

## In Memoriam

Anna Seidel

(1939–1991)

The year 1991 was darkened by the loss, on 29 September, of Dr. Anna Katharina Seidel, a member of the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient in Kyoto, founder of the *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie*, and, to those who had the privilege of knowing her, an example of uncompromising honesty and profound human kindness.

Anna Seidel was convalescing after a successful liver transplant at the Pacific Medical Center in San Francisco when she suffered a fatal Epstein-Barr viral infection. She rests under the willows of Skyview Memorial Park in Vallejo next to Edward Schafer (1913–1991), a colleague and close friend whose wife, Phyllis Brooks Schafer, aided by Ursula Angelika Cedzich, cared for her until the last moment. Both were witnesses to the stoic energy and defiant humor with which Anna Seidel faced the extreme hardships of her final months.

Anna Seidel, born on 31 July 1938 in Berlin, was raised to confront hatred and cowardice with quiet courage – her parents had given asylum to a Jewish friend, Vally Wolffenstein, and only the fall of the Nazi regime put an end to the constant danger that had faced them. Most of her school years she spent in Bayern, Germany, where her family had moved in 1942. In the year 1954–1955 she stayed in Virginia, where she was initiated into American life by her uncle, Peter Olden, who had emigrated in 1929 and raised a critical voice concerning the developments in Germany before, during, and after the War. Back in Germany she soon dedicated herself to Chinese studies at the University of Munich (1958–1960) and the University of Hamburg (1960–1961), where she studied under Herbert Franke and Wolfgang Franke. A sense of affinity with the subject may have underlaid her decision to specialize in Taoist studies; she moved to Paris, where research in this field had reached a high level under the professorship

of Henri Maspero (who died in Buchenwald in 1945) and his successors Max Kaltenmark and Rolf A. Stein, both of whom had left Germany under Nazi pressure. Kaltenmark and Stein, to whom Anna Seidel went to study with in 1961, provided her with an excellent example of intellectual probity in their strict separation of objective scholarship and personal opinion.

Taoism was for Anna Seidel not a vague *wu wei* but a philosophy of life, and this prompted her lifelong efforts to replace mystical ambiguities with documented, objective information in a readable form. Her work—be it “La divinisation de Lao-tseu dans la taoïsme des Han” (doctoral thesis, Paris 1969), “Taoism” (*Encyclopædia Britannica*, 1974 ed.), “Buying one’s way to Heaven: The celestial treasury in Chinese religions” (review article, *History of Religions* 17, 1978, pp. 419–31), or “Chronicle of Taoist studies in the West: 1950–1990” (*Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie* 5, 1989–1990, pp. 223–347), “Kokuhō: Note à propos du terme ‘trésor national’ en Chine et au Japon” (*BEFEO* 69, 1981, pp. 229–61), to mention only a few of her thirty-nine published books and articles—developed as a continuous stream of new questions, of new answers updated and critically revised for further investigation, and of comparative perspectives illustrating the wealth and depth of specific concepts as opposed to dull generalities. Princeton University Press intends to publish in the near future a selection of her articles and a complete bibliography (already available at the Hōbōgirin Institute).

“Des Taoismus war die organisierte Hochreligion, die *unabhängig* von bürokratischen Staatsapparat und *wesensverschieden* von der ‘Volksreligion’, die Mentalität sowohl der Elite wie des Volkes zwei Jahrtausende hindurch geprägt hat. In diesem Sinne ist der Taoismus die inoffizielle Hochreligion Chinas” (“Taoismus, die inoffizielle Hochreligion Chinas” *OAG aktuell* 41, Tokyo 1990, p. 3). It was this mentality—incorporating both the “elite” and the “ordinary”—that she focused on, transcending abstract metaphysics and rituals, the intricacies of textual analysis, the (ever loose) limits of Taoism, and even the geographical boundaries of China itself.

This brought her to Japan in 1969, where as a member of

the Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient she collaborated in writing and editing the Buddhist Encyclopedia *Hōbōgirin*. Back in the late 1920s, the original objective of this encyclopedia had been to help scholars of Indian Buddhism find their way through the bulky wealth of scriptures no longer extant in Sanskrit but preserved in Chinese translation (and in Tibetan, which would have required even more lifetimes to investigate). Paul Demiéville (1894–1979), the anonymous author of nearly all the articles in the first three volumes (which he humbly termed “fascicules”), soon expanded the project to include the historical dimensions of Northern Buddhism, encompassing the Buddhist conquests of China, Korea, and Japan, or more precisely, the original development of Chinese Buddhism and its overwhelming influence on Korea and Japan.

Anna Seidel was neither a Sanskritist nor a Buddhologist in the strict (and often narrow) sense. She was interested in philosophical and religious thought, whether Taoist or Buddhist, inasmuch as it influenced, and still reflects, specific aspects in the mentality and the life of people. This is expressed in many of the entries to the *Hōbōgirin*: morning and evening meetings in Zen monasteries (*chōsamboshin*, fasc. V, pp. 407–20); the casting of cult images in brass and other alloys (*chūjaku*, pp. 499–505); the Indian rite of cremation (*dabi*, fasc. VI, pp. 573–85) versus the Chinese rule of burial; ghee (*daigo*, pp. 640–51) as a metaphor for the most excellent wisdom, notwithstanding the native Chinese abhorrence of all milky products. All of these involve the social, material, and literary implications of Buddhism. Ready for publication are entries on *dembō* (the transmission of the Law), *den'e* (the monastic robe), *danda* (the scepter of Yama, king of the nether regions), and *Datsueba* (the old shrew who takes off the clothes of the deceased). The latter two articles show Anna Seidel's growing interest in the mythology of hells and – reading between the lines – her profound sympathy for those whose sufferings she shared almost as a *migawari-Jizō*. She visited Tateyama many times and planned a monograph on this fascinating site – the T'ai shan of Japan – where infernal topology is transposed to a holy mountain.

Her self-critical attitude and almost instinctive aversion to pedantry may have justified in her a certain reluctance to stand on a professorial podium. Yet her lectures at the University of Hawaii-Manoa (1978), the University of California-Santa Barbara (1988), and the Evans-Wentz lectures at Stanford (1988) influenced not a few of her students in their choice of a field. Sad circumstances, which we would prefer to erase from memory, prevented her from accepting an invitation to Princeton in 1990. Indeed, she was a teacher without a chair, but certainly not without an audience. She had a sharp sense in discerning those students who were eager to work. Those happy few were sure to find in Anna Seidel a keen and generous preceptor, and, for the steadiest ones, a very close friend.

“In creating the *Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie*, our intention is not to initiate yet another journal for specialists in Asian studies but rather to offer something like an annual newsletter that is directed towards a broader audience and that serves to communicate, as rapidly and cheaply as possible, some of the information our privileged location in Kyoto permits us to collect.” However modest this announcement in the inaugural issue (1985), her “newsletter” gives detailed information on current research and recent publications in the field of East Asian thought and religions. The newsletter proper now constitutes only the latter third of each issue, following a series of outstanding articles that demonstrate how enthusiastically scholars have responded to the appeal of a rapid yet very carefully edited publication. Anna Seidel would not have taken on such a burden if there was no objective need. She *did* assume it in a deep sense of personal responsibility to both authors and readers, and would certainly not allow her untimely death to be the end of what she felt to be her task, and is now ours.

**Robert Duquenne**

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