
Among the numerous books dealing with the history of Polish Jews and the Holocaust that have come out in recent years in Poland, the study by the young historian, Dariusz Stola, is particularly noteworthy. Born in 1963, the author studied history at Warsaw University, where he developed an interest in Polish-Jewish relations during the Holocaust. He completed a doctorate about the wartime work of Dr. Itzhak (Ignacy) Schwarzbart, and the book under review is an expanded version of this dissertation, which he wrote under the supervision of eminent historian, Professor Marcin Kula. Dr. Itzhak Schwarzbart was one of the most distinguished figures among Polish Jewry in the inter-war period. During World War II, he rose to a position of considerable importance as the Jewish representative in the Polish National Council-in-Exile. Yet despite his position and energetic endeavors, he remained unknown to the vast majority of the Jewish people. This lack of public recognition has been matched by the reticence of historians to discuss the man: very few works of historical scholarship contain references to Schwarzbart's activities during the war.¹

¹ I have pointed this out in a lecture delivered at a conference of the Congress of Jewish Studies, see: Shmuel. Krakowski, “Dr. Itzhak Schwarzbart: His Legacy and Diary” (Hebrew) in: *Proceedings of the 10th World Congress for Jewish Studies*, vol.1 (Jerusalem: 1990), pp. 473-478.
Stola’s book goes far to fill this scholarly lacuna. Its significance lies, above all, in offering us a broad perspective on the history of the complex relations between the Poles and the Jews during the Holocaust. Our understanding of this subject is considerably lessened if Dr. Schwarzbart’s prodigious labors are not considered.

What prompted this young Polish historian to write a dissertation and subsequently publish a book about the Jewish leader? The answer can be found in the author’s preface:

We should bear in mind that the saga of Ignacy Schwarzbart, the Jewish representative in the Polish National Council, is an integral part of Poland’s own history. Neither Schwarzbart nor Shmuel Zygielbojm was a Jewish ambassador accredited to the Polish Government-in-Exile; they were members of the National Council of the Polish Republic, in other words, part of the Polish State in exile. This does not mean that they do not belong to the history of the Jews. Schwarzbart wished to be part of the history of the two peoples, and he belongs to both. In fact, his story further proves the extent to which the history of Poland remains incomplete unless we take into account its national minorities. It is also proof of the incompleteness that comes from dividing the country’s history along ethnic lines (pp. 12-13).

Stola points out (p.14) that, beside his own interest in the subject, another incentive to pursue his research was the presence of numerous photocopies from the Schwarzbart archive that were transmitted by Yad Vashem to Poland as part of the archival exchange program. Endowed with a highly developed historical consciousness, Schwarzbart had collected and preserved every document and letter that came into his possession. Over the years a large and important archive was developed, which was subsequently moved in its entirety to Yad Vashem. In addition, Schwarzbart had kept a diary-beginning January 13, 1940, and ending December 30, 1947-in which he recorded the events as they occurred, as well as his meetings and conversations with a great many people.
It goes without saying that Stola's study does not draw exclusively on the Schwarzbart archive; the author also thoroughly researched archives in Poland and London and made extensive use of the underground press and diaries from the war period, as well as of memoirs written after the events. His bibliography of secondary sources is equally impressive.


The first, introductory chapter dwells on the nature and history of the Polish National Council-in-Exile. It was established in December 1939, in the wake of the German occupation of the country, by decree of the Polish president-in-Exile, who also appointed its members. The council functioned as an advisory body to the president and to the Polish Government-in-Exile—a parliament-in-Exile of sorts but which lacked executive powers. Like the Government-in-Exile, the council was convened in the town of Anger, near Paris, and, after the defeat of France in the summer of 1940, moved to London. Its membership changed over time. In 1942, for example, the council had thirty-one members who represented several Polish political parties: the People’s Party (peasants), the nationalists (known as Endecja), Christian Democrats, Socialists, and non-party members.

Why was Schwarzbart co-opted onto the National Polish Council? According to Stola:

Polish pre-September 1939 policies toward minorities, particularly toward the Jews, met with very negative reactions in the West. It was, therefore, considered desirable [by the Polish authorities in exile] to put a distance between themselves and these policies in a decisive fashion (p. 30).

In fact, Polish authorities in the West sought to portray the council as a democratic parliament and, as part of this effort, decided to include a representative of the Jewish minority in this body. Schwarzbart was appointed
a member of the Polish National Council-in-Exile on December 24, 1939. In retrospect, this position proved critical during the Holocaust years.

By the time of his appointment, Schwarzbart, a lawyer by profession, had already acquired a great deal of experience in political and public activity as leader of the General Zionists in Poland. He had served as deputy during almost every Zionist congress in the inter-war period. He was well known and respected by Polish Jews as a brilliant speaker and publicist, as well as a distinguished intellectual. In November 1938, Schwarzbart was elected as a deputy to the Polish Sejm. Of the five Jews in the Polish parliament, he was the only deputy who managed to flee the country together with members of the Polish government after the defeat in September 1939. With them he succeeded in reaching France. He also received the backing of the representation of Polish Jewry that had been established in mandatory Palestine by the leaders of the various Zionist parties along with Agudat Israel. Stola highlights the fact that Schwarzbart regarded himself as a representative of all Polish Jews and did his utmost to speak on behalf of the country's entire Jewish community (pp. 48-49).

Polish exiles also sought to add to the National Council a representative of the Ukrainian minority, the largest ethnic minority in the country (14 percent of the population), but failed in their efforts to find a suitable candidate who would be willing to accept the nomination:

The Polish and Ukrainian politicians could not reach an agreement on two fundamental issues: the eastern border of Poland, and the conscription of Ukrainians into the Polish army, which had been assembled in France. According to the Ukrainians, the previous border between Poland and the Soviet Union had ceased to exist and its reestablishment had to be ruled out since it would mean cutting the Ukraine in half (p. 45).

The Ukrainians also strove to organize their own troops.
The Jewish council member was, therefore, the only minority representative on the Polish National Council-in-Exile.
In the course of time, as the council grew to include over thirty members, it was decided to increase the Jewish representation, since Jews made up about 10 percent of the country's population. Shmuel Zygielbojm, the Bund representative, was appointed a council member. After his suicide, he was replaced by Emmanuel Scherer.

Relations between the two Jewish representatives were far from harmonious. Stola underscores the rivalry between Zygielbojm and Schwarzbart, which did nothing to facilitate the latter's work. Relations with Scherer turned out to be better (pp. 55-56).

How did Schwarzbart view his job? Stola devotes the second chapter of his book, “The Task,” to this subject. He shows that two fundamental assumptions underlay Schwarzbart's activities. First, he believed that the vast majority of Polish Jews would stay in their places of residence in the country, or, as Stola writes: “Simply put, the Zionist from Krakow harbored serious doubts about the possibility of securing the Land of Israel [for the Jewish people] and solving the Jewish question there” (p. 63). Second, he firmly believed that ultimately Germany would be defeated and Polish independence reestablished. Consequently, he saw it as his task to struggle for the elimination of the antisemitic restrictions that were in force before the war and for the enactment of laws that would ensure full civil rights for the Jews of Poland.

Schwarzbart harshly criticized the political forces in Poland that strove to force the Jews to emigrate from the country. He aspired to secure from the Polish authorities full recognition for Jews as citizens with equal rights, without any restrictions or discriminatory practices. He therefore fervently supported pro-Polish policies and close cooperation between the Jews and the Poles. At the same time, however, Stola writes, “he did not hide the fact that the pro-Polish policies of the Jews offered no insurance that the Poles would pursue a similar policy toward the Jews” (p. 68).

Schwarzbart's vigorous efforts to promote mutual understanding between Poles and Jews can hardly be described as successful. Among many Jews, and, even more so, among Poles, his political views met with strong opposition:
Several members of the Representation body of Polish Jewry held that Schwarzbart's policy [toward the Poles] was overly compromising, opportunistic and ineffective...He was accused of excessive Polish patriotism...In the eyes of Polish nationalists he remained a Jew and a Zionist, in other words, a rival, a representative of hostile Jewry...In both his efforts to protect Jewish interests before the Poles and those of Poland before the Jews, Schwarzbart felt himself isolated from the two groups he sought to represent (pp.90-91).

Schwarzbart was aware that the struggle for pro-Jewish legislation within the Polish National Council-in-Exile was not the main battle front. Thus, he sought ways to become involved in practical aid efforts on behalf of Jews who were Polish citizens but who were living outside the country as refugees and Jews who lived within occupied Poland. These efforts form the subject of the third chapter, entitled “Current Issues.”

The first order of priority for Schwarzbart was to get the Polish government-in-Exile to supply more up-to-date information about the fate of the Jews under Nazi rule. As in his other efforts, here, too, Schwarzbart met with difficulties, particularly in the early years. Occasionally, reports from Poland were doctored before they reached Schwarzbart, especially the sections dealing with relations between Poles and Jews under the Nazi occupation. As a serious and conscientious historian, Stola dwells at length on these distortive practices:

The picture of relations [between Poles and Jews] in Poland as drawn by Polish politicians in exile was deliberately distorted so that it didn't match the information received. Clear proof of such distortion about relations between Poles and Jews is found in a report that was drafted by the [underground] courier, Jan Karski, “The Jewish Question in Poland,” dated spring 1940. The contents of this report were tampered with in several places in order to alter the picture of attitudes of Poles toward both the Jews and the anti-Jewish policies of the Germans. One original sentence, for example, reads: “The
attitude [of the Poles] toward the Jews is mostly uncompromising, often merciless. In large part [the Poles] enjoy the powers granted to them by the new situation. In many cases they take advantage of these powers, and often even abuse them. This brings them somewhat closer to the Germans.” Having been doctored, this fragment of the report read as follows: “The attitude of the Poles toward the Jews varies in many cases under the impact of events...In many cases the Poles clearly show their compassion toward the Jews. This becomes even more characteristic...because an obvious display of compassion is liable to end up—as it often does—very badly for those who open their hearts” (pp. 113-114).

Under the circumstances Schwarzbart failed to organize substantive help for the ghettoized Jews. For this he chiefly blamed the British and American authorities, who refused to search for ways of rendering assistance by providing medicines and food (p. 124).

Schwarzbart went to great lengths to aid Jewish refugees from Poland; he devoted particular attention to the problems of Jewish servicemen, who complained about antisemitic incidents in the Polish military.

The German invasion of the Soviet Union and the signing of the agreement between the Soviets and the Polish Government-in-Exile, created conditions conducive to establishing ties with a large community of Jews, Polish citizens, in Russia. Schwarzbart saw this as an important area of his work:

As early as the first days of July [1941], Schwarzbart took steps aimed at helping the Jews in the Soviet Union. He collected information and drew up a list of Jewish exiles and their leaders in the Soviet Union. He sought to ensure that Jews would also be among the beneficiaries of agreements between the Poles and the Soviets. He supported the request of the mission of Polish Jewry to dispatch a Jewish representative to the Polish embassy [in the Soviet Union]. At first, things moved in the right direction. The Polish-Soviet talks dealt with all Polish nationals. Jews were by no means excluded, which Schwarzbart considered a good sign (p. 134).
With time, however, relations worsened. The Jews were particularly embittered by the hostility that existed toward them within the ranks of the Polish army that was being formed in the Soviet Union under the command of General Anders. Schwarzbart was infuriated by the anti-Jewish discrimination evidenced when the army, together with a great many refugees, was evacuated from the Soviet Union into Iran. The number of Jews among the evacuees from Russia was small, well below their proportion among Polish nationals-in-Exile in that country. Stola writes:

Government policy toward Polish Jews in Russia in the years 1941-42, aid efforts, conscription into the army, and the evacuation into Iran were later remembered by Schwarzbart and other Jewish politicians as proof of the unreliability of Polish statements about equal rights for the Jews. After two years of work, the hopes of the representative of Polish Jews in the National Council for a historic turning point in relations between the Poles and the Jews and the improvement of the Jews' situation soured. Meanwhile, the reports that started coming out of Poland turned the hopes that remained into wishful thinking (pp. 150-151).

The fourth chapter, “Reports on the Extermination,” is, to the mind of this reviewer, the most important in Stola's book. Dissemination of these harrowing reports throughout the free world was, without a doubt, the most important of Schwarzbart's tasks:

Schwarzbart's activity in the Polish National Council can be divided into two stages. The first stage ended and the second stage began gradually with the realization on the part of the representative of Polish Jewry that his people had been almost completely wiped out. Ignacy Schwarzbart's world collapsed, though very little had changed in his immediate environment of the Polish London community...Ignacy Schwarzbart was an important figure both in the history and the historiography of reports on the Holocaust. He was the first Jew in the West who received reports from the Polish authorities on the situation in Poland. He either disseminated the information himself or
conveyed these reports to Jewish organizations. In his capacity as a member of the Polish parliament-in-Exile, he confirmed the information that appeared truly unbelievable, exerted pressure on the [Polish] government to disseminate in a proper fashion the information about the fate of the Jews, and demanded an appropriate reaction. He left an archive containing a rare collection of documents, reports, and diary entries for the benefit of future historians. Without this material a great many black holes would exist in our knowledge of the events, the views and the opinions surrounding the most dramatic period in the history of both the Jews and Jewish-Polish relations (pp. 152-153).

Stola offers us a detailed account of the sequence of the flow of information about the catastrophe, information about the Einsatzgruppen operations, the activation of extermination camps, and the liquidation of the ghettos. He dwells on the incredulity with which the information was received, on how difficult it was to comprehend and absorb it, and on the tremendous importance of Karski's efforts. He describes the desperate attempts to translate the terrible information into rescue efforts.

Schwarzbart played a major part in these rescue efforts. The high hope that the transmission of information about genocide would spur the Allies into action was matched only by the tremendous disappointment. Stola narrates this drama with great skill in the sub-chapters entitled ``The Crime and the Silence'' and ``The Causes of the Silence.'' At a session on November 27, 1942, the Polish National Council adopted the text of an appeal to the world to put an end to the German crimes. It was Schwarzbart who initiated and phrased the appeal.

Two weeks later, on December 10, 1942, the Polish foreign minister issued a call to the Allied governments, which led to the public declaration on December 17, 1942, by the United States, Soviet Union, Britain, and the French National Committee concerning Germany's crimes against European Jews. This was Schwarzbart's greatest achievement as the Jewish representative on the Polish National Council. However, neither the efforts involved in transmitting and disseminating the information throughout the free
world, nor the declarations on the intention to punish the perpetrators bore fruit. Stola dwells on this subject in the fifth chapter of his book, “Reactions”:

Reports on the extermination of Polish Jews effected a change of priorities in Polish-Jewish policies. Efforts to design a suitable solution to the Jewish question in the future had to be shelved in favor of immediate action aimed at saving the Jews in the present. At that time, thanks to the connections established through the Polish underground, Jewish representatives in exile received urgent calls for immediate help from both the Bund and the Jewish National Committee. Calls for rescue that came from Poland were addressed to the representatives of Polish Jewry in exile, to the Polish government, to Jewish organizations, to the Allies, and to “the entire civilized world.” Polish Jews hoped, in fact had every right to hope, they would receive assistance from these bodies and organizations. As Polish Jews, and in their capacities as representatives of Polish Jewry and members of Polish governing institutions in exile, Schwarzbart and Zygielbojm were especially involved in these ventures. “All that matters to us is our ability to help you,” wrote Schwarzbart to the Jewish National Committee (p. 189).

The most urgent task was to further proper efforts, such as punitive actions against Germany, on the part of the Allied powers. The Polish Government-in-Exile supported these demands. The Allies, however, were not willing to engage in operations designed specifically to help the Jews. David Wyman and Martin Gilbert dwelt at length on these demands and the reasons for the Allied powers' refusal to act on them.

Schwarzbart proposed that the Home Army (Armia Krajowa) attack extermination camps, but this was anything but practical. The Home Army's strategy did not include substantive armed operations aimed at helping the Jews. Furthermore, assuming that the Home Army had been more forthcoming, it is very doubtful whether it had the capacity to liquidate the

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camps. After all, it could not even free Polish prisoners from concentration
camps.

More promising was the venture of transferring funds to the Jewish
underground in Poland and to the Zegota, the Council for Aid to Jews, which
had been established in Warsaw in 1942. Having no conduits of their own for
channeling funds into occupied Poland, Jewish organizations were dependent
on the assistance of the Polish Government-in-Exile and the Polish
underground. Some funds, were, in fact, transferred through the couriers of
the Polish government. It was little more than a drop in the sea of needs, but
the money did amount to some substantive assistance.

Stola devotes a separate sub-chapter, “The Funds,” to an extensive account
of dates and amounts conveyed to the Jews, as well as the sources and
destinations of the funds transferred. Stola made a thorough search of
archives to unearth these details; among other things, he discovered that part
of the funds failed to reach their destination. It is possible that these funds fell
into the hands of the Germans after they captured the couriers en route along
their intricate and dangerous itineraries. Embezzlement also cannot be ruled
out. In any event, Stola’s painstaking research failed to uncover evidence that
would provide us with answers.

Schwarzbart was well aware of the fact that the magnitude of the aid did not
match in any way the scale of the catastrophe and that neither he nor the
Jewish organizations in the free world were capable of rendering substantive
assistance. All proposals for real actions to save the Jews were rejected by
the Allies and, to a large extent, by the Polish authorities in exile. The sense of
total defeat began strengthening its grip over Schwarzbart. Stola describes
this period in the last, interesting—even profound—chapter entitled “The Failure”:

All in all, the contacts with the [Polish] government [in exile] concerning rescue
efforts were not satisfactory, to put it mildly, from the point of view of Jewish
leaders. Schwarzbart and the other members of the mission of Polish Jews
were convinced that the government could have done more than it did to save
the Jews (p. 223).
Stola lists several reasons for the dissatisfaction on the part of the Polish Jewish representatives: first, the government procrastinated for several months before calling on the Polish population to render assistance to the Jews; second-and contrary to the promises—no Jewish representatives were dispatched to Polish government institutions in neutral countries. The representation of Polish Jewry hoped that Jewish emissaries in neutral countries would be able to facilitate contacts with Polish Jews in occupied Poland and in this fashion promote rescue efforts. Third, the promise to send Jewish parachutists from mandatory Palestine was not honored.

In 1943, a serious crisis brought Polish-Jewish relations in exile to the breaking point, and Schwarzbart found himself in the thick of it. He was increasingly aware of the defeat, and he viewed it as also his personal failure. Stola quotes a passage from Schwarzbart's diary, an entry written on May 18, 1943:

Blackness all around: The Jewish question in Europe has been eliminated almost completely. It appears that we shall not get the Land of Israel. Jews of Great Britain—a lost position...Russian Jews-remnants destined for assimilation. I do not see a way out. There is only extermination (p. 238).

On December 1, 1943, Schwarzbart wrote: “This is the end of Polish Jewry. Lord, my spirit is broken. Truly, there is nothing to live for.”

In January 1944, two well-known leaders of Polish Jewry arrived in London from the United States and mandatory Palestine: Professor Aryeh Tartakower of the World Jewish Congress and Anschel Reiss, leader of Poalei Zion and a member of the Representation of Polish Jewry. The two leaders renewed pressure on the Polish Government-in-Exile to step up rescue efforts. After two months of deliberations, the government yielded and established the Commission for Rescuing the Jewish Population. The only practical accomplishment of this body was the dissemination of information about the deportation of Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz. Schwarzbart described the commission as “a fiction” (p. 254).
Polish-Jewish relations in exile worsened even further in early 1944, following the desertion of sixty-eight Jewish servicemen from Polish army units stationed in Britain. Jews had complained about intolerable antisemitism in the army and preferred to cross over to the British army. Schwarzbart, in opposition to Jewish public opinion, was against the desertion. Despite the crisis, he did not wish to harm the Polish Government-in-Exile and continued supporting its foreign policies. Stola is correct in pointing out that the uproar provoked by this affair was completely disproportionate to the magnitude of other burning issues facing the government: "More was written about desertion in the Polish London community than about the Holocaust of the Jews or about their future status in Poland" (p. 268).

The desertion affair and the ensuing uproar constituted a *coup de grace* for Schwarzbart’s activity on the Polish National Council. On March 21, 1945, his tenure in this body came to an end. One year later he left London and settled in New York. He died there in April 1961.

According to Stola, Schwarzbart did everything possible to improve relations between the Poles and the Jews in exile. The author clearly blames the Polish Government-in-Exile for the failure of Schwarzbart and his policies. In the conclusion Stola writes:

The government’s policy toward the Jews was ambiguous. Statements were issued about full equality for the Jews, and, later, about how everything possible was being done to save them. In reality, these statements bound no one. Every effort that was made required special pressure and interventions. Many simple aid proposals met with no response. Information on the fate of the Jews was not made public for a long time. The call to help the Jews was also broadcast after a long period of waiting. Instructions dealing with measures to be taken against collaborators with the Germans in the persecution of the Jews came too late. Financial help to remnants of the Jews in Poland was disproportionate to their need. The government hardly rendered any assistance. The Commission for Rescuing the Jewish Population did not play the role of the Department for Jewish Affairs that representatives of Polish Jews demanded be established. The budget and powers of the
Commission bore no relation to the needs of those concerned or the publicity that surrounded its establishment (p. 271).

Stola does not blame Schwarzbart for failing in his declared task. On the contrary, in the author's view, Schwarzbart did everything humanly possible. He writes about his protagonist favorably and with great empathy. Stola does not make secret his liberal views as he praises Schwarzbart as a Jewish and Polish patriot, as a Jew-Pole. We should bear in mind here that the latter designation signifies a significant semantic distinction: in Polish, the concept of “Jew-Pole” (Zyd-Polak) is not identical to the concept of “Polish Jew” (Polski Zyd). The former denotes a person who is both mentally and culturally a Jew as well as a Pole. Stola, the liberal, does not regard this status as contradictory; he approves of the dual ethnicity of people who grow up in two cultures. However, the majority of Poles during the period under discussion, the people amidst whom Schwarzbart lived and worked, did not share Stola's contemporary, liberal views.

Stola is also aware of the fact that the scene of Schwarzbart's activity, i.e., the Polish National Council in London, was not the most important in terms of relations between the Jews and the Poles during World War II. The principal setting was occupied Poland and the events that took place there. But, as the author himself points out (p. 115): “The analysis of relations between the Poles and the Jews in Poland itself transcends the confines of this book and calls for further research.”

Stola does not address much the issue of Schwarzbart's activity among the Jews themselves, since the Jewish setting does not form the subject of his book. Thus, we do not learn from the book why, unlike most of his colleagues in the Representation of Polish Jewry, Schwarzbart, who was a Zionist, failed, or, rather, did not try to join the struggle of the Yishuv in mandatory Palestine for building the infrastructure of the future state.

Schwarzbart's political world collapsed because the foundation of his activity, namely, Polish Jewry, was wiped out. Stola points out that Schwarzbart lost, together with the Polish Government-in-Exile, which he supported all along:
In the years 1944-1945 [Schwarzbart] lost once more-this time together with the Polish Government-in-Exile and the underground subordinated to it. The Polish state established following the decisions at Yalta and Potsdam and the inclusion of Poland in the Soviet sphere of influence was a far cry from the hopes of the exiles. The politicians with whom Schwarzbart collaborated in London had no influence on the image of the newly reestablished state. In this sense Schwarzbart’s underlying assumption from the early stages of the war turned out to be wrong (p. 299).

Stola does not offer a detailed discussion of the reasons for and implications of the failure of the Polish Government-in-Exile, which obviously influenced Polish-Jewish relations. This subject, too, goes beyond the goals he set for himself in his study.

Dariusz Stola's book is an illuminating, well-researched, thorough, and well-written study. It certainly deserves translation into both English and Hebrew. Many readers with no knowledge of the Polish language will find it of great interest.

Translated by Jerzy Michalowicz