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An unknown side to Salo Landau



unknown author [Public domain], [via Wikimedia Commons](#)

Salomon Landau (1903-1944) vs. Count Johannes van den Bosch (1906-1994), c. 1930.

by Bob van de Velde

Several years ago, Reuben Fine and Salo Landau's Schaaksleutel (= Chess Key) was presented in the Nieuwsbrief (Newsletter) of the Max Euwe Centre ([no. 76](#), April 2011) as an exceptional object 'from bygone days'. It is a kind of disc made of thin cardboard, the size of an LP^U. When this disc is turned inside a frame, which is also made of cardboard, it shows a multitude of chess opening variations, 116 in number. As far as I know, this was the first time that someone attempted to present chess opening theory in such an easy-to-use, systematic way. No wonder that MEC trained the spotlight on this copy of the second, improved edition (≥ 1936) of a quite rarely preserved instrument! Initially it couldn't be retained in the MEC collection, but eventually the Amsterdam chess centre was able to obtain it after all.

Bridge keys



Schaak Sleutel

In a reaction ([Newsletter 77](#), September 2011), I wrote that Landau had also been a prominent bridge player in the 1930's, which reveals a side of him that was presumably unknown to many chess aficionados. This Chess Key, of which the first edition appeared in 1936, was apparently a kickoff for three similar instruments that came on the market one year later: one for the game of draughts, manufactured by the former draughts world champion Ben Springer in collaboration with the then French World Champion Maurice Raichenbach, and two for the game of bridge: Bridge-sleutel; Het bieden and Bridge-sleutel; Het spelen (Bridge Key; Bidding, and Bridge Key; Playing). All three of these were issued by the Amsterdam publisher Hans Wittkowski. The latter was a chess player himself, and a member of the Amsterdam chess club VAS. Landau worked together with E.C. (Ernst) Goudsmit on the construction of these Bridge Keys. Like his brother F.W. (Frits), Ernst Goudsmit was a teammate of Emanuel Lasker and Landau in the very first international team tournament ever held in the history of contract bridge. This tournament was an initiative of Lasker, and it took place in London, 1932, between England, Germany and the Netherlands. The Netherlands won this tournament. Thus, Landau and his teammates became the first Dutch bridge internationals, even though Lasker had the German nationality – he was denaturalized after 1933. De 'Goudsmeden', Dutch plural for Goldsmiths, as their nickname was, were regarded as ranking among the strongest players in the international bridge world from several years before to several years after WW II.

From both bridge keys and the draughts key, as was the case with the two editions of the Chess Key, only few copies have been preserved– which is small wonder because the cardboard discs were as vulnerable as they were large. Today, both Bridge Keys are part of the 'Bridgecollectie Nederland' (BCN, i.e. Netherlands Bridge Collection), formerly called the Amsterdam Bridge Collection as part of the Amsterdam University Library; now the BCN has been included in the Dutch Mind Sports Collection Centre of the Tresoar, a large library and archive institution in Leeuwarden, the capital of the province Friesland. Tresoar recently selected mind sports as one of its central subjects. This bridge collection, by the way, is the largest in the world in a public library.

For the Landau collection of Tresoar, the Herman Filarski Foundation, which promotes the interests of the BCN, is still searching for copies of the Draughts Key as well as both editions of the Chess Key. Within its walls, Tresoar also has a chess collection which contains among others the libraries of the late Frisian IM Haje Kramer, of the late chess historian Peter Monté and of the late draughts and mind sports historian Karel Wendel Kruijswijk, as well as a draughts collection, and the beginning of a go collection.

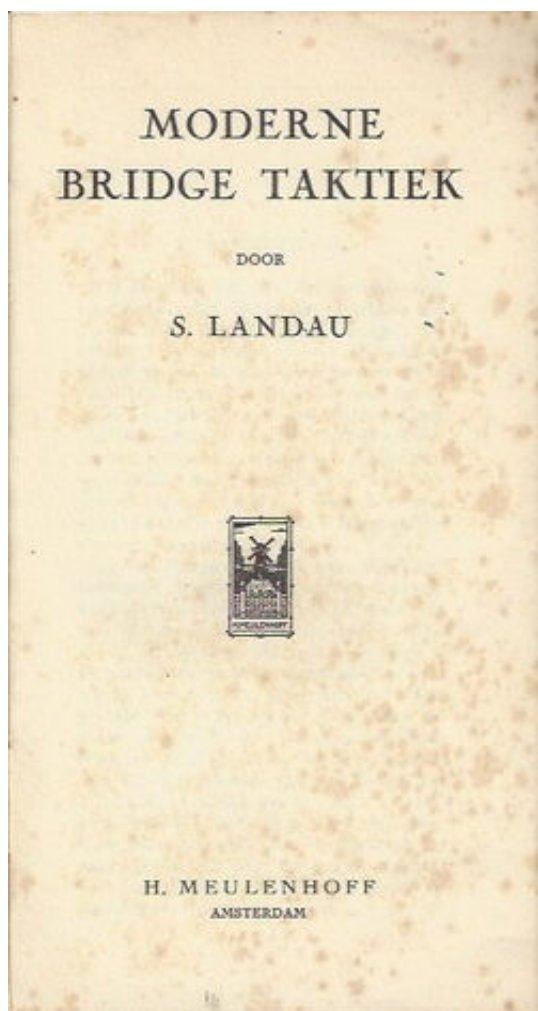
Bridge craze

— Moderne Bridge Taktiek - S. Landau - cover

The BCN has acquired Landau's virtually complete, though small, bridge oeuvre. This also comprises the edited translation of the two, but rather different, editions of Emanuel Lasker's first Dutch bridge book *Bridge; Eenvoudige handleiding* (Bridge; An easy manual; 1931, 1932), his own book *Moderne bridge-taktiek* (Modern bridge strategy, 1932; alas, the second, fully improved edition is missing, and is still being searched after) and the brochure *De nieuwe Internationale bridge-telling* (The new international bridge count, ±1937). All of this may be regarded as the result of Emanuel Lasker's 'thoroughly regrettable [...] great digression', as W.A.T. Schelfhout called it in his chapter *In memoriam Salo Landau* in the book *Partij verloren...* (Game lost...), compiled by L.G. Eggink and Schelfhout, Amsterdam 1947. For, as Schelfhout writes, in the late 1920s 'one could [have] expect[ed] the full development of Landau's undeniable chess talent, if it had not been for Dr. Lasker, whom Landau greatly admired, and who had convinced him at an evil hour that bridge would soon supplant the game of chess entirely.' Schelfhout also speaks of 'the surge of bridge frenzy in the years 1931-1934' and continues: 'The talented Noteboom, too, was thrown off-balance by Lasker's prophecy. Both Landau and Noteboom suffered from serving two masters. Noteboom settled in Berlin as a bridge teacher, and Landau tried his luck in London. For both of them the result was a fiasco.' While it is questionable whether this was correct in the case of Noteboom – proof of his activities as a bridge teacher in Berlin is yet to be found – Schelfhout's indignation also sounds a tad hypocritical; he wasn't beyond serving two masters himself, and had no qualms taking his share from the results of the bridge craze by writing a booklet called *Zo wordt u een goed bridger* (How to become a good bridge player, 1937), of which at least two editions appeared!

Is this the entire story of Landau's two talents, his serving of 'two masters' and lending of his name to these chess and bridge keys? Absolutely not.

Landau the designer



Moderne Bridge Taktiek - S. Landau - title page

Landau was at least closely involved as an author both in the manufacturing of the Chess Key, the first edition of which appeared in 1936, and in that of both Bridge Keys in 1937. Also, he must have been indirectly involved in the manufacturing of the draughts key, although this is not mentioned anywhere on this edition. If we consider that he was at least involved with both editions of the Chess Key and both Bridge Keys, then it is only logical to assume that he played a central role in the realization of the idea of trying to summarize the theory of all important mind sports in this type of revolving keys. And that raises the question whether Landau, besides his chess and bridge talents, didn't have another side to him that has remained unknown so far – namely, that of a designer! If we cannot find any predecessors for such 'key-instruments' in this form, then this circular key was indeed a highly original idea that was further developed by Landau, at least in the case of the chess and bridge keys. For the chess- and bridge-theoretical side of the matter he probably assured himself of authoritative partners, bringing in Fine and Goudsmit, not least to improve sales. This suggests practical and commercial insight at the very least. Reuben Fine was staying in the Netherlands in those years, and was already ranked among the best chess players in the world, think of Zandvoort 1936! As said, Ernst Goudsmit enjoyed a similar status in the bridge world. Moreover, Landau knew both men well personally. Incidentally, the indications on the keys themselves leave some obscurity about the relations between the authors. On the chess key it says, briefly and to the point, 'manufactured by Fine and Landau', which seems to point at equivalence, but on the bridge keys in the same place only 'manufactured by Mr. E.C. Goudsmit' is written, while the Explanation underneath has been signed with 'The authors'. Then, on the other side of the keys, and on the envelopes in which the keys were packed, we find 'manufactured by Mr. E.C. Goudsmit in collaboration with S. Landau'. Perhaps the envelope that contained the draughts key also gave some information about Landau's involvement, but it has not surfaced to this day.

International circulation

So far I have just been making conjectures from which it cannot be readily inferred that Landau was the actual designer of the instrument. However, we can find the confirmation of these assumptions in the catalogue of the chess collection of the Koninklijke Bibliotheek (KB, Royal Dutch Library), an indispensable source for chess-bibliographical research. Here, using the entrance ‘chess key’, we encounter ‘Schach-Schlüssel / bearb. durch M. Euwe und R. Fine’ (Amsterdam 1937; publisher: Wittkowski) with the annotation ‘Entwurf: S. Landau’ (Design : S. Landau). Unnecessarily for us, the KB adds to this a reference to the original Dutch edition from 1936.

Moreover, it turns out that Wittkowski didn’t restrict himself to this German translation – two other translations have seen the light! Also in or after 1937, there appeared in Amsterdam, with a copyright indication of 1937, *Clé-d’échecs composé par Dr. M. Euwe et R. Fine*, and *Chess-key by Dr. M. Euwe et R. Fine*, and in these two publications Landau was explicitly mentioned as well: respectively, ‘Projet: S. Landau, Champion de Hollande’ and ‘Designer S. Landau, Champion of Holland’. So, with this, the Chess Key also obtained an international status, and Landau was recognized as its designer. As will become clear from the following, it is important for the history of these keys that this recognition was unambiguously recorded in these three publications at least. It is still striking, though, that Landau’s co-authorship of the original Dutch-language edition remains unmentioned. By the way, it remains doubtful whether the translated copies have seen a very wide circulation outside the Dutch borders. I am greatly obliged to Jurgen Stigter, the well-known Dutch chess collector, who possesses copies from both translations in his inexhaustible collection, for pointing these French and English editions out to me and granting me inspection of them. Naturally, for the Tresoar collection I am now also searching for copies of all three translations.

How Landau’s name disappeared

But this still doesn’t put an end to the story of the keys and the questions raised by them. As it turns out, the Chess Key has also been issued in Spanish-speaking regions, under the name *Clave de las aperturas* – again with Euwe and Fine as the authors. However, these came out not in the circular key shape, but as a handy-sized booklet. The first edition, of which the KB owns a copy, appeared in Buenos Aires in 1941 – at least this is the copyright year. In this book edition the Chess Key experienced its greatest success, as there appeared at least five reprints in 1944, 1950, 1954, 1961 and 1972 (all of which are present in the Netherlands Bridge Collection), each time with the addition ‘ed. autorizada’, although this authorization cannot have come from Landau. What is more, none of these Spanish-language editions^[2] contain any reference to Landau as the designer and co-author of the original edition. These Argentinian editions raise a new question, as the title description does mention ‘trad. del inglés por Hector Rodriguez Escande [sometimes given as Esconde or Escanda]’. Translated from a copy of the English translation? How did the Argentinian publisher lay his hands on such a translation in wartime?

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_ Clave de las Aperturas - Max Euwe, Reuben Fine, 1941 - cover

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- _ Clave de las Aperturas - Max Euwe, Reuben Fine, 1941 - title page
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_ Clave de las Aperturas - Max Euwe, Reuben Fine, 1972 - cover

During the Buenos Aires Chess Olympiad in 1939, WW II broke out. In itself, it is possible that one or several of the participating players possessed a Chess Key, and came into contact with the Argentinian publisher Grabo. However, this is not very probable since the key was of course not very interesting for strong chess players. It cannot have been Reuben Fine, who was still Landau's co-author in 1936, since Aidan Woodger did not mention a single word about the Olympiad or on Fine's possible presence in Buenos Aires in his detailed book on the American, Reuben Fine; A Comprehensive Record of an American Chess Career, 1929-1951 (Jefferson, London 2004). In the recently published issue of Karl^[3] we read the real reason for his absence : the two strongest members, Fine and Reshevsky, of the American team, winner of the four preceding Olympiads, refused to play unless their very high financial requirements were met, which was not the case.

But at a later stage, as the author and one of the entitled parties, Fine may easily have been able to make the English-language key available for the Spanish edition. The United States were not yet involved in the war in 1941, and Argentina remained neutral. Possibly then, that edition was realized through Fine from the United States, as it seems improbable that Euwe could be heavily involved in such a project from occupied Holland, let alone Wittkowski or Landau himself. Most probably they had other concerns in 1941, which was the year of the first razzias. As is known, Landau was betrayed at an attempt to escape to Switzerland in 1942, and deported together with his wife and daughter. Like Wittkowski, they died in

concentration camps^[4].

But it seems that after the war Euwe didn't take care that Landau's name was included in the 3rd and following editions, the way Fine could have done already in the first two editions. Perhaps Euwe wasn't even aware of the fact that the keys were reprinted in Argentina. Of course, it was by now only a booklet instead of the original turn-table key, and strictly this mention wouldn't have been necessary, but the effect was that in this way the name of Salo Landau quietly disappeared as the designer of an original instrument that was used to present the basic theory of chess openings in a practical and well-organized way. Without any after-war reprint of the bridge and draughts keys neither his name was part of the collective memory of the bridge and draughts world anymore.

Landau's pseudonym

Even though the history of the mind sports keys leaves many questions unanswered, I could have concluded here, were it not for the fact that shortly after the Chess Key editions appeared in 1936 and 1937, yet another systematic overview of the chess openings came out: Schaakopeningen in overzichtelijke vorm; 5.000 zetten! (Chess openings conveniently arranged; 5,000 moves!). The publisher this time was G.B. Van Goor Zonen's U.M. in The Hague, the same publisher that also issued Euwe's Theorie der schaakopeningen (Theory of chess openings). Inside the cover pages we find a fold-out sheet typed on both sides, on which we see an extremely concise overview showing in a single glance the entire (basic) theory of the openings, including evaluations. The cover names Leo Landuijt as its author – a completely unknown name in chess in the year 1938 and also in the following years before and after WO II. Not until 20 years later do we encounter his name again. But the catalogues of the KB and the University Library of Amsterdam (UBA) provide a surprising explanation: Leo Landuijt was the pseudonym of Salo Landau! The source is not mentioned, unfortunately – the two most important sources of information about Landau's life, Schelfhout's In memoriam article in the above-mentioned book Partij verloren... as well as Adri Plomp's article Het korte leven van Salo Landau (The short life of Salo Landau)^[5] remained silent about Leo Landuijt – as they did, by the way, on the subject of his mind sports keys.

However, we cannot assume that both libraries were skating on thin ice with their attribution. Moreover, at that time they both employed experts – Kruijswijk in the KB and J. ten Have in the UBA, who were quite familiar with the Dutch chess world before and after WW II. Perhaps they based their attribution on (among others) oral sources. If they were indeed right, then the keys designed by Salo Landau are not the only tangible evidence that he was not just interested in the way in which theoretical subject matter could be presented systematically, well-organized and easy-to-handle, but also that he had the talent to design workable instruments to achieve this.

Why a pseudonym?



_ Schaak Openingen - Leo Landuijt, 1938

The family name Landuijt is not completely unknown in the Netherlands, but it is very rare. In Flanders however, we find the name to be a bit more frequent, but in various forms, like (Van) Landuyt, (Van) Land(h)uy(d)t, and many others. In total, 25,316 mentions from all over the world are found in Geneanet^[6], relatively few of them from recent times, and mostly in Belgium (Flanders): 19,586 times, against only 112 in the Netherlands. Only one single time did I find a Leo(pold) Landuyt, who was living in the province of Zeeland ('Sealand'), but died in 1933. So, it is highly probable that Leo Landuijt is indeed not more than a pseudonym.

If we accept that Leo Landuijt was a pseudonym of Landau, then the question is: why did he assume it? Landau was, after Euwe, the best-known and strongest chess player in the Netherlands, and in the absence of Euwe he even became the Dutch chess champion in 1936-37. Without doubt, his fold-out sheet would have sold more easily with his own name on the cover than with the completely unknown name of his pseudonym. Could it have been that his contract with Wittkowski didn't allow him to bring out a competing book under his own name with a different publisher? Also, it doesn't seem unrealistic to assume that Wittkowski, or else Euwe and Fine, didn't want such a rival publication to appear on the market under the name of the original designer after the three translated editions of Landau's and Fine's Dutch Chess Key brought out under their authors' names. Whatever the cause or the reason may have been, the result was that Landau's name disappeared again.

A stolen print?



Schach Eröffnungen - Leo Landuijt, 1957

But new questions also arise. Twenty years later, and 14 years after Landau was murdered by the Nazis, there appeared with Schachverlag Heinz Loeffler the book *Schach-Eröffnungen; 6250 Züge! Übersichtlich aufgestellt. 2. verbesserte und vergrößerte Auflage. Von Leo Landuijt. Bad Nauheim 1957*^[7] – in Germany of all places! Immediately a first question comes up: who had taken care of those improvements and extensions if it hadn't been the author himself? Then, it must have been an unknown hand after 1940 or 1941, but whose hand? The short introduction, signed L.L., on the inside of the cover is not more than a translation of the original, largely unaltered Dutch text, and it doesn't provide any further clues about either the author L.L. or the printing history of this 2. Auflage.

Next question: was there also a '1. Auflage', a first edition, whether or not 'verbessert und vergrößert'? If it was ever published, it has never been found as far as I know. Therefore, it seems plausible that here a 'second, translated reissue of the first and only Dutch edition from 1938' was meant. Also there is the more intriguing question of how this Dutch edition ended up in Germany, and who owned the copyright, which was already mentioned in the 1938 edition, and is here also explicitly mentioned as 'Auteursrechte vorbehalten' (Authors' rights reserved). Whose rights? Could this be what is bibliographically known as a pirate edition, or, even better, as a late example of so-called 'roofkunst', looted art from the war years – a looted print?

If Landau was indeed the author of *Schaakopeningen in overzichtelijke vorm*, then that would mean that no entitled parties were known by this time. But of course this doesn't mean that the copyrights or rights of ownership have expired. That neither publisher Van Goor nor the German publisher had any scruples about this, can be derived from the fact that yet another, identical publication of this title has appeared – though without mention of a date – with *Das Schach-Archiv* in Hamburg. And of this edition, even a dated reissue saw the light with the same publisher in 1969 – although it cannot be readily determined if this wasn't the same publication with a date added on part of the edition by the publisher. And thus, Landau's *Schaakopeningen in overzichtelijke vorm* became a success even 30 years later, albeit anonymously as well as posthumously, and as said, remarkably in Germany.

What's in a name?

The questions raised by all these different publications will probably never be answered, and certainly not fully satisfactorily. A large amount of archive material has been lost. For example, the 1. Auflage, which was never found, may have been destroyed by a bombardment. Any existing correspondence between Wittkowski, Landau and Euwe which might provide some explanation would first have to be found in archives. Can the publisher's archives of Loeffler and Das Schach-Archiv still be traced, if they do exist at all?

An intriguing question that remains to be answered concerns Landau's pseudonym itself. It seems to be not at all without meaning. I remember reading somewhere long ago that Landau chose his pseudonym because his openings survey had to be brought out of the country in order to be published, but this explanation is less convincing because the post-war German editions had been preceded by a Dutch edition. It is of course possible that a German edition was already planned in 1938 or 1939 without a Jewish name on the cover. The possible connotation of 'land uit' ('out of the country') might be an allusion to the fact that Landau's original Chess Key had left the country in the translated and elaborated version of Euwe and Fine, without mention that Landau was more than just its designer – or that his new design of a systematic survey of the chess openings was allowed to leave the country, but could not appear under his own name – either because Wittkowski or Euwe and Fine objected to this, or, for the German edition, because of the fact that he was Jewish. Of course, this is all just guesswork.

Previous history and *Nachleben*

Of course, Landau's two surveys of opening theory were not the first efforts to present chess opening theory in a well-organized and coherent way. The history of that presentation is almost as interesting as the history of chess notations and its discussions, especially in the Anglo-Saxon chess world, though less rich with emotion. For instance, the idea of presenting the theory of chess openings as a kind of 'family tree', which Landau also more or less did in *Schaakopeningen in overzichtelijke vorm*, can already be found in a Portuguese book from 1907: *O jogo real; Apontamentos diversos para a tentativa de um tratadinho elementar de xadrez* (Lisboa 1907) by Alfredo Ansur; a copy of this book I could inspect because it belongs to also to Jurgen Stigter's collection. In the fold-out leaf that has been added as an appendix in the back of this book, the idea has even been beautifully rendered in the shape of an actual tree with branches and twigs. More publications can be found after that, and possibly also earlier, in which attempts are made to organize either the entire openings theory or separate openings by making use of the family tree idea or in another form than the well-known Bilguer did^[8].

But until it turns out that an earlier example can be found, the originality of Landau's concept is precisely hidden in the idea of using the shape of a turntable for the presentation of the theory, and making it applicable for opening theory – respectively the theory of playing (and bidding) of the three 'great' mind sports, chess, draughts and bridge.

Considering the boom in the communication technology of the past half-century, it is no wonder that such creativity, with the use of cardboard, did not cause any great stir later. Again with thanks to Jurgen Stigter, I have found only one example where this idea was imitated, and this comprises thus its entire '*Nachleben*' at this stage. In 1973, at least according to the copyright indication, *The Chess Wheel; Chess openings finder*, 'compiled and designed by V. Armen a.k.a. Vrej ter-Gevorkian', appeared on the market. This edition included recommendations by Paul Schmidt, to whom a biography was recently devoted^[9], but unfortunately this book does not shed any light on Schmidt's relation to the author of *The Chess Wheel*. V. Armen, of Armenian descent, worked in the United States as a linguist and a chess teacher since 1966. In his *Chess Wheel*, he presents the theory of the English Opening, of course still in descriptive notation. This wheel also has the size of a longplay record, and it works in a similar way as Landau's keys. Other Chess

Wheels are not known; probably, despite recommendations by renowned chess players, no new wheel was ever made. I have never heard anything more from Armen himself either and there is no mention of him in Jeremy Gaige's Chess Personalia (1987). The additional documentation doesn't mention where V. Armen, a.k.a. Vrej ter-Gevorkian, got his wheel idea from. Could it, perhaps thanks to Reuben Fine, have been Salo Landau's chess key?

Amsterdam, 10 November 2019

[1] That's perhaps a size indication that may come to require explanation for younger generations. So, let us say about 30 cm diameter. [↵](#)

[2] By the way, it was Juan Morgado of Buenos Aires who helped me to find these Argentinian editions of these Claves de las aperturas. Many thanks to him! [↵](#)

[3] Karl, das kulturelle Schachmagazin 36 (2019), 3, p.12-13. [↵](#)

[4] Guus Luijters, Raymund Schütz and Marten Jongman, De deportaties uit Nederland 1940-1945; Portretten uit de archieven. Amsterdam © 2017 (The deportations from the Netherlands 1940-1945; Portraits from the archives). [↵](#)

[5] The Dutch chess magazine Matten no. 7 (Alkmaar © 2010), p. 120-131. [↵](#)

[6] <https://nl.geneanet.org> [↵](#)

[7] Chess Openings; 6250 moves! Conveniently arranged (second, improved and extended version) by Leo Landuijt [↵](#)

[8] Perhaps Schematische Anordnung der Schacheröffnungen von Dr. Eugen v. Schmidt, Verlag von Veit 1895, 562 pages ['A Schematic Arrangement of the Chess Openings'], which is still sought after by me, although the word 'schematisch' (schematic) probably suggests more than the book actually offers. For instance, this is the case with B.Kagan's Schematische Zusammenstellung der Eröffnungen im Schachspiel (Berlin 1919), in which the author offers only the initial moves of 79 openings, presented in an unsystematical order. [↵](#)

[9] Magacs, Eva Regina, and Michael Negele. Paul Felix Schmidt; A winning formula. Berlin 2017. [↵](#)

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An earlier version of 'An unknown side to Salo Landau' was published in the [Digitale Nieuwsbrief](#) (Digital Newsletter) of the Max Euwe Centre No. 94 extra (March 2019). Peter Boel was so kind as to take care of the translation.