

Eveline Goodman-Thau  
Meyer Heinrich Hirsch Landauer -  
Bible Scholar and Kabbalist

I

After the decline of kabbalistic tradition in Germany at the end of the 18th century<sup>1</sup> and the generally negative attitude towards kabbalistic writings in Jewish historical scholarship (in contrast to its reception in Christian circles<sup>2</sup>), we witness a first attempt at a scholarly study of the history and development of Jewish mysticism by a little known but highly original young scholar, Meyer Heinrich Hirsch Landauer, who, between 1838 and 1840, engaged in a serious study of Hebrew manuscripts in the Munich Hofbibliothek.

Born in 1808 at Kappel, near Buchau, in Württemberg, Landauer was the son of a pious cantor, Elias Landauer, who had hoped to prepare his bright son for a rabbinical career. He was, however, not to see this, as a chronic illness led to his son's premature death in 1841 at the age of 33. This marked the end of a brief but promising effort at integrating the study of Kabbalah as part of religious life and scholarship in the German Jewish tradition. Under the influence of German idealistic philosophy, Landauer attempted a symbolic interpretation of the Bible - in particular the Pentateuch - according to kabbalistic motifs. One of the few biographical sources on Landauer is contained in an obituary which appeared on February 25, 1841 in the *Israelitische Annalen*<sup>3</sup>. It described how Landauer, after proper preparation in rabbinic-talmudic subjects, entered, at the age of 18, the *Talmud-Schule* in Karlsruhe, while at the same time engaging in humanistic studies at the local Lyceum. Later, Landauer took up studies at the universities of Munich and Tübingen where his encounter with German Romanticism of the school of Schelling and modern bible criticism led him to develop his own original ideas regarding the meaning of the Names of God in the Pentateuch as a hermeneutical key in understanding the Bible in the Jewish tradition.

---

<sup>1</sup>See Gershom Scholem, "Die letzten Kabbalisten in Deutschland" *Judaica* 3, Frankfurt 1987, p. 218.

<sup>2</sup>See Gershom Scholem, "Die Erforschung der Kabbala von Reuchlin bis zur Gegenwart" *Judaica* 3, Frankfurt 1987, p. 259 ff.

<sup>3</sup>*Israelitische Annalen* - Ein Zentralblatt für die Geschichte, Literatur und Kultur der Israeliten aller Zeiten und Länder, hrsg. Dr. J.M. Jost, Jahrgang 1841, Nr. 9, p. 69-70.