

Historical Fiction

When she was growing up, Michelle Cameron's mother told her that she was descended from a famous rabbi. It wasn't until years later when she was researching her family tree that she discovered his name—Meir of Rothenberg.

Founder of the Jewish seminary in the German city of Rothenberg, he was known throughout 13th century Europe for the wisdom of his letters responding to Talmudic questions. Late in his life, with persecution of Jews in Germany increasing, he and his family prepared to immigrate to Palestine. Betrayed by an apostate, he is imprisoned by Rudolph I of Hapsburg who asks an exorbitant ransom for his release. Fearing it would set a precedent, Meir refuses to allow the Jews of Europe to raise the funds to win his release, and spends the rest of his life in prison.

Cameron wanted to tell his story, finding that the best way into his story was to invent a character—Shira, a lively and intelligent wife. The resultant novel, *The Fruit of Her Hands: The Story of Shira of Ashkenaz* (Pocket Books), is a meticulously researched and immensely readable saga that brings to life an often overlooked period in Jewish history. Learn more at <http://michelle-cameron.com/books/fruit.html>

Sandee Brawarsky, book critic of *The New York Jewish Week*, is author of *212 Views of Central Park: Experiencing New York City's Jewel From Every Angle*.