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In memoriam Ulrich Braukämper (1944–2018)

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Personalia

Academic News

Michael Knibb Awarded the British Academy Edward Ullendorff Medal

The Edward Ullendorff Medal of the British Academy ‘for scholarly distinction and achievements in the field of Semitic Languages and Ethiopian Studies’, established thanks to the generous support of Edward Ullendorff’s widow, Dina, was awarded in 2019 to Professor Michael Knibb FBA (Samuel Davidson Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Studies, King’s College London) for his significant contribution to the field of the Ethiopic Bible (<https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/prizes-medals/edward-ullendorff-medal>).

In memoriam Ulrich Braukämper (1944–2018)

JON ABBINK, African Studies Centre Leiden

The news of the death, on 26 October 2018, of Ulrich Braukämper, professor emeritus of ethnology at the Institut für Ethnologie (Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology) of the Georg-August-Universität in Göttingen, came as a shock to the community of Ethiopian studies scholars. He was just 74 and still very active. Braukämper was one of the most notable German figures in the fields of anthropology and ethnology, as well as in Ethiopian and African studies, for over forty years, and will be greatly missed.

Ulrich Braukämper was born on 1 January 1944 in Albaum, Germany, in the present-day community of Kirchhündem in the federal state of Saarland state. After his high school education at the gymnasium in Altenhündem, Lennestadt, he went on to study ethnology at the Universität zu Köln

(University of Cologne), with prehistory, sociology, and oriental studies as minor subjects. Among his professors were Helmut Petri and Helmut Straube. He obtained his PhD degree at the University of Cologne in 1969. His doctoral thesis was not about Ethiopia but about the Cameroon–Nigeria border area, specifically, the history of Islam in Adamawa. This study was not based on fieldwork but on all the relevant secondary literature and was published as *Der Einfluss des Islam auf die Geschichte und Kulturentwicklung Adamawas: Abriss eines afrikanischen Kulturwandels*, Studien zur Kulturkunde, 26 (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GmbH, 1970).

In 1969 he joined the Frobenius-Institut (FI) in Frankfurt am Main, one of the most important post-war German centres for African ethnology and cultural anthropology. At the time, positions at the institute did not carry teaching obligations and one could devote all one's time to research. In the 1970s Braukämper did field research in southern Ethiopia, as part of a wider project initiated by FI director, Prof. Eike Haberland, on the Hadiyya and Kambaata peoples, and, later, on Ethiopia's various Islamic communities and cultural traditions. In addition, he made forays into research on the Sidaama and the East Oromo. After the Revolution of 1974 in Ethiopia, the conditions for fieldwork by Western researchers became much less congenial. From 1980 to 1988—with interruptions—Braukämper, by that time forbidden to enter Ethiopia, was mostly active in Sudan. Here he became scientific director of the Ethnographic Museum in Khartoum. After his return to Germany in 1988, he did his *Habilitation* at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich in 1990 (started under Helmut Straube and completed under Johannes W. Raum), and was an associate researcher there while still working in Frankfurt. In 1995 he was appointed professor of ethnology at the Georg-August-Universität in Göttingen, where he was also curator of the Ethnologische Sammlung (The Ethnographic Collection) exhibitions on Africa. He retired in 2009.

Braukämper was a man of broad interests and wide experience. His track record in field research since 1970 was very impressive. It covered both East and West Africa, including Sudan, southern Ethiopia, Nigeria (Borno), northern Cameroon, and Burkina Faso. He spent a total of twelve years abroad. He often did pioneering research, on ethnohistory, Muslim religious culture, and pastoralist societies, with a deep and sincere interest in the people studied, and he also stimulated students to go to areas where he had worked. In Nigeria and Burkina Faso in the 1980s he did fieldwork on human–environmental interactions in savannah areas. Unfortunately, in some of these areas (north-east Nigeria and adjacent Chad and Cameroon) fieldwork is no longer possible today due to insecurity and societal breakdown.

In his academic practice Braukämper was known for his disciplined style of hard work and intensive research. He reported on it in a substantial number of monographs, (co-)edited books, chapters, and journal contributions. Two major ethnohistorical monographs focused particularly on the Ethiopian Hadiyya, hitherto little studied. The first was his path-breaking *Geschichte der Hadiyya Süd-Äthiopiens: Von den Anfängen bis zur Revolution 1974*, *Studien zur Kulturkunde*, 50 (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GmbH, 1980), of which an English edition came out in 2012.¹ The second was an impressive study of cultural recovery, on the old Hadiyya religion: *Fandaanano: The Traditional Socio-Religious System of the Hadiyya in Southern Ethiopia*, *Aethiopistische Forschungen*, 80 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014). With Tilahun Mishago, he also published *Praise and Teasing: Narrative Songs of the Hadiyya in Southern Ethiopia*, *Sonderschriften des Frobenius-Instituts*, 13 (Frankfurt am Main: Frobenius-Institut, 1999). Braukämper's equally thorough study on the related Kambaata people appeared in 1983 (*Die Kambata: Geschichte und Gesellschaft eines süd-äthiopischen Bauernvolkes*, *Studien zur Kulturkunde*, 65 (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1983)). His work on Islam in Ethiopia was carried out from an historical and ethnological perspective, treating subjects like Muslim state-formation processes on the eastern fringe of Ethiopia from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries, Muslim shrines in the Harär area, the famous *Šayḥ* Ḥusayn of Bale shrine, and the Islamization of the Arsi Oromo. His book of collected essays on these subjects (*Islamic History and Culture in Southern Ethiopia: Collected Essays*, *Göttinger Beiträge zur Ethnologie*, 9 (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2002)) came out in 2002, with a second edition in 2004. Other noteworthy contributions by Braukämper concerned the ethnology of southern Ethiopia, for instance religious syncretism, food taboos, Sidaama 'ethnogenesis', and Oromo traditions of origin. But Braukämper also published on Sudan (on Darfur, on the Baggara pastoralists, and on migrations in the East Sudanic zone) and West Africa (for example on the Fulani people), as well as on wider contemporary and African studies issues, as is evident from his edited collection on globalization (with Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin)² and from his last book (2015) on anti-colonial resistance in Africa at the time of World War I.

¹ U. Braukämper, *A History of the Hadiyya in Southern Ethiopia*, tr. G. Krause, *Aethiopistische Forschungen*, 77 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012).

² B. Hauser-Schäublin and U. Braukämper, eds, *Ethnologie der Globalisierung: Perspektiven kultureller Verflechtungen*, *Ethnologische Paperbacks* (Berlin: Reimer, 2002).

Braukämper's ethnological interest was strongly empirical and descriptive, but his approach was also predominantly a historicizing one, not determined by a particular theoretical school in anthropology. This orientation, in part a result of the reigning atmosphere at the FI where he worked (and where, as he later said, 'scepticism regarding contemporary theoretical mainstreams prevailed'),³ is evident in all his major works on the Hadiyya, on the Kambaata, and on Islam in Sudan and Ethiopia. Historical ethnology was indeed well-established at the FI when he started work there in 1969, but Braukämper had no dogmatic theoretical attachment to prevailing older ethnohistorical perspectives, such as that of Adolf E. Jensen or Helmut Petri, and he also distanced himself from Eike Haberland's post-*Kulturschichten* approach. Braukämper undertook two field expeditions in Ethiopia with Haberland, but the two did not get along. He remained reticent about his disagreements with Haberland, who, at a crucial point in his career, refused him support and rejected his *Habilitation* in Frankfurt (see the 2008 interview transcript, n. 4 below). Braukämper, although hurt and annoyed, did not harbour resentment but moved on in his research and worked well with his FI colleague Siegfried Seyfarth. He eventually left the FI in 1995 for the Göttingen professorship. In a one and a half hour interview on his career in 2008,⁴ in the series *Interviews with German Anthropologists*, he gave very interesting insights into his education and *Werdegang*, his research work, and provided a 'participant observation' account on the history and development of German ethnology in the 1970s–1990s.

Braukämper fulfilled many roles in the field on ethnology and historical anthropology in Germany, among them his active membership of the Göttinger Gesellschaft für Völkerkunde, and, since 2006, of the editorial board of this journal, *Aethiopica*, to which he contributed reviews and manuscript evaluations until the last weeks of his life. In Göttingen he supervised a number of PhD theses of scholars like Dirk Bustorf, Alke Dohrmann, Cathrin Horstmann, Wäldä Šəllase Abbute, Nicole Poissonnier, Editha Platte, and others, mostly on Ethiopia, but also several on non-African subjects, for instance the study by Petra Maass on indigenous knowledge traditions in Guatemala (2008). He was highly praised as a patient, professional,

³ U. Braukämper, 'Field research in Ethiopia confronted with changing politics of ethnicity', in S. Dinslage and S. Thubauville, eds, *Seeking out wise old men: Six decades of Ethiopian Studies at the Frobenius Institute revisited*, Studien zur Kulturkunde, 131 (Berlin: Reimer, 2017), 57–74, here p. 58.

⁴ See <http://www.germananthropology.com/video-interview/interview-ulrich-braukemper/152>, accessed on 10 January 2019.

and generous *Doktorvater*. After his retirement in 2009, Braukämper was honoured in a rich *Festschrift* with twenty-nine chapters, prepared by former PhD students and colleagues, including one fascinating chapter by his former Hadiyya field assistant Solomon Daaimo.⁵

Braukämper kept a lifelong connection with the Hadiyya, the Ethiopian people on whom he did his most in-depth research work, and amongst whom he lived for several years. He always recognized the debt he owed them and especially his informants/assistants.⁶ He received an honorary title from Hadiyya elders in 1994 and became a resource person for their socio-political efforts in Ethiopia, whereby his academic work was actively used—sometimes in ways he had not foreseen.⁷ His passing away was also mourned on several websites of the Hadiyya.⁸

Braukämper was a sympathetic and generous man and, from an early age, he was driven by a deep curiosity and interest in non-Western societies and peoples. During his long career he frequently assisted African students from various backgrounds and gave testimony in many asylum cases.

In his academic work he was very reliable, professional, and conscientious. His scholarly heritage is extensive, covering a wide variety of subjects. His corpus of ethnological and ethnohistorical knowledge on Ethiopia, notably on the Hadiyya and Kambaata, as well as on Muslim and various ethnic communities, is unique and extremely valuable, marked by amazing in-depth knowledge and historical recovery, and based on a careful weighing-up of oral testimonies and other sources. His contributions did not aim to develop novel theoretical perspectives.⁹ However, his ethnohistorical approach clearly recognized the dynamic aspects of interethnic relations over time and thus avoided an undue focus on one ethnic group, as was often the case in British social anthropology at that time. He also wrote on some theoretical leitmotifs in German anthropology, for example in his papers on the ‘meritorious complex’. As well as de-emphasizing theory,

⁵ A. Dohrmann, D. Bustorf, and N. Poissonnier, eds, *Schweifgebiete: Festschrift für Ulrich Braukämper*, Reihe Ethnologie, 37 (Berlin–Münster: LIT Verlag, 2010).

⁶ See for instance in his *Islamic History and Culture in Southern Ethiopia: Collected Essays*, Göttinger Beiträge zur Ethnologie, 9, 2nd edn (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2004), xi–xii.

⁷ See U. Braukämper, ‘Field research in Ethiopia confronted with changing politics of ethnicity’, in S. Dinslage and S. Thubauville, eds, op. cit., 69–70.

⁸ See, for instance, <https://hadiyajourney.com/ulrich-braukamper-passed-away-remembering-a-hero-in-the-hadiya-scholarship/>, accessed on 12 February 2019.

⁹ See also his remark in *Islamic History and Culture in Southern Ethiopia: Collected Essays*, op. cit., 8.

Braukämper did not pay too much attention to political process or to the ‘politics of knowledge’, although two of his last texts are very interesting exceptions in this regard.¹⁰ His final book, *Afrika 1914–1918: Antikolonialer Widerstand jenseits der Weltkriegsfronten*, Studien zur Kulturkunde, 130 (Berlin: Reimer, 2015), a survey of African responses and protests in World War I, also refers to recent political history, and, in a way, opened up a new research agenda. Throughout his research career, and despite his clear specialization on southern Ethiopia, Braukämper showed an active interest across geographical regions, notably West Africa and Sudan, and covered many field sites and themes. Also of special note here are his monograph *Migration und ethnischer Wandel: Untersuchungen aus der östlichen Sudanzone*, Studien zur Kulturkunde, 103 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1992) and his co-edited work on globalization (2002), already referred to above. He also made major contributions to the study of African material culture and to museum anthropology (in Khartoum and in Göttingen). Overall, his contributions to African and Ethiopian studies comprise a number of remarkable, richly descriptive, and essential works, the impact of which will be felt for decades to come. His work has stimulated numerous new field studies by students and other scholars, making his legacy secure.

Bibliography of Ulrich Braukämper 2010–2018¹¹

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2014

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¹⁰ U. Braukämper, ‘Field research in Ethiopia confronted with changing politics of ethnicity’, in S. Dinslage and S. Thubauville, eds, op. cit.; and ‘Indigenous Views on the Italian Occupation in Southern Ethiopia: A Post-Colonial Approach’, *Aethiopica*, 14 (2011), 163–183.

¹¹ A bibliography of Braukämper’s work up to 2010 is included in A. Dohrmann, D. Bustorf, and N. Poissonnier, eds, op. cit., 341–346.

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 - ‘Migrations from the 15th to the 19th century’, 172a–175a;
 - ‘Qabeena ethnography’, 248a–249a;
 - ‘Śidi’, 659a–b;
 - ‘Solomoon Daaimo’, 690b–691b;
 - ‘Soof Omar’, 716a–b;
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