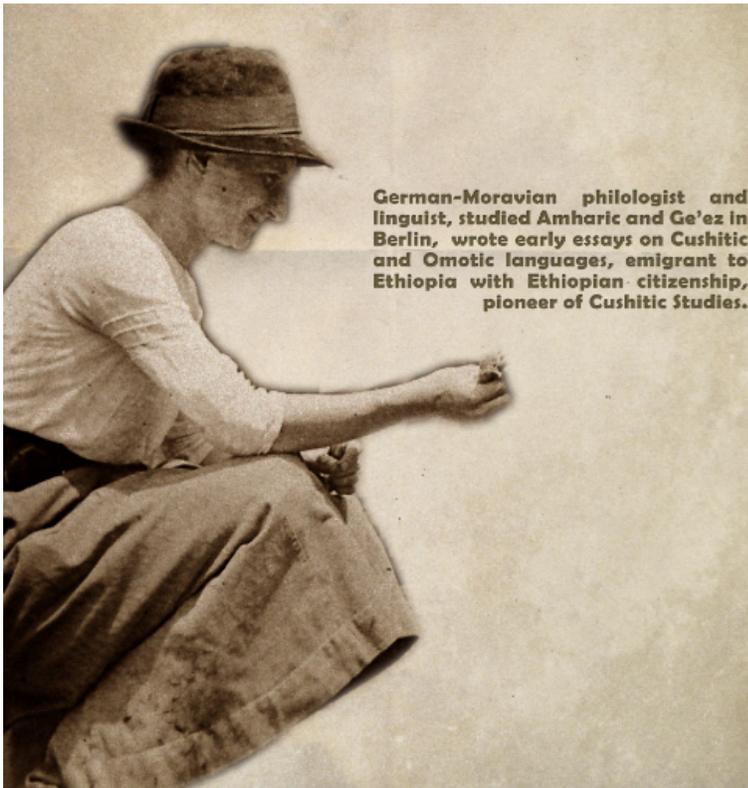


Herma Plazikowsky-Brauner: Philologist and linguist of Cushitic and Omotic languages



Hermine, or Herma, Plazikowsky-Brauner hailed from Brno, the old Moravian capital. She was one of the first women to enter into Oriental Studies, in Prague and Berlin, where she learnt Amharic with texts documented by the first Ethiopian university lecturer, Aleqa Tayye, and where she completed a PhD on Amharic in 1913. At the time she had already struck close ties with Ethiopia – her later husband had emigrated to Ethiopia as a craftsman in 1907, and had taken up work in the service of Emperor Menilek II. In Ethiopia, Plazikowsky-Brauner continued her academic studies in an unusual way: without any kind of institutional ties to German universities she subsequently became known as a specialist within the academic world in Germany for her publications on

the Cushitic languages of southern Ethiopia. In the early 1930s she ran into conflict with the German delegation and lost her German citizenship, taking on the Ethiopian citizenship instead. However, this became void when Italy occupied Ethiopia. When in 1941 Italy was defeated as the first country of the Axis powers by Ethiopia, Ethiopian citizenship was returned to Plazikowsky-Brauner, but when she later refused to support the entry of Ethiopia into the war against Nazi-Germany, she was dispossessed. This led to a large part of her academic papers being lost. Plazikowsky-Brauner returned to Germany with her husband as a stateless refugee. Only as late as 1954, having regained citizenship in the meantime, did she manage to establish herself in the academic community: she became a teacher for Amharic and Ge'ez at the University of Frankfurt. Here, she began to re-write some of the lost manuscripts, but many of them were lost a second time, and with them important information about her life: her deserted house was sold later, which had been decorated in the Ethiopian style, a few years ago, and her remaining manuscripts got lost again in this way. Many blank spaces thus remain in the story of her life, which had such an important role in the exploration of the region.

Text: Wolbert Smidt



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