

**‘Out of the shadow’ – biographical details of  
Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow  
or  
‘The woman behind Dr. Augustin Krämer’  
by Sven Mönter**



**Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow**

In January 1904 the German Navy surgeon and ethnologist Dr. Augustin Krämer married Elisabeth Bannow in Berlin. This union was an important event not only in regard to Krämer's private life, but also for his professional career. In Elisabeth, Krämer-Bannow had not only found a supporting and caring wife, but also a dedicated fieldworker and traveling companion. Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow accompanied her husband on his three subsequent expeditions to the Pacific between 1906 and 1910. On the later two, the *Deutsche Marine Expedition* from 1908 to 1909 and the *Hamburg Südsee Expedition* from 1909 to 1910, she was even employed as an official crew member.

Despite these, for the time exceptional circumstances, Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow's person as well as her contribution to Augustin Krämer's work has largely been

overlooked. By paying special attention to ‘the woman behind Augustin Krämer’, this presentation however aims to redress this imbalance. It will provide a biography of Elisabeth, bringing her out of the shadows and into the light. It will further investigate her role in the field and her contribution to Augustin’s ethnological work in Oceania. This presentation will demonstrate that Elisabeth’s existence in the shadows was indeed a reflection of her surrounding social environment and her time.



*Dr. Augustin Krämer*

**Dr. Augustin Friedrich Krämer**

Before I start reconstructing Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow’s biography and history I first of all have to briefly her ‘famous husband’, in whose shadow she has been lost:

Dr. Augustin Friedrich Krämer.

Born in Los Angeles de Chile to German emigrants in 1865, Dr. Krämer (1865-1941) was a German Navy surgeon, who became a leading ethnological authority on the Pacific. His monographs on Samoa and Palau are still regarded as major ethnological sources. Krämer eventually became director of the Linden Museum in Stuttgart, one of the leading ethnological museums of its time. In 1919 he started his career with the University of Tübingen, where eventually founded the Ethnological Institute and the

Ethnological Collection at the Museum Hohentübingen, which both remain to the present day. He died in November 1941.

Back to the center of this investigation, the woman in the shadow. The marriage to Dr. Augustin Krämer in Berlin on the 16 January 1904 marked not only a change in Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow's social status, as she became 'Frau Doktor' (Mrs. Doctor) Krämer, but it also characterized her stronger appearance in social memory and historical record.

This presence of her reached its high point in regards to her accompanying travels and, subsequently found its expression in a number of publications. From than onwards, her presence began to shade into the background. A fading, which not only mirrors the presence of information in regards to her early 'pre-marriage' years, but also symbolizes her presence in regards to social memory in general.

However, being "in the shadow", does not mean out of view.

In the 1990s Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow, her life and work, was rediscovered by historians and ethnologists in Germany. On one hand this renewed interest in her person was partly motivated by her contribution to the work of Augustin Krämer and her reminiscences in regards to the ethnological collection at the University of Tübingen. On the other hand it was her exceptional role as a woman and researcher at the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which begun to receive great attention among researchers interested in gender history. And its these works together with surviving letters and information, which help to make her life more apparent.

Elisabeth Bannow was born in Wismar, a small town in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania on 29. September 1874. As a single child, she grew up in well middle class circumstances. Her mother, Charlotte Bannow nee Beckmann, was the daughter of a pharmacist from Stuttgart; her father, Dr. Adolph Bannow, was a chemist.

Due to his professional career, the family soon moved to Berlin. Employed by the chemical factory C.A.F. Kahlbaum in Kreuzberg, Dr. Bannow not only became a close confidant to the owner, Johannes Kahlbaum, but also received a directorial post within the firm. Subsequently the family Bannow resided in the representative front

building of the firm in the Schlessiger Strasse 33, near the river Spree in the growing Berlin suburb of Luisenstadt.

Although the closer details of Elisabeth's childhood, as well as of her up-bringing and education remain unknown, it can be assumed that she followed the, at the time typical, *Mädchenbildung* (girl education). This included instruction in art and music as well as in domestic activities. It has been argued that Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow displayed a passion for the arts, as well as an interest in weaving. It seems certain that her interest in the arts was supported by her father, who himself was a dedicated illustrator.

Indeed it seems as if Elisabeth received much support from her parents. This support was not only limited to her education, but also have referred to her life in general. She was nearly 30 years old when she married Augustin Krämer in 1904. This is important, as it was above the average age, in which women at the time got married. She presumably enjoyed a close relationship with her parents.

With her marriage to Dr. Augustin Krämer, as mentioned earlier, her life became more transparent.

They presumably met during one of Krämer's frequent stays in Berlin after his return from Samoa. Krämer was certainly drawn to her, as his letter to his friend Kurt Lampert reveals, when he states:

‘She had spent many months in Ceylon during the last few years, and is very musical and paints wonderfully. Her artistic abilities are only surpassed by her kindness. She declared that she would accompany me everywhere and that she would be proud to assist me in my work. You see that it just needs a stroke of luck, to not get totally unfaithful to anthropology.’

It can be presumed that Elisabeth not only shared similar feelings for the 9 year older Krämer, but was also fascinated by his work. Apart from this emotional bond, Augustin Krämer, in his position as medical doctor, Navy officer and renown scientist, was certainly well suited as a further husband and son-in-law.

Krämer became a frequent visitor at the Bannow's residence in Berlin, who also spent much of his time with his 'Lise', as he called her. In September 1903 they announced their engagement.

From then on things developed quite quickly:

On 12 January Krämer received 31 days holiday, he then immediately travelled to Berlin. On 15 January, he and Elisabeth celebrated their *Polterabend* (eve-of-the-wedding party) at the Kahlbaum's residency. It seems that the close relationship between Kahlbaum and Bannow also translated to the newly engaged couple Krämer. Johannes Kahlbaum even became *Trauzeuge* (witness to the marriage).

The marriage took part on the 16. January 1904. After the official ceremony the marriage was celebrated with a feast in the restaurant *Norddeutschen Hof* in Berlin. 'The celebrations', as Krämer remarked in his diary, 'proceeded kindly and nice'.

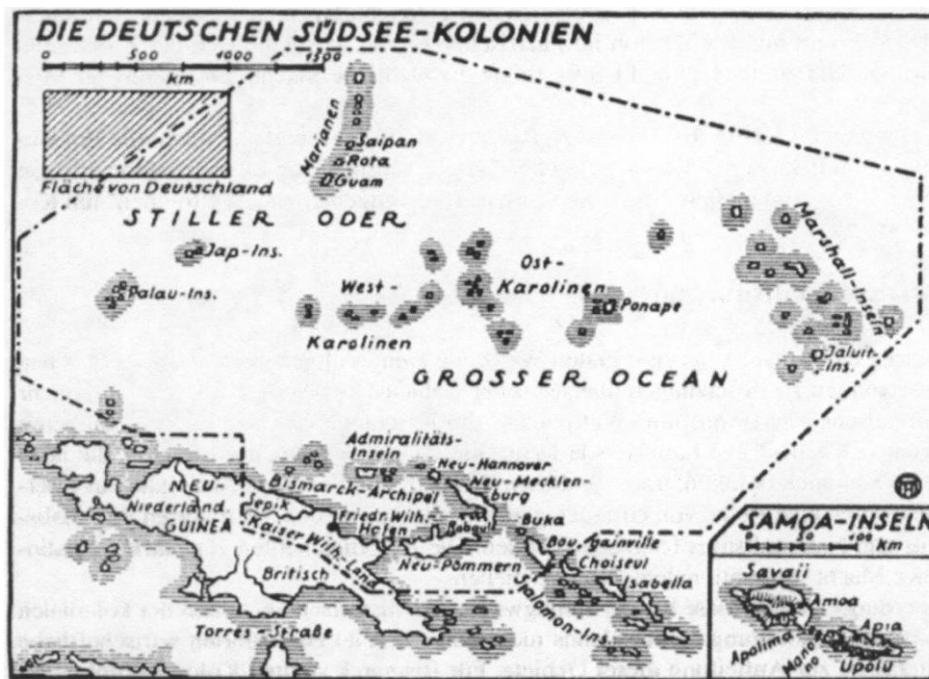
That same night the newly wed couple left Berlin for their honeymoon, which, in keeping with one's station, led them to the South. Travelling by train via Munich to Italy, from where they made their way through the south of France back to Berlin. On this travels, Krämer also had the chance to discover the patience and nursing ability of his wife. He had fallen ill, with stomach pain in Nizza. 'In my pain', as he exclaimed in a letter to Lampert, 'I noticed the luck of having a loving wife'.

On their return in early March 1904, Mr. and Mrs Krämer set up home in Berlin. Krämer also kept Berlin as his place of residence, apart the fact that he was stationed in Kiel, and therefore spent most of his time there, nearly 300km away from Berlin. How Elisabeth felt over this arrangement remains open to debate. Although it has been suggested, that she was 'not willing to take her 'grass widow existence' (*Strohwitwendasein*)' any longer'.

However, the question about the place of residence soon became irrelevant. In mid 1905 Dr. Krämer received notification about his deployment onboard the SMS *Planet*, which was to take him via Africa to the Pacific. This deployment, which was to last

for nearly 11 month, provided the chance for Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow to stand true to her promise to ‘accompany her husband and support him in his work’.

Since she was not allowed to accompany her husband on board the Navy vessel, they decided that they were to embark on a private expedition at the end of his deployment onboard the SMS *Planet*. In their endeavour and planning they received great support from *Kommerzienrat* Johannes Kahlbaum, whose ‘generous’ financial support helped to turn their plan into reality.



‘The German Colonial Empire in the South Seas’

On 5 November 1906, with some days delay, Elisabeth finally arrived at Matupit (Rabaul), where she was desperately awaited by her husband, who had arrived in New Britain in early October that year. In a letter to Felix von Luschan from October 1906 Krämer had stated that: ‘In a couple of days I await her arrival, which is great comfort since I noticed that I am no good’. This remark might have been based on his dissatisfaction about his previous travel, but it also illustrated his true wish for her company.

Their travels eventually lead them to the Central and West Caroline Islands, which they used for longer stays on the different Islands. In all, they spend three weeks on Yap and two months each on Chuuk (Truk) and Palau. Their stay on these islands was characterised by their ethnological research, which, as it has been pointed out, was stationary and saw them develop a kind of ‘work sharing agreement’.

This work arrangement saw Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow, apart from sketching, focus on weaving, binding and women questions (Frauenfragen), whereas Krämer worked on geography, geology, political and social organisation, jewellery, tools, language, botanic, medicine and mythic.



‘At Work’, in Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow’s book  
*Bei kunstsinnigen Kannibalen der Südsee*, p. 197

After nearly 7 months of research, in July 1907, the Krämers left the Pacific to return home to Germany.

Whereas Krämer engaged writing and summarising the collected material, as well as increasing his cooperation with Count von Linden and his planned museum, Elisabeth’s activities during this time also remain uncertain. Only in regards to a brief exhibition at the Lichthof of the Gewerbemuseum (in Berlin) early 1908, did her name find any recognition. Among their collected artefacts, the exhibition also contained a few aquarelles from Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow, as well as 56 of her smaller paintings.

It might have well been this demonstration of her artistic ability as an illustrator, which eventually contributed to the fact that Elisabeth again received the opportunity to accompany her husband on his next expedition to the Pacific; this time however as a official member. In mid 1907 Krämer was approached to take over the leadership of the *Marine Expedition*. Its previous leader, Navy surgeon and ethnologist Dr. Emil Stephan had suddenly died of fever and Krämer had been identified as the perfect replacement.

He accepted, but only under the condition, as he later stated, that ‘my wife is accompanying me as my assistant and for the study of the women life (Frauenleben), which, especially in Melanesia, is very hard for men to research.’

Eventually Krämer’s wish was granted and they eventually embarked on their second expedition. With their arrival in Muliama, the expedition headquarters, in early November 1908, the Krämers were back in the field. During the nearly 7 months lasting expedition Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow and her husband wandered nearly over 1000 km across the island of New Ireland. They used these hikes to collect ethnographical artefacts and to conduct ethnological investigations. In the 12<sup>th</sup> report to the *Deutsche Marine Expedition* their travels were described as a ‘full success’.

The end of the *Marine Expedition* in mid 1909 marked the beginning for the Krämers third combined expedition. By his old friend Dr. Georg Thilenius, Augustin Krämer had been offered the leadership of the *Hamburger Südsee Expedition* in its second year. Eventually Krämer accepted, but again only under the condition that his wife was allowed to accompany him. He argued for the cooperation of ‘a trained female European, as the matters of the indigenous women could only insufficiently be observed by male researchers’. Krämer therefore recommended his wife, demanding for her the same payment as all the other scientists on the expedition were to receive. Eventually his demands were accepted and his wife became ‘an official member of the scientific team’.

During their 10 months travels with the expedition, Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow was not only responsible for the so-called ‘women questions’, but also for sketching and

illustrating. She also led the official logbook of the expedition. However, with the end of the expedition in April 1910, she again began to fade into the historical background.

Her name only briefly re-emerged with the publication of her book *Bei kunstsinnigen Kannibalen der Südsee: Wanderungen auf Neu Mecklenburg, 1908-1916*, which was published in Berlin in 1916, and two articles, which were published in 1913. The book was a travelogue based on her experiences during her stay on New Ireland. It was accompanied by a preface as well as an epilogue by her husband in order 'to provide some more scientific information'. Her articles, titled 'Natur- und Heimatschutz, Menschenschutz in unseren Kolonien' and 'Heimatschutz in die Deutschen Kolonien!', demonstrated her concern about the fundamental change the people of the Pacific (and particular in Palau) were experiencing in regards to the European contact. The fact that the later article was published in *Dürer Bund, Flugschrift zur Ausdruckskultur* leads to the assumption that she might have become involved with the *Dürerbund*, a society aimed at protecting and encouraging culture and aesthetic education. Perhaps she was even one of its 30.000 members. The only thing sure is that on their return, the Krämers settled in Cannstatt, and it is here that she was buried on her husband's side after her death on 9 January 1945, nearly four years after his death.

**‘In the Field’- Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow’s contribution to ethnology**



**Elisabeth doing research, in the background  
the indigenous translator and informant William Gibbon**

Similar to her existence in the historical shadow, Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow’s role as an ethnologist has also been left in the dark, despite the fact that she had an important impact on Augustin Krämer’s ethnological work. An impact, which becomes obvious, when he remarked in the first volume of his five volume monograph on Palau:

‘Especially in regards to the research into the Palau Islands did she lend me a helping hand, as illustrated in > Krämer’s Diar< (P. 160) on the history of discovery. Her field was not only sketching and drawing, but [in regards to] her research into the life of the women, their work, economy, cooking and so on, do I owe her so much that I should have published certain chapters under her name. If I do not do so , than it is because her observations and encouragement play largely everywhere in my work. I therefore set her name next to the one of Kubary on the dedication page.’

(See Krämer’s Introduction in *Palau. I Teilband, Ergebnisse der Hamburg Südsee-Expedition*, Hamburg, 1917, p. VIII)

Indeed, as the quote illustrates, Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow's contribution to Krämer's ethnological work was not only influential, but it was also many-sided. It was in the later, as the chapter will demonstrate that it affected not only the quality and quantity of the ethnological data and ethnographical objects, but also the practical course of the expeditions. Thus by examine her contribution, the presentation will demonstrate, that it was the result of interplay of her position as fellow fieldworker and official illustrator, as well as her position as a woman and wife.

Elisabeth's contribution to her husbands work becomes most visible in her artistic work as an illustrator and artist. Her drawings and paintings can be found throughout Krämer's later published work. That also applies to her photographs, because in addition to her artistic work, she also employed a camera; developing from an assistant to her husband into a skilled photographer.

Apart from her work as illustrator Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow also engaged in the collecting activity, exchanging and collecting ethnographic artefacts. On Palau, for example, she tried to establish 'a complete collection of aprons'. During her stay(s) she also made a number of sketches and plaster casts of the relief-beams, so-called 'lochukle', which were decorating the indigenous men-houses, and which now are still an important part of the ethnological collections in Hamburg, Stuttgart and Tübingen.

However it might be no coincidence, that it was Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow, who undertook this time-consuming activity. Thus this activity of her can be seen as a symbol of her contribution in general. Despite the visual aspects of her contribution, it was her activity behind the scene, which had the greatest effect on Krämer's ethnological work. And it was these 'behind the scene' activity of her, which was closely linked to her position as a woman.

Elisabeth's gender certainly had an important impact on her contribution, as on her participation on her husband's expeditions to the Pacific in general On one hand did her gender allowed the expeditions to succeed in collecting ethnological data, since

women were often seen as ‘messengers of peace’, on the other hand however did her gender proved to be a great obstacle, especially in regards to her travels. As previously illustrated, she was not allowed to accompany Augustin Krämer onboard the SMS *Planet*, since the German Navy forbid the presence of women onboard its warships.

Even on her later travels her participation was met with some reservations. A fact, which becomes obvious in the notes of a fellow colleague, who stated that: ‘I do not want to participate on a ship expedition whose member is a woman’.

However, even when she succeeded, Elisabeth was still expected to fulfil the classical woman-role. This not only saw her functioning as nurse for her husband and other members of the expeditions, but also her in charge of organising the food supply and cooking. Her book, *Bei kunstsinnigen Kannibalen*, reveals that Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow took this role to heart. She spend much time organising the supplies, during her time on the *Deutsche-Marine Expedition* she even established a small garden near the base camp in Muliama, where she grew vegetables to supplement the expeditions food. Her organisational talent, as well as her focus on the food supply was especially important in regards to the many travels she conducted with her husband. On these travels she was solemnly responsible for setting up camp and preparing and/or organising food.

She therefore had an important, but largely forgotten impact on the practical course of the expeditions. However it were exactly these tasks, which eventually attributed to her great contribution to the ethnological work of Augustin Krämer. Because organising food supplies and setting camp bought her into close contact with the indigenous population, especially local women.

Due to her daily contact Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow was able to establish rather deep relationships with the indigenousness women. This allowed her to research and collect information on ‘women-clubs’ and female customs, rituals and practices. And in this regard it seems not surprising that Augustin Krämer and she developed their ‘work sharing agreement’.

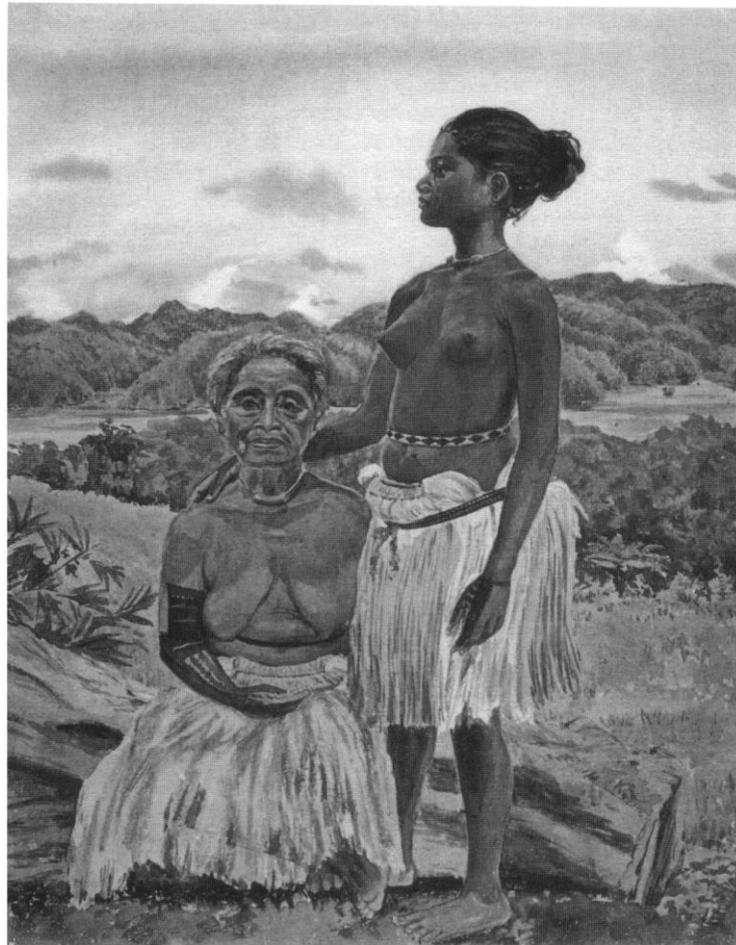


**Elisabeth weaving a round basket on the Truk Islands**

In her contact with these women Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow displayed first traces of an anthropological fieldwork method, which is now called ‘participant observation’. This method is based on the assumption, that an anthropologist will gain in-depth insight by participating in local customs and craft forms. In the case of Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow’s case, her participation became most obvious in her attempt to learn and be taught the different forms of weaving.

Her diaries reveal that she was also ‘adopted’ by an older Palauan woman. This contact, as well as her interaction with the indigenous women led her to note, that ‘the women are particularly affectionate and loving, especially if one was to joke, dance and laugh with them.’

This remark illustrates not only her awareness on the usefulness of her method, but also demonstrates the strong affection she had for these women. This affection becomes apparent in her writings, as she frequently praised these women, who ‘are doing a men’s work’; whereas she referred to the men as ‘lazy’, adding that ‘chivalrousness in regards to the women seems to be unknown’.



**Two women of Palau: On the left Mrs Diraingeáol of Goréor, Elisabeth's 'Mother', on the right the young Mrs Kélebil from Melekéiok. Aquarelle by Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow, 1909/1910**

Her description of the indigenous women, especially Melanesian women, also contrasts with these her male colleagues. Hans Vogel, Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow's predecessor as illustrator on the *Hamburger Südsee Expedition*, for example described the women as 'ugly', stating: 'One has to sit down, take all one's fantasy and draw a head as ugly as one can imagine. [...] The 'ladies' take on their spouse in all respects, on the contrary they even top them in their revolting appearance'. In contrast Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow's description of these women was much more sophisticated. In her book *Bei kunstsinnigen Kannibalen*, Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow states that during her portray painting: 'I was surprised how much kindness, even

gracefulness the closer observation of their old facial features revealed, and how lively and awake their spirit was’.

Indeed her descriptions, observations and research contributed to a more balanced picture of the indigenous people. However this contribution has largely escaped any closer investigation. The same also applies to her position as Dr. Augustin Krämer’s wife. In this position she not only functioned as support and a motivating force, but also as a ‘diplomat’, mediating between her husband and the other members of the expeditions. Further more; her presence also had a profound impact on Krämer’s mood. It has been pointed out, that he no longer complained about ‘oceanic loneliness’. He even became more distant in regards to his description of the local women.

This fact illustrates that Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow’s contribution to the ethnological work of Augustin Krämer was indeed many-sided and influential.

Her contribution did not stop with the end of their fieldwork trips in 1911. Lecture notes held at the Ethological Institute at the University of Tübingen, Krämer’s later position, reveal that she continued to support his work, as they depict her handwriting. It can further be assumed that she also helped in Krämer’s correspondence. This form of contribution and support was certainly not uncommon for the wives of scientists and academics of the time.

However her contribution was of a so-called ‘indirect nature’. It was based on her position and role as woman and wife. But since, as Krämer later argued, ‘science needs results and not experiences’, her contribution has disappeared into the shadows, where it remains largely unmentioned.

## **Conclusion**

Indeed, the shadows cast over her history and contributions remain a dominant feature in establishing a biography of Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow. The questions that follow,

‘why she did not do more with her experiences? Why did she disappear in the shadows?’, seem not only legitimate, but also natural.

However it seems unfair to limit these questions just to her persona. Instead they should also be extended to other German women, who also engaged in ethnological research in the Pacific at the time.

It has to be noted that Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow was certainly not the first woman to accompany her husband on his expeditions. Maria Pauline Thorbeck (1882-1971) for example, accompanied her husband on his travels to Cameroon in Africa. Similar applies also to Hilde Thurnwald (1890-1979), the wife of the socio-ethnologist Richard Thurnwald, who contributed to her husbands work, and later worked as *Oberassistentin* at his founded Institute for sociology and ethnology. Both of them actively supported their husbands in their work and publications.

She was also not the only women engaging in the collection of ethnographical artefacts in the wider oceanic region. Research reveals that Mrs. Frida Bolominski, the wife of *Stationsvorsteher* Franz Bolominski in New Ireland, for example was involved in the collection of artefacts. The same also applies to Mrs. Antonie Brandeis, the wife of the *Landeshauptmann* Eugen Brandeis on Marshall Islands and missionary nurse Lotharia Müller, who worked on the Palau Islands from 1909 to 1913.

Thus a first response to the questions posed earlier, seems rather easy and straight forward. Like her contemporaries, Elisabeth Krämer-Bannow was after all a ‘Child of her time’. She was part of the common held assumption within 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany (and probably most of Europe and the Western World at the time), that the wife was not only responsible for the domestic sphere, but that it was also her duty to support her husband in his professional life.

It is therefore left for further historical and social inquiry to bring light to the history and true impact of these women, whose work, also in the shadows, un-doubly

contributed much to the development of ethnology and ethnographic collections in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany.