

IN MEMORIAM



THOMAS GEIDER

29.4.1953 – 15.10.2010

The editors of *Swahili Forum*, as well as the Swahilist community, mourn the untimely death of Thomas Geider, our esteemed colleague, dear friend and founding editor of this journal. Thomas died on 15th October 2010 in his hometown Cologne in Germany, at the age of 57 years. He had suffered a stroke in April and though he seemed to recover, he died of related complications a few months later.

Thomas was born in 1953 in Bonn. Starting in 1974, he studied Geography, Anthropology, and 'Afrikanistik' (African languages and linguistics) at the universities of Bonn and Cologne. His academic teacher at the University of Cologne was the Bantuist Wilhelm J. G. Möhlig, who inspired his student, through his own interest in folk narrative research in Africa, for this field of study. Thus, for his master thesis, Thomas analysed folk narratives of the Pokomo, who live at the Tana River in the Kenyan coastal hinterland. After obtaining his Master degree in 1980, he pursued this project further with a field research in Kenya: between 1977 and 1988, he spent twenty-four months at the Tana River, where he collected and analysed Pokomo folk narratives. His research resulted in a detailed study dedicated to the character of the *zimu* (a type of ogre) in Pokomo tales, which he published in 1990. In the two volumes of the book, he documents the performances and discusses the function of the ogre in the tales relating this character to the culture and living environment of the Pokomo. With this study, Thomas obtained his PhD degree in 1989 with the highest grade possible.

UTA REUSTER-JAHN

Thomas was fascinated with African oral literature, and for his subsequent studies in the German framework of a further post-doctoral degree, the so-called “Habilitation”, he conducted research on folk narratives of the Kanuri in Borno State. Between 1991 and 1996, he spent twenty months in Nigeria as a research member of the Collaborative Research Centre (SFB) on “Cultural Development and Language History in the West African Savannah” at Goethe University Frankfurt, funded by the German Research Foundation. This time his focus was on developing a methodology for the classification of tale motifs, which he exemplified with regard to narratives of the type of the ‘enfant terrible’ and the ‘defeater of monsters’. He attained his “Habilitation” at Frankfurt University in 2001, and published his study in 2003.

From 1984 to 1991, Thomas worked as a lecturer at the University of Mainz, where he taught courses on African oral literature. After his time as a researcher in Frankfurt, he returned to Mainz where he worked as acting director of the Janheinz Jahn Library for African Literatures, from 2000 to 2002. During that time, he developed a strong interest in the concept of World Literature, and the role African works play in it.

Thomas’ goal was to establish African Narrative Research as an integral part of the discipline of African Languages and Linguistics in Germany, but he did not succeed in attaining the position of professor which would have allowed him to do so. The German university system provides only very few positions for senior academics other than the also few full professorships, which results in highly qualified scholars depending on third-party funded posts in projects of often short duration. Thomas’ professional career has been tragically affected by this structural problem. He was an extraordinarily learnt scholar who had a very intimate knowledge of the literature related to his academic field. Drawing from this broad knowledge, he contributed a number of articles to the volumes of the *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*, (‘Encyclopedia of the Folktale’, edited by the research centre *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* in Göttingen, Germany), dealing, among others, with African tale-types and motifs. As an academic teacher, he has inspired many students through his courses on African oral narrative research.

Thomas was also a distinguished Swahilist. Together with Rose Marie Beck and Werner Graebner, he founded the journal *Swahili Forum* in 1994. When the journal went online in 2003, the first volume published in the World Wide Web consisted of his comprehensive Bibliography of Swahili Literature, Linguistics, Culture and History (*Swahili Forum* 10; see <http://www.ifeas.uni-mainz.de/SwaFo/Volume10.html>). This bibliography reflects his immense knowledge of the scholarly literature, and is a most valuable source and tool for all Swahili scholars. Thomas was in the final stages of preparing an update to the bibliography which now will have to be published posthumously.

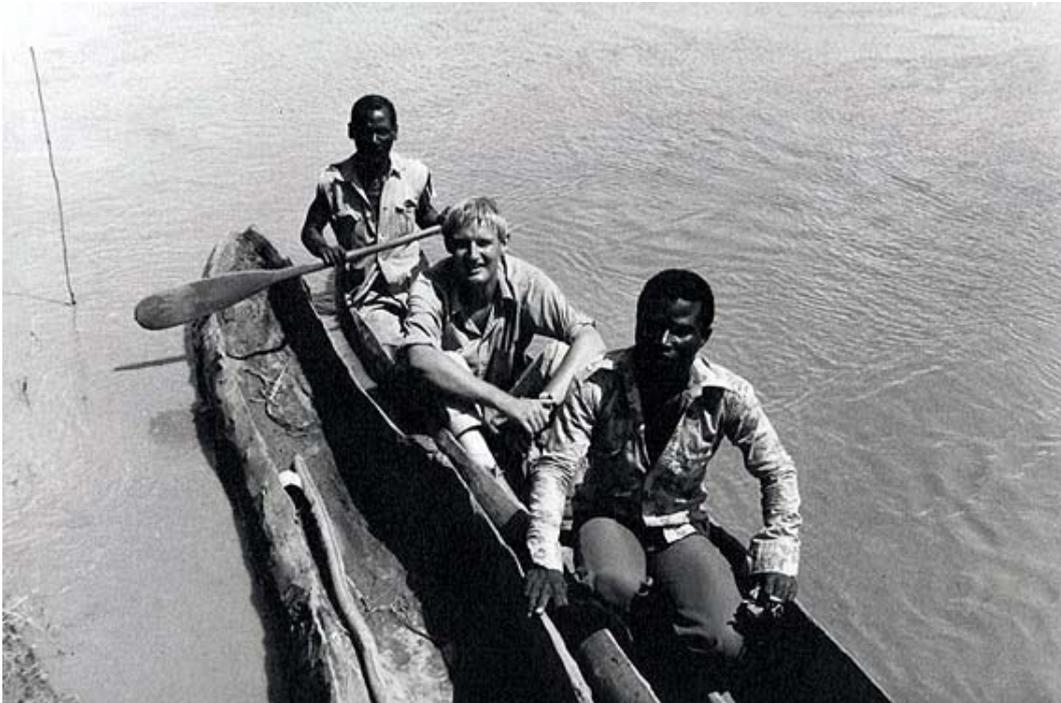
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Thomas has been working at the universities of Mainz, Frankfurt, Bayreuth, Leipzig, and Maiduguri (Nigeria). In 2007, in fulfilment of the requirements, he obtained the title of professor from the University of Frankfurt. His last employment was at the University of Leipzig, where he worked as a lecturer from 2008 to 2009, and as an acting chair for African Languages and Literatures from 2009 to 2010. It was during a journey from Leipzig to his home in Cologne that he suffered the stroke.

Prof. Dr. Thomas Geider's death is a great loss to his friends and colleagues as well as for the disciplines of African Narrative Research and Swahili Studies. Our heartfelt condolences go out to Thomas' family, his wife Anita, his son Leon and his daughter Sally.

Mungu Amweke Pema Peponi

Uta Reuster-Jahn



Thomas Geider, Tana River (Kenya) 1979.