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INTRODUCTION

Nahum Sokolow (1859–1936) stands in the center of this book. From the time he began writing for *Ha-zefira*, Warsaw's first Hebrew-language daily, in 1876 till his departure from Russian Poland in 1906 he was recognized as the most important Jewish journalist of his era. He was also one of the foremost Jewish intellectuals in eastern Europe and a prominent political activist on behalf of the Jews in the Russian Empire. Later, between the two World Wars he would be regarded as the spokesman and symbol of Polish Jewry.[1]

However, as the years passed Sokolow has been largely forgotten. Indeed, while the majority of the Jewish population of Israel knows his name, since virtually every Jewish city and town in Israel has its own Sokolow Street, only a few laymen know anything about the man behind the name. Not only laymen know very little about Sokolow. Although he is regarded as the founder of the Hebrew press and the Israeli parallel of the Pulitzer Prize is named after him, only a few Israeli journalists, including those who have received the prize, know why the prize carries his name.

His reputation as a leading Jewish journalist is not the only reason that his life's story is worthy of a book. His public and intellectual activities in Warsaw in the late nineteenth century are also good reason for an intellectual biography of the young Sokolow. This specific study will try to solve the question of how a Jewish journalist, leader and intellectual tried to find his place in the social fabric of the time and why, after almost twenty years of public activities, he turned to Zionist politics in western Europe.

1 Grünbaum, "Le-vo'o shel Sokolow," p. 1.

Thus a book about Sokolow can be a valuable contribution to many aspects of modern Jewish life. Surprisingly, little has been written about him. Moreover most of what has been written about him has focused on Sokolow as a Zionist activist.[2] A recent doctoral dissertation by Shoshana (Anish) Stiftel on Sokolow's pre-Zionist phase portrayed him as a Zionist in the making. In this case his turn to Zionism was presented as a preordained result of his Polish background and education.[3] According to this interpretation, Sokolow was a Liberal who felt that the Jewish people had two options: either to assimilate completely into the peoples who host them, or to accept the national definition of community and recognize the national potential of the Jewish people.[4] Throughout this work Sokolow is presented as a case study regarding the formation of modern Jewish leadership in the transitional era between the feudal period and the modern capitalist era.[5] In the eyes of the traditional public this type of figure was seen as an agent of change who mediated between past and present. Both he and the community shared a common traditional heritage. At the same time, he was familiar with the world at large. Through this agent, the new way of life looked less threatening to the traditional majority. From this point of view, Sokolow became a leader who prepared Jewish society for its entrance into the modern world.[6]

Despite the important contributions made by Stiftel's dissertation, it is important to focus further on the period before Sokolow became a committed Zionist in order to clarify our understanding of Sokolow and the period in which he lived. Since other works concentrate on the influence of political and philosophical thought on Sokolow's writing in the late 1870's, this particular study will focus on how these influences infused his understanding of

2 For example, Kressel, "Nahum Sokolow"; Rawidowicz, *Sefer Sokolow*; and Stiftel, *Darko shel Nahum Sokolow.*

3 Stiftel, *Darko shel Nahum Sokolow.*

4 Ibid., p. 222.

5 Ibid., p. 225.

6 Ibid., p. 226.

the complex relationship among the different sectors of Jewish society and between Polish and Jewish communities. Moreover, by focusing on an individual such as Sokolow this study will improve our understanding of more complicated processes that are often discussed in the debates regarding the formation of modern Jewish identity.

The formation of a Jewish identity is closely related to larger issues regarding the formation of modern individual identity. Contemporary scholars have long been concerned with describing the implications of modern identity by explaining why some definitions were more influential than others and by tracing the changes in meaning and importance of this term over time.[7] The complexity of the topic, the challenge of determining the exact components that define an individual's identity and the confusion produced by different attempts to solve this problem are all discussed in the rich body of research on modern identity. Despite the different approaches, it is widely agreed that modernity changed the situation of the individual not only in terms of his or her social conditions but also with regard to his or her social definition. New ways of designating a person were invented that had not yet been significant in previous periods. Of these, nationality was perhaps the most widely adopted. In modern Europe, the new designations for identity that appeared were based largely on the relationship of a citizen to his or her political framework. During the nineteenth century that relationship was defined more and more by various ideas of the nation as the central mediator between the individual and his or her surroundings.

This pervasiveness influenced, among other things, various concepts of Jewish identity. Since the end of the eighteenth century, when the Jews of western Europe began to integrate into their surrounding societies, the meaning of Jewish identity has been a

7 See for example Smith, *National Identity*; Tilly, *Citizenship, Identity, and Social History*; Pynsent, *The Literature of Nationalism*; and Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen.*

central issue in the ongoing debates about how Jews ought to relate to the surrounding society.[8] In some countries, such as Germany, modern Jewish identity crystallized within the framework of a society dominated by one particular nationality. In these countries, Jews took on the national identity of the surrounding society. However, there were other societies in which modern Jewish identity crystallized within a complex fabric consisting of several different national groups. This was the situation in the Russian and Austrian Empires. There, many Jews saw themselves as belonging to a separate Jewish nation. As Michael Meyer wrote in his book, *The Origins of the Modern Jew*:

> For the Jew in the modern world Jewishness forms only a portion of his total identity. By calling himself a Jew he expresses only one of multiple loyalties. And yet external pressures and internal attachments combine to make him often more aware of this identification than any other. Conscious of an influence which Jewishness has upon his character and mode of life, he tries to define its sphere and harmonize it with the other components of self. Such Jewish self-consciousness – while not entirely without precedent in Jewish history – has been especially characteristic of the last two centuries. In the considerable isolation of the ghetto, Jewish existence possessed an all-encompassing and unquestioned character which it lost to a significant extent only after the middle of the eighteenth century. It is with the age of enlightenment that Jewish identity becomes segmental and hence problematic.[9]

Various attempts to address the difficulties created by the segmentation of modern Jewish identity gave rise to some of the most important ideas and movements that have influenced Jewish life

8 The historian Michael Meyer noted that "long before the word became fashionable among psychoanalysts and sociologists, Jews in the modern world were obsessed with the subject of identity." Meyer, *Jewish Identity*, p. 3.

9 Meyer, *Origins of the Modern Jew*, p. 8.

over the past two centuries, including, among others, emancipation, Reform Judaism, Zionism and antisemitism.[10]

Until recently, though, Jewish historiography has tended to identify two sharply contrasting positions that modern Jews have adopted in defining their own identities. The first approach affirmed emancipation and integration into the surrounding society. Those Jews who chose this path believed that states and surrounding societies should remove all social and political barriers that divided Jews from non-Jews and that Jews, in return, should remove similar cultural barriers. As a result, Jews would not only become equal citizens but would also change their traditional style of life. They would start to speak the languages of people among whom they lived and they would develop social relations with non-Jews. Jewishness would involve religious belief and practice only. The second approach was the way of Jewish nationalism. Those who chose this path argued that Jews constituted a unique ethnic group. Jews, they argued, were not analogous to Catholics or Protestants but rather to Poles, Russians, Germans or Frenchmen. Moreover, in direct contradistinction to the integrationists, the nationalists called for clear cultural and political barriers between Jews and their surrounding societies. Nationalists placed special value upon the Jews' continued use of their own historic languages (Hebrew or Yiddish) and sought political arrangements that would grant them a significant measure of autonomy over internal communal affairs.

Historians have generally viewed these two conceptions as diametrically opposed positions in a bipolar ideological world. Similarly, they have posited a sharp break between this modern situation and pre-modern traditional conceptions of Jewish identity which saw Jews as a community *sui generis*, established by God, to which the non-Jewish analytical categories of "confession" and "nation" could not be applied. Although, as Jonathan Frankel

10 Regarding these attempts see Ettinger, *Toldot am Yisra'el ba-et ha-hadasha*; Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews*; idem, *The Zionist Idea*; Katz, *Out of the Ghetto*; and idem, *Emancipation and Assimilation.*

has pointed out, this conception had the advantage of serving as "a compass enabling the historian to find his way through the complex and limiting expanse of Jewish history in the modern period,"[11] it also led to serious distortions including excessive attention being paid to extreme positions at the exclusion of more centrist ones.

Recently, however, the historical literature has begun to view the two poles of integrationism and nationalism in a different light. The traditional model of exclusive positions standing in dialectical tension both to one another and in opposition to pre-modern conceptions of Jewish identity has come under severe criticism. As the historian Amos Funkenstein wrote in one of his last articles:

> All too often, Jewish historians operate with a family of dichotomies. Is a given phenomenon of the past, cultural or social, a testimony of assimilation or of its opposite? [...] Most Jewish historians until today share [a] deep sentiment against assimilation. Yet no conscientious historian dares to deny the obvious, namely that, Jewish culture exhibited always and everywhere formidable mimetic forces, that it adjusted to the most diverse climates. The way to solve the dilemma was to distinguish between the indistinguishable – between essential "assimilation" and accidental "adjustment," the one bad and evitable, the other good and inevitable. [But] [...] even the self-assertion of Jewish cultures as distinct and different is articulated in the language of the surrounding culture; assimilation and self-assertion are truly *dialectical* processes.[12]

Other studies have illustrated this dialectic by focusing on the ongoing struggle between integrationism and nationalism, as well as the tension between tradition and modernity.[13] However, all of these studies deal with communities, movements or other Jewish

11 Frankel, "Hitbolelut ve-hisardut," pp. 28–29.

12 Funkenstein, "The Dialectics of Assimilation," pp. 4–6, 10–11.

13 See for example Hundert, "Reflections on the Whig Interpretation of Jewish

collectives. Indeed, few have analyzed this tension synchronically through the world of a single individual. In doing so, this book will challenge the bipolar model of modern Jewish identity more effectively than those studies that explore public debates within Jewish society.

This work will examine this tension through the experiences of Nahum Sokolow, a major figure in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century east European Jewish intellectual circles. It makes sense that many would associate Sokolow with Zionism as he edited the World Zionist Organization's central organ, *Ha-olam*, for many years. He also served as president of the World Zionist Organization, was one of the principal spokesmen for the Zionist cause in negotiations with the British government that led to the Balfour Declaration of 1917, and wrote the first major history of Zionism.[14]

Yet even though his early activities displayed certain features of what has generally been called a national orientation, it was not until 1906 that he unequivocally joined the Zionist camp. In the earlier stages of his career, before his Zionist phase, Sokolow actually sought a middle ground between the extremes of assimilation, on the one hand, and nationalism, on the other. Until 1906 his principal goal was to find a place for a collective Jewish national culture within a supranational Polish society.

Sokolow did not reject a national definition of the Jewish people. Like other nationalists he regarded the Jews as a dispersed ethnic group. Moreover he rejected any reference to the Jews as a religious confession. At the same time, he repeatedly encouraged Jews to think of themselves as patriotic Poles and to use Polish alongside Hebrew and Yiddish as vehicles of Jewish literary expression.

He himself practiced this ideology during the 1890s when he

History," pp. 111–119; Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics*; Fishman, *Russia's First Modern Jews*; and Feiner, *Haskala ve-historia.*

14 Sokolow, *History of Zionism.*

functioned simultaneously as the editor of both the Hebrew daily *Ha-zefira* and the integrationist Polish–language weekly *Izraelita*. The fact that the same individual served in both capacities challenges the historiographical tradition that has long represented integrationism and nationalism as mutually exclusive phenomena. Even in his own time there were many Jews and non-Jews who had difficulty understanding how Sokolow could function as editor of both journals. Around the time of the first Zionist Congress in 1897, a number of Polish newspapers, as well as the nationalist Hebrew paper *Ha-melits*, criticized the "editor with two hats" for seemingly condemning in one newspaper what he advocated in the other.[15]

Sokolow's answer to this charge was that he did not write for the nationalist-oriented Hebrew reading audience of *Ha-zefira* and the so-called enlightened, integrationist audience of *Izraelita* in the same style. Nevertheless, he insisted, that the spirit, aims, and mission of his writing were the same in both newspapers.[16] Many years later, in a speech he gave at a celebration honoring his twenty-fifth anniversary as a Hebrew writer, he recalled how he had been attacked for inconsistency and insisted that his aim had always been to bring the two ideological extremes closer together.[17]

Sokolow, thus, offers an excellent opportunity to explore the relationship between integrationist and nationalist ideologies among east European Jews in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. If we can understand how Sokolow was able to work simultaneously in two seemingly opposing ideological camps we may be able to understand better the full range of options that east European Jews faced in defining their identity as individuals and

15 *Ha-melits*, 5 September 1897 (pa'ane'ah [=A. N. Frenk], "Mikhtavim mi-Varsha"). The article cites a critique from the Polish newspaper *Prawda.* References to its appearance in other Polish newspapers, including the radical–democratic *Przegląd Tygodniowy* are found in Hartglas, *Na pograniczu dwóch światów*, pp. 51–52, and Fried, *Yamim ve-shanim*, p. 143.

16 *Ha-melits*, 18 September 1897 ("Rusia-Varsha").

17 Sokolow, "Le-toldot ha-yovel," CZA–A18/ Box 10 (uncatalogued).

as members of a Jewish collective. Such an understanding, in turn, may also provide additional insight into more general processes through which personal and collective identities are constructed.

In addition to its value in clarifying issues of Jewish identity and identity in general, a study of Sokolow during his pre-Zionist phase will also contribute a valuable perspective to the historiography of Polish–Jewish relations. Like Jewish historians, many Polish historians have adopted a bipolar conception of Jewish identity according to which Polish Jews were divided into a relatively small group of "Poles of the Mosaic Persuasion," those who sought full social and cultural synthesis with the Polish nation, and a much larger group of "separatists" who had no affinity at all for Polish society and culture and who exhibited a brand of Jewish nationalism influenced by Russian or German models.[18] Some Polish writers even held that those Jews who did not define themselves as "Poles of the Mosaic Persuasion" were *ipso facto* enemies of Polish national aspirations.[19]

The main chapters of this book analyze Sokolow's program as he explained it to different sectors of Polish–Jewish society. These programs appeared in three books and several thousand articles that he wrote between 1876–1906 in Hebrew and in Polish. After an introductory chapter, the second chapter addresses the first statement of his program that was published in 1884 under the title "*Va-yehi-Or.*" This program was aimed at the national stream of the Jewish society, those who were attracted to the *Hovevei Zion* movement. Sokolow hoped that this pragmatic program would be able to convince people that the *Hovevei Zion* project was misdirected and that a Jewish national existence could and should be established in the Diaspora. The third chapter discusses a program that Sokolow wrote in Polish six years later, *Zadania inteligencji*

18 Blejwas, "Polish Positivism and the Jews," pp. 21–35; and Davies, *God's Playground*, 2: 251–252.

19 For example see Engel, "Ha-she'ela ha-Polanit ve-ha-tenu'a hatsiyonit," pp. 61–62.

żydowskiej (The Tasks of the Jewish Intelligentsia). This book was designed to encourage the Polonized Jewish intelligentsia to serve as the leadership of the movement for communal and social reforms. Sokolow emphasized that the integration of Jews into Polish life need not be achieved at the expense of Jewish national identity. The fourth chapter analyzes the dialogue Sokolow had with Polish society. The fifth chapter examines the changes in Sokolow's thought that took place in the beginning of the twentieth century. Around that time, Sokolow realized that his attempt to persuade different sectors to join him had failed. Hence, he turned to new directions, to the Zionist movement and to the orthodox rabbinate. This appeal constituted the third version of his program, *Maranan ve-rabanan*. In this program, Sokolow called upon the rabbinic authorities to join the Zionist movement in order to help reform Jewish society. Unlike the two other programs, this one was written after Sokolow had already begun to take an active role in the Zionist movement. Nevertheless, this new affiliation did not affect the multi-faceted approach that Sokolow used when addressing Polish Jewry.

Thus, focusing on a person like Sokolow and his three different ideological programs can contribute toward expanding current conceptions of the possible modes of interaction between intellectuals and society in *fin de siècle* eastern Europe and to the body of research on Polish–Jewish relations.