

**SOKOLOW, NAHUM** (1859–1936), Hebrew writer, pioneer in modern Hebrew journalism, and president of the World Zionist Organization. Sokolow was born in Wyszogrod, near Plock, Poland, into a family with deep roots in Poland that had produced many rabbis and public figures. He received a fundamental Jewish education and he also acquired a general education. This mixture of Jewish and world culture marked him later in life as one of the few Hebrew authors with a command (both written and oral) of a number of other languages. He also had a command of the treasures of non-Jewish literature and culture, and this contributed to the charm he had for leading personalities of the Western world. After his marriage at the age of 17 he lived in his father-in-law's house in Makow, and pursued his studies. He began to write in a variety of fields – commentaries on Jewish topics, poetry, stories, plays, scientific articles, etc. His first literary effort was a report from Plock to the Hebrew weekly *Ivri Anokhi* (1874).

Sokolow continued sending reports to the newspaper *Ha-Zefirah* (1876) and soon became its regular columnist on scientific affairs, a subject that was close to the heart of the editor, H.Z. \*Slonimski. In a short while, Sokolow became one of the paper's most famous writers. His first book also dealt with the natural sciences, geography and geology (*Mazzukei Arez*, 1878). At the same time, he developed his writings in other

languages (Yiddish, German, and Polish). Finally, Sokolow moved to Warsaw (1880), where his writing took a decisive turn with the publication of the first of a series of articles in *Ha-Zefirah* entitled “*Zofeh le-Veit Yisrael*,” which became most popular. The column treated current affairs in a feature-writing (“feuilleton”) style in a rich and sparkling Hebrew. From that time he was the regular columnist for *Ha-Zefirah* and gradually transformed the paper into a lively publication, finally becoming its acting editor (his name appeared among the list of editors only from 1886).

Sokolow was the first in the history of the Hebrew press and literature to create a vast reading public, which was an unusual mixture encompassing *maskilim* (Western-oriented secularists), extreme Orthodox rabbis, and religious Jews. He knew how to direct the style of his writing at a variety of different circles because he was close to all of them. Sokolow expressed reservations about the Hibbat Zion movement when it first appeared, although he was simultaneously drawn toward it emotionally. He wished to restrain the enthusiasm of the early 1880s and even attacked J.L. \*Pinsker's *Autoemancipation*, continuing in this line until the First Zionist Congress (1897). In the meantime, he published books in the fields of history and belles lettres. His textbook on the English language for Yiddish-speakers was widely distributed at the beginning of the great wave of migration to the United States, after the pogroms in southern Russia (1881). He also published an adaptation of Laurence \*Oliphant's book on Erez Israel entitled *Erez Hemdah* (1885). When he began to feel confined by his position with *Ha-Zefirah*, Sokolow started to publish the voluminous yearbooks *Ha-Asif* (6 published, 1885–94), in which all types of literature were presented. These collections had a success unprecedented in the annals of Hebrew literature in the scope of their distribution. These collections marked the beginning of Hebrew literature as a public medium and not only as a vehicle for personal entertainment.

In the spring of 1886 *Ha-Zefirah* became a daily, and Sokolow himself filled practically every issue, in addition to his many writings in other periodicals and other languages. With the aid of Y.H. Zagorodski, he also published the first lexicon of Hebrew authors (including some scholars on Judaism who wrote in other languages) entitled *Sefer ha-Zikaron* (1889). A decisive turn took place in his life with the appearance of Theodor \*Herzl. At first he received Herzl's *Jewish State* with reservations. But after his participation in the First Zionist Congress as the correspondent for *Ha-Zefirah* and his meeting with the Zionist leader, he became one of Herzl's greatest admirers, and turned *Ha-Zefirah* into his most loyal and dedicated Hebrew organ. Through this transformation, Sokolow's writing became even more ramified, and there was almost no literary genre that he did not attempt, especially in his efforts to bring Orthodox circles closer to Zionism through a series of articles that grew into entire volumes (*Le-Maranan u-le-Rabbanan*, 1901).

Sokolow translated Herzl's Zionist novel *Altneuland* into Hebrew under the title *Tel Aviv* (a site mentioned in Ezek.

3:15), by which he meant to symbolize the original name of the book (old-new land; *tel* meaning a hill of ruins, *aviv* meaning spring), and thereby inspired the name for the first Jewish city in Erez Israel. During the controversy over the \*Uganda Scheme, his newspaper was the most devoted to Herzl and the plan, although it also published articles against the Scheme. Above all, Sokolow wanted to preserve the unity of the Zionist Organization. As part of his program to combine public activities with literary endeavor, he became involved in the plan to publish a general encyclopedia in Hebrew, which never materialized because of the upheaval surrounding the 1905 revolution in Russia.

At the beginning of 1906, *Ha-Zefirah* ceased publication, and in the same year Sokolow was invited by David \*Wolffsohn to serve as the general secretary of the World Zionist Organization. His first act in this position was to establish the official Hebrew weekly of the Zionist Organization, \**Haolam* (1907), which continued to be published up to and after the establishment of the State of Israel. From that point on, Sokolow's life was intimately connected with the history of the Zionist movement (see \*Zionism). From his position as general secretary he rose to become a member of the Zionist Executive in 1911 and was reelected in 1913. He continued to write throughout this period, especially after *Ha-Zefirah* was renewed in 1910. He won the esteem of his readers and the Hebrew literary world with the publication of a selection of his articles (1902) and a jubilee book in his honor (1904), as well as by his editing of a literary collection to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of *Ha-Zefirah* (1912).

During his period of service as general secretary of the Zionist Organization, Sokolow began meeting with European personalities, an activity which continued until the end of his life. During his first visit to the United States and Canada (1913) he won the support of many Jews and non-Jews for the Zionist cause. Close to the outbreak of World War I, Sokolow visited Erez Israel as head of an investigating committee of the Zionist Organization, and after the trip he published for the first time his impressions of the country and continued to do so after his succeeding visits. With the outbreak of World War I, he moved to London and, together with Weizmann, was involved in Zionist political activity in England and in other countries (France, Italy, etc.). After Herzl, Sokolow was the first Zionist to have an audience with the pope (and the first Jew to have an audience with Pope Benedict xv) whom he informed on the affairs of the Zionist movement (1917). He played an important role in the efforts which eventually achieved the \*Balfour Declaration, and was the head of the committee which prepared the wording of the declaration, in addition to procuring the approval of statesmen from other countries for it. His name thus became linked to that of Weizmann, and he became one of the most outstanding figures in the Zionist movement both through his connections with diplomats of many nations and his deep roots in the Jewish world.

During the period of political work for the Balfour Declaration, Sokolow was also involved in preparing his monumental work entitled *History of Zionism, 1600–1918*, which came out in two volumes in 1919 (a shorter German edition came out in 1921). The work not only provides a comprehensive description of the Jewish people's attachment to Erez Israel but also describes the relationship of non-Jews to the idea of the return of the Jews to Erez Israel, and this made it a pioneering endeavor. He revealed a mass of new material, all but unknown until his time, especially on the personalities in England who had preached the return of the Jews to their homeland for hundreds of years. Sokolow wished to prove indirectly that the Balfour Declaration grew out of a rich tradition in England. In his introduction to the book, Lord Balfour expressed his own credo through a defense of the Zionist idea against opposition from a number of viewpoints. In his comprehensive introduction, Sokolow defined the foundations of Zionism in the following points:

A home for Jews who are materially or morally suffering; a home for Jewish education, learning, and literature; a source of idealism for Jews all over the world; a place in which Jews can live a healthy Jewish life; a revival of the language of the Bible; the resurrection by civilization and industry of the old home of our fathers, long neglected and ruined; the creation of a sound, strong Jewish agricultural class.

Thus Sokolow combined all three aspects of the practical, political, and cultural Zionism. Although he himself was involved in political activity throughout the years, he always emphasized the other two aspects as well.

After World War I, when the solution of all problems, including the Jewish problem, was the prevailing mood toward peace, Sokolow headed the Jewish delegation to the Paris Peace Conference. His appearance before the conference on Feb. 27, 1919, was most impressive. Weizmann described Sokolow's speech in *Trial and Error* (1949, p. 243): "... without being sentimental, it was as if two thousand years of Jewish suffering rested on his shoulders. His quiet, dignified utterance made a very deep impression on the assembly." From that time on, Sokolow appeared at every general Jewish and Zionist assembly, and was chairman of most of them. When the Zionist Executive was consolidated after the war, he was elected as its head. He was also the head of the Comité des Délégations Juives, the representative of world Jewry at the League of Nations, succeeding Julian \*Mack and Louis \*Marshall. In this position he formulated the Jewish claims, especially that of European Jewry, most notably in the field of securing Jewish rights in the new countries created after the conflict. At the Zionist London Conference (1920), which adjusted Zionist policy and organization to the post-war reality, Sokolow was not only one of the principal speakers, but also the one who named the new Zionist fund \*Keren Hayesod. From that time until the end of his life he traveled throughout the Jewish world on behalf of the fund. He again visited Palestine in the spring of 1921, at the same time that Winston \*Churchill was there, as head of the Zionist Commission (in-

stead of M. \*Ussishkin, who was then in the United States). He succeeded in undoing the effect of the Arab memoranda sent to Churchill, and took the opportunity to participate in the founding of the Hebrew Writers' Union in Erez Israel. He also did much to encourage the *yishuv* after the anti-Jewish riots that had taken place at the time. Sokolow was chosen chairman of the 12<sup>th</sup> Zionist Congress (the first congress to convene after the war; Carlsbad, 1921) and was chairman of every succeeding congress until his death, continuing the tradition of Max \*Nordau by speaking on the situation of the Jews of the Diaspora. Although he could not match Nordau's eloquence, he was far more knowledgeable than Nordau about what was happening throughout the Diaspora, in the East as well as the West. At the congresses he proved his skill in cajoling the conflicting factions, and his concluding motto, "It was a difficult Congress but a good one," became famous. He was in great demand as a public speaker. During his trips he would constantly meet with public leaders and heads of government and would obtain pro-Zionist statements from them.

When the enlarged \*Jewish Agency was established in 1929, Sokolow became chairman of its Executive. At that time, Arab riots again broke out in Palestine, and opposition, headed by Weizmann, grew in the Zionist movement against the policy of the Zionist Executive toward the Mandatory government. This subject created a storm at the 17<sup>th</sup> Zionist Congress (1931) and resulted in Weizmann's failure to be reelected president of the Zionist Organization. Sokolow was chosen in his place. He was reelected at the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress (1933), and continued in the presidency until Weizmann was again elected president at the 19<sup>th</sup> Congress (1935). During Sokolow's term as president, the Nazis rose to power in Germany, and the United States, which was the main source of Zionist funds, underwent a financial crisis. Sokolow again set out on a series of trips and mobilized a substantial amount of capital to meet the pressing needs of the Zionist endeavor. In 1935, when his last term as president of the organization ended, he was chosen honorary president of the Zionist Organization and the Jewish Agency and chairman of its Department of Education and Culture and of Mosad Bialik. He died in London. In 1956 his remains were reinterred on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem.

With all his dedicated and ramified activity in the Zionist movement for two generations, Sokolow was above all a Hebrew author and journalist (in his case it is sometimes difficult to draw an exact dividing line between these two areas of literary activity). He was also a skilled writer in a number of other languages (notably Yiddish, Polish, German, English, and French). Sokolow was the idol of the Hebrew reading public for almost three generations, and his writings are a unique example of the development of Hebrew literature from the 1870s until the end of his life in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The reading public that Sokolow created was not attracted to the Hebrew language by romanticism and nostalgia, but by the response provided by the new Hebrew literature to their actual cultural and social needs. Sokolow created a specific personal genre of writing in each generation, at first as a writer on current affairs

and afterward in other roles, especially as a journalist writing what is called in Europe the "feuilleton." He knew the secret of how to be innovative in every new generation and was thus constantly surprising and refreshing, as, for example, in his last years with his endeavors in the field of belles lettres and in his famous series of articles *Ishim* ("Personalities"), which were begun many years before, and only reached their climax late in his life. His works covering his impressions of his travels are also outstanding. His mosaic style added much to the magic of his writings, which no other Hebrew author could match. At the end of his life he worked on the preparation of a lexicon on the history of the Hebrew language (chapters of which were printed in his lifetime).

Sokolow was Hebrew literature's most prolific author for many years, and Bialik said: "If someone were to be found to collect all of Sokolow's writings – his articles, essays, feuilletons, impressions of travels, studies, stories, etc. – and bring them together in one spot, he would need 300 camels." Over the years he published many books in installments in *Ha-Zefirah* and *Haolam*, only a small portion of which was later published in book form: *Barukh Spinoza u-Zemanno* (1929), *Ha-Ani ha-Kibbuzi* (1930), and *Ishim* (3 vols., 1935). A large portion of these works, however, is still buried in periodicals in Hebrew and in other languages. Shortly before his death he published in English the book *Hibbath Zion* (1935) dealing with the Zionist idea in the modern period. After his death *Sefer Sokolow*, edited by S. \*Rawidowitz, was published, containing a selection of his early writings with an evaluation and bibliography of his works (1943). A selection of all types of his works was published in three volumes with a comprehensive monograph on him by G. Kressel (1958–61), who also put out a similar selection in Yiddish (1966).

Sedeh Nahum, a kibbutz in the Jezreel Valley, is named after Sokolow, as is Bet Sokolow, the journalists' house in Tel Aviv. The Tel Aviv municipal council offers an annual prize in journalism in his honor.

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[Getzel Kressel]