

Chadasoth, 27 July 1962

Dr Elias Auerbach – 80 years old

Dr Elias Auerbach has been a resident of the city of Haifa for nearly 53 years and has been one of its few honorary citizens for some time. As the first Jewish doctor and the first Jew from Germany to settle here, he is a well-known personality amongst the population, especially amongst the “old Jischuw”¹. Many people will certainly want to congratulate him personally on his 80th birthday on 28 July 1962. But he is spending his birthday on a European trip, during which he is combining leisure and relaxation with lectures on bible research and bible scholarship.

A medical doctor, Dr Auerbach is also known in Haifa as a Mohel² who brought thousands of young boys from Haifa into Abraham’s band³. He recounts vividly how he began to practise here in 1909 under conditions which are barely imaginable today, and how he had to educate not only his staff, but also his patients, until they came to accept his “European” methods. With the active help of the League of Jewish Women⁴ in Berlin and Baroness Rothschild, he was able to open a small hospital in 1911, in which he himself had to do everything, from delivering babies to the most complicated operations. The Aid Association of German Jews⁵, which was then beginning to build the Technion⁶, appointed him as curator; in this role he had to look after their rights as he was on the spot, and had to deal with the Turkish authorities. He instigated the creation of a Kehilla, an organised community, which in those days represented the only possibility for Jews to assemble together.

The Rosthchilds, who visited the country in 1914, supplied him with the funds to build a large Jewish hospital, a plan which was disrupted by the war. In the 1920s the Americans undertook the provision of health services in Haifa and built the small Hadassa Hospital. The Rothschild Hospital was not built until much later, at the beginning of the Second World War.

¹ Jews settled in Palestine before the foundation of Israel

² Jewish man who performs the ritual of circumcision

³ I.e. circumcised them

⁴ **Jüdischer Frauenbund (League of Jewish Women)** founded in 1904 by Bertha Pappenheim, attracted a large following. Absorbing some traditional Jewish women’s charities and building on programs that Jewish women’s groups had pioneered, the JFB offered a feminist analysis and approach to social welfare. Combining feminist goals with a strong sense of Jewish identity, it was the first nationally coordinated organization to promote German-Jewish women’s interests. Its membership in and support of the goals of the German bourgeois women’s movement distinguished it from other Jewish women’s organizations of its time as well as from the major Protestant and Catholic women’s organizations.

<http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/juedischer-frauenbund-league-of-jewish-women>

⁵ **Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden (Aid Association of German Jews)**, German Jewish organization established in 1901 mainly to help Jewish communities in Eastern Europe that had fallen victim to pogroms and wars. It supported the creation of Jewish education and social welfare institutions in Eastern Europe, as well. After World War I the association also helped Jews emigrate from Eastern Europe through Germany to locations abroad. After Hitler came to power in 1933, the association began to provide assistance for German Jews who wanted to leave Germany for countries other than Palestine (those immigrating to Palestine were served by the Jewish Agency). In all, it helped 90,000 Jews relocate. After the Nuremberg Laws were passed in 1935, more and more Jews turned to the association for help; they were offered language instruction and job training, and assistance in leaving the country. The association worked with worldwide Jewish organizations such as the Joint Distribution Committee and HICEM. Closed down in 1939 by the authorities, its activities were taken over by the Reich Association’s emigration department.

http://www1.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%206371.pdf

⁶ The **Technion**, or Israel Institute of Technology, is an internationally acclaimed institution in Haifa founded in 1912. The emphasis was on natural sciences, engineering and architecture, with a school of medicine added later.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technion_%E2%80%93_Israel_Institute_of_Technology

A sparkling orator, in 1942 he made a short venture into active politics: he was one of the founder members of the "Alija Chadascha", a liberal group which in those days tried to represent the interests of the then-still-new wave of Eastern European immigrants.

Dr E. Auerbach was active as a doctor in Haifa for almost 50 years, with several breaks while he concentrated fully on the historical studies for which he became well-known worldwide. It is difficult to say exactly why the doctor chose historical research as his hobby, but he became a recognised expert on the historical periods he studied, especially the earliest epochs of the bible.

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Elias Auerbach grew up in a small community in Poznan⁷, the son of a rabbi. He was made familiar with the world of the bible from his earliest youth. He understood Hebrew before he had fully mastered the German language. His older brothers took him to Berlin when he was ten and enrolled him in a Gymnasium⁸. In the capital city of the Second Reich, he was an early member of the first circle of young Zionists. The young medic decided to emigrate to Palestine. But his school and university years had formed his personality, and dominated his working methods and his thoughts. We can see how all his works, essays and speeches were thought out and filed on a strong logical basis.

Dr Auerbach is one of the few people still alive today to have had personal contact with Herzl.⁹ He was introduced to him in 1901 as an "active Zionist student". He is in a position to talk inspiringly of the [Zionist] movement from its modest beginnings to its fulfilment – the founding of the state [of Israel]. The drafts of a detailed autobiography lie ready ordered in many folders. He understands how to describe from memory encounters from the past and therefore how to present the world of the past vividly and to fill it with details.

During the [First] World War he learnt Arabic and occupied himself with Babylonian and Assyrian cuneiform script. With this he laid a further foundation for his later historical researches.

As a German national he obtained only with great difficulty in those days permission for re-entry to his city of Haifa from the British Mandate¹⁰. As well as the help from the Zionist organisation, his Ottoman doctor's licence, which he obtained in Constantinople in 1909, helped him.

His first publication (1920) dealt with the *Prophets*. Then followed some drafts dealing with the historical period from the settlement to the Babylonian exile, until at the suggestion of Prof. Ismar Elbogen he dealt with the beginnings of the Israelite tribes. During his second stay in Berlin, 1930-33, he was not only a doctor and a teacher of bible studies at the Higher Institute for Jewish Studies¹¹, he also wrote a work that later became very well known, *Desert and Promised Land*, the second volume of which came out before the [Second] World War. Not until 1953 did a further book, *Moses*, appear, and by then Dr Auerbach had finished several large works to the manuscript stage, which he continued to work on until he believed he had found the right format in terms of phrasing and structure.

⁷ Now Poland's fifth-largest city; part of Prussia/Germany until a popular uprising after Germany's defeat in WWI led to the creation of the Second Polish Republic.

⁸ Equivalent to grammar school

⁹ Theodor Herzl, 1860-1904, an Austro-Hungarian journalist who was the founder of modern political Zionism.

¹⁰ Then administering Palestine

¹¹ **Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums**, a rabbinical seminary established in Berlin in 1872 by Jews who were unable to join the University of Berlin, and destroyed by the Nazis in 1942.

In his *Door to the Bible* – the final title would sound something like this – he attempts to differentiate history from stories, and historical events from legends and narratives, and reports from lyric poetry, and to elaborate new methods, research and discoveries from the source material. The notes of the writing will be exhibited as historical foundations, as religion and artwork. The autobiography mentioned above will cover more events from decades crowned with personal success, the life story of a man who travelled from a small east German town of the 1900s via Berlin to Haifa; the young man who was led into the world of holy writings by his father; the doctor who first pounced on issues in the natural sciences, anthropology and genetics, then to become a historian and bible scholar, who worked with scientific standards and often found other explanations than those which he had been taught as a young man.

We hope that Dr Auerbach, who has reached the “Gewurot”¹², the age of the strong, will continue to be active in historical research and the daily life of his city of Haifa! As a connoisseur of writing, as an exact scientist, we expect from him many more articles to clarify and explain those times that illustrate the foundations of the Israelite tribes, and during which the concept of a monotheistic religion came into being!

H.W. Goldstein

¹² I think this is the German rendition of a Hebrew word rendered in English as “Gevurot” – a Hebrew blessing praising one who revives the dead.