

## Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults

EDITED BY DANIEL SCHEIDE AND REBECCA JEFFERSON

**Alroey, Gur. *An Unpromising Land: Jewish Migration to Palestine in the Early Twentieth Century*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014. 295 pp. \$65.00. (9780804789325).**

The participants of the Second Aliyah—those 35,000 Jews who immigrated to Palestine during the years 1904-1914—are examined here, and the Zionist myth of their exceptionality debunked. By framing this demographic instead within the trend of the over 2½ million Jews who left Eastern Europe during the three decades before World War One, historian Gur Alroey argues that, like their brethren who moved elsewhere within the Diaspora, the majority of the emigrants here had neither religious nor ideological motivations. Rather, they sought to flee the pogroms and poverty of the Russian Pale, which in the late nineteenth century was undergoing tremendous changes. Palestine, then under Ottoman rule, was more accessible than other places, due to lighter travel and immigration laws.

Through an overview of diaries, letters, and media, the author uncovers the backgrounds of mundane people who struggled over a new culture and language and suffered boredom, loneliness, and exploitation. The port town of Jaffa teemed with hotels, brothels, and swindlers on the prowl for naïve arrivals. In spite of local aid, those without money or skills languished and many, including Zionists, ended up returning to Russia or going elsewhere; some even committed suicide. Yet those who stayed eventually contributed to the “New Yishuv,” even joining kibbutzim or acquiring land. Unlike the American Jews, who made assimilation their goal, the Palestinian Jews absorbed Zionism, which gradually became the prevailing ideology. This book provides a fine, albeit disillusioning, insight into Jewish migration to Palestine. Essential for Israel-Middle East collections.

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