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Anna Seidel in Memoriam



Not only pen and typewriter, but also a camera constituted part of Anna Seidel's scholarly equipment, here in use at an outdoor goma ceremony of the Daigoji-based branch of Shugendō, Spring 1989.

Anna Seidel in Memoriam

**Berlin, 31st July 1938*

†San Francisco, 29th September 1991

The international sinological community in general and students of Chinese religion in particular have lost one of their most prominent figures with the passing of Anna Seidel. Known by her colleagues and friends as a resourceful and enthusiastic scholar whose interests covered a wide area pertaining to Chinese and East Asian religion as well as popular faith, Anna was a trailblazer in the true sense of the word. In addition she was a ceaseless fighter for the recognition of female scholarship. Herself a victim of male chauvinism in the academic world, Anna never resorted to self-pity, but through the high quality of her own work she clearly showed that a woman can be as excellent a scholar as any man. Nevertheless, Anna came down hard on so-called “feminist scholarship” as an academic discipline in its own right, insisting that true scholarship should always be judged by its thoroughness and quality, and not by the author’s sex.

Anna Katharina Seidel was born in Berlin to Dr. Hans Joachim Seidel and Esther Maria Olden, both deceased, the younger sister of Dr. Michael Seidel and of Marielle Knaggs (deceased), into a Europe on the brink of war. Those inclined to seek omens and parallels will have little difficulty in seeing in the circumstances of her birth and early life—her parents were in constant peril of discovery by the Nazis, harbouring as they did a Jewish friend of the family—precursors of the tensions and struggles which she herself was to be subjected in both her professional and her private life. That her passing came at a time when she had once again overcome a critical attack on her health and was bubbling with ideas and hope will heighten the poignancy which seemed to be at the centre of her life: a tension which in the case of the noble produces strength and beauty, but where lesser people cannot but be dragged down by the quirks of fate.

In 1942 her family moved from Berlin to the south of Germany, to Bavaria. Her secondary schooling was conducted in Germany and in the United States and her university education in her chosen field, Chinese, began in Munich (1958–60), followed by a year in Hamburg (1961). At the end of 1961 she

continued her studies at the University of Paris, beginning now to specialize in the area which was to become the centre of her academic interests: the ancient religions of China, in particular Daoism. She worked under the supervision of Professors Max Kaltenmark—to whom the fourth and fifth issues of her *Cahiers d'Extrême Asie* were dedicated—and R. A. Stein, at the Fifth Section (Sciences religieuses) of the École Pratique des Hautes Études. In 1967 she submitted her thesis, *La divinisation de Lao-tseu dans le taoïsme des Han* for the *diplôme de l'E.P.H.E.* In the following year she submitted an augmented version of this work for her doctorate, and it was published in 1969 as Volume LXXI of the *Publications de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient*.

The quality of this early work was such that subsequent to her gaining her doctorate she was elected to the École Française d'Extrême Orient and stationed in Kyoto. Here, under the chief editorship of her long-standing colleague and close friend, Dr. Hubert Durt, she was to assist in the restarting of the *Hōbōgirin* project at the Rinkōin in the traditionally very important Rinzaï Zen temple, Shōkokujī, just north of the Imperial Palace in Kyoto. Until her passing, she collaborated in the writing and editing of this mammoth project, which—despite its slowness—has already furnished much of lasting value for scholars in the field of Far Eastern Buddhism. As an illustration of the quality of this work, attention should be drawn to the fact that Fascicule VI (1983) was awarded the Shinmura Izuru Prize for reference works published in Japan. Several of Anna's articles for the *Hōbōgirin* will appear in forthcoming issues.

Her work, however, was not restricted to this one encyclopedia: she did in fact contribute to several, one of her best known contributions, “Taoism”, appearing in the fifteenth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1974). This introductory piece is generally regarded as a manifesto of the new approach to Daoism that in the last two decades has done much to balance and correct our view of Chinese culture. Shortly before her death she published a booklet which set out her mature understanding of Daoism as the “unofficial high religion of China”, as she put it. Despite a number of inexcusable editorial and printer's errors (which she was powerless to correct), *Taoismus, die inoffizielle Hochreligion Chinas* (Tokyo: O.A.G., 1990) will remain for some time to come one of the best introductions to Daoism in the religious culture of China.

Anna was renowned not only in her native Europe, but also in the United States, where, as mentioned above, she had indeed also received an important part of her education. She was thus invited to the universities of Hawaii (1978) and of California at Santa Barbara (1988) to teach the history of ancient Chinese religions as Visiting Professor. An indication of her dedication to the scholarly pursuit may be seen in her declining of offers of permanent positions in the States, valuing as she did the freedom for research which her post in Kyoto gave her.

Perhaps one of the most visible traces of Anna's life and work is the internationally renowned bilingual (French-English) journal, *Cahiers d'Extrême Asie*, which she founded in 1984. To date six issues have appeared, each weightier (both literally and in the quality of the contributions!) than its predecessor. Her "Chronicle of Taoist Studies in the West, 1950–90", which was included in the last issue which she was able to see through the press, is a masterly review of work done by Western scholars in that difficult field. Volume 6 has just been published: Anna was able to follow the essential stages of its completion before her final illness, but the immediate—and sad—impact of the volume lies in the various testimonies of her colleagues on the *Cahiers* to her work and her person. What is important for us as editors of *Studies in Central & East Asian Religions* is that she gave freely of her experience with her publishing venture, and was tremendously encouraging in her support for our own journal. We are indeed honoured that Anna saw our journal not as a competitor, but as a complement to her own efforts with the *Cahiers*.

Changes in her conditions of work began to affect Anna, and long-standing problems with her liver also began to rear their ugly head again from November 1990 onwards. On a family visit to the United States in the summer of the following year she was seized by a violent haemorrhage on the 4th August. Emergency treatment was successful and for the first time for some years she was beginning to feel a great deal better. However, in the midst of this recovery she contracted a virus, which in the course of a few days rendered the foregoing hope and enthusiasm nigh on meaningless. She died at the Pacific Medical Center of San Francisco on the 29th September 1991.

Although her own work tended to focus on the early history of Daoism, she also worked on the Lingbao tradition, funeral practices, mountain cults in Japan (to lecture on which subject she graced the 1990 SBS seminar on "Japanese Religion on the Ground"), and religious art in China. Shortly before her death she compiled the most comprehensive survey to date of contemporary scholarship on Daoist studies, including all the important scholarly contributions to the field written over the past two decades. Despite her time-consuming job as the chief editor of the *Cahiers*, which has become one of the flagships in the study of East Asian cultural and intellectual history, Anna was a prolific writer. In addition she always took time out of her busy schedule to attend scholarly meetings and frequently went on lecture tours.

Despite the fact that Anna's scholarly writings and work with the *Cahiers* stand as shining monuments to her commitment to Daoist studies in particular and East Asian religions in general, to those who knew and worked with her, her role as a friend, benefactor, and teacher is bound to overshadow even these achievements by far. To many of the younger scholars who benefitted from her friendship, Anna was a constant stimulus, both as a person whose criticism was welcome and fair, but also for the genuine kindness she always showed us. She shared her knowledge with us freely, let us borrow

books from her extensive library, and would even offer shelter in her house in Kyoto. Not only that, she would often go out of her way to offer her support, and in numerous ways assisted and encouraged us in our academic pursuits. Indeed, her unassuming and unconscious modesty led her on occasion to the surprising statement that she often regarded younger scholars as far greater authorities on aspects of Daoism than she could ever hope to be!

Although Anna is no longer with us in the flesh, and her immortal spirit has long since taken its place in Shangqing, the fond memories of her person will always remain with us, reassuring us with the knowledge of having been blessed with something valuable and lasting.

(HHS, IAK)

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transmission of the Law); “Den’e” (the transmission of the robe), etc., for *Hōbōgin*, Fascicules VIII and IX.

In Preparation

Handbuch der taoistischen Mythologie.

“Étude sur les inscriptions funéraires et les contrats d’achat de tombeaux sous les Han et les Six Dynasties”, in preparation for *T’oung Pao*.



Photo: IAK

Although the modern Japanese Shingon counterpart of the traditional Indian three-dimensional maṇḍala is far more of a permanent structure than its cow-dung based predecessor, the underlying principle—that of constructing an exteriorized reflection of the teachings embodied in the ritual—is the same.

(IAK)