

LESLAU Wolf Wilek (1906-2006) semitologist, Zionist. He was born on 14th November 1906 in Krzepice, the son of Henoeh and Itta née Goldrajch. His parents died when he was ten-years-old. He was brought up by his older brother.

Leslau attended a *cheder*, after which he studied in a *yeshivah* in Częstochowa. At the age of eighteen, he graduated from a Polish gimnazjum and prepared to emigrate to Palestine, to a life on a kibbutz. He also joined the left-wing Zionist organisation for youth, *Hashomer Hatzair* - he was even one of its leaders in Częstochowa. However, the English would not issue him with a travel certificate. (They probably found that he was suffering from tuberculosis.). In order to avoid serving in the Polish Army, in 1926, he renounced his Polish citizenship and emigrated to Vienna. There, until 1931, he studied semitology. He continued his studies at the Sorbonne, under Prof. Marcel Cohen. His studies covered most semitic languages.

After the fall of France in 1940, his wife fled to the south of the country, while Leslau was arrested by the French police and sent to an internment camp in the Pyrenees. He was later transferred to a concentration camp in des Milles, in Aix-en-Provence. Prior to the camp being taken over by the Germans in 1942, he managed to escape with the help of an international organisation. Together with his family, he moved to the United States.

He settled in New York and worked (part-time) in the École des Hautes Etudes (founded by emigrants for emigrants), the Asian Institute and in the New School for Social Research. A Guggenheim scholarship enabled him take research trips to Ethiopia. Over the course of a few years, he travelled all over that country. In 1951-1955, he was employed by the private Brandeis University in Massachusetts. He then became a professor at the prestigious University of California in Los Angeles. He worked there until his retirement.

He was one of the leading experts on Ethiopia's semitic languages and the author of close to fifty books. He received a prestigious award from the Ethiopian Emperor Hajle Sellassi and an honorary doctorate *honoris causa* from the Hebrew University.

He died on 18th November 2006 in an aged care home in Fullerton, California.

His wife was Charlotte née Halpern (-1998). They had two daughters - Eliana, married surname Silverman and Sylvia, married surname Grotz.

Czenstochow, p. 26. – Wikipedia; Herbert Davidson, *Wolf Leslau in memoriam*, on the web page https://senate.universityofcalifornia.edu/_files/inmemoriam/html/wolfleslau.html. - Materials (birth record extract) in the ODDC collections.

Wiesław Paszkowski