Book Reviews

Moshe Arens, *Flags over the Warsaw Ghetto: The Untold Story of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*, Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing House, 2011, 405 pages, (paperback).

Review Article by Dariusz Libionka and Laurence Weinbaum

> "Whoever reports a saying in the name of its originator brings deliverance to the world." [Rabbi Chanina] *Babylonian Talmud*, Megillah, 15a.

The Warsaw Ghetto uprising was a seminal event in Jewish history and memory. Often compared to Masada or Thermopylae, no military encounter of comparable magnitude has attracted such a degree of attention. Over time, and especially in recent years, researchers have enabled us to develop a more accurate and nuanced understanding of this struggle and its context.

Among the most elusive aspects of the uprising is the role played by the adherents of Vladimir Jabotinsky. In the 1930s, the New Zionist Organization (*HaTzohar*) and its youth movement, Betar, attracted a sizeable following in Poland. Though bereft of most of its prewar leadership (including Menachem Begin), the remnants of this organization eventually established their own armed underground group in the Warsaw ghetto, the Jewish Military Union (ŻZW), which operated independently from the mainstream Jewish Fighting Organization (ŻOB). Led by Mordechai Anielewicz, the ŻOB was a coalition of left-wing Zionist youth movements as well as the anti-Zionist Bund and the Communists. Its best-known veterans were Zivia Lubetkin, Antek Zuckerman and Marek Edelman, who, together with other surviving fighters, created the narrative upon which much of the popular knowledge of the uprising has been based. To the extent that the Revisionists figured in the accounts of their political rivals, it was referred to only minimally and sometimes disparagingly.

As Yad Vashem historian Nachman Blumental noted in 1965, the paucity of documentation left by the ŻZW—of which there were but a handful of survivors –hardly made the historians' job easier. Consequently, piecing together an accurate picture of that group became a formidable challenge, all the more so since the information that did exist was entwined with competing ideologies. In December 1943, little more than half a year after the destruction of the ghetto and shortly before his own death, Emanuel Ringelblum, the great chronicler of life and death in the ghetto and no friend of the Revisionists, wrote: "And why is there no infor-

mation on the ŻZW in the history? They must leave an imprint, even if in our eyes they are unsympathetic."[1] For the nearly seven decades that have elapsed since the uprising, the full story of the ŻZW has been missing from the historiography of the ghetto. It is a subject that has proven especially resistant to scholarly inquiry.

To complicate matters further, not all those who dealt with the story have demonstrated proper respect for the historical facts, and some still do not. At the end of the 1950s, Phillip Friedman, one of the greatest and most prolific early pioneers in Holocaust research, cautioned, "Legendary stories...are always likely to be invented and diffused in time of crisis at their face value without checking their authenticity. It will, therefore, be a difficult task for the scholar in years to come to free himself [or herself] of the new myth that has already struck deep roots in our historical consciousness."[2]

At the end of a long and distinguished career in politics and aeronautical engineering, Moshe Arens decided that he would "set the record straight," and *Flags over the Warsaw Ghetto* is the result of his efforts. Beginning in 2003, Arens wrote a number of articles on the Revisionist underground. These were published in Israeli newspapers and several prestigious scholarly journals in Israel and abroad. In 2005, Arens felt so confident of his accomplishment that he boldly declared in an interview with Israeli journalist Yossi Ahimeir that he was perhaps *the* most knowledgeable authority on what actually happened in the ghetto uprising.[3] Arens' point of departure was his deep-seated and not unfounded conviction that the ŻZW had played a far more important role in the uprising than had previously been understood; that it never received its rightful place in the national pantheon; and that politics were largely to blame. Accordingly, his book was long awaited by those eager to see a departure from "majority history."

In the preface to *Flags* published two years ago in Hebrew, and now, with some alterations, both in English and Polish, Arens explains that his inspiration came from the late Chaim Lazar, a historical writer closely associated with the Revisionist movement. For many years, his book on the ŻZW (first published in Hebrew in 1963 as *Metzada shel Varsha* [The Masada of Warsaw] and later in English in 1966 as *Muranowska 7*) was the only one on the subject. Arens affirmed that, although Lazar's research broke new ground, it failed to transform the basic narrative. Like Lazar before him, Arens maintained that the founding of the ŻZW preceded that of the ŻOB; that it came to be the most well-armed and well organized force in the ghetto; and that it did the lion's share of the fighting. "The facts were there," writes the author, "they only needed to be examined" (p. 3).

The basic facts of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which erupted on April 19, 1943 and was snuffed out in mid-May, are well known. Faced with the final liquidation of the ghetto (and near-certain death), the Jewish population that remained after the *Grossaktion* of the summer of 1942 resisted the German forces that had entered the ghetto to deport them. The documentary source that provided the

most detailed information about the actual fighting, the report by the infamous SS *Brigadeführer* Jürgen Stroop, is chillingly entitled, "The Jewish Quarter of Warsaw Is No More," and has been reproduced and analyzed numerous times—most thoroughly by the American military historian French L. MacLean.[4]

Describing the genesis of the underground organization, Arens stated in an article for *The Jerusalem Post* in April 2003, "The ŻZW was headed by Paweł Frenkel of the Revisionist youth movement Betar; his deputies were David Apfelbaum and Leon Rodal. It had been founded almost immediately after the German conquest of western Poland. Apfelbaum had been a Polish officer and through his acquaintance with Major Henryk Iwański, who had commanded his regiment during the battles against the invading German army, he had already arranged the first acquisition of arms for ŻZW at the end of 1939....Iwański was a member of the Polish underground Security Corps (KB), which subsequently became a part of the Polish underground."[5] Arens' work received immediate recognition. *Jerusalem Post* reporter Abraham Rabinovich based a lengthy text for his paper's weekend supplement on what he gleaned from Arens.[6] No less an authority than Saul Friedländer, in his magisterial book *The Years of Extermination*, chose to rely—when briefly relating the story of the ŻZW in the uprising—on Arens' "painstaking reconstruction of the combat."[7]

In successive articles in *Yad Vashem Studies*, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, *Yalkut Moreshet* and *Israel Affairs*, as well as in numerous public appearances Arens restated these particulars and challenged those who questioned them. A similar approach was taken by Marian Apfelbaum and in a review article for *Ha'aretz* in April 2003 Arens endorsed his book, *Retour sur le Ghetto de Varsovie*.[8]

In the meantime, in ethno-nationalist circles in Poland, Arens' works were cited as a validation of the proposition that some kind of Polish-Jewish brotherhood of arms had existed in German-occupied Warsaw. That history, they maintained, had been suppressed by an unholy alliance of Polish Communists and left-wing Israelis who had tarnished Poland's good name.[9]

Arens' ready access to the media, coupled with genuine public curiosity and the dearth of other sources, helped catapult his writings into the spotlight. Unfortunately, most of Arens' publications (including the book under review) did not undergo rigorous peer review. A lack of critical scrutiny, which may have resulted from a certain deference to Arens' prominent public stature, may have accelerated the publication process.

Clearly, with the publication of this book and of his earlier texts, it was Arens' fervent hope to succeed where Lazar had failed and to influence the historical narrative. Unlike Lazar, Arens was a prominent public figure whose name could open doors and whose writings would attract attention. On the back cover of his book there are accolades from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ("Thorough research. Groundbreaking work"); former Chief Rabbi Israel Meir Lau ("an es-

sential addition to the library of Holocaust heroism"); and former ambassador to Poland Shevah Weiss ("an outstanding study"). Significantly, there is no endorsement from any reputable scholar of the subject of his study.

Arens also had the advantage over Lazar of writing well after the collapse of the Iron Curtain, at a time when a vast trove of hitherto unknown documentation became accessible. This development enabled capable historians to reassess and correct earlier interpretations and resulted in a flowering of new scholarship and debate on the fate of Polish Jewry.

At the very beginning of his book, Arens informs the reader that he has carried out research in "the libraries and archives that house the documents and books relating to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising" and also names individuals with whom he has consulted. Significantly, except for the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw (ŻIH) and its then director, none of those institutions is in Poland, and he did not name any Polish scholars specializing in the history of the ghetto. Given the importance of the latest scholarship of Polish researchers and discoveries in Polish archives, particularly the Institute of National Memory (IPN), this omission raises immediate doubts about the seriousness of this work. And a glance at the author's bibliography confirms those misgivings. Missing are many of the most important recent texts dealing with the essence of his research, including the 2008 book on the ŻZW by August Grabski and Maciej Wójcicki, published by ŻIH. More striking still is the author's failure to note the existence of research and documents published in Israel by other historians, which have appeared in the pages of *Ha'aretz* (for which he regularly writes), as well as in *Yad Vashem Studies*, *Yalkut Moreshet*, and *HaUma*. Without a mastery of the secondary sources, such as they are, it is obviously impossible to appreciate the dimensions of this complex and calamitous story.

To be sure, *Flags* does contain some nuggets of credible original research. To his credit, Arens has, for example, made use of the little-known correspondence between Betar leaders trapped in Europe and Betar headquarters in Palestine. He also made efforts to corroborate the location of the graves of some of the protagonists of the struggle and may well have been the first researcher to do so. He sought out many of the few remaining survivors of the revolt, most of whom have since passed on. But this book is clearly not the work of a qualified historian who has an appreciation of the caution required in using oral testimony and who understands that, after so many years, not all aspects of the uprising can be established with certainty. Moreover, at times, its author's emotional closeness to the subject of his study appears to have clouded his judgment.

In reviewing Lazar's book and a biography of Anielewicz written by ŻOB survivor Israel Gutman, who was just embarking on his career as an historian, Nachman Blumental wrote as early as 1965, "We are not dealing here with research workers, treating certain problems *sine ira et studio* [without hate and zealousness],

with objectivity, calm and equanimity. The two authors [Lazar and Gutman] regard their respective parties as the embodiment of all their ideals—personal, national, and human."[10] To some extent, this observation applies to Arens' book as well. Among scholars, however, it is unlikely that Arens' final product will be considered as dispassionate history writing.

The most exhilarating aspect of historical research is the potential to discover and publish new facts that invalidate even the most cherished beliefs and to question sources that were once regarded as authoritative. However, one of the first principles taught to students of the discipline is that all existing writings as well as all relevant documentation must be exhaustively and critically analyzed. In this respect, the author's efforts fall short. His inability to distinguish the documentary wheat from the chaff is apparent. He cuts and pastes citations from various accounts by purported ŻZW survivors and other eye witnesses without seriously checking their authenticity and accuracy. It is clear today that the only contemporaneously written account of the uprising by a ŻZW fighter is that of Paweł Besztimt, which was first published in the journal *Dapim* in 1986.[11] Although Arens does cite from this document, he makes no attempt to analyze it, let alone evaluate its significance.

Independently, both Lazar and Havi Ben-Sasson Dreyfus, a younger and especially accomplished Israeli scholar of the ghetto, recognized the importance of the writings of Ruben Ben Shem (Feldschu). An outstanding personality of the prewar Zionist right (in 1927 Jabotinsky described him as "the only sensible man" in his movement in Poland), Ben Shem left a detailed diary describing the preparations for the uprising. In *Flags* he does not even rate a single reference, despite the fact that some thirty years ago long extracts of his account were published in the journals *Massua* and in *Yalkut Moreshet*. Although Arens cites (though again without an attempt at real interpretation) the testimony of Ryszard Walewski, the account of his ward, Jurek Plonski, who was an integral part of the story and passed away as recently as 2009 at Kibbutz Meggido, is missing. This is odd given that Walewski's published memoirs entitled *Jurek* are actually named after Plonski—and that Walewski died in 1970. Some noteworthy testimonies, such as that of Michał Jaworski, an eyewitness who left a lengthy written description of his experiences are mentioned in the bibliography but do not appear in the text itself.

A major problem with this book is that its author relies on accounts of uncertain merit, such as the memoirs of David (Dudek) Landau and Jack Eisner, both of which can best categorized as apocrypha. He accepts uncritically the wholly unsubstantiated account of Eisner who, at the beginning of his 1980 memoir, *The Survivor*, claims that as a 13-year-old he shot down a German airplane with a rifle he had lifted from a dead soldier. Landau's book, *Caged,* is also contaminated with manifestly false information. Avraham Cykiert, who claims to be its ghost writer, unabashedly asserted in a letter to the editor of *Ha'aretz* in June 2005

that his principal's wife and daughter had "doctored" the original manuscript. But none of this deters Arens, who solemnly declares, "Their [Landau and Eisner's] accounts, written many years after the events, tend to confirm the central role of ŻZW in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising" (p. 310). Arens uses several other accounts, some reliable, others less so, but almost never looks at the material critically, comparing and contrasting accounts. That type of probe, which is the essence of the of historian's job, is completely absent.

An especially unsettling aspect of this book is the author's failure to explain fully how his own views evolved. By the time he wrote *Flags*, his original, and seemingly unshakeable, faith in the veracity of much of the previously published Polish "testimony" must have evaporated. Missing from the narrative of the uprising is the larger-than-life Polish hero Iwański and his shadowy Jewish protégé, Apfelbaum, for whom a square has been named in Warsaw and who Arens had previously insisted was one of the founders and commanders of the group. Gone too is Kalman Mendelson, who in his previous works Arens had assured his readers was "a former officer in the Polish Army and one of the founders of ŻZW."[12] Today, it is understood—and Arens says as much—that Henryk Iwański and his cohorts (including Mendelson) were *hochstaplers* (confidence men) and that David Apfelbaum was an artificial construct. Evidently no such person even existed. Of course, if Iwański and Apfelbaum have finally been expunged from the narrative (and good riddance if they have), then why continue to trust blindly in the veracity of memoirs such as those of Landau, in which that duo figures so prominently?

Those who practice "the historian's craft" are charged with distinguishing between trustworthy and spurious accounts of the events, and identifying those that fall somewhere in the grey zone. The conscientious writing of history is a process that requires an ongoing reevaluation of the sources and the literature—continuously taking into account new findings. Misappraisal of sources is not exceptional, but historians, however, are obliged to explain *why* they have changed their original views and to give proper credit to others whose research has supplanted previous works, including their own. In relating to the material that tainted almost everything he had written until the appearance of this book (and which actually influenced the work of others who relied on his earlier and unverified findings), Arens sheepishly writes (in a four-page appendix entitled "The Polish Connection") "one [sic] of my earlier research papers was based in part on these Polish claims" (p. 315).

Arens appropriately credits Israel Gutman, the doyen of scholarship on the revolt, as being the first to raise doubts concerning the veracity of the Polish sources. At the same time, he omits any reference to the fact that, between November 2005 and April 2006, he had engaged in a fierce polemic with Gutman on the authenticity of the Polish sources that have now been discredited. Originally Arens main-

tained that the very same documentation was completely credible. This debate was published in *Yalkut Moreshet*, but nowhere in *Flags* can the reader detect the author's retraction. Arens does not cite by name the research on Apfelbaum that finally consigned the fairytale in which the mythical Polish officer starred to the dustbin of history.[13] Instead, he summarizes the findings, and in so doing, implies that these are his own conclusions.

In evaluating Arens' book, one is again reminded of the prescience of Phillip Freidman. As early as the late 1940s he drew attention to the challenges confronting serious historians of the "Catastrophe," as the Shoah was then known. Friedman cautioned his colleagues about "works written by inadequately trained amateurs, zealous and ambitious, using unchecked materials and unreliable sources, credulous, taking all for granted." He also noted the perils of "publications which tend to adjust the historical facts to preconceived theories or political biases." Friedman's observations are no less valid today than when he first wrote them. It still behooves us to heed his earnest warning: "Indulgence and tolerance, or even indifference, toward these abuses can greatly damage our discipline."[14]

NOTES

1. Emanuel Ringelblum, "Michtavim mi-HaGetto: Pirsoom HaRishon," *Yalkut Moreshet*, No. 75 (April 2003), p. 83 (Hebrew).
2. Phillip Friedman, "Problems of Research on Jewish Catastrophe," *Yad Vashem Studies*, III (1959), p. 33, as quoted in Roni Stauber "Laying the Foundations for Holocaust Research: The Impact of Philip Friedman," *Search and Rescue Lectures and Papers* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2009), p. 53.
3. Yossi Achimeir, "Ha-Hoker Moshe Arens: Betar Haya Ha-Gorem Ha-Merkazi b'Mered b'Getto Varsha" (interview with Moshe Arens by Yossi Achimeir), *Hadashot HaMachon*, No. 30 (March 2005), p. 6 (Hebrew).
4. French L. MacLean, *The Ghetto Men: The SS Destruction of the Jewish Warsaw Ghetto April-May 1943* (Schiffer Publishing, 2001). Arens' book includes the Stroop report in its entirety in an appendix (pp. 318–378).
5. The Changing Face of Memory—Who Defended the Warsaw Ghetto?" *Jerusalem Post,* 23 April 2003.
6. "The First Casualty of War," *Jerusalem Post Magazine*, 20 April 2006.
7. Saul Friedländer, *The Years of Extermination* (New York: Harper, 2007), pp. 524, 772 ff. Friedländer writes of David Apfelbaum being one of the commanders of the ZZW and cites Arens' article, "The Jewish Military Organization (ZZW) in the Warsaw Ghetto," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 19, no. 2 (Fall 2005), as his primary source.
8. At that time, Arens wrote: "In his book, Apfelbaum, a relative of David Apfelbaum, one of the leaders of the ZZW, tries to set the story straight....There is apparently no disagreement over the facts concerning the establishment of the early cells of the ZZW, just months after the German army invaded Poland in 1939, and that among its commanders were fight-

ers who had served as officers in the Polish army, such as David Apfelbaum, who participated in the battles against the German army in September 1939....The battle in Muranow Square was apparently the largest battle in the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. It was one of the battles fought by the ZZW. David Apfelbaum was killed in that battle. In the introduction to his book, Marian Apfelbaum writes: 'This book charges the enormous and venerated literature about the Warsaw Ghetto uprising with lies—and above all, lies of omission.' His book makes an important contribution to correcting the picture." See Moshe Arens, "Plucked Out of Oblivion," *Ha'aretz*, 25 April 2003.

One of these authors (Laurence Weinbaum) wrote in 2003 a cautious introduction to the Hebrew translation of Apfelbaum's book, the appearance of which he welcomed as a catalyst for further study. At that time, he was unaware of the problematic nature of the Polish sources used in that volume. In subsequent works he, together with his co-author, strove to deconstruct this material. See note 13. To that end, he publicly repudiated his earlier views at various conferences, including, for example, one in June 2006 at the University of Haifa, dedicated to "The Role of Underground Organizations in the Warsaw Ghetto" and refused to allow the publisher of the English translation to use his flawed text. The two keynote speakers were Moshe Arens and Israel Gutman. Arens took issue with both Gutman and this author for rejecting the questionable Polish documentation.

9. See for example Waldemar Moszkowski, "Prawda o powstaniu w gettcie warszawskim—Karły krzyczą, gdy śpią herosi," *Nasz Dziennik*, 19 April 2006 (Polish).
10. Nachman Blumental, "New Books on the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising," *Yad Vashem Bulletin*, No. 16, February 1965, p. 36.
11. Yehuda Helman, "The Fate of the Last of the Fighters of the Jewish Military League in Warsaw," *Dapim: Studies on the Shoah* (ed.), Asher Cohen, Yehoyakim Cochavi and Yoav Gelber (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), pp. 203–220. Helman mistakenly identifies the Polish officer mentioned in Besztimt's account as a reference to Iwański. The original document was written in Polish.
12. "The Changing Face of Memory," op. cit. This description is all the more puzzling as in *Flags*, Arens takes pains to inform his readers that one of these writers (Weinbaum), in his forward to the Hebrew translation, identified Mendelson as "the only surviving ZZW officer." Nowhere, however, does Arens mention his own earlier portrayal of Mendelson as such. See note 8.
13. In June 2007, in the pages of *Ha'aretz Magazine*, the authors of this review (who had once accepted the veracity of some of the problematic Polish material), deconstructed the Apfelbaum/Iwański story and rejected its authenticity. In order to complete the picture, *Ha'aretz* journalist Ehud Ein-Gil asked Arens to comment on the article. On that occasion, Arens had to concede that indeed, there were "questions," but he called the whole issue (in fact what amounted to the canonical version of the founding of the ŻZW) an entirely "marginal and unimportant matter." He went on to suggest that the testimony of one Henryk Rolirad, an Iwański cohort who claimed to have aided the Jewish insurgents (and who ultimately settled in Israel with his Jewish wife), might ultimately substantiate the Apfelbaum/Iwański story, as would the account of a Polish officer by the name of Andrzej Petrykowki. Rolirad's testimony at Yad Vashem is listed in the bibliography of *Flags* under "Articles" [sic], but there is no mention of his name in the index. Petrykowski's name is omitted altogether, and Arens makes no mention of these reviewers' exposé in

Ha'aretz—or of his own response to it. See "A legendary commander," 22 June 2007. There is no mention of this text in Arens' book. Arens restricts himself to a single reference to an earlier text by the same authors, one written *before* they had exploded the Apfelbaum story. See Dariusz Libionka and Laurence Weinbaum, "Deconstructing Memory and History: The Jewish Military Union (ŻZW) and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising," *Jewish Political Studies Review*, 18:1–2 (Spring 2006).

14. Phillip Friedman, *Roads to Extinction: Essays on the Holocaust* (New York, 1980), p. 508, as quoted in Stauber, op. cit., p. 39.

Dr. Dariusz Libionka is the director of the Majdanek State Museum Research Department and chief editor of the journal, *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały / Holocaust Studies and Materials*, published by the Polish Academy of Science Center for Holocaust Studies. Dr. Laurence Weinbaum is chief editor of *The Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* and an adjunct lecturer at the Ariel University Center of Samaria.

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A BITTERSWEET SUCCESS STORY: THE HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR WHO ALMOST BECAME A POPE

Henri Tincq, *Jean-Marie Lustiger. le cardinal prophète* (Jean-Marie Lustiger, The Prophet-Cardinal), Paris: Editions Grasset, 2012, 364 pp.

Reviewed by Michelle Mazel

Had it been told in a novel, the story of the little Jewish boy who survived the war years in France, converted to Catholicism, became a priest and rose to the top of the Catholic hierarchy in France, would have been dismissed as too fantastic to be credible. The fact that it did happen is a source of wonder, and the remarkable book devoted to Cardinal Lustiger does not quite explain the meteoric rise of a man, who, though undoubtedly gifted, labored under the double handicap of being a convert to Catholicism and a Jew. He was also not known to have easy temper. Yet the author, Henri Tincq, who knew Lustiger personally, was singularly qualified for the task of helping us understand Cardinal Lustiger, the man and his work. Tincq is the author of a number of books on the church and its history and was for many years the religious specialist of *Le Monde*, where he started working after he left his previous post at *La Croix* (The Cross), flagship publication of the Catholic press in France. For this biography, Tincq has drawn heavily on the