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Review

SABINE DINSLAGE and SOPHIA THUBAUVILLE, eds, *Seeking out wise old men: Six decades of Ethiopian Studies at the Frobenius Institute revisited*

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und außenpolitischen Probleme (‘Domestic Politics’, ‘Foreign Affairs’, ‘Socioeconomic Developments’) der aufstrebenden äthiopischen Regionalmacht einer ausgewogen neutralen, umfänglich recherchierten Analyse unterzogen. Dabei erweist es sich als vorteilhaft, dass der regionalerfahrene Autor versucht, jüngere politische Ereignisse und Entwicklungen (Wahlen, Massenproteste, Korruption) von innen zu verstehen. Die internen Kontroll- und Machtsicherungspraktiken äthiopischer Regierungsakteure werden ebenso kenntnisreich und faktenbasiert beschrieben wie das als zu nachsichtig (‘lenient’) kritisierte Einflusshandeln regionaler (African Union, Intergovernmental Authority on Development) und globaler (European Union, United States, Great Britain) Akteure. Dabei werden neben offiziellen Verlautbarungen auch verbreitete Narrative—und damit zusammenhängende emotionale Befindlichkeiten wie das strategische Schweigen von Teilen der jungen Generation—in die Analyse einbezogen.

Abbinks informiertes Hintergrundwissen bietet zudem die Basis für die Erörterung neuer zukunftsbezogener Fragestellungen: Welche Zukunft haben die Reformbemühungen von Dr. Abiy Ahmed in einem der größten und bevölkerungsreichsten afrikanischen Länder? Wird es dem jungen Premierminister gelingen, Reformwillen und politische Kontinuität friedlich zu vereinbaren, und welche Bedeutung kommt dabei dem Einflussgewinn neuer Generationen und dem äthiopisch-eritreischen Frieden zu?

Dem Buch ist anhaltende Aufmerksamkeit zu wünschen. Es ist nicht nur für Regionalspezialisten und Studierende, sondern auch für generell afrika-interessierte Leser von Interesse. Es gilt, sich abzeichnende Zukunftsszenarien praktisch und theorieorientiert zu erforschen und aus schlechten Erfahrungen zu lernen.

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SABINE DINSLAGE and SOPHIA THUBAUVILLE, eds, *Seeking out wise old men: Six decades of Ethiopian Studies at the Frobenius Institute revisited*, Studien zur Kulturkunde, 131 (Berlin: Reimer, 2017). 320 pp., 139 illus. Price: €39.00. ISBN: 978-3-496-01588-8.

The Frobenius Institute has pioneered research on southern Ethiopia since the mid-1930s, undertaking several multi-sited field expeditions under its directors Alfred Ellegard Jensen and Eike Haberland. These expeditions resulted in several large collaborative volumes, including Jensen’s *Im Lande des Gada*, Haberland’s *Galla Süd-Äthiopiens*, and Helmut Straube’s *Westkuschitische Völker Süd-Äthiopiens*. Their research focused on the his-

tory (including pre-history and megalithic culture), oral traditions, myths and folklore, kingship and political systems, as well as the ritual performances and material cultures of an ethnically and geographically diverse area.

The volume reviewed here is a fascinating contribution to this history of ethnographic research in southern Ethiopia. It is an outcome of the DFG-funded project *Erschließung und Digitalisierung der Archivbestände zu Äthiopienstudien des Frobenius-Instituts*, which digitized the collections of the southern Ethiopian fieldwork (from 1935 to 1995) and made them available in a German and English language database. This project is now online and can be accessed through the Frobenius Institute's website.¹ Together with archival materials, the 'discussion section' offers video documentation of paper presentations, including those included in this volume. These talks were organized as a seminar series entitled *Frankfurter Südäthiopien Forschung: Eine Retrospektive*.²

Seeking out wise old men is a result of this extensive re-evaluation of southern Ethiopian research. Given the span of six decades covered by the book's chapters, and multilayered aims and topics, from the re-evaluation of methodologies, to presenting previously unknown aspects of the research, the extensive volume consists of sixteen diverse chapters, divided into three sections. All the chapters are richly illustrated with many previously unpublished ethnographic and historical photos. Regrettably, not all chapters can be given the same treatment in this review.

The first section ('Scientific and political environment for research in Ethiopia under three governments') provides context to situate the research environment of southern Ethiopia and Ethiopia more generally, opening with the recollections of Herbert S. Lewis, Asfa-Wossen Asserate, and the late Ulrich Braukämper, as well as a piece on ethnographic films by the Japanese anthropologist Itsushi Kawase. The contributions of Braukämper and Lewis in particular set the stage for understanding the times and contexts of the Frobenius missions and give a sense of the changing anthropological scene.

The core of the book begins in the second section: 'Southern Ethiopian studies at the Frobenius Institute: focuses and critical discussion'. The opening chapter by Susanne Epple offers a broad, archive-based appraisal of marginalized communities (occupational groups, slaves, hunters) as seen

¹ <https://www.frobenius-institut.de/datenbanken/aethiopien-datenbank>.

² <https://www.frobenius-institut.de/datenbanken/aethiopien-datenbank/68-ethiopia-database/458-discussion>.

through the materials of the Frobenius mission. Pointing to the methodological shortcomings of this fieldwork, the chapter clearly shows that the Frobenius expeditions were among the pioneer researches on social stratification, despite the fact that social division was a by-product rather than the focus of the research. With a more specific focus, in his chapter Kansite Gellebo discusses the case of Konso social divisions between *etanta* (cultivators) and the *xawda* (the ‘occupational caste’, cf. p. 109). Richard Kuba introduces the study of rock art in southern Ethiopia as yet another aspect of the southern Ethiopian research.

The second part of this section continues under the title ‘Critical discussion of theoretical approaches and methodology’. In a volume that directly and indirectly deals with the history of research, the pressing questions of knowledge production and methodology are of seminal importance. Here we find critical appraisals by Dirk Bustorf, who puts his finger on one of the immanent questions of cultural studies: the relationship between informants and researchers. In his chapter, based on researchers’ archival notes, Bustorf assesses their relationship with informants (mostly ‘wise old men’, given the focus on oral history), and especially questions the visibility of informants, aides, and collaborators in the field. Jon Abbink looks at Haberland’s work on Wälāyitta and Dizi people and discusses the limiting methodology of ‘cultural history’ in comparison to the rich data that Haberland excavated.

The third section of the book, ‘Discussion of the archival material on Ethiopian studies at the Frobenius Institute’, brings together contributions by the editors, Sabine Dinslage and Sophia Thubauville, as well as Kim Glück, on the artefacts collection; the hitherto little-studied cinematographic materials; and an insight into the technical and logistical hurdles of the expeditions. In an otherwise male-dominated setting, Sabine Dinslage’s chapter, ‘How to finance an expedition? Insights from the archives of the Frobenius Institute’, puts Elisabeth Pauli at the centre of the discussion. Pauli accompanied the expeditions as a painter, mainly copying rock art and providing ethnographic sketches. Through Dinslage’s archival reconstruction, we learn that Pauli was also the logistic mastermind behind the expeditions. The chapter is crucially important in a volume that sets out to put the history of research in perspective. Glück discusses the development of the ethnographic collection; the contacts that the Frobenius Institute had with other ethnographic collections in Europe, and the collaboration that developed between them. Thubauville’s chapter shines a light on the film snippets that came out of the expeditions, although the crews did not include professional film directors. The short ethnographic films, mostly from the 1950–1952 and 1954–1955 expeditions, are among the earliest filmic evi-

dence of the peoples of southern Ethiopia, and a full list of topics, titles, length, and so on is provided at the end of the chapter.

The section closes with a discussion by three Ethiopian anthropologists of unpublished archival materials. Data Dea Barata, as with Abbink, discusses the Wälāyṭta manuscript of Haberland. Ambaye Ogato delves into the Sidama materials, discussing the unpublished manuscript of a Sidama monograph based on draft chapters by Jensen, Straube, and Pauli. The final chapter, by Getachew Senishaw, is devoted to Jensen's work on the Gedeo. The editors, with the help of Glück (with much personal devotion, as we can see from the acknowledgments in the chapters), provided translations for the three Ethiopian scholars to engage with the German materials. To my mind, these last chapters are the most praiseworthy in this generally fascinating book.

Overall, the chapters of the book are slightly uneven, given the different topics and quality of the materials the chapters deal with. We find papers that are only loosely connected to the focus of the book. Involved as a Frobenius member and student of Haberland, Asfa-Wossen Asperate's chapter on the legacies of Mənilək II in the politics of modernization under Ḥaylā Šəllase, as well as Kawase's look at ethnographic film-making, and the interpretative relations between ethnographer, audience, and subject, albeit fascinating, appear as stand-alone chapters, with no immediate connection to the rest of the volume. More valuable in the context of the book are the contributions to the history of research that engage the archives and discuss the research history of the Frobenius Institute, and the logistical aspects of the expeditions: the chapters on rock art, ethnographic films, and the collections and archive.

By far the most rewarding chapters—and the majority of contributions—are concerned with the legacies of the Frankfurter Schule of German anthropology. These chapters trace the trajectories of the research tradition of 'cultural history' that was the foundation of the German ethnological tradition, and which stood apart from the American cultural or the British social anthropological traditions. While these contributions value the large amount of data provided by the multi-sited, peer-based collective expeditions, they also discuss the methodological shortcomings, the overall limited legacy in the present-day reception of the southern Ethiopia research. Lewis, for example, singles out Leo Frobenius's work in his overview of the ethnographic work of contemporary anthropologists since the 1950s. While Lewis focuses on the *Kulturkreislehre*, famous with Frobenius, as a base for the methodological shortcomings of the Frankfurt School, Abbink dissects the cultural history approach using the example of Haberland's work. For Abbink, the 'problem' lies with Leopold von Renken's positivist histor-

ical paradigm that guided Haberland's approach in attempting to reconstruct how 'history really was'. This undertaking—to decipher the history of the 'people without history'—yielded enormous knowledge of certain aspects of the past, but neglected any attempt to understand their present, a fact that is bemoaned by the Ethiopian collaborators in their engagement with the manuscripts. The late Braukämper, mission participant from the 1970s onwards, asserted from an emic perspective the male bias of the Frobenius expeditions. The best informants for the cultural-historical approach of the Frobenius team were seen to be elderly men, who were taken as 'guardians of historical traditions and cultural heritage' (p. 61). He emphasized the focus of the Frobenius mission as based on empirical fieldwork and detached from contemporary theoretical discussions. Nonetheless, Braukämper concludes, all Frobenius members were of the opinion that emic and etic perspectives yielded some form of objective results.

Seeking out wise old men is an important homage to, and appreciation of, the pioneering German contribution to the study of southern Ethiopia and its people. The discussion of its shortcomings, between appreciation and critique, places the book at the centre of an important larger discussion about German ethnology in the round. Opening the archives for critical discussion and engagement with Ethiopian scholars is an important step in decolonizing the otherwise hegemonic knowledge on non-European peoples.

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HENRI MÉDARD, MARIE-LAURE DERAT, THOMAS VERNET, and MARIE PIERRE BALLARIN, eds, *Traites et esclavages en Afrique orientale et dans l'Océan Indien*, Esclavages (Paris: Karthala–Centre International de Recherches sur les Esclavages, 2013). 522 pp. Price: €34.00. ISBN: 978-2-8111-0931-4.

'Freedom', 'enslavement', 'abolition', 'kinship', and 'strangers' are some of the concepts and experiences explored in this ground-breaking book that covers a very large region, from the Arabian Peninsula and the Horn of Africa, to the Swahili coast and its hinterlands, and the islands of the Indian Ocean. This geographical zone covers areas of extraction and departure of enslaved people, areas of their consumption, and only a part of the areas where they arrive. It has the advantage of creating a dialogue between regions not usually studied together, and to 'open' Africanist knowledge on the historical dynamics of the Indian Ocean. It is published in a collection