

Reider, Rudolf

(1904–1973)

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Rudolf Reider was a missionary and language researcher who served the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Germany, Liberia, and Tanzania.

Early Years

Rudolf Reider was born June 8, 1904, in Kassel, Germany. He was an apprentice and learned the craft of a precision mechanic. From 1922 to 1926 he was a student at the Neandertal Mission Seminary where he trained to become a missionary. Between 1926 and 1929, he trained as a nurse at Waldfriede Hospital in Berlin, after which he began working as a pastor in Germany. At the same time, he was a guest auditor of the lectures conducted by Diedrich H. Westermann of Berlin in the Kpelle Language. He also began studying Swahili for himself!

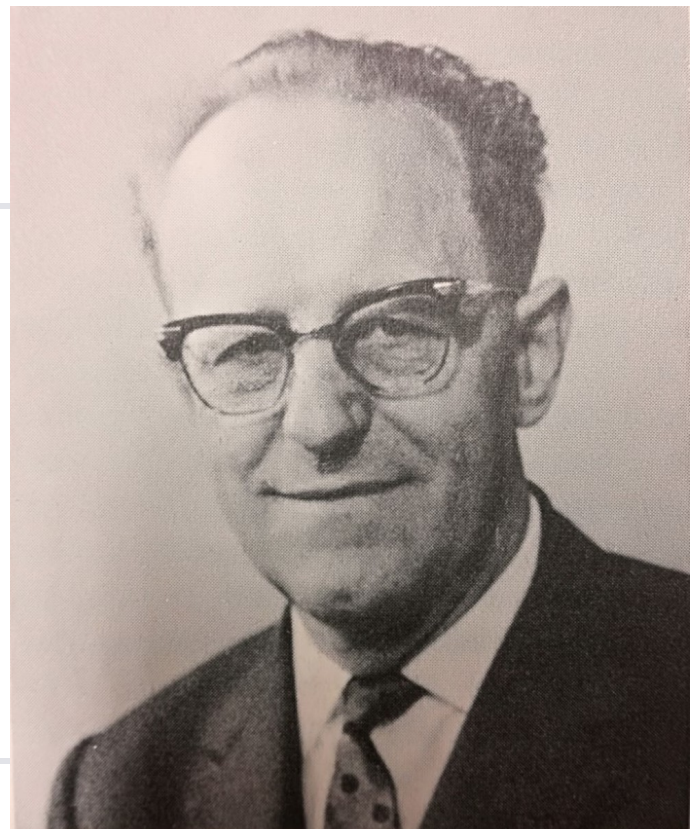
Missionary Work

In 1931 Reider, his wife, and son were sent to Liberia along with Rudolf Helbig, Ernst Flammer, and Karl Noltze.² In Liberia these missionaries were mainly engaged in building and erecting structures for the mission stations. In 1933 Reider was called to Tangayika Mission in East Africa, where he began directing the mission station in Majita, south of the Victorian Sea.³

In the following years he began researching the culture and language of the Jita, which until then had hardly attracted attention in ethnographic literature except for the work of Austrian anthropologist, Richard C. Thurnwald.⁴ Reider was an unusually talented linguist.⁵ After three years of intensively studying the Jita language, Reider, with the help of two local colleagues (one of them Abraham Maradufu),⁶ translated the whole New Testament into the Jita language in 1937.⁷ He was able to rely on the work of a missionary of the African Inland Mission, Emil Sywulka, who had already translated the Gospel of Luke in 1934. Reider's New Testament was published in 1943 by the British and Foreign Bible Society.⁸ In addition, Reider created a dictionary and worked on a grammar of the Jita language. Reider was also able to speak a variety of other languages used in West Africa: Ewe, Hausa, Kpelle, and Twi.⁹

Reider has been considered one of the most outstanding missionaries of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in East Africa. He appears to have been the eminent missionary at Majita and one of the few missionaries who was deeply interested in the language and culture of the people who he served. This is supported by the fact that Reider even praised the Jita in an article published in Germany.¹⁰ As a capable linguist, Reider was the only missionary who continued the Adventist translation tradition of pre-World War I in Lake Victoria, Tanzania.¹¹

Between 1937 and 1938, Reider went on furlough to Germany, a time he used to study ethnology under Diedrich H. Westermann. In 1938 Reider founded in the southwestern highlands the Mbeya Mission Station. Because of the outbreak of the World War, in September 1939, Reider was interned and was repatriated to Germany in January



Rudolf Reider
Photo courtesy of Historical Archives of Seventh-day Adventists in Europe, Friedensau, Germany.

1940.¹²

That same year he began working as a pastor in Munich. By July or August of that year the German labor office sent him to work in Berlin.¹³ While working in Berlin, he got permission to continue his studies in linguistics, phonetics, and ethnology under Westermann and Heinz Sölken. In 1942 he completed his doctoral thesis based on the Jita language under Westermann.¹⁴ Shortly after he was recruited by the army as an interpreter until 1943.¹⁵ After Berlin was conquered by the Allies, Reider and his family moved to Saalfeld and then to Kassel, where he opened a private translation office where he also taught English.¹⁶ Around 1947 or 1948 he began working for the Hessian-Westphalian Conference as a part-time pastor in Kassel.¹⁷ During that time he baptized more than a dozen people.¹⁸

In 1957, on a contract from the University of Hamburg, he returned to Tanzania on the Ukerewe island, where he researched tone pitches along with the natives. He also worked on the revision of his New Testament, which was republished in 1960.

Later Life and Contribution

From 1962 to 1968, Reider served as the director of the Goethe Institute in Accra, Ghana, and Nairobi, Kenya. He died February 13, 1973, in Rheydt near Mönchengladbach.

Rudolph Reider's mission efforts in Liberia and Tanzania helped plant and establish Adventism in those countries. His literary, linguistic, and translation prowess contributed to providing literature, materials, and avenues for learning about God in the mission field. His legacy is evident in the translation of the New Testament into the Jita language, which was not just beneficial to the Adventists, but also to all other Christian groups.

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NOTES

1. See Daniel Heinz, "Reider, Rudolf," in *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon*, vol. 18, ed. Traugott Bautz (Herzberg: Bautz, 2001), 1178-1180.?
2. E. D. Dick, "The West Coast of Africa – No. 1," *ARH*, August 3, 1933, 14-15.?
3. M. E. Kern, "Missionary Recruits, 1933," *ARH*, March 1, 1934, 13.?
4. For example, *Black and White in East Africa: The Fabric of a New Civilization* (London: Routledge, 1935).?
5. Heinz, "Reider, Rudolf," 1178-1180.?
6. Stefan Höschele, *Christian Remnant-African Folk Church* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 149.?
- 7.

- "British and Foreign Bible Society," *Australasian Record*, March 22, 1943, 6.?
8. "Rushing a New Testament to Completion," *ARH*, August 19, 1943, 23.?
 9. See Rudolf Reider to Walter K. Ising, December 23, 1943, Correspondence, Box 6753, RG 26, General Conference Archives, Maryland.?
 10. See Höschele, *Christian Remnant-African Folk Church*, 147-149. The article was published in *Koloniale Rundschau*: see Reider, "Die Wirtschftsformen Der Djita und ihre Bezeihungen zu den Nachbarstämmen, *Koloniale Rundschau*, 31 (1940), 210-221.?
 11. For instance, Ernst Kotz who was a generation before him had done pioneering language studies among the Pare people. Ibid. See also, Heinz, "Reider, Rudolf," 1180.?
 12. Rudolf Reider to Walter K. Ising, October 25, 1946, Correspondence, Box 6753, RG 26, General Conference Archives, Maryland.?
 13. Ibid.?
 14. See his "Laut-und Formenlehre Djita-Sprache," ["Sound and Form of Djita Language"] (Ph.D. dissertation, Friederich Wilhelm University, Berlin, 1942).?
 15. Reider to Walter K. Ising, October 25, 1946.?
 16. By this time, he had lost connection with his former conference and did not have any with Berlin. Hence, he looked for a place to work and eke out a living. Ibid.?
 17. See "Hessian-Westphalian Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1948), 87.?
 18. Reider to Walter K. Ising, October 25, 1946.?

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