

VERENIGING 'VRIENDEN VAN HET INSTITUUT KERN'

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We are pleased to announce the next Friends of the Kern Institute lecture, entitled

Kṛṣṇa, the butter-thief from North to South, Back and Forth
by Charlotte Schmid (École Française d'Extrême-Orient, Paris)
Thursday 22nd June 2017, 16.00h—17.30h

Time: 16.00h—17.30h, drinks afterwards

Place: Leiden University, Matthias de Vrieshof 3, room 104 (“The Verbarium”)

Charlotte Schmid

Charlotte Schmid is Director of Studies of the École Française d'Extrême-Orient (French School of the Far East). After working in Northern India on the earliest known figurative representations of Kṛṣṇa in the region of Mathura, between the 1st and 3rd century AD, she spent several years in the Tamil-speaking South. Poring over inscriptions and sculptures produced during the Pallava and the Cōla period (6th—13th century) and reading texts with the help of the pandits at the centre of the ÉFEO in Pondicherry enabled her to produce her most recent books: *Sur le chemin de Kṛṣṇa: la flûte et ses voies* and *La Bhakti d'une reine* as author, and *The Archaeology of Bhakti I, Mathura and Madurai, Back and Forth* as editor, in association with Emmanuel Francis (CNRS).

Her research is thus divided between two cultural spaces in India, the North and the South of the peninsula, between which have always been woven links that she seeks to define more precisely.



Kṛṣṇa, the butter-thief from North to South, Back and Forth

Kṛṣṇa as a butter-thief is one of the most well-known and most represented of the episodes of the legend of Kṛṣṇa today. This theme is peculiarly popular in the North of India: Kṛṣṇa as a *mākhān-cora*, “butter-thief”, frequently appears in the *Sūrsāgar*, a poetic anthology composed in Brajbhāṣā in the first



half of the 16th c. and prominent in the struggle for the recognition of Hindi as a literary language in the 1920s and 1930s. However, the first known textual data of this motive are to be found in texts composed in Tamil, a Dravidian language, in the South of the Indian peninsula, probably around the 7th c. At the same time, the motif is developed in another Tamil corpus, the *Tiviyappirapantam* (TP), composed between the 7th c. and the 9th c.

The role that played the South of India played in the development of the legend of Kṛṣṇa is largely ignored. In order to stress its importance, I will focus in this lecture on a survey of the development of the motive of the butter-thief from the first known Tamil poems till the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, a text composed in Sanskrit, known all over the Indian peninsula and which may be held responsible for the spread of the motif. We will read Tamil and Sanskrit poetry but also analyze the first known stone representations of Kṛṣṇa as a “butter-thief”, dated of the 5th—6th c., which have been found in North India.

Furthermore, because of the lack of a chronological correspondence between texts and stone-reliefs in the two zones of the South and the North of India, the concept of a folk, oral culture for the emergence of the motive arose. However, there are links with literary and religious figures that have nothing in common with a folk world, like Agni who devours the oblation of butter and the Kṛṣṇa of the *Bhagavadgīta*, who devours the world. This leads us to question the concept of a folk background to explain the emergence of the motive in Tamil texts.

