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Personalia

In memoriam Francis Anfray (1926–2022)

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Personalia

The project team also strives for inclusion of the tradition of *bāhra ḥassāb* in interdisciplinary and intercultural research on Computus, divination, historical epistemology, and similar topics, from which it has been almost completely excluded so far. Already in the first months of the project, Elagina and Dickinson presented on the tradition of Christian Ethiopia and Eritrea at the workshop ‘The Visual Scribe: Tables and Diagrams in Middle Eastern Manuscripts’ organized by the project ‘Zodiac – Ancient Astral Science in Transformation’ at the Institute for the History of Knowledge in the Ancient World, Freie Universität Berlin, in cooperation with the Institute for Advanced Studies, Princeton, and at the 13th International Conference on the Inspiration of Astronomical Phenomena (INSAP 2025), at Queen’s University Belfast.

The project hopes to make significant contribution to the field of Ethiopian and Eritrean studies, and in broader perspective, to the further development of the recently established ‘History of Knowledge’ (‘Wissensgeschichte’) by offering a detailed analysis of an African epistemic tradition.

Obituaries

In memoriam Francis Anfray (1926–2022)

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Francis Anfray was a distinguished French archaeologist and pioneer in the study of the ancient cultures of Ethiopia and Eritrea. His long career left a lasting impact on the archaeology of the Northern Horn of Africa, particularly through his extensive excavations and numerous publications on the archaeological sites of Aksum, Yəḥa, Adulis, and Mätära.

He started his career in Paris and pursued further studies at the École biblique in Jerusalem. In 1958, he moved to Ethiopia to join the archaeological section of the Institut éthiopien d’études et de recherches. He contributed to the creation of the National Museum of Ethiopia in Addis Abäba, for which he was awarded the prestigious Prize Trust by Emperor Ḥaylä Śəllase I.

Between 1959 and 1963, Anfray directed important excavations in northern Ethiopia at sites such as Mätära, Yəḥa, and Adulis. At Mätära, he carried out four extensive campaigns, the results of which he published in the *Annales d’Éthiopie* between 1963 and 1965. In Aksum, he excavated Dungur palace (1966–1968), a

site relevant for understanding Aksumite architecture. After the Ethiopian Revolution of 1974, he continued collaborating with local institutions and started investigations in the Soddo region, southern Ethiopia, where he documented sites and funerary stelae. From 1982 to 1991, he taught at Addis Ababa University. His book *Les anciens Éthiopiens*¹ became a standard reference work for Ethiopian history and archaeology.

Returning to Paris around 1990, Anfray remained a central figure in Ethiopian and Eritrean studies, making his archives available to younger scholars. Over the course of his career, Anfray produced more than forty scientific publications, many of which are today available open access through *Persée*.²

Anfray's work has introduced many scholars to the complexities of northern Ethiopian and Eritrean archaeology. His careful documentation, detailed site and finds reports, and interpretive insights remain foundational references. Many of the sites he investigated have not been revisited since his campaigns, making his records invaluable for ongoing and future research.

My own path into Aksumite studies began through Anfray's writings, which first attracted me as a student and then became central to my doctoral research. In the early 2000s, I had the privilege of meeting him in person, thanks to the kind intermediation of the late Professor Rodolfo Fattovich, who was then supervising my PhD thesis. Francis Anfray generously granted me permission to re-examine the archaeological materials he had collected at the Eritrean sites of Adulis and Mätära, stored and exhibited at the National Museum of Ethiopia in Addis Abäba. This collaboration culminated in a renewed publication of those materials, edited by Anfray himself, in which he most graciously included my name.³ This act demonstrated his openness to the next generation of researchers. His mentorship—whether direct or through his published works—was illuminating for me and many other colleagues as well.

Francis Anfray left an important legacy in African archaeology: his excavations, publications, and teaching shed light on neglected aspects of North-eastern African studies and enriched our understanding of Aksumite history. Combining scholarly rigor and respect for local cultural heritage, he remains a point of reference for the field today.

¹ F. Anfray, *Les anciens Ethiopiens: siecles d'histoire*, Collection Civilisations (Paris: Armand Colin, 1990).

² *Persée*, <https://www.persee.fr/search?q=Anfray&ta=article&a=74849>, accessed on 15 October 2025.

³ F. Anfray, *Recherches archéologiques à Adoulis (Erythrée)*, avec Chiara Zazzaro, Sites et cites d'Afrique (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Midi, 2016).

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In memoriam Elisabeth Biasio (1941–2022)

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Elisabeth Biasio, a distinguished cultural anthropologist and long-serving research assistant and curator at the Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zurich (UZH), passed away on 21 June 2022. Born in Zurich in 1941, Biasio initially trained as a medical laboratory assistant and later pursued a correspondence course to earn her Matura in 1970. After completing her secondary education at