


DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

**REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
KARL WILHELM BUTZER**

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Karl Wilhelm Butzer, Professor Emeritus, Department of Geography and the Environment, has filed with the Secretary of the General Faculty the following report.



Alan W. Friedman, Secretary
General Faculty and Faculty Council
The University of Texas at Austin
Arthur J. Thaman and Wilhelmina Doré Thaman Professor of English and Comparative Literature

**IN MEMORIAM
KARL WILHELM BUTZER**

Karl Wilhelm Butzer, geographer, geoarchaeologist, cultural ecologist, environmental scientist, and Raymond Dixon Centennial Professor at The University of Texas at Austin, passed away at age eighty-one on May 4, 2016, in Austin, Texas. Born in Mülheim an der Ruhr, Germany, on August 19, 1934, he was smuggled out of Germany as a refugee with his brother, rejoining his parents first in England (1937-41) and then in Canada (1941-55); these early experiences influenced his lifelong interest in ethnogeography and human rights. He obtained his undergraduate degree in mathematics and master's degree in Meteorology and Geography from McGill University, and his doctorate in Physical Geography and Ancient History from the University of Bonn (1957), where he studied with Carl Troll. In Bonn, he met and married Elisabeth Schloesser, and the two of them went on to spend their lives together, raising a family as well as being partners in research. In 2017, the American Association of Geographers named a lifetime achievement award in long-term environmental change in their honor: "The Karl and Elisabeth Butzer Award." He is survived by Elisabeth; their children, Helga Butzer Felleisen, Carl Butzer, Kieke Butzer, and Hans Butzer; and seven grandchildren.

Butzer had a lifelong interest in detailed, field-based studies of interacting cultural and environmental changes, and the ability of local communities to adjust to challenges over long periods of time. Much of his work involved recording local stratigraphy, sampling sediments for detailed lab analysis, and then synthesizing his results in books and articles, drawing upon extensive study of related literatures. He took detailed field notes and made beautiful hand-drawn maps and diagrams, as well as taking thousands of photographs; this archival material will be highly valuable to future researchers. He performed field studies in Egypt, South Africa, Namibia, Ethiopia, Spain, Australia, and México, among other places. His pioneering research in Environmental Archaeology transformed the way many North American and European archaeologists viewed the relationships between human societies and the environments in which they lived. His research shed light on human origins in Africa, long-term water management and hydraulic civilization in the Nile Valley, agricultural change and grazing in Spain and Mexico, as well as issues of climate change and cultural identity. He coined the name geoarchaeology, geoscience applied to archaeology, and was its most important founder. He authored fifteen books and monographs and more than 275 refereed scientific papers or chapters, some of which have been translated into Chinese, Russian, French, Spanish, Hungarian, and Catalan. Books include authoritative treatments of broad topics (*Geomorphology from the Earth*, *Archaeology as Human Ecology*), as well as more specialized monographs and edited volumes.

Butzer taught at the University of Wisconsin (1959-66), the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich (1981-82), and the University of Chicago (1966-84) before his appointment at The University of Texas at Austin (1984-2016). At UT Austin, he primarily taught graduate seminars. Topics included geoarchaeology, landscape, society and meaning, and historical geography of Mexico; he received an Outstanding Graduate Teaching Award in 2005. He supervised thirty-two doctoral students and sixteen master's students; four of his students at UT Austin won outstanding dissertation awards. Many students benefitted from his caring and

generous mentorship in the classroom, laboratory, and field. He also found time to mentor other faculty, and participated in team teaching and in numerous departmental and professional field trips.

Butzer received numerous honors and awards, including the Busk Medal of the Royal Geographical Society, the Fryxell Medal of the Society for American Archaeology, a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Henry Stopes Medal of the Geologists' Association of London, and the Pomerance Medal of the Archeological Institute of America. He was elected Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the National Academy of Sciences. He received an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Stirling, Scotland in 2011.

Butzer continued working until a few months before his death, actively participating in research conferences and publications and attending conferences and meetings. Memorial sessions in his honor have been organized by the Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers and the Association of American Geographers, providing an opportunity for his many colleagues, friends, and students to express their gratitude for his contributions. His example of a keen scientific mind and dynamic interdisciplinary scholarship combined with humility and concern for the dispossessed will remain an inspiration for us all.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Gregory Knapp (chair), Timothy Beach, William E. Doolittle, and Arlene Rosen.

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