

## German Research in Nepal

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Misconceptions, but especially confusions are not rarely the result of identical or similar expressions or names. Most of us have already caught ourselves in an error of this type; and for many philologists (in the continental sense of the word), at least those dealing with problems of textual criticism or preparing editions of texts, errors due to say *homoio-teleuton* are their stock-in-trade, so to say, – of course as something to be recognized rather than to be done. It is hence quite understandable that Per Kvaerne in his review of

B. Kölver (ed.), *Aspects of Nepalese Traditions*, Nepal Research Centre Publications No. 19, Stuttgart (F. Steiner) 1992

in *Acta Orientalia* 55 (1994), 280 (ff.) fell a prey to the indeed similar names of two different projects concerned with Nepal and a research institute in Nepal. Even the mere thought of reproaching him with ascribing the work done by one project to the other would certainly be ridiculous. But I gladly follow his suggestion and gratefully avail myself of the opportunity for a clarification, kindly offered by him.

The “German Research Council” (“Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft”), the central self-administrative organization of sciences in Germany, distinguishes between different categories of research projects which it supports financially such as short-term research projects, long-term research projects, research programmes (“Forschungsschwerpunkte”), collaborative research centres (“Sonderforschungsbereiche”), etc. (cf. *The Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. Organization and Functions*, Bonn 1990). A common feature of the last two is interdisciplinarity, but a “research programme” brings together scholars from different universities, sometimes even countries, who wish to work on a particular

project defined thematically and/or regionally, whereas “collaborative research centres” are by definition established at one particular university only.

My friend, Prof. Dr. Bernhard Kölver (University of Leipzig), was in charge of, i.e. had planned and had then been coordinating, a Research Programme on Overarching Traditions in Nepal, briefly called “Nepal Research Programme”, which started its work in 1990 and continued it *de facto* until 1991. In 1992 another Research Programme, equally concerned with Nepal, was started jointly by the geographer Willibald Haffner (University of Giessen) and the Tibetologist Dieter Schuh (University of Bonn), but its thematical frame (“Rahmenthema”) is Processes of Settling and State Formation in the Tibetan Himalaya.

The “Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project” (NGMPP), as it is conveniently called (started in 1970 and which I took over in 1985 after the unexpected demise of its founder and former director, the Indologist and librarian Dr. Wolfgang Voigt), however, is a long-term project for microfilming “all Asian manuscripts in the Kingdom of Nepal”, the concept “manuscripts” including also xylographs – which after all are carved by hand – as well as historical documents, deeds of land, etc., all of which are likewise written by hand.

The “Nepal Research Centre” (= NRC), finally, the former “Thyssen House”, is the “oldest German cooperative institution on Nepalese soil”: in 1974 it was taken over by the German Oriental Society (“Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft”) and has since 1977 it has been working under five year agreements with the Research Division of the Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, or, to be precise; Kirtipur. The NRC has four principal aims, viz. to render assistance to scholars visiting Nepal, to organize lectures, seminars, etc., in particular to publish especially the results of research on and/or in Nepal, and to provide working facilities and ‘bed-and-breakfast’, to scholars from abroad (cf. *Scientific Projects and Himalayan Culture (1960–1992)*, Nepal Research Centre, Kathmandu 1992).

It is, of course, the “Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project” which has, to quote from Kvaerne’s review, discovered and microfilmed more than 100.000 manuscripts – mainly in Sanskrit and Tibetan. In fact the number of manuscripts (in the sense explained above) microfilmed has meanwhile risen to almost 150.000, approximately one fifth of them being Tibetan. The NGMPP is based on an agreement between His Majesty’s Government of Nepal and the German Oriental Society signed

in 1970 and since then extended five times (1975, 1982, 1986, 1990 and 1993). In accordance with it, the negative film, the "master copy", and one of the two positive copies made from it remain with the Nepalese – and are now stored in the Microfilm House behind the main building of the National Archives in Kathmandu – while the second positive copy which is the property of the German Oriental Society is passed on by it as permanent loan to the State Library in Berlin ("Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung"). Some years ago (1987) another section of the NGMPP was established at the Institute for History and Culture of India and Tibet ("Institut für Kultur und Geschichte Indiens und Tibets") at the University of Hamburg, where a "Preliminary List of Manuscripts and Xylographs Microfilmed by the NGMPP" is being compiled with the help of computers and special software, kindly developed by my colleague Ronald E. Emmerick; this list is, however, mainly based on the so-called index cards for each and every item microfilmed, and not on the MSS or the microfilms themselves. (The preparation of descriptive catalogues of the whole material will be the purpose of a follow-up project which can for obvious reasons only be undertaken when the NGMPP has completed its work). It is planned to publish the "Preliminary List ..." within a year after the microfilming work has been completed in Nepal to make this vast amount of information, the first of its kind, available to scholars as soon as possible.

A report on the first 15 years of the NGMPP's activities, written in German, was published in ZDMG 136 (1986), \*2\*–\*14\*<sup>\*</sup>; in addition, each issue of this journal from 1986 onwards contains a brief report about the NGMPP as well as the NRC. An updated, though also not very detailed report will form part of a book which the Committee ("Vorstand") of the German Oriental Society will publish later this year, on the occasion of the Society's 150th anniversary, under the title "Die Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft. Seit 1845 der Erforschung der Sprachen und Kulturen Asiens und Afrikas und dem Verstehen des Fremden verpflichtet". It is true that a detailed report on the NGMPP in English is overdue, and in fact I have been working on one for quite some time now; but I decided to ignore even the occasion of the project completing 25 years of activity in 1995, because the idea is to continue the work, if at all possible, for five more years. To wait until 2001 would allow me to give a report which is not only comprehensive, but also complete at least as regards the duration – and to try to compile a more comprehensive bibliography of the publications in which material provided by the

NGMPP has been used. Indeed, such publications began to appear already in the course of the first five years, and their number has been steadily growing since 1975.

For many years now the main focus of the work of the project in Nepal have been Tibetan texts, and in fact approximately one third of those already microfilmed are texts which were not known or not previously accessible elsewhere; but in order to reach the generally far-off villages or Gompas in the higher regions of the Nepalese Himalaya where they happen to have been preserved it is necessary to carry out veritable expeditions. Regarding some of the particularly important results of this part of the activities of the NGMPP, I should like to refer the reader to the reports given by F.-K. Ehrhard in *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research* 2 (1991), 20–24 as well as *Abhilekh* 7 (1989), 51–58, 8 (1990), 78–82, 9 (1991), 33–38 and 10 (1992), 82–86, as also to Ch. Cüpper's article in 'Forschung'. *Mitteilungen der DFG*, 4/91 [1991], 4–7.

Inquiries, especially about individual titles and manuscripts, should be directed either to

Bibliotheksdirektor Dr. H.-O. Feistel  
Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – PK  
Orientabteilung  
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D-10785 Berlin  
Tel. 030-266 2489  
Fax 030-264 5955

or to the undersigned,

Institut für Kultur und Geschichte Indiens und Tibets  
Neue Rabenstrasse 3  
D-20354 Hamburg  
Tel. 040-4123 3385  
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But inquiries can, of course, also be made on the spot, so to say, i.e. in Kathmandu itself in the National Archives, Ramshahpath, or in the Nepal Research Centre, New Baneshwar (behind Hotel Everest), or, last but by no means least, in the State Library, Berlin.