

ISA INTERNATIONAL GUEST LECTURE

CITY AND DEATH: ON PLACES AND PROCESSIONS IN BHAKTAPUR, NEPAL

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Bhaktapur is one of the three royal cities of the Kathmandu Valley, which till recently preserved a unique urban culture, with dense quarters centring on a rich public infrastructure of Hindu as well as Buddhist temples, stupas and a variety of aniconic shrines. In the early 1970s, the Newar society preserved a lifestyle characterised by social and spatial immobility. Based on these preconditions, every household was tied to spirit stones that absorbed ritual impurities originating from birth and death, and every household had a preconceived route to follow to one of the three cremation places beyond the city limits. Every family belonged to a group of 6 to 15 families who worshipped the same ancestor deity. These family groups then belonged to a larger entity that served as a funeral association. Parents and ancestors received food daily, the parents received offerings once a year and on certain occasions the family priest received offerings in the name of the deceased. Death and the dead thus marked daily life and punctuated the annual calendar, especially in the context of the collective staging of a farewell (Ghajjatra) in August to all those who had died during the preceding 12 months.



NIELS GUTSCHOW, born 1941 as the son of an architect in Hamburg. The architect and architectural historian completed his PhD on Japanese Cities in Darmstadt in 1973. Since then his life and research has had two centres: He publishes on urban space and ritual in South Asia and since 1971 has also been engaged in architectural conservation of the Newar urban culture of the Kathmandu Valley. From 2002 to 2004 he concentrated on death rituals, in collaboration with the indologist Axel Michaels, under the auspices of the Collaborative Research Centre "Dynamics of Ritual" (SFB 619). Since 1978 his research has also covered town planning in the wake of the Second World War, and the planning activities of German and Austrian planners as part of the "germanisation" of occupied Poland. Since 2004 he holds an Honorary Professorship at the South Asia Institute, Heidelberg. He lives and works in Abtsteinach (Germany) und Bhaktapur (Nepal).

