

## News (continued)



## Folk gods, memorial stones, pastoral communities and temples – the digitisation of Günther-Dietz Sontheimer's slide collection

In 1977 Günther-Dietz Sontheimer (1934-1992) became a professor of the Religious History of South Asia with a special emphasis on Hinduism at the South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg, where he also taught traditional law, Marathi language and literature. During his thirty years of research in India he made more than 22,000 slides portraying the everyday life and rituals of ordinary people, peasants, pastoralist communities and ethnic minorities.

Edeltraud Bienek & Sonja Stark-Wild

THE OLDEST OF THESE PICTURES were taken in the late 1950s, the latest shortly before his death in 1992. When Sontheimer died, the library of the South Asia Institute obtained this collection alongside with his tape recordings, films and manuscripts. Now, after more than 15 years and funded by the Cluster of Excellence 'Asia and Europe in a Global Context – Shifting Asymmetries in Cultural Flows', the whole collection has been digitized and is now accessible through the image database HeidICON.

Sontheimer's major concern was to make evident the continuity, interrelation and mutual impact of classical high and folk culture. He used art, art history, archaeology, modern languages and dialects, written records as well as oral traditions to understand the culture and religious life of the 'common people', especially the pastoral communities of the Deccan plateau. Aiming to preserve the oral traditions endangered by India's modernization, he recorded, transcribed and translated songs, myths, legends and folk tales often with the help of then-modern media such as film and photography.

The slide collection can be divided into five areas, four of which reflect Sontheimer's major research foci:

1. 'Folk gods' of Maharashtra (and the surrounding states) and their origins, evolution and forms of worship. A major part of the collection – around 4.000 slides – is dedicated to the god *Khandoba* and his main temple at *Jejuri*. Other pictures show different places of worship and gods such as *Mhaskoba*, *Biroba*, *Dhuloba*, and *Vithoba*.
2. The everyday and religious life of semi-nomadic pastoral communities, particularly the Dhangars, their habitat, wanderings, religious feasts, ancestors and gods.
3. The dissemination, meaning, diversity and beauty of *memorial stones* for ancestors, heroes and *satis*.
4. Tribal communities of Madhya Pradesh, particularly in the district of Bastar, their religious feasts and practices, including different kinds of ancestor-, hero- and religious worship.

5. Temples, shrines, landscapes, towns and people in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Orissa and Goa.

The collection with its portrayals of rituals and religious feasts, pilgrimages, devotion and possession is of special interest for Indologists, anthropologists and scholars of comparative religion. Of iconographic importance are also bronzes, insignia, and depictions of gods, people, animals, plants, temples, shrines and memorial stones.

#### Search overview:

Please use the guest login of the database HeidICON in order to search the collection. Choose 'EXC Asia and Europe > EXC Sontheimer' from the drop down menu. After this one can make a free keyword search. The category 'title/object' is useful for specific search queries, such as places, festivals and years, names of deities, the date of a festival according to the South Indian lunar calendar as well as subject headings.

The following lists are also useful for searching the Sontheimer Collection in HeidICON:

- Alphabetical Index of Place Names in the Sontheimer Slide Collection
- Catalog to the Sontheimer Slide Collection in Numerical Order
- List of Deities depicted in the Sontheimer Slide Collection
- Front door of HeidICON
- Direct link to EXC Sontheimer in HeidICON
- EXC Sontheimer introduction and contact information

#### For further information contact:

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## Read it!

### A poem for writers

read again your Words

a Stranger to Yourself, with Best Intentions

discover the Relationships

Unintended Offspring, Orphan Facts

and Broken Promises

sleep on it

your Unmade Bed

let Dreams come, welcome Serendipity

avoid Pointless Flirtation

acknowledge Friends and Sources

Contradiction and Failure

can make You strong

face Them fairly, use Them well

Respect may foster

Unexpected Resolutions

imagine Future Readers

be remembered well, if at all

find your Own Way, with Words

then read it, again, and again

before The Letting Go



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