

Editorial and Acknowledgement

The aim of this book was not to write a complete history of research in Ethiopia and the wider Northeast-African region from German perspective, but to present diverse insights on the very different periods of cultural research, with a focus on social anthropology and its precursors. Such an endeavor, encompassing such a wide time frame and several disciplines, has not yet been undertaken. We therefore hope to provide readers some new information and possibly even some surprises. It was important for us not to show research history just as a series of successes of great personalities, but in the contrary as a complex phenomena marked by very diverse aims, dreams and questions, changing over time, leading not only to great results and new knowledge but also to failures and detours. The term 'research' is understood in a wide sense, encompassing any kind of activities aiming to systematically document and understand cultural phenomena and contributing to our knowledge. In the 20th century research was often (not always) carried out with a strong institutional background, by researchers affiliated with universities and other academic institutions. In previous centuries, however, the institutional background of researchers was much more complex and diverse, and this has also marked research history. Researchers were for example in the services of feudal state leaders in Europe, or, in the 19th century, also of Ethiopian feudal lords, and also of religious institutions, especially missions, and of self-made academic organisations.

Classically, research history was often understood as the history of (Western) researchers studying cultural phenomena or texts from the Ethiopian highlands or doing field research close to the people, learning their languages, documenting their traditions and daily practices. However, research history has to be understood as an interaction of many personalities, and certainly not only as the history of officially recognized academic researchers coming from outside. Researchers

from outside always worked with local scholars, who often still have to get their place in research history. Ethiopia for example has a long history of higher learning in the traditional educational institutions in the Orthodox Church schools. In addition, there were also Muslim centres of learning and manuscript production since centuries, such as in Arsi and Bale, and highly skilled oral tradition and legal experts, whose input has marked our image and knowledge of the region. The articles assembled in this volume reflect these multiple origins of research. Also the participating scholars have themselves different backgrounds, and we are very grateful that also in this way it became really possible to treat research history from different perspectives. Also the institutional basis for this publication reflects this background: Following an initiative by the Goethe-Institut Addis Ababa, the Frobenius Institute in Frankfurt and Mekelle University, particularly the College of Social Sciences and Languages, collaborated in making this German-Ethiopian publication possible.

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