

Jozef Piłsudski: Founding Father of Modern Poland. By Joshua D. Zimmerman. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2022. 623 pp. Notes. Index. Illustrations. Maps. \$39.95, hard bound. doi: 10.1017/slr.2023.107

By the early twentieth century Józef Piłsudski (1867–1935) was already a well-known Polish patriot and political activist. Piłsudski was a leading figure in the Polish Socialist Party as well as the editor and a key contributor to its party newspaper, *Robotnik* (The Worker). According to contemporaries he was an inspirational writer and an effective organizer with a magnetic personality. Since before the Great War he doggedly pursued the goal of an independent Polish state and skillfully maneuvered between various competing political interests to press his case. He was a bold dreamer possessed of political and, importantly, military acumen. When Polish independence was finally achieved in November 1918 Piłsudski became the temporary Head of State.

The role that Piłsudski played in the story of Poland's rebirth has long been known. But this history has not been presented quite as compellingly before. Zimmerman's is a masterful biography. While Piłsudski is of course the main star, not surprisingly "Poland" too features as a major character in Zimmerman's telling of Piłsudski's life. It is Piłsudski's profound commitment to a particular conception of the Polish state—democratic and in which all ethnicities would have full national and civic rights—that explained (even if did not always justify) his choices and actions. To some extent this is a story of a man's love for an idea.

But the road was a difficult one for Piłsudski—and for Poland. Zimmerman shows how excitement about Polish independence quickly turned to frustration as Piłsudski came to the conclusion that democracy was not working in the new state. In particular, the assassination in 1922 of Poland's first elected President, Gabriel Narutowicz, sent Piłsudski into despair. He retreated from public office, disgusted by the veneration of the assassin in some right-nationalist and antisemitic circles who had decried the fact that the President had been elected with the help of national minority votes. Piłsudski emerged again in 1926 as the leader of a coup d'état that was meant to save Poland from the right-wing nationalist politicians who had symbolic responsibility for the Narutowicz assassination. This dramatic action against the elected government represented an obvious violation of the democratic norms that Piłsudski himself had done so much to establish in the first place, and in the years after the coup Piłsudski presided over the partial dismantling of Poland's parliamentary democratic system; post-1926 Poland came to bear many of the features of an authoritarian state. The elections were no longer free, and Piłsudski's regime harassed, repressed, and ultimately even imprisoned its political opponents.

This turn of events makes Piłsudski a challenging figure for a sympathetic biographer. Zimmerman's stated goal in the book is to probe what he refers to as the dual legacy of Józef Piłsudski, to reconcile the two distinct parts of his career and indeed, his personality: on the one hand as a democrat committed to ethnic, linguistic, and religious pluralism and minority rights, and on the other as a man who countenanced using extra-legal methods to achieve his aims when "the people" let him down.

For Zimmerman, the Piłsudski of 1926 on was a disillusioned man with little of the romantic idealism that had defined his earlier years. Yet in other ways Zimmerman shows the older Piłsudski to have retained some essential elements of his earlier self: he continued to believe that ethnic tolerance ought to form a fundamental part of Polish democracy and that independent Poland should provide a home for Jews, Ukrainians, and Lithuanians in addition to ethnic Poles. He continued to believe that his personal destiny was to ensure this outcome. In other words, 1926 was a political

caesura, to be sure, but perhaps it ought not to be seen as a wholesale intellectual one, at least not in every way. For Piłsudski there could indeed be legitimate and extraordinary reasons to wield violence and to subvert democracy if what was at stake was protecting higher values.

While it is clear that much separated Piłsudski from the notorious authoritarian leaders of the interwar period, how to define Piłsudski's authoritarianism, including its limits, remains a bit opaque in Zimmerman's biography. As we know, the ruling camp in post-coup Poland was called *Sanacja* ("healing," 403), and members of the camp were often referred to as the Piłsudskiites, signaling of course their allegiance to Piłsudski himself. Perhaps it would have taken Zimmerman too far from a focus on the individual that the biographical form demands, but a more detailed exploration of the ideas—perhaps it is too much to say they constituted an ideology—of the *Sanacja* might have helped illuminate some essential questions about the evolving man himself. Given that Piłsudski's plan after 1926 was to set Poland on a better course, his and the Piłsudskiites' vision for internal political and social reform, for education and even for the economy becomes very relevant.

Throughout its eighteen chapters Zimmerman's biography follows a conventional chronological format. Zimmerman's starting point is in and near Vilna, where Piłsudski was born into a Polish gentry family in 1867 that nurtured his interest in history and in the romantic ideals of the multi-ethnic Jagiellonian Commonwealth of Nations. We follow Piłsudski as he becomes a young socialist activist in the Russian empire. Already at the young age of nineteen, Piłsudski is sent into Siberian exile for running afoul of the tsarist regime. We read about periods of boredom and uncertainty during his five years of exile, but we can also feel Piłsudski's excitement at the opportunities he had for intellectual growth when he met other exiles, including those who were national heroes of the failed 1863 Polish uprising against the Russians. After his release Piłsudski continued conspiratorial work, proceeding at a dizzying pace; it is no wonder that he was often exhausted or ill. By 1901, Piłsudski was in Galicia, the Austrian part of the Polish partition. From a home base in Kraków he continued to develop his ideas about how to expel the Russians from Polish lands, and he eventually determined that only a trained standing army could hope to achieve this goal. Despite never having had formal military training or education, from 1905 Piłsudski worked on creating just such an armed force, and by 1914 the idea that had started in the early part of the century had evolved to become the Polish Legions. The Legions became an auxiliary force within the Austrian army in the fight against Russia during the Great War and, more than that, eventually became the long-dreamed-of "Polish army" that would become so symbolically central in the story of Polish independence. Piłsudski himself commanded the First Brigade of the Polish Legions.

The first half of Zimmerman's book, which covers the years up to the formation of the independent Polish state in 1918, is a page turner. More so than in the second half of the book, which reads more like a political history of independent Poland (albeit a very clear, organized and detailed one), in this earlier section Zimmerman uses Piłsudski's personal correspondence in a particularly effective way. This allows us to inhabit the interior world of the young(er) Piłsudski, such that we feel privy to his private hopes and anxieties, to his loves and his longings. Moreover, in providing such a comprehensive account of Piłsudski's early years, including the all-important period from 1914 to 1918, Zimmerman is in effect addressing one of the main questions that drives his biography—about how to understand the apparently contradictory aspects of Poland's founding father. The volume of detail about the pre-1918 man allows Zimmerman to carefully and slowly build Piłsudski's vision for Poland. By the time we get to the Second Polish Republic—to independent Poland—we know who Piłsudski is, where his patriotism comes from and why. By this time, in other words,

Zimmerman has created a great deal of sympathy for Piłsudski—but without idolizing him or turning him into an unproblematic national hero.

This book should be read widely by historians of modern Europe, and not just historians of Poland. Zimmerman's account of Piłsudski's life and legacy helps make sense of modern Poland, to be sure, but it also makes a case for his relevance far beyond Poland's borders. It elucidates broad subject areas with European-wide resonance—like the relationship between socialism and nationalism, the uses of political violence, and the nature of interwar authoritarian regimes—while it also offers narrower regional perspectives on many specific subjects. One of these is Piłsudski's evolving relationship with Jews in the Polish lands—this forms a thread that runs throughout the biography—and another is the role of Russia in the region.

Piłsudski maintained a belief throughout this life that both the Russian tsars and the Bolsheviks posed a profound threat to the area's non-Russian peoples, and it was for this reason, among others, that from his earliest days he advocated for the separation of Poland, Ukraine, and Lithuania from Russia. Piłsudski believed that an independent Ukraine was essential to securing the territorial integrity of a Polish state and, beyond that, the stability and security of all of Europe. It is difficult not to think about the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine when reading Zimmerman's book.

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Magnetic Woman: Toyen and the Surrealist Exotic. By Karla Huebner. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020. xx, 408 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Plates. Photographs. \$100.00, hard bound.

Toyen: The Dreaming Rebel, 1902–1980. Ed. Anna Pravdová, Annie Le Brun, and Annabelle Görgen-Lammers. Prague: National Gallery Prague, 2021. v, 333 pp. Appendixes. Notes. Bibliography. Illustrations. Figures. €46.00, hard bound.
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Widely recognized as one of the most important Czech painters of the last century, the artist Toyen is the subject of two revelatory and richly illustrated new books, one a monograph focused on her exploration of Surrealism and the erotic, and the other a catalogue published to accompany an expansive, traveling retrospective of her career. Some two decades have passed since the last substantive study was published on her art, which until the appearance of Karla Huebner's monograph had not previously received a book-length treatment in English. Together these two publications mark a significant shift in scholarship on Toyen and Czech modernism more broadly, as they seek to reconcile her contributions to the visual culture of central Europe with the extensive work she produced over the roughly three decades she spent in France.

Toyen came of age during the fertile period of Czech nationalism as a member of the generation that entered the professional arena at the moment the First Republic was inaugurated. She established herself as a painter and illustrator of surreal and highly charged erotic imagery, only some of which she shared publicly. Born Marie Čermínová to a middle-class family in a cosmopolitan Prague suburb at the turn of the century, she adopted an opaque pseudonym upon leaving her parents that may derive from *citoyen*, the French word for citizen. The masculine gender of that spelling appears to be relevant, but to this day nobody is certain what precisely to make of it, for although she regularly appeared in public dressed in men's clothing, she