

# Abba Ahimeir and the Scroll of the Sicarii

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Translation and Commentary

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## Foreword

The impetus to translate into English Abba Ahimeir's *The Scroll of the Sicarii* had as much to do with personal curiosity as it did with academic interest. During the course of past research into Ahimeir's life and political ideologies, *The Scroll of the Sicarii* appeared to me to be a much discussed and therefore apparently influential work. Yet any attempts at a closer familiarization with the essay were thwarted, due not only to the unavailability of the work in an English translation, but also to the fact that any "discussion" of the work was nothing more than a summary: that the essay was a "glorification of political murder", and that's about as far as it went. It was my frustration with both issues which catalysed this study.

In addition, I believed it necessary to frame a work so apparently notorious in some sort of context: that of Ahimeir's life and output, as well as a more general temporal-historical one. In an essay on a not altogether unrelated topic, Derek Penslar critiques

the historian's tendency to privilege early sources over later ones (origins of ideas over their development or extension) and the unmediated over the mediated source, the diary over the novel, the archival document over the published report.<sup>1</sup>

I have endeavoured to remain conscious of this observation while carrying out this study.

The first section contains a biographical sketch of Ahimeir's life which, it is hoped, places the sections that follow it in a better context. Ahimeir, who coined the term "Revolutionary Zionism", was a founder of the first anti-British underground group, *Brit HaBiryonim*, and a description of the group and its activities comprises the second section. There then follows a discussion on *The Scroll of the Sicarii* which deals with thematic as well as historic-contextual elements. The fourth section looks at how Ahimeir's essay came to light during investigations into the murder of Chaim Arlozorov and was eventually used as evidence against him in the *Brit HaBiryonim* trial one year later. The fifth section briefly examines Ahimeir's feelings about both the *Brit HaBiryonim* trial, and the Arlozorov murder. Finally, some concluding observations will be noted before presenting *The Scroll of the Sicarii* in my English translation.

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<sup>1</sup> Penslar, Derek J., "Herzl and the Palestinian Arabs: Myth and Counter-Myth", *The Journal of Israeli History*, Vol. 24, No. 1, March 2005, p. 66

## “Ani – Ahimeir”<sup>2</sup>

Abba Ahimeir was born Abba Shaul ben Isaac Gaisinovich (or Haisinovich) on 2 November 1897 in Dolghi, White Russia, in present day Belarus. Although the family was neither particularly religious nor Zionist, he was already by the age of six under the tutelage of the young Yiddish and Hebrew poet David Shimoni. After the family moved to Bobruisk in 1905, the young Gaisinovich was enrolled at the Russian Private Gymnasium in 1907, supplementing his course privately with Hebrew and Talmud study. During this time he became acquainted with future Labour Zionist leader Berl Katznelson, before the latter made *aliyah* to Ottoman-Palestine in 1909.

Catalyzed by an avid interest in Hebrew literature and Jewish culture and history, alongside a burgeoning identification with socialism and Zionism, he successfully petitioned his parents to allow him to study at the Herzliya Gymnasium in Tel Aviv, and in October 1912 journeyed there, chaperoned by fellow-socialist older sister Bluma. He renewed his acquaintance with Katznelson, who had emigrated to Ottoman-Palestine in 1909, and who helped bring him into socialist circles. He purchased his first “Zionist shekel” in 1913.

The young Gaisinovich returned home to Bobruisk in July, 1914 to spend the summer break with his family, but while there the First World War broke out, and he was forced to stay in Russia for its duration. The subsequent eruption of the October Revolution in 1917 further complicated this extended sojourn, and was to have a far reaching impact for the nation as a whole, and Abba as an individual: a photo taken from that period<sup>3</sup> shows Gaisinovich surrounded by seven friends: four “Revolutionaries”, and four “Zionists”. By the end of the Revolution only the four Zionist youths had survived; the rest – most notably his younger brother Meir – had perished at the hands of the Polish and Communist armies. In 1919, in honour of his fallen brother, Abba Gaisinovich became Abba “Ahimeir”: “my brother, Meir”. The same year he left both the University of Kiev and what

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<sup>2</sup> Compiled using: Abba Ahimeir, *Atlantidah, o Olam shayShakah: Sipporim v’Zicharonot*, (Tel Aviv, 1996), Ahimeir, Yosef (Ed.), “Beit Aba: Abba Ahimeir Archive, Ramat Gan”, <http://www.beitaba.com/>, last accessed 11 April 2011, n/n, *Dr. Abba Ahimeir: Luach Ta’arichim b’Haievo*, Jabotinsky Institute, Tel Aviv, and interviews with Yosef Ahimeir, 8 June 2010 and 15 February 2011

<sup>3</sup> See Ahimeir, *Atlantidah*, Photo Plate “Friends in Bobruisk – Spring 1917” (1917 חברים בבוברויסק – אביב 1917), between pp. 206-207

was now Communist Russia, unable to consolidate within himself all the horrors of the previous six years; indeed, his gradual disillusionment with socialism and communism stems from this time. He came to view the Bolshevik uprising less in the context of international class struggle, but rather that of Russian nationalism. Nonetheless, in his mind he wondered about the feasibility of an “October Revolution” for Zionism: he admired Lenin, not for his political leanings, but for his leadership style and his ability to breathe life into his words through direct action.

Ahimeir continued his studies at the universities of Liège and Vienna, where, in 1924, he successfully defended his doctoral dissertation entitled *Bemerkungen zu Spenglers Auffassung Russlands* (“Remarks on Spengler’s Concept of Russia”) which considered Oswald Spengler’s seminal work *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (“The Decline of the West”) from a Russian perspective.

That same year he returned to what had now become British Mandatory Palestine, and joined the *HaPoel HaTzair* Labour Youth Movement, quickly moving up its ranks: Berl Katznelson considered him to be one of the ‘meteors’ of the movement. He found work as a teacher, and worked as librarian for the cultural committee of the *Histadrut*, in Zikron Yaakov. He also began to publish articles in *Ha’aretz*, *HaPoel HaTzair*, *Davar* and *Kuntras*, which were deeply critical, not only of the situation in Palestine under British rule and the Zionist movement in general, but also of the Labour movement, of which he was still a member. Many of these articles were prefaced by a disclaimer from the editorial staff: Ahimeir had remained wary of socialism after the October Revolution, and was slowly reaching the intellectual conclusion that socialist ideology was incompatible with Zionist aspirations. The soundness of this verdict was furthered underscored by the unsuccessful formation of the Revisionist Labour Bloc (*Gush HaAvodah HaRevizjonisti*), which, in spite of its name, remained well within the organizational structure of the *Histadrut*. The next logical step was to disavow his Labour loyalties and join Ze’ev Jabotinsky’s Revisionist party, a move undertaken in 1928 with colleagues Yehoshua Heshel Yevin and Uri Zvi Greenberg.

The question remains open as to whether Ahimeir and his colleagues were indeed true Revisionists. The pivotal motivation for the shift was their embracement of monism – the belief in one overriding truth – which stood as the cornerstone of Revisionist-Zionist ideology<sup>4</sup>. Although the trio acted

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<sup>4</sup> Jabotinsky had likened the pairing of Zionism with Socialism to that of “ideological *sha’atnez*”: the resultant confusion in such an “adulteration of conceptions [...] [would] render impossible a clear-cut relationship towards Zionism and the Jewish State.” (Z. Jabotinsky, “The Ideology of Betar”, included in G. Shimoni, ed. *The Development of Zionist Thought: Source Material for Study Groups*, South Africa, 1966, p. 110). Certainly the events surrounding the formation of the Revisionist Labour Bloc as they unfolded were to prove Jabotinsky correct.

within party guidelines, they expressed the ‘maximalist’ manifestation of its precepts, and consequently, referred to themselves as such. Strategically, they believed that demanding the maximum may not necessarily result in total fulfilment of purpose, but would perhaps achieve at least a substantial portion thereof, certainly more than by demanding the minimum. Tactically, this meant civil disobedience rather than diplomacy, coupled with the preparedness to sacrifice one’s own complacency and security by accepting the consequences that this might necessitate; whether arrest, exile, prison or even execution. Ahimeir and the Maximalists preached monism in both belief and action. This set them apart from many within the ‘general’ Revisionists, and the two groups often found themselves at ideological loggerheads. Unlike Jabotinsky they advocated revolutionary – not evolutionary<sup>5</sup> – Zionism, and not only was their ideology maximalist, so was their aesthetic: in 1928 Ahimeir began publishing a column in the Revisionist mouthpiece *Doar HaYom* entitled “From the Notebook of a Fascist”. The following year he became active within the Revisionist youth movement training Betar *madrachim*.

The 1929 massacre in Hebron was another turning point. The lack of British support for its Jewish community prompted Ahimeir to term them “foreign occupiers”. He now rejected the effectiveness of political diplomacy; whether by discussion or “bridge of paper”. Zionist goals could only be achieved by demonstration of a tangible preparedness to achieve them. True belief in the national goal would require personal sacrifice, whether by sacrificing one’s own safety and security, going to jail, the gallows, being wounded, or exiled from the land itself. It was this ideological spirit which led to the founding of *Brit HaBiryonim*.

## **Brit HaBiryonim**

The Maximalist imperative for ‘revolutionary space’ was realised in October 1930 by Ahimeir’s creation of a group called *Brit HaBiryonim*. They were to serve as an alternative to the socialist workgroup *Gdud HaAvodah* which had witnessed several splits since 1926, the most serious of which

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<sup>5</sup> Colin Shindler’s term, see Shindler (2006), pp. 16 and 186

had seen a section headed by Menachem Elkind leave *Eretz Israel* altogether and re-establish itself in Crimea.<sup>6</sup>

Although, like Betar, it espoused an aesthetic which employed military trappings and looked proudly to the Bar-Kochba revolt for inspiration, ideologically-speaking, *Brit HaBiryonim* was altogether a different phenomenon. It was not a youth group, but rather a small, informal, anti-British underground faction; indeed the first of its kind in Mandatory Palestine. While in existence for just under three years, only participating in a limited number of protest activities, it nonetheless served as a prototype for its ideological successors *Irgun* and *Lehi*, more extreme groups established in its spirit. *Brit HaBiryonim* set out to implement the Maximalist ideology of direct action, and thus – ironically – was precisely the sort of underground movement which Jabotinsky had sought to prevent when petitioning the British to maintain the Jewish Legion.

A connection to the ancient *Biryonim* had already been established in Revisionist circles through writings by historian Josef Klausner<sup>7</sup> and poetry by Yaakov Cahan<sup>8</sup> and Uri Zvi Greenberg. It had served as inspiration for the youth of Betar, and this doubtlessly influenced the Maximalists' decision in naming the new group. Interestingly, Ahimeir – the figure most readily associated with *Brit HaBiryonim* – originally wanted the group to be named after the Nili Group's Sarah Aharonson<sup>9</sup>, who he considered to be the Joan of Arc of Israel<sup>10</sup>

In contrast to the Revisionist youth group, whose 'identification' with the Betar fortress of the Bar-Kochba revolt was due more to the coincidence that it was a homophone for the group's acronym (*Brit Yosef Trumpeldor*), *Brit HaBiryonim* appeared to identify overwhelmingly with their namesakes from the Second Temple period. They took their name from a band of Zealots – the *biryonim* – who were said to have gone out to actively resist the Romans, and who subsequently set fire

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<sup>6</sup> Shindler (2006), p. 159

<sup>7</sup> Shavit (1988), p. 88

<sup>8</sup> Kaplan, xiii

<sup>9</sup> The Nili Group, based in Zikhron Yaakov, had been a Jewish espionage ring working on behalf of the British, and Aharonson had committed suicide rather than disclose information while enduring torture at the hands of the Ottoman Turks.

<sup>10</sup> See Heller (1995), p. 22

to all stores of wheat and barley remaining in besieged Jerusalem.<sup>11</sup> The etymology of *biryonim* is unclear. Jastrow lists *biryon*<sup>12</sup> as “palace guard”, but has a second entry for *biryona*<sup>13</sup> which he translates as “rebel”, “outlaw”, or “highwayman”. It has been suggested that *biryoni* is derived from the Hebrew root for “empty”<sup>14</sup>, since the *biryonim* were “empty men with a propensity to violence.”<sup>15</sup>

The temptation simply to understand *biryoni* in its Modern Hebrew translation – that of “thug” or “hooligan” – does not take into consideration the nuances which exist in a more historical understanding of the word: that of “one who was all for (the defence of) the capital city – the *bira* – in other words, Jerusalem<sup>16</sup>. The *Sans-culottes* of the French Revolution and Bolsheviks were understood to have had their ideological roots in the *biryonim*<sup>17</sup>, a fact with which Ahimeir and Yevin were familiar. Nevertheless, Ahimeir – the ideological *agent provocateur* of the group – could not have been unaware of the word’s double-edged meaning. Any lingering doubt about the word’s potential for wide-ranging interpretation is quickly eradicated when one considers the variety of ways in which both *biryoni(m)* and *Brit HaBiryonim* appear in translation: from “thugs”<sup>18</sup>, “terrorists”<sup>19</sup>, “Praetorian Guard”<sup>20</sup>, “ruffians”<sup>21</sup>, and “palace guards”<sup>22</sup>, to “Covenant of Thugs”<sup>23</sup>, “League of the *Sicarii*”<sup>24</sup>,

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<sup>11</sup> See Babylonian Talmud, Gittin 56a

<sup>12</sup> ביריון

<sup>13</sup> ביריונא, In spite of the discrepancy in spelling, he claims it is the latter group which is referred to in B Talmud Gittin 56a as discussed below.

<sup>14</sup> בור

<sup>15</sup> See Babylonian Talmud, Gittin 56a, note 27 in the Schottenstein edition, Artscroll Publications, Brooklyn, 2005

<sup>16</sup> Yosef Ahimeir, interview 8 June, 2010.

<sup>17</sup> See Shindler, p. 159

<sup>18</sup> Gail Lichtman, “Abba Ahimeir”, *The Jerusalem Post Magazine*, May 31, 2002, p. 16, etc.

<sup>19</sup> The definition put forth by the prosecution when Ahimeir and other members of the Brit HaBiryonim stood trial, charged under the “Seditious Offences Ordinance No. 41 of 1929” ((PRO) London, CO733/266/1)

<sup>20</sup> The definition put forth by the defence during the same trial.

<sup>21</sup> Rashi, in B.Gittin 56a (in its English translation in Babylonian Talmud, Schottenstein edition( Brooklyn, 2005)

<sup>22</sup> The same passage in B.Gittin 56a, in its English translation in Babylonian Talmud, Isidore Epstein (ed.), (London, 1978), p. 256



“Brotherhood of Hoodlums”<sup>25</sup>, “The Union of Zionist Rebels”<sup>26</sup>, “Covenant of Brigands”<sup>27</sup> or “Alliance of Warriors”<sup>28</sup>. Very often the choice of translation used also belies a particular author’s political affiliations.

In spite of all rhetoric to the contrary, *Brit HaBiryonim* limited its activities to non-violent acts of civil disobedience: bloodshed and terror would come later, with the likes of the *Irgun* and *Lehi*. Its first organized act was a demonstration on 9 October 1930 outside the Tel Aviv hotel of visiting British Under-Secretary, Dr Drummond Shiels. They protested against the Second British Census on 18 November 1931, and the appointment in 1932 of Norman Bentwich to professor of international relations at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. It was the sympathies of the latter to the bi-nationalist *Brit Shalom* movement, calling as it did for peaceful coexistence between Jews and Arabs in Palestine that catalysed the interruption of Bentwich’s inaugural lecture by members of *Brit HaBiryonim*. In the context of their ideology, Bentwich was akin to the Rabbis of B. Gittin 56a, who wanted to go out and make peace with the Romans: now, as then, the *biryonim* were required to ensure that this would not transpire.

At the conclusion of the 1930 *Yom Kippur* services at the Western Wall, it was a member of *Brit HaBiryonim* – Moshe Segal – who blew the traditional *shofar* blasts, in defiance of a British ruling designed to placate the Arabs: “against the wishes of the Mufti, of (Lord) Plummer II, of Claim II (Arlozorov), of the Bund in *Eretz Israel*, of the *Va’ad Leumi* (Jewish Agency) and of others.”<sup>29</sup> It was also the first group to undertake acts of civil disobedience against the Nazi regime when it removed the swastika flag from the German consulates in both Jerusalem and Jaffa in May 1933, and set fire

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<sup>23</sup> Ehud Sprinzak, *The Ascendance of Israel’s Radical Right*, (Oxford, 1991), p. 315, and others.

<sup>24</sup> Josef Heller, *Stern Gang: Ideology, Politics and Terror, 1940-1949*, (London, 1995), p. 15, etc.

<sup>25</sup> Eran Kaplan, *The Jewish Radical Right*, (Madison, 2005), p. 181

<sup>26</sup> Ahimeir, Yosef (Ed.), “Dr. Aba Ahimeir: the Man Who Turned the Tide”, *Beit Aba: Aba Ahimeir Archive, Ramat Gan*, <http://www.beitaba.com/>, last accessed 11 April 2011

<sup>27</sup> Gideon Shimoni, *The Zionist Ideology*, (Hanover, 1995), p. 250

<sup>28</sup> Anita Shapira, *Berl: The Biography of a Socialist Zionist*, (Cambridge, 1984), p. 195

<sup>29</sup> Abba Ahimeir, “The Great Shofar Blast”, *Hazit Ha’am*, Nov. 11, 1932. Reprinted in *Revolutionary Zionism*, (Tel Aviv 1966)

to the door of the former<sup>30</sup>. Although the Maximalists had at first spoken favourably about Hitler's election, seeing it as a victory against communism and socialism, they quickly disassociated themselves once it was clear to them that Nazi anti-Semitism was an integral ideological element.

*Brit HaBiryonim* did, however, meet with violent reaction from the British authorities: Ahimeir was beaten and arrested at the Shiels, Bentwich and British Census protests, and served prison time in Acre, Jerusalem and Jaffa. He had remarked ironically already in 1926 that it was perhaps only to the police that he was still known as Gaisinovich or Haisinovich.<sup>31</sup> It was these actions that resulted in Jabotinsky famously referring to Ahimeir as '*moreinu v'rabbeinu*': 'our teacher and guide'.<sup>32</sup>

The short lifespan of *Brit HaBiryonim* came to an end in the summer of 1933, in the fallout of the Chaim Arlozorov murder and its subsequent trial.

### The Scroll of the Sicarii in Context

In 1926, a failed attempt on Mussolini's life had prompted Ahimeir to write *Megillat HaSikarkin* – "The Scroll of the Sicarii" – a work dedicated to the memories of Dora Kaplan and Charlotte Corday<sup>33</sup> which considered the relationship between acts of the ancient *sicarii* and modern-day political assassination<sup>34</sup>.

The historical *sicarii* were understood to be the extremists among the Zealots<sup>35</sup>, active at the time of the destruction of the Second Temple, and so-named for the daggers – *sicae* – concealed beneath their clothing, with which they would stab Jewish moderates sympathetic to the Roman

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<sup>30</sup> Shimoni (1995), p. 434, fn. 43

<sup>31</sup> Ahimeir, *Atlantidah*, p. 11

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Yosef Ahimeir, 8 June 2010, see also Shindler (2006), p. 151

<sup>33</sup> See p. 23n80 and 81. Interestingly, Jabotinsky had written a poem about Corday in 1902, "*Charlota HaUmlalah*"

<sup>34</sup> Three years later, in the wake of the 1929 Arab Riots, Greenberg would also begin to use *sicari* imagery in various poems.

<sup>35</sup> Although Zeitlin understood them to be 'two distinct, mutually hostile groups'. See Solomon Zeitlin, "Zealots and Sicarii", *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 81, No. 4 (Dec. 1962), pp. 395-398

regime<sup>36</sup>. They saw the Roman rule as illegitimate and sought to liberate the Jewish People from it through ‘deliberately planned strategy’<sup>37</sup>. In spite of this, it would appear that they focused their attention on Jewish notables and ruling groups: Josephus gives ‘not the slightest indication that the Sicarii ever attacked a Roman official or a Roman military object’<sup>38</sup>. Ironically, some modern research<sup>39</sup> suggests that the sicari phenomenon was a result of the “alienation of the intellectuals” within Jewish society during the Roman occupation of Jerusalem, and that its leadership and a significant number of members were drawn from the Jewish “intelligentsia”: a pointed coincidence when considering Ahimeir and his colleagues in this respect. It has also been posited that the *biryonim* – who had been ‘organized at a stage when the situation in Jerusalem had not yet been totally hopeless’<sup>40</sup> – preceded the *sicarii*, who were an ‘extreme offshoot’ of the former that added a ‘Messianic-social’ streak to the ‘national-political’ struggle of the Zealots. Josef Klausner believed them to be “‘activist Essenes”, communistically inclined, aiming at an egalitarian society and the abolition of poverty’<sup>41</sup>. It was indicated during their trial (see below), that the various members of *Brit HaBiryonim*, including Ahimeir, understood the two different factions in this way.

Furthermore, Ahimeir would often publish articles under the name Abba Sikra, which, translated literally, means “Father of the *Sicarii*”. In the Babylonian Talmud, however – in the passage discussed above – Abba Sikra is said to be the head of the *biryoni* in Jerusalem and, moreover, the nephew of Rabban Jochanan ben Zakkai:

Abba Sikra the head of the biryoni in Jerusalem was the son of the sister of Rabban Jochanan b. Zakkai. The [latter] sent to him saying, Come to visit me privately. When he came he said to him,

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<sup>36</sup> See Shimoni (1995), p. 434n39, Shavit (1988), p. 388n58, etc.

<sup>37</sup> Richard A., Horsley, “The Sicarii: Ancient Jewish Terrorists”, *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (Oct., 1979), pp. 444

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 445

<sup>39</sup> See *Ibid.*, p. 448

<sup>40</sup> Josef Nedava, “Who Were the Biryoni”, *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, Vol. 63, No. 4 (Apr., 1973), p. 321

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 318-319

How long are you going to carry on in this way and kill all the people with starvation? He replied: What can I do? If I say a word to them, they will kill me.<sup>42</sup>

Nedava believed that this pointed to ‘basic political schisms within the leadership of the revolt’<sup>43</sup>. According to him, Abba Sikra bridged the gap between the *biryonim* and the *sicarii*, and was seen as a moderate rather than a ‘mere, irresponsible “brigand”’.<sup>44</sup> Certainly the passage quoted above would seem to support this.<sup>45</sup> Ahimeir saw in the figure of Abba Sikra someone who would not support those from within the Jewish community who were ready to compromise at any cost with the ruling power: the Rabban’s willingness simply to relocate the centre of Jewish learning to Yavneh in the wake of the destruction of Jerusalem was a concession that Ahimeir was not willing to make<sup>46</sup>.

Ahimeir uses the imagery of the *sicarii* as a vehicle for the presentation of a hero who – as an “anonymous” individual acting alone – “makes” history through deeds and not words, and who is ready to sacrifice and, indeed, be sacrificed, in the name of the greater good. This was, in fact, a precedent set in the Tanakh, which ‘in general is fond of the sicarii’: figures such as Ehud, Yonatan and the sons of Benjamin are all considered as heroes since ‘in antiquity sicari-ness was treated more sympathetically’. The Marxist – so Ahimeir – ‘negates the hero’s value in history’ because ‘he is jealous of individual heroism’<sup>47</sup>, unlike the society of ancient Greece in which ‘every killer of a tyrant is considered a native hero’. In spite of this, Ahimeir wrote that sicari-ness appeared as a last resort, only ‘when there is the feeling that liberal-parliamentary means are not enough’ to bring down the existing regime. Sicari killing could thus only be justified because it served a “public” objective: as such – it is presumed – killing was rendered permissible because it constituted a form of (national)

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<sup>42</sup> B.Gittin 56a, Babylonian Talmud, Isidore Epstein (ed.), (London, 1978), p. 256

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Nedava, op. cit., p. 318

<sup>45</sup> The comments of Klausner and Nedava are relevant from both a historical and political perspective. Klausner was a professor and chief editor of the *Hebrew Encyclopedia*, and had established the “Pro-Wailing Wall Committee” in 1929. Nedava was a historian and professor of Political Science at the Universities of Bar Ilan, Dropsie, and Haifa, and wrote the Forward to Ahimeir’s *Berit HaBiryonim* and *HaMishpat*, as well as a book about him, *Ha Ish she Hitah et Ha Zerem (The Man Who Turned the Tide)*.

<sup>46</sup> Josef Ahimeir, interview with author, 15 February 2011

<sup>47</sup> See p. 25, below

self-defence<sup>48</sup>. Even so, far from glorifying the sicari deed, Ahimeir describes sicari-ness as a “sickness which is contagious and dangerous”; a necessary evil perhaps, but a bad sign nonetheless for the society held in its sway.

Ahimeir’s conception of the “hero-as-doer” appears to have remained an important theme for him: just two years before his death he would write in his book *Yuda’ikah* that the idea of “heroes as makers of history” was the ‘historical philosophy of the Tanakh’ and that as such, had preceded the philosophies of Carlisle and Nietzsche by thousands of years.<sup>49</sup> The Tanakh is interested in individuals, not the masses, with each book (or at the very least several chapters) dedicated to an individual hero. In terms of bloodshed, the ‘Book of Books’ – ‘bleeding with blood’ – is second to none, with the exceptions of Homer and Shakespeare<sup>50</sup>.

*The Scroll of the Sicarii* was written in 1926, while Ahimeir was still a member of *HaPoel HaTzair* and two years before his “defection” to the Revisionists. It was handwritten into one of his notebooks: he never sought its publication, and doubts remain as to whether he would ever have done so.<sup>51</sup> He almost certainly would have found an opportunity had publication been his intention: by this time he was already an established contributor to several major press organs within the *yishuv*, and did not shy from journalistic provocation in any of them. He began to write his column *From the Notebook of a Fascist* just two years after penning *The Scroll of the Sicarii*, and had previously argued the case for Italian fascism and its suitability as a political model in an article published in *Ha’arets* in November 1927<sup>52</sup> (while still a member of the Labour Party). Indeed, he had been fostering fascist sympathies since before returning to *Eretz Israel* in 1924, but had not given them public expression

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<sup>48</sup> For commentaries on the permissibility of killing in Jewish Law see B. Talmud, Sanhedrin 74a-b.

<sup>49</sup> Abba Ahimeir, “*Giburim Oseh Historiah*”, in *Yuda’ikah*, p. 39

<sup>50</sup> Abba Ahimeir, “*Tanakh v’Dam*” and “*Tanakh Shotet Dam*”, in *Ibid.*, p. 40-41

<sup>51</sup> See Josef Nedava’s Forward to Abba Ahimeir, *HaMishpat*, (Tel Aviv, 1968), p. 1”ט

<sup>52</sup> A. Ahimeir, “If I am not for myself who will be?”, *Ha’arets*, 15 November, 1927

sooner because “the time had not yet been ripe”<sup>53</sup>. Just under a year later and now as member of the Revisionist party he was entreating Jabotinsky to “command us *more*”.<sup>54</sup>

Be that as it may, the *Scroll of the Sicarii* sat unpublished – and in all likelihood unread – for seven years amongst Ahimeir’s many writings in the room that he shared with fellow Revisionist Avraham Stavsky.

## The Scroll as Evidence

### The Arlozorov Trial

On 16 June 1933, prominent Mapai leader and spokesman Chaim Arlozorov was shot and killed while walking with his wife along the beach in Tel Aviv. He had just returned two days earlier from Nazi Germany where he had negotiated an agreement which would oversee the emigration of German Jews to Palestine. The Nazis had been unwilling to let their Jewish *émigrés* leave with their possessions, and the new agreement sought to resolve this by permitting the transfer of Jewish capital from Germany to Palestine by immigrants or investors in the form of goods. This, of course, assisted the Germans through increased production and export of goods which, technically, were bought by Jews at the other end, thereby staving off any anti-German boycott in Palestine for the time being, and giving the economy in the *Yishuv* a much-needed injection<sup>55</sup>. It was dubbed “The *Ha’avara* Agreement” and was highly controversial.

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<sup>53</sup> Shimoni, (1995), pp. 250, 434n41

<sup>54</sup> Ahimeir to Jabotinsky, 25 Oct. 1928, in Heller (1995), p. 11 To be sure, he was not alone in his advocacy for the adoption of fascist ideology within the Revisionist movement, but he was arguably its most impassioned and eloquent proponent. Fascism must also be understood in its temporal context: in the 1920’s it was seen as the only real “antidote” to communism and socialism, and had not yet garnered the “sinister” implications which it would a decade later with the Nazis. An uncompromising idealist and individualist, Ahimeir was arguably the most doggedly intellectual of the three “Maximalist” leaders, eschewing personal interests in favour of ideological convictions.

<sup>55</sup> See “August 25: Ha’avira Agreement”, *Yad Vashem Chronology of the Holocaust*, [http://www1.yadvashem.org/about\\_holocaust/chronology/1933-1938/1933/chronology\\_1933\\_18.html](http://www1.yadvashem.org/about_holocaust/chronology/1933-1938/1933/chronology_1933_18.html), accessed 21 April 2011

That same spring the Revisionists had proscribed all political and economic relations with Germany, and, following the lead of members of *Brit HaBiryonim*, had instigated a boycott of German goods. Although the Maximalists could not, at first, see past the Nazi victory as representative of anything more than a victory of fascism over communism, once it became clear to them that the “Hitlerists” would not renounce their anti-Semitism, Ahimeir and *Brit HaBiryonim* were the first in the *Yishuv* to take action against the Germans.<sup>56</sup> Arlozorov’s visit and subsequent negotiations with the Nazi leadership was viewed as betrayal by the Revisionists, who now began to attack him openly in their press organs, branding him a traitor who “offers not only to lift the ban but to guarantee a market for German exports”<sup>57</sup>, concluding that “By this action, Mapai is stabbing our people in the back”. Furthermore, on the day of Arlozorov’s assassination, *Hazit HaAm* had published an article describing Arlozorov as willing to “deal away the most sacred Jewish assets and values” for money and wealth<sup>58</sup>.

Thus it is perhaps not surprising that in the wake of Arlozorov’s murder an accusatory finger was pointed in the direction of the Revisionists. Five weeks after the murder Ahimeir was among fifteen members of Betar, the Revisionists and *Brit HaBiryonim* arrested in connection with it. At that time the police seized the Revisionist archives and Ahimeir’s writings, including the notebook in which he had written *The Scroll of the Sicari*. Ahimeir was formally charged by the British Mandatory police with plotting the murder, while two Betarists – Avraham Stavsky (a recent *émigré* with whom Ahimeir shared a room) and Zvi Rosenblatt – were charged with carrying it out. This brought the increasingly hostile relationship between the Revisionists and the Labour Zionists to a head, with the Revisionists accusing Mapai and the Left of waging a “witch hunt”<sup>59</sup> and “blood libel”<sup>60</sup> against them. Copies of some of the documents seized, including *The Scroll of the Sicarii* were transferred to Prague in August 1933, where the 18<sup>th</sup> Zionist Congress was to take place. Berl Katznelson called

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<sup>56</sup> See Kaplan, p. 12, p. 182n22, Heller (1995), pp. 21-22 and Shindler (2006), pp. 174-175, etc.

<sup>57</sup> *Hazit HaAm*, 9 June 1933, quoted in Kaplan, p. 12

<sup>58</sup> “*Brit Stalin-Ben Gurion-Hitler*”, *Hazit HaAm*, 16 June 1933, in Kaplan, p. 183n23

<sup>59</sup> Nedava, Forward to *HaMishpat*, p. ט"ו

<sup>60</sup> See Ahimeir, Yosef (Ed.), “Beit Aba: Abba Ahimeir Archive, Ramat Gan”, <http://www.beitaba.com/content.php?id=19> last accessed 11 April 2011, and *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol., 2, pp. 471-472

for a commission of inquiry to be appointed which would scrutinize the documents. This, in spite of claims by several Zionist council members that such a commission may influence the judges as well as public opinion to the detriment of the accused during their subsequent trial<sup>61</sup>. That notwithstanding, a majority of 92 to 67 voted in favour of setting up the council of inquiry. Through its establishment it was hoped to bring the results of the investigation to the Zionist General Council so that it could take steps to “put an end to such trends should they be found to exist and to root out all elements guilty or responsible for such trends from within the Zionist movement.”<sup>62</sup>

On 16 May 1934 Ahimeir was acquitted of the charges relating to the Arlozorov murder, but Rosenblatt and Stavsky stood trial, eventually being acquitted due to lack of corroborating evidence, although only on appeal in Stavsky’s case. Jabotinsky, for his part, spoke out in support of all men charged, in an effort to maintain a show of solidarity in a trial which was as much about its perception as part of a world struggle between right and left<sup>63</sup> as it was about the actual murder of Arlozorov.

### **Trial of the Biryonim**

Although acquitted, Ahimeir remained in jail and began a hunger strike which he endured for four days and ended only at the prompting of the Chief Rabbi, Avraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook. On 12 July 1934 he was further charged (alongside other members of *Brit HaBiryonim* Yehoshua Yevin, Yehoshua Lichter, Haim Divri, Moshe Svorai and Yacob Orenstein) with “conspiring to effect acts in furtherance of a seditious intention, advocating and encouraging unlawful acts, being a member of an unlawful and seditious association, and being in possession of seditious literature.”<sup>64</sup> The major piece of “damning”<sup>65</sup> evidence used against Ahimeir was *The Scroll of the Sicarii*.

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<sup>61</sup> Nedava, Forward to *HaMishpat*, pp. ט"ז – ט"ח

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, see also Shapira (1984), pp. 194-195

<sup>63</sup> See Heller (1995), p. 22

<sup>64</sup> National Archives (PRO) London, CO733/266/1



During the trial, much emphasis was given to the question of semantics. Although the defendants agreed that the word *Sikariki*<sup>66</sup> meant “terrorist”, there was less of a consensus on the translation of *biryon* or *biryonim*. This suggests that Ahimeir and his group may well have understood the *sicarii* to have been “extreme offshoots” of the *biryonim*, as discussed above. While the prosecution maintained that *biryon* was synonymous with “terrorist”, the defence claimed that they understood the word in its old Hebrew meaning of “Praetorian Guard”<sup>67</sup>, both sides producing dictionaries (that of *Eliezer Ben Yehuda Dictionary* on the part of the prosecution, and the *Jastrow Dictionary of the Talmud* on that of the defence) to support their claims. The judge, in his ruling, questioned whether this differentiation was “of very much importance, because the object of nature of a society does not depend upon its name but upon its propaganda and its aims”, and decided that “in certain circumstances “*biryonim*” can be translated as “terrorists””. Similarly, with regard to the word “revolutionary”; while accepting the word’s potential for a many-faceted interpretation, he nonetheless argued that when “used in documents which include references to murder, revolvers, knives, the shedding of blood, blowing up of trains etc., the word acquires a much more sinister meaning”.

Ahimeir defended *The Scroll of the Sicarii* by claiming it to be an historical essay, written out of a keen interest in terrorism and its history, and with the desire to write a history of the Russian Revolution in the future. He attributed to the work no serious meaning, adding that its writing had been catalysed by an attack Mussolini’s life several years earlier. Nonetheless, regarding *The Scroll of the Sicarii*, the judge found that

There is no doubt that it can be given a meaning which is more seditious than any other document in the whole of this case [...] It is in effect a glorification of political murder. Killing from a Sicarii point of view and for political reasons is permitted.

Ahimeir, seen to be the leader of the body was deemed “head and shoulders above anyone else in ability, intelligence and education”, and sentenced to twenty one months imprisonment with hard labour, the minimum sentence which he could receive. The judge had spotted a clear difference

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<sup>65</sup> Nedava, Forward to *HaMishpat*, p. ט"ו

<sup>66</sup> *Sicarii* in its Greek form

<sup>67</sup> This, and subsequent citations from the trial, taken from National Archives (PRO) London, CO733/266/1

between the Revisionists and *Brit HaBiryonim* finding that “a dangerous conspiracy had been unearthed” during the trial of the latter. Jabotinsky appeared to use this fact for political gain, effectively letting the group hang themselves with their own rope. Certainly his support of Ahimeir throughout the trial was nothing like that given to Avraham Stavsky during his appeal.

The negative press generated by their initial support for the Nazis coupled with the fallout of the two trials against them signaled the end of the *Brit HaBiryonim*, and, in point of fact, also the Maximalists. Upon Ahimeir’s release from prison he devoted his time to intellectual pursuits: publishing articles, and serving on the editorial boards of the *Herut* daily paper, and the Hebrew Encyclopedia, to which he was a significant contributor.

## Dénouement

Ahimeir never really recovered politically or personally from the events of 1933 and 1934. Although acquitted before even going to trial, the notoriety he gained during the Arlozorov murder inquiry would hang like an albatross around his neck for the rest of his life.

While proud of his involvement and achievements with *Brit HaBiryonim*, Ahimeir steadfastly maintained his innocence with regard to the Arlozorov murder throughout his whole life, both publicly, and – more pointedly – privately. In an unpublished letter to his daughter Ze’eva Ahimeir-Zavidov<sup>68</sup>, he outlined the events which led to the accusation<sup>69</sup>. As a member of *HaPoel HaTzair*, Ahimeir had fought,

together with Arlozorov against the adoption of the socialist program and against a merger with *Achdut HaAvodah*. Arlozorov surrendered and joined *Mapai*, and I didn’t. Since then I hadn’t seen him [...] I was informed about the Arlozorov murder 12 hours after his murder. Neither I, nor Stavsky, nor Rosenblatt, nor any person from Jabotinsky’s movement had any relevance to this

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<sup>68</sup> “Ze’eva-li, Bati”, (Letter to Ze’eva Ahimeir-Zavidov, 6 February 1952, unpublished, “Beit Aba” Archive, Ramat Gan)

<sup>69</sup> The events also led to years of estrangement from his daughter. An infant at the time of the trials, she had been sent to live with his older sister Bluma, who she grew up to believe was her mother. She would learn that Ahimeir was her father only as an adult. The letter in question is an emotional outpouring from father to daughter which attempts to explain the reasoning behind some of the decisions reached during that period.

crime. But *Mapai*, who thus found themselves in a difficult situation, exploited the murder and in the light of the propaganda the Palestine Foundation Fund potentially conducted a blood libel.<sup>70</sup>

He believed that there was a plot against him because of his activity in *Brit HaBiryonim*. Stavsky was accused because he shared a room with Ahimeir, and Rosenblatt came into the picture because he was still a youth, and a third person was needed. Privately, Ahimeir believed that Arlozorov was murdered by the British Mandatory secret police. “The question”, he continued, “is whether some of the *Mapai* leadership weren’t also involved (Berl Katznelson, Dov Hoz, Elyahu Golomb, and others).”

It had been Berl Katznelson who was instrumental in establishing the commission of inquiry in Prague and throughout the whole affair had maintained a dogged anti-violence stance which would eventually serve to isolate him from his own party. Nonetheless, behind closed doors he was nagged by a sense of culpability from all sides involved: “A great deal of emotional preparation was required of these people before they arrived at this state. And who can tell whether or not one of us did not expedite this process?”<sup>71</sup> Indeed, it would appear that privately he came to doubt Ahimeir’s guilt<sup>72</sup>, but did not voice this openly since the presumed guilt of all three men charged was a “tenet of faith for the leaders of the *Histadrut* and *Mapai*”<sup>73</sup>, and thus unchallengeable.

Ahimeir, perhaps more than anyone, understood how difficult it was to dispel the rumours of his guilt in the matter. In the same letter to his daughter he repeats once again, emphatically,

I swear on all that is holy to me, I swear on the memory of my parents who were murdered at the hands of the Germans, I swear on the lives of my children, - that neither I, nor Stavsky, nor Rosenblatt, and neither any person from the membership of Jabotinsky’s movement had a hand in the murder of Arlozorov [...] My soul has been extremely wounded. I traversed a path of life which was very difficult. But I was sincere. In a sense I succeeded. Not in everything. I could not save a few souls which were dear to me.

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<sup>70</sup> Abba Ahimeir, “Letter to Ze’eva. The sentence underlined is reproduced as in the original letter.

<sup>71</sup> Mapai Central Committee minutes, 31 January 1934, quoted in Shapira (1984), p. 196

<sup>72</sup> Shapira (1984), p. 197

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

## In Conclusion

The controversy surrounding the Arlozorov murder and subsequent trial of members of *Brit HaBiryonim* were defining moments in Ahimeir's life. Indeed, misconceptions and inaccuracies regarding the circumstances surrounding not only Ahimeir's involvement in the murder, but also the writing of *The Scroll of the Sicarii* exist to this day.<sup>74</sup>

In no small sense is it remarkable that an essay which most likely never saw the light of day could, seven year later, come to play a role so central in serving to determine the further course of its author's life. What good is a manifesto if it is never given the opportunity to catalyse? How seditious can a work be that remains unread? The judge who sentenced Ahimeir concluded that "a society does not depend upon its name but upon its propaganda and its aims", yet how effective is "propaganda" which does not "propagate"? Although produced as one of the central pieces of evidence in the trial of *Brit HaBiryonim*, no proof – indeed, not even an indication – exists that *The Scroll of the Sicarii* was ever used as a "manifesto" for the group.<sup>75</sup>

Much attention has been given to the fact that the article remained unpublished by Ahimeir. While we will never know his true intentions for the essay, it is important to remember that Ahimeir had no qualms about courting controversy in print. This was the man who, in 1933, had implored the masses "to learn from the success of Nazism."<sup>76</sup> It is therefore very likely that Ahimeir would have sought the work's publication had he so desired.

Regarding the essay's content, it is true that there are passages which condone political killing, but I have tried to show that Ahimeir saw this not only as a last resort, but also as indicative of a diseased society. Furthermore, the concepts contained therein do not stray too far from the

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<sup>74</sup> A recent article in the Israeli daily *Yediot Achronot* mistakenly refers to *The Scroll of the Sicarii* as having been written *in the wake of* the Arlozorov murder. The comments which followed when Ahimeir's son Yosef corrected the error give a good indication of how polarizing the affair remains within Israeli society. See Mignazi, Aviel, "Telegramti, ein teshuva memekh, katav Eshkol l'ishta", *Ynet News*, <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4027803,00.html>, accessed 13 February 2011

<sup>75</sup> Yosef Ahimeir maintains "Absolutely not!"

<sup>76</sup> See Heller (1995), pp. 20-21

Talmudic conception of the *rodef*, or law of the pursuer.<sup>77</sup> Ahimeir, while an avowed enemy of Rabbinic Judaism, was nonetheless steeped in a Talmudic education. It is perhaps not unthinkable that this helped his justification for the type of assassination as described in *The Scroll of the Sicarii*. In any case, Ahimeir's justification is hardly the "glorification of political murder" which the sentencing judge concluded in the *Brit HaBiryonim* trial. Moreover, a critical reading of *The Scroll of the Sicarii* shows Ahimeir's own position on the matter to be less clear cut than it is generally understood to be, and the text itself is not without thematic inconsistencies. The question remains as to why he would write a treatise expounding a belief in the societal benefits of the individual terror act, when such an act had recently very nearly taken the life of his great ideological hero, Mussolini, and that this, in fact, had been the catalyst for the whole exercise?

This, of course, leads us back to the observation noted at the beginning, which critiqued the historian's predisposition towards the mediated over the unmediated source, the archival document over the published report etc., and which has framed this whole discourse "from the wings" as it were. In the same article on Herzl and the Palestinian Arabs, Penslar asks the pointed question, "How much of what was scribbled in the diary was an outpouring of the id or the libido, released verbally only to be sublimated into constructive political action?"<sup>78</sup> Indeed, I believe that this must be one of the thoughts foremost in the reader's mind when considering *The Scroll of the Sicarii*.

Abba Ahimeir once wrote to his best friend Josef Katznelson, "You will make history, and I will write history."<sup>79</sup> Although unwittingly and through circumstances which were at times beyond his control, in doing the latter he certainly achieved the former, and that in no small measure.

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<sup>77</sup> Of course we cannot know for certain if Ahimeir was familiar with this, nor if it carried any weight for him had he been. I offer the idea merely as conjecture, and in order to show that there does, indeed, exist discourse on the subject which has endeavored to justify political killing as a means of self-defense. For commentary surrounding the application of this principle to contemporary society, see "War and Non-Jews" in J. David Bleich, *Contemporary Halakhic Problems, Volume II*, (New York, 1983), pp. 159-166

<sup>78</sup> Penslar, p. 73

<sup>79</sup> As related by Yosef Ahimeir, 8 June 2010

## **Note on the Translation**

The original manuscript of *The Scroll of the Sicarii* is lost. When Ahimeir's son Yosef decided to publish the essay in 1972 as an appendix to an edition of Ahimeir's writings which centered around *Brit HaBiryonim*, he pieced the work together from excerpts published in *Ha'aretz*, *Davar*, *Doar HaYom* and *Hazit HaAm* at the time of the Arlozorov murder trial, and court files from the *Brit HaBiryomin* trial.

I have endeavoured to strike a balance between literal translation and literary flow and have tried to remain true to the spirit of Ahimeir's writing style.

# The Scroll of the Sicarii

Dr. Abba Ahimeir

To the memory of Charlotte Corday<sup>80</sup> and Dora Kaplan<sup>81</sup>

In the same way that the devotees of the present regime declare loudly that their hero is one of the greats of humanity, etc., so is the desire awakened within the Sicarii to remove from their path their opponents upon whom the existing regime is based. One who possesses the spirit of the Sicarii turns to the help of the sword, the revolver and the bomb. The Sicarius, the opponent of the existing regime, believes in a hero who makes history no less than the supporter of the existing regime does. Supporters see in the hero a heavenly son; the Sicarii see in him an infernal son. Sicarii historical philosophy elevates heroes and heroic deeds to the status of a miracle. The Sicarii see in history the naive actions of negative heroes - not of sons of God, rather of sons of Satan.

The Sicarii war of terror is waged by anonymous heroes. For the most part, no organization stands behind them. A certain mood<sup>82</sup> takes them, compels them to bring about a casualty and also obliges them to be ready to be brought down themselves. For the most part the Sicarii pay with their lives for the sake of an attempt which does not succeed in bringing down the enemy of public

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<sup>80</sup> Marie-Anne Charlotte de Corday d'Armont (27 July 1768 – 17 July 1793), Girondin sympathizer, who during the French Revolution stabbed Jean-Paul Marat (see note 4, below) to death in his bath, which resulted in his apotheosis, and for which Corday went to the guillotine.

<sup>81</sup> Fanya (a.k.a. Fanni or Dora) Kaplan (10 February 1890 – 3 September 1918), Russian socialist revolutionary who shot Vladimir Lenin 3 times on 30 August 1918 in an unsuccessful assassination attempt, for which she, herself, was shot four days later.

<sup>82</sup> מצב-רוח, more accurately, "a state of spirit"

ideals. How blissful was Charlotte Corday as she mounted the gallows after she managed to fatally wound Marat<sup>83</sup>, and how tragic was Dora Kaplan as she went to her death knowing that her attempt to put an end to Lenin's life was not successful. It is not terrible to die when the objective is achieved – but to pay with life for the sake of a failed attempt...

Belonging to the Sicarii allows a man to be transformed from a nobody into a hero. If not for the fact that Marat was “beloved of the people”, Charlotte Corday would not have been discovered. What did the death of Charlotte Corday matter<sup>84</sup> to her given that she died in the recognition that she was a second Joan of Arc in French history. For the removal of Marat was one of the most important events of the French Revolution. After Marat the Revolution began “swaying drunkenly” until it failed and headed towards defeat.

What was Corday in terms of her talents when compared to Danton, Robespierre, or Napoleon? Nothing<sup>85</sup>. One lass amongst many in France. But with one successful knife-stab, Charlotte Corday acquired<sup>86</sup> for herself no lesser importance than that of those mentioned above. Had the boy of 15 who didn't kill<sup>87</sup> Mussolini been successful, he<sup>88</sup> would have become a hero of history. To achieve this nothing else is required than to aim at one's target well, to practise aiming at one's target. What is the small portion of life given to man compared to the great reputation which

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<sup>83</sup> Jean-Paul Marat (24 May 1743 – 13 July 1793), Prussian-Swiss physician, journalist and politician, instrumental in bringing down the Girondins during the French Revolution.

<sup>84</sup> Lit. “is there”

<sup>85</sup> Lit. “Zero”

<sup>86</sup> Lit. “bought”

<sup>87</sup> Lit. “raise his hand against”

<sup>88</sup> i.e. Mussolini



will stay with him throughout history? His name will not perish from memory. The deed of the sicarius does not require talent, neither physical nor spiritual sweat, for what is suffering for a few hours on the cross – followed by<sup>89</sup> death – compared to the unending suffering of daily life for many long years. The sicarius sacrifices himself, and does so for the sake of life. What an altruistic deed! He sacrifices his own life for the sake of a life in which he will not participate. Someone committing suicide does so in his attic room and does not ask for a chance to bring his life to an end by killing some Alexander the Second, Mussolini, Marat or Lenin. The sicarius possesses an ideal of life. He is certain that he leaves the world having been given the opportunity of realising life in a different mode, even better than the future one in which he, himself, will not participate. He sacrifices himself upon the altar of life for the future to come. Not for nothing are the Marxists opposed to the Sicarii – the extreme Marxists and the moderate are all alike<sup>90</sup>, no difference. The Marxist negates the hero's value in history. He is jealous of individual heroism.

The sicarius is a unique sort. He possesses "sicarius-capacity" – that is to say he is ready both to kill and to be killed. He has the spiritual capacity to shoot cold-bloodedly at his target. He needs to be moderate in spirit from his own point of view. For if he misses the target it is likely that he will transform his enemy into a greater hero still; by virtue of his failure a hero becomes a martyr. If he had been killed, Mussolini would have been forgotten. But after he was shot at and missed, he became a hero, and legends formed around his personality.

Youth and women especially get caught up in sicariness. They bond easily with the malady of the Sicarii. A man over the age of 40 is rarely infected by such a malady. The youth and the

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<sup>89</sup> Lit. "on the trail"

<sup>90</sup> Lit. "are as one"

woman – they who understand less of politics – in reality it is they who are the real Sicarii: the youth lives in a world of ideals, and the woman is as strengthened by hate as by love. The youth and the woman tend more towards ideals, towards extremes. Their attitude to walking on the “tried and true path of gold” is negative. They also tend not to take moderate measures.

Clearly the sicarius is a good individual of a particular teaching<sup>91</sup>. He is ready to sacrifice himself for a labour of which he will not enjoy<sup>92</sup> the fruits. He is a good man, because he is ready to give his life – man’s greatest possession by far – in the name of an ideal; moreover, he would gladly spare a penny to give to the poor! So it is<sup>93</sup>, ostensibly, from the perspective of logic; but, in the truth of the matter the feeling of hatred is embedded in the heart of the sicarius deeper than the feeling of love. For his hatred is centered on one point, while his feeling of love is centered on many different directions so that he cannot concentrate on them.

95 percent of the Sicarii paid with life for the attempts that were made to do away with<sup>94</sup> those people of the existing regime, which they hated. Only 30 percent and maybe less than that achieved their goal. Who knows, if someone planning to become a sicarius was aware that the success rate was only 30 percent, he might have pulled out of it. But each man is 100% certain that he will succeed. If not for this certainty within us, we would be unable to accomplish even one step in life. Yes clearly, each one of the hundred thousand soldiers of the French Army who defended

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<sup>91</sup> "תורת פרט"

<sup>92</sup> Lit. "eat"

<sup>93</sup> Lit. "כך הדבר", "so is the thing"

<sup>94</sup> Lit "להגות מדרך החיים", "remove from the path of life"

Verdun<sup>95</sup>, believed deep within his heart that the danger of death hung over<sup>96</sup> his *comrade*, even the one right beside him, while he himself was immune to the bullets of the enemy. Every man is an optimist with regard to himself...if this were not the case, not one of us would have enough strength to live.

He who kills in order to steal, is a murderer, but the sicarius – the killer of the existing regime’s representative – is not a mere murderer, even in the opinion, in their heart of hearts, of the members of the existing regime. Morally speaking, it is permissible to kill in the name of a “public” objective, which is not the case in the name of private objectives or even out of private revenge. It is not the act of murder *per se* which determines its nature, and determines the verdict, rather the statement – “In the name of what was the murder committed”.

Sicari-ness is a sickness which is contagious and dangerous, very dangerous. For the civil society held in its sway it is a bad sign. Sicari-ness is contagious among the youth. In the place of civil public sentiment, a member of the Sicarii appears, and there is no end to the matter. The youth are educated in Sicari-ness, in the notion that there is no lawlessness without the pistol. The Sicarii themselves, they are heroes, but don’t mention this in a loud voice, lest war take hold of<sup>97</sup> society. The youth is cruel regarding himself and therefore has no pity in his heart for others.

The existing regime responds to the Sicarii in terror. Red<sup>98</sup> or white<sup>99</sup> terror. No difference. Terror – the revenge of the existing regime, is relative to that of its liberal opposition. Thanks to the

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<sup>95</sup> The Battle of Verdun (21 February – 16 December 1916), fought between the French and German armies was one of the major battles of the First World War. Although a tactical victory for the French, the battle resulted in over 300,000 deaths, approximately forty percent of forces deployed.

<sup>96</sup> Lit. “floated”

<sup>97</sup> Lit. “grip”

<sup>98</sup> i.e. Bolshevik

successful deed of the sicarius, a hero of the existing regime may fall, but the regime itself would not fall. Terror flows from a feeling of fear and revenge. This fear and revenge converge within the men of the existing regime in a war against their opposition by all means possible.

Sicari-ness chooses for its goal the hero of the existing regime. If the first sicarius is unsuccessful, the second sicarius comes along and attempts to assassinate the hero of the regime. If the second is also unsuccessful – you can be fairly sure, that the third, fourth, etc. will appear, in turn, until the assassination is brought about. The point is that the sicari atmosphere will not expire within society. The sicarii don't recognise each other. The hero of the existing regime becomes a sort of animal which the sicarii hunt, one after another. If the first hunter falls victim – the second and the third come after him, until eventually it is the animal which falls victim. How many attempts were made on Philip the Second<sup>100</sup>, on Cromwell<sup>101</sup>, on Wilhelm of Orange<sup>102</sup>, who served as head of the revolutionary movement in the Netherlands, on Alexander the Second<sup>103</sup>, on Stolypin<sup>104</sup>, and now – Mussolini! The fate of Alexander or Wilhelm needs to appear before our eyes

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<sup>99</sup> i.e. Tsarist

<sup>100</sup> Philip II of Macedon (382-336 B.C.E), *basileus* of Macedon, renowned for his agenda of Macedonian territorial expansion, and pioneer of the Phalanx military formation, assassinated by one of his bodyguards, Pasionius of Orestis, and succeeded by his son Alexander III ("The Great").

<sup>101</sup> Oliver Cromwell (25 April 1599 – 3 September 1658), English political leader, Commander of the New Model Army, overthrew the English monarchy, turning it into a republican Commonwealth. Lord Protector of England, Scotland and Ireland.

<sup>102</sup> Wilhelm (William) I, Prince of Orange (a.k.a. William the Silent, William of Orange), (24 April 1533 – 10 July 1584), leader of the Dutch provinces in the revolt against their lord, Hapsburg emissary Philip II of Spain. Assassinated by Balthasar Gérard.

<sup>103</sup> Aleksandr II Nikolaevitch (a.k.a. Alexander the Liberator), (29 April 1818 – 13 March 1881), Tsar of the Russian Empire, liberal reformer, emancipator of the serfs. Endured many assassination attempts, killed by a bomb planted by members of the Narodnaya Volya.

<sup>104</sup> Pyotr Stolypin (14 April 1862– September 18 1911), Russian Prime Minister from 1906-1911, notable for agrarian reforms and suppression of revolutionary groups. Assassinated by Okhrana agent Dmitri Bogrov (Mordechai Gerskovich).

when we discuss Sicarii-ness; just as one needs always to keep before one's eyes the fate of Alexander or Wilhelm, heroes of the existing regime just like Mussolini is a hero of fascism.

There is a sicari assassination which is without worth. Upon the altar of the sicarii there ascends a man who is not worth the effort. If the sicarius performs his deed unnecessarily on a political figure, in that case we need to hang the collar of guilt around the neck of liberal journalism, whose way is to condemn every man who does not belong to its party. And perhaps in order to protect society from the Sicarii it is appropriate to limit the reading of the newspapers, and only permit it for people aged 25-30 and older!

Is it possible that the deed of the sicarius may re-direct history? Will we remember what a wonderful feeling the death of Wilhelm of Orange produced with regard to the Netherlands revolution or that of Marat with regard to the course of the French Revolution? What would have been the fate of the Russian Revolution had Dora Kaplan succeeded in killing Lenin? Would the course of history in Italy have changed had Mussolini been murdered? What would have been the fate of Rome – and not just Rome – were it not for the murder of Caesar? And Henry the Fourth<sup>105</sup>, and so on...

I think there is no public movement based on sicari-ness. The last movement which acted thus was that of the Party of Socialist-Revolutionaries in Russia, in 1905. In antiquity sicari-ness was treated more sympathetically. In the Tanakh, Ehud is considered a hero. The Tanakh in general is

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<sup>105</sup> Henry IV (13 December 1553 – 14 May 1610), King of Navarre and France, Huguenot, first Bourbon king, responsible for the Edict of Nantes, securing religious freedom for Protestants. Assassinated by Catholic extremist François Ravaillac.

fond of the sicarii. Yonatan kills the Philistine governor.<sup>106</sup> Two sons of Benjamin kill the son of Saul. In Greece, every killer of a tyrant is considered a native hero.

Why is our attitude to sicari-ness negative? Are we more infused with the ethic “Thou shalt not murder” than our ancestors were<sup>107</sup>; or perhaps it stems from our opposition to “cold calculation”, that this is not worth doing? It is the nature of “cold” logic that condemns the Sicarii while the opponents of the existing regime are happy in their hearts for any successful deed of the sicarius. By that which we declare about our opposition, there is, in fact, hypocrisy. For example – the assassinations of DeHaan<sup>108</sup> and of Mussolini.

Were the realization to be impressed upon the sicarius, that society would condemn him, he would not attempt to carry out the act of murder. The sicarius sees enemies in the eyes of flesh and friends in the eyes of spirit. Sicarii appear because there arises in<sup>109</sup> them the recognition, that they are volunteers and that the act of murder will be considered a heroic deed, and a positive act in the eyes of the masses. Therefore only in a legal sense does the sicarius bear responsibility for his action. When does the sicarius appear? Whenever there is hope that it is possible to put an end to the existing regime by legal means, sicari-ness does not appear. It appears only when there is the feeling that liberal-parliamentary means are not enough. The sicarius came for the goodwill of society.

Presently there is no sicari ideology in the world, and no organization which has objectives of sicari-ness, similar to the sicari ideology of ancient Greece, the days of the destruction of

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<sup>106</sup> I Samuel:13

<sup>107</sup> Lit. “more than the ancients”

<sup>108</sup> Jacob Israël de Haan (December 31, 1881 – June 30, 1924), Dutch-Jewish writer, emigrated to Palestine in 1919, assassinated by the *Haganah* for his alleged dealings with Arabs and anti-Zionist politics.

<sup>109</sup> Lit. “stands in”

Jerusalem, Italy in the 1920's, (or) in Russia in the 1870's or in 1905. The sicarius acts now of his own accord. Here he volunteers that he does not advertise his deed before he puts it into action.

In our time, the sicarius gets his ideological preparation from the war of opinions waged by the opponents of the existing regime, whose leaders<sup>110</sup> are against a battle by liberal legal means. From a legal perspective liberal opposition is not to blame for the act of the sicarius, however in a deeper legal sense it may be said that moderate opposition – *this* is what trains the sicarius for his immoderate act. And in vain this moderate opposition declares to itself – after the terrorist act – that it plays no part in it. Indeed, one does not take into account the messages of the opposition, and hangs on it<sup>111</sup> the collar of guilt – justly, from the perspective of simple truth, unjustly, from a legal perspective. Whether assassination is successful or unsuccessful – the manner in which the regime responds to the deed of the sicarius is that of an eye for a tooth. When the end came to the war of opposition in a liberal way (which the existing regime fights by means of “tooth”, that is to say by means of the press and from the public platform<sup>112</sup>) – the ruler responds after the sicari assassination, while he takes against it<sup>113</sup> the means of eye for an eye. The question of whether the sicari act is worth doing is in place only from the perspective of the opponents of sicari-ness. As long as sicari-ness doesn't reveal its claws– and not necessarily towards the existing regime – behold, the opposition refers to it sympathetically. In a subjective manner, that is to say, on theoretical grounds or tact, there are those who oppose it<sup>114</sup> from the bottom of their hearts. But from an

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<sup>110</sup> Lit. מנהלים, “managers” or “directors”

<sup>111</sup> i.e. the opposition

<sup>112</sup> הבמה הציבורית, lit. “public stage”

<sup>113</sup> i.e. the assassination

<sup>114</sup> Lit. “there are opponents to it”

objective perspective which is in a moment of will, it is all opposition to a successful sicari deed.

But if the sicari deed is unsuccessful, obviously, as each opposition felt to declare, it has no relevance for them.

Suvorov's<sup>115</sup> dictum: “stupid the bullet, brave the bayonet” was unsuitable in the light of science. In the last wars the bullet “overtook” the bayonet, but as far as sicari-ness is concerned, the gun takes the place of the two-edged sword. The sicarius in the days of the Judges, in the destruction of Jerusalem, in the murder of Caesar, Henry the Fourth and Wilhelm of Orange – they all used the short sword. Now the Sicarii mostly use the gun, and Suvorov's dictum about the bullet is adjusted according to the sicarius's deed. Technique adapted for itself the rifle for the necessity of war, but sicari-ness has not yet adapted for itself the gun. More precisely – the guilt lies not in the technique, but rather in the gun, which is not a perfect tool. But the hand of the sicarius is nonetheless the hand of a man, and a “man-made” deed is controlled by his spirit, which is not perfect either, in good intentions or in bad.

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<sup>115</sup> Alexander Vasilyevich Suvorov, (24 November, 1729-18 May, 1800), Fourth and last Generalissimo of the Russian Empire, authored a military manual entitled *The Science of Victory*. He never lost a battle.



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