



Dr. Alex McKay

## **THE VIEW FROM THE PALACE** **THE SIKKIM ROYAL ARCHIVES**

With support from the British Library Endangered Archives Programme (funded by Arcadia and administered by the British Library), around 95,000 pages of historical documents from the former Himalayan kingdom of Sikkim will shortly be made available online. The documents are from the private archives of the Sikkimese royal family and date from around 1875 up to 1975. Thus they include both documents from the British colonial period (1888-1947) and the post-colonial period leading up to the “merger” with India in 1975.

This lecture will firstly describe the collection and the approach taken to classifying the material in it, before focussing on the insights to be gained from examination of the minute books of the “Ruling Council” for the first decades of colonial rule. This Council originally consisted of a small group of aristocrats nominated by the British Political Officer, John Claude White, who expected them to “rubber stamp” the decisions he made. But when the Chogyal (or Maharaja) of Sikkim was allowed to join the Council its character began to change and particularly after 1908, when Charles Bell replaced J.C. White, it took on a more representative character. The Council minutes shed considerable light on the process of transforming a “traditional” Buddhist kingdom into a modern autonomous state of colonial India, and the economic, cultural, and political aspects of that process. This period culminated in the brief reign of the Oxford-educated Buddhist incarnate Lama, Sidkeong Tulku.

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