



Begin: A Biography.

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books, articles and chapters in books written in English. Of a large number of possible entries, Lewanski has selected those which he has judged to be more consequential and significant in terms of their quality and general availability. The decision on what to include and what to omit could not have always been easy. Walerian Krasinski's *Historical sketch of the rise, progress and decline of the reformation in Poland* (published in 1838–40) is a very important source indeed, but certainly not generally available. As this has, however, been included, in the company of John Bowring's *Specimens of Polish poets* (1827), and *The papers relating to the Scots in Poland* (1915), should not other, very important books, concerned with Poland and written in the early twentieth century by English or American historians, such as W. R. Morfill, Lord Eversley, Monica Gardner, Ninian Hill, J. H. Harvey, Julia Smith Orvis, Walter Alison Phillips and F. E. Whitton also be included? One ought, however, to accept the author's decision that the main stress must be upon the most recent publications. Great efforts have been made by the author to include all the more significant of the latter, but there are some omissions. The following are not mentioned: Jerzy Pietrkiewicz's *The third Adam*; W. S. Kuniczak's *The thousand hour day*; Eva Fournier's *Poland*; Bernard Newman's *Portrait of Poland*; A. Attman's *The Polish and Russian markets in international trade (1500–1650)*; G. Blazynski's *Flashpoint Poland*; and *War through children's eyes*, edited by Irena and Jan Gross.

A more serious weakness seems to be listing only very few of the numerous articles on Polish matters in such periodicals as *The Polish Review* of New York, *Foreign Affairs* and *The Slavonic and East European Review* of London, or *Soviet Studies* of Glasgow; and failing to list *Wiadomości*, one of the most important literary periodicals published in London in Polish between 1939 and 1983. There is also no reference to a very substantial bibliography of books on Polish themes in English by Norman Davies, *Poland, past and present* (Newtonville, 1977), which includes over 1800 entries. As Professor Lewanski intimates that he would welcome suggestions for the inclusion of additional items in the next edition of the volume, the above-mentioned shortcomings will, no doubt, be taken into account by him.

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Middle East

Begin: a biography. By Eric Silver. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson. 1984. 278pp. Index. £12.50.

MENACHEM BEGIN is the most controversial Prime Minister in Israel's history, with Golda Meir running him a close second. He survived eight successive electoral defeats to become Israel's longest-serving Prime Minister after the founding father, David Ben-Gurion. During his six years of autocratic rule, Begin exacerbated the ethnic conflict within Israeli society; contributed to an erosion of its democratic and liberal values, presenting to the outside world the ugly and vengeful face of Zionism; and he presided over a catastrophic mismanagement of the national economy which brought the country to the verge of economic disaster. In foreign affairs, the mismanagement of the peace process with Egypt, the escalation of the fight against the Palestinian people and the ill-conceived and ill-fated invasion of Lebanon stand out as his most monumental failures. With such a consistent record of botching up virtually anything he touched, it is not surprising that Begin felt he 'cannot go on' and faded from the Israeli political scene, not with the usual bang but a whimper. Behind him, this fiercely nationalistic and proud Jew left a country in a state of material and psychological exhaustion, incurred in pursuit of his illusions of grandeur and geopolitical fantasies.

It cannot be too strongly stressed, however, that this was not just the failure of one individual, but of a school of thought in Israeli politics, the school of thought which seeks to secure the whole of the ancient homeland west of the Jordan for the Jewish people, regardless of all the practical consequences. Eric Silver, in this timely biography, does indeed present Begin as Israel's first ideological Prime Minister. But he does not recognize that

Begin's greatest failures are the inevitable product of a bankrupt ideology. Silver sees Begin as a complex character, full of contradictory impulses: 'an unrepentant terrorist who won the Nobel Peace Prize, then launched another war. A democrat and an autocrat. A courtly rabble-rouser, Polish gentleman and Levantine cult hero. A man of honour with whom it was wise to read the small print. A conspirator who found it hard to keep a secret' (p. 253). Though not an admirer of Begin, Silver tends to keep his opinions to himself and refrains from passing harsh judgements on his subject. Implicitly, Silver is guided by the motto that 'the historian is not a judge, still less a hanging judge'. The result is a sober and balanced biography but a singularly uninspired one. Silver traces, interestingly, the roots of Begin's assertive Jewish nationalism to the impact of Zeev Jabotinsky, to the trauma of the holocaust and to the revolt against British rule in Palestine. But when it comes to Begin's years in power, which Silver was in a position to observe at close quarters as the *Guardian* correspondent in Israel, the narrative becomes unaccountably bland and superficial. Consequently this can be regarded as no more than an interim biography. Begin is too important and too controversial a figure in modern Jewish history to escape having his biography written by an historian who is not just a judge but a hanging judge.

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Abandonment of illusions: Zionist political attitudes towards Palestinian Arab nationalism, 1936–1939. By Yehoyada Haim. Boulder, Col.: Westview. 1983. (Distrib. in UK by Bowker, Epping.) 173pp. Index. Pb.: £14.75.

THIS study in the evolution of Zionist political attitudes towards Palestinian Arab nationalism in the 1930s must provoke the question: could a conflict have been avoided? In terms of official Zionist thinking the answer is 'yes'. It did not attribute Arab hostility to nationalism; second, it assumed that such hostility would diminish by virtue of the economic benefits brought by the Zionist enterprise; third, with the growing achievement of a Zionist *fait accompli*, the Arabs would have no choice but to accept the inevitable. But the disturbances of 1929 and still more those of 1936 denied these expectations, and the reality of Palestinian Arab nationalism became unmistakably evident. How Zionist opinion evolved from this point does not make happy reading, for Dr Haim's thesis eventually discloses the inevitability of conflict. He is primarily concerned of course with Zionist opinion—secondarily with British—and the Arab viewpoint is relatively undocumented. But it is certainly not unrepresented or overlooked and its presence, even in a somewhat shadowy form, gives this book as much objectivity and impartiality as may be expected from any author dealing with this contentious topic. The heart of the conflict was clearly diagnosed by the Peel Commission of 1937, which proposed partition as the only resolution to a conflict in which conflicting political aspirations were pitted against each other. But although the partition scheme was, with qualifications, accepted by majority Zionist opinion, it was rejected by the Arabs. Only Ben-Gurion, it seems, grasped the full weight of Arab opposition. 'He believed', writes Haim, 'that the Arab states did want to help their Palestinian Arab brothers, and that they opposed partition from Pan-Arab motives which aimed at the establishment of an Arab federation that included an Arab Palestine' (p. 132). But majority Zionist opinion took a more sanguine view. Ben-Gurion was not proved wholly correct, of course, in so far as conflicts among the Arab states precluded any notion of an Arab federation. Yet he was more right than wrong. In his concluding remarks Dr Haim makes it clear that all the Zionist parties and groupings were in varying degrees subject to illusions and mistaken perceptions. The Revisionists best understood the basic national conflict but their proposed solution was the most impractical. The official Zionists were pragmatic but refused to acknowledge Arab political rights. The Binationalists understood that without Arab consent only force could solve the conflict but refused to accept minority status for the Jews in Palestine—which was a *sine qua non* for the Arabs. Hashomer Hatzair must fail in its endeavour to bring together the Jewish and Arab working class, for nationalist emotions had priority over the notion of class solidarity. On the Hebrew and Jewish side this book is excellently documented from published and unpublished sources. It is indeed a masterly analysis of Zionist opinion at a crucial stage of its development.

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