

Adolf Ellegard Jensen, Eike Haberland and the Frankfurt Research Tradition in Southern Ethiopia

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Ethnological research in southern Ethiopia owes much to the contributions of German-speaking cultural historians, ethnologists and anthropologists. Many of the ethnic groups of the south were first documented by scholars linked to what is sometimes called the 'Frankfurt School' (Jensen according to Tall 2005: 16; cf. also Asfa-Wossen Asserate 2009, 2010). However, it is probably more appropriate to speak of a 'research tradition'. The term 'school' would imply a school of thought. However, when examined in detail, the theoretical thinking of the main figures of this 'tradition', Adolf Ellegard Jensen, Eike Haberland and Helmut Straube, as well as of their students reveals a variety of approaches. Real continuity is to be found in their interest in diachronic ethnology and culture history in general, and in certain thematic fields of interest. A focus on the production of primary data and the dedication to the study of what was understood as a 'terra incognita', that is, the many ethnic groups and cultures of Ethiopia and their interconnections, is also characteristic of the 'tradition'. An important aspect related to this was the broad collection of ethnographic objects that was an integral part of the Frankfurt expeditions. Research expeditions were organized in teams of differently advanced students together with their respective academic supervisor. This allowed the transmission of practical experience, knowledge and skills from teacher to student as well as exchange between peers directly in the field. The research activities of Frankfurt anthropologists were never limited to Ethiopia. However, in this paper their work on other areas of the world, e.g., New Guinea, is intentionally ignored.

Frobenius and Jensen: the founding fathers

In southern Ethiopia ethnological research by trained social and cultural anthropologists began with the expedition of Leo Frobenius' student Adolph Ellegard Jensen. He started a cycle of research dedicated to ethnography and the documentation of cultural history of southern Ethiopia, which, at that time, had only been visited by a few European travellers. Jensen's collaborators were a high-school teacher, Hellmut Wohlenberg, who focused on material culture, and a painter, Alf Bayrle, who was to prepare ethnographic drawings. Another of Jensen's students, Helmut von den Steinen, was only formally part of this expedition; he departed from Jensen's team in Addis Ababa to study the Amhara culture around Gondar and Lake Tana (Frobenius in Jensen 1936: V–XI). Jensen's expedition visited several ethnic groups such as the Sidaama, the Gujji Oromo, the Gede'ó, the Burji, the Amarro, the Baditu, the Konso, the Gamu, the Wälaytta and the Gurage. Their voluminous research report *Im Lande des Gadaa. Wanderungen zwischen Volkstrümmern Südadessiniens* ('In the Land of Gadaa. Peregrinations among the Fragmented Nationalities of Southern Abyssinia', 1936) tried to reconstruct the cultural history of ethnic groups, which Jensen saw as 'fragments' of more ancient cultures. It combines a traveller's report containing personal impressions and judgments with detailed ethnographic descriptions and cultural-historical interpretations. Jensen's team showed a broad scope of interests. They studied socio-political systems, systems of cultivation, ritual performances, material culture, megalithic culture, myths and folklore. On the basis of these investigations Jensen tried to establish the sequence of cultural strata



Fig. 1: Priest of the Bamballe with his *kallacha* headdress (painting by Alf Bayrle, Jensen 1939: 389)

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in southern Ethiopia and their interconnections with other cultures of north-eastern Africa. In the case of the *gadaa* system of the Gede'ó, he was the first to describe one of the complex age class systems characteristic of many southern Ethiopian groups, including the Oromo. His studies on feasts of merit, and the social and symbolic role of 'heroes', big game hunters and killers, laid foundations for a thematic stream in the German research tradition that continues today (Haberland 1957; Braukämper 2001b: 161; 2002b; Poissonnier 2009).

Jensen understood cultural change as the result of historical processes within and between cultures. Such processes created overlaying cultural strata that represented different epochs of cultural development. His work was based on detailed ethnographic documentation, cultural comparison and historical research. It also contained speculation, for example – as the subject was fashionable at the time – he accorded fertility symbolism (cp. also Amborn 2010) an overwhelming significance. Although *Im Lande des Gada* was published in the third year of Nazi rule in Germany, it did not display racist attitudes. In the section describing their travels, the authors sometimes negatively generalized about the character of certain ethnic groups. However, in general they showed respect to the subjects of their research. In this regard they followed the humanist tradition of Frobenius. In August 1938, Adolf Ellegard Jensen was appointed acting director of the institute and museum. However, he was forced by the Gestapo to go to the front after having rejected an interpretation of cultural anthropology that would explain cultural differences through racial differences (Tall 2005: 16; Asfa-Wossen Assefate 2010: 24; on Jensen see also Braukämper 2007; Straube 1963).

Frobenius expeditions after World War II

Five years after World War II, the *Forschungsinstitut für Kulturmorphologie* (Research Institute for Cultural Morphology), now called the *Frobenius-Institut* (Frobenius Institute), was ready to continue its research programme in southern Ethiopia (on the history of the institute see also Zerries 1950; Braukämper 2005a; 2005b). Under Jensen's leadership two long field research campaigns were conducted. The major



Fig. 2: Haberland (left) and Jensen at Maddera, Konso; photo by Elisabeth Pauli, 1950–52



Fig. 3: Chief of the Dizi in his attire (photo by Eike Haberland, between 1970 and 1971)

aim of all these expeditions was a cultural-historical survey of southern Ethiopia. During relatively short visits to the different ethnic groups (sometimes only days or a few weeks), ethnographic data was gathered from oral informants and field observation. These expeditions were not only important for ethnographic documentation but also for the training and performance of a new generation of anthropologists. Two of them, Eike Haberland and Helmut Straube, became leading scholars themselves, Haberland in Mainz and Frankfurt, Straube in Munich.

The first post-war expedition to Ethiopia took place in the years 1950 to 1952. The participants were Adolf E. Jensen, Eike Haberland, Elisabeth Pauli and Willy Schulz-Weidner. Its main research areas were situated in the extreme south-west of Ethiopia and included the ethnic groups of the Konso, Baka, Banna, Hamar, Bashada, Tsamako, Amarro (Kure), Arbore, Bacha, Maale, Zala, Boorana and different Aari groups (Shangama, Sido, Bio, Ubamer, Argenne), as well as Basketto, Dime, Bodi, Mursi, Boorana and Gujji Oromo. The second journey, in the years from 1954 to 1955, was carried out by Adolf E. Jensen, his wife Elisabeth Jensen-Pauli, Eike Haberland, Helmut Straube and the cultural geographer, Wolfgang Kuls. It focussed on peoples inhabiting areas along the southern Rift Valley lakes, such as the Konso, Burji, Amarro, Gede'ó, Sidaama, Gujji and Arsi Oromo, Haruro (Harro of Gidichcho), Zay, Wälaytta, Dorze, Dita, Ochollo and Borodda. Outside the main research area, the Yäm and Chako were investigated. In both the first and the second expeditions, Elisabeth Jensen-Pauli served as an excellent graphic artist (for Pauli see also Beer 2007: 106-110).

Eike Haberland and his work

Eike [Friedrich Georg] Haberland (18 May 1924–6 June 1992) was born in Detmold (in Lippe, East Westfalia) to the senior official, Fritz Haberland, and his wife, Käte (née Baumert). He attended schools in Detmold, Nauen and, finally, Potsdam where he accomplished his university-entrance diploma at the Victoria Gymnasium, a high school for humanities, in 1942. Soon after that he was recruited by the German *Wehrmacht* to join the artillery (Seyfarth interviewed by Haller, 8 November 2008). In

April 1942 he was arrested by U.S. troops and became a prisoner of war until August 1945. A year later, he joined the University of Frankfurt am Main to study law. However, he soon refrained from pursuing this any further and took up ethnology, which he had already envisioned as a pupil. Additionally, he took courses in the areas of Oriental studies, classical philology, ancient history and religious studies. In summer 1949, Haberland studied ethnology and African languages in Mainz. In the following winter semester, he attended lectures by Enno Littmann, a specialist in Ethio-Semitic languages in Tübingen. A year later, Haberland joined the Frobenius Institute and travelled with Jensen's research team to southern Ethiopia where he stayed, with breaks caused by sickness and car accidents, until 1952 (Jensen 1959: Vf). He continued his research, participating in Jensen's second journey, and completed his Ph.D. degree in Frankfurt in 1959. His doctoral dissertation was entitled *Das Gadaa-System der süd-abessinischen Völker* (The Gadaa System of the South Abyssinian Peoples). He submitted his habilitation thesis *Untersuchungen zum äthiopischen Königtum* (Studies on Ethiopian Kingship) in 1962. Three years later he was appointed head of the Institute of Ethnology in Mainz. Succeeding the short-term head Schmitz, Haberland became head of the Frobenius Institute in 1968, a position that he held until his death in 1992 (for further information on Haberland see Abbink 2005; Oevermann 1993; Seyfarth 1992; Völger 1991).

While Frobenius, Jensen and Schmitz were cultural morphologists, Haberland followed a cultural-historical approach (cp. Haller 2012: 223). He abandoned many of their theoretical assumptions but continued the Frankfurt tradition and led research in southern Ethiopia to new heights. His main research agenda was the generation and documentation of primary data on socio-political institutions, historical background, cultural ecology and material culture. In addition, he also collected information on unexplored languages and various other topics. The aim of this was to gather, at 'the last moment', the historical and cultural knowledge of the peoples studied, which he considered highly endangered under the influence of the Ethiopian state and modernization. Moreover, he wanted to reconstruct their cultural history (Haberland 1963: VII; 1981a: 735). Following this programme, he stud-

ied various ethnic groups, such as the Konta, Maale, Dime, Bodi, Basketto, Mursi, Bacha, Gofa, Gidichcho and Galila, and carried out more intensive investigations among the Dizi (see Haberland 1981b; 1993) and the Wälaytta (cp. also Abbink 2006).

Haberland's main research focus, however, was on the Oromo. He spent about two years with the Boorana sub-group but also visited the Oromo groups of Gujji, Arsi, Harar, Jimma, Yajju, Wallo and Sh-



Fig. 4: Boorana female elder sitting in front of the researcher's tent (photo by Eike Haberland, between 1950 and 1952)

ewa. Before him, only few studies had treated the Oromo in any detail (esp. Cecchi and Cerulli) and he was the first to study the Boorana. His choice of this group was led by his 'principle, as far as possible, exclusively to study the original Oromo culture' and to historically reconstruct abandoned 'original customs'. He considered the Boorana to have kept 'the most ancient Oromo culture' (Haberland 1963: 4ff., VII; citations translated by the author). Other Oromo groups, in his view, had been exposed to cultures with kingship and agriculture while he believed that the Oromo were originally egalitarian pastoralists like the Boorana (ibid.). According to his research, each of the Oromo sub-groups represented an inherently unique cultural-historical unit with their own history, material culture, economic system, kinship system and socio-political structure (including different forms of the *gadaa* systems), customary law, life cycle, religious life, etc.

Haberland saw Ethiopia as a 'culture area' different from the rest of Africa. Within this area he identified a number of 'culture provinces': northern Ethiopia, characterized by centralized leadership, plough agriculture, terrace building, writing system, sacred kingship and Christianity; and southern Ethiopia which he sub-divided into three different sub-areas, 'ancient peoples', 'megalithic or terrace cultures' and 'pastoralists'. Among the cultures of the south, he identified two opposed basic types of such systems which had to varying degrees influenced each other: (1) the more egalitarian socio-political organization by generation classes, the '*gadaa* system', and (2) hierarchical and centralized societies or states characterized by 'sacred kingship'. By identifying cultural features to be linked to *gadaa* and kingship respectively he tried to understand the way in which different cultural historical strata had intermingled in southern Ethiopia. His investigations into the influence of Christianity and northern statehood and kingship culture in southern Ethiopia have to be understood in this context (cp. Haberland 1965, 1976).

Personality and politics

Eike Haberland's scholarly achievements and his determination to promote his institute and German ethnology as a whole, have gained the re-

spect of his former students and colleagues. It is obvious from the careers of his students and their choice of research areas and fields of interest how much they owe to him. However, his personality and his political attitude have been criticised. Haberland is often described as a man of rigour who kept his students at a distance and sanctioned those not aligned with his thinking. However, despite his authoritarian habitus, he is also said to have been generous and amicable during field research and even cheerful, for example, during the institute's yearly commemoration feast for Leo Frobenius (Seyfarth interviewed by Haller, 8 November 2008).

During the late 1960s, the generation of students that Haberland taught became highly politicized (cp. also Braukämper 2002a). While the students formulated their anti-authoritarian ideas, Haberland kept good relations with the Ethiopian emperor and at the same time claimed that the ancient northern Ethiopian-Christian kingship had exerted a strong influence on the conquered Ethiopian south (Haberland 1964a). Students naturally sided with the 'oppressed' southern peoples and criticized Haberland's 'ideologically strong relations to the Ethiopian imperial house' as a sign of a lack of democratic attitude (see also Haller 2012: 190).

From the late 1960s until around 1980, German ethnology underwent a theoretical paradigm shift towards a social-scientific understanding. As a representative of the discipline, Haberland supported the adaptation of international standards. He was in favour of an orientation along the lines of American cultural anthropology. Perhaps this came nearest to his own cultural-historical approach, which he continued somewhat unchanged (Haller 2012: 203, 239). Because of that and since he was a student of culture morphologist Jensen, Petermann (2004: 641f.) in his history of German ethnology calls Haberland, together with Straube, an 'epigone[s] of a discontinued model'. From the point of view of Ethiopian studies, however, where Haberland and Straube's tradition, in combination with up-to-date theoretical approaches, bore fruit till recently, this judgement may be seen as too general.

Haberland's attitude towards the recently independent African states seems to have been slightly ambiguous. He established respectful links with scholars, universities and politicians in the new Africa in order to promote ethnological research and the fame of Leo Frobenius. However,



Fig. 5: Helmut Straube as a young researcher in Ezo, Gamu Gofa (photo by Wolfgang Kuls, 1954 or 1955)

he claimed that in most African regions ‘no cultural development independent from European language and culture’ had taken place since before 1900. For him, European economic and cultural aid were a prerequisite for the regaining of African identity (Tall 2005: 45; Haller 2012: 269).

The third generation

Following the model of his predecessor, Haberland used the institute’s research campaigns (1970–1971 and 1972–1974) as opportunities to provide on-the-job training for younger colleagues such as Ulrich Braukämper, Siegfried Seyfarth, Karl Heinz Striedter and Werner Lange. In Jensen’s and Haberland’s research programme, generating primary data for a thematically broad ethnographic survey and general cultural history of southern Ethiopia was the priority (Haberland 1971; Striedter 1971). The third generation of the Frankfurt research tradition took the next logical step and carried out thematically and geographically more specialized research. Each member developed his own perspective, selected his own thematic interests from the broad agenda of the Frankfurt tradition, and connected himself to the ethnological theories of the time. Ulrich Braukämper studied the ethno-history and cultures of the Hadiyya, Kambaata, Timbaaro, Allaaba and Arsi and Islam in southern Ethiopia. The *Derg* period interrupted his research in Ethiopia, which he resumed later with re-study projects. As full professor in Göttingen, he supervised students who again undertook field research in southern Ethiopia, among, for example, the Hadiyya, Gurage, Silt’e and Konso. Siegfried Seyfarth, later head of the library at the Frobenius Institute, studied the material culture of the Hadiyya. The American Werner Lange undertook his Ph.D. research on the ‘Gimira’ peoples, which included the small ethnic groups of Nao, Tsara, She and Bench (1975). He also studied what he called the ‘Southern Gongga’ peoples, i.e., the Hinnario, Kefa, Bosha and Sheka (1982). Other students of Haberland to be mentioned here are: Nagaaso Gidaada, later president of Ethiopia, who wrote on the ethno-history of the western Oromo; Frederike Kemink who studied the position of women in customary law in Tigray; and Asfa-Wossen Asserate, writer on the history of the

Shewa dynasty (Braukämper 2001a: 162ff.). Through his intensive collaboration with African universities and scholars, Haberland and the Frankfurt tradition had an important influence on the development of social anthropological research far beyond Ethiopia.

The Frankfurt research tradition was not only carried forward by Eike Haberland but also by Jensen’s student, Helmut Straube, chair of the Munich Institute of Ethnology and African Studies from 1969 to 1984. In World War II Helmut Straube (6 May 1923–22 March 1984) had been severely wounded and was made a prisoner of war. After the war he studied ethnology, geography and history in Frankfurt. Under Jensen he obtained his Ph.D. on African religion (1952) and habilitated in Cologne with a study on Nilotic people (1967). In his research in south-western Ethiopia (1954–1956; 1973–1974; Straube 1963) Straube was interested – like Haberland – in the organizational patterns of the centralized sacred kingdoms and egalitarian societies, and in feasts of merit. Straube was in favour of a comparative multidisciplinary approach to cultural history. Particularly important is his conceptualization of the ‘agricultural intensification-complex’, which is an early example of an ecological perspective being applied to cultural history (Hermann Amborn 2009; 2011).

Straube’s student Hermann Amborn, later professor in the Munich institute, carried out field research among the Dullay and Burji. With his comparative research on craftsmen or special occupational groups, he maintained another field of interest of the Frankfurt tradition (cp. Haberland 1961; 1962; 1964b). A student of Amborn (2009) continued the studies on the Burji that he had already started with Jensen. Gunter Minker, another student of Straube, after having investigated the demography, settlement structures and agriculture among the Burji, Konso and Dullay, took up another of the Frankfurt tradition’s fields of interest, in studying the sacred character of power among the Dullay of southern Ethiopia.

The reports and the scholarly outcomes of the Frobenius expeditions continue to be an indispensable source of ethnographic and historical information, as well as of inspiration for the study of the southern Ethiopian peoples and the country as a whole. Presently, Ethiopia

is going through an intensive and ever-accelerating period of cultural, social and economic change. Cultural traditions and memories fade away quickly. Members of the older generations that are testament to the cultural environment as encountered by the Frankfurt expeditions are about to pass away. It is part of the very nature of culture to change. The young generation is facing new challenges that are changing the life of Ethiopia's entire society. In the face of increasing societal problems, fast population growth and nationwide urbanization they have no option but to focus on modern education and skills, to prosper and to catch up with the globalized world. The cultural traditions, especially those of smaller ethnic groups, are under extreme pressure to change and integrate into the recent Ethiopian mainstream culture. Today, in the framework of ethnic federalism, 'cultural/traditional' performances and emblematic items celebrate cultural diversity in the mass media and at various occasions throughout the country. At the same time, however, inventing or standardizing 'staged identities' together with commercialization may reduce noble cultural traditions to mere folkloricism. Therefore, it is one of the great achievements of the Frankfurt research tradition to have documented the cultural diversity of southern Ethiopia in a way that allows later generations to recall the full richness and depth it used to have.

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Fig. 1: Priest of the Bamballe with his *kallacha* headdress, register no. EBA-B019-27 © Frobenius Institute

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