grants from Rajasthan (17th-19th century)

GISELE 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.

DISSUSION

10:45 COFFEE BREAK

11:00 Panel VI: Documents and the Palace
Chair: Hans Harder

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 Durgapuja Practices

DISSUSION

AXEL MICHAELS
Concluding Remarks

13:00 LUNCH BREAK

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