

**Part IV. The League of Extraordinary Women. Spies.
Minna Weizmann, Sarah Aaronson, and Hannah Arendt.
Alan Berg
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“In AD 73 or 74...a Roman soldier taking part in the siege of the Jewish fortress at Masada wrote a line preserved on a papyrus scrap that the Roman poet Virgil’s Carthaginian Queen Dido spoke to her sister, “Anna, my sister, what dreams terrify me in my anxiety.”

Perhaps he was thinking of
Minna “Fanny” Weizmann;
Coincidentally the sister of Chaim Weizmann,
who at that time was somewhere in England.

Dr. Minna Fanny Weizmann, a physician emigre from Belarus. Like Moses Hess, Minna was a socialist and a Zionist.

While in medical school in Berlin, she took the opportunity to escape from Czarist Russia by darting off to Palestine, where she became one of the few women physicians.

In early 1914 she met and fell in love with Curt Proffer, a spy for the German Kaiser and who co-incidentally would become a high ranking officer in the 1930s later under Hitler in the SS his private military.

This was Jerusalem in 1914. He was worried that she had other male companions. Their bond the evidence shows was true love.

Nevertheless, Proffer suggested and Minna agreed that she go to Cairo, present herself as an asset to the British and spy on what the British were up to.

She would do this under the cover of her Russian passport, and by spying on the British, Minna would get revenge on Russia, England’s ally,
And strengthened the hand of Zionism;
Since at this point, Ottoman Turkish Palestine, was an ally of the Germans.

We should always be informed about context.
Minna, in 1914| the mind and actor behind the establishment of the first Zionist spy network; worked with her romantic companion Proffer.

In 1937 Proffer joined the Nazi Party, he was tasked with removing anyone of Jewish ancestry or wives.

In 1943, because of his World War I experience in Turkish-Ottoman Jerusalem, he oversaw the relationship between Hitler and the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem.

Later in 1943 he retired with his family to Switzerland, where I'm sure of one thing: they enjoyed Tobelrone Chocolate.

Nevertheless, in 1914 the Jews in Palestine were all Russian emigres, hated Russia as we all do.

Once they had escaped to Palestine, under the violence of war-torn Palestine, some fled to British Egypt.

Hiding among them was Minna Weizmann leading a ring of Jews who wanted to spy on the despised Russia, England's ally. In early May 1915 Minna was making the crossing to Egypt as the newest member of Proffer's spy ring. She needed little persuading, as both a Jew and a socialist, definitely Moses Hess's intellectual heir, "Here was a chance for adventure and revenge."

"...she was so beloved in Cairo and Alexandria, and held in such respect (as a physician) that people gave her unwavering denial of being a spy, credence.

Traveling across the Mediterranean to neutral Italy, deported back to Russia to for certain execution, she survived and returned to Palestine to work with Hadassah medical service.

Dr. Minna Weizmann's older brother was Chaim Weizmann. He had immigrated to Great Britain, and who as Minna was spying against the British on behalf of the Palestinian Zionists, was in 1915 working closely with the British munitions industry to improve their war making capability.

"Chaim would go on to become the first president of Israel, while Minna's nephew Ezer Weizmann would go on to serve as Israel's seventh Prime Minister.

Minna has been largely excised from the history books and even from Weizmann family memory.

"Chaim made not a single reference to his sister..."

Who actually did something, and if you see her in her whole story you will see a level of courage that is unparalleled in all of Jewish history, so there could be a state of Israel.

Perhaps for the first family of Israel to have among its members someone who not only spied for Germany in World War One, who not only was a woman, but whose spymaster German lover went on to become a senior Nazi diplomat; is one of those awkward stories best left behind, untold.

I won't tell if you don't.

At the same time, working in Palestine, for a second, parallel entirely Jewish spy network, with no German ties, working for, not against the British, was the hero and martyr, Sarah Aaronson.

Sarah Aaronson led founded with her brothers the Nili Jewish spy network, in the service of Zionism, working for the British.

The name they gave their organization, Nili is an acronym for the Hebrew phrase 'netzar Yisroel lo yishaket' 'The Eternal One of Israel will Not Lie!'

Sarah's courage and genius, her impact was to create the chance, an opportunity for the Jews of Palestine to have a future.

"In April of 1917, in the Jaffe Harbor, pale and weak, but alive, Sarah boarded a British spy ship off of the coast of Palestine. Soon she would have a reunion with her brother Aaron, the leading Jewish agronomist, also a spy. She had come to share a disturbing story, the Turks had ordered the city of Jaffa, in Palestine's north, to be entirely evacuated.

She reported to the British, "Things had fallen especially heavy on Jaffa's Jews. Most were forced to leave on foot, their possessions left behind. They had been abused, and two Jewish men, she said to the British debriefing her, had been lynched just outside of Jaffa."

To quote Scott Anderson who has a remarkable portrayal of Sarah Aaronson in his award winning Lawrence In Arabia, "To say Sarah Aaronson was an independent spirit would be a gross understatement."

As it would happen, her struggles to get out of Turkish controlled Syria, that is Palestine to Cairo, was arduous, but her report about Jewish suffering in Jaffa, and the two Jewish men hanged, was fabricated.

That was the point, it was her plan,
And it succeeded in bringing the British,

who wanted Jewish support, to conquer the Turks in Syria, which included Palestine; actions which thirty years later would lead to the establishment of the Jewish commonwealth.

Sarah Aaronson was born in Palestine, a daughter of the first Russian migrants who came in the 1880s,
She was raised in the first kibbutz founded by the Rothchilds.

This kibbutz happens to be where Moses Hess was buried. It is called Z'cron Ya'akov. Remember Jacob.

Jacob? I sure that name was a mixed message to Sarah Aaronson; I'm sure she agreed with the mission. But Jacob had four wives. What's that?

Name the kibbutz after one of them. Leah, Bilhah, Zilpah, or better yet Z'cron Briana Taylor. Say her name.

Sarah Aaronson, growing up at Z'cron Yaakov, she scandalized the more typically, on gender issues, more conservative kibbutz citizens.
She rode, she hunted, she was educated, and worldly.

Probably the most cosmopolitan and intelligent Jewish woman in Palestine, it probably did not apparently bother her that she was resented among the Caucasian Jewish men of Palestine.

She did make one concession by marrying Absalom (Avshalom) Feinberg so that her younger sister Rivka would not have to marry first.

But Sarah, they were living I believe in Constantinople (?), soon walked out on Avshalom.

She was soon back in Palestine, and assumed leadership of the NILI spy ring, Under her leadership the network expanded to forty-four spies.

The primary reason for Sarah Aaron's 1917 visit to Cairo was to meet with her brother to plan NILI's activities for the coming months.

With the spy network floundering in her absence, she resisted her brother's heartfelt plea that, for her safety, she remain in Egypt.
On June 15, after a sox week visit with her brother, she would depart, and never see Aaron again.

Ten weeks later on August 30th, out of desperation for information about a British ship dropping Jewish spies south of Haifa, Sarah experimented with carrier pigeons.

Tragically, one was intercepted by the Turks.

Having learned from the information on the carrier pigeon that the headquarters of NILI and its leader Sarah Aaronson, the Turks lay siege to their hideout at Z'chron Yaakov.

Sarah, her father Ephraim, and her brother Yoni were captured and tortured into unconsciousness.

Rather than give up her colleagues in the spy ring, Sarah Aaronson took her own life," She died on October 9 and was buried at the kibbutz cemetery. She was twenty-seven years old.

Hannah Arendt, a German emigre to the United States had in 1951 published the gold standard of political books, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, when in 1961 she arranged for a commission from the *New Yorker*, still a very powerful magazine, to report on Adolf Eichmann trial.

She flew to Israel on the *New Yorker's* dime and sat in the audience at the trial with Eichmann in front of her in a glass cage.

She had a right to be there and as history, philosophy and popular culture has agreed, no one has ever understood Nazism as successfully as she did. As it would happen, not only the Nazis, but all groups involved including the Jewish leadership of Germany, Poland, Ukraine, Italy, France and Russia,

Her life had been an act of courage in service to the Jewish people. In 1933, an avowed Zionist, she worked in Berlin for Youth Aliyah, the dramatic effort to save Jewish children under the shadow of Nazi street violence.

You can see what that's like.

Hannah Arendt was arrested by the Nazis in 1933 for work with the Zionist Federation of Germany, thrown into a concentration camp, tortured, she fled to Paris via Czechoslovakia, and Switzerland, you can see how hard it is just to leave the United States right now. All during this time she is teaching, speaking, acting. She made it to the United States in 1940 and became a citizen in 1950, and as I said, In 1951 Arendt published *The Origins Of Totalitarianism*. She became the first woman to become a full professor at Princeton.

The Origins is well written, easily understood, and Long It has never been challenged as the definitive word on communist, fascist, authoritarian and totalitarian governments. The greatest contemporary historians continue to hold it up as definitive.

In 1961 Arendt is in Jerusalem covering the Eichmann trial. She is disturbed. First at Ben-Gurion, that is Polish born David Grun, Using Eichmann to create a show-trial that ignored basic principles of justice.

What was the point if the rule of law was disregarded! she challenged.

Her second insight is of a different nature. It is something she observes first-hand in Eichmann. but at first she can't pin it down.

Then, while hearing testimony about Hungarian Jews, she perceived a problem with what is called the Jewish Councils, and she becomes more alarmed.

Her deep personal involvement allows Arendt as she is observing the trial to know more than most.

She watches Eichmann talk about taking an oath, Following potentially immoral orders. The Israeli prosecutor asks Eichmann, Do you ever feel a conflict between your duty and your conscience.

Eichmann answers: "One could call it a state of begin split. A conscious split state where one could flee from one side to the other."

The prosecutor asks. "One's personal conscience was to be abandoned? If there had been more civil courage, things could have been different."

Eichmann's answer, "If civil courage actions, had been hierarchically defined in the officer's manual, then then yes, absolutely."

Arendt is working toward a break-thru insight. She realizes Eichmann is not an anti-Semite; It's something else,

She is compelled, inhabited, haunted; as she returns to New York.

having lived her life under Hitler's shadow,
Having the mind she had and the heart,
and the physical courage,
she inhabits the trial's transcripts in a way
no other person could.

Civil Courage, The words come to mind.

She concludes, evil has nothing to do with selfishness, She argues with her New Yorker editor William Shawn, it's too simplistic to call Eichmann a monster.

What is new about the Eichmann phenomenon,
Is that he is a terrifyingly normal human being, a professional.
He behaved according the law, which in the case of Germany was 'thou must kill.
Evil, she writes, is supposed to be something demonic, but Eichmann is not even able to think.

Thoughtlessness.
She will call this the banality of evil.

Where Jews lived there was community leadership, councils, and these councils and leadership interacted in one way or another with the Nazis.

Arendt argued in Eichmann in Jerusalem that the whole truth is if the councils had not existed, there would have been less chaos; plenty of misery, but "the total number of victims would hardly have been between four and half and six million."

This was testified by Jews at the trial. Their interactions with Eichmann, she highlights, were very important.
Arendt does not seek analyze or explain this,
She reports: To a Jew this role of their leaders in the destruction of her people is undoubtedly the darkest chapter of the dark story.

Upon its publication what became known as Eichmann in Jerusalem A Report on the Banality of Evil, the Israeli prosecutor flew to New York to denounce Arendt for excusing Eichmann.

Nothing could have been farther from the truth.
She supported Israel hanging Eichmann.

Unlike Minna Weizmann and Sarah Aaronson, Arendt lived to see an Act Two.

She couldn't be bullied.
History proved her to be tougher than the rest.

When Ann is singing Sim Shalom,
if you are lucky, she'll pause in the middle,
keep strumming and she will go into
an altered state reverie,
talk about being raised in a Yiddish kindershule,
and like Tina Turner,
explaining her version of Proud Mary,
Ann will say, they sang it a little differently,
they sang Sol Sein Sholom, Sholom uber die Velt.

Every time Ann does this we are startled.

We live our lives measuring ourselves
Against certain standards.
We measure ourselves, against other's lives.

These are some you might have missed.
Perhaps by looking at these women,
one day others may look to you.

5681 Rabbi Alan Berg.