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**Sasson Sofer.** *Zionism and the Foundations of Israeli Diplomacy*. Translated from Hebrew by Dorothea Shefet-Vanson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. 449pp. Hb. £45.00 (US\$69.95), ISBN: 0 521 63012 6.

Reviewed by *Jason Sanford Greenberg*, Ph.D. Candidate in Anthropology, Temple University.

Observers of the Israeli academic scene have, over the past two decades, witnessed a number of significant changes in how Israeli and Zionist history is retold. On a very general level, those responsible for these changes have focused on the history of the *Yishuv*, the early Zionist settlement in Palestine, noting the failure of an 'older generation' to question and look beyond the narrow confines of Zionism as an ideology. The historiography of the *Yishuv*, like all studies of origins, is fraught with debates, which reflect as much upon past history as on current status. It is within the context of these debates that Sasson Sofer's *Zionism and the Foundations of Israeli Diplomacy* must be located.

Whether Sofer succeeds in revealing the 'foundations of Israeli diplomacy' in the early history of the *Yishuv*, particularly in the struggles between differing political parties and ideologies for hegemony is debatable. However, in the attempt he provides, to my knowledge, the most comprehensive guide to early Zionist political factions available. His mastery and familiarity with the history and character of Zionist politics and detailed descriptions of the ideologies and backgrounds of the major players in the *Yishuv* makes *Zionism and the Foundations of Israeli Diplomacy* a unique and useful book, one which can be recommended to the general reader. With this said, the book also shows a lack of consistency, as well as isolationism and elitism. For the reader who is looking for an actual description of the foundations of Israeli diplomacy, Sofer's book is a likely disappointment. Indeed, perhaps due to the book's commendable depth and breadth of detail it frequently digresses from its supposed topic. In addition, the book appears to be the victim of spotty translation from Hebrew, particularly the final chapter.

Sofer's main point is that up to the establishment of the Israeli State no unified approach to foreign policy existed. Its development was stilted by an inability of the major parties to go beyond the narrow confines of their ideology and dogmatism. Thus, the early Zionists relied too heavily upon the received theories of socialism, racialism, nationalism, and communism; world visions which, according to Sofer, were in the final instance "an impediment to the growth of a coherent foreign policy" (59).

Sofer examines the ideological foundations and internal politics of five political trends in the *Yishuv*: Labour, Revisionism, the Civil Right, Orthodox Judaism (both Zionist and non-Zionist) and Pan-Semitism. The first three of these trends were, at different times, contenders for hegemony, and all five contributed in some way to the present state of Israeli politics. Labour and Revisionism, are today identifiable as the precursors of Ehud Barak's *One Israel* and the *Likud*. The others, excepting the Orthodox Parties, are less easily recognizable.

The book is logically organized in six parts; Part I examines the history of Zionism and the *Yishuv*, while Parts II through VI examine each of the five political trends in *Yishuv* Zionism, each chapter detailing the different political parties within each trend, characters and ideologies.

Part I, 'Setting the Scene' attempts to link the formation of the *Yishuv*'s political ideologies to its social structure. Sofer asserts, rightfully, that "ideas must be studied in the context of the social structure in which they were formed and played a role" (8). Unfortunately, the book does not live up to this assertion. In the following chapters we are provided with an abundance of information on the development of Zionist political ideologies, the 'scene' however in which this transpires is a rather brief, unoriginal and problematic description of the history of Zionist society and politics. Sofer's description of the social structure of the *Yishuv* is contestable and superficial. For instance, Sofer insists the Palestinian economy and that of the *Yishuv* were completely separate, and that the conflict between them was "strictly political in nature" (16), both highly controversial and problematic assertions.

Part II, "Appearances and Reality," looks deeply into the foundations of Labour Zionism, as the first example of how an 'over-commitment' to ideology caused many of the early failures of Zionist politics. Sofer describes the intellectual and ideological foundation of Labour Zionism, notably the second generation of Zionist ideologists such as Ber Borochov, Nachman Syrkin and A.D. Gordon, while the early foundational ideologists Ahad Ha'Am and Hertzl are only briefly considered. Sofer argues that Labour Zionism was deeply rooted in two forms of socialism, a dogmatic evolutionary form typified by Ber Borochov, and A.D. Gordon's romantic 'Tolstoyian' notion of a return to the earth. Though to some extent

incompatible, these two approaches were combined in an attempt to provide a Zionist answer to Marx's "On the Jewish Question." In both cases, the answer to Marx was that the 'normalization' or 'proletarianisation' of the Jewish people would 'spread' Jewish class structure beyond that of the middleman, moneylender, merchant petty bourgeois. Thus for Borochoy, Gordon and most Labour Zionists, the internal renewal of the Jewish people was enough, all else was extraneous. The emphasis upon an 'introverted' and perhaps naive internal renewal, suggests Sofer, rather than a detailed and 'extroverted' view of world politics stunted the growth of a mature Israeli diplomatic approach. Thus, Zion would be found not with diplomacy or military might, but with self-realization. Politics and war were, according to Sofer, an afterthought.

Despite the fact that Labour's "approach to foreign affairs was characterized by conceptual poverty," (59) the party was somehow able to modify its overly dogmatic approach, and become, until the 1970s, the dominant party and ideology in Israeli politics. It is not clear how this happened, however Sofer appears to see as the primary cause the forceful figure of David Ben-Gurion, and the inability of any other political trend to present a unified front. The book's study of the main politicians of early Labour Zionism, David Ben-Gurion, Moshe Sharett, Berl Katznelson among others is well, perhaps overly detailed. His approach to Ben-Gurion is neither laudatory nor overly critical, presenting him as a great but flawed leader, who in the end destroys his own party (102). Much attention is paid to the conflict between Ben-Gurion and Chaim Weizmann, displaying the nature of Ben-Gurion's ascent to power, and the destructive nature of party politics.

While Sofer's attitude toward Labour Zionism appears rather dispassionate and occasionally a bit boring, his approach to right-wing Revisionism in Part III is brief, but much more interesting (see also Sofer's *Begin: An Anatomy of Leadership*; New York, 1988). Ze'ev Jabotinsky's role as both founder and ideologist of Revisionism is well documented and a good read. Much however, of the three chapters on Revisionism appears apologist, particularly the role of Menachem Begin in the Deir-Yassin Massacre and the sinking of the Altalena (235-36).

For Sofer the early Revisionists, particularly Jabotinsky offered to Zionism that which Labour could not, a unified theory of international power and politics (213). However, internal conflict within Revisionism destroyed any possibility of facing Labour with a united front. Jabotinsky's vision of international alliances based on national interests and pressure politics conflicted with that of a younger generation of Revisionists. This led, according to Sofer, to a split between the Revisionist leadership, Menachem Begin in his example, and the more active terrorist organizations, such as the Irgun and Lehi, leading to schism and eventually the dissolution of Revisionism.

Parts IV and V, on the General Zionists and Orthodox Judaism respectively, are the least comprehensive of the book. Indeed, these are areas that are deserving of some serious attention by historians. Sofer however, dismisses the early foundations of the *Yishuv*, such as the Rothschild's Vineyards on Mt. Carmel by claiming that the "history of the Civil Right is distinguished by the extent of its economic power compared with its political weakness[...] its contribution to Israel's political thought was minimal" (271). Examining the early history of the *Yishuv* however indicates that while the Civil Right's contribution to Zionist political thought might not be obvious, it is quite clear that the labour policies of Rothschild's plantations heavily influenced the future of Zionism, and most certainly influenced Zionist political thought in relation to non-Western Jews and the Palestinians (see Gershon Shafir's *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*; Berkeley, 1996)

Similarly, the Religious Jewish trends, whether Zionist or not, are given short shrift. With the astounding growth of *Shas*, an Ultra-Orthodox Jewish party supported primarily by Jews of Middle Eastern background (*Sephardim*, *Mizrahim*), and their present keystone position in Barak's coalition, it is of undeniable importance to understand the foundations of these groups. All too frequently historians of Israel and the *Yishuv* ignore the existence and influence of the thousands of Middle Eastern Jews who immigrated to Israel during the 1950s.

Sofer's final section, "The Boundaries of the Intelligentsia," particularly the section on the 'Semites' and the 'Canaanites,' is, at least for this reader, the most interesting part of the book. An often forgotten chapter in Israeli intellectual history, the notion of 'pan-semitism' whether from the radical right or left, offered, for the first time, a recognition of a shared background and plight of many of the 'combatants,' as well as a realization that the future of Israel/Palestine was not necessarily Eurocentric. Pan-semitism failed to make much of an impact, however it raised the recognition that the Sephardi Jews and Arabs shared many similarities, and may have, at one time, offered a bridge between opponents. While Sofer appears genuinely interested in Pan-Semitism, he gives short shrift to what might be considered its practical application, the Sephardi (in this case the native Palestinian-Jews) Elite, notably Eliyahu Eliachar, whose ideas are today reflected in the work of Ella Shohat and Ammiel Alcalay.

Despite Sofer's initial call for context, what is so clearly missing from *Zionism and the Foundations of Israeli Diplomacy* is

a vision of Zionism *in situ*; seeing the actors and action with a comprehensive and comprehensible background. Sofer's statement "only a few hundred people were to determine the nature, ethos and myths of Israeli society" (60) reveals the major flaw in this book, which is, ironically, Sofer's main criticism of the founders of Zionism; a complete inability to consider external (to Jewish interests and the *Yishuv*) influence in the development of Zionist Foreign Policy. He treats the development of Zionism in isolation. Indeed the influence of the Palestinian people, other than their mere existence and the 1936 Revolt, is notably lacking. For that matter, other Arabs and Turks are also missing. Another glaring absence is that of women. In a book loaded with names and characters, Sofer decides to mention only five women. It is a bit odd that neither Golda Meir, nor Henrietta Szold, both obvious figures in Israeli diplomacy and politics, is mentioned in anything but passing.

There is much to praise in *Zionism and the Foundations of Israeli Diplomacy*; it provides a well balanced, detailed and much needed introduction to *Yishuv* politics and ideologies. There is also much to criticize; it shows a lack of theoretical sophistication, isolationism and elitism. These are, I would suggest, caused by Sofer's failure to study the development of Zionist ideologies "[...] in the context of the social structure in which they were formed and played a role" (8). The social structure of the *Yishuv* was not, in anyway imaginable, isolated from the Palestinians, Ottomans or Hashemites. Indeed, it is certain that the social structure of the *Yishuv* was determined by its relationship to its 'other.' In the context of the ongoing debates within the Israeli Academe, this book clearly reflects both the advantages and the shortcomings of Zionist historiography, an applaudable depth of detail, yet an uncritical acceptance of an ingenuous Zionism.