

*Allgemeine Jüdische Wochenzeitung*<sup>1</sup>, Düsseldorf  
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### **Elias Auerbach turns 85**

The old master of critical bible scholarship, Dr Elias Auerbach from Haifa, turned 85 a few days ago. Although his youthful vitality and still sharp mind may make it hard to believe, he was born on 28 July 1882 in the province of Ritschenwalde in Posnen. As is generally known, a small housing complex on the Bergstraße in Hessen bears the name Auerbach. But in fact he has nothing to do with the well known Auerbach family from Halberstadt, whose family tree has been repeatedly printed, nor with the Plozker Raw<sup>2</sup> Auerbach family. His family, like that of Plozker Raw, originates in Poland. His father was actually an official in the tiny community of Posnen and knew how to bring up his three children in the Jewish faith in this environment. His daughter<sup>3</sup> married one of the leading religious Jews, Professor Heinrich Loewe, who was already in Palestine before Herzl's<sup>4</sup> appearance as a Zionist. His older brother Israel<sup>5</sup> was active in the Orient carrying out assignments for Jewish assistance organisations, mostly headquartered in Constantinople. The young Elias grew up in the hat-wearing tradition of Posnen's small Kehillah<sup>6</sup> and by the age of 12, as he himself recalls, was already influenced towards Zionism by Heinrich Loewe's visits to his family home. Unsurprisingly, as a student he joined the Jewish Students' Union (VJSt, which later became the KJV) founded by his brother-in-law Heinrich Loewe, and motivated by its principles, he seriously planned to go to Palestine during his lifetime. While most people did not come until 1933, he was already there by 1909. He had studied medicine and settled in Haifa, where he was a popular doctor from the earliest days of the growing city. He remained connected to Haifa his whole life, apart from his foreign trips, and it is an unsurprising honour that the City of Haifa recognised him as an honorary citizen.

Alongside his professional career he had another activity that was no less important – bible scholarship. Influenced by the results of the newest critical bible studies, he became a sharp critic who rejected the traditional ideas of his youth and used new methods to search for knowledge of the bible. As early as 1920 he had published a book about *The Prophets*. But his masterpiece is the much admired and much attacked work *Desert and the Promised Land*. Unlike Benno Jakob<sup>7</sup>, who wrote in moderate language to explain the holy texts, he proceeded radically, to the sorrow of traditionalists. Perhaps this helps explain why, despite his traditional education and his earlier traditional lifestyle, he joined the League Against Religious Coercion and took a leading role, even in his capacity as an honorary citizen of Haifa, in protesting against every kind of religious coercion, as he saw it. He was, even in his old age, at heart a young revolutionary, and he rebelled against many a tradition which in his opinion was no longer appropriate to the time. That he therefore had bitter critics, even many personal enemies, is understandable. He himself never let this hold him back and carried boldly along on his own way. Also anyone who [word missing?] with his ideas and overestimates the results of his researches<sup>8</sup> will wish him the uninterrupted vigour to perform further research work even into the second half of his ninth decade.

### **Rabbi Dr Neufeld**

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<sup>1</sup> *General Jewish Weekly Newspaper*

<sup>2</sup> I've been unable to find if this is a reference to a place or person/people.

<sup>3</sup> I.e. Elias's sister

<sup>4</sup> Theodor Herzl, 1860-1904, an Austro-Hungarian journalist who was the founder of modern political Zionism.

<sup>5</sup> I.e. Elias's brother

<sup>6</sup> Jewish community. In pre-WWII Europe all towns or cities with a Jewish population had one communal organisation. In Poland, taxes for the Polish government were collected from members of the Kehillah by elected trustees, who were also responsible for things necessary to live a Jewish life, such as education.

<sup>7</sup> 1862-1945. A Reform Rabbi and bible scholar

<sup>8</sup> The first half of this sentence doesn't make much sense to me!