

Heikki Palva

* 5.5.1935 † 26.11.2022



Professor Emeritus of Arabic Language at the University of Helsinki Heikki Palva died at the age of 87 after suffering from heart problems. He passed away on 26 November 2022 at his home in Tuusula. He was born in Porvoo on 5 May 1935.

Heikki Palva grew up in a family of eight children at the parsonage in Riihimäki and matriculated from upper secondary school in 1953. He studied at the faculties of Theology and Arts at the University of Helsinki, focusing especially on Latin, Greek, Arabic, Hebrew and other Semitic languages.

Having obtained his Master of Arts degree, Palva made his first linguistic trip in 1959 by cargo ship to Haifa and by moped to Galilee to observe the spoken dialects of local Arab villages. Palva's doctoral thesis, *Lower Galilean Arabic* (1966), analysed the syllable structures and anaptyctic and prothetic vowels of these dialects and thereby the development of the Arabic language.

The study of Arabic dialects based on field work became Palva's scientific specialty. He expanded his areas of focus to include Jordan and its Bedouin tribes, but also Syria, Iraq, Morocco, Tunisia and

Saudi Arabia. Studying the Jewish-Arabic manuscripts kept in the National Library of Russia in St. Petersburg shed new light on the history of the language. Palva was one of the world's leading researchers in Arabic dialectology. His publications have permanent value; two are worth mentioning here: *Artistic Colloquial Arabic* (1992) and *A 17th-18th Century Manuscript in Spoken Egyptian Arabic. Part One: Text and Translation & Part Two: Linguistic Notes* (2007–2008).

His career took him from being appointed a part-time teacher of Arabic, Hebrew and Greek in Helsinki in 1963 to working as assistant of Old and New Testament Exegesis at the Faculty of Theology 1965–1969. He was appointed Professor (temp.) of Semitic Languages at the Uppsala University in 1968 and then Professor of Arabic Language, especially Modern Arabic, at the University of Gothenburg. His career there lasted from 1970 to 1982. He then returned to Helsinki in 1982 to take up the post of Professor of Arabic, which had finally been established at the university. He retired as Professor Emeritus in 1998.

The inspiring and kind-hearted teacher was not only a prolific researcher, but also

made extensive contributions to the work of scientific and cultural institutions and associations as a multidisciplinary and responsible person. Palva was invited as a member of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters in 1986, served as a member of its board 1999–2009 and was awarded the title of honorary member in 2012, particularly as the chief editor of the *Humaniora* series. He was a member of the Research Council for the Humanities at the Academy of Finland 1992–1994. Palva also gained merit as head of the Finnish Oriental Society from 1983 to 1993, and was invited to become an honorary member of the society in 2005. His membership in the Bible translation committee 1983–1991 was a particularly enjoyable role for him; Palva became Doctor honoris causa in Theology in 2005.

Scouting was one of Heikki Palva's favourite pastimes throughout his life and, ever since he was a young boy, he enjoyed "scribbling" various texts. During his years in office, he also published literature on the Middle East, religions and the Bible for the Finnish audience. A couple works worth mentioning are the extensive *Raamatun tietosanasto* ("Bible encyclopaedia") and *Islamilainen kulttuuri* ("Islamic culture", cum Irmeli Perho). Even in his retirement he produced scientific texts and wrote about his own family history.

His marriage to Leena in 1965 and their three children – as well as a summer cottage, mushrooming and a passion for art – served as a reviving and fortifying home base in the middle of all the action, and Palva's nine grandchildren brought many moments of joy to their grandfather.

Tapani Harviainen and Kaj Öhrnberg