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Bairu Tafla

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Bairu Tafla

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The present issue of the journal is dedicated to Bairu Tafla on the occasion of his 65th birthday.

Bairu Tafla (= Bayru Tāflā) was born on 15 December 1938 in Adirba near Keren (in what today is Eritrea). His eyesight deteriorated considerably already in his early childhood. After medical treatment had proved unsuccessful he went to Addis Ababa, where during the years 1951–62 he received secondary education.

From 1961 to 1965 he studied history, educational theory and political studies at Hayle Selassie I University and, after obtaining a Bachelor's degree he stayed to work for the Institute of Ethiopian Studies. He completed his university education in 1968, when he received the degree of M.A. from Howard University in Washington, D.C. He returned to Ethiopia and resumed work at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, this time as an Assistant Professor.

In 1975, supported by a grant from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, Ato Bairu came to Hamburg in order to carry out an investigation into the history of relationships between Ethiopia and central European countries. However deeply Bairu was involved into his independent research, he also found time to continue and enhance his education, attending classes at the departments of African Studies, History and Educational Science. Among his teachers were Ernst Hammerschmidt, Ludwig Gerhardt and Bernd Manuel Weischer. In 1979 he defended his dissertation on "Ethiopia and Germany. Cultural, Political and Economical Relations, 1871–1936" and was awarded with the degree of Ph.D. from the Faculty of Oriental Studies of Hamburg University. That same year the Faculty appointed him staff researcher. In the summer of 1990 he finalized his habilitation thesis under the title "Ethiopia and Austria. A History of Their Relations" and was subsequently made Privatdozent with the *Venia legendi* "Ethiopian Studies with a Particular Consideration of the Ethiopian History". As a sign of recognition, the University of Hamburg bestowed on him the title of Professor.

Bairu Tafla has been married since 1980 and has two children, born 1984 and 1985.

In the focus of Bairu Tafla's research are the questions of recent Ethiopian history, whereas a special role is played by Ethio-European relationships. His inquiries can be classified into four thematic areas:

1. Biographies, which has considerably broadened our knowledge of the second half of the 19th century and the first third of the 20th century, and also the period of the transition of the Horn of Africa into its modernity;
2. Contributions into the study of political and cultural history of the region, its traditional laws, titles and offices. Not only do these illustrate the broad spectrum of his interests, they are also of particular importance for all the scholars as Bairu in his work has been making use of numerous unpublished sources;
3. Editions, translations, commentaries and analyses of historiographies dealing with recent history of the region – all those have revealed the deep knowledge Bairu has of the subject and remain relevant for many inquiries into Ethiopian Studies;
4. From the very beginning of his time in Hamburg Bairu has been particularly interested in the issues of the Ethio-European cultural encounter; thus it is by no accident that his current research is devoted to the written legacy of the Swiss engineer and diplomat Alfred Ilg.

Besides his research activities, Bairu Tafla has contributed to Ethiopian Studies as a lecturer and teacher. The main stress of his lectures and seminars on the history of North Africa was recent foreign politics as well as colonial and educational history. His numerous contributions to conferences and congresses attest his reputation of a widely respected scholar.

Bairu Tafla has not only invested much energy into individual research, he has participated in numerous interdisciplinary projects. A co-editor of the *Aethiopica* journal, he is an invaluable member of the editorial board, whose meticulousness and constant objectivity have been essential for the recognition of the periodical. The existence of the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* would also be unthinkable without his co-operation as a field specialist and an author. The substantial amount of articles he has contributed to the first two volumes documents his encyclopaedic knowledge as well as willingness to scholarly cooperation.

The editorial board of the journal would like to express their deep gratitude to Bairu Tafla for his critical commitment to the cause and his co-operation as co-editor and they wish him many more years of fruitful research!