

## Foreword

This little book has grown out of a loose collection of materials for a summer school that was supposed to be held at the University of Marburg in August 2020, but which eventually had to be cancelled on account of the global Coronavirus outbreak. These materials originally consisted of extracts from the raw material for a comprehensive grammar of Classical Newari that I have been working on for the last two years, and that was originally conceived to serve as both grammar and textbook. For several reasons, I have decided to publish the material presented here separately, leaving the reference work to grow and gestate for some more years. Recent events have convinced me that there is, after all, some demand for a tool (however imperfect) for learning Classical Newari among students of South and Central Asian linguistics, history, and culture – both in Nepal and in the “West”.

In compiling this book, I have sought to anticipate the needs and qualifications of its potential readership, as well as the institutional framework for learning and teaching Classical Newari – or rather, the lack thereof: since Classical Newari is not a regular part of the academic curriculum, the book is primarily designed for self-study, although it can of course be used in the classroom as well. It does make certain demands on the learner that introductory textbooks do not usually make: First of all, it presupposes a certain familiarity with Indic scripts – more specifically, the **devanāgarī** script. This is based on the assumption that anyone wishing to learn Classical Newari can be expected to have some prior knowledge of Modern Newari, Sanskrit, and/or Nepali, all of which are usually printed in **nāgarī** characters. (The script most widely used in Classical Newari manuscripts, the so-called **nevārī** or **pracalita lipi**, will be introduced in this textbook.)\* To a somewhat lesser extent, it also presupposes a certain familiarity with linguistic terminology, which in light of the intended readership

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\*) Those who merely wish to acquire a working knowledge of Classical Newari grammar (e.g. for comparative purposes) can still use the book, since all paradigms, sample sentences, and reading passages are also provided in transcription (more on which below).

seems to be a fair assumption. Generally speaking, explanations have been kept to a minimum, all theoretical issues having been set aside for consideration in the reference grammar which I hope to present to the public some day in the not too distant future. Consequently, wherever I make statements that seem to contradict previous authorities, I have to crave the readers' indulgence as well as their trust that a linguistically sound justification will eventually be supplied – only not here, and not now.

A word has to be said, however, about the sources upon which this textbook draws. The first and foremost of these is, of course, Hans Jørgensen's *Grammar of the Classical Newari* published in Copenhagen in 1941. Despite its imperfections – inevitable in any pioneering work –, it is a remarkable feat of scholarship, and continues to be the standard against which any study of Classical Newari grammar has to be measured. When it comes to verb morphology, Jørgensen's work has been improved upon by the work of Tej Ratna Kansakar, and by Ulrike and Bernhard Kölver in their seminal 1978 article. The most valuable source for Classical Newari verb morphology, however, is not a grammar at all, but rather the *Dictionary of Classical Newari* published in Kathmandu in 2000, whose editors have made the felicitous decision to give full references (usually including sample sentences) for all verb forms found in their sources. The wealth of material contained in this indispensable work of reference is a still largely untapped reservoir – not least for a comprehensive study of the diachronic development of the Newari verb system, which continues to be an urgent desideratum. While the description of the Classical Newari verb system adopted in this textbook differs more or less radically from its predecessors, it is obviously greatly indebted to them.

The considerable uncertainties still pertaining to the diachrony of Classical Newari made it seem advisable to adopt a specific text as the corpus on which this textbook is based; I have chosen the (as yet unedited) Newari version of the *Vetālapañcaviṃśati*, the earliest dated manuscript of which was copied in the second half of the seventeenth century, and which fairly represents the (heavily Sanskritised) literary register of “mature” Classical Newari without any obvious archaisms, nor any admixture of Modern Newari forms. With few exceptions, the

sample sentences and sentences for exercise have been taken from three of the eleven manuscripts of this text that are currently at my disposal; a critical edition of the entire text is currently in preparation.

It should be pointed out that this book makes no pretensions to completeness in its grammatical description; any such pretension is necessarily precluded by the high degree of diachronic and synchronic variation of Classical Newari, and by the fact that the study of the language is, even eight decades after the publication of Jørgensen's *Grammar*, in many ways still in its infancy. I have, however, endeavoured to cover all grammatical phenomena encountered in the *Vetālapañcaviṃśati*. For phenomena not encountered in this text, I have relied on the references and examples given in Jørgensen's *Grammar* and in the *Dictionary of Classical Newari*.

In writing this book, I have received (at times much needed) encouragement from colleagues and friends, including Jürgen Hanneder (Marburg), Camillo Formigatti (Oxford), Sanyukta Shrestha (Pasa Puchah Guthi UK, London), and Astrid and Christof Zotter (both Heidelberg). Bastian Jantke (Heidelberg) read parts of an earlier draft of this book and made some very useful comments. Special thanks are due to Manik Bajracharya (Heidelberg), whose help in resolving some thorny issues in the Newari text and its translation has been invaluable. Kristina Münchow and Siegfried Schmitt of the Oriental Department at Staatsbibliothek Berlin have been extremely helpful and supportive throughout my research, and also in securing the rights for the illustrations used in this book. I am very grateful to Nicole Merkel-Hilf and Elizaveta Ilves of CrossAsia-eBooks for the kind and professional management of the publication. My greatest debt of gratitude, as always, is to my wife Goulia, without whose love, support, and patience this book would not have been written.

*Marburg, October 2020*