

ŁUKASZ TOMASZ SROKA, MATEUSZ SROKA, *POLSKIE KORZENIE IZRAELA. WPROWADZENIE DO TEMATU. WYBÓR ŹRÓDEŁ [THE POLISH ROOTS OF ISRAEL. INTRODUCTION TO THE SUBJECT. SELECTION OF SOURCES]*, WYDAWNICTWO AUSTERIA, KRAKÓW – BUDAPEST 2015, 710 PP., B/W ILL. ISBN 978-83-7866-177-1

The importance of Polish-Israeli relations depends not only on current political and economic issues, but also on the common difficult history.¹

Interest in Jewish issues has increased significantly in Poland in recent years. This fascination refers not only to the history of Polish Jews, but also to the history of the State of Israel. Part of the reason for this is that representatives of the Jewish faith co-created the social landscape of Poland for a few centuries, deciding on the character of cities and villages within the current borders of Poland, Ukraine and Belarus. As a result, the book in question relates to present trends, but we should firmly state that it also fills a gap in the studies on the development and meaning of Zionism within the Polish lands. The aforementioned aspects of migration to *Eretz Yisrael* constitute the core of the volume. The difficult subject undertaken by the Polish researchers could have raised doubts as to whether the young historians would be able to rise to the challenge. It turns out, however, that their outstanding expertise played a huge role as far as the heuristics and hermeneutics of the collected sources are concerned. In particular, Łukasz Tomasz Sroka is known, not only in Poland, as a specialist on issues related to the history of Jews in the 19th and 20th centuries.² It is worth mentioning his book entitled *Żydzi*

¹ From the introduction to Łukasz T. Sroka, Mateusz Sroka *The Polish Roots of Israel. Introduction to the Subject. Selection of Sources*, Kraków – Budapest 2015, 15.

² “Stan badań nad historią Żydów krakowskich w XIX wieku,” in: J. Rajman (ed.), *Kraków: studia z dziejów miasta*, Kraków 2007, 156-168; “Izrael w relacjach międzynarodowych: tradycje i współczesność,” in: B. Bednarczyk, M. Lasonia (eds), *Spoleczne, gospodarcze i polityczne relacje we współczesnych stosunkach międzynarodowych*, Kraków 2007, 85-97; “Czy Kraków miał żydowskie elity?,” in: J. Małecki, T. Leśniak (eds), *Świat przed katastrofą: Żydzi krakowscy w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym*, Kraków 2007, 33-41; “Kościół katolicki w Polsce wobec kwestii żydowskiej: dyskusja na łamach ‘Gazety Kościelnej’ na przełomie XIX i XX wieku,” *Annales Academiae Paedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia Historica* 2008, no. 7, 148-156; “Żydzi w Krakowie około 1800 roku,” in: H. Żaliński, H. Chudzio (eds), *Galicja w Księstwie Warszawskim: 200 rocznica*, Kraków 2009, 147-159; “Historia i kultura Żydów lwowskich w XIX wieku: stan badań i postulaty,” in: K. Pilarczyk (ed.), *Żydzi i judaizm we współczesnych badaniach polskich*, vol. 5, Kraków 2010, 197-211; “Tel Awiw: młodość nieposkromiona wiekiem,” *Konspekt* 2010, no. 3 (36), 147-152; “Judaizm wobec rodziny: spojrzenie historyczno-religioznawcze,” in: B. Popiołek (ed.), *Człowiek w teatrze świata: studia o historii i kulturze dedykowane Profesorowi Stanisławowi Grzybowskiemu z okazji osiemdziesiątych urodzin*, Kraków 2010, 69-77; “Der Einfluss Wiens auf die polnisch-jüdischen Beziehungen in Galizien im 19. Jahrhundert, speziell in Lemberg und Krakau,” in: R. Wichard (ed.), *Kulturbegegnung im öffentlichen Raum. Dokumentation eines internationalen wissenschaftlichen Symposiums vom 11. bis 14. September 2009 in Krakau*, Frankfurt am Main 2010, 89-101; “Wyruszyliśmy do Izraela... szukać sąsiadów,” *Konspekt* 2010, no. 1 (34), 107-114 [co-author: M. Sroka]; “*Achduth – B’nei B’rith* lodge of Stanyslaviv in

w Krakowie. *Studium o elicie władzy 1850-1918 (Jews in Krakow. A Study of the Establishment 1850-1918, Kraków 2006)*, which attracted a great deal of publicity in Poland, not only among experts on the history of Kraków. In October 2014, he represented the Institute of History of the Pedagogical University of Krakow as an organizer of the International Conference “Polish-Israeli cooperation experience: The 130th anniversary of the Zionist Congress in Katowice.” Among other organizers were the Institute of Jewish Studies of the Jagiellonian University and Beit Berl College from Israel. It should also be noted that Łukasz Tomasz Sroka is currently pursuing a scientific grant devoted to modernization processes among the Jews in Lviv at the turn of the 20th century. The research is almost entirely conducted on the basis of unique Judaica from Ukrainian and Austrian archives. The second author is developing his linguistic interests. In order to get to know the Hebrew language, he spent several months living in Jerusalem and in Kibbutz Samar located near Eilat in the Negev Desert. At present, he works for a renowned company based in the Israeli capital.

The first chapter of the book, entitled “The Birth of an Idea,” constitutes an attempt to emphasize the role of Palestinian and Israeli tradition and the Christian understanding of the Holy Land from the perspective of Poles and Polish Jews. The issue in question is analyzed in two consecutive sections (“The Land of Israel in the Polish culture,” “The Land of Israel in the culture of Polish Jews”). As far as historical knowledge is concerned, the second chapter is of utmost importance, since it describes the modern Zionist movement. The chapter not only presents commonly known events and figures related to the Jewish national movement, such as Theodor Herzl, but also focuses on less globally well-known people gathered around modern Zionism. In consequence, the authors dedicate much attention to, for instance, Leon Pinsker and the forgotten first Lovers of Zion Congress, which took place in Katowice in 1884, fourteen years before the Zionist Congress in Basel. “The Migration of Polish Jews to Israel” is the title of the following chapter, which is the most interesting one for me, as a historian studying the events of

the light of documents found in the local archive,” *Scripta Judaica Cracoviensia* 9, 2011, 159-168; “Changes in the Jewish community of Kraków in autonomous Galicia,” *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, vol. 23; *Jews in Kraków*, Oxford 2011, 63-82; “Pamiętniki, wspomnienia i korespondencja jako źródła do badań historycznych poświęconych narodzinom Państwa Izraela,” in: K. Karolczak (ed.), *Pamiętniki, dzienniki i relacje jako źródła do badań historycznych: (XVIII-XX wiek)*, Kraków 2011, 237-244; “Israel and its friends: selected international relations issues in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries,” in: M. Misztal, P. Trojański (eds), *Poles Jews: History – Culture – Education*, Kraków 2011, 29-44; “Zaangażowanie społeczne elit żydowskich we Lwowie w okresie autonomii galicyjskiej,” in: O. Arkusa, M. Mudryj (eds), *L'viv: misto, suspil'stvo, kul'tura*, vol. 8, 1; *Vlada i suspil'stvo*, Lviv 2013, 351-364; “Transformations in mentality and identity of Jews living in Polish cities between the second half of the 19th century and 1939: a catalogue of paradoxes, stereotypes and distinctive features,” in: P. Švorc, H. Heppner (eds), *Veľ'ká doba v malom priestore: Zlomové zmeny v mestách stredo európskeho priestoru a ich dôsledky (1918-1929)*, Prešov – Graz 2012, 390-400; “Ubezpieczenia społeczne Żydów na ziemiach polskich okupowanych przez hitlerowskie Niemcy,” *Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia Historica* 14, Kraków 2013, 229-241 [co-author Konrad Meus]; “Asymilacja, emancypacja i odrodzenie narodowe Żydów w kontekście walki o niepodległość Rzeczypospolitej,” in: T. Sikorski, M. Śliwa, A. Wątor (eds), *“Piekło i niebo Polaków”: powstania narodowe, bunty i rewolucje: inspiracje – kontynuacje – spory – pamięć*, vol. 1, Kraków 2014, 86-104; “Dziedzictwo Galicji w II Rzeczypospolitej: aspekty społeczne i gospodarcze,” in: U. Jakubowska (ed.), *Galicja: mozaika nie tylko narodowa*, vol. 2, Warszawa 2014, 129-152; “Żydzi w Radzie Miasta Lwowa w okresie autonomii galicyjskiej 1870-1914,” in: L. Michalska-Bracha, M. Przeniosło (eds), *Znani nieznanymi dzięciomastowiecznego Lwowa. Studia i materiały*, vol. 4, Kielce 2014, 97-114; “Żydzi w samorządach miast galicyjskich (na przykładzie Krakowa i Lwowa),” *Krakowskie Studia Małopolskie* 2014, no. 19, 111-121.

the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. In fact, knowledge of this matter today leaves a great deal to be desired. What is more, research regarding the beginning of Zionism within the Polish lands, including *Jidischland – Galicia*, has been treated marginally so far. In this part of the work, which is based on rich sources, the authors present comprehensively the origins of migrations from Poland to *Eretz Yisrael*, taking into account demographic, economic and cultural aspects. This section is followed by a detailed description of the course of migrations, focusing mainly on the *aliyah* which took place between 1882 and 1939. They focus at length on the difficulties faced by the first Zionists, both when it comes to organizational matters, and to the travel and their lives after reaching Palestine. This part of the work brings the readers closer to the ideas of *kibbutzim* established even in Galicia, to facilitate the adaptation to the new Middle Eastern environment. The last section of the third chapter presents the migration to Palestine after 1945, the *aliyah* of the Holocaust survivors. The section is full of scientific digressions on the history of Polish Jews during the German occupation of Poland. In order to emphasize the importance of this chapter, based on the findings of the authors, I should mention the fact that between 1920 and 1935 100,000 Jews emigrated from Poland to Palestine, compared to the USSR and Germany in second and third place respectively, from each of which the figure was about 60,000. After the Holocaust, the numbers of Jews leaving Poland were the following: 41,839 emigrants between 1945 and 1955, and 46,112 between 1956 and 1966.³ An attempt at an anthropological presentation of the consequences of mass migrations to Palestine, and later Israel, should interest both a less and a more demanding reader. We get to know the adaptive problems of immigrants to *Eretz Yisrael*, emphasized with concrete and vivid examples. The authors present exemplifications of the transfer of cultural behavior typical of the Polish lands and instilled in the new social environment. In order to demonstrate this, it is worth mentioning the habit, initially unpopular in Israel, of kissing women's hands upon greeting them, which became popularized among other inhabitants of Israel, also among the highest authorities. These examples brought the expected results, as the book is dynamic in character and full of interesting (but confirmed with facts) anecdotes related to the specificity of this multicultural community creating one Nation and one state. Last but not least, in the final part the authors give the real story behind the diplomatic relations of Poland and Israel (before 1948 Jewish inhabitants of Palestine). The starting point of the narrative is the moment in January 1923 when the consulate of the Republic in Poland in Jerusalem was established. "Poland in the context of international relations of Israel," as the chapter is entitled, does not constitute only a review of current knowledge, but also places emphasis on generally unknown topics from the Polish-Israeli cooperation. Among the most important ones – although already known in historiography – is the history of creating training camps for members of Irgun and Betar, who were to become the core of the assault army in Palestine, in Poland. Another topic that stimulates the reader's imagination is the history of Jews who left the USSR with General Władysław Anders in 1941 as a result of a Polish-Soviet agreement. It is assumed that there were 4401 Jewish soldiers in Anders' 77,000-strong army, which got to Iran. As the authors of the book rightly

³ The authors based their calculations on the studies conducted by Grzegorz Berendt and presented in his article "Emigracja Żydów z Polski w latach 1960-1967," in: J. Wijaczek, G. Miernik (eds), *Z przeszłości Żydów polskich. Polityka – gospodarka – kultura – społeczeństwo*, Kraków 2005, 297-309.

point out, induction of Jewish citizens of Poland, who were in the USSR in consequence of forcible transportations to Siberia, to the Polish Armed Forces contributed to saving thousands of Jews from certain death as a result of hunger or superhuman labor in Soviet labor camps. It is estimated that among the civilians accompanying Anders' Army, there were even one thousand Jewish children, mainly orphans. This part of the book also constitutes an honest attempt at analyzing the difficult, often controversial relations between the authorities of the People's Republic of Poland and the Israeli governments. The authors devote due space to the issue of breaking off diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1967. They conclude the story with an analysis of contemporary times, which in fact constitute a new chapter in mutual bilateral relations. It is worth mentioning the description of non-political relations created by current Polish-Israeli partnerships, including economic and cultural ones.

The source appendixes (16 in total) deserve a separate reference, as they constitute the highlight of the book, as emphasized by the authors themselves in their framing of its subtitle. The cognitive value of correctly chosen and analyzed source material cannot be overestimated. Owing to the importance and uniqueness of these documents, I can state that they will be of much interest both for people with a passion for the subject, and, or above all, experts and researchers, including especially those studying the Jewish national movement. Among the edited materials are, for instance, the statute of the Zionist Organization in Poland, the statute of the Keren Keyemet LeIsrael Association (the Jewish National Fund in Lviv) registered in 1934, documents of the Lviv and the Austrian Branch of Keren Keyemet LeIsrael, the statute of the Tikvat Cijon Association in Lviv and the statute of the National Zionist Organization in Lviv from 1927. The institution had its representatives in almost the whole of Eastern Lesser Poland; also very valuable as a result is "The alphabetical register of local committees, with the names of their leaders." I would argue that this source appendix constitutes the most valuable source, as it touches upon a great geopolitical movement from the micro-historic perspective. The presented combination of sources allows us to understand the range and the very phenomenon of Zionism in Eastern Lesser Poland, the region of interwar Poland, where it was in fact most popular. It is also important that the region in question was also very relevant for the development of Zionist ideas, not only from the regional perspective, but also from the European one, at the turn of the 20th century. This can be clearly confirmed with preserved sources from Ukrainian archives, to which the authors of the book refer. Reading the aforementioned appendix, readers will be able to create a map of the national Jewish movement in the south-eastern part of Poland (currently Ukraine), including such places as Brody, a trading center dominated by the Jewish community; Borysław, known for its mining industry, or Bohorodczany, Chyrów, Obertyn, Przemyślany or Skałat, completely forgotten and absent from international discourse. An interesting matter here is that for people less acquainted with the topography of Galicia and Lesser Poland of the time, the authors placed the towns (mainly villages and small towns) close to other important and recognized places and orientation points, such as key communication routes. There were also situations when old names of towns were transformed after the change of national membership (from Polish to Ukrainian). In such situations, in order to locate an old town, its current name was used as well. Another source worth mentioning is a complete list of "Makkabi" clubs operating within Poland in 1938

found in the Central State Archives of Ukraine in Lviv. This is especially significant as the issue of Jewish sports within the Polish lands before the Second World War remains completely neglected and, as can be concluded from my own research, unexplored. A potential future researcher of the subject could find a key source in the abovementioned list while trying to create a map of Jewish sports organizations operating in large numbers in pre-war Poland. As this brief description shows, the majority of the source materials are unique in character and highly valuable when it comes to their contents for researchers of the history of Jews and Israel; however, taking into account the only partially scientific character of the publication, the appendix also includes commonly known documents, such as “The Israeli Declaration of Independence.” This inclusion is not accidental, however, as several years ago the document constituting the basis of Israeli statehood was known to the Polish reader only in the original language, Hebrew, or as a translation into English. The authors of the book translated it from the original speech of David Ben Gurion, born in Płońsk, delivered on May 14, 1948 and uploaded on the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ website. The document of “The Israeli Declaration of Independence” is concluded with a list of signatories, allowing Polish readers to familiarize themselves with the role of Polish Jews in creating the independent state of Israel.

The reviewed book, despite the fact that it is addressed mainly to readers who are not professional historians, was prepared using professional scientific tools, and this is its major asset. In my view, the source basis of the publication is its main strength. Research was carried out not only in Polish archives, but also, or above all, in Austria, Ukraine, and Israel. Among the Polish archives visited by the authors are the Archives of New Records in Warsaw and the National Archives in Krakow. However, while reading the book it can be deduced that the greatest source of knowledge on the Jewish national movement developing in lively fashion within old Polish lands (mainly in East Galicia) are the Central State Archives of Ukraine in Lviv (Центральний Державний Історичний Архів України у Львові), where contemporary researchers can find several archival collections, including “The Jewish Community in Lviv” (fond 701), “The Central Committee of Polish Jews” (fond 505), and “The National Zionist Organization in Lviv” (fond 338). The materials listed in fond 146 entitled “The Galician Governorship,” including many scattered sources confirming the thesis that Galicia was “the Mother of Israel,” could also be utilized in Lviv. Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv in Vienna provided documents on diplomatic relations connected with the functioning of the diplomatic post of Austria (later Austria-Hungary) in Jerusalem, including information on the Jewish emigration to *Eretz Yisrael* at the turn of the 20th century. Finally, research conducted in Israel should be mentioned, including the Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem and the Historical Archives of the Municipality of Tel Aviv-Yafo.

In order to prepare the book, the authors used not only official archival materials in great numbers, but also various types of memoirs. The recollections used and quoted in the book usually referred to the description of life in Palestine at the turn of the 20th century. In consequence, they often constitute an expressive complement for information found in accessible archival items. Among the most interesting accounts are those written by Józef Hussarzewski and Count Stanisław Tarnowski.

The authors often imaginatively refer to Polish literature and poetry when describing Palestine and the State of Israel. Without a doubt, this composition diversifies the

presented contents and proves the authors' unparalleled erudition. Here it is worth noting that even today many historians, especially from Central Europe, rarely make use of literature and poetry as a historical source, which impoverishes their writings. Among the most interesting literary and poetical references used in the reviewed book is Antoni Słonimski's poem *Israel*, written in 1948, during the breakthrough moment for the existence of Israel. Moreover, it incorporates the poetical-literary creations of Szymon Wolf (*Palestinian Poets*), Norbert Levy (*A letter to the homeland I won't see*), Wanda Ekerówna (*An evening in Tel Aviv, a poem of Hehalutzim*), Uri Cwi Grinberg (*A wild poet*), or Roman Brandstaetter, author of the poem *Jerusalem of light and darkness* from 1935. The book also includes the influence of Polish literature on the first settlers in *Eretz Yisrael*. One such work is the four-part novel *Chłopi* (*The Peasants*) written by the Polish writer Władysław Reymont, awarded the Nobel Prize for this epic in 1924. The Hebrew translation of *The Peasants* was a peculiar glorification of the collective life of farmers for the first inhabitants of kibbutzim.

Apart from belles-lettres, artistic works were interpreted as well, focusing mainly on Polish painting involving references to Judaism and the history of Jews, both older and contemporary. The authors' use of the greatest painting of Wojciech Korneli Stattler, entitled *Maccabees*, was untypical. This stunning work was awarded a gold medal during an art exhibition in Paris in 1844. For Poles, deprived of their statehood at the time, it was a symbol of uncompromising fight, similar to that of the Maccabees against the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes.

The book demonstrates in an interesting and satisfying manner less known or forgotten figures who became ambassadors of Poland among Palestinian Jews, and vice-versa, in the 20th century. For instance, Professor Moses Schorr, the president of the Society of Friends of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in Warsaw. This was established in 1922, three years before the university was created. It is also worth noticing the influence of Galician Jews on the development of the Zionist movement at its outset. Here, an interesting figure is Naftali Herc from Złoczów in East Galician, the author of the current Israeli national anthem *Hatikvah* (which used to be the anthem of the Zionist Organization).

As far as the narrative is concerned, we must note that it is comprehensible for readers who are not experts on the Jewish and Israeli matters. This is definitely an asset, as we might presume that the idea behind the book is popularization of history, tradition and culture of Israel and its relations with Poland among people who do not specialize in the field.

The book's graphic layout is also a positive aspect, especially the illustrations from the turn of the 20th century and contemporary photographs taken by the authors during their peregrination in the Middle East, research stay in Israel and travels to Lviv (for instance, the photograph of the old hospital of Maurice Lazarus). Numerous photographs presenting old documents from Israeli, Polish and Ukrainian collections reflect the unique character of the book. Photographs showing Polish Jews, who left the USSR with General Władysław Anders and reached Palestine through Persia, completely absent from Polish and European consciousness, raise much interest. These were the people who created the foundation of the Israeli statehood.

To conclude, let us state that the reviewed book constitutes a clear compendium of knowledge on the long history of Polish-Jewish relations. A diversified approach to the subject allows us to situate *The Polish Roots of Israel* among the most valuable books devoted to the history of Polish Jews and the State of Israel, at the same time. Without a doubt, it will be read not only by those who want to familiarize themselves with Israel and the influence of Polish Jews on its creation, but also by experts from the field. For the latter group, the source materials presented by the authors, which have so far been inaccessible for most scholars, should be of utmost importance. In consequence, historians specializing in the field of Jewish and Israeli studies can utilize this intriguing, valuable, and hardly accessible source material in their research. The greatest flaw of Łukasz T. Sroka and Mateusz Sroka's book, unfortunately, is the fact that it was published in Polish, and despite the interesting subject, the number of readers was therefore limited.

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