

## Dr. Krapf – the (Almost) Forgotten Missionary Pioneer

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In January this year it was 200 years since the missionary pioneer Dr. Johann Ludwig Krapf (1810-1881) was born in Derendingen in southern Germany.

Who then was Dr. Krapf? It seems, alas, that two persons with the same name have existed!

One was a pioneer of mission work in East Africa; basically, a *tragic figure* and a *failure*. The work of this Krapf and his early missionary colleagues on the east coast of Kenya was summarized by the famous missiologist Bishop Stephen Neill in the following way:

Very little was achieved in these early years... Their work was limited to the learning of Swahili and the translation of the New Testament into it, the care of the occasional convert – and waiting for a better day.<sup>1</sup>

The other Krapf was a very *influential missionary*. He was, in fact, so important that his name appears every now and then in a number of areas – geography, linguistics, mission history. This Dr. Krapf was so active and so influential that one almost starts to think that the expression ‘Kilroy was here’ can be changed into ‘Dr. Krapf was here’. Dr. Catherine Griefenow-Mewis, a German linguist specializing in African languages, has made the following statement about Krapf; note that she only refers to his *linguistic* contribution, not to the geographical or missiological ones:

Dealing with the bibliographies and publications about and by J L Krapf, especially in the archives of the Basle Mission, I was astonished and I got

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (Harmondsworth, 1964, 1973), 317. For other statements of a similar kind, see M. Louise Pirouet, ‘The Legacy of Johann Ludwig Krapf’, <http://131.111.227.198/CKrapf.htm> (viewed 2010-02-03), and Rune Imberg, *A door opened by the Lord. The history of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya* (Nairobi 2008), 21.

the feeling that such an amount and such a variety of work could not have been done by one person only.<sup>2</sup>

## Why has the Influence of Dr. Krapf been Underestimated?

In my opinion, the importance and influence of Dr. Krapf has often been underestimated. This has basically occurred for three important reasons.

The first two mistakes made by many scholars concerning Dr. Krapf are common in historical studies and related to one another. They are, to put it briefly, different aspects of the historiographical problem called *anachronism*. Some scholars have been so influenced by *modern presuppositions* when studying the life of Dr. Krapf that they have not been able to discern his contribution in different fields. Others have been so influenced by *modern values* that they have not really understood the unique influence he has had. The third reason why his contribution has been underestimated is a rather strange fact: Krapf was active in so many areas of work that *there is hardly any living scholar who is competent to fully evaluate them all*, especially when his linguistic production is considered.

I will now try to prove this case, but let us first consider a statement made by a colleague of Bishop Neill – the famous missiologist, Dr. Bengt Sundkler. In his monumental book, *A history of the Church in Africa*, Sundkler has described Krapf, but in a much more positive way than Neill. According to Sundkler, Dr. Krapf was an *important pioneer missionary*.

Krapf and his co-workers made contributions in four different areas: geographical exploration, contacts with African chiefs, translation work and the formulation of missionary strategy.<sup>3</sup>

Basically I agree with the statement of Bishop Sundkler. In my opinion he has identified four areas where Krapf made a lasting contribution. I would still dare to say that even Dr. Sundkler, with his encyclopedic knowledge of mission history, did not stress enough the unique extent of the contribution made by Dr. Krapf.

<sup>2</sup> Catherine Griefenow-Mewis, 'J. L. Krapf and his role in researching and describing East-African languages', AAP 47 (1996): 161-171, quoted from Internet: [http://www.ifeas.uni-mainz.de/SwaFo/swafo3/3\\_13\\_Mewis.pdf](http://www.ifeas.uni-mainz.de/SwaFo/swafo3/3_13_Mewis.pdf) (2009-09-01); quotation taken from p. 161.

<sup>3</sup> Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed, *A history of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge 2000), 517.

I will now attempt to give a kind of re-assessment of the work and life of Krapf, indicating why he was such an important pioneer missionary. In my opinion, an evaluation of his work shows that he can only be compared with his younger contemporary Dr. David Livingstone.<sup>4</sup>

In the following we will see why the contribution by Dr. Krapf is so important, using the four areas mentioned by Dr. Sundkler. I write from my personal perspective, being a Church historian and having lived for many years in the same country as Krapf (i.e. Kenya), although in the opposite end of it (not at the coast, but close to Lake Victoria). From my Swedish perspective, I can identify how he has influenced Swedish mission history; from my years in Kenya, I have come to understand his importance for the vibrant Christianity found in many areas in East Africa and also for the development of Swahili as a language.

Before I put forward my case, let me just give a brief outline of his life.

### **Some Basic Facts about the Life and Work of Johann Ludwig Krapf**

Johann Ludwig Krapf was born in Derendingen, today a suburb of Tübingen, in 1810 and was raised in a pious and pietistic family.<sup>5</sup> As a teenager he walked together with his elder sister from Tübingen to the famous mission institute in Basel, covering the long distance by foot, in the middle of the winter. He was, however, denied admittance because of his age – he was only fifteen years old. Although, one year later he was admitted as a student. He graduated from the institution in 1829, still only a teenager. After graduation he did not enter into mission service but continued with studies of theology in Tübingen. This means that he attended the classes of the fa-

<sup>4</sup> It can be noted that the publication of the most famous book by Krapf, his *Reisen in Ostafrika ausgeführt in den Jahren 1837-1855...* (published in Germany 1858; abbreviated English tr. 1860) was influenced by the success of Livingstone's book, 'Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa,' which was published the previous year (London, 1857); cf. J. L. Krapf, *Reisen in Ostafrika* [Stuttgart 1964, repr. of original ed.], XXI.

<sup>5</sup> Concerning the details found in this section, see Jochen Eber, *Johann Ludwig Krapf. Ein schwäbischer Pionier in Ostafrika* (Riehen/Basel, 2006) and *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, (Berlin 1969 [reprint of 1. ed., 1883]), xvii: 49ff. Cf. also, on the Internet, 'Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon', vol IV (1992), col. 606-608 [updated version], <http://www.bautz.de/bbkl/k/Krapf.shtml> (2010-01-27), and M. Louise Pirouet, 'The Legacy of Johann Ludwig Krapf', cf. note 1, above.

mous Tübingen scholars, including F. C. Baur. It seems they did not make any lasting impression on him; he was more influenced by mystical authors such as Madame de Guyon and others.<sup>6</sup> Krapf served for a short period as a parish pastor following his academic graduation.

After a conflict with his parish and the ecclesiastical authorities, as well as a renewed interest in mission work,<sup>7</sup> he went to Ethiopia where he served as an Anglican missionary between 1837 and 1843. While still a teenager, it became evident that he had a special gift for languages.<sup>8</sup> This gift was put into use when he served in Ethiopia. In fact, he was only 32 years old when his *alma mater*, the University of Tübingen, created him a Doctor of Philosophy, *honoris causa*, because of his excellent linguistic work in Ethiopia.<sup>9</sup>

After a trip to Egypt, he was not allowed to re-enter Abyssinia (Ethiopia) for political reasons. Instead the mission society transferred him and his wife Rosine to the Mombasa area, on the coast of modern Kenya, where he served as a missionary from 1844 to 1855. He and Rosine, who died after just a few months, were the first missionaries in the 'modern' sense to serve in East Africa.<sup>10</sup> Due to health reasons, Krapf left Africa and returned to Europe in 1855 where, except for a couple of brief journeys to Africa (one to Kenya and one to Ethiopia), he remained until his death in 1881.

We can also note some facts related to his ministry which will be elaborated upon later:

<sup>6</sup> Eber, *Johann Ludwig Krapf*, p. 26 ff.

<sup>7</sup> 'After less than a year of not altogether happy parish ministry he met Peter Fjellstedt, a Basel-trained Swedish missionary, who rekindled his missionary call'; M. Louise Pirouet, *op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> 'At school he quickly caught up with his contemporaries and then outstripped them, soaking up languages like blotting paper. He learned Latin and Greek and made a start on French and Italian... [while still in school, he] had 'read the greater portion of the Old Testament in the original.'" M. Louise Pirouet, 'The Legacy of Johann Ludwig Krapf'. – It is interesting to compare him with other missionary pioneers like William Carey and Peter Fjellstedt, who had a similar gift of learning new languages.

<sup>9</sup> He assisted the University of Tübingen by collecting rare Ethiopian manuscripts which he bought or copied and sent home to Germany; Eber, *Johann Ludwig Krapf*, 78ff.

<sup>10</sup> Portuguese priests and monks had served on the East Coast of Africa from 1505 onwards. A Portuguese fort (Fort Jesus) was built in 1593-95, but the Portuguese colony basically disappeared in 1698 (finally in 1729). For more than a century, there had not been any Christian presence at all in that area of Africa until the arrival of the Krapfs; cf. Imberg, *A door opened by the Lord*, 27ff, with references.

- while working as a missionary in East Africa, Krapf was the first European to identify Mt. Kenya and only the second to identify Mt. Kilimanjaro – it even seems that he was influential in introducing the names still in use.<sup>11</sup>
- he came to the Mombasa area in January 1844 where he encountered the Swahili language for the first time in his life; only some five months later, on 8 June, he started to translate the first portion of the Bible (Genesis) into Swahili, assisted by a local *kadi* (judge), Sheikh Ali Ben-Mueddin.
- he was influential in giving Swahili its modern shape – before his efforts Swahili was written with *Arabic* script; he was one of the first writers to use *Roman* letters.
- he produced books and booklets (Bible translations, grammars, vocabularies, dogmatic works, Anglican liturgies) in some ten to fifteen African languages; in many cases he was the first one to write/edit any written document in those languages.
- although he personally seems to have been a very ‘unsuccessful’ missionary (baptizing only one or two converts), he influenced a number of missionary societies, mainly in England, Germany and Sweden, in their missiological thinking, especially how and where to initiate mission work in Eastern Africa.

He was married three times.<sup>12</sup> The marriage with his first wife, Rosine, lasted less than two years. They were married in Egypt in September 1842. In late May 1843, while they were travelling in Ethiopia, she gave birth to a premature daughter who died after an hour. The child was buried the same day along the road. Rosine died in July 1844 near Mombasa in connection with giving birth to their second daughter; the girl died a few days later. With his second wife Charlotte, whom he married in 1856 in Germany, Krapf had a daughter, Johanna, who survived him. In 1869, one year after the death of Charlotte, he entered into a third marriage with Nanette Schmid which

<sup>11</sup> In his book *Reisen in Ostafrika ausgeführt in den Jahren 1837-1855...* (II:160; cf. Eber, *Johann Ludwig Krapf*, p. 140) he used the names *Kilimandscharo* and *Kenia/Kegnja*, respectively. The mountain called Mt. Kenya has given its name to the modern country; the name seems to go back to a tribal word *Kirinyaga*. Quite often his spelling gives a quite strange impression to modern readers, at least concerning Swahili. Krapf was not only a pioneer in writing Swahili with Latin letters, his spelling was also influenced by his *German* background. The Swahili orthography which developed after his time in Africa is much more simple and influenced by *English*.

<sup>12</sup> For details, cf. Eber, *Johann Ludwig Krapf*, 73ff, 89ff, 185, 233ff, 237.

lasted until his death in 1881. She died in 1901. As it seems, Dr. Krapf died while making his personal evening devotion. After having had an evening devotion together with his family, he returned to his room where he was found the next morning on his knees, leaning towards his bed.<sup>13</sup>

## Krapf – the Explorer and Geographer

From a modern perspective, we can easily discern that Krapf was a pioneer missionary – but was he really an important ‘explorer’ or ‘geographer’ in his time? It is easy to recognize that Krapf had a different temperament and distinct priorities than Dr. Livingstone. While Livingstone constantly moved around – during his famous journey Stanley struggled not only to *reach* the camp of Livingstone but initially even to *find* it – Krapf acted in a totally different way. He built up his mission station *Rabai*, near Mombasa, where he stayed most of the time. His trips to the interior of Africa lasted for a number of weeks or months, but not years, and always had a specific purpose. When travelling he stressed making contacts with people, especially chiefs, so that the Gospel could reach new areas. He also made a large numbers of notations documenting his experiences. To a large extent, these notes make up his famous book *Reisen in Ostafrika*.

He certainly was an important explorer and geographer. But how important? That begs further attention. It seems, surprisingly enough, that no definite study of his explorations has ever been made. Consequently, it is difficult to evaluate his contribution as an explorer and geographer. However, it is well known that he was only the second white man to view Mt. Kilimanjaro, and the first one to view Mt. Kenya (the second highest mountain in Africa). It is also well known that he and his colleague, Mr. Rebmann, were treated with ridicule by European scholars when they stated that these mountains were covered with snow.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, xvii: 55. – Livingstone had died in a similar way some years earlier; cf. Jonathan Hildebrandt, *History of the Church in Afric. A survey* (Achimota Ghana, 1981), 118.

<sup>14</sup> I have always been surprised by the fact that geographical scholars in Great Britain ridiculed his claim that there was at least one mountain in Africa covered with snow. Were they not aware of the fact that he was born in southern Germany and had studied in Switzerland?

Almost 50 years ago (in 1964), *Privatdozent* Hanno Beck, in his German Introduction to Krapf's *Reisen in Ostafrika*, made some important statements which seem to have been neglected until now:<sup>15</sup>

- The best geographical competence in the world in the 1820s and 1830s was not found in the Western universities, but among some mission societies and organizations. Furthermore, the mission institute in Basel (where both Dr. Fjellstedt and his friend Dr. Krapf had studied) had a unique geographic competence by this time.
- The teaching of geography at mission institutes like the one in Basel deserves a study, but also the importance of the mission literature and the journeys made by the missionaries.

Of course a number of contemporaries of Krapf shared, at least partly, his knowledge. Some local political leaders (e.g. the Sultan in Zanzibar) and merchants,<sup>16</sup> not to mention the slave traders, had a basic geographical knowledge of the area between the coast and Lake Victoria. Much of the information spread by Krapf and others to the learned world was based on information given by the local population and indigenous authorities.<sup>17</sup> The difference between Krapf and them was that he actively sought new information, for its own sake, and wanted to spread it to the world outside of Africa, mainly in order to open up Africa for the Gospel. We also ought to recognize that his number one priority was his mission work, and so did not allow the explorative side take over (like it seems to have done with Dr. Livingstone). It is well known, for example, that Krapf through a number

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<sup>15</sup> 'Diese Vorbereitung verdankte er der Baseler Missionsanstalt, *wie denn diese Institute damals mehr praktische geographische Erfahrungen besaßen als die Universitäten*, eine Tatsache, die von der Geographiegeschichte noch gebührend untersucht werden muß. Der geographische Unterricht dieser Anstalten verdient eingehende Würdigung, und es ist überhaupt noch eine Aufgabe, *endlich die explorativ-geographischen Ansätze der Missionsliteratur zu verstehen und dem Gesamtbild der Geschichte der Reisen einzufügen*. Missionare waren nicht nur ausgezeichnete Ethnologen und Philologen, die meist die ersten Wortlisten, Wörterbücher und Grammatiken auch kleinerer Stämme aufzeichneten und herausgaben, sondern ihre geographischen Leistungen stellen oft die farbigsten Kapitel der Geschichte der Reisen in vielen Epochen dar.' Hanno Beck, ('Einführung', VII) in: J. L. Krapf, *Reisen in Ostafrika* (Stuttgart 1964). – *Italics* by H. B.

<sup>16</sup> Concerning Said Sultan in Zanzibar, cf. C. P. Groves, *The Planting of Christianity in Africa* (London, 1954, 1964), ii: 97.

<sup>17</sup> The *Kamba* chief Kivoi, for example, was an important source for Krapf when, during a journey to *Ukambani* (Kamba-land) in Nov. 1849, he was informed that there was a mountain covered with snow in the interior (J. L. Krapf, *Reisen in Ostafrika*, ii: 160).

of Africans had received information of the existence of Mt. Kilimanjaro, but that he let his colleague Rebmann 'discover' the mountain instead of desiring to personally make that observation and become famous.<sup>18</sup>

According to my understanding, the importance of the observations made by Dr. Krapf, from a geographical perspective, seem to have been underestimated, even by scholars of geography.<sup>19</sup> One reason to make such a statement is the fact that the 'outer world' had no detailed knowledge of the interior parts of Eastern Africa (except for Abyssinia / Ethiopia), until Krapf published his famous book *Reisen in Ostafrika ausgeführt in den Jahren 1837-1855* in 1858. The map which is found in both the German and English version of his book contains unique information, even if many details (distances, geographical positions, etc.) are mistaken. His book seems to have greatly influenced the exploration and the investigation of the interior of Eastern Africa.<sup>20</sup>

## Krapf's Social and Ethnological Contribution

Sundkler also mentions the importance of Krapf in connection with African chiefs. The contribution of Krapf in this area seems, in fact, to have been twofold: a social one, but also an ethnological one (not mentioned by Sundkler). To start with, Krapf met with a number of people during the time he spent in East Africa. This pioneer work opened the door for a number of missionaries who came after him, and in that way a number of Christian

<sup>18</sup> Dr. Beck is impressed with their attitude, not searching for fame through 'discoveries' which they could spread all over the world: '*Bewunderungswürdig ist die völlige Freiheit dieser Missionare von Rekordsucht und Ehrgeiz*'; Beck, 'Einführung', VIII (cf. note 16).

<sup>19</sup> I hope, however, that a Masters thesis in History, presented in Vienna University in Austria in 2008, will create a new trend. The thesis is written by Heinrich Bursik and called 'Wissenschaft u. Mission soll sich aufs innigste miteinander befreunden. Geographie und Sprachwissenschaft als Instrumente der Mission – der Afrikareisende Johann Ludwig Krapf.' I am grateful to Dr. Jochen Eber for drawing my attention to this study.

<sup>20</sup> For us who are not specialists in the history of geography, the Internet can help us to understand the general geographical knowledge as it developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. (Use search words like *Africa – antique – maps!*) To get an idea of what was known of the interior of Africa before Krapf, see the maps reproduced in Imberg, *A door opened by the Lord*, 34ff. Cf. also <http://www.philaprintshop.com/images/ewingafrica.jpg>, from 1830, and <http://www.philaprintshop.com/images/tannerafrica.jpg>, from 1840 (both viewed 2010-02-16). Krapf's own map from 1858/1860 is found here – note, that now the lakes in the interior of Africa start to appear: <http://www.archive.org/stream/travelresearchmission00krapf/page/n639/mode/1up> (2010-02-15).

churches in East Africa have been influenced by his work. In this way, Krapf paved the way for Christian mission work in East Africa more than any other person. A tribute to the work of Krapf and his colleagues is the fact that a couple of book titles refer expressly to his work:

When the Anglican Church in Kenya celebrated its first 150 years, the book describing its history was called *Rabai to Mumias* (Rabai was the mission station in eastern Kenya where Krapf worked), while James Hannington, a famous Anglican Bishop and martyr, died close to Mumias in 1885). In a similar way, Dr. Carl-Erik Sahlberg has written a book called *From Krapf to Rugambwa – a Church history of Tanzania*. Rugambwa was a famous Tanzanian Roman Catholic Bishop and Cardinal.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, it is easy to see that the pioneering perspective of Krapf has been recognized. The ethnological side has, however, been grossly forgotten. In order to make this point clear, let me make a comparison with the Swedish situation.

The first official missionary coming to ‘Sweden’ was St. Ansgar, who came to visit the ‘king’ in approximately 830 A.D., although there is reason to believe that there had been many individual Christians before him in the country. We have a very interesting biography written about him by one of his successors as a bishop in Germany, Archbishop Rimbert. Except for Rimbert’s *Life of Ansgar*, and a later book by a German cleric called Adam, we have very few written sources concerning the first centuries of organized Christianity in Sweden. Both books are written in Latin, but we have excellent translations into modern Swedish. Today Swedish scholars would do almost anything to find new, additional sources related to our own ancient history and we would not care a bit even if they were written in Chinese or Arabic! Such a source would rapidly be translated and analyzed from every possible angle. How does it come, then, that so little has been made of the overflowing information found in Krapf’s books and his numerous letters?

His books, especially the two volumes of his *Reisen in Ostafrika*, but perhaps also the journal produced in 1843 together with Isenberg and covering their

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<sup>21</sup> *Rabai to Mumias. A short history of the Church of the Province of Kenya 1844 to 1994* (Nairobi, 1994); Carl-Erik Sahlberg, *From Krapf to Rugambwa – a Church History of Tanzania* (Nairobi, 1986).

work in Abyssinia/Ethiopia,<sup>22</sup> are important and interesting pre-colonial sources dealing with the situation in a number of countries in Eastern Africa. In *Reisen in Ostafrika*, Krapf mentions a number of places, tribes, lakes, rivers and even mountains. We need to recognize that some details are not correct; the position and extent of Lake Victoria, for example, given in the map in his book is incorrect, which is indicative of some of the problems. Yet we are given a tremendous amount of information related to many areas in the interior of East Africa, for the first time ever. Let me just give a few examples from one passage in the German original.<sup>23</sup> The exact date of the passage can be dated to 1849 and 1858 respectively: The text was printed in 1858 and Krapf wrote it on the basis of the information recorded in his journal from November and December 1849.

- Krapf started his journey from Rabai on 1 Nov., 1849. He returned fifty-one days later, meeting Rebmann and Erhardt on 21 Dec. (*Reisen in Ostafrika*, ii: 137, 170).
- Krapf was assisted by eleven porters carrying his luggage, which indicates that his caravan was quite small. The porters were paid in ‘Thalers’ (ii: 136ff). This ought to refer to the *Maria Theresia thaler*, originally coined in Austria but for a long period of time used over great areas of Africa up to the previous century.
- Through the information in his book we might even be able to identify a standard ‘salary’ given to porters by this time in the coastal areas.
- We are also informed of the ‘tribute’ which Krapf had to pay when passing tribal borders, starting with the *Duruma* tribe (ii: 137). This payment has sometimes been treated as a kind of *bribery*, but today we might rather call it a form of taxation.
- In the *Kamba* area, Krapf met chief Kiwoi (*Kivoi*; ii: 160), who mentioned not only Mt. Kilimanjaro in the *Dschagga* (*Chagga*) area, but also another mountain which he called ‘Kiima [Kilima?] dscha dscheu’ (‘the white mountain’).

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<sup>22</sup> *Journals of the Rev. Messrs. Isenberg and Krapf, Missionaries of the Church Missionary Society, detailing their Proceedings in the Kingdom of Shoa, and Journeys in Other Parts of Abyssinia, in the Years 1839, 1840, 1841, and 1842* (London, 1843).

<sup>23</sup> The basic historiographical problem is this: unless you study the German original, you cannot know what is left out of the abbreviated English translation. Consequently, the German original must always be consulted, while the abbreviated English translation in general is of less interest.

- Kivoi also mentioned a place in *Wanduroboland*; the *Ndorobo* is a small tribe still existing in Kenya and related to the Bushmen peoples in southern Africa.
- According to Kivoi, it took 10 days to walk from his home to Kilimanjaro, but only six days to Kenia/Kegnia (*Kenya*) in the Kikuyu area.
- A cow was slaughtered by Kivoi and in connection with this event the current price of cows is mentioned: in *Ukambani* 3 doti or 1 ½ Thaler, among the *Kikuyu* 2 doti or 1 Thaler (ii: 164)
- Krapf then mentions the names of the highest mountains in that area: Kirikata, Kirimonge, and Kawumbu (nine names are given). This is followed by seventeen names of tribes and places including: Kirugami, Tuku, Gnalua, and Molodoi.
- He also describes how to reach Mt. Kenya, ‘Schneeberg Kegnia’, a journey taking six days: Starting from Kitui – via Muakini – Mambidschi (*Mambitchi?*) – Tana river – Muea – Uimbu – finally reaching Mt. Kenya. – Through this and similar descriptions (ii: 165), many of the old trails and caravan routes can be identified.

These are just a few brief examples of the information which is given by Krapf in just one short passage. His book is like a gold mine for research related to certain areas in East Africa, especially the interior of Kenya and northern Tanzania. Just like a gold mine, the contents need to be evaluated carefully. Krapf was influenced by his background and his values. He misunderstood things and was prejudiced – like most of us. Still, the fact remains: There is no source which can be compared with his *Reisen in Ostafrika* concerning the pre-colonial history of Kenya and its neighbouring countries. That said, it is surprising that no proper ethnological or historical analysis of his writings, utilizing this information, seems to have been made. What would happen if these texts – which are like ‘verbal photos’ of East Africa 150 to 160 years ago – are compared with the historical investigations which have been undertaken in Africa, especially in the last fifty years?

The historical and academic research in modern Kenya working on pre-colonial history has stressed the use of oral sources and seems to have come very far in many cases.<sup>24</sup> It would now be very interesting, even thrilling, to compare these historical studies with the written information given by Krapf and his colleagues, including Rebmann and others. I am not only thinking of Krapf's books, but also of his letters which now are found in numerous archives in Europe (especially England, Germany, Switzerland).<sup>25</sup> However, it must be noted that it is a pity that the English translation of Krapf's *Reisen in Ostafrika*, published in 1860 as *Travels, Researches and Missionary Labours During an Eighteen Years' Residence*, was heavily abbreviated.<sup>26</sup> The scholars in East Africa need to get access to a well translated and well edited version of the complete German original. It is also a pity that most of the scholars working with Krapf have used the translation, not the German original.<sup>27</sup>

### Larger than Life? Krapf – the Linguist

One of the main reasons why so little is written about the work done by Krapf, in Africa and elsewhere, is perhaps that in one area he was almost larger than life: linguistics. Let us start by quoting the volume which commemorated 150 years of Anglican work in Kenya and East Africa, where it is said about Krapf:

The missionaries had to study and know African languages in order to communicate with the Africans and spread Christianity. For this reason they undertook a good pioneering work in African languages. They spent a lot of time preparing grammars, dictionaries and New Testament translations into Swahili and other African languages.

<sup>24</sup> While living in Kenya, I saw a number of interesting historical studies dealing with the pre-colonial period made by a number of scholars working especially in East African universities. I was impressed with how they had been working with oral sources, in order to uncover the historical development several centuries ago (e.g., how different tribes have moved). Just one example of this approach, related to the Gusii / Kisii tribe, is: William Robert Ochieng', *A pre-colonial history of the Gusii of Western Kenya from c. A.D. 1500 to 1914* (Kampala, 1974).

<sup>25</sup> Concerning documents by Krapf, see Eber, *Johann Ludwig Krapf*, and the references given by him.

<sup>26</sup> J. Lewis [!] Krapf, *Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labours, During an Eighteen Years' Residence in Eastern Africa* (London, 1860). The book consists of 566 pages, the German original of 505 + 521 pages.

<sup>27</sup> The classical study by C. P. Groves, *The Planting of Christianity in Africa*, e.g., seems to be based totally on the English version; cf. ii: 96, note 1 ff.

Dr. Krapf was a brilliant linguist and reduced Kiswahili and other coastal dialects to writing in the Roman alphabet, being a pioneer of future grammars and dictionaries in these languages. Thus, right from the initial stages of planting Christianity in East Africa, missionaries placed importance on studying African languages and translating scriptures into vernaculars....

Krapf travelled up and down the coast and into Ukambani. He was eager to set up a chain of missions right across Africa. He thought that a short stay in a village, teaching the fundamentals of Christianity, training a catechist and then moving on, was the best way of proceeding. In this way he anticipated the thinking of Roland Allen which, though slow to win acceptance, has been so valuable to missionary strategy in the twentieth century. Krapf was quick at picking up languages and translated parts of the Bible at great speed. Being himself full of energy in between bouts of fever, he did not seem to see the difficulty of asking missionaries to deal with three or four new languages and sets of customs in a year...<sup>28</sup>

The unfortunate fact is that in order to fully evaluate the linguistic work of Dr. Krapf, a scholar needs to have a working knowledge of several European languages, the Biblical languages, popular ('vulgar') Arabic, and then, on top of that, some ten to fifteen different African languages, in which Krapf in most cases was a pioneer.

As we already have seen, the German scholar Dr. Catherine Griefenow-Mewis was surprised that an individual could produce 'such an amount and such a variety of work'.<sup>29</sup> The best summary of his linguistic production, although it is hardly complete, is given in the German *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon* found on the Internet. For any non-specialist it is difficult even to identify all the languages mentioned there, but they seem to be more than fifteen.<sup>30</sup>

One area where Krapf's contribution was very important for the later development is related to Bible translations.<sup>31</sup> It has been described in this way:

<sup>28</sup> *Rabai to Mumias*, 5, 10.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. note 2, above.

<sup>30</sup> I have been able to identify these languages: *African*: Galla (Oromo), Swahili, Kinika, Kikamba, Kipokomo, Kihiau, Wakuafi/Maa (Maasai), Amharic, Falasha, Tigré, Ethiopic (Geez?), Kinyassa, Guragesch. Others: English, German, Latin; *translations* from Hebrew and Greek. Cf. 'Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon', vol IV (1992), col. 606-608 [updated version], <http://www.bautz.de/bbkl/k/Krapf.shtml>.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Viera Pawliková-Vilhanová, 'Biblical translations of early missionaries in East and Central Africa. I. Translations into Swahili' in: *Asian and African Studies* [Slovak Academy of Sciences], 15 (2006), I, 80 ff.

In the linguistic field, particularly with regard to Swahili, Krapf was a pioneer and as such his influence was to prove fundamental. He thought he had found that Swahili was 'spoken, at least understood from the Equator to the Portuguese settlements in Mosambic' and the language thus offered what Krapf always was looking for in peoples and in languages, a key – in this case a linguistic key – to the languages of the interior.... His work on the Gospels into Swahili and on a dictionary of this language and related East African languages was important for Bishop Steere's New Testament translation and this again was to be a basis for translations into other leading East African vernaculars, such as George Pilkington's Luganda [a major language in Uganda] translation in the 1890s.<sup>32</sup>

Although Krapf worked with a large number of East African languages, he preferred Swahili as a language of evangelism to all the others. 'Its status as a lingua franca and its rich reservoir of religious concepts relevant to Christianity, made Kiswahili in the eyes of Rev. Krapf an ideal language for East African Christianity.' But before it really could be used, it was necessary to start to write it with Roman letters rather than using the Arabic script, not to leave a door wide open to 'Mohammedan proselytism'.<sup>33</sup>

When the linguistic contribution by Krapf is studied, his interaction with other scholars also needs to be analyzed. Together with his colleague Rebmann he was, just to take one example, involved in a linguistic fight against the Anglican Bishop Steere of Zanzibar, dealing with the issue of which coastal dialect should be considered as being normative for standard Swahili: Kiunguja (of Zanzibar) or Kimvita (of Mombasa)? Krapf and Rebmann lost the fight, while Bishop Steere won.<sup>34</sup> Today millions of people all over East Africa use Swahili, but few of them know about the contribution made by Bishop Steere or Dr. Krapf. The fact still remains that the Swahili dialect favoured by Steere is the one taught in the schools of Tanzania and Kenya, and not the one favoured by Krapf.

It cannot be a surprise when this has been said, that even if Dr. Krapf did not introduce the concept Bantu, which today is a necessity for anyone

<sup>32</sup> Sundkler & Steed, *A history of the Church in Africa*, 518ff.

<sup>33</sup> Ali A. Mazrui and Alamin M. Mazrui, *Swahili state and society: political economy of an African language* (London, 1995), 52.

<sup>34</sup> Farouk Topan, 'Langue et culture à Zanzibar', in: Colette Le Cour Grandmaison – Ariel Crozon, *Zanzibar aujourd'hui* (Paris, 1998), 254. The linguistic struggle was closely related to evangelistic issues: Which Swahili dialect should be used for proclaiming the gospel? ('Chacun voulait que le kiswahili de sa région soit le véhicule essentiel pour la propagation de christianisme.')

studying African languages and culture, it was launched by persons who were influenced by his linguistic work. According to Dr. Griefenow-Mewis, the Bantu concept was developed by scholars as a result of the discussion which followed after the printing of Krapf's book *Vocabulary of Six East African Languages* (Tübingen, 1850).<sup>35</sup> Griefenow-Mewis also writes:

As it holds true for the Swahili studies, the Oromo studies can also not deny the origins laid down by Krapf. It is one of the ironies of fate that Krapf was honoured with a Ph.D. degree of the Tübingen University in 1844 neither for his Swahili or Bantu studies nor for his Oromo studies, but for his merits in collecting and describing sources in Amharic and Ge'ez.<sup>36</sup>

Before we leave this section, let us make one final observation. Krapf has often been accused of paving the way for European (or German) colonialism in Europe in the nineteenth century. Such an accusation is hardly correct; my impression is rather that he was, at least for many years, critical towards colonial ambitions. It might, however, be that other persons, especially in Germany, used his name to promote their own agendas.<sup>37</sup> Still, his stand on this issue, and his personal development, deserves a careful analysis.

It is, thus, interesting to note what Krapf wrote towards the end of his life in a dictionary which he published shortly before his death. He edited the book *Dictionary of the Kinyassa language*, a language mainly used in Malawi,<sup>38</sup> which his late colleague John Rebmann had written. He wrote:

NB. Regarding the Alphabet used in this Dictionary, the Editor has followed that of Dr. Steere, as given in his valuable *Handbook of the Swahili Language* pag. 8 (second edition). Rebmann [sic] has adopted another [sic] Alphabet and Orthography, which to an English reader was rather objectionable. The Editor is of the opinion, that the introduction of a standard alphabet on behalf of the

<sup>35</sup> Catherine Griefenow-Mewis (cf. note 2), 163 ff. – Krapf's own terminology was quite complicated; cf. Krapf, *Reisen in Ostafrika*, ii: 267, when dealing with the Maa (Maasai) language.

<sup>36</sup> Catherine Griefenow-Mewis (cf. note 2), 166. The correct year for his doctorate is, in fact, 1842.

<sup>37</sup> At least in 1858 he was very critical against plans of colonial expansion, even if it were for evangelistic purposes. Note the final comments in his *Reisen in Ostafrika*, addressed to missionaries to be: 'Do not expect anything, or at least very little, from political changes in East Africa'. ('Erwarte du nichts, oder nur sehr wenig von politischen Veränderungen in Ostafrika.' ii: 520)

<sup>38</sup> My impression is that Dr. Krapf never spoke Kinyassa, only editing the first book in that language. Rebmann, however, had learnt to talk Kinyassa through some persons coming to the Mombasa area.

great South-African [Krapf's term for 'Bantu'?] family of languages *ought to be left to the development of the natives of future generations*.<sup>39</sup>

## The Most Important Contribution by Dr. Krapf – His Visions

Last, but not least, we come to the contribution of Krapf which in many ways is the most important of all – his visions and his mission strategy. One reason why so many people have criticized him seems to have been his 'Galla vision', i. e. to reach the *Oromo* people with the Gospel.<sup>40</sup> The Swedish scholar, Gustav Arén, is only one of many who could hardly restrain himself when describing the thoughts of Krapf in this area:

The more he [Krapf] learnt of the Oromo people, the more he was taken by them. He went so far as to predict that they 'in time might become for Africa, what our Germany became for Europe'... His words made a great impact on friends in Europe. 'The Germany of Africa' became a catchword. Converted to Christ the Oromo would have an important mission to fulfil in the Horn of Africa by forming a mighty bulwark against Islam.<sup>41</sup>

Today we can see, on the one hand, that Krapf was mistaken in many ways: The Oromo were not so numerous as he believed them to be and mission among them was not of such a strategic importance as he thought. However, on the other hand, today we talk of Christopher Columbus as an important explorer – the important thing to remember is the discovery he made and the development he initiated, not primarily his mistakes (i. e. his belief that he had found the route to India). In a similar way, we ought to evaluate the work and ministry of Dr. Krapf by asking: What has been his contribution to the development of mankind?

Leaving aside the geographic and linguistic aspects of his work, we can say this: In mission history he is important for at least three reasons:

<sup>39</sup> Quoted from <http://www.archive.org/stream/dictionarykinia00socigoog#page/n6/mode/lup> (2010-02-11). - The last case of *italics* made by RI, the previous ones by Krapf.

<sup>40</sup> Note that Krapf preferred to call them *Oromo* ('Orma oder Oroma') rather than *Galla*, which then was the common name but now is abandoned, since it is pejorative; J. L. Krapf, *Reisen in Ostafrika*, i: 92 ff (*Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labours*, 72 ff).

<sup>41</sup> Gustav Arén, *Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia. Origins of the Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus* (Stockholm, 1978), 73.

- His Oromo vision (which he, in fact, had inherited from others including the Jesuits) influenced and inspired a great number of Christians and mission societies, among them Louis Harms in Hermannsburg in Germany,<sup>42</sup> English Methodists, Swedish Evangelical Mission (Evangeliska Fosterlands-Stiftelsen) in Sweden, and many others,<sup>43</sup>
- He developed a vision of creating a chain of mission stations across Africa ('the Apostles' Street'), but did not invent it,<sup>44</sup>
- In general, he assisted a number of mission societies, encouraging them to send missionaries to Africa.

If we want to make a fair and realistic evaluation of the contribution of Dr. Krapf to the development of Christianity in Africa, we can only come to one conclusion: Few missionaries coming to Africa have been so influential as Dr. Krapf.

Let us study a few statements all pointing to the same conclusion. First, Dr. Sundkler relates the influence of Krapf and Livingstone in the same sentence. It is surprising that so few other scholars have made such a comparison:

Within twenty-five years (1863-88) seven mission societies were established in East Africa. They were all inspired, in different degrees, by the visits and work in the region of two earlier missionaries: Johann Ludvig [sic] Krapf and David Livingstone. Krapf travelled extensively in East Africa between the years 1844-53. His vision of a chain of mission stations across Africa, 'another 'Apostles Street', from Rabai on the Indian Ocean coast to Gabon on the Atlantic, stimulated many Protestant mission boards to think in terms of transcontinental strategies. ...<sup>45</sup>

A Roman Catholic scholar, John Bauer, writes in an interesting way about Krapf and his influence. When stressing the importance of Krapf (together with his colleagues), he shows that the 'failures' seem to have influenced his very influential mission vision:

<sup>42</sup> Arén, *Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia*, op. cit.

<sup>43</sup> For examples, see Imberg, *A door opened by the Lord*, 37 ff.

<sup>44</sup> Krapf was influenced by the vision of creating chains of mission stations across Africa ('the Apostles Street' and others), but did not invent it; Sundkler and Steed, *A history of the Church in Africa*, 81, 510, 519 and 1208 ('mission chains'), Imberg, *A door opened by the Lord*, 36, note 25, with references.

<sup>45</sup> Concerning this vision, cf. Sundkler and Steed, 510.

The visible result of twenty years of missionary presence [of Krapf, Rebmann, Erhardt] was six converts and six catechumens. Yet the local disappointment helped Krapf to develop a vision of much wider horizons: an 'Apostles' Street' across the continent. A chain of mission stations should be built, connecting East with West Africa, Mombasa with Libreville. The [Anglican mission society] CMS [Church Missionary society] accepted the idea with enthusiasm, and later on [the Roman Catholic mission order] the Holy Ghost Fathers dreamt the same dream.<sup>46</sup>

It is also very interesting to note that Dr. Arén, who in many ways was so critical towards the Oromo (Galla) vision of Krapf (which in his rendering appears to have been chauvinistic and almost ridiculous), wrote a very beautiful summary of the effects of this very Oromo vision! Dr. Arén summarized the effects of the vision, writing from a mixed Swedish / Ethiopian perspective in this way:

The history which has been narrated in this book can be likened to a drama which unfolds itself in a colourful variety of scenes. The scenes are separated by varying intervals of time characterized by waiting, probing, retreating and advancing. There is one dominant theme to the whole drama: the vision of taking the gospel to the Oromo, or the 'Galla', as they were known to Western Christendom as far back as the middle of the seventeenth century. The vision was shared by British, Swiss, German and Swedish missionary societies. Each of these nationalities were to contribute the men and the means which eventually gave momentum to the planting of the Evangelical Church of Eritrea and the Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus in Ethiopia. The vision of taking the gospel to 'Galla' was pursued with astounding tenacity.... Their missionary zeal had grown out of the message of C. O. Rosenius, whereas their interest for 'Galla' had been reinforced by the urgings of the pioneer missionary J.L. Krapf.... The vision of 'Galla', which Swedes shared with Germans, was to bear fruit in more than one area. The work around Mas-sawa, the missionary endeavours in Kunama and Mensa, the ministry among Orthodox Christians on the Eritrean highlands, the missionary efforts among the Somali of the Kismayu area are all illustrative of this fact. The ministry at Imkullu with its special concern for freed slaves, for the education of girls, for the treatment of the sick, for the feeding of victims of famine and for the creation of literature in several languages is a good example of missionary activity on a broad front.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>46</sup> John Baur, *2000 years of Christianity in Africa. An African history 62-1992* (Nairobi, 1994), 224. – Baur's note on p. 224 is both graceful and accurate: 'It is however wrong to attribute the failure to the shortcomings of the missionary method only. History has shown that Krapf and Rebmann had pegged their tents among one of the most resistant tribes of Africa...'

<sup>47</sup> Arén, Gustav Arén, *Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia*, 439 ff.

## Some Final Comments

As this paper shows, it is evident that Dr. Krapf was an important and influential missionary. For that reason, I am convinced that we – both from a Christian and a more academic, scholarly perspective – need to study his life and work. It is important to study his work from a German, European, and even more from an African perspective, because few Christians have influenced the vibrant Christianity in East Africa more than he.<sup>48</sup> We can learn from his life and work, both from areas where he can inspire us, and from his mistakes. Moving to a general, scholarly perspective, I am convinced that many of his writings need to be translated from German into English, some documents perhaps also into Swahili and other languages. Many of his observations are the earliest written documents from various areas in Kenya, and all of them are dated before the colonial era which make them even more important.

Perhaps the initiative should start in Tübingen? He was taught by Prof. Ferdinand Christian Baur, one of many theologians believing that they could identify with certainty the different strata of the development of the Christian doctrine – even if they did not recognize that one of their students (and honorary doctors) became a missionary of equal importance with Dr. Livingstone.<sup>49</sup> It is high time to give Dr. Krapf the attention which he deserves.

There are many who would eagerly receive the results which can only come forward as a result of the combined efforts by German and East African scholars. That would be a tribute fitting the memory of Dr. Krapf, who wrote:

It is really important to collect and transform all African languages, which we can reach, into written languages. This is a preliminary work for the time, when the Lord will pave a way to the hidden, inner Africa.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Some ten million Anglican Christians in East Africa (especially in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania) belong to churches which have their humble beginning in his 'failed' ministry in Rabai, some 165 years ago!

<sup>49</sup> J L Krapf attended lectures given by Professor F. C. Baur in History of Theology, Church History and Church Law (*Dogmen- und Kirchengeschichte, Kirchenrecht*); concerning this, and his studies in general, see Eber, *Johann Ludwig Krapf*. 30.

<sup>50</sup> 'Es ist gewiß wichtig, alle africanischen Sprachen, die wir erreichen können, zu sammeln und in Schriftsprachen zu verwandeln. Dies ist Vorarbeit für die Zeit, da der Herr den Weg ins verborgene Innere Africas bahnen wird.' Quotation taken from <http://www-alt.ub.uni-tuebingen.de/pro/veran/2004/missionsbibeln/krapf.php?la=de&fr=n> (2010-02-16).