

Jaina Studies

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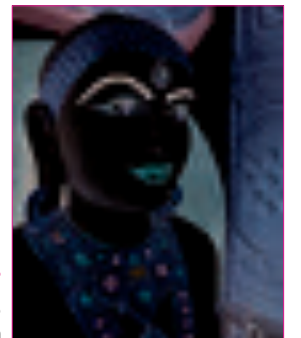
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On the Cover

Āyodhyāpuram Tīrtha, 2 January 2023

Photo: I. Schoon



Adelheid Mette (12.12.1934 – 03.03.2023)

Jens-Uwe Hartmann

The death of Adelheid Mette marks the end of an era in German Indology. As a student of Ludwig Alsdorf (1904–1978), she had taken up the research on Jainism founded by Walther Schubring (1881–1969) in Hamburg and continued by his successor, Alsdorf. The investigation of this religion, especially of its early literature, and also the encounter with its contemporary representatives, remained a matter close to her heart until the end. At the same time, she will be remembered for the astonishing breadth of her research, which began with the lyrical verses in the Euripidean choral songs, extended to Indology in Vedic studies as well as in Buddhist literature, and even reached as far as Tibetology in the songs of the Tibetan saint Milarepa. Mette's interests were not only quite broad; no less remarkable is the fact that she pursued all of her studies with an exemplary level of rigor and perfection.

Born in 1934 in Belgard on the bank of the Persante River in the then province of Pomerania, she was the first of three children of a Protestant pastor's family. Her youth was marked by the Third Reich and the consequences of World War II. After a dramatic flight from Pomerania shortly before the end of the war, the family found a new home in Greifswald. Immediately after graduating from high school in 1953, however, Mette left the German Democratic Republic and went to Hamburg, where she began studying Classical Philology in the winter semester of 1953/54, while also taking up related subjects such as Classical Archaeology, Philosophy, Ancient History, and Indo-European Linguistics. A first consequence of these studies was her meeting Hans Joachim Mette (1906–1986), then a *Privatdozent* (lecturer) and later professor of Classical Philology, whom she married the following year. In 1959 Mette received her doctorate from Bruno Snell (1896–1986), an important representative of Classical Philology, with a dissertation on "The Aiolian Meters in the Dramas of Euripides."¹

That same year, she began attending classes at the Seminar for the Culture and History of India, initially with the aim of deepening her knowledge of Indo-European language history and metrics. There she met Alsdorf, who, as she herself wrote in a private *curriculum vitae*, "promoted his field not only by his admirable connoisseurship of Indian languages and branches of literature, but also by his personal great love and affection for the country and peoples of India."² His endorsement resulted in Mette's rapid turn to Indology, not least to Middle Indian as preserved in the literature of Jainism. A major result of this preoccupation was her study of the Jaina monks' alms rounds as described in the *Oha-nijjutti*, which she used

¹ "Die aiolischen Maße in den Dramen des Euripides"

² "...nicht nur durch seine bewundernswerte Kennerschaft indischer Sprachen und Literaturzweige, sondern auch durch seine persönliche große Liebe und Zuneigung zu dem Land und den Völkern Indiens für sein Fachgebiet warb."



Adelheid Mette (1934-2023) at home, 27.11.2017.

for her *Habilitation* in 1972 and published in 1974, in the renowned series of the Academy of Sciences and Literature in Mainz.³

This was a very fruitful period: Only a year before, Mette had published a very interesting comparative study in the same series. She examined Indian accounts of the foundation of culture and their relationship to the legend of the ages,⁴ in which, starting from the motifs of ascendancy and decadence in Greco-Roman philosophy and literature, she discussed the Indian parallels, focussing on the Jainist tradition as preserved in the *Vasudevahinḍi* of Saṅghadāsa and especially in the *Āvaśyaka-niryukti* with the commentary tradition that accompanies it.

In 1973, Dieter Schlingloff appointed the young *Privatdozentin* to the position of Assistant Professor at the Institute of Indology and Iranian Studies at the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich. In 1978, she was awarded the title of adjunct professor, and just two years later, in 1980, received a lifetime appointment as "Professor of Middle Indian Languages at the University of Munich." Here Mette continued her research work, but at the same time developed an intensive teaching activity, which was characterized not least by the fact that all ancient Indian language layers were covered in the same way, no matter whether it was Vedic, Jaina-Prakrit, epigraphic Sanskrit or Buddhist Pali. As she was not primarily concerned with using the lessons as a handy preparation for own publications, she was always willing to tailor her teaching to the

³ Mette 1974.

⁴ Mette 1973.

needs of the students. One example was Vedic: Whole generations of students will gratefully remember her exciting introductions to the reading of the *R̥gveda* and other ancient Indian works of the same period. Although she had also mastered this specific language, she did not express it through publications, if one leaves aside her last paper on *yoj* and *yoga*,⁵ in which she also draws on Vedic material.

Motivated by her extreme intellectual curiosity and philological interest in the source materials, Mette began to delve into two very different areas using original documents. The first was the Gilgit manuscripts, named after their find-spot in northern Pakistan, a collection of Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts dating from the 6th to 8th centuries. After gaining an overview of the collection, she turned primarily to the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*, an important work of Mahāyāna Buddhism, which she edited in comparison with its Nepalese version and examined in a series of individual studies.⁶ At the same time, she began collecting manuscripts and printed editions of the various versions of Milarepa's hagiography. The quintessential Tibetan saint and ascetic, Milarepa is famous for his songs. Mette used these songs as the basis for a comparison of the different versions, thereby shedding light on the extremely complex tradition, and countering the then still widespread notion of the "Hundred Thousand Songs" as a unified composition. It is to be regretted that her investigations were reflected in only one paper,⁷ for even this one contribution reveals how deeply and thoroughly she had delved into the difficult subject matter.

In 1987 Mette was offered the chair of Indology at the Westphalian Wilhelms University of Münster, and in 1988 she accepted, an appointment which she held until her retirement in 2000. Her interest in the post was not only on account of an opportunity to lead an institute, but also the chance to work with Bansidar Bhatt (01.06.1929–04.09.2016), a Jaina scholar who

had come to the Institute in Münster in 1985.⁸ While there, she wrote another book on Jainism, but this time with the stated aim of going beyond the narrow confines of an intra-academic philological perspective and to bring the religion of the Jina in its written testimonies to the attention of a wider circle of readers.⁹ She offered a detailed introduction to the central ideas of this religion and, in appealing translations, excerpts from the scriptures, which she provided with brief commentaries and used for illustrating important aspects of the teachings. This book found a significantly expanded continuation in the volume that Mette, long after her retirement, contributed to the well-known series published by the Verlag der Weltreligionen.¹⁰ As with the previous publication, the aim here was to make the Jain religion comprehensible and bring it closer to a non-indologically educated reading public on the basis of extensively annotated written testimonies.

While still in Münster, Mette was honored on her 65th birthday with a *Festschrift*, which also contains a complete bibliography up to that time.¹¹ After her retirement, she found it quite painful that it had not been possible to save the Department of Indology at the University of Münster from closure. On the other hand, this made it easier for her to return to Munich, where she seamlessly continued her cherished university teaching at the now renamed Institute of Indology and Tibetology. Since she was able to locate her classes outside the relatively rigid BA and MA curricula, she was always willing to accommodate special requests of advanced students, and for this, too, she will be remembered with profound gratitude. Very quickly, she not only became an important contact person, in equal measure for professors, staff, and students, but also played an active role in supervising a whole series of theses, especially several doctoral dissertations.

Unsurprisingly, given her own dissertation topic,

8 Krümpelmann, Kornelius. "Bansidhar Bhatt (1.6.1929 – 4.9.2016)." *Jaina Studies, Newsletter of the Centre of Jaina Studies* 12 (2017) 47-48.

9 Mette 1991.

10 Mette 2010.

11 Chojnacki, Hartmann, Tschannerl 2000.

5 Mette 2015.

6 Mette 1997.

7 Mette 1976.



Winners of the The Prākṛta Jñānabhāratī International Award: (Right to left) Adelheid Mette, Rajaram Jain, and Nalini Balbir, Śraṇabelagoḷa, 14.10.2010. Photo: Luitgard Soni. (See also: Soni, Jayandra. "Five in One: A Report on Jaina Events in Karnataka." *Jaina Studies, Newsletter of the Centre of Jaina Studies* 6 (2011) 18-19.)

Mette's first Indological paper was devoted to a metrical phenomenon.¹² Questions of metrics preoccupied her throughout her scholarly career, and she was always happy to offer advice and assistance in solving metrical problems. During my own work, I have never known anyone with such a fine ear for linguistic rhythms and such a comprehensive knowledge of Indian metrics. Several times I tried to get her to write at least a short manual to pass on her comprehensive knowledge to the next generation. Unfortunately, I did not succeed in warming her up to it, but that was again characteristic of her: a manual was simply no challenge, not something that would have required clever thinking and opened up new insights.

In recent years, age began to increasingly take its toll. It was especially sad to watch her, who had such a great love of language and languages and who could effortlessly speak in wonderful phrases ready for print, slowly lose her speech until she was finally unable to talk at all. On 3 March 2023, Adelheid Mette died in a nursing home in Ottobrunn near Munich. She will be very much missed by many, not only her former students, but also colleagues and friends.

Jens-Uwe Hartmann, retired, is the former chair of the Department of Indology at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich.

¹² Mette 1973.



Mette in Mysore, during the conference *Jainism through the Ages*, 8-10 October 2010. (Photo:Luitgard Soni)



Mette consults with her student, Ruixuan Chen, 15.8.2019. (Photo: Lijuan Lin)

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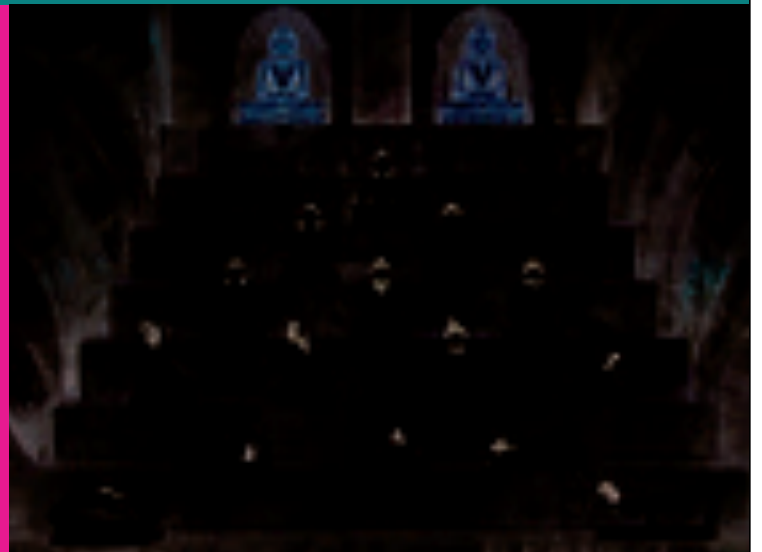
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Design
Janet Leigh Foster

Printed by Calderstone Printers, Tadworth

For information on the Centre please consult the Centre website:
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ISSN 2059-416X



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