

ETHIOPIAN STUDIES IN POLAND

The study of Ethiopian and African culture in Poland has always been on the margins of the general intellectual current, mostly due to a lack of direct contacts between Poland and Africa. Nevertheless, the Polish interest in Ethiopia can be traced back at least to the 17th century when King Jan III Sobieski (r. 1674–1696) tried to set up an embassy in Ethiopia in hope of establishing an anti-Turkish alliance. In the first half of the 18th century, the Załuski brothers, who were scholars and collectors, managed to acquire some of the important publications devoted to Ethiopia in this epoch, most notably the works by Hiob Ludolf. At the end of the 18th century, Poland lost its political independence for the next 150 years, which greatly affected Polish universities and academic life.

The first representative of Ethiopian studies active in Poland was Izaak Wajnberg (1878–1941), who worked in the field of Ge'ez philology and Tigrinya linguistics. Wajnberg, however, never taught Ethiopia-related subjects; therefore, his work related to Ethiopia was not continued by his students. Also a work by a geographer Ludomir Sawicki (1884–1928) *Studia nad Abisynią* (“Studies on Abyssinia”) should be noted as the first Polish attempt to describe the life and culture of Ethiopia.

It is Stefan Strelcyn who should be regarded as the true founder of Ethiopian studies in Poland. Trained by Marcel Cohen, Strelcyn began teaching Ge'ez and Amharic in the 1950s within the framework of Semitic Studies at the University of Warsaw. Semitic Studies were dissolved and the few active Ethiopian studies specialists found their place in the Department of African Languages and Cultures established in 1977 by Joanna Mantel-Niećko. The Department is still active today and courses in Ethiopian studies and Amharic are offered alongside Hausa and Swahili. Over the years, six Ethiopian native speakers worked in the Department. Getatchew Paulos taught Amharic from 1962 until 1969, as well as co-authored (with Joanna Mantel-Niećko) the first manual of Amharic *Praktyczna nauka języka amharskiego* (“Practical Amharic”) and consulted Andrzej Bartnicki and Joanna Mantel-Niećko while writing *Historia Etiopii* (“History of Ethiopia”). Sebhat Tefera worked for the Department in 1984, replaced by Dr. Mohammed Ali who continued until 1988. Worku Gella taught from 1989 to 1990, Dr. Taddele Gebre

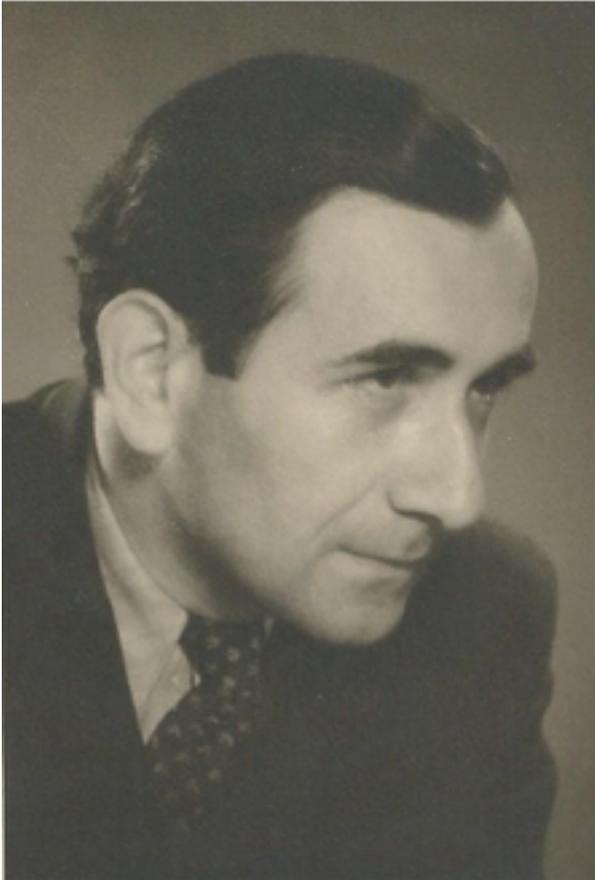
Hiwot from 1990 to 1999, and Dr. Makonnen Asfaw started in 1999 and is still currently teaching.

The output of the Polish school of Ethiopian Studies in Warsaw can be measured in the number of dissertations produced: 20 BA theses (since 2008), 68 MA theses, 7 PhD theses and 2 habilitations. In recent years, the syllabus has shifted from the traditional approach deeply rooted in philology towards more interdisciplinary studies combining political science, anthropology, history and linguistics.

Among the other Polish scholars who devoted their career to Ethiopian studies are Andrzej Zaborski, associated throughout his whole career with the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, and Wacław Korabiewicz – a physician by training, known for his interest and research on Ethiopian crosses. Stanisław Chojnacki, who is well-known to the international community of Ethiopian studies specialists, spent most of his time outside of Poland and conducted his research in Ethiopia, but kept sentimental and professional ties with his native country.

With the recent unprecedented development in political and economic relations between Poland and Ethiopia, the constantly growing number of Polish tourists in Ethiopia and the organization of the 19th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies in Warsaw in August 2015, one can assume that Ethiopian studies in Poland are facing the beginning of a new era.

SCHOLARS OF ETHIOPIAN STUDIES IN POLAND



Stefan Strelcyn (1918–1981), the Polish Semitist much valued by the international community of scholars, was the founder of Ethiopian Studies at the University of Warsaw.

Stefan Strelcyn was born on the 28th of June 1918 in Warsaw, where he spent his childhood and acquired primary and secondary education. After completing Wawelberg Mechanical Engineering School in 1938, young Strelcyn went off to Belgium to study Oriental Philology and Archaeology at the Free University of Brussels. During World War II he briefly studied general linguistics and phonetics at the University of Montpellier in France.

After World War II, Strelcyn settled in Paris and during the period of 1945–1950 he continued his education at the Sorbonne, where he studied Egyptology and Semitic Studies at L'École Pratique des Hautes Études and Ethiopian Studies at L'École Nationale des Langues Orientales Vivantes under Marcel Cohen. In 1948, he received a BA in Language and Literature (Licence des Lettres) as well as a diploma in Amharic from the Sorbonne. In this time he also learned Coptic at L'École des Langues Orientales Anciennes of the Catholic University of Paris (Institut Catholique de Paris). In 1949–1950 Stefan Strelcyn served as a research assistant in the French National Centre for Scientific Research in Paris. Among his scholarly output "Catalogue des manuscrits éthiopiens (Collection Griaule)" and "Prières magiques éthiopiennes pour délier les charmes" seem to be of the greatest importance.

In 1950 he decided to return to Poland. It was a time when the University of Warsaw was slowly recovering from the losses incurred during the war. Upon

arrival Stefan Strelcyn immediately started his career at the University of Warsaw becoming the head of the Department of Semitic Studies, which he founded and ran for the next nineteen years as an integral part of the Institute of Oriental Studies. He introduced lectures in Ethiopian history, literature and linguistics, teaching also Ge'ez and Amharic alongside Hebrew and Arabic. In 1954 Stefan Strelcyn was nominated as an assistant professor in the field of Semitic studies. At this time, he was also elected as a member of the Committee of Oriental Studies in the Polish Academy of Sciences and became head of the Department of Eastern Manuscripts. On behalf of the Polish Academy of Sciences, he was also commissioned to undertake a three-month journey to Ethiopia (from December 1957 to March 1958). It was an expedition which had a significant impact on the Professor's subsequent activities. Apart from fulfilling his scientific goals, he established ties with the University College of Addis Ababa and particularly its librarian at that time, Stanisław Chojnacki. That cooperation turned out to be of great importance for the development of the present day Department of African Languages and Cultures, which acquired many valuable Ethiopian books; some of them were a gift from the Emperor Haile Sellassie I himself.

In the years 1961–1965 Professor Strelcyn served as a director in the Institute of Oriental Studies of the University of Warsaw. Thanks to his long-term efforts, he created interdisciplinary African Studies at the University of Warsaw, which united scientists from different fields who were interested in Africa. From 1964 until 1966 he served as vice-chairman of the Oriental Studies Committee in the Polish Academy of Sciences. Throughout this career the Professor taught, published and popularized knowledge about Ethiopia. He translated into Polish the celebrated work of Ethiopian literature *Kebrā Nagast* (*The Glory of Kings*). Stefan Strelcyn served on the editorial boards of many periodicals including *Africana Bulletin*, *Przegląd Orientalistyczny*, *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* and *Euhemer*. He was also an editor of catalogues of oriental manuscripts in Polish collections. For his achievements in the field of Ethiopian Studies, he was awarded the Haile Selassie I Foundation Prize in 1967.

The events of March 1968 in Poland and the government-run anti-Semitic campaign made him leave the University and forced him to leave the country as well. He settled in Great Britain, where he initially taught Semitic languages at the School of Oriental and African Studies. Eventually, Strelcyn settled at the

University of Manchester where he continued his scientific activities, including cataloguing manuscripts kept in England and Italy. In 1976, he was elected as a member of the Royal Academy of Sciences in the United Kingdom. At this time he was also an editorial board member of the Journal of Semitic Studies.

On the eve of his nomination for the position of professor at the University of Manchester, where he was going to become the head of the Department of Semitic Studies, Stefan Strelcyn died suddenly of a heart attack on the 19th of May 1981.



Joanna Mantel-Niećko (1933–2009), an outstanding scholar of Ethiopian Studies of broad horizons and an interdisciplinary approach, devoted teacher and propagator of Ethiopian culture in Poland, was one of the first pupils of Stefan Strelcyn and his successor. Born in Warsaw on the 14th August 1933 as a daughter of a military officer and a medical doctor, she showed a gift for languages from a very early age, mastering French, English and Latin even before completing her secondary education in 1951. During the same year, she enrolled at the University of Warsaw to study at the newly established Department of Semitic Studies in the Institute of Oriental Studies under direction of Stefan Strelcyn. She graduated in 1956 after submitting an MA

thesis on Old Amharic Royal Songs – their grammatical analysis, translation and commentary, and was employed there as an assistant lecturer. From the very beginning she focused on the languages of Ethiopia – Ge’ez and Amharic. In 1963/64 she was granted a fellowship at the École Nationale des Langues Orientales Vivantes in Paris where she met Marcel Cohen and Joseph Tubiana. In

1966 she defended her PhD thesis „Les verbes de type A/B-C en amharique. Analyse sémantique comparée”. The next step in her academic career was a degree of Doctor Habilitatus which she acquired in 1976 after submitting a dissertation on „The Role of Land Tenure in the System of Ethiopian Imperial Government”. This qualified her for a position of assistant professor. In the next year she established a Department of African Languages and Cultures, which she ran with great success for the next ten years. Thanks to her great organizational talent during her time in office as a head of the DALC, she managed to establish cooperation between the University of Warsaw and Addis Ababa University, as well as Kano University, so students of Amharic and Hausa could go for scholarships to Africa. She also initiated „Studies of the Department of African Languages and Cultures”, the publication of the Department which at present is internationally acclaimed. Her first visit to Ethiopia was in 1984 when she was invited for the 7th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies. Only then did she have a chance to see the country and to experience the culture the study of which she devoted her entire life to. She also met in person many scholars whom until that moment she had only known through correspondence and publications. Her second visit to Ethiopia was a field trip in 1987/88 where she undertook research of indigenous historical sources, which had not been explored by the researchers until that moment. Thanks to her interpersonal skills, she managed to establish cooperation between the Department and the Asien-Afrika-Institut at the University of Hamburg, which led to mutual visits of scholars, as well as the participation of Polish scholars in the international project Encyclopaedia Aethiopica run at Hiob Ludolf Centre.

Professor Mantel-Niećko was a very versatile academic teacher and scholar, giving lectures on introductory knowledge of Ethiopia as well as its detailed history, conducting lectures and seminars on the most important historical, cultural and socio-political issues concerning not only Ethiopia, but also the rest of the Horn of Africa. Over forty MA theses were written under her guidance and she supervised two PhD theses. She was an author and co-author of 13 books and many articles. One of the books, *Historia Etiopii* (“History of Ethiopia”) which she wrote with a historian Andrzej Bartnicki was translated into German, Russian and Amharic.

Professor Joanna Mantel-Niećko died on the 28th of October 2009 while four of her pupils were on board a plane going to Ethiopia to participate in the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies in Addis Ababa. During that time it was decided that the 19th ICES will take part at the University of Warsaw.

Witold Kazimierz Brzuski (1935–1987), a pupil of Professor Strelcyn, was a philologist interested in diachronic linguistics. In 1953 he became a student at the University of Warsaw in the Department of Semitic Studies of the Institute of Oriental Studies where in 1958, under the supervision of Stefan Strelcyn, he wrote his Master's thesis on the causative and factitive verb forms in Amharic. In 1969, also under Strelcyn's direction, he defended his PhD thesis analyzing the classical Ethiopic language of royal chronicles in view of it being influenced by Amharic. In 1984 he wrote his habilitation thesis on Arabic loanwords in old and contemporary Amharic. Until his untimely death in 1987 he taught Ge'ez and Amharic as well as comparative Semitic linguistics in the Department of African Languages and Cultures, founded in 1977 by Joanna Mantel-Niećko. The main scholarly interests of Witold Brzuski included the Epigraphic South Arabian alphabet, influence of Amharic on the language of royal chronicles written in Ge'ez, Arabic loanwords in Amharic, as well as the contemporary Ethiopian literature in Amharic. His translations of Taddese Liben's short stories were the first examples of 20th century Ethiopian literature translated from Amharic into Polish. He also wrote the first grammar of the Ge'ez language in Polish. His main scholarly achievements include:

- "Note sur les thèmes à seconde radicale graphiquement redoublée en sudarabique", *Rocznik Orientalistyczny*, 20, 1, 1961, 127–31
- "Les verbes amhariques en contexte guèze dans les chroniques royales éthiopiennes", *Rocznik Orientalistyczny*, 30, 1, 1967, 19–26
- "Constructions amhariques à valeur génétivale dans les chroniques royales éthiopiennes", *Rocznik Orientalistyczny*, 31, 1, 1968, 29–38
- "L'influence de la langue amharique sur l'emploi des verbes auxiliaires 'nabbara' et 'hallawa' dans textes de chroniques royales écrites en guèze", *Africana Bulletin*, 12, 1970, 27–31
- "Gramatyka języka gyyz (Etiopskiego Klasycznego)", Warszawa 1972

- “Zapożyczenia arabskie w dawnym i współczesnym języku amharskim”, Warszawa 1983
- “Dwie nowele ze zbioru Taddese Libena ‘Inny sposób’”, Przegląd Orientalistyczny, 1974, 4, 349–6



Aleksander Ferenc (1945–2001) was a philologist with a particular interest in Bible studies, Ethiopian Orthodox Church writings, as well as Ge’ez literature, especially religious poetry. Born just after World War II in Polish Silesia, he completed secondary education in Oświęcim in 1962. The same year, as a very young man, he joined the University of Warsaw to study Semitic and Ethiopian Studies. He was passionate about gaining knowledge and learned much more than was included in the programme of the studies. His MA thesis, *The life of Isaac of Gunda Gunde*, was written in 1967 under the supervision of Stefan Strelcyn. In 1976 he defended his PhD thesis on the history of the

Oromo peoples on the basis of Amharic sources, which was supervised by Witold Tyloch, a Semitist specializing in Hebrew studies, from whom Ferenc learned Hebrew.

Aleksander Ferenc was an academic who liked to escape from the hustle and bustle of everyday life into the mysterious world of old books and manuscripts. As a meticulous philologist with an inquiring mind, he paid attention to the smallest detail. He was a devoted and valued teacher, lecturing at the University of Warsaw, primarily focusing on the Ge’ez language and literature, as well as the history of Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Students liked his willingness and patience in teaching about such a different culture and were eager to write their MA theses under his supervision.

As a pioneer of his field in Poland, he popularized the knowledge of Ethiopian Christianity and also the unique religious poetry, which he translated from Ge'ez and published in parish journals. He was especially interested in gene

- “Les Actes d’Isaïe de Gunda-Gunde”, *Annales d’Éthiopie*, X, 1976, 243–294
- “Les peuples Oromodans écrits et l’historiographie éthiopiens”, *Africana Bulletin*, 29, 1980, 81–95
- “Writing and Literature in Classical Ethiopic (Giiz)”, in: B.W. Andrzejewski, S. Piłaszewicz, W. Tyloch (eds) “Literatures in African Languages. Theoretical Issues and Sample Surveys”, Warszawa 1985, 59–65

Andrzej Zaborski (1942–2013) was one of the most prominent Polish linguists, a world-renowned specialist in Semitic and Cushitic languages, as well as an expert in comparative studies of Afro-Asiatic languages.



Andrzej Zaborski was born in Kraków on the 7th of October 1942. In 2000, he was nominated Professor Ordinarius of the Jagiellonian University of Cracow. His research interests covered Afro-Asiatic linguistics, Semitic and Cushitic in particular, and the results of his studies were taught in many regular courses for students and presented during conferences worldwide. His teaching experience included regular lectures on Cushitic languages (Somali, Oromo, Beja), and also on Amharic, Tuareg and Masai. The groundwork for the next academic level, his PhD thesis (1969) “Biconsonantal Verbal Roots in Semitic”, was written under the supervision of the brilliant Polish linguist Prof. Jerzy Kuryłowicz. His subsequent academic degree, i.e. his habilitation at the Jagiellonian University in 1976, was granted on the basis of the book *The Verb in Cushitic* (1975). The second habilitation in African Studies, received at the University of Vienna in 1984, opened a new chapter in Andrzej Zaborski’s academic career. Professor Zaborski also specialized in translation, including the theory and practice of translation. From 2002 to 2008,

he edited a series of conference volumes entitled *Oriental Languages in Translation*. Throughout his academic career, Profesor Zaborski performed numerous administrative functions. Since 2000, he was the head of Afro-Asiatic Linguistics. He was also the chief editor of the "Folia Orientalia", published by the Cracow Branch of the Polish Academy of Sciences. In 1997, he became the president of the Orientalist Committee of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Cracow. For many years he represented Poland in the International Organizing Committee of the International Conferences of Ethiopian Studies.