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ANDREAS WETTER, Berlin

Review

RUDOLF SCHLAFFER and RALF-GUNTER LEONHARDT, *Äthiopien '84/85:
Privates Fotografieren im militärischen Hilfseinsatz, Begleitpublikation zur
Ausstellung des Militärhistorischen Museums der Bundeswehr,
Flugplatz Berlin-Gatow vom 11. November 2024 bis 14. Dezember 2025*

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RUDOLF SCHLAFFER and RALF-GUNTER LEONHARDT, eds, *Äthiopien '84/85: Privates Fotografieren im militärischen Hilfseinsatz, Begleitpublikation zur Ausstellung des Militärhistorischen Museums der Bundeswehr, Flugplatz Berlin-Gatow vom 11. November 2024 bis 14. Dezember 2025*, Texte und Materialien, 24 (Berlin: Militärhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr, 2024). 128 pp. Price: €0.* ISBN: 978-3-9823649-4-0.

The exhibition *Äthiopien '84/85: Privates Fotografieren im militärischen Hilfseinsatz* ('Ethiopia '84/85: Private Photography in a Military Aid Mission'), hosted at the Military History Museum of the German Armed Forces in Berlin-Gatow, offers a compelling and historically nuanced look at the German military's involvement in humanitarian aid during the Ethiopian famine of 1984–1985. Running from 11 November 2024 to 14 December 2025, the exhibition presents a selection of private photographs taken by West German (Bundeswehr, 'Federal Armed Forces') and East German (Nationale Volksarmee, 'National People's Army') air force personnel during their deployment.

The exhibition's strength lies in its juxtaposition of images from both German states, highlighting the parallel yet politically distinct missions. While West German C-160 Transall aircraft operated from Dərre Dawa, East German crews flew Antonov An-26 and later Il-18 planes from 'Asäb. The photographs—drawn from 15 private collections—capture not only the logistical challenges of aid delivery but also the soldiers' personal encounters with Ethiopia.

However, as noted in the accompanying catalog with essays by Markus Evers ("Man hat ja einige Filme verschossen"—zur Privatfotografie beim Militär', pp. 7–18) and Konstantin Wastl ('Zum historischen Hintergrund und zur thematischen Gliederung der Ausstellung', pp. 19–25) and an introduction by Ralf-Gunter Leonhardt (pp. 4–5), these images are far from neutral. Some of them reflect stereotypical 'Africa' clichés prevalent in the 1980s, a time when awareness of racial and colonial biases was less developed than today. The curators critically address this, acknowledging that some of the photos are shaped by the photographers' perspectives—ranging from humanitarian empathy to exoticizing curiosity.

The exhibition is divided into two rooms in the historic Gatow airfield tower. The first room focuses on arrival, daily life, and initial impressions, including tourist-like snapshots of landscapes and local people. A particularly striking—and ethically marked—section displays images of famine victims, preceded by content warnings.

* The book is available as a PDF and can be downloaded from <https://www.mhm-gatow.de/de/ausstellungen/aethiopien-fotografien>. For visitors of the exhibition it can also be obtained in print for free.

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The second room shifts to operational realities: loading planes, navigating muddy airstrips, and mechanical struggles. A notable highlight is the documentation of the (later) so-called 'Africa technique', an improvised airdrop method developed by West German crews to deliver supplies to inaccessible areas. These images underscore the mission's improvisational challenges and technical ingenuity.

For many Germans, the Ethiopian famine is remembered through televised appeals and the founding of Karlheinz Böhm's nonprofit organization Menschen für Menschen (MFM). This exhibition adds a military-historical dimension, revealing how Cold War-era German forces engaged in a rare cooperative humanitarian effort despite political divisions.

While the exhibition provides valuable historical insight, its critical framing of photographic representation ensures visitors reflect on the biases embedded in such documentation. The accompanying catalog deepens this analysis, making it a worthwhile companion.

For those interested in Cold War history, humanitarian missions, or visual culture, *Äthiopien '84/85* is a significant and thought-provoking exhibition—one that complicates familiar narratives while shedding light on an understudied chapter of German military involvement abroad.

The exhibition will be supplemented by a large special exhibition from summer 2025 (p. 4).

Andreas Wetter, Berlin

HAGAR SALAMON, *Meat Matters: Ethnographic Refractions of the Beta Israel*, Sephardi and Mizrahi Studies (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2023). . xiv, 153 pp., 30 figs. Price: \$80.00 (hardcover), \$30.00 (paperback). ISBN: 978-0-253-06577-3 (hardcover), 978-0-253-06578-0 (paperback).

The vast majority of the Betä ʿĪsraʿel (Ethiopian Jewish) community resided in rural villages in the northern Ethiopian Highlands prior to their late-twentieth-century *Aliyah* (immigration) to Israel. In this region, the rearing of cattle is a central source of livelihood and a central element in rural life. Hagar Salamon's new book explores the rich symbolism and significance with which the interaction between humans and cattle and the production and consumption of cattle meat was endowed in Betä ʿĪsraʿel society and in Ethiopian society more broadly. This symbolism is not only restricted to agricultural life but rather touches upon numerous aspects of Betä ʿĪsraʿel society, such as community, ethics, and interreligious interaction. Given that Betä ʿĪsraʿel communal life in rural Ethiopia is now a thing of the past, Salamon's study provides important insight into a world