

WHAT HAS BEEN DONE
AND WHAT REMAINS TO BE DONE:
RECONSIDERING THE DEVELOPMENT
OF ACADEMIC JEWISH AND ISRAEL
STUDIES IN RUSSIAN¹

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I

These notes stem from my reflections over the last several years on some trends in Russian Judaica or as they also say, Jewish studies. Although some surveys of the current state of the research, teaching and publishing activities in the sphere of Jewish studies have already been published by competent young specialists,² I nonetheless think that this theme is still in need of due critical consideration. The articles on the state of “Jewish matters” in the post-Soviet area are often at fault for window dressing and create a magnificent picture which only remotely resembles the true state of affairs; often the same is true about published scholarly treatises on the state of Jewish and Israel studies in general. Since for the last ten years I have been actively involved in teaching and research in the field of Russian-language Jewish (and to a greater degree, Israel) studies, made a total of forty visits to all of the European republics of the former Soviet Union on work-related travels, published there seven monographs and more than a hundred articles in practically every important Jewish publication, and given lectures at tens of universities – from Moscow to Tomsk and from St. Petersburg to Nizhni Novgorod – I consider myself to be entitled to offer to the reader the results of my reflections gained through much suffering.

I begin with a banal statement that any half-full glass is at the same time half-empty. I therefore state straightaway that the half-empty part is of more interest to me, since in my opinion it is that half that has been under represented in the literature on this theme. Immeasurably more has been written on what has been done than on what remains to be done, and the latter is far more significant in determining the directions of activity in the near future.

In 2006 I conducted a series of interviews with many leading Jewish scholars in Moscow engaged in research and teaching in the field of Jewish studies (the interviewees included: Rashid Kaplanov (prematurely deceased in November 2007), chairman of the Academic Council of the Association for University Teaching of Jewish Civilization “Sefer”; Elena Nosenko, the senior research fellow of the Russian Academy of Science Institute of Oriental Studies; Professor Leonid Katsis from the Russian State University of Humanities; Associate Professor Alexander Sinelnikov from the Faculty of Sociology of the Moscow State University, the President of the Institute of the Middle Eastern Studies; Eugene Satanovsky, the chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Moscow Jewish University, and others; all the interviews were videotaped). I quote only a part of the remarks which they shared with me:

...In Russia there is still no serious Jewish historical ethnographical museum and archive...

...The majority of the Jews and members of their families living now in Russia know neither Hebrew nor Yiddish, nor any Jewish religious tradition...

...In Russia the tradition of training and electing rabbis has been interrupted; almost all of the rabbis in the country are foreign emissaries not very knowledgeable in local community life, and there are no others...

...In Russia there is not a single fundamental Jewish library which receives at least one copy of all (or almost all) Russian books published in the world in the field of Jewish studies...

...In Russia there are only now appearing institutions where one can try to receive a research grant for a study in Jewish history – and in

addition, for the time being, this is only in the history of Russian and East European Jewry (note parenthetically that these institutions also distribute “oligarchic” money)...

...All research of the mentality and self-consciousness of Russian Jewry is actually based on samples taken among the inhabitants of large cities. There exists no research on Jewish respondents living outside the largest cities (note that according to the 2002 census half of the Jewish population in the country lives outside Moscow and St. Petersburg)...

...The Jewish institutions of higher education and educational programs cannot function without outside financial and intellectual support, and several decades will pass before such institutional independence can become possible...

It is on these and other problems of the contemporary state of Jewish (in a wider sense of the word) and Israel studies in the Russian language that I would like to reflect now.

II

Truly, for the last twenty years the research in Jewish and Israel studies in the Russian language has been developing at an unprecedented tempo. The number of publications by researchers and journalists from Russia, Ukraine, Israel, USA, Germany and other countries dealing with the Russian-Jewish Diaspora issues is also growing. Not only Jewish kindergartens or schools, but higher education institutions have been created. The number of Russian books on Judaic and Israeli studies crossed the 1,000 threshold long ago and dozens of various periodicals publish materials primarily “on the Jewish theme.” And yet there are many reasons preventing one from becoming euphoric about the situation in this discipline.

First and foremost, the *quality of a considerable number of Russian-language publications in the field of Jewish and Israel studies remains comparatively low*. Over the last century, Russian Jews have played and are still playing a tremendous role in the development and accumulation of knowledge in the field of social sciences and humanities; in this connection, it suffices to name psychologists Lev

Vygotsky (1896–1934) and Sergei Rubinstein (1889–1960), literary critics Boris Eikhenbaum (1886–1959), Victor Shklovsky (1893–1984), Julian Oksman (1895–1970), Lidia Ginzburg (1902–1990), Grigory Gukovsky (1902–1950), Vladimir Admoni (1909–1993), Efim Etkind (1918–1999), Yury Lotman (1922–1993) and Natan Eidelman (1930–1989), psycholinguists Alexander Luria (1902–1977) and Rebecca Frumkina, medievalist historians Matvey Gukovsky (1898–1971) and Aron Gurevich (1924–2006), historians of the 19th century Yevgeny Tarle (1875–1955) and Albert Manfred (1906–1976), social psychologist Igor Kon, theorist of philosophy and cultural studies Gregory Pomerants, eminent expert in international relations Gregory Mirsky, philosophers and sociologists Vladimir Bibler (1918–2000), Michael Gefter (1918–1995), Pavel Gurevich and Arkady Gofman, art historians Abram Efros (1888–1954) and Juriy German and many others. The role of humanities scholars in Russian emigration also was a significant one; suffice it to name the philosopher Semen Frank (1877–1950), the sociologist George Gurvitch (1894–1965) or the linguist Roman Jakobson (1896–1982)... Unfortunately, no one of these people had ever dealt with Jewish history, philosophy or social studies. As to those who occupy a leading place in the world of the *Judaica Rossica*, with all due respect, they are at most good professionals.

It so happens that as *leading Russian specialists in Judaic studies are considered people who have had no systematic education (due to obvious reasons) in that sphere*; many of them do not know (or scarcely know) Hebrew. When important books and papers in Jewish studies appear, the overwhelming majority of them are devoted to the history and culture of Russian and East European Jewry. This rule of course, like any other rule, has its exceptions,³ but the majority of respected Russian scholars in humanities and social sciences dealing with Jewish and Israel studies are not the “stars” of Russian, let alone world scholarship.

This “*quality problem*” has not yet been solved either by Israeli Russian-language scholars in humanities and social sciences. Although in 1996 the Hebrew University of Jerusalem opened the Chais Center for promoting Judaic studies in the Russian language, more than ten of whose Russian-

speaking immigrant lecturers were awarded Ph.D.'s degrees in Israel, the editorial board of its periodical *Vestnik* is experiencing great difficulties in finding acceptable original scholarly papers on Jewish history, culture and sociology; the same was true about the Center's second journal, *Evreiskoe obrazovanie* [Jewish Education], published from 2000 till 2004. Most of the books published in the *Bibliotheca Judaica* series – a joint project of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Russian-Israeli publishing house “Gesharim”/“Mosty kulturey” [Bridges of Culture] – are translations of works by Israeli and American scholars. The share of translation among the publications of the Academic program for teaching Jewish and Israel studies in Russian of the Open University of Israel is even higher. Only an extremely limited number of works written by Israeli Russian-speaking scholars have become events in the world of intellectual literature and have been translated into other languages. An example is the historian Mikhail Beizer's book *The Jews of St. Petersburg: Excursions Through a Noble Past* published in English and Hebrew after it was published in Russian. It should be noted that also in that case a successful author specializes in the history of Russian Jewry. It is completely obvious that for success and acceptance by the world scholarship of Jewish studies in the Russian language it is necessary that it learn to be at the world level, and not only judged within the studies of the history of Russian Jews themselves and their culture. For the time being, there are few specialists of such a level in Russian Judaica, and the great Jewish historians of the past, Shimon Dubnow (1860–1941) and Yuli Gessen (1871–1939) remain unreachable giants.

Another important problem concerns teaching: today in Israel there is no university where a student can obtain the baccalaureate studying in Russian. The closest to that is the Open University's academic program for teaching Jewish and Israel studies in Russian, which on February 6, 2005 was given the right to award bachelors in Jewish studies to their students in the CIS countries. In order that this decision be implemented and the first Russian bachelors graduate from the OUI, a number of some additional courses should be developed and introduced; it is highly probable that this task will be realized before the end of 2008.

The issue of the possibility of studying for the baccalaureate in Russian in Israel is presently discussed by the Open University authorities and not by any other university. In Israel there exists only one accredited institution of higher learning (the Tel Aviv City College created in 2002), which in fact is an affiliation of the Moscow State University of Economics, Statistics and Informatics (MESI) where courses are given in the Russian language, but only for two specialties, management and programming. Some Israeli universities, as the Hebrew University of Jerusalem or the Bar Ilan University, teach some courses in Jewish history in Russian, but only at the preparatory departments within the framework of annual programs for students from the CIS. The attempts to transform the Center for Academic and Educational Relations with the CIS and Baltic states into a structure of some real influence have for the time being failed due to various reasons, not always financial ones. *As a result, the Israel Russian-language humanities studies lack basic conditions for creating scientific schools in which ideas could be generated and serious long-term research projects carried out with the participation of Russian-speaking scholars of different generations.* The one- or two-month long periodic teaching travels of Russian-speaking Israeli scholars to the Jewish university centers in Moscow and St. Petersburg cannot of course solve that problem.

The situation in Russia seemed to be more favorable, but recent time trends fail to give any reasons for optimism. The creation in the early 1990s of a quality Jewish University in Moscow, and in St. Petersburg, of a sufficiently professional Institute of Jewish Studies, laid the groundwork for professional higher education institutions, which could have trained highly qualified specialists in a broad spectrum of Judaica-related disciplines. To our great regret, many Israeli and American Jewish organizations that invested tens of millions of dollars into various nationally oriented programs in Russia did not deem it necessary to support these institutions, whose only sponsor turned out to be the Russian Jewish Congress. The financing problems, along with the evident difficulty of attracting students (especially the draft-aged young men) to the non-state higher education institutions, as

well as a decrease in the Jewish population – all these factors resulted in their factual self-liquidation in the 2007/2008 academic year. They were integrated as small departments at the Russian State University of Humanities (The Jewish University of Moscow) and at the Herzen State Pedagogical University (St. Petersburg Institute of Jewish Studies). In the fall of 2006 the JUM library – which for fifteen years was practically the only place for the collection and storage of new books on Jewish and Israel studies published in the whole of the FSU – also ceased to exist. Eugene Satanovsky has made a sad conclusion: “The opportunity for the Russian Jewish community to create a non-state higher learning institution with a deep study of academic Jewish studies has been missed.”⁴

Taking into account the importance for scholars gained in recent years by the Internet communications, one cannot but mention the problem of an almost complete absence on the Internet of texts of the most important works in the field of Russian-language Jewish studies. The largest publishers in the Russian Jewish world are now *Gesharim/Mosty kultury* [Bridges of Culture], the Open University of Israel, the *Moscow House of the Jewish Book* and the Kiev Institute of Judaica. On the Internet there are no full texts of books published by them (and altogether they have published about 500 volumes). Of more than two hundred books published by the extinct Jerusalem publishing house *Biblioteka aliya* [The Repatriation Library], only a few volumes can be found on the Internet. Of high importance should be considered the fact that the Internet contains in full the eleven volumes of the Jewish encyclopedia in Russian published in Israel in a considerably expanded version as compared to the printed edition,⁵ but this obviously is not sufficient. Although the Internet provides a considerable amount of materials from such journals as *Novaia evreiskaia shkola* (New Jewish school, St. Petersburg), *Evrei Evrazii* (Jews of Eurasia, Kiev), *Vremia iskat'* (Time for a Quest, Jerusalem), the most important Russian language publications in the field of Jewish studies (*Vestnik evreiskogo unversiteta* [Herald of the Jewish University], *Evreiskoe obrazovanie* [Jewish Education], *Judaica Rossica* and *Paralleli* [Parallels] have no electronic versions. As a result,

researchers, lecturers and students are devoid of a speedy access to the texts of necessary books and papers, and the Russian Jewish Internet is full of pseudo-scholarly and somewhat-scholarly materials, and the scholarly level of many of them leaves much to be desired. Not of small importance is the fact that *Israel has no library which has all (or even the majority) of the books published in Russian on Jewish history and culture*. The great effort put forth by Klara Elbert, the founder of the only large “Russian” library in Israel – located in Jerusalem in a small, although four-storey detached house – bore fruits that have considerably surpassed the initial expectations;⁶ however even that excellent library’s collection does not have enough scholarly and popular publications on Jewish topics published in the FSU/CIS, Baltic states and Israel. The modest budget of the only Israeli municipal “Russian” library – whose building was sold in the end of 2007 by its owner, the billionaire Mortimer Zuckerman, so that there exists a real threat that the library will find itself literally in the open – does not allow it to order expensive books, and its funds are replenished by the children donating their late parents’ book collections or by making exchanges with other libraries. As a result, new scholarly publications, which often have very small circulations, almost never reach the library shelves.

Another important problem in the sphere of Jewish studies in the post-Soviet countries is that *there exist practically no research grant programs for studies abroad*. The existing programs are designated almost exclusively for young people, students and postgraduate students (and many programs stipulate a 30-year age limit for the potential recipients). Regarding the Russian researchers who have already established themselves as specialists, for them there exist no fellowships or grants for studying (in Israel or elsewhere). As a result, among the staff of the Israel department at the Russian Academy of Science Institute of Oriental Studies – and it should be noted that this is the only department completely devoted to Israel studies at a reputable academic institution in the CIS – there are people who visited Israel five to ten years ago, and those who submit dissertations on the Jews in medieval Spain have never visited Spain. Obviously, the impossibility of conducting field research,

of working in relevant archives, or of simply “imbibing” the gamut of impressions of the country which is one’s subject of study, causes grave harm to both the quality of research and the status of researchers in the eyes of their Western colleagues who consider unthinkable a situation where an author is isolated from the subject of his/her study. Russian and Ukrainian researchers in Jewish and Israeli studies are represented at international congresses far less than they deserve. For instance, in the last ten years three congresses of the International Association of Israel Studies were held in Israel (in 2000 at Tel Aviv University, in 2004 at the Hebrew University, in 2007 at the Open University). In each of these congresses only a single researcher from Russia took part. In the first case, it was the then head of the Israel department of the Institute for Oriental Studies (IOS) Andrey Fedorchenko who now heads the Middle East center in the Moscow Institute of International Relations, and in the second and third case it was Irina Massiukova, a research fellow of the Israel department of the Institute of Oriental Studies. Of course, this is totally insufficient for “incorporating” Russian Israel Studies into the international community of researchers studying the Jewish state.

III

I would like to dwell upon the development of Israel studies as a research discipline. For the last fifteen years the Israel studies in the Russian language have been developing at an unprecedented tempo. While in the previous years the majority of the literature on Israel published in Russia bore sharply anti-Israeli headings, in the last sixteen years following the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, there has been published in Moscow a considerable body of balanced and even openly pro-Israeli literature. The total number of more or less serious books and articles on Israel (including those on the history of the Zionist movement, an immediate forerunner of the independent Jewish state) published in the Russian language is close to four hundred – a situation that seemed completely impossible only twenty years ago.

As far as I know, a more or less complete bibliographical index of Russian-language books and articles on Israel has never been published. In 2001, Alek D. Epstein, Andrey Fedorchenko and Nina Kheimets compiled an annotated index of the main works on the history, policy, economics and social problems of the State of Israel that appeared after 1985;⁷ in particular, the index included 80 books and articles written in Russian and another 49 books by Israeli and American authors translated into Russian. In August 2005, under the aegis of the Research Authority of the Open University of Israel and the Oranim Academic College, I prepared a bibliography guide of the main works on the history of Zionism, and on the policy, economics and social history of the State of Israel, which included 314 books and articles, both original (a total of 185) and translations. Since that time, another several dozens of publications have appeared and the reactions of readers have made it possible to find a number of relevant publications from former years not included by the compiler into the bibliographical guide, but whose expanded version is now being prepared for publication.

I would like to note with pleasure that in spite of stereotypic expectations only a quarter of the publications deal with the place of Israel in the conflict with the Arabs and its role in opposing Islamic extremism and terrorism. I consider that to be a positive factor, since it grieves me deeply when the social, cultural and political life of Israel, a unique country in many respects, remains in the shadow of the Arab-Israeli (and in a narrower sense, Palestinian-Israeli) conflict. About 10% of the Russian language publications deal with the history of the Zionist movement and the Jewish community in Eretz Israel/Palestine in the pre-state period, about a quarter with the social, political and judicial aspects of Israeli life, about 10% with the economy, agriculture and foreign trade, about the same number with the development of culture, science and education. More than thirty Russian language books and articles are devoted to the Israeli 'Russian' community, and about ten publications concern the Israeli Arabs. In other words, today, even when one knows only Russian (not knowing Hebrew or English), it is possible to collect several presentable shelves of literature on Israel, and

the books will cover practically every aspect of the country's history and its present.

It should be noted that a situation has gradually come into being when the Russian-language publications on Israel which appear are written by three groups of authors: the researchers and journalists who live and work in Russia (sometimes in Ukraine and Belarus, although very few of them); the sociologists, political scientists and ethnographers who emigrated to Israel from the CIS; and the Israeli and American (and extremely rare – European and Arabic) scholars, diplomats and journalists. Of the total number of publications, slightly more than a third are written by authors from the CIS, about a quarter by Russian-speaking Israelis, and about 40% are translations of works published in foreign languages. Authors from different countries meet also at scholarly conferences, in particular at annual forums of the Association for University teaching of Jewish civilization “Sefer,” where two or three sections are always devoted to contemporary Israel. Such a state of affairs ensures a constructive enrichment of the Russian and Russian-Israeli “idea market,” mutually benefiting both the authors and the readers.

Taking into account that many books about Israel are being published in Russia and articles in the periodic press number many hundreds (if not thousands) annually, there arises a conclusion that everybody wishing to get any information about Israel can do that without an effort, since there are riches of informative literature available. But if one begins to ponder this, the situation does not seem to be so obvious.

Firstly, four quite different categories of people are potential readers of books and articles about Israel.

The first – and the largest one – includes Russian citizens of various ethnic origins for whom the entire Middle East and Israel in particular is one of the regions they are interested in, since the news from there threatens an outbreak of a world war especially dangerous because of the existence of nuclear weapons in the region. Whatever their stand is towards Israel, as a rule, they perceive it as a foreign country at the periphery of their own intellectual life. “Let it be all quiet there,” they

say when meeting an Israeli or Palestinian tourist, having as a rule no special desire to delve into the entanglements of Middle Eastern history and politics.

The second group could be described as the adherents of the idea of “Russian statehood,” the so-called national patriots whose stand towards Middle Eastern problems is tainted with both nostalgia for the basically anti-American Soviet-Arab friendship and antisemitism. However, as a rule these people do not enjoy perceiving themselves as antisemites, so they have their own court Jew, Israel Shamir, a native of Novosibirsk who lived for many years in Israel and whose anti-Israeli and antisemitic nonsense they consume and reproduce on the pages of their publications thus “killing two birds with one stone”: they cannot be accused of antisemitism (the author himself is a Jew!) and Israel (and also the USA) is called names short of four-letter words. “*As I see it, the main moving force behind this war,*” Shamir said in an interview to the *Zavtra* [Tomorrow] newspaper in February 2003, on the eve of the second Iraq campaign, “is the Judaic ideology in American politics. We see it from the concrete people and names, take for instance Wolfowitz and other Jewish leaders in America, prominent Zionists still dreaming of a great Israel. As a result of this war, they hope to tremendously weaken the entire Arab world, to deport to Iraq all the inhabitants of Palestine, to increase Israel’s geographic space and to divert the development of the world in another direction. They think: let us tear oilfields from the Saudi Arabia, from Iraq, hand them over under the American-Israeli control. Deport all the Palestinians to the inhabited Iraqi lands under a permanent control of the American army...In a long perspective a madder plan: to destroy Jerusalem mosques and to build a Jewish temple instead. These people who have already invested millions of dollars in their plan, do mystically believe in the impending coming of a Jewish Messiah, that is, the Anti-Christ who will transform everything. Presently entire Israel is covered with posters calling for that.”⁸ All this nonsense is a pure invention from the beginning to the end, but it completely fits the usual pattern: the Jews had crucified Christ and now “entire Israel is covered with posters” welcoming the coming of the

Anti-Christ, simple and nice; to make the picture complete only ritual murders of Christian children should be added. The stand of this group towards Israel is only successor of the state nationalist antisemitism of the late Stalin era.

The third group of readers differs in principle from the first two: it consists of Russian Jews (including the offspring of mixed marriages) and of their relatives of various ethnicity; practically all of them have relatives or close acquaintances in Israel. Moreover, many of them have been to Israel (in many cases, several times), and very many have considered immigrating to the Jewish state. Although these people have decided not to tie their fate to it, Israel remains for them not an alien country and even not a foreign country; every terrorist act in a Jerusalem or Tel Aviv bus strikes a chord of pain in their hearts. As a rule their stand towards the Middle East conflict is obviously a pro-Israeli one, and it can vary from a basically atheistic humanitarian internationalism (a compromise is needed: our people that for centuries have been a persecuted minority should show magnanimity to the minorities among us) to the radical ultra-nationalism in the spirit of the late Rabbi Kahane: “Only a transfer of the Arabs will bring Israel peace and security.”

The fourth group of the readers of books, journals and newspapers published in Russian is the most non-trivial one with respect to the theme under consideration: these are the people who lived in Israel for many years and now live and work in Moscow and other Russian cities. The tens of thousands of Israeli passport holders who live and work in Russia differ from other consumers of these information products in that they know the situation in Israel from within. Their views may vary from the worshipping of “a beautiful flourishing country created on the desert stones of Palestine,” “the only democracy in the Middle East,” “a world center of high technologies” to the condemnation of “a rotten, bureaucratized village, corrupt to the core” and “handed over to the Arab bandits by the mercenary left-wingers.” Whatever their stand towards the Jewish state, these people differ in that, as a rule, they get the information about the events in the Middle East mostly from the Israeli Internet sites, both in Russian and Hebrew, and the majority of them have a good command of the latter.

However, the specific character of the situation consists not only in that different categories of readers of literature, written in Russian, about Israel exist. The literature itself is of rare variety and can be divided into several kinds.

The first group of books and articles has been written by the authors of the “Primakov school”: arrogant towards Israel and extremely critical towards the USA, they are slightly changed versions of the writings published earlier by the same people and their spiritual mentors under the headings like *Palestine in the Zionist Hangman Noose* or *Racism under the Blue Star*. Yevgeny Primakov himself has never renounced either his monograph *The History of a Complot: The US Middle Eastern Policy in the 1970s to early 1980s*⁹ or a doctoral thesis under the blasphemous heading: “Connections between Zionism and Nazism, 1933–1945,” defended in 1982 at the Institute of Oriental Studies then headed by him, by the present head of the PNA Mahmoud Abbas. In his book, *The Middle East Onstage and Backstage* published in 2006 (an English edition is going to be published by the Free Press in 2009), Primakov develops practically the same ideas as in the Brezhnev times: e.g. denies Arafat’s complicity in the terror (“It is known that the Palestinian part commits among others terrorist acts against the Israeli peaceful population. According to the Israeli authorities’ scheme, it was Arafat who was behind these acts. I completely disagree with that,” and further: “Some people say that Arafat purposefully did not prevent terrorist measures thinking that they allegedly would force the Israeli leadership to agree to a compromise. I disagree with that”)¹⁰ by the way, in contrast to Israel (“Israel’s antiterrorist measures were also carried out in a terrorist manner”)...¹¹ Israel’s answer to a Hezbollah provocation when six Israeli soldiers were killed and two taken hostage is described by Primakov as the “bloody war in Lebanon conducted by Israeli soldiery.”¹² His stand towards Israel remains despising and arrogant: the indignation expressed by the Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni in connection with Moscow’s invitation of leaders of the Islamic terrorist organization Hamas is called in his book an “exaltation” which could be “excused” in a “woman,”¹³ while the disapproval by Israel’s ambassador in Moscow

of the stand taken by the Russian leadership aroused Primakov's indignation: "An ambassador should adhere to the elementary code of diplomatic conduct in his/her host country. If an ambassador expresses such utterances about the policy of this country, he/she has nothing to do here."¹⁴ For twenty-four years (from 1967 to 1991) there was no Israeli ambassador in Moscow and it seems that Primakov feels sincerely nostalgic for those times. Although in present-day Russia Academician Primakov is considered the most reputable and authoritative expert on the Middle East, it seems doubtful that those who wish to understand the entanglement of the history and the present-day state of the Arab-Israeli conflict should begin with becoming acquainted with his works, or with the writings of his disciples and followers.

The second kind of publications is the slanderous inventions by Israel Shamir mentioned above and his equally-minded adherents who relate that "in the Holy Land of Palestine a racist regime of apartheid is flourishing"¹⁵ and that "the capture of the Al-Aqsa mosque and the construction of a Jewish shrine on its place is the wild dream of the Zionist Jews."¹⁶ Again, these so-called articles can not be considered to any degree as an informative source of knowledge about Israel, its policy, history or culture.

An antithesis of the printed and electronic production of these two kinds is the books and journals published by various Jewish publishers. A certain problem exists in that sometimes these publications are propagandistic in character, and the fateful existence problems of the Jewish state and more so, the sufferings (far from imaginary) of the Palestinian Arabs, are rarely considered worthy of a thoughtful consideration. The principle of "negating the Diaspora" that was thrust upon us for many years has led and leads to a distortion of the historical perspective of the Jewish existence in the Diaspora and the central place given to the Holocaust (and previous persecutions) in the constructing of a national history creates a largely distorted picture used often to justify various of Israel's actions having little in common with the fight of the Warsaw Ghetto heroes. As a result, while also communicating important and truthful information, these publications form a certain

perspective of perception in which as a matter of fact the stand of the Zionist Yishuv and of the State of Israel becomes the most adequate one and morally justified over the entire historical period under consideration. An extreme form of such literature is expressed in not a few compositions in the genre of “beat and save”, where one should “beat” the Arabs (and their “left-wing traitor” sympathizers) in order to “save” Jewish Israel.

Having made an attempt to eliminate the books and articles of the above three kinds as not objective and therefore of little use, an interested reader finds that his/her bookshelf has been drastically reduced and the “dry residue” consists of a rather small number of publications. There are not many publications about the Jewish state written without false enthusiasm and matter-of-factly (to say nothing of mass popular literature like the writings by Leonid Mlechin or Konstantin Kapitonov), especially when one takes into account not the works on, say, the role of Russian immigrants in the development of the local ballet or the chemistry of polymers, but those which without ideological prejudice analyze the fundamental problems of Israel’s socio-political history. Has the State of Israel fulfilled its predestination as was seen by the founding fathers of Zionism, to what degree has it become a secure haven for the Jewish people and the spiritual center of its national life? To what degree do the calamities, for centuries experienced by the Jews in various countries, justify the regime’s policy towards the Arab Israeli citizens that existed in 1949–1966 and for forty years still exist, and towards the Palestinians in the West Bank? What role has been played and is now played by the remembrance of the Holocaust in the collective consciousness of Israeli society and what stand do the Israelis take towards the genocide and mass persecution of other peoples in other countries carried out according to national or social criteria? How wise and farsighted was the policy of different Israeli leaders in different times, considered retrospectively? Which wars could Israel really not avoid after it was attacked by Arab armies, and which were initiated by its own military-political establishment? What in reality

is the system of relations between Israel and the USA, and how has it transformed over the sixty years of the existence of the Jewish state? What benefits and what harm were brought about by the policy of “negation of the Diaspora”, one of the expression of which was the demand that all the new immigrants switch immediately to Hebrew? On the other hand, were there other ways to realize one of the most amazing projects in the world history, the project of the revival of the Hebrew language? All these (and many other) questions concern the very essence of the existence of the State of Israel, and it is by answering them that a thoughtful person forms his/her stand towards the Jewish state. And there are very few Russian language books and articles where these questions are considered *sine ira et studio*, at a decent intellectual level. I would like to believe that the lacuna will gradually be filled.

IV

However strange it may seem, until the most recent time there existed not a single (!) textbook on contemporary Israel written by a Russian author. The 280-page reference book *Gosudarstvo Izrail* [State of Israel] edited by V.V. Benevolensky was published as early as 1986, and it contained many ideological labels of the time.¹⁷ In 2000 there appeared a small reference dictionary *Izrail segodnia* [Israel Today] compiled by a famous Moscow Hebrew teacher and literary critic, A.A. Kriukov (who now heads the Russian Cultural Center established in Tel Aviv), but this book was conceived as an auxiliary reference book. And that is why of special interest is the 500-page book by Irina Zviagelskaya, Tatiana Karasova and Andrei Fedorchenko, *Gosudarstvo Izrail* [The State of Israel],¹⁸ which was originally conceived precisely as a textbook. This work deserves the keenest attention due to several reasons. In the introduction the authors themselves explain the purpose of the book as follows: “The set of negative axioms concerning the Soviet-Israeli relations led to a political bias in the scholarly sphere, thus explaining the absence in this country of textbooks on the history of that state, its policy and economy. In actual fact, until the 1990s the

Israel studies bore an imprint of a rigid ideological line. This practice is now in the past, but some stereotypes are still alive... The present book is an attempt to fill the existing gap.”¹⁹

An impressive work by three leading Russian Israel scholars (it suffices to mention that Karasova heads the Israel department at the Russian Academy of Science Institute of Oriental Studies, and Fedorchenko is its former head), it consists of three parts, “History,” “Party system” and “Economy.” The book is appended by a supplement containing short biographies of leading Israeli politicians and history charts of the country’s party system. The part “Economy” is supplemented by 22 tables and diagrams on the main indices of development, demography, prices, taxes, and foreign trade. The more than forty photographs in the book are well-chosen.

Among the merits of this book, I would like especially to mention three.

First, the authors have succeeded in finding an appropriate balance between international policy topics and other aspects of Israeli life. In the sections dealing with foreign policy, the Arab-Israeli conflict is naturally at the center of attention, but the authors do not confine themselves only to it, since the book considers in sufficient detail Israel’s relation with the European Union, Japan, China, India, the CIS countries, SAR, and the states of “black” Africa.

Second, the authors have included the most recent events, up to the “unilateral disengagement” program. Given that the writing of textbooks usually takes years and they become obsolete even before they appear in university libraries, such a speed of publication seems highly amazing.

The third point is probably the most important one. Many events and notions which in Soviet times bore a negative sense later were judged differently. But not so with the term “Zionism”: it has not been rehabilitated in Russia, but has simply vanished from the vocabulary of leading politicians and mass media (along with the words “imperialism” or “cosmopolitanism”). Any Russian reader who grew up in the Soviet times does certainly remember that on November

10, 1975, the United Nations Assembly declared Zionism “a form of racism and racial discrimination.” But the fact that the resolution was rescinded on December 10, 1991 is known in Russia only to a narrow circle of specialists. In a conversation with the present author, Tatiana Karasova, the author of the second part of the book, told me that every year she conducts a kind of sociological poll among her students on what is Zionism. In her words, the results are deeply depressing. It is obvious that with such a state of affairs it is difficult to expect that the present-day students and postgraduate students will treat Israel any differently from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials of the Gromyko – Primakov school. The textbook authors are trying to “unstick” old labels from the term “Zionism.” In the very first pages of the book, *Zviagelskaya* treats Zionism as a historically and morally justified ideology and practice of the return of the Jews to Palestine/Eretz Israel. In the chapter on political parties in the Yishuv and Israel, Karasova shows the variety of Zionist trends, their connection with the ideals of social justice, and clashes of opinion within the Zionist movement on the building of relations with the Palestinian Arabs. Mentioning the anti-Zionist UNO resolution, the authors emphasize that it was adopted “exclusively due to political time-serving considerations.”²⁰

Of course, the book under consideration contains not a few controversial statements, but the main thing is that a textbook of such a level has finally appeared. One can only regret that questions of culture, science, mass media, and present-day relations between Israel and the Jewish Diaspora remained outside of the authors’ sphere of interests. It would have been excellent if simultaneously a book on modern Russia on the same scale had been published in Hebrew which would have been read by Israeli diplomats, journalists, and students of international relations. A similar publication would be of a great use in the building of mutual relations.

Nevertheless, one can not but mention a number of specific problems complicating the development of Russian language Israel studies.

First, *almost all of the professional authors in the FSU, engaged in Israel studies live in Moscow and work (as a rule, simultaneously) in the three Moscow research institutions: the Institute of Oriental Studies, the Institute of the Middle East and the Moscow Institute for International Relations.* Practically every one of these specialists is the only expert in Russia in his/her field: Fedorchenko – in Israel’s economy, Karasova – in the Israeli party system, Svetlana Gasratian – in the role of religion in Israeli public life, Gregory Kosach and Nina Semenchenko – in Israel’s radical left-wing political movements, Tatiana Nosenko and Gregory Melamedov – in the political history of Jerusalem, Irina Massioukova – in the Israeli Russian-speaking community, Ekaterina Usova – in Israeli foreign policy, Alexander Lokshin – in the history of Soviet-Israeli relations, and Valeriy Vorobyev – in Israeli constitutional law. Gregory Mirsky, Irina Zviagelskaya and Eugene Satanovsky are recognized experts on a wide range of Middle East issues, including the Arab-Israeli conflict. Beyond the Moscow borders literally single persons study Israel at a more or less acceptable level: Efim Epstein in St. Petersburg, Savely Volfson and Vladimir Rummyantsev in Tomsk, Alexander Kornilov and Igor Ryzhov in Nizhny Novgorod, Michael Agapov in Tiumen, Dmitry Shevelev in Minsk, Yuri Kogorodsky in Kiev (although he has recently changed the sphere of his professional interests, having switched to contemporary Ukrainian politics), and the number of their publications is extremely low, not only in international, but even in central Russian scholarly periodicals. As a result, Russian scholars specializing in Israel have practically no opponents for conducting intellectual disputes, since each of the above named authors holds a “monopoly” in his/her field. Due to a variety of reasons, which deserve a deeper study, the number of Russian-speaking graduate students in Israel studies is extremely low both in the CIS countries and in Israel itself, and the level of their knowledge is far from that which would allow them to take part in a scholarly discourse. That dissertations on Israel are being written and presented for a diploma or degree, does not mean that all of them are worth the paper on which they are written, and it does not seem likely that the situation will change in the foreseeable future. In recent years

scores of dissertations and diplomas have been defended on various aspects of Israeli politics, social life and culture, but very few of them are really original research works and not reformulations (and even copies) of already existing publications. The number of young scholars in Israel studies who work in academic institutions and publish in the journals of repute remains extremely low.

Second, the problem is that practically *no one of the above authors writes in English, and as a result, their work is inaccessible to foreign colleagues*. More than a hundred books on the history of Zionism and the State of Israel published originally in Hebrew, English and (in rare cases) French have been translated into Russian, while none of the books on Israel written in Russian has been translated into any Western language. This is true for both the important books written by Russian specialists²¹ and the works by scholars who immigrated to Israel, writing in Russian.²² The only book on Israel of all those published in Russian that has also been published in English is the book *Ex-Soviets in Israel. From Personal Narratives to a Group Portrait* by Maria Elenevskaja and Larisa Fialkova.²³ Collections of articles produced jointly by Russian and Israeli scholars²⁴ have also been published only in Russian. Thus the dialogue is a one-way road: those who read in Russian have an opportunity – even those with a limited knowledge of foreign languages – to study translated works of many Israeli and American scholars, while the Israelis and Americans who do not read Russian cannot follow the work of scholars in Israel studies who write in Russian.

Third, *neither in Israel nor in Russia does there exist a really functioning consultative editorial board that would select the books worthy of translation*. As a rule, each organization translates and publishes materials which are in line with its own institutional interests. As a result, although quite a few books on Israel have been translated into Russian, a large number of the most important works remain untranslated.²⁵

Fourth, *the texts of the books on Israel already published are not available on the Internet, and therefore they remain inaccessible to a mass audience of potential readers*. Neither the impressive course-books of the Open University *The Formation of Israeli Democracy; Society, Economy*

and Culture of Israel. The First Decade and *Government and Politics in the State of Israel*²⁶ – eighteen books in all, nor the above mentioned fundamental volume by Zviagelskaya, Karasova and Fedorchenko, nor the monographs on the history of Jerusalem by Tatiana Nosenko and Michael Sternshis, nor the books by Boris Dubson on the Israel economy (and I name only the most important, innovative ones) has been placed on the Internet, thus reducing the number of their readers and their influence on the formation of an intellectual market in the field of Israel studies in the Russian language. The only publishing house that places (although delayed by a year or a year and a half) on the Internet the full texts of its books is the publishing house of the Institute of the Middle East. At present, a book although published but not available on the Internet is very little known, and nobody anywhere has set a goal of creating a large-scale “virtual hall of Russian-language Israel studies” which could become a portal where those interested can seek information on Israel. The sites of The Jewish Encyclopedia in Russian on the Web and of the Open University of Israel at present are probably the fullest and most authoritative sources of scholarly information on the theme, but they are a far cry from what is necessary in order that Israel studies in Russian be represented in accordance with the level of their present-day development.

Of course, the state of affairs in the fields of Jewish and Israel studies today cannot be compared with the situation existing ten and, more so, twenty or thirty years ago. For the last twenty years, the Russian-language Jewish and Israel studies have been developing at an unprecedented tempo. At present, they are almost at a par with the level of development of these disciplines in France, Germany and other “most advanced” countries of the non-English-speaking world. In the mid-1980s one could only dream about this. But the way to go is far longer than that already covered.

- 1 This article has been written as part of the project “The development of Israel studies in Russia and beyond,” with the support of the Research authority of the Open University of Israel and the Oranim Academic College.
- 2 See the following articles, published in Russian: V. Likhachev and A. Fedorchuk, “Vysshee obrazovanie v oblasti iudaiki na postsovetском prostranstve” [“Higher Education in the Field of Judaica in the Post-Soviet Area”], *Evroaziatskiy evreiskiy ezhegodnik [Euro-Asian Jewish Annual]* (Kiev, 2003), pp. 170–182; S. Charnyi, “Pozdnesovetskaia i postsovetiskaiya iudaika” [“Late-Soviet and Post-Soviet Judaica”], *Materialy Odinnadtsatoi ezhegodnoi mezhdunarodnoi mezhdistsiplinarnoi konferentsii po Judaike [Materials of the 11th Annual International Interdisciplinary Conference on Jewish Studies]* (Moscow, 2004), vol. 2, pp. 133–162; M. Gold, “Evreiskie zhurnaly na postsovetском prostranstve: kratkiy obzor i klassifikatsiya” [“Jewish Journals in the Post-Soviet States: a Brief Survey and Classification”], *Evrei Evrazii [The Jews of Euro-Asia]*, no. 1 [8] (2005).
- 3 In particular, the Head of the Jewish Studies Department at the Institute of Asian and African Studies, Professor A. Kovelman authored a number of serious monographs, among others, *Between Alexandria and Jerusalem: the Dynamic of Jewish and Hellenistic Culture* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2005).
- 4 E. Satanovsky, “Sostoianie del k iubileiu” [“The State of Affairs on the Eve of a Jubilee”], *Diaspory [Diasporas]*, no. 3 (2006), p. 84 [in Russian].
- 5 See M. Gutgarts, “Kratkaia evreiskaia entsiklopediya – kollektivnyi trud uchenykh-vykhodtsev iz SSSR/SNG” [“The Short Jewish Encyclopaedia – a Collective Work of Immigrant Scholars from the USSR/CIS”], in: *Idemte zhe, otstroim steny Ierushalaima. Evrei iz Rossiiskoi imperii, SSSR/SNG v Erets-Israel i Gosudarstve Izrail [Let Us Build the Walls of Jerusalem. Jews from Russia in Palestine/Israel]*, ed. by J. Sister and M. Parkhomovsky (eds.) (Jerusalem, 2005), pp. 91–96 [in Russian].
- 6 On the Jerusalem Russian library see N. Zilberg, “Why Change Culture? A Trilemma Confronting Russian Intelligentsia in Israel”, in: *Israel as Center Stage: A Setting for Social and Religious Enactments*, ed. by A. Paul Hare and G.M. Kressel (Westport: Bergin and Garvey, 2001), pp. 88–102.
- 7 See *Obshchestvo i politika sovremennogo Izrailia [Contemporary Israel: Politics and Society]*, ed. by A.D. Epstein and A. Fedorchenko (Moscow/ Jerusalem, 2002), pp. 401–444 [in Russian].

- 8 Quoted from the conversation between V. Bondarenko and I. Shamir published in the *Zavtra [Tomorrow]* newspaper on 25 February, 2003 [in Russian].
- 9 Y.M. Primakov, *Istoriia odnogo sgovora; blizhnnevostochnaia politika SShA v 70-e – nachale 80-kh gg. [The History of a Complot: the US Middle Eastern Policy in the 1970s to the Early 1980s]* (Moscow, 1985) [in Russian].
- 10 Y.M. Primakov, *Blizhnii Vostok na stsene i za kulisami [The Middle East Onstage and Backstage]* (Moscow, 2006), p. 254 [in Russian].
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 366.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 353.
- 13 *Ibid.*, pp. 369–370.
- 14 "Yevgenii Primakov has commented on the situation in the Middle East", The Segodnia [Today] TV program of July 13, 2006, the NTV channel.
- 15 I. Shamir, "Carter kak novyi Radishchev" ["Carter as a New Radishchev"], The Internet site of the St. Petersburg Centre for Contemporary Middle Eastern Studies, 26 January, 2007 [in Russian].
- 16 I. Shamir, "V kresle u dantista" [In a Dentist's Chair], *Politicheskii zhurnal [Political Journal]*, nos. 5-6 (148-149), 19 February, 2007 [in Russian].
- 17 *Gosudarstvo Izrail [State of Israel]*, ed. by V. Benevolenskii (Moscow, 1986) [in Russian].
- 18 I. Zviagelskaiia, T. Karasova and A. Fedorchenko, *Gosudarstvo Izrail [The State of Israel]* (Moscow, 2005) [in Russian].
- 19 *Ibid.*, pp. 8–9.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 260.
- 21 Among them, one could name T. Nosenko, *Ierusalim. Tri religii – tri mira [Jerusalem. Three Religions – Three Worlds]* (Moscow, 2003); S. Gasratian, *Istoriia i ideologiia evreiskogo religioznogo dvizheniia XIX–XX vekov [The History and Ideology of the Jewish Religious Movement in the XIX–XX Centuries]* (Moscow, 1999); S. Gasratian, *Religioznye partii Gosudarstva Izrail [Religious Parties in the State of Israel]* (Moscow, 1996); T. Karasova, *Blok MAARAKH v partiino-politicheskoi sisteme Izrailia [The MAARACH Block in the Party-Political System of Israel]* (Moscow, 1988); A. Fedorchenko, *Ekonomika perselencheskogo obshchestva: izrail'skaia model [The Economy of a Settlers' Society. The Israeli Model]* (Moscow, 1998); E. Satanovskiy, *Ekonomika Izrailia v 90-e gody [The Economy of Israel in the 1990s]* (Moscow, 1999); A. Kriukov, *Ocherki po istorii izrail'skoi literatury [Essays on the History of Israeli Literature]* (St. Petersburg, 1998); A. Kriukov, *Ivritskaia literatura v XX veke [The Hebrew Literature in the XX Century]* (Moscow, 2005); A. Krylov, *Sootchestvenniki v Izraile [Compatriots in Israel]* (Moscow, 2006), and others.

- 22 The list of monographs on Israeli history, economics and politics, published in Russian by the Russian-speaking scholars living in Israel includes the following titles: M. Sternshis, *Istoriia Gosudarstva Izrail [A History of the State of Israel]* (Herzliyah, 2003; 2nd edition, 2005); M. Sternshis, *Istoriia goroda Ierusalima [A History of the City of Jerusalem]* (Herzliyah, 2006); F. Kandel, *Zemlia pod nogami. Iz istorii zaseleniia i osvoeniia Erets-Israel s nachala deiatnadsatogo veka do knots Pervoi mirovoi voiny [The Soil under One's Feet. From the History of the Settlement and Cultivation of Eretz-Israel from the Early Nineteenth Century to the End of the WWI]* (Kiev/Jerusalem, 2003); E. Feldman, "Russkii" Izrail: *mezdu dvukh poliusev ["Russian" Israel: Between Two Poles]* (Moscow, 2003); V. Khanin, "Russkie" i vlast' v sovremennom Izraile ["The Russians" and the Power in Contemporary Israel] (Moscow, 2004); B. Dubson, *Bogatstvo i bednost' v Izraile [The Rich and the Poor in Israel]* (Moscow, 2004); B. Dubson, *Izrail'skaia biznes-elita: bol'shie den'gi v malen'koi strane [The Israeli Business Elites: Big Money in a Small Country]* (Moscow, 2006); Z. Zaretskaia, *Fenomen izrail'skogo teatra [The Phenomenon of Israeli Theater]* (Jerusalem, 1997); A.D. Epstein, *Voiny i diplomatiia. Arabo-izrail'skii konflikt v XX veke [Wars and Diplomacy. The Arab-Israeli Conflict in the XX Century]* (Kiev, 2003); A.D. Epstein, *Izrail i problema palestinskikh bezhentssev: istoriya i politika [Israel and the Palestinian Refugee Problem: History and Politics]* (Moscow, 2005); A.D. Epstein, *Izrail v epokhu "post-sionizma": nauka, ideologiya i politika [Israel in the Era of "Post-Zionism": Academy, Ideology and Politics]* (Moscow, 2005); A.D. Epstein, *Izrailskaia voina protiv "Khezbolly" [Israel's War Against Hezbollah and Its Impact on the Middle Eastern Politics]* (Moscow, 2006).
- 23 L. Fialkova and M.N. Yelenevskaya, *Ex-Soviets in Israel. From Personal Narratives to a Group Portrait* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007). The Russian edition, entitled *Russkaia ulitsa v evreiskoi strane. Issledovanie folkloria emigrantov 1990-kh v Izraile*, was published in Moscow in 2005.
- 24 Among such books: *Migratsionnye protsessy i ikh vliianie na izrail'skoe obshchestvo [Mass Migration and Its Impact on the Israeli Society]*, ed. by A.D. Epstein and A. Fedorchenko (Moscow, 2000); *Obshchestvo i politika sovremennogo Izrailia [Contemporary Israel: Politics and Society]*, ed. by A.D. Epstein and A. Fedorchenko (Moscow/Jerusalem, 2002); G. Melamedov and A.D. Epstein, *Diplomaticheskaya bitva za Ierusalim*

[*Diplomatic Struggle Over Jerusalem*] (Moscow/Jerusalem, 2008); *Gosudarstvo Izrail: politika, ekonomika, obshchestvo* [*The State of Israel: Policy, Economy, Society*], ed. by T. Karasova (Moscow, 2007).

- 25 I mention only some of the most important works whose absence on the Russian-language intellectual market is especially noticeable. The following books need to be translated into Russian: on the history of Zionism, G. Shimoni, *The Zionist Ideology* (Hanover, 1995); on the history of the Yishuv and the State of Israel, T. Segev, *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs Under the British Mandate* (New-York, 1999); T. Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust* (New York, 1993) and other books by that author; on the sociology of Israeli society, D. Horowitz and M. Lissak, *Trouble in Utopia. The Overburdened Polity of Israel* (Albany, 1989); B. Kimmerling, *Mehagrim, mityashvim, elidim* [*Immigrants, Settlers, Natives. The Israeli State and Society between Cultural Pluralism and Cultural Wars*] (Tel Aviv, 2004 [in Hebrew]); on the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, B. Morris, *Righteous Victims. A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict* (New-York, 1999); I. Rabinovich, *The Road Not Taken: Early Arab-Israeli Negotiations* (Oxford, 1991); Y. Gelber, *Palestine 1948. War, Escape and the Emergence of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* (Brighton, 2001, and even better, the revised edition of this book published in Hebrew in 2005), on the history of Israeli army, M. van Creveld, *The Sword and the Olive: A Critical History of the Israeli Defense Force* (New-York, 1998) and Y. Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room. How the Military Shapes Israeli Policy* (Washington, 2006). These works are among the most important books on Israel, they are read worldwide at all the leading chairs for Israel studies, and they of course should also be studied by Russian students of the history and policy of Israel and the entire Middle East.
- 26 Among these courses: *Stanovlenie izrail'skoi demokratii* [*The Formation of Israeli Democracy*] (Tel-Aviv, 2001); *Obshchestvo, ekonomika i kultura Izrailia. Pervoe desiatiletie* [*Society, Economy and Culture of Israel. The First Decade*] (Tel-Aviv, 2002–2003) and *Vlast i politika v Gosudarstve Izrail* [*Government and Politics in Israel*] (Tel-Aviv, 1997–1998), authored by leading Israeli sociologists and political scientists like Professors B. Neuberger, T. Hermann, D. Kaspi, Y. Weitz, Z. Shalom and others.