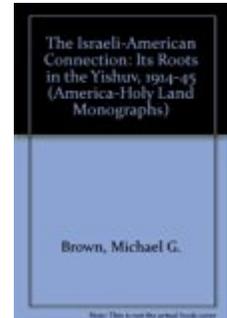




Michael Brown. *The Israeli-American Connection: Its Roots in the Yishuv, 1914-1945.* Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996. 396 pp. \$39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8143-2536-0.



Reviewed by Antonio Donno

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Michael Brown's book deals with a not very well-known theme in the history of the Zionist movement: we could define it as the feeling of hate-love that for many years connected the Jewish *Yishuv* in Palestine with the United States and the American Hebraism itself. It was a very difficult and controversial relationship, because the Zionists' way of life and ideological strictness did not get on well with the American way of life, which was also typical of the American Jewish community. Pragmatism, secular sense of life, welfare, refusal of the ideologies were, so to speak, sacrilegious features, according to the Zionist leaders, who were engaged to re-establish a Jewish State and Hebraism itself. But Palestinian Zionism's ideological purity had to confront a hard reality: the absolute need of money, which only the Americans, and the American Jews, were able to give to the Zionist undertaking. It was a hard need, one to which had to submit reluctantly all the Zionist leaders of Palestine, who travelled continually in the United States--between 1914 and 1945--in search of money. In so doing, almost all suffered from a political myopia: they saw well only those who were close, i.e., the American

Jews, but they were not able to perceive the American reality that was the background of their roamings.

Michael Brown gives us an excellent description and interpretation of those controversial facts of Zionism and points out how much the two main currents of Zionism were different: the Palestinian Zionism, with its provincialism and sense of moral superiority, and the American Zionism, powerful and self-confident, which after all will be decisive to the success of the Zionist undertaking. It took Ben Gurion to understand the United States' fundamental role to the future Jewish State. Perhaps he understood it reluctantly, but he did it. The same thing was not true for many other Palestinian Zionist leaders, who were always suspicious towards the United States.

Brown describes those facts by tracing the biographical and political profile of six Zionist leaders of Palestine: Vladimir Jabotinsky, Chaim Nachman Bialik, Berl Katznelson, Henrietta Szold, Golda Meir, and David Ben Gurion. All those leaders were very different in culture, political role, and mentality--so the book is discontinuous, because

the six leaders' attitude towards the American reality was different. Katznelson and Bialik, during their journeys in the United States, did not understand anything of the American society, because they were only concerned with the relationship with some parts of the American Jewry. They collected money and nothing else. Jabotinsky was too biased against the Americans and, above all, his intelligence was too volatile to pursue his own aim coherently: giving an international role to the Zionist Revisionist movement. Szold was a Jewish American woman, progressive and cosmopolitan, who moved to Palestine and worked in the educational and sanitary field with great results, but she was always considered to have nothing to do with the Jewish *Yishuv's* mentality. Golda Meir moved when very young from the United States to Palestine, but took with her many American values that helped to de-provincialize the Yishuv and to create, at the right moment, fundamental relations with the United States. Ben Gurion was the great leader who induced the Palestinian Zionism, at the Biltmore Conference, to establish a close linkage with the American Zionism. That result would prove decisive for the birth of the State of Israel.

Describing all these fundamental facts of the Jewish history in our century by the profiles of six so different leaders is dangerous work. But Michael Brown overcomes brilliantly these risks: his book, well founded in many primary sources, is a fascinating intellectual history of Zionism before the birth of the State of Israel.

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