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Gur Alroey. *Bread to Eat and Clothes to Wear: Letters from Jewish Migrants in the Early Twentieth Century.* Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011. 256 pp. $29.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8143-3519-2.

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"Not in ink but in blood and tears we are composing these words to you!" (p. 139).[1] Thus begins one of the many letters written to the Jewish Territorial Organization (ITO), a society established to assist the masses of Jews desperate to leave the Russian Empire at the beginning of the twentieth century.

This fascinating book by Gur Alroey, professor of Jewish history at the University of Haifa, seems long overdue. The history of Eastern European Jews before and after their immigration to the United States and, to a lesser extent, to the Land of Israel, has been covered in depth by many scholars. Alroey, however, focuses on the process of migration rather than (primarily) on the situation in the emigrants' countries of origin, or on their new life in the countries that received them. In most cases, it is not certain that the person who wrote the letter eventually decided to leave Eastern Europe or succeeded in their endeavor if they did. Alroey covers the period between 1875 and 1924. This precedes the assassination of Tsar Alexander II and the ensuing pogroms and restrictive anti-Jewish laws by several years, and he concludes with the year the United States introduced its momentous Immigration Act.

The book consists of two parts: an elaborate introduction provides the historical background for the second part. The latter consists of the translated and carefully annotated text of sixty-six letters written in Hebrew and Yiddish by Jews at various stations of their emigration process to relatives or organizations, including a few responses by the latter. Some content of the book will be familiar to students of modern Jewish history, such as the causes for emigration or its peak years. However, the letters provide a qualitative, even intimate perspective on what often remain the faceless masses of the Great Migration.

The introduction is divided into four parts. The first summarizes the extent of Jewish migration between 1875 and 1924. The second points out the unique characteristics of Jewish migration patterns in contrast to those of other national

groups, such as a high percentage of women and children, as well as a low rate of return migration. Moreover, Alroey writes about the differences between migration to Palestine and the United State. As is well known, fewer people immigrated to the Land of Israel; a perhaps lesser known fact is the higher percentage of children and old people, or that more Jewish immigrants decided to leave Palestine than the United States. The third part is devoted to the history of the information bureaus during the time in question, and the reasons for their establishment. In a relatively short span of time, six information bureaus were established: one in St. Petersburg by the Jewish Colonization Association (ICA) in 1904; two (1905 in Odessa and 1908 in Palestine) by the Zionist Organization; one by the ITO in 1905; one in 1901 by the Industrial Removal Office in the United States; and another one, the Central Office of Migration Affairs of the ***Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden***, in Berlin in 1904. The fourth and final part of the introduction focuses on three aspects of migration as manifested in the letters. Alroey looks at how the decision to emigrate was made, the difficulties prospective emigrants encountered in carrying it out, and the impact emigration had on family members who were left behind.

Some nonacademic readers may be surprised by Alroey's statement that "the rate of emigration from areas that suffered pogroms was lower than from other parts of the Pale of Settlement," namely, those that chafed under greater economic hardships (p. 37). Another contention, more intuitive yet much less often researched by historians, is his finding that there was a direct correlation between the number of information offices in a given locale and the number of immigrants leaving it. In a way, this is a chicken-or-egg question that, as Alroey admits, remains inconclusive: did the offices follow the willingness of a place's Jewish population to immigrate, or did their presence cause an increase in immigration? Alroey presents somewhat sobering evidence concerning Zionist officials who expressly discouraged the immigration of Jews who may have become a liability--those were welcome to go elsewhere--and instead asked for people of means. Although this was certainly a sensible attitude, it may be disappointing to readers who think of early Zionist leaders in idealistic terms.

The letters reveal numerous interesting aspects concerning the emigrants' expectations, motivations, and details influencing their decision-making process. If the push was strong enough, the pull sometimes played only a secondary role. Some immigrants became less adamant about getting to a particular destination when their options diminished. Alter Perling (whose letter also provided the title for the book), stranded in Bremen after he was diagnosed with trachoma, asked Israel Zangwill, who served as the president of the ITO, to send him "somewhere where I can live--and where I will be allowed to live.... I don't care if it's in the remotest place in the world, just get me a home!!" (p. 93). A special category of letters included in this volume are those written by ***agunot***, "anchored" wives whose husbands had left them and often their children behind in the Old Country without a means of support. Unable to obtain a divorce and uncertain whether they may have already become widows, some of these women turned to emigrant aid agencies and information bureaus, asking for help in locating their husbands. Their desperation is palpable in the anguished language of the letters.

For those interested in the history of German-Jewish relations prior to the Holocaust, the experience of Eastern European Jews passing through Germany is especially enlightening. None of them had anything positive to say about the treatment they received, yet they took particular exception to the way their fellow Jews behaved toward them. One of the letters, an "Open letter to Mr. [Albert] Ballin" signed by a few dozen Eastern European Jews, bristles with anger that this influential German Jew, the director of the mighty shipping company HAPAG, should allow his coreli-

gionists to be exposed to the indignities they went through at the holding camps.

The questions asked in the letters range from the most general to the extremely specific ("Can female hairdressers for women's wigs or falls find a position [in Palestine]?" [p. 178]). The latter type of questions are especially enlightening since they help to show that at least a part of the emigrants planned their move carefully, rather than simply running for dear life without having the time to think much about living or market conditions in the receiving countries. It is not always the content of the letters that is the most touching. A matter-of-fact remark by Alroey on the research process, namely, that the handwriting was sometimes illegible since "a considerable number of the letters were written in a state of distress and emotional turmoil," points at the material, physical manifestation of their anguish that remains invisible to the reader of the neatly translated and printed version of the letters (p. 89).

Even though he had the letters translated by professional translators, Alroey's mastery of Yiddish and Hebrew enabled him to peruse a wide array of sources. He consulted the American Jewish Historical Society and the YIVO Archives in New York City, as well as the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People and the Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem. Thanks to the author's thoroughness and willingness to examine not merely conditions in the Old Country and in the New, but also the interstitial, sometimes intangible moment in between, the insights that can be gained from this captivating and informative book will benefit both scholars of Jewish history and the general reader.

Note

[1]. Max Mandelstamm of the Jewish Territorial Organization (ITO) in Kiev to Israel Zangwill, letter no. 27, November 6, 1905.

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