

Eike Haberland and the Frankfurt Research Tradition in Southern Ethiopia



Influential German ethnologist at Frankfurt University, with leading publications on the Oromo and their Gadaa system and traditional kingship in the south, one of the most important teachers of this generation's German ethnologists of Ethiopia, leader of ethno-historical studies on Ethiopia

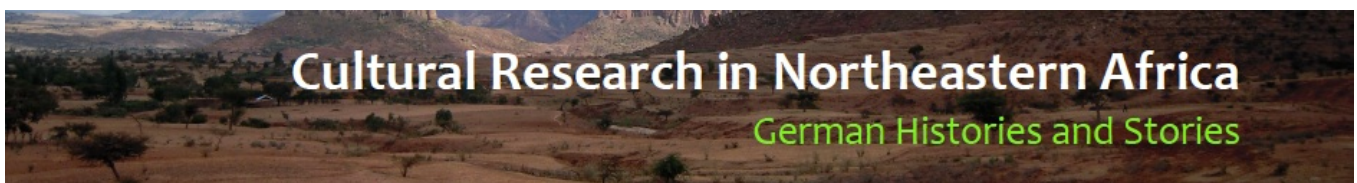
As a researcher, ethnographic writer, and academic teacher, Eike Haberland was the most influential ethnologist of the Frankfurt research tradition in southern Ethiopia. Today's ethnographic understanding of the peoples of this region strongly relies on his own work as well on that of his students, and students of students. As director of the Frobenius Institute he played an important role in defining the profile not only of the institute but also of Germany's ethnology of his time. Through his intensive collaboration with African universities and scholars Haberland and the Frankfurt tradition contributed to the development of cultural anthropology also beyond Ethiopia.

Eike Haberland studied Ethnology in Frankfurt after having survived World War II and American imprisonment. Additionally, he took courses in Oriental studies, classical philology, ancient history, as well as

religious studies. He also spent a semester in Mainz and attended lectures of the Semitist and Ethiopianist Enno Littmann in Tübingen. After completing his studies, he joined the Frobenius Institute and participated in Jensen's expeditions to southern Ethiopia. He completed his academic education with a Ph.D. degree on the *gadaa* generation class system and then submitted his habilitation on forms of Ethiopian kingship. These two topics reflect Haberland's theoretical approach. In southern Ethiopia he claimed to have identified the cultural-historical intermingling of two opposing cultural systems, the more egalitarian pastoralist "*gadaa* system" and hierarchical and centralized "sacred kingship", typical for agriculturists. In this context he also investigated the influence of Christianity and northern statehood and kingship culture in southern Ethiopia.

As director of the Frobenius Institute, Haberland led the Frankfurt research tradition in southern Ethiopia to new heydays. His main research agenda was to document socio-political institutions, history, cultural ecology as well as material culture. Additionally, he collected information on unexplored languages and various other topics. The aim of this was to gather in "the last moment" the historical and cultural knowledge of the peoples studied which he considered highly endangered under the influence of modernization, and to reconstruct their cultural history. Following this programme, he studied various ethnic groups, such as the Dizi, Welaytta, Konta, Maale, Dime, Bodi, Basketto, Mursi, Bacha, Gofa, Gidichcho and Gelila. Haberland's main research focus, however, lay on the Oromo, and the Boorana sub-group in particular.

Text: Dirk Bustorf



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