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Ulrich Haarmann, 1942-1999

When I had to fulfil the sad task of writing this obituary about Ulrich Haarmann, I recalled the following two scenes: The solemn burial service at the Littenweiler cemetery in Freiburg was in progress, when suddenly out of nowhere, in the midst of this very peaceful gathering, the faint utterances of a newborn were heard. After a while, the escalating little voice of the infant grew louder and louder and more demanding—it was the sound of a baby crying out to the world. With disapproving glances, the crowd turned their heads in an attempt to signal the student, who had brought her child to the funeral, that she should take the disturbance away. If Ulrich Haarmann had been there to witness this, he would have given a sympathetic smile, which was so typical of him, and I am sure he would have asked the mother to come to the front. After all, he had been fascinated, since his childhood, by creation in its immeasurable variety and by life in all its unfathomable dimensions; thus, he would have certainly enjoyed this allegorical representation of life and death on such an occasion.

It was the mixture of self-irony, uprightness, the enchanting ease with which he made contacts and professional appearances, his cosmopolitan tolerance, and the ability to unite and compromise without ever losing sight of his own interests which made people want to befriend Ulrich Haarmann. In addition to this, his strong sense of duty and profound scholarly dedication, along with his warm kindness, made him a highly esteemed colleague wherever he went. It is, therefore, no surprise that first and foremost it was his personality which made him the perfect candidate for the post of Director of the Zentrum Moderner Orient/Center for Modern Oriental Studies (ZMO) in Berlin. In spite of his illness, he carried out his duties as Director of the Center from 1 April 1998 to the end with enthusiasm and earnestness. In fact, even during the last days of his life, he added corrigenda and addenda by hand to the Center's current proposal book submitted to the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft/German Research Association (DFG) in July 1999. Incidentally, he was thrilled about working in Berlin from the very first day. This was not only because of the fantastic atmosphere at the ZMO but also due to the twelve months he had spent in Berlin as a fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg/

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Institute for Advanced Study (1995/96 and February/March 1997)—a time which he always considered as having been wonderful, important, and very productive.¹

It was also within the rooms of the Wissenschaftskolleg where the second scene I recalled took place: It was a beautiful, sunny day when I visited Ulrich Haarmann and found him, upon my arrival, amidst a group of other fellows in one of the residents' rooms at the institute. He was in his element: First, he spoke to a German colleague on his right about cultural life in Berlin; then he discussed emphatically in French with someone on his left the financial misery of German universities before he switched to English to converse with the gentleman opposite him about the complicated careers and activities of Mamluk descendants before the Ottoman conquest of Egypt. Somewhat shy, I had stepped into the international circle without Ulrich Haarmann having noticed. When he took notice of me, he jumped up enthusiastically and introduced me in perfect Standard Arabic to a colleague from the Comores. Later that evening, he even tried his (to my reassurance) somewhat rusty Russian on an acquaintance from Moscow. One could really feel the ease with which he changed from one idiom to another. Enchanted by the phenomenon of language, he delighted himself in engaging others in his enthusiasm.

Ulrich Haarmann was born in 1942 in Swabia. After having attended the Eberhard-Ludwig-Gymnasium in Stuttgart (classics), it was Arabic which he chose to study at the University of Freiburg. Thereafter, he quickly attained a Fulbright scholarship at Princeton, from which he graduated with a B.A. in Oriental Studies on 15 June 1965. In many ways, this early stay abroad in the USA had a strong influence on the rest of Ulrich Haarmann's life: First, he discovered a love for Arabic grammatical theories, acquired from his examination work under Rudolf Mach on Ibn Bābāshādh's *Al-Muqaddimah fī al-Naḥw*; second, he developed an interest in editing Arabic texts. In a short time, he mastered this philological craft, which for a long time was one of the most sought-after skills in a German orientalist. Despite the demands of today's students to deal only with modern topics, he made a continuous and conscious effort to stress that a solid philological education was indispensable.

At Princeton, Ulrich Haarmann hardly visited the hectic city of New York although it was only an hour away by train. He learned to value the exclusivity and privacy of a campus university, and therefore I believe that the wonderful location of the ZMO in Berlin fulfilled his expectations of a scientific retreat. The years at Princeton laid the groundwork for his lifelong and heartfelt relationship with the USA and Canada. In 1974, he spent four months as visiting professor of Islamic History at the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA). After two

¹See his account of this year at the Wissenschaftskolleg: "Joseph und seine Söhne," *Wissenschaftskolleg –Jahrbuch 1995/96*, 65-71.



similar stays at McGill University in Montreal (1976 and 1986), he participated as a fellow in a research program at the Annenberg Institute for Judaic and Near Eastern Studies in Philadelphia (January-April 1990). In the meantime, he remained loyal to Princeton over the years: first, as a research fellow (January-April 1987), then as a visiting professor (March-June 1992) in the School of Historical Studies of the Institute for Advanced Studies, where he had the opportunity to further his scholarly activities.

Free from the bureaucratic burdens of a German professorship, during these quiet and peaceful months he was able to finish many of his scientific projects. It should suffice to mention the critical edition of Abū Ḥāmid al-Qudṣī's *Duwal al-Islām*; some important articles about the careers of the sons of the Mamluks, the legal opposition to Mamluk autocracy, and ethnic and racial prejudices in the medieval Near East; and lastly his pioneering study on life and trade in Ghadames (Libya) in the nineteenth century.

The starting point for Ulrich Haarmann's intellectual occupation with the somewhat controversial, unique, and fascinating rule of Turkish slaves over the native population of Egypt was his decision to leave Princeton and to return to Freiburg to write his dissertation on *Quellenstudien zur frühen Mamlukenzeit*. His supervisor then was Hans Robert Roemer, the leading figure in German Oriental Studies after 1945.² Roemer not only supported Ulrich Haarmann's Ph.D., but he also took great pleasure in witnessing Haarmann's work at the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut/German Archeological Institute (DAI) in Cairo from autumn 1969 until May 1971. Upon completing this first stay in Egypt, he was offered an assistant professorship in Freiburg. Just one year later he would qualify for his *Habilitation* in Islamic Studies on the basis of his current writings, in particular his dissertation and his edition of the *Chronik des Ibn ad-Dawādārī*. With this, he paved the road for a university career: From 1974 to 1976, he was an assistant professor; from 1976 to 1978 an unscheduled professor; and from 1979 to 1992 a full professor at the University of Freiburg. At the same time, he continually worked in different areas and offices within the administrative organization of his alma mater. His last position before his post in Berlin was a full professorship in Oriental Philology (Arabic and Islamic Studies) at the Christian-Albrechts University in Kiel (1992 to 1998).

Considering the often difficult financial situation of today's young academics, time and again he mentioned how thankful he was for his early job opportunities. All the more reason for him to want to undertake everything in his power to help promising younger scholars. Therefore, he also saw his position in Berlin as a

²See Ulrich Haarmann's obituary about his "Doktorvater" (supervisor): "Zum Gedenken: Hans Robert Roemer (18.2.1915-15.7.1997), *Die Welt des Islams* 38 (1998): 1-8.



chance to turn the ZMO into a place for advanced research on the Orient, where above all, postdocs would be invited as fellows. With regard to the overall conceptual framework of the ZMO, he always emphasized the importance of partnerships and cooperation with individuals and institutions, at regional as well as interregional levels. Haarmann believed the ZMO should act as an (inter)national mediator, bringing together various entities for the enhancement of Oriental Studies both within and outside Germany. The West, in his opinion, had neither an intellectual monopoly on research, nor on the art of mastering the future.

Contact with the Islamic world and its people was always important to Ulrich Haarmann. He personally knew the Arab countries—with the exception of Iraq and the Sudan—from long or short private trips, international congresses, and several research and teaching programs. For instance, in Cairo he was not only employed by the DAI, but also acted as a visiting professor at the American University in Cairo/Center for Arabic Studies (Spring 1971), as well as a lecturer at the University of Cairo (Spring 1977). The time he worked during the Lebanese civil war as Director of the Orient Institute of the Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft/German Oriental Society (DMG) in Beirut (1978-1980) was an especially important experience for him. This task was particularly difficult for him personally, since his wife, his six-month-old daughter and his almost three-year-old son had to remain in Germany. The fact that he nevertheless completed this duty, with courage, was honored by the award of a Golden Medal for Education and Science by the Lebanese President on 15 November 1980. Finally, he kept in close contact with Kuwait ever since his discovery of the earliest naming of this state from the travel logs of Murtaḍá ibn ‘Alī ibn ‘Alwān.

Because of Ulrich Haarmann’s high reputation among his colleagues, many honorable tasks and duties were offered to him. From about 1976 to 1992, he was principal lecturer (“Vertrauensdozent”) at the Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes, and from 1981 to 1991 he was a member of the advisory body of the Institute for Oriental Studies at the DMG. From the winter term 1990/91 he worked as an expert on the Entrance Exam Committee of Princeton University (Alumni School Committee), and in 1995 the role of publishing the highly reputed *Bibliotheca Islamica* was assigned to him.³ In addition to this, the DAI asked him to oversee the publication of *Quellen zur Geschichte des Islamische Ägyptens*, and in 1992 he acted as co-editor of Brill’s series *Islamic History and Civilization*. In 1994, the Academia Europaea nominated him as a member and one year later he was admitted into the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Science.

For a long time, Ulrich Haarmann’s wide-ranging interests focused on the various facets of Mamluk society. He, who was also talented at writing substantial

³In Spring 1999 he handed over this task to Prof. Dr. Tilman Seidensticker (Jena, Germany).



and well considered reviews, did a lot of thorough research in this field. In addition to the above-mentioned titles, his scholarly contributions on medieval Muslim perceptions of Pharaonic Egypt deserve to be highlighted: He introduced and critically edited the *Pyramidenbuch des Abū Ġaʿfar al-Idrīsī (st. 649/1251)*, and no student should miss the opportunity to read his well-written articles on this subject. Besides the difficult subjects of the interdependencies of the Arabic language and Muslim jurisprudence, and socio-political questions on the history of Muslim Central Asia—I will mention only his articles about Faḏl Allāh ibn Rūzbihān Khunjī (860-925/1456-1519), and on Transoxania in the sixteenth century—Ulrich Haarmann was generally interested in the social, cultural, and intellectual history of the medieval Near East as a whole.

One of Ulrich Haarmann's lasting merits was editing the *Geschichte der arabischen Welt*. This work—already in its third edition—has become a classic not only among German students, but also among specialists. Through this inspiring and exemplary teamwork by German orientalists, many students are now able to acquire a very high level of understanding and deep insight into the confusing variety of the political and social systems in the different Arab regions.

Ulrich Haarmann had never been just a resident of the ivory tower. It was for him a basic necessity on suitable occasions—be it during lessons or public appearances, in conversation with amateurs of both religions, in discussion groups or lectures on specific topics—to emphasize the common roots of the Muslim and Christian world views. In his opinion, mutual acceptance and tolerance—with all of the necessary remaining unfamiliarities—were the keywords to opening the way to a multi-cultural society. In this regard, Berlin as a metropolis also seemed to him to be opening up to new perspectives.

After becoming Director of the ZMO, he started looking for new scholarly fields. With his typical curiosity, he quickly found his way into theoretical discussions within the humanities and social sciences. As time went on, he considered these new methodological approaches as being the core of all multi- and interdisciplinary projects. On these grounds, he believed that the identity-producing effect of historiography and the international "contact areas" of the Islamic world during the modern age (the Sahara, Central Asia, the Indian Ocean) would be interesting subjects for future projects. These undertakings were prevented, however, like so many other plans, by his sudden death. There were a lot of good things still to be expected from Ulrich Haarmann; instead there remains an impressive, but somehow brutally interrupted life. The contemporary German community of orientalists has lost a wonderful person and a very erudite scholar.



ULRICH HAARMANN'S SCHOLARLY WORKS

1965

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1972

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1974

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