

The Nepal German Manuscript Preservation Project

Franz-Karl Ehrhard

The Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project (NGMPP) is a joint venture between the Department of Archaeology, HMG Ministry of Education and Culture and the German Oriental Society. Its principal objective is to preserve the literary, historical, religious and cultural heritage of Nepal through the microfilming of manuscripts, block prints and historical documents. Any manuscript that has a bearing on this objective can be included for microfilming if its owner so desires. No language or subject area is excluded.

To date, since the project was launched in 1970, a total of more than 120,000 manuscripts with around 4,500,000 folios has been microfilmed. Two types of microfilms are prepared from a given manuscript: one negative copy and two positive copies. The negative copy and one of the positive copies remain in the National Archives in Kathmandu, and the other positive copy is sent to Berlin to be kept in the collections of the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek, the German State Library. Copies of individual texts can be ordered from the National Archives in Kathmandu only, and the National Archives has the copyright on any reproduction of the material.

The organization and ongoing business of the NGMPP is handled jointly by the National Archives, Kathmandu, and the German Oriental Society, though the responsibility of financing the project devolves upon the latter. The photographic section located in the National Archives undertakes microfilming and does the developing of all the films.

Given the large number of manu-

scripts microfilmed to date, one should keep in mind that it is not yet possible to undertake a systematic and thorough qualitative evaluation of the collection, aside from a few isolated instances. The vast majority of microfilmed manuscripts are Sanskrit texts, frequently of Indian provenience. We estimate that some 80 to 85% of the manuscripts which have been microfilmed thus far contain texts which have been microfilmed in the project before. Indeed, such duplicate texts are occasionally represented in our collection in as many as 100 separate microfilms. There is, however, a quite good scholarly reason for this practice of microfilming practically every manuscript fragment which we can locate or which is submitted to the project for filming, even if we already have many copies of the given text: because of such a procedure, it will be possible for the first time in the history of research of Hindu and Buddhist culture in South Asia to put together a statistical overview of the distribution and frequency of certain texts in a given geographically limited cultural area, such as the Kathmandu Valley or the northern parts of Nepal that are under the influence of Tibetan culture.

This wealth of manuscripts is not only distinguished by its exceptional diversity - nearly all subfields of Hindu and Buddhist Sanskrit and Tibetan literature are represented - but frequently also by the rarity and great antiquity of individual pieces. In many cases, the microfilmed manuscripts represent the oldest available source for a given text, and this holds true not just for the Buddhist Sanskrit texts which have

been preserved in their entirety only in Nepal, but also for many Vedic, Brahmanic and Hindu works which are only extant in later copies in India or Europe. Rare samples of Tibetan-language material (religious literature and documents) are also to be found in Nepal, many of which are lost now in Tibet proper.

Thanks to a revision covering the extension of the agreement between HMG and the German Oriental Society to its third five year phase, it became possible to microfilm throughout the entire kingdom except for the restricted areas. Exploratory research and microfilming expeditions were undertaken into the mountains and the Terai - to centres of Nepalese history such as Gorkha, Janakpur and Kaski. Lamaist monasteries in the far north of the kingdom became a major focus of attention after 1983. In this new context, the quality of a given manuscript was given priority in the criteria for microfilming. With the aid of a short-title list we were able to determine whether it was in fact worthwhile microfilming a particular manuscript which we found in the field. The careful and thorough preparation of such expeditions in cooperation with the National Archives came to constitute a major new and rewarding activity during the fourth and now fifth phase of the project.

History of the NGMPP

The establishment of the NGMPP took place in 1970 through an agreement between the Department of Archaeology, HMG Ministry of Education and Culture, represented by Mr. R.J. Thapa, and the German Oriental Society, represented by Dr. Dr. h.c. W. Vogt, director-general of the NGMPP and the Nepal Research Centre (NRC).

This agreement, which was initially planned for five years, stipulated that the entire holdings of the National Archives, situated on Ramshah Path in Kathmandu, would be committed to microfilm. The National Archives, of course, houses the large collection of the Durbar or Bir Library. It also looks after a number of smaller but nevertheless valuable libraries, such as that of the late Rajguru Hemraj Pandit as well as the partial collection of the former Prime Minister Chandra Shumshere Jung Bahadur Rana.

The first German representative of the NGMPP in Nepal was Prof. B. Kolver, later coordinator of the Nepal Research Programme, who led the NGMPP for a period of two years from 1970 to 1972. He, in turn, was succeeded by Prof. A. Wezler and Mr. F. Erb in 1972. The next representative was Prof. M. Witzel, who directed the activities of the project as well as the NRC for a period of some five years - up to 1977.

During the first five years virtually all of the manuscripts stored in and looked after by the National Archives were microfilmed. On the basis of these microfilms a tentative catalogue was prepared to facilitate the preparation of a more comprehensive catalogue that is now being compiled at Hamburg University with the aid of a PC (provisional title: Preliminary List of Titles of Manuscripts Microfilmed by the NGMPP).

In 1975 a new five-year agreement was signed which allowed for a broadening of the scope of the activities of the NGMPP. Aside from filming or retaking manuscripts, palm-leaf rolls and inscription rubbings from the National Archives, the NGMPP obtained permission to film all the extensive private and other public libraries of the

entire Bagmati zone as well. When Prof. Witzel stepped down in 1977, the NGMPP witnessed a rapid succession of representatives who, besides directing the project itself, also continued to look after the NRC. Thus Prof. O. von Hinuber was representative from 1977 to 1978, Prof. Wezler again in 1978, Prof. M. Hahn from 1978 to 1979, Dr. H. Brinkhaus from 1979 to 1981, Dr. A. Michaels from 1981 to 1983, Dr. H. Brinkhaus again from 1983 to 1985, Dr. C. Cuppers from 1985 to 1986, Dr. R. Grunendahl from 1986 to 1987, Dr. C. Cuppers again from 1987 to 1988, and Dr. F.K. Ehrhard from then to the present.

Within the second phase of the NGMPP, microfilming began to be done outside the buildings of the National Archives to which the preservation activities of the NGMPP had been previously confined. Another microfilming unit was set up at the Ganabahal office of the NRC, and a series of mobile units were established in Banepa, Bhaktapur and Patan so as to ensure maximum accessibility to the project for private owners of manuscripts.

For the third phase of project activities, Prof. A. Wezler (Hamburg University) was appointed by the German Oriental Society as director-general of the NGMPP and NRC. This coincided with the establishment of the new NRC building in New Baneshwar in 1980. The microfilm unit shifted as well to the new house and continued to attract private manuscript owners. During the third phase expeditions of the Tibetan section of the NGMPP were started to the northern parts of Nepal.

These activities continued during the fourth phase (1986-1990), during which a total of 10 expeditions were successfully conducted. From 1986 onwards a microfilm unit was also

established at the Gūṭhisamsthān in Bhadrakālī, allowing the NGPP to microfilm the valuable Gūṭhi records.

Entering the fifth phase (1990 onwards) has meant continuing the work in the National Archives (filming of new incoming Sanskrit and Tibetan material), filming private collections and the Gūṭhi records, as well as exploring new areas in northern Nepal and conducting microfilm expeditions in those regions.

The Microfilmed Manuscripts

The largest proportion of Sanskrit texts comes from areas of *karmakāṇḍa*, *stotra* and *tantra*, though it is somewhat difficult at times to classify the texts as belonging to one field or another. In the remaining half of the manuscripts *jyotiṣa*, *purāṇa* and *mahātmya* constitute a considerable portion. Other fields such as philosophical *darśana* texts, Veda, traditional sciences, *kavya* and *itihāsa* are relatively rare but nevertheless of great scholarly importance.

The proportion of palm-leaf manuscripts amounts to an estimated 1 to 2% of the total. In the reported national holdings, however, the proportion of palm-leaf manuscripts is substantially larger (some 7%).

Along with the manuscript collections there are also rubbings of inscriptions, palm-leaf scrolls containing contracts, and other documents which were and are being microfilmed.

In addition to manuscripts in Sanskrit, there are also preserved a considerable number in Nepali, Newari, Maithili and several of the other languages of Nepal.

Manuscripts in the Tibetan language constitute the second major focus of the microfilmed holdings of the

NGMPP. Buddhist literature in the Tibetan language is quite prevalent in the Himalayan regions of northern Nepal, and it is therefore hardly surprising that the National Archives has a fairly sizeable collection of Tibetica of its own. When these were filmed, however, no Tibetologist was on the staff of the NGMPP, and it was only much later that these were completely catalogued by Mr. F.K. Ehrhard, whose results were published in the 4th volume of the *Journal of the Nepal Research Center* (1980).

Given the steady influx of Tibetica from 1976 onward, in 1978 a Tibetologist came to figure as a permanent staff member of the NGMPP. At that time, Mr. U. Hartmann joined the NGMPP; he was succeeded by Dr. L.W.J. van der Kuijp in 1980, and from July of 1983 to July 1988 the Tibetan section was led by Dr. C. Cuppers. Dr. F.K. Ehrhard took over this task in August 1988.

During the period when activities were confined to the Bagmati Zone, most of the Tibetica filmed came from several monasteries of Svayambhūnāth and Bodnāth. In addition, however, not an inconsiderable number of manuscripts and block prints were still and are being brought by private individuals to the NGMPP. Once access was gained to collections of Tibetica lying beyond the Bagmati Zone, expeditions were undertaken to such northern areas as Langthang, Helambu, Jomosom, Jumla and Junbesi, and from 1991 onwards also to remote areas such as Serang (Gorkha District) and Muchu (Humla District). With the opening of Dolpo future expeditions in this area are planned as well.

Mention must also be made of the Tibetan collection of the National Museum (Chauni), which the project was able to have transferred in 1990 to

the National Archives for microfilming. Of special interest in this collection of around 500 individual block prints and manuscripts are, among other things, the hitherto oldest block print of the *Theg mchog mdzod* of Klong-chen rab-'byams-pa (1308-1364), a rare manuscript copy of ritual texts ascribed to the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617-82) and an unknown biography of Padmasambhava rediscovered in Yang-le shod (present-day Parping) by the "treasure finder" sTag-sham Nus-Idan rdo-rje (17th century). For a report on these activities see Dr. F.K. Ehrhard, "New Accessions and Recent Findings in the Tibetan Collection of the National Archives", *Abhilekh*, no.9 (1990).

The legal codes kept in the National Archives were thoroughly examined and compared by Dr. Jean Fezas (France) during a study trip in 1990. The results of his research work were presented to the Nepalese public in a preliminary article: "The Nepalese Juridical System and Its Sources: A List of the *ain* Books Kept in the National Archives", *Abhilekh*, no. 8 (1990). Only a portion of these manuscripts, which comprise some 29 volumes, have been microfilmed by the project up to now.

On the manuscripts presented recently by private owners for microfilming in the Nepal Research Centre, two items may be mentioned: the collected material of the Regmi Research Series and a manuscript collection from Gūhyeśvarī (that of Padmanāth Paudel). Thus the work of the NGMPP continues to go on, and tasks still lie ahead to be done.

On the 27th of February 1991 the foundation stone for a microfilm building was laid on the premises of the National Archives. The house will provide adequate maintenance and

storage facilities for the films made under the NGMPP. With the completion of this building it is hoped that the collections of the National Archives can readily be consulted via microfilm, in surroundings offering proper research facilities to the interested public and Nepalese and foreign scholars.

Publications

The series entitled *Publications of the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project* is edited by the project's director-general, Prof. A. Wezler, in cooperation with the National Archives, Kathmandu. The first volume was prepared by one of the former representatives: A Concordance of H.P. Śāstri's Catalogue of the Durbar Library and the microfilms of the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project / Reinhold Grünendahl. A catalogue of palm-leaf and selected paper mss. belonging to the Durbar Library Nepal: vols. I und II / Hara Prasad Śāstri. -Stuttgart: Steiner Verl. Wiesbaden, 1989. (Publications of the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project; 1) (Verzeichnis der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland; Suppl.-Bd. 31)

For general information on the National Archives and document-holding institutions in Nepal see:

National History Guide Committee (Nepal), ed. Dr. S. Amatya

His Majesty's Government, Ministry of Finance, Department of Revenue (Record Section) and Office of the Comptroller General Kumari Chowk Gosara Treasury

Source Manual Series No.1, 1988

His Majesty's Government, Ministry of Defence; Royal Nepal Army Headquarters and His Majesty's Government, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Record

Section)

Source Manual Series No.2, 1988

Guthi Records and Accounts Office; The Civil Servants Record-keeping Office; Document Section - Charkhal (Misil Phat); The National Archives; The Central Library - Tribhuvan University; Centre of Nepal and Asian Studies; The Madan Puraskar Library; The National Library and the Keshar Library

Source Manual Series No.3, 1989

Dadeldhura, Doti, Bajura, Accham, Bajhang, Jumla, Mugu, Kalikot, Jajarkot, Surkhet, Dailekh, Salyan, Rolpa, Dang, Piuthan, Mustang, Myagdi, Baglung, Parvat, Argha Khanchi, Gulmi, Palpa, Kapilvastu, Tanahun, Lamjung, Shyangja, Nuwakot, Rasuwa, Dolakha, Udayapur, Bhojpur and Panchthar district.

Source Manual Series No.4, 1991