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“We Call Him Mister (*Pan*) Editor”:* Nahum Sokolow and Modern Hebrew Literature

Abstract: This paper presents the tasks and aims that Nahum Sokolow believed Hebrew literature should have in Jewish life and in the Jewish national movement. Before his official joining the Zionist movement, Sokolow believed that the contribution of Hebrew literature to the formation of Jewish nationalism was more significant than the return of the Jews to their historical territory. This position did not change significantly after his joining the Zionist movement in 1897. In addition the paper evaluates Sokolow’s significant input to the development of the Jewish literary center in Warsaw and a new Hebrew literary style.

Keywords: Nahum Sokolow, Hebrew literature, Zionism, Warsaw, Jewish press, *Ha-tsefira*

In 1923, Nahum Sokolow visited Poland. It was his first visit after an absence of more than fifteen years. “How could anyone imagine,” wrote Yitzhak Grünbaum, “that Sokolow would be a guest in Warsaw.”¹ Grünbaum was not the only one who expressed such a sentiment. A collection of memoirs, notes and articles written by Jewish intellectuals, leaders and writers that was published by the Central Committee of the Zionist Organization in Poland in 1923 under the title “Nahum Sokolow, the Guest of Polish Jewry” honored Sokolow and described the central position that Sokolow held in Warsaw.² Jehoshua Ozjasz Thon (1870–1936), Yitzhak Grünbaum (1879–1970) and Yehoshua Gottlieb chose to write on the centrality of Nahum Sokolow in Jewish

* “We call him Mister Editor” is quoted from Yitzhak Grünbaum, “Pegishot Rishonot,” in Simon Rawidowicz (ed.), *Sefer Sokolow* (Jerusalem, 1943), 338.

¹ Yitzhak Grünbaum, “Lebo shel Sokolow,” in Yosef Haftman (ed.), *Nahum Sokolow Ore’ah Yehudei Polaniya* (Warsaw, 1923), 1–2.

² Haftman (ed.), *Nahum Sokolow Ore’ah Yehudei Polaniya*.

public life in Warsaw and beyond. While various Hebrew writers such as Hillel Zeitlin (1871–1942), Shalom Asch (1880–1952), Jacob Fichman (1881–1958), and the leading Hebrew literary scholar Fishel (Yeruham) Lachower (1883–1947) underscored the contribution of Sokolow to the development of modern Hebrew literature and the influence that he had on the Hebrew readership of the second half of the nineteenth century, including the young Orthodox readers in many *bati medresh* throughout Eastern Europe who hid copies of the Hebrew newspaper *Ha-tsefira* under their Talmud volumes.³ In his essay, Hillel Zeitlin focused on Sokolow's involvement in the field of Hebrew literature over the years.⁴ Fishel Lachower wrote that Sokolow's name was the first name of a Hebrew writer with which he (Lachower) became familiar at the age of twelve.⁵ And Fichman chose to describe Sokolow as a prolific writer for whom writing came very easily.⁶ Indeed, this literary collection – like other collections of this kind – included only praise and words of admiration. Nevertheless, a close look at Sokolow's engagement in the development of Hebrew literature during the last decades of the nineteenth century can confirm that those who praised him did not have to embellish the truth much.

This paper will present the tasks, aims and roles that Sokolow believed Hebrew literature should have in Jewish life, before and after his joining the Zionist movement. It will also evaluate Nahum Sokolow's contribution to the development of modern literature that was created in the Kingdom of Poland in the second half of the nineteenth century. Hebrew literature was not the only area that was enriched as a result of Sokolow's involvement in it. Also Hebrew, as a modern language, gained significantly because of Sokolow's involvement.⁷ Sokolow wrote in a very rich language. His writing integrated many linguistic layers. He was one of the first that in different Zionist gatherings spoke in Hebrew, despite disapproval of part of the audience.⁸ These who are familiar with his writings in different languages, are aware of his phenomenal knowledge

³ Shalom Asch, "Nahum Sokolow," in *ibid.*, 5.

⁴ Hillel Zaytlin, "Ed shel dorot," in *ibid.*, 9.

⁵ Fishel Lachower, "Ha-agada Sokolow," in *ibid.*, 10.

⁶ Jacob Fichman, "Eish Seifa," in *ibid.*, 11.

⁷ On the ways Sokolow re-newed Hebrew words see: Yitzhak Avinari, "Al signuno shel Nahum Sokolow," Rawidowicz (ed.), *Sefer Sokolow*, 377–401.

⁸ At Minsk Conference held in August and September of 1902, when Sokolow began to speak in Hebrew the audience divided between those who protested because the speaker spoke Hebrew and those who argued that in a Zionist gathering no one had the right to

of the Polish language and other languages as well. Nevertheless, this article will deal only with the connections and links of Sokolow to Hebrew literature.

The tasks and missions of Hebrew literature according to Sokolow

The early steps of young Sokolow in the Hebrew literary sphere were taken in Płock where he grew up, and in Maków where he lived after his marriage. These steps were done in the post-Polish uprising (1863) era. It was a time in which a new political alternative to the Polish romantic tradition had been formed as Polish positivism. This new way of thinking suggested to the Polish society to turn their efforts to cultural and economic endeavours, because these were the best means with which the Polish people would be able to defend their national interests.⁹ Before 1863 most Polish leaders glorified the romantic armed revolutionary struggle for independence, while after the failure of 1863 uprising economic and cultural reforms were understood as means that could help the nation to gain its independent statehood. The rejection of the romantic armed revolutionary struggle did not mean rejection of Polish romantic literature and its romantic representatives such as Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855), Juliusz Słowacki (1809–1849) and Zygmunt Krasiński (1812–1843). Nevertheless, the supporters of Polish positivism argued that the era of the post-Polish uprising set new challenges to the Polish nation. Due to new political and socioeconomic conditions created in 1864 and later on new challenges were set also to literature and journalism.¹⁰ Large part of the Polish positivism doctrine was dedicated to searching for ways that would guarantee intensive industrialization and the entrance of the Polish market into the capitalist era. However, this agenda did not prevent the supporters of Polish positivism from believing in the ability of literature to influence its readers and to promote social and political changes. In addition, at this time relatively many young people in Warsaw, mostly those who studied at Warsaw Main School

protest against speakers who spoke in Hebrew. See "Kultural Masit," *Ha-tsefira* 9 (22) September 1902.

⁹ Stanislaus A. Blejwas, *Realism in Polish Politics, Warsaw Positivism and National Survival in Nineteenth Century Poland* (New Haven, 1984), 1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 82.

(*Szkola Główna Warszawska*) worked as journalists and held other literary positions because of the limited career opportunities in educational, cultural, administrative and academic institutions.¹¹

The traces of the Polish intellectual environment in Sokolow's intellectual development can be noticed already in the two youth magazines, *Divrei shalom ve-emet* and *Ha-shoshanah*, he published at the beginning of the 1870s when he was thirteen or fourteen years old.¹² The magazines offered readers a fusion between Sokolow's own translations of classic literary works, such as *Die Räuber* by Friedrich Schiller, and original articles, some of which later appeared in similar versions in several Hebrew periodicals.¹³ By adapting a magazine format in order to spread his agenda and by offering different kinds of writing to different readers, Sokolow presented a very early interpretation of the Polish concept of "organic work" (*praca organiczna*). In these early publications, he already expressed his belief that only literature with an agenda could justifiably be published.¹⁴

An additional indication of how important it was for Sokolow to publish literary materials that would be valuable to Jewish readers, guide them and teach them new things they did not know can be seen at the end of the 1870s when he found himself in the middle of a polemic with leading members of the Hebrew literary community about the legitimacy of Hebrew *belles lettres*. In one of his early articles he wrote that Hebrew literature should not only aim to spread scientific knowledge but also to explore Jewish history and provide modern interpretations of traditional books. Hebrew literature should combine discussions on the past and the present in a way that would suit readers' needs and interests.¹⁵ In the polemic that began in 1879 in the pages of *Ha-kol*, a Hebrew periodical published in Königsberg, Sokolow used a best-selling autobiography of the time, *Hat'ot ne'urim* (The Sins of Youth) by Moses Leib Lilienblum, as an example of Hebrew *belles lettres* that did not take the traditional

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Copies of these publications can be found in the Central Zionist Archives CZA-A18/770, 739 and Box 24 (uncatalogued). Some of this material was published in Rawidowicz (ed.), *Sefer Sokolow...*, 3–21.

¹³ See for example Nahum Sokolow, "Plotsk," *Ha-tsefira* 31 December 1876 (12 January 1877), and "Devrei shalom ve-emet," in Rawidowicz (ed.), *Sefer Sokolow...*, 3–4.

¹⁴ Nahum Sokolow, *Ha-shoshanah*, no 5, CZA-A18 Box 10 (uncatalogued).

¹⁵ Idem, "Russland zum Schutz der neuhebraischen Literatur in Russland," *Judische Literaturblatt*, 5, 12 March 1879.

world of nearly all of its readership (young Orthodox men) into consideration.¹⁶ Sokolow did not reject the publication of *belles lettres* in Hebrew, but he definitely expected from Hebrew writers, such as Lilienblum, to take into consideration the needs of its readers. He believed that *belles lettres* in Hebrew had a task; namely, to create a broad Hebrew readership and contribute to the revival of the Hebrew language without confronting its readers.¹⁷ Based on this understanding, it seemed to Sokolow that Lilienblum's book *Ha'ot ne'urim* did not bring value to his readers and even prevented them from reading other books that could improve their perception of the world.¹⁸

At the end of the 1870s, shortly before Lilienblum began his involvement in the Jewish national camp, he was part of the Haskalah's radical camp in the Russian Empire, while Sokolow was interested in promoting a middle ground that integrated traditional Judaism with Haskalah.¹⁹ The young writer (Sokolow) and the older one (Lilienblum) were influenced by different intellectual environments. Lilienblum was influenced by Russian radicalism and nihilism, by intellectuals such as Mikhail Alexandrovich Bakunin and Dmitry Ivanovich Pisarev. Sokolow was influenced by the pragmatic approach of Polish positivism and by the intellectuals involved in this camp, such as Aleksander Świętochowski and Bolesław Prus (Aleksander Głowacki).²⁰ Hence, already from a young age, and even before his arrival in Warsaw in the early 1880s, Sokolow had adapted the assumptions that were common in Polish intellectual circles and he was already aware of the power of literature and its ability to influence its readership and public life.²¹

Thanks to his approach to *belles lettres* and literature in general, Sokolow found common ground with Chaim Zelig Slonimski (1810–1904), the founder and editor of *Ha-tsefira*, the Hebrew newspaper published in Warsaw and considered to be the longest-running Hebrew newspaper ever published in Eastern Europe.²² Slonimski be-

¹⁶ Idem, "Be-mah madlikin uve-mah ein madlikin," *Ha-kol*, 23 March 1879.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid. For more on this literary polemic see Ela Bauer, *Between Poles and Jews: The Development of Nahum Sokolow's Political Thought* (Jerusalem, 2005), 43–50.

¹⁹ Bauer, *Between Poles and Jews...*, 34.

²⁰ Ela Bauer, "Dialogue or Monologue? The Relationship between Jewish and Polish Journalists in Warsaw at the End of the 19th Century," *Polin* 22 (2010), 332–345.

²¹ Nahum Sokolow, "La-emet yetse mishpat," *Ha-kol*, 6 May–25 June, 9 July 1879.

²² On *Ha-tsefira* see Ela Bauer, "Ha-Cefira" (1862–1931)," in Joanna Nalewajko-Kulikow in cooperation with Grzegorz P. Babiak and Agnieszka J. Cieślukowa (eds.), *Studia*

lieved in publishing only material that could be useful to his readers, while Sokolow believed in the importance of nurturing the Hebrew language by writing different kinds of literature, including *belles lettres*. Slonimski was interested in writing in Hebrew only as a vehicle for bringing the positivist educational program to the Jewish readership. Despite this distinction, Slonimski's attitude towards publishing useful material in Hebrew that could benefit his readers led to Sokolow's joining the editorial board of *Ha-tsefira*.²³ This did not take long, and in addition to framing his agenda about the tasks and roles that Hebrew literature had in the modernization project of Jewish society in Eastern Europe, Sokolow began to write about the tasks and roles that Hebrew literature had as a national asset and as an essential component in the creation of Jewish national awareness. His opportunities to articulate this approach in *Ha-tsefira* were limited, since his agenda of promoting the importance of Hebrew literature in general and from the Jewish national angle in particular did not agree with the agenda of Slonimski, who was not interested in nurturing Hebrew language and literature, and rejected the publication of Hebrew *belles lettres* of any kind.²⁴ Because of that Sokolow could not promote these issues in *Ha-tsefira*. Thus, at the beginning of his writing career and before his position on the editorial board of *Ha-tsefira* had been established, Sokolow had to publish his views regarding the links between Hebrew literature and Jewish national awareness in other literary arenas.²⁵ In 1884 this approach was articulated in the pioneering literary annual that Sokolow founded and edited – *Ha-asif*. *Ha-asif* was Sokolow's own realm in which he could advance ideas that he was unable to promote in *Ha-tsefira*. This attitude could be noticed already in the title that defined the spectrum of topics with which *Ha-asif* would engage: "A yearly book that would be dedicated to Torah, wisdom and research, to the investigation of religious issues and to the people relating to non-Jewish rules and civil behaviour. *Ha-asif* would be divided into two parts; one section that would deal with assorted issues and another dedicated to literature."²⁶

z dziejów trójjęzycznej prasy żydowskiej na ziemiach polskich XIX–XX w. (Warsaw, 2012), 31–45.

²³ Zvi Hirsh Rozental to Sokolow, no date, CZA-A18, Box 44 (uncatalogued).

²⁴ Hayim Zelig Slonimski, "Petah davar," *Ha-tsefira*, 18 January (4 February) 1862.

²⁵ Nahum Sokolow, "Zikaron la-rishonim: Hashkafa kelalit al shenat 1879 ha-holefet ve-erka be-nog'w le-aneinu benei yisra'el," *Ha-magid*, 28 April 1879.

²⁶ Idem, "Petah ha-sfar," *Ha-asif* 1(1884). Next volumes were published in the years 1885–1887 (2-4), 1889 (5) and 1893 (6).

Under the umbrella of literature, the young editor included various types of genres. He understood that expanding the spectrum of Hebrew writing, including *belles lettres*, was necessary in order to create a broad Hebrew readership. He outlined the tasks of *Ha-asif* in the formation of the national Jewish aspirations by means of various items and references that he addressed to his readers. His understanding that literature had central tasks in the formation of Jewish national awareness can be seen in the ideological program published under the title "Va-yehi or" (Let There Be Light) in the first volume of *Ha-asif*.²⁷ And in the second volume where Sokolow wrote: "This periodical is the national book. Literature is the best way that a nation can articulate its national aspirations."²⁸

At the beginning of the 1880s, it was important for Sokolow to present Hebrew literature as a Jewish national possession because of the formation of the Hovevei Zion associations – the early Jewish national associations that were established at that time in different parts of Eastern Europe. These associations were primarily interested in supporting new settlements in Palestine and not in nurturing national awareness in the Diaspora. The publication of his ideological program in "Va-yehi or" in 1884 was not accidental. In November of that year, the first Hovevei Zion conference was held in Katowice. The discussions of this conference provided additional confirmation for him that the proto-national associations were not interested in meeting the cultural needs of the Jewish society in the Diaspora. From the beginning of the 1880s until the end of the nineteenth century, as a response to the emergence of Jewish nationalism and the strong emphasis given by different Hovevei Zion associations to the new settlements in Palestine, it was important for Sokolow to explain to his readership the special place that cultural and spiritual possessions had in Jewish public life. Hebrew literature and language were part of the Jewish national cargo. This view was also articulated in *Zadania inteligencji żydowskiej* (Tasks of Jewish Intelligentsia), another ideological program published by Sokolow in Polish in 1890, first in *Izraelita* and a short time later in a book format.²⁹ Despite some similarities between "Va-yehi or" and *Zadania inteligencji żydowskiej*,

²⁷ For more on this program, its significance and its different articles, see Ela Bauer, *Between Poles and Jews...*, . 71–79.

²⁸ Nahum Sokolow, "'Aspeklarya' & Safrut yisra'el ba-shana hacholeft," *Ha-asif* 2 (1885). "El ha-koreim," *Ha-asif* 4 (1887).

²⁹ Idem, *Zadania inteligencji żydowskiej; Szkic programu* (Warsaw, 1890).

Sokolow's two ideological programs were written for different audiences. *Zadania* was written for the circles of Jewish intelligentsia in order to increase their involvement in Jewish society by suggesting that members of this circle take upon themselves new social and cultural tasks; assisting with the development of the Jewish literary arena was one such task.³⁰

Until 1897 Sokolow was not identified with any of the sectors that comprised Jewish society. As the name of his column "Ha-tsofeh le-veit yisra'el" (The Observer of the House of Israel) asserted, he did not want to be identified with any of the many sectors of Jewish society. However, in the year after the first Zionist Congress in Basel, held in the summer of 1897, Sokolow officially joined the Zionist movement. For the first time he took a side with a clear ideological identification, Zionism, even though in 1896 he wrote that "the Israeli [Jewish] nationality is not territorial. It is not linked to the ground. Even Hovevei Zion understood this. Slowly, slowly they limited their extreme activity by narrowing the territorial activity and increasing their involvement in literature and education."³¹ As the years went by, it became difficult and in fact, almost impossible, to find any indications of his earlier approach that acknowledged the right of literature to be published only if that literature had a purpose and agenda. The absence of this approach did not change his belief that Hebrew literature, like any other literature (Jewish and non-Jewish), had an important place in the life of nations and societies. At a certain point he even wrote that anyone who did not acknowledge the literature of Israel and its future, did not recognize the existence of the Jewish nation.³² After officially joining the Zionist movement in 1897, Sokolow was considered a major supporter of the leader of the movement Theodor (Benjamin Ze'ev) Herzl, despite the fact that Herzl believed that most, if not all, of his efforts and those of the movement he established should be dedicated to diplomatic efforts to achieve recognition by various states and empires of the establishment of a Jewish national home. At the beginning of the twentieth century, at a time when his involvement in the Zionist movement increased, he felt it important to explain to his readers that the approach he presented twenty years earlier had not changed, and that he still believed that literature had a significant role to play in public and national Jewish life.³³

³⁰ Bauer, *Between Poles and Jews...*, 80–109.

³¹ Nahum Sokolow, "Teshuvah," *Ha-tsefira*, 19 October (1 November) 1896.

³² Idem, "Chazut Kasha," *Ha-tsefira*, 19 June (1 July) 1889.

³³ Idem, "Hakav ha-yashar," *Sefer ha-shana*, 1902.

At the beginning of the twentieth century Sokolow added a new goal to his previous agenda of establishing Hebrew literature as a national possession; namely to expand the borders of Jewish literature in Congress Poland into multi-lingual literature. He acknowledged that Jewish literature in Congress Poland during the final decade of the nineteenth century was composed of three separate literatures: Hebrew, Yiddish and Polish. Each was written for different readers and these three kinds of Jewish literature complemented each other. Sokolow did not only write about the need to expand the borders of Jewish literature. He himself already from an early age contributed to Jewish journalism in various languages, but mostly he wrote simultaneously in Hebrew and in Polish. At the beginning of the 1880s he occasionally contributed to the Jewish-Polish weekly *Izraelita*. At the end of that decade he already contributed to *Izraelita* on a regular basis. In 1896, following the death of the founder and editor of *Izraelita*, Samuel Zvi Herz Peltyn, Sokolow became the literary editor of *Izraelita* until 1902.³⁴

His writing in Polish and Hebrew allowed him to communicate with various sectors of Polish Jewish society and to move them towards a common ground. In addition, Sokolow hoped that the simultaneous writing would help develop modern Jewish literature in both Hebrew and Polish. He believed that literature of this type could help strengthen the ties between Polish Jews and the local non-Jewish culture. He argued that this had often been the case in the past when Jewish literature included many works in the languages of the surrounding society, especially in Arabic and Latin. The fact that some distinguished Jews had been able to integrate Jewish and non-Jewish cultures made Sokolow hopeful that this could happen in Polish areas as well. In addition to his attempts to enter a dialogue with different sectors of Jewish society, Sokolow also looked for ways to reach out to Polish society. It was thus important for him to introduce Hebrew literature to Poles, as can be seen in a letter he wrote to Samuel Peltyn in 1886:

[...] Comments in Polish journals show that Polish publicists know nothing about Hebrew literature or the Hebrew press. When they hear about Hebrew literature every now and then, they think that the Talmud and the *Shulhan Aruch* are being discussed. Polish journalists have never dreamed of the creation of new Hebrew

³⁴ Short biography of Peltyn can be found in Hebrew in Nahum Sokolow, *Sefer hazikaron le-sofrei Yisra'el* (Warsaw, 1889), 91. In Polish see Nahum Sokolow, "S. H. Peltyn," *Izraelita*, 15 (27) November – 13 (25) December 1896.

literature aiming to facilitate the enlightenment of the Jewish public and to bring it closer to its culture. If these journalists were aware that Hebrew periodicals discuss literature and benefit the country as a whole, they might be able to evaluate them differently. [...] I ask you kindly to explain in Polish in your own publication the difference between the Yiddish “jargon” and the Hebrew language, between books of fables in Yiddish and Hebrew literature. [...] Please extricate the Polish reader from a mistaken understanding that Hebrew literature leads to separatism. On the contrary, progressive writers are the ones who deal with the new Hebrew literature, which condemns the negative aspects of Judaism.³⁵

Regarding Jewish literature in Polish, Sokolow believed that it was the best way to introduce Jewish heritage to those Polish Jews who did not read Hebrew. He also supported the development of Yiddish literature as long as the superior place of Hebrew literature in the linguistic hierarchy between Hebrew and Yiddish would remain. As he explained to his readers in 1889, Jews had an obligation to preserve and develop Hebrew literature and had no similar obligation regarding literature in *zhargon*. That literature could exist as long as its secondary importance to Hebrew remained clear, and it should be used primarily as an instrument for promoting more important goals.³⁶ The emergence of modern Yiddish literature and the establishment of new daily Yiddish newspapers that began to appear in the Russian Empire and the publishing of *Der fraynd* and the *Vog* in Warsaw at the beginning of the twentieth century, created in him the need to protect Hebrew literature, which he believed was threatened.³⁷

His simultaneously writing in Hebrew, Polish and occasionally Yiddish to different readerships put him in a unique position because it was done at a time when the mutual ground between the various Jewish sectors in Warsaw was fragile. In earlier periods, it was quite common for Jewish writers to write simultaneously in different languages, as leading Jewish intellectuals argued that the Jewish writings in different languages complemented each other and created a whole. However, at the end of the nineteenth century, it was difficult to maintain this simultaneous writing mostly for ideological reasons. Jewish writers who chose to write

³⁵ Nahum Sokolow to Samuel H. Peltyn, CZA-A18, Box 1 (uncatalogued). There is no date on the document. However we can assume it was written in 1886 because in the letter Sokolow mentions the transformation of *Ha-tsefira* from a weekly to daily that took place in 1886.

³⁶ Nahum Sokolow, “Yakar u-mezulzal,” *Ha-tsefira*, 16 (28), June 1889.

³⁷ Idem, “Le-sader,” *Ha-tsefira*, 10 (23) January 1902.

in Polish did so in order to declare their identity and their connection to Polish society, while members of the national camp chose Hebrew in order to articulate their identity and the links they had with the Jewish national camp. Those who chose to write in Yiddish also wanted to articulate their ideological views. Thus it was no longer possible to continue writing simultaneously in the different languages. Nevertheless Sokolow continued to write simultaneously for a long period of time, even though it was not always well received by various Jewish and even non-Jewish circles. 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 Sokolow, calling him "the editor with two hats." According to the criticism of that time, *Ha-tsefira* and *Izraelita* represented two different views and ideologies, with one newspaper condemning that which the other advocated. Sokolow's answer to this charge was that he did not write for the nationalist-oriented Hebrew reading audience of *Ha-tsefira* and for the readers of *Izraelita* in the same style, although the spirit, aims and mission of his writing remained consistent in both newspapers.

Sokolow and the Literary Center of Warsaw

I decided that between 1880–1885, a new [modern] Hebrew literature was created [...] *Ha-asif* was the first Hebrew literary annual, which over a short time (several months) was sold in 10,000 copies. [...] Hebrew literature began to grow and expand and become what it was not yet but what it would be: the literature of a nation (people).³⁸

At the end of 1901 the Hebrew periodical *Ha-dor* ceased publication, since it did not have the one thousand subscribers needed in order to guarantee its existence. In the final edition, the editor David Frishman (1859–1922), Sokolow's friend and colleague, published a passionate letter to his readers.³⁹ The letter opened with a strong declaration: "You did not believe me! Day by day I talked with you and told you that we do not have a nation. We do not have a literature and we do not have a movement and we do not have a revival. We do not have anything."⁴⁰

³⁸ Idem, "David Frishman," in Getzel Kressel (ed.), *Ishim* (Jerusalem, 1958), 281–283.

³⁹ On *Ha-dor*, see Gedalia Alkoshi, "Ha-dor bearichat David Frishman," *Gilyonot* (1951–1952), 383–370. On Frishman's letter, see Dan Miron, *Bodedim be-mo'adam* (Tel-Aviv, 1987), 23–28.

⁴⁰ David Frishman, "Miktav met haorech," *Ha-dor*, June 1901.

As early as 1889, Sokolow already wrote that at the beginning of the current decade it looked as though Hebrew literature was in a time of prosperity. Almost a decade later it was hard to be optimistic about the future of Hebrew literature.⁴¹ At that time, when a different literary project failed, Sokolow used the opportunity to raise public awareness regarding the crucial state of Hebrew literature. The pool of idioms he used at this opportunity was biblical, including well-known phrases from the books of Nahum and Lamentations with which his readers were familiar.⁴² But unlike Frishman, he did not lose his hope that Hebrew literature, with the support of the Zionist movement and other public organizations and publications, could keep its place at the top of the hierarchy of Jewish literature and would be able to regain the readers who had abandoned it. In order to do so, throughout the middle of 1880s and later, Sokolow began to promote several literary projects that were meant to regain readers' trust in this literature that had made a significant contribution to the development of Warsaw as a leading Jewish literary center.

Sokolow settled down in Warsaw at the beginning of the 1880s, around the time when several Hebrew publishing houses already operated there, and in the future, two new publishing houses with a national orientation, *Ahi'asaf* and *Tushia*, would join the old established publishing houses. The new publishing houses represented a new and different approach than that which had been carried out by the old publishing houses already operating in Warsaw.⁴³ Young people from the provinces and other cities from various parts of the Russian Empire who wanted to write (such as the young Sokolow) came to Warsaw hoping to become famous writers. In addition, older and better-known writers came there and joined those young men taking their first steps on the literary path.⁴⁴ In 1896, it was Ahad Ha'am (Asher Ginzberg) who got a position at the new publishing house, Ahi-Asaf. At the beginning of the twentieth century, it was Chaim Nachman Bialik. Bialik came to Warsaw in order to edit the periodical *Ha-shiloah*. Jacob Fichman wrote that Bialik did not

⁴¹ Nahum Sokolow, "Hazut Kasha," *Ha-tsefira*, 19 June (1 July) 1889.

⁴² Idem, "Ha-tsofeh le-veit Yisra'el," *Ha-tsefira*, 21 May (3 June) & 22 May (4 June) 1890.

⁴³ Saul Rosenzweig, "Zaslugi żydów w księgarstwie polskim: Na marginesie walki z księgarzami i nakładami żydowskimi," YIVO Archive, New York [no date]; Jacob Shatzky collection, RG356, file 131; Hagit Cohen, *Behanoto shel Mokher Hasefarim* (Jerusalem, 2006), 26–38.

⁴⁴ Nahman Meisel, "Yidishe vort-fihrer in der letster tkufe," *Haynt*, 28 October 1932.

like the intellectual atmosphere of Warsaw. However only in Warsaw, argued Fichman, could Bialik write his love poems, and when he returned from Warsaw to Odessa, he was a different person.⁴⁵

The first steps that Sokolow took in the Hebrew literary arena were not different from those taken by other young members of his generation. The intellectual graduation of Sokolow, David Frishman, and Yitzhak Leibush Peretz (1852–1915) occurred at the time of the transition between the Haskalah and revival (*Tehiya*).⁴⁶ These young writers shared the mutual belief that entrance to the Jewish literary world should be driven from an organic, natural, and self-central need to "guide the people." Many of them shared another dream: to become an editor of a Hebrew periodical. "The road of the leader was not yet in our hand, but it was hidden in any maskilic bag."⁴⁷ As far as Sokolow was concerned the ambition to become an editor did not stay hidden deep in his baggage.

Sokolow began his road to the editor's chair of a Hebrew periodical at a relatively young age. His first article published in *Ha-tsefira* appeared in 1877. It was a critical report on the Jewish community of Płock where he grew up.⁴⁸ It was the first of many articles in which Sokolow wrote on a wide spectrum of topics, including geography, history and recent scientific discoveries. It took almost four years until Sokolow became an employee of *Ha-tsefira* and not only a correspondent who occasionally contributed to the periodical. By 1884, at the age of twenty-five, he already was the editor of his own periodical, *Ha-asif*.

Ha-asif was an extensive annual literary publication that was published between the years 1884 and 1889. In 1894, there was a failed attempt to renew its appearance. Ten thousand copies of the first volume were sold shortly after its publication. An additional 5,000 copies were sold later on. No other modern Hebrew book at that time (the 1880s) had spread at these numbers, in such a short time.⁴⁹ And none of the Hebrew periodicals published in the 1880s, including *Ha-tsefira*, had enjoyed such a circulation of buyers and readers.⁵⁰ As has already been

⁴⁵ Jacob Fichman, *Sofrim be-hayehem, sefer pegishot* (Tel-Aviv, 1942), 55.

⁴⁶ Nahum Sokolow, "David Frishman," 275.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 276.

⁴⁸ Nahum Sokolow, "Plotsk," *Ha-tsefira*, 31 December (12 January) 1876/1877.

⁴⁹ *Idem*, "Eishi hayom," in Kressel (ed.), *Ishim*, 156. Sokolow wrote this piece in 1936.

⁵⁰ According to Sokolow's estimation until 1886 of all the Hebrew periodicals together, namely: *Ha-magid*, *Ha-carmel*, *Ha-melits* and *Ha-tsefira*, did not have such an amount of subscriptions. See Sokolow, "David Frishman," 282.

mentioned by various scholars and writers, it is difficult to pinpoint what in the two first volumes turned these publications into best sellers such a short time after their publication.⁵¹ It is hard to understand what in these volumes caught the attention of their many readers. Most likely it was the whole package: the mix of articles and the profusion of literary items that were included in the different volumes of *Ha-asif*. Each volume of *Ha-asif* was nearly one thousand pages. The appearance of *Ha-asif* paved the way for the publication of other literary annuals such as *Kneset Isra'el*, *Otsar Safrut*, *Kneset Gedola* and *Ahi'asaf*.⁵² A new era in the development of modern Hebrew literature had begun; it was on its way to becoming popular and national.⁵³

If, until the publication of *Ha-asif*, assorted writers, journalists, editors and publishers who were engaged in the establishment of modern Hebrew literature wondered if there were enough readers for its various products, the achievements of *Ha-asif* raised new hopes regarding Hebrew literature's potential to be popular literature with many readers.⁵⁴ The accomplishments of *Ha-asif* also had an important contribution to the establishment of Warsaw as a leading Hebrew literary center. For Sokolow himself, it was an opportunity to carry out what he wrote about in *Ha-asif* and in other places about the ability of Hebrew literature to influence its readers and to be an essential tool in the creation of Jewish nationalism. Thanks to Sokolow's initiative and activities, in 1886 *Ha-tsefira* began to appear as a daily newspaper.⁵⁵ This was not only a shift from a weekly periodical to a daily newspaper, as can be recognized from the subtitle that defined the newspaper. At that time *Ha-tsefira* was described as a political, scientific and literary periodical.⁵⁶ At the end of 1887, when addressing its readers to renew their subscrip-

⁵¹ Moses Kleinman, *Demuyot ve-komot, reshimot le-toledot ve-hitpathot hasafrot ha-hadashah* (Paris, 1928), 146–154.

⁵² On these periodicals see: Menuha Gilboa, *Leksikon ha-itonut ha-ivrit ba-me'ot ha-18, veha-19* (Jerusalem, 1992), 324, 330, 353, 374.

⁵³ Nahum Sokolow, "Be-mi ashem?," *Ha-tsefira*, 27 January (13 February) 1902, "Eishi hayom," in Kressel (ed.), *Ishim*, 157, 283. Both Moses Kleinman, *Demuyot ve-komot* and a few years later Dan Miron, *Bodedim be-mo'adam*, adapted Sokolow's conclusions regarding the influence *Ha-asif* had on the development of Hebrew literature in the last decades of the 19th century.

⁵⁴ At the beginning of the 1890s, Ben-Avigdor (Avraham Leib Shalkovich, 1866–1921) began his project publishing *agora* (penny) books in Hebrew.

⁵⁵ Ela Bauer, "Ha-miroz achari ha-yomon ha-evri ha-reshon," *Kesher* 32 (2002), 87–97.

⁵⁶ See the first issue of *Ha-tsefira* in the daily format from 1(13) April 1886 and the last issue published in the weekly format from 31 December 1885 (5 January 1886).

tions to the newspaper, Sokolow wrote that *Ha-tsefira* was published in the most important cultural and national center.⁵⁷

In 1902 the new Association of Hebrew Writers decided to operate from Warsaw, because the city was already home to three important leading literary and cultural institutions: the Hebrew newspaper *Ha-tsefira* and two publishing houses, Ahi-Asaf and Tushiya.⁵⁸ The establishment of Warsaw as a literary center brought several old and young Hebrew writers who could enjoy in Warsaw a direct connection with their readers. Sokolow himself, like his friend and colleague Y.L. Peretz, became a central literary authority through regularly organized assemblies and informal meetings.⁵⁹ One of the first things that many of the new arrivals in Warsaw used to do was to go to the office of *Ha-tsefira*, first on Królewska Street and later on Mariańska Street, in order to meet the editor, Sokolow.⁶⁰ It was a ritual of sorts, although we do know that some of these encounters ended with disappointment.⁶¹ A similar ritual, or even a kind of pilgrimage, took place at #1 Ceglana Street, where Peretz lived.⁶²

Ha-asif gained wide and strong recognition for Sokolow among the Hebrew readership in Eastern Europe and beyond. In 1889, he hoped to achieve similar recognition among the community of Jewish writers by publishing *Sefer zikaron* (a memorial book of the writers of Israel). *Sefer zikaron* was intended to help Sokolow gain recognition from the community of Jewish writers in different parts of the Jewish world regarding his centrality in the creation of modern Hebrew literature. The introduction to *Sefer zikaron* explained the benefit that could be gained from this book by its readers, since it would show them how rich and diverse literature of the Jewish people was.⁶³ However the way that Sokolow arranged the

⁵⁷ *Ha-tsefira*, le'shenat 1888, 18 (30) December 1887.

⁵⁸ "Haknesia hagedula be-minsk," *Ha-tsefira* 1(14) September 1902.

⁵⁹ On the regular assemblies at the houses of Sokolow and Peretz, see: Ela Bauer, "From the Salon to the Street: Jewish Assemblies in Warsaw in the Last Decades of the Nineteenth Century," *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook* (2008), 143–159.

⁶⁰ Florian Sokolow, *Avi Nahum Sokolow* (Jerusalem, 1970), 94; Sofia Sokolow Rachecovska, "Be-tsel aba," in Rawidowicz (ed.), *Sefer Sokolow*, 330.

⁶¹ See the description of Joseph Klausner, *Darsi lekhat ha-tehiya ve ha-geulah* (Tel-Aviv, 1946).

⁶² Yitzhak Dov Berkowitz, *Kitvei Y.D. Berkowitz: Sipurei zikaron* (Tel-Aviv, 1964), 21. Nahum Meisel, *Sefer Y.L. Peretz* (Tel-Aviv, 1960), 231; Gershon Levin, *Peretz Bosel zikhroynes* (Warsaw, 1919), 39; Jechiel Isaiah Trunk, "Peretz at Home," in Lucy Dawidowicz, *The Golden Tradition: Jewish Life and Thought in Eastern Europe* (Boston, 1968), 297–304.

⁶³ "Petah davar," in *Sefer ha-zikaron le-sofrei Yisra'el* (Warsaw, 1889).

preparations for *Sefer zikaron* indicated that the book's readers were not his main target. He aimed this book to another target audience: Jewish authors writing in Hebrew and other languages. Various writers received personal invitations to submit their own biographies. Announcements with similar requests were published in different Jewish periodicals.

This literary project was done at the publishing house of *Ha-asif* with the assistance of Yisrael Chaim Zagorodski. It was the continuation or articulation of Sokolow's earlier declaration: "to lay bricks to the building of Hebrew literature."⁶⁴ It was not the only time when Sokolow used the image of erecting a new building in order to describe the developing process of modern Hebrew literature.⁶⁵ It was important for him to present himself not only as one of the central builders, but as one of the architects. Like his previous projects, this publication was also preliminary. It paved the way for other literary projects and lexicons. However, unlike Sokolow's other literary projects, the publication of *Sefer zikaron* was accompanied by unsupportive criticism. He was accused of bias, rejecting several biographies of writers he did not like and including only those who were close to him. In his response, Sokolow argued that the book did not include certain writers because many authors who had been asked to send their biographies to the project did not understand the purpose of the request and the idea behind the publication, and therefore did not cooperate with the project.⁶⁶ In the introduction to the book, it was promised that missing information would be added in future volumes.⁶⁷

Sokolow's inability to repeat the success of the earlier literary project can be seen also at two other literary projects – *Sefer Ha-shana* and an attempt to publish Jewish encyclopedia that he was involved with at the beginning of the twentieth century. These attempts articulated his ongoing desire to be a central figure in the formation of modern Hebrew literature. *Sefer Ha-shana* was published over the course of several years but it did not repeat the success of *Ha-asif*. In the twenty years since *Ha-asif* first appeared, it filled an essential gap that at the beginning of the twentieth century no longer needed to be filled. As can be understood from the first volume of *Sefer Ha-shana*, Sokolow was aware of the fact that during the time that had passed since the publication of

⁶⁴ Nahum Sokolow, "Russland zum Schutz der neuhebraischen Literatur in Russland," *Judische Literaturblatt*, 5 March 1879.

⁶⁵ Idem, "Lesader," *Ha-tsefira*, 8 (21) & 9 (22) January 1902.

⁶⁶ Draft, CZA-A18 box 29 (uncatalogued).

⁶⁷ "Petah davar," in *Sefer ha-zikaron*.

the first volume of *Ha-asif*, several changes had occurred and therefore long articles could no longer be included in daily and weekly periodicals.⁶⁸ Although several volumes of *Sefer Ha-shana* appeared, it could not be considered a duplication of *Ha-asif*. The attempt to publish an encyclopedia ended with bitter disappointment and personal financial damage. The attempt to establish a Jewish encyclopedia demonstrated that even after his full engagement with the Zionist movement, Sokolow continued to be influenced by local, non-Jewish intellectual and cultural trends. Although he lived at a time when the reputation and impact of the French eighteenth century encyclopedia, *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, edited by Denis Diderot, was well known, in his close environment (Warsaw), publishing encyclopedias, as well as geographic or literary lexicons and dictionaries, was considered an articulation of the Polish national awareness. While in previous decades the Polish everyman's encyclopedia, *Encyklopedia Powszechna*, was published by a private Jewish publisher, Samuel Orgelbrand, in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, literary projects that could be considered as Polish national publications were issued under the sponsorship of various organizations and associations. The publication of such works by a private body with Jewish affiliation seemed as a step against Polish nationalism.⁶⁹

It seems likely that the failure of this project was not only due to Sokolow's performance as an organizer, since we can see from the responses he received from various writers that he invited to participate that they promised him their full collaboration. They did not challenge his ability to accomplish this kind of project.⁷⁰ Sokolow's attempt to publish an encyclopedia for the Hebrew readership was not the only kind of project that failed. Several years earlier, it was Ahad Ha'am who could not accomplish a similar project.⁷¹ Thus perhaps the Jewish readership was not yet ready for a work of this type.

⁶⁸ Nahum Sokolow, "El Ha-korim," *Sefer ha-shana* 1 (1900).

⁶⁹ Irmina Ossowska, "Pokolenie 'Szkoły Głównej,'" in *Inteligencja polska XIX i XX wieku. Studia*, vol. 1 (Warsaw, 1981), 170–208.

⁷⁰ The responses are located in CZA-A18/101, Box 21 (uncatalogued).

⁷¹ Steven Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet: Ahas Ha'am and the Origins of Zionism* (London, 1993).

Sokolow's contribution to the development of a new Hebrew literary style

Despite this failure at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, Sokolow's centrality in the Jewish literary world in Warsaw was undeniable. This centrality was achieved due to the combination of his involvement in different literary projects, his editorial work and his journalistic style of writing.

Already at a very early age Sokolow was recognized by members of his family, friends and several highly regarded authors as a very gifted writer.⁷² It was his father who urged him to write when he was still quite young: "... et the pen work for you. Use what you know best."⁷³ After the publication of his first books in Hebrew, *Metsukei-erets* (The Pillars of the Earth) and *Sin'at olam le-am olam* (Eternal Hatred for the Eternal People), he received a letter from the leading writer Yehuda Leib Gordon (1830–1892).⁷⁴ Gordon praised the writing style and rich linguistic ability of the young author.⁷⁵ Later, when Sokolow was already the editor of *Ha-tsefira*, readers of the newspaper used to send him letters full of praise and expressions of admiration.⁷⁶ As Sokolow's biography indicated, his decision to become a writer was made at a relatively young age.⁷⁷ Writing came very easily to him throughout his life. He wrote a great deal, in many genres and using various literary styles. In addition to the numerous articles and feuilletons that he wrote on a daily basis, his literary inheritance to future readers was diverse and sizeable, including poems, short and long stories, historical romances and theatrical plays.⁷⁸ As Bialik wrote, "If someone would like to collect all of Sokolow's writing: his articles, essays, feuilletons, scholarly pieces and travel diaries, and ship them to one place, he should prepare three hundred camels."⁷⁹

⁷² Zvi Hirsh, Rozental to Sokolow, no date, CZA-A18, Box 44 (uncatalogued).

⁷³ S.Y. Sokolow to N. Sokolow, Lag Ba'omer 5636, 12 May 1876, CZA-A18/570.

⁷⁴ Nahum Sokolow, *Metsukei-erets o yesode yed'at ha-geografiyah ha-tiv'it* (Warsaw, 1878); idem, *Sin'at olam le-am olam* (Warsaw, 1882).

⁷⁵ Gordon to Sokolow, 10 September 1882, CZA-A 18/703.

⁷⁶ See assorted letters from readers of *Ha-tsefira* to Sokolow, CZA-A18, Box 30 (uncatalogued).

⁷⁷ See for example his diary from 1875 CZA-A18, Box 75 (uncatalogued).

⁷⁸ A selection of Sokolow's literary writing can be found in Getzel Kressel, *Be-mar'ot ha-keshet* (Jerusalem, 1960), see also Rawidowicz (ed.), *Sefer Sokolow...*, 31–120.

⁷⁹ Bialik, 27 January 1931, *Ha-olam* 1931. Quoted in Getzel Kressel, introduction to *Ha-tsofeh le-veit Yisra'el* (Jerusalem, 1961), 11.

Despite the praise that Sokolow's literary work gained during his lifetime, from a contemporary perspective it is often difficult to appreciate his poems, stories and plays as literary accomplishments. Based on his literary corpus, it is hard to include Sokolow in the modern Hebrew literary canon or the Hebrew literary pantheon. His entrance to the Jewish literary pantheon would only be due to his achievements in journalism – his writing and editing, and in particular in the way that he developed Hebrew feuilleton writing over the decades.

In the history of European literature it is common to locate the cradle of the feuilleton in French literature. The feuilleton entered Hebrew literature in the second half of the nineteenth century from assorted sources and by various writers. It is hard to link Sokolow to the French sources of the feuilleton; however it is easy to link him to Bolesław Prus. Sokolow adapted Prus's view of what a good feuilleton should include. His understanding that a feuilleton should be a free conversation between the writer and the readers, in which the shift between one issue and the next could be based on the associations of the writer, was based on Prus's journalistic work.⁸⁰

In one biographical essay, it was written that Sokolow decided to dedicate himself to Hebrew literature and nothing could distract him from this life goal.⁸¹ Throughout his life he tried several times to make a living in other fields besides writing, but these efforts did not last long. His decision to be a writer was not made because of the eager reactions he received in his nearest environment or due to practical reasons. It was made because already at a young age Sokolow understood that by means of writing he would be able to influence others and make change, since in Eastern European Jewish society writing was a way to exert influence on the Jewish public. Writers and journalists in the Polish environment also enjoyed a strong public perception as being able to change and improve Polish society. Sokolow's first steps in Jewish periodicals in Warsaw were taken in an era in which the position of a journalist was formed from professional and public perspectives. Only in 1882 did the category of journalist appear as a profession in the residence registry of Warsaw.⁸² Until the end of the nineteenth century, the central place of journalists

⁸⁰ On the feuilleton in the literary oeuvre of Prus, see Stanisław Fita's introduction to Bolesław Prus, *Kroniki: Wybór* (Warsaw, 1987), 6–9. On the influence of Prus on Sokolow, see Ela Bauer, "Dialogue or Monologue?..."

⁸¹ Sokolow's biography in Yiddish, CZA-A18/101, Box 230 (uncatalogued).

⁸² Janina Żurawicka, *Inteligencja warszawska w końcu XIX wieku* (Warsaw, 1978), 29.

and writers in public discourse was undeniable. Sokolow was one of the first in Jewish society who could make a living from journalism. During the last decade of the nineteenth century, he was not only considered a central figure of the Hebrew literary republic; he was also a dominant figure in the local intellectual arena of Warsaw. Although Sokolow's literary output was very rich, there were several parts that did not have much value. Nevertheless the fact that he was involved in many literary areas and projects, and the fact that by means of his literary work he was able to establish himself as a key public figure, turned him into a central figure in the Jewish literary milieu of Warsaw in the final decades of the nineteenth century. The responses of assorted writers and others who were his devoted readers for many years clearly indicate Sokolow's central position in the Jewish literary world and the impact that his writing and his various literary projects had on his readers over the years.

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