In the years 1904–14, about 35,000 immigrants reached Palestine and, according to the historians, initiated a new period in the history of Jewish settlement in the land of Israel known as the Second Aliyah. In fact, the immigrants who landed on the shores of Jaffa in those years were part of a general wave of immigration that engulfed the Jews of the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires from 1904 onward. This upsurge, the third great wave of immigration since the 1880s, was the product of rapid demographic growth, economic difficulties, the struggle for a livelihood and means of subsistence, and pogroms and persecutions by the authorities. The main billow of this wave reached the shores of the United States, but ripples also reached England, Argentina, South Africa, Australia, and Palestine. This historical context of the migration of more than two and a half million Jews from Eastern Europe to various countries overseas was the immediate backdrop to the Second Aliyah.

The historiography of the new Jewish Yishuv, or settlement in Palestine, and of the history of immigration to the country usually places emphasis on the difference and special character of the Jewish immigration to Palestine, and it stresses the importance of the Zionist ideology as the main motivation for the immigration. This view is based on the idea of “quality versus quantity”; the small number of immigrants who preferred Palestine to America is understood to mean that it represented a
special and exceptional immigration, a return to the ancestral land after an exile of 2,000 years.

This article takes a fresh look at the process of immigration to Palestine at the beginning of the twentieth century. My intention is to follow the process from the moment immigrants left the Russian Pale of Settlement, through their sea voyage from the ports of Odessa and Trieste, to their arrival at their final destination, Palestine. An examination of the complexity of this process through a study of the bureaucratic difficulties and the travails of the journey—in addition to the crooks and white slave traders the immigrants met on their way—casts a different light, of a less ideological nature, on aliyah to Palestine from the beginning of the twentieth century to the outbreak of World War I.

**Information Bureaus for Travelers to Palestine**

In the time of the great immigration, more than two and a half million Jews left their countries of residence on their way to lands overseas. The great distances they traveled were fraught with danger. The emigrants had to travel thousands of miles to reach their port of departure and, on the way, were exposed to dangers, to difficult climatic conditions, and to hunger. Crooks and criminals lay in wait for them on every side and often took advantage of their naïveté and their difficult—sometimes intolerable—situation in order to exploit them and enrich themselves at the emigrants’ expense. The situation of the Jewish emigrants was, arguably, more difficult than that of non-Jewish emigrants, who were not in danger apart from the risk of losing their property and possessions. By contrast, the Jews often had to contend with a hostile government and environment that did not want to receive aliens, least of all Jewish aliens, for even a short time. “The Jewish migrants place their lives in danger. They are alarmed and frightened by an environment full of animosity and prison and the fear of death,” wrote one of the newspapers of the period.¹

For a considerable number of the emigrants, it was the first time they had left their town and country of birth. As soon as they started out on their migration, they lost control of their fate. Their lack of knowledge of the language, the difficulty of finding their way on the long journey, and insufficient knowledge of the emigration process as a whole made things very hard for them:

The Jewish migrants, who are generally from the lower classes, are shy and of a lowly spirit, and do not dare to contradict or to speak face-to-face with
The wealthy people in the town and those with diplomas in charge of the information offices, and even when one of them is so bold as to go to the bureau to ask the advice of those in charge, he encounters a strange formality and coldness and leaves as unsatisfied as when he came.²

The most common danger the emigrants encountered was from the travel agents—dubious types who were familiar with the tricks of the emigration business and who knew how to exploit these travelers. “They fall,” wrote the Vilna newspaper Ha-yom, “into the hands of agents who suck their blood like leeches and deliver them up to a fate where the beasts-among-men of all the coastal cities surround them and treat their tickets as if they were their own property.”³ Emigrants were simply unable to manage alone in traveling on the long and dangerous roads, in purchasing tickets for the sea voyage, and in finding suitable lodgings where they could wait until the ship sailed, and they therefore required a travel agent who would help them find their way through the bureaucratic maze. As a result, many people fell victim to trickery and deception:

This is how things have gone in recent decades in this kidnapped and frightened emigration. Warnings are of no avail; nothing is of any avail. The agents in the Pale of Settlement, and especially in the towns of the south, run the emigration business in a venal manner, and everyone is caught in their net. These scoundrels earn their living at the expense of the emigrants, and a single ruble matters to them more than the lives of many emigrants. They won’t abandon this way of earning their living in which they grow rich and fill their pockets with money.⁴

The agents were the main cause of the emigrants’ troubles. Their helplessness made them place their trust in people who were familiar with the language and the geography. As we learn from the newspapers of the period, “The curse of God is on the Jews of Russia. If many of them have been slain in pogroms, they are now joined by the slain of emigration, and this is our special curse. . . . The time has come to really do something for these wretched emigrants and to rescue the poor slain emigrants victimized by the agents.”⁵

In Sholem Aleichem’s The Adventures of Mottel, the Cantor’s Son, there is a humorous and colorful description of an experience of falling into the hands of swindlers who exploited the naïveté and ignorance of the emigrants. The story relates how Mottel’s family was deceived by a Jewish woman agent called “Chaimova,” who acted as an intermediary between the family and four drunken crooks who were preparing to rob them when they crossed the frontier:
Suddenly our two guides stop and ask us how much money we have. We are so frightened that we cannot utter a word. Mother comes forward and says we have no money. They say it's a lie, all Jews have money. They take out two long knives and hold them right under our noses. They say, if you don't give us everything you have, you'll die. We all stand speechless, trembling like a leaf. . . . It suddenly occurs to my sister-in-law Bracha to faint on the spot. When mother sees her fall, she cries, “Help!” and Taibel adds, “Help!” Suddenly—bang, bang, bang! Somebody fired . . . .

The solution to the unhappy situation of the emigrants came in the form of information offices, which appeared throughout the Pale of Settlement along the main emigration routes and in the chief ports of departure: “We need popular information offices that would be run by representatives from among the people and by people who really want to relieve the emigrants’ hardships and to sweeten the bitterness of their fate a little.”

Until 1904, no coordinated support system existed for emigrants, and assistance depended on the goodwill of individuals and on private initiatives—but these were like a drop in the ocean for the millions of travelers. Then, in October 1904, a large conference was held in Frankfurt under the auspices of major Jewish organizations such as Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden (“Ezra”), the Alliance Israëlite Universelle, and the Jewish Colonization Association; they wanted to bring the matter of Jewish emigration and its problems to public attention. At this conference, it was decided to set up a Central Information Office to help the Jewish migrants. This office was founded in Berlin, an axis of emigration at that time. “The majority of the migrants pass through Germany, whether they are those who go by ship from Hamburg and Bremen or those who make their way by sea from Rotterdam, Antwerp, and Amsterdam.”

The task of the Central Information Office in Berlin and its subsidiaries, spread along the emigration routes, was not to hold back or encourage emigration but to provide the migrant with the most relevant and precise available information, such as the shortest and most inexpensive route to the port, the purchase of tickets and finding cheap lodgings in the ports before sailing, and finally absorption and the chances of employment in the desired country. In addition, the office had “to help the migrant to obtain the necessary documents and to get into contact with the shipowners so that the latter will know that there is someone watching their behavior and they will not mistreat the migrants as is so often the case.”

Another large and important information office that provided valuable information to hundreds of thousands of Jewish migrants in the
Pale of Settlement was the Jewish Colonization Association in St. Petersburg. The association was established in 1893, but until 1904 it was dormant and almost inactive. The pogroms of 1905–6 and the large wave of emigration that followed caused its revival and the renewal of its activities.  

This association was directed by Samuel Janovsky, a Zionist who saw Palestine as the true solution to the Jewish problem. Yet he was careful at the office not "to mix his personal Zionism with his Jewish Colonization Association work." Janovsky divided tsarist Russia into three parts: Russian Poland; White Russia and Lithuania; and the southern region, comprising Volhynia, Podolia, and Bessarabia. A special chief secretary was made responsible for each area. This person was knowledgeable about matters of emigration in general and about arrangements for emigration from that area in particular and was in continual contact with all the emigration committees in the various towns and cities of the Pale of Settlement. Before the outbreak of World War I, the association set up about 400 local committees in tsarist Russia that were spread throughout the Pale of Settlement.

Many letters were sent directly to the Jewish Colonization Association in St. Petersburg and not to the committees, and the person who dealt with them and sorted them out was Zalman Rubashov (later Israeli president Shazar), who at that time was one of the assistants in Janovsky's office. Rubashov described his work in the office as follows:

Every day, from eight in the morning until one in the afternoon, I was up to my neck in the problems of the Jewish people. I read and searched and answered and sorted, and I sent my replies to the secretaries for a signature. . . . Jews who wanted to emigrate and didn't know whom to turn to; emigrants who had been swindled by dishonest agents and had no one to defend them; the rabbi of a community who saw the poverty of the artisans in his town who were penniless and had no customers and wanted to leave, and the rabbi wondered how he could help them; a scholar from a shtetl who worried about the troubles of the Jews and who wanted to help the workers and improve the lot of the people; an abandoned wife whose husband had left her and gone overseas and forgotten her and her children and left them to their plight without anyone to care. . . . Within a year I was expert in these various misfortunes that contained the seed of the approaching Holocaust.

In addition to this continuous activity, the association published special booklets in Russian and Yiddish for the guidance of the emigrant. These were prepared by Janovsky. There was a twice-monthly newspaper, Der Jüdische Emigrant; pocket dictionaries were also pub-
lished; and, on the eve of World War I, Janovsky put out an encyclopedia in Russian entirely devoted to matters of Jewish emigration. The pamphlets, the encyclopedia, and the newspaper instructed the emigrant about how to reach the port of departure, the dangers from thieves and agents, the steps necessary in order to obtain a passport, and the cost of sailing to various places, and they provided information about the chosen country, such as the possibilities of earning a living and the cost of living and rents. The newspaper also included emigrants’ letters, giving firsthand accounts of the difficulties of the journey and of the experience of absorption into the new country. The association in St. Petersburg was careful to keep in contact with the Central Information Office in Berlin and the office of the Hovevei Zion (Lovers of Zion) in Odessa with its branches in Jaffa, Beirut, and Istanbul, and it sometimes published information provided by them in its newspaper.

In January 1905, a special information office was opened in Odessa for emigrants traveling to Palestine. Its purpose was to provide them with precise information about the Jewish Yishuv in Palestine and to summarize the information received “from reliable sources among the Jews who are settled or who are about to settle in Palestine and Syria.” The information included a description of the laws prevailing in the country and the conditions for buying land, and data on the possibilities of setting up a business:

The office will provide verbal or written answers to all questions relating to its sphere of operation; it will inform applicants of cheap and decent lodging in Odessa, and banks where money may be changed at an advantageous rate or sent on; it will be in continual contact with the shipping companies in order to provide exact information on the times of departure of ships for Palestine and Syria, and the office will also attempt to obtain reduced rates for applicants.13

The Odessa information office branched out, and in 1906 it opened offices in Jaffa, Jerusalem, Haifa, Beirut, and Istanbul. The Palestinian information office in Jaffa14 was a subsidiary of the central office in Odessa but was financially supported by the Central Information Office in Berlin:

Palestine also has an important place among countries of emigration, but because of the terrible economic situation of the Palestinian Jews, the Berlin office for questions of migration is not enthusiastic about it. But it has to deal with the facts as they are, and thus sees it as its duty to arrange the migration there in an orderly manner, to provide information about
places of work, and to set up reliable information offices . . . and it has therefore undertaken to shoulder the expenses of the general information office for Jewish immigrants in Jaffa established by the Palestinian Committee in Odessa.”

The Odessa information office began to function at the beginning of 1906, but in its first years it did not function as it should, and there were quite a few failures in its operation. “I know the situation in the Odessa office,” wrote someone who adopted the pen name “Hadash” in the newspaper *Ha-poel ha-tsair*.

I have followed its development carefully, and I want to say a few words about it . . . Out of all the rooms in the building [of the Odessa emigration committee], in each of which there sits one or two workers of the committee, in the one used for the information office you will sometimes find a whole minyan [ten people] at the same time, and it is the smallest and narrowest of the rooms, between the door and the kitchens . . . and it must be said that Mr. A., who has been put in charge of the office, is unworthy of the very responsible task he has been given. In the office of the committee you will always hear the travelers asking if in Odessa they should change Russian money for some other, and the director answers: it’s the same thing if you change the money here or there. Many of the travelers do not change their money, and they soon discover (especially if they do not have large sums) that it is not the same thing at all. With the money-changers in the Turkish territories they lose about five kopeks on every ruble.

The faulty operation of the Odessa information office in its early years resulted in many immigrants spending a great deal of money unnecessarily on their way to Palestine. When they reached the country, they complained bitterly to various people in the Jewish community about the inefficiency of the office and about the unnecessary expenses they had incurred because of the inaccurate information it had provided. It appears, for example, that there were quite a number of cases where the head of a family was forced to buy tickets for his children when in fact they were exempted from payment. When the mistake was discovered, it was too late; the money for the tickets had already been paid:

After the committee published the reductions it had made in the cost of the travel tickets from Odessa to Jaffa, it pressured the travelers, forcing them in a bureaucratic way that aroused suspicion among the crowd to buy half-price tickets for infants aged three and four, when in fact this extra expense could have been avoided. There were cases where the com-
mittee forced heads of families to buy tickets for their infants, threatening those who refused not to sell them tickets at all, so that they would later have to pay the shipping-company 21 rubles for a ticket. Later, when the shipping officials examined the tickets, they laughed at this ridiculous expense, and the fathers were left with the children’s tickets (every meeting was full of this business). 17

It is unclear if the immigrants were misled unintentionally or if there were deliberate deception. In an article in the newspaper Ha-

zman, I found another piece of evidence that unnecessary payment was exacted on infants. The article described a poor woman who was traveling with her five children “to her husband, a cobbler in the Street of the Jews in Jerusalem.” The woman, wrote the journalist, had been impoverished by two things: “By the fact that her husband had not sent her much money for the expenses of the journey and by the fact that they had advised her to buy sailing-tickets for the children when some who were older traveled on the ship without tickets.” 18

The travelers suffered another financial loss at the hands of lodging-house keepers and intermediaries who used the visiting cards of the Odessa emigration committee to entice the many emigrants who arrived in the city a number of days before they set sail. For many of them it was their first experience in a city, and they found themselves in expensive lodgings that soon used up the little money they had, or in hotels that served as camouflage for brothels, so that they had trouble with the police:

The committee issues cards of recommendation to various hotel-agents in Odessa, and travelers from provincial towns fall victim to them. There was a case where one of these agents brought the travelers to a hotel of you know the kind . . . and this led to unpleasant incidents, including some with the police. And even after the committee was informed of this, it did not withdraw the cards from the agents. We protest strongly against this ill-considered and harmful relationship. 19

The agents and hoteliers exploited the “authorization” provided by the Odessa committee in order to arrange for the provision of passports and permits to enter Palestine and to make various bureaucratic arrangements. These arrangements were made in the worst possible manner: the agents needlessly extended the travelers’ stay in the city and asked a high price for the necessary documents:

When the issue of passports by the consuls in Odessa is arranged through the hotel agents, it results in many unnecessary expenses. There were cases when emigrants arrived in Odessa on Monday, a whole day before
the ship left, and one hotelier nevertheless pestered them about the issue of their passports until they had to remain in Odessa—in that same hostel, needless to say—for a whole week, although the whole business, if done in an honest manner, would have taken only 20 minutes.\textsuperscript{20}

The emigrants sometimes arrived in Odessa several days before the ship sailed and learned that the sailors and dockworkers were on strike and no ships were leaving the port. The strike forced them to wait in the city for a long time, a delay that further exposed them to various types of swindlers and caused them needless expenses: “The travelers must be warned in the newspapers against staying in Odessa and waiting for the strike to end,”\textsuperscript{21} the emigrants told public figures of the Jewish community in Palestine when they arrived in Jaffa.

Angry complaints led to setting up a committee that met for the first time in Beit Ha-am (the House of the People) in Jaffa in 1906. The initiators of the idea and the heads of the committee were Akiva Aryeh Weiss, Y. D. Freyer, Raphael Sverdlov, and Mordechai Lederer, and their aim was “to investigate the difficulties experienced by immigrants on their way to Palestine.”\textsuperscript{22} In early July 1906, a meeting was called after the committee heard “with interest and attention the travelers’ accounts of their troubles and misadventures and after decisive proof had been provided of the truth of these stories.”\textsuperscript{23} The committee decided to write a letter of complaint to the Odessa committee protesting at the slovenly work of the information office in Odessa, which, they said, almost “harms our national enterprise.”\textsuperscript{24} At the end of the letter, the signatories said that, “on behalf of our sacred cause, we ask for our observations to be given serious attention and for them to be discussed at the next general meeting.” I have searched in the archives of Menahem Ussishkin, head of the Odessa committee, who was responsible for the information office at that time, but I did not find his answer. In \textit{Ha-yom} at that time, however, we find his reaction to the Beit Ha-am committee’s letter of complaint. Ussishkin took the immigrants’ complaints to heart, and thus in the minutes of the meeting we find the following:

The information office must improve its methods of work so that in future all the obstacles that the Beit Ha-am committee has pointed out to us in its exposition will be removed or corrected as far as possible. The meeting received this conclusion with trust and goodwill . . . and we must set about immediately removing these difficulties, which, although they seem petty, have serious consequences.\textsuperscript{25}

Another way to help emigrants overcome the difficulties they encountered was by publishing a booklet for their guidance. This
booklet—written and edited by the information office in Jaffa headed by Menahem Sheinkin—specified the problems that could arise, warned the emigrants of what to expect, and attempted to steer them through the bureaucratic maze. It contained all the information emigrants needed from the moment they left their place of residence until they reached Palestine.26 A comparison between the booklet issued by the Palestinian information office and the booklets issued by the Jewish Colonization Association for Jewish immigrants to America reveals a great similarity between them. Sheinkin undoubtedly used the literature of guidance for immigrants to America as the model for his own booklet.27

The problems of the Jewish migrants who made their way to Palestine were thus much the same as those encountered by the Jews who migrated to America and other foreign countries. They were exposed to the same crooks and swindlers and paid dearly for their guilelessness. A multitude of dishonest people waited on the shore to rob the immigrants of their money and possessions under the pretence of being “guides,” stevedores, or the representatives of hotels. Some of the most contemptible were Jews who exploited their proficiency in Yiddish to gain the trust of the immigrants in order to cheat them.

The Formalities of Immigration to Palestine

Obtaining a Passport

In order to obtain a passport, emigrants had to go to a police station or to the representative of the ministry of the interior in their province to receive a “certificate of good character,” and in order to obtain the certificate they had to pay 15 rubles at the local branch of the ministry of finance.28 The certificate was only given on presentation of the receipt for payment. When they received the certificate, emigrants went to the district secretariat (govanators kansellaria) to obtain the passport. The issuing of the passport cost an additional 15 rubles. If the travelers declared that their intention was to go to Palestine to pray (and they could present to the authorities the certificate of good character, the receipt from the ministry of the interior, and an endorsement from the rabbinate of the district confirming their intentions), they could obtain a pilgrim’s certificate, which enabled them to obtain a passport for only 50 kopeks. After obtaining passports—whether for 50 kopeks or for 15 rubles—the emigrants were asked to submit them to be signed at the Turkish consulate and to purchase stamps for the sum of
2 rubles and 75 kopeks. Children under the age of 16 who needed a passport required an endorsement from their parents or guardians testifying that they were traveling.

**The Cost of the Sailing Ticket**

For the ordinary immigrant without resources, the sea journey to Palestine was considerably cheaper than the sea journey to America. The price of the ticket was subsidized by the Odessa emigration committee. To sail from the port of Odessa to Palestine, third class without food, cost the traveler 12–14 rubles (about $7). In contrast, a sailing ticket to Palestine from the port of Trieste cost almost twice as much. The sea journey from Odessa to Palestine was thus cheaper than that from Trieste to Palestine. Only when the port of Odessa was closed did the Jewish immigrants who arrived from the Pale of Settlement sail to Palestine from the port of Trieste: “Owing to the war and the closing of the Dardanelles,” wrote the newspaper *Ha-olam* in 1912, “there has been less travel in the last two months to Palestine in general and via Odessa in particular. The travelers have had to go via Trieste, and this has cost them twice as much as going via Odessa.”

The journey to America was far more expensive, both because of the high price of the sailing tickets and because of the extra expenses it involved: frontier charges, train travel, and food for a long sea voyage. The main ports from which the immigrants sailed to America were Bremen, Hamburg, and Rotterdam. For travelers to America via the port of Hamburg, the ticket cost 67–77 rubles per person; those who sailed from Bremen paid 72–77 rubles, and those who sailed from Rotterdam paid 72 rubles. The price did not include the train journey from the Russian frontier to the port. The journey to America took 17 or 18 days in all.

As of 1900, there was the possibility of sailing to America from ports in Latvia and Finland: Libau, Riga, and Hanko. The advantage was that the emigrants did not have to travel by train or cross any frontiers. The cost of sailing tickets from these ports to New York was about 60 rubles per person. The sea voyage to Baltimore and Philadelphia cost about 64–68 rubles. A ticket for a child aged one to twelve cost half price, and a child under the age of one paid five rubles. The sea voyage on these routes took 15 to 16 days.

As a result of the high cost of sailing to America, at least some of the emigrants preferred Palestine to America as a destination. The low cost of a sailing ticket to Palestine and back considerably reduced the dangerousness of emigration. The emigrants knew that, if they failed
in Palestine and were unable to acclimatize themselves, they could easily find the money to return to the Pale of Settlement. In a 1906 report describing the wretched situation of the immigrants in Jaffa, the writer pointed out that many of them had come to Palestine because “Palestine is the nearest country to Russia and the journey back from there is inexpensive.”\textsuperscript{33} In an article on Jewish immigration to Palestine published in \textit{Ha-yom} in 1906, Zeev Smilansky wrote:

The low cost of the journey is also a factor that makes it easy for emigrants to leave Palestine. Whereas the journey to America, South Africa, or Australia costs a large sum, which for ordinary emigrants would be a considerable part of their fortune, the journey to Palestine costs very little. . . . The costs of the journey are so low that anyone who has 15 to 20 rubles in his pocket can easily return to Russia.\textsuperscript{34}

These descriptions make it clear that, at least in the case of some emigrants, Palestine was chosen for lack of an alternative. The sailing ticket subsidized by the Odessa committee considerably reduced the danger of leaving, and it permitted these people to join the millions of emigrants during that period.

\textbf{Luggage}

For immigrants who left via the port of Odessa, transporting their luggage was not complicated or expensive. The luggage was loaded on the ship in the port of Odessa and was unloaded about 12 days later at the port of destination. In contrast, the travelers who left via the port of Trieste had a more complex and problematic experience: they had to change ships at Alexandria and consequently had to unload the freight and re-load it on the second ship. Apart from the financial costs of unloading the baggage and loading it again, the dangers of falling victim to fraud and losing one’s luggage were greater. As a general rule, the immigrants were advised not to bring many belongings with them and to buy whatever they needed for their families in Palestine. Artisans, however, were advised to bring the tools of their trade with them, both because of the high cost of tools in Palestine and because in that way they could begin work almost immediately and quickly gain a foothold in the country.\textsuperscript{35}

The customs at the port of Jaffa imposed few duties on the belongings that the immigrants brought with them, and the Ottoman officials generally behaved toward them with decency:
Concerning customs: they simply don’t raise duties on the baggage, and sometimes a small crate of books also passes through without paying customs, especially if they are Hebrew books. . . . I have often noticed that they treat the owners of the luggage fairly and politely. If they see they are used objects and household utensils, they don’t search much in the bundle and don’t [charge any fee] on them. New objects that have not been used and goods of various kinds they take for evaluation. . . . They are not too exacting about things that go by weight.36

But passing through the customs was not always so easy. Sometimes, in the general confusion, the immigrants found their belongings scattered and broken without their being able to do anything about it:

The spectator has a miserable impression when he sees how the immigrants’ belongings emerge from the customs house. The travelers, driven from their usual places of residence, who have succeeded in saving a remnant of their belongings and in bringing them ashore at Jaffa, receive them back broken, torn, and miserable, as if there had been a pogrom.37

The immigrants encountered a certain difficulty when bringing books into the country, especially books in European languages. The books had to go through an “inspector”—a censor who allowed them in—and they were taxed according to weight: “They charge 10 piastres (84 kopeks) per kilo on books and up to 20 piastres (1.6 rubles) on medical books.” In return for a small remuneration to the officials, only two or three books would be sent to the censor—usually those on top of the crate—and all the rest would remain with the traveler: “Books in European languages must be examined by the censor. . . . The customs officials generally let them off this official inspection in return for a small baksheesh. They sometimes take the first two or three books and send them to the inspector.”38

The Process of Entry: Obtaining the Tazkra

The acquisition of a passport permitted the migrants to leave Russia, but it did not enable them to enter the Ottoman empire. At the stopover at Istanbul (see below for discussion of the sailing route), the immigrants were expected to obtain a tazkra (red note). The tazkra was a document given to the Ottoman authorities by every Jew arriving in Palestine on reaching the shore. It was really a commitment by the Jewish traveler to leave Palestine after three months. In order to obtain it, the travelers had to produce a document from the Russian consul costing 80 kopeks and had to go to the Ottoman authorities with this doc-
ument and their passports. The authorities charged 20–40 kopeks for each passport. Travelers who did not succeed in obtaining a tazkra could receive one at Jaffa, but in that case they had to pay a fine: “Those who came without the tazkra,” wrote Sheinkin, “paid the 2.40 fine. . . . For this fine, the port officials do not give a receipt, and one suspects that they take the money for themselves.” When the travelers arrived in Jaffa, they deposited their “laissez-passer or passport with the official responsible for granting permits, and they received, in exchange for a bill of divorce, a temporary document for visiting and residence stating that they were permitted to travel and stay in Palestine for three months. In order to distinguish this document from the others it had a different format and a different color.”

The Jewish immigrants generally did not leave the country at the end of the three months and thus became illegal residents in the Ottoman empire. In reality, however, they were now dependent on the capitulation rights of the countries from which they came. Ali Ekrem Bey, the governor of Jerusalem, commented on the paradoxical nature of this situation:

There is a large increase in the number of Jews emigrating from Russia because of the pogroms there, and there is also a large increase in the number of Jews coming from Austria and Romania. They enter Palestine as aliens, and although they have been driven out of their own countries, the consuls here display a strong protective attitude toward them, against which there is no appeal.

Apart from requiring the tazkra, there was no difficulty in entering the country, and the immigrants encountered few legal or governmental obstacles. Sailing to the United States, however, was more complicated and, as discussed above, more expensive. The rigid immigration laws had not yet been imposed, but there was a perpetual fear of the medical examinations, especially the eye test for trachoma, which prevented some people from entering the United States. All of the difficulties in raising funds for the emigration process and sailing tickets, the long journey from their homes in the Pale of Settlement, the crossing of the frontier at night, and the journey to the port could all come to naught in a short eye test before they went on deck. This is what happened to some emigrants who left Jaffa for America:

Many people who traveled from here [Jaffa port] to America came back on that Sabbath on a French ship from Marseilles, as the doctor of the shipping company living in Marseilles was responsible for deciding if the emigrants were allowed to enter America. In accordance with the law, he
declared them unfit, and as the people returning from there relate, only ten out of a hundred received permission and the others were declared unfit, and the travelers, who did not have a penny in their pockets, were in great distress, and many of them did not even have stale bread to eat on the ship. And therefore the emigrants should be warned before they travel that every one of them should go to the oculist in his own town and ask if his eyes are in order.43

This is how the journey of Mottel and his family to America almost ended when his mother was found to have trachoma, which nearly prevented them from boarding the ship:

What do you think about the awful thing that happened to us? We finally took mother to the doctor to have her eyes examined. He examined them and did not say a word. He wrote a note and put it into an envelope. We took it to “Ezra,” where we found nobody except Miss Zaichik. . . . She opens the envelope, reads the note, and stops laughing. Mother says, “What’s the news?” Miss Zaichik replies, “The news, my dear, is very bad. The doctor says you can’t go to America.”44

The Sea Voyage

Until the 1840s, not surprisingly, most of the ships that came to the port of Jaffa were sailing vessels. Only from that time onward did steamships visit the port. The turning point in the means of transportation came in 1852, with the setting up of European firms that ran regular lines of steamships to distant places overseas. The shipping line that came regularly to Jaffa was the French company, the Messagerie Nationale, but in that year two other shipping firms were set up: the Austro-Hungarian Austrian Lloyd, which ran a line from Trieste to Alexandria—the route considered quickest for travelers from Western and Central Europe—and a Russian firm for passenger and commercial shipping that operated shipping lines on the Black Sea and the Mediterranean.45

The sea voyage to Palestine from the ports of Trieste and Odessa took 11 to 12 days. Those who left from Odessa sailed directly to Palestine, with short stops on the way lasting no more than 24 hours. Those who sailed from Trieste, however, had to change ships at Alexandria and wait for three days until another ship took them to Palestine. It thus appears that the journey from the port of Odessa was easier and more convenient for the travelers—or, at any rate, for those with families—because they did not have to move their luggage from ship to ship but could unload directly at the port of Jaffa.46
The companies that ran the ships from Trieste and Odessa were aware of the economic potential of the Jewish emigration to the east. From 1911 the Austrian Lloyd koshered the food on the ships that sailed to Jaffa:

The Austrian Lloyd ships going back and forth between Trieste and Jaffa, we read in one of the journals, serve preserved foods made in Frankfurt-on-Main under the supervision of the learned rabbi, our teacher Breuer Shalita (may he be granted long life), and a new copper container will be provided on every ship for heating the preserves, which will be far tastier as a result.47

Carrying luggage from place to place was not the only hardship the travelers had to contend with, and their trials were not yet over when they came onto the ship. The conditions of the voyage were difficult and sometimes unbearable. Most of the travelers were not used to sailing and, after a short while, suffered from seasickness and vomiting. One of the emigrants wrote,

I never liked the sea, and the sea had its revenge on me as if it wanted to show me that we do not have dominion over it, but it has dominion over us. For two days, I couldn’t leave my place; the waves tossed the ship about wildly. . . . There were groans on every side, and the travelers, who were not used to this, all became seasick.48

Most of the emigrants traveled fourth class without food, and water was supplied by a single tap on the deck. The provisions the emigrants took for the journey were insufficient and became spoiled in the course of the sea voyage, so the travelers usually went hungry. “The food Isaac [the hero of Agnon’s Only Yesterday] bought for the trip turned bad, and when he got up on the third day he found his bread moldy and his fruit rotten and the rest of his food was not fit to eat. So Isaac went without food until his knees buckled with hunger.”49 The travelers, some of whom slept on deck during the voyage, suffered from cold and other climatic conditions.

That night the cold woke me several times. It was terrible to be awake at night when everyone else was sleeping and the engine was roaring. . . . My eyes were sleepy and I was shaking with cold. I tried to walk, but because of the strong movement of the ship I fell on the railing. The dark horizon rose up and the sea was like a bowl of water held in a trembling hand.50

The conditions were hard, and the vomiting in the dirty and crowded cabins made things very difficult for the travelers, who had to endure
this situation for two weeks. This is how the beginning of the sea voyage was described by Haya Rotenberg in her memoirs:

I went onto the ship; I "got myself fixed up" together with the other Jews who traveled in the lower part of the vessel. We lay one next to the other in crowded and filthy conditions. In the morning I went up from the lower part. The travelers were bending over a tap in order to get hot water. I saw a ladder next to the partition of the ship and I climbed up. Before me lay the deck, empty and washed down. In the middle were the white lifeboats and all around me was the endless sea blending into the blue of the heavens.51

David Smilansky, one of the founders of Ahuzat Bayit, had a similar experience. He arrived in Palestine in March 1906 and was a partner in the Atid Company, which set up oil-producing factories, and later became a partner in Leon Stein’s factory in Jaffa. After Tel Aviv was founded, he became active in the city’s affairs. He wrote as follows:

The ship moved to and fro; the travelers felt well enough and only a few suffered from seasickness. When we left Odessa, the weather was cold and it was snowing; we wore winter clothing and we did not take it off until we reached Istanbul. They do not light stoves in the third class on the ships, and the travelers down below catch cold easily and fall ill on the voyage. They are continually exposed to cold and humidity, and roll around all the time in dirt and uncleanliness. . . . Next to the steam-boilers fueled by coal there are also some places for travelers of the third class. Only the lucky ones find these places, and then only after a physical struggle.52

Sometimes, because of the difficult conditions on the ship, some of the travelers failed to reach their destination. This was the case with a woman who died on board and whose body was lowered into the water:

A few days ago a Jewess died on the “Russian” ship on the way from Beirut to Jaffa and was lowered into the water. She was from Warsaw, and her name was Yuta Hanna Wallman. With regard to the possessions and money she had with her, her heirs should apply to the office of the Russian shipping company in Odessa.53

But the greatest dangers lay in wait for the travelers in the stops on the way. As soon as they came ashore, the emigrants were assailed by a host of stevedores, hotel agents, crooks, intermediaries, and other dubious characters. The stunned emigrant, not knowing where to turn, often made a wrong decision under pressure and fell victim to some deception. One of the most common forms of exploitation took place
on the rowboat taking them from the ship to the port. The owner of
the boat usually began by asking the travelers for a certain price for
taking them to the port, but, after leaving the ship, the master of the
boat “took them out into the open sea and insistently demanded some
sum of money he had thought of and refused to leave the spot until
they agreed. The captain of the ship and the crew were indifferent to
the fate of the travelers.”54

The stopover at Alexandria was the most problematic of all because
of the three days the travelers had to wait there. There was no infor-
mation office in the city, and the travelers often felt confused and helpless
in the midst of the tumult that surrounded them:

When someone comes off the ship, Arabs and hoteliers surround him and
all shout that they have the cheapest hotel, but when the traveler reaches
the place they ask some completely different price. They sometimes delib-
erately delay his departure so that he will stay an extra day and the hote-
lier will earn a little more.55

The Jewish community in Alexandria, observing all this, wrote to
Arthur Ruppin (head of the Palestine office) and asked him to do
something about it. “From the day I arrived here,” wrote Abraham
Yitzhak Neustein, a Hebrew teacher in Alexandria, “I have heard that
nearly all visitors and especially the Jews complain about the disorder
here. They are surprised there is no information office here.”56 Rup-
pin turned to the Jewish hoteliers in Egypt and asked them to appoint
“a trustworthy person whom the Jews passing backwards and forwards
through Egypt can turn to concerning immigration and emigration,
the journey and hotels,”57 but he did not find it possible to set up a
well-ordered, institutionalized information office like the one in Pale-
stine. The Odessa information office, for its part, only set up informa-
tion offices along the routes traveled by emigrants from Odessa, and
because these did not pass through Alexandria, that city remained
without an office.

The absence of an information office was exploited by the hoteliers,
who proposed representatives of their choice who would receive the
travelers and bring them to the hotels where they would remain until
the ship left for Port Said and Jaffa. “A person such as you propose is in-
deed needed here, as many of our brethren passing through our shores
... suffer from the intermediaries,” wrote the owner of a hotel in Alex-
andria to Ruppin. Accordingly, the owner of Hotel Carmel assumed re-
ponsibility for “all matters concerning immigrants arriving by ship or
railway.”58 It was decided that the representative of the hotel would
have an external sign identifying him, like the representatives of the major travel agencies waiting for their clients at the port:

This person must have an external sign, just like the interpreter of Cook's or of the Hamburg-America line or of any other tourist company. In other words, he will have a cap or an overcoat of such a kind that everyone will know he is the "Jews' interpreter." On the front of his cap or on the lapel of his official uniform, there will be a small pin . . . a star of David, for instance . . . or a cluster of grapes, so that no other interpreter will be able to act as an impostor. In order that he should also recognize his travelers, it would be a good thing if in the information offices of the coastal cities every traveler would purchase the same symbol—a pin in the form of a cluster of grapes or a star of David—and when the ship comes in, this symbol will be on the right-hand lapel of his overcoat, and thus everyone will immediately recognize everyone else.59

The travelers to Odessa also fell prey to swindling, especially when they went to obtain their tazkra in Istanbul. Crooks who pretended to be representatives of the Odessa committee took money from the travelers in exchange for an assurance that the tazkra would await them when they reached Jaffa. The deception only came to light in Jaffa, and then it was too late. The immigrants not only gave money to the swindler but also had to pay the fine of 2.4 rubles:

In many cases, when one asks the emigrant why he did not obtain his document, he utters a cry and says that he gave the money to some man that the Odessa committee told him to go to. Many people complain that this man comes to meet them in Istanbul in the name of the committee and then exploits them terribly. . . . It is possible to save them from this mishap if, when the immigrant is given his landing ticket, he is not pressed within a crowd of people so that, when he pays what he has to, they can look inside his open wallet and surround him until he gets confused.60

There were some travelers who fell victim to crooks who pretended to be Yiddish-speaking religious Jews and who exploited their dependent situation and the limited time they had to obtain the tazkra during the stopover. There were also some who "mobilized" the Zionist ideology for these purposes. Ha-yom wrote in 1906,

In Istanbul, a certain man with sidelocks appears on every ship, claiming to be the son of a rabbi from Galicia, and offers the travelers to Jaffa his services in obtaining the tazkra—the endorsement of passports by the Turkish authorities. There is also a young man with a top hat who also offers these services, but on behalf of the Zionist Organization. . . . I want to
warn about this nasty phenomenon. The travelers must know that here they are simply dealing with a crook who wants to take their money, and many emigrants have had their money stolen by him.\textsuperscript{61}

\textbf{Culture Shock}

For most, of course, the experience of emigration represented the first time they had left the Pale of Settlement. The majority were also leaving their native town for the first time. The first encounter with the new country was traumatic for many of them and left them agitated, confused, and sometimes helpless. This was particularly noticeable in the case of the immigrants’ encounter with the United States. When they arrived in New York, it was the first time they had been in a noisy, frightening city with skyscrapers and trains that ran underground at tremendous speed. The immigrants, who had probably come from small, remote shtetls in the Pale of Settlement—or even if they had come from one of its cities—and could not fail to be excited and amazed at what they saw:

The first day in the new world, the first step upon American land, the first sight of this terrifying New York, the first emotion—a compound of loneliness, bewilderment, fear and excitement—no immigrant, regardless of how dulled his memory might become through trouble or success, could ever forget that moment. Talk to one thirty, forty, even fifty years later, and he or she will always come back to that moment, with its realization that life is now forever changed, all is unfamiliar, even if in the near distance relatives are waving and Jewish officials want to help. For who had ever seen such buildings before? Who had seen such masses of people scurrying about, their eyes fixed on some distant prospect, without apparent notice of the people near or in front of them? Noise, lights, streetcars, screaming hawkers, people shouting, “Go left, go right,” children crying, yet with some undercurrent of good nature to it all.\textsuperscript{62}

Little Mottel the cantor’s son, who came from the shtetl of Kasrilovka and for the first time mounted the steps of the underground railway to the city of New York, could also not help being amazed at the crowds in the underground railway and at the height of the buildings:

You’d think we’ve been all over the world. You’d think we’ve seen all kinds of trains—steam trains and electric trains, in Cracow and in Lemberg, in Vienna and in Antwerp, and in the great city of London. But such a pushing and a shoving and a pressing and a crowding as we’ve experienced here, in the bowels of the earth, we’ve never seen before. . . . Here the tumult and confusion are much worse. And the noise is greater. And the
houses are higher. The houses are enormous. Here, a six-story house is considered a hut. You can find here twelve and twenty and thirty and forty story houses—and even higher.63

The immigrants' first encounter with Palestine and the stops on the way was different. They did not see enormous buildings, nor did they have a trip on an underground railway. But their first encounter with the East nonetheless gave them a shock and made a great impression on them, which was reflected in their letters and memoirs. The ships' sailing routes took them to two large cities of the period—Istanbul and Alexandria. The encounter with the smells of the East, the people, and the unfamiliar lifestyles evoked wonder and amazement. "The travelers were able to leave the ship for a few hours and to take a close look at the cities of Anatolia and Syria, and observe the customs of these countries and their inhabitants. . . . The strange sounds and the colorful and picturesque costumes and especially the bargaining in the markets" enchanted Yitzhak Ben-Zvi and made him realize that he was now in a "new world," different from the one he had known.64

The Jewish press in the Russian empire also provided descriptions of Palestine and the Orient. These reports are interesting because they describe the feelings of contemporaries and are not retrospective like later memoirs. This, for example, is how a woman traveler to Palestine described her encounter with the city of Alexandria in the newspaper Hed ha-zman in 1911:

We went ashore, and this was a different country, a different atmosphere, and people who were so different and strange. And among the types gathered on the shore, each one pushing and shoving the other, there were all sorts: Arabians, Egyptians, Negroes, Jews, all speaking some peculiar language that did not seem to be rich in vocabulary because the speakers supplied what was missing with shouts, grimaces, and strange sounds. And all these people were rushing, running about and pushing each other, and all was shouts and noise. The European stood there and was surprised . . . at the strange place he had come to, a place where they were unfamiliar with his ways and customs and manners, and where he too was pushed around, and where they paid no attention to him and his astonished reactions. And everything one sees is so interesting, so new—a completely different world.65

This colorful description demonstrates the cultural gap that existed between the Eastern and Western consciousness. The account reflects the great difference between the writer's world and the "new" world. The tumult, the shouts, and the pushing and shoving were not interpreted
by her as the usual Oriental way of doing things but as a primitivism that served as a cover for a poor and undeveloped language.

**Arrival at the Port of Jaffa**

The arrival at the port of Jaffa also made a strong impression on the travelers. Before they reached the town and its streets, they had to undergo yet another kind of voyage.

Jaffa did not have a port in which ships could dock quietly and safely. Most of the ships dropped anchor about a kilometer from shore. The passengers were then taken onto rowboats, which made their way between the rocks and brought them to the customs house in Jaffa. Sometimes, in bad weather, the passengers had to wait a long time on the ship until calm returned and the rowboats were able to draw up to the ship and collect the passengers. Sometimes, when it became clear that it was not going to be possible to reach shore, the ships sailed back to Beirut or Port Said, returning to Jaffa some days later: “It is not unusual for ships which come to Jaffa in wintertime to run into a storm so that they are unable to unload the passengers onto the boats. At such times, the ships move around for some days off the coast of Jaffa or sail to Port Said together with the passengers and then turn back to Jaffa again.”

Even once the travelers were on the rowboats, their troubles were not over: the journey required great skill and the capacity to maneuver between the rocks that lay between the port and the open sea. Sometimes the boats capsized, together with the passengers and their cargoes: “The sea gets stormier day by day. Yesterday, some boats capsized and the goods they were carrying fell into the water.”

Sometimes the passengers got soaked to the bone:

> I suffered very much from the sea. The sea was very high and we couldn’t leave the ship. The ship waited from 12.00 to 6.00, and at six began to sail to Beirut. But suddenly there was a signal from the shore that the ship should wait a little longer, and now a boat approached and we were very happy and went down into it. When the boat came to the rocks it almost overturned, but in the end we were saved and arrived wet on shore.

The “welcome” the passengers received from the boat owners and the stevedores who had to take them to shore was different from the relatively orderly reception of passengers in European ports. The din and the sight of the stevedores and sailors suddenly taking the passengers and their belongings down into the rowboats without asking their permission gave the immigrants a feeling of confusion: “The crew tied ladders to the ship. Strange people climbed up on board. Some pushed
on top of others and some in front of others. Some were half naked and their faces were dreadful and their loud voices went from one end of the ship to the other. Even in a dream they would have terrified us.69 As Ben-Zvi wrote in his memoirs:

When the ship dropped anchor, the sailors appeared without waiting for the bridge to be let down. They leapt quick as monkeys onto the ropes of the ship. They came onto it from all sides, and without asking the passengers seized their belongings and threw them down to the boats tossing on the waves. With their wide trousers, their wild cries, and their terrifying expressions, they were like pirates. The Jewish passengers were stunned and did not know what to do. One of the passengers took hold of his umbrella in order to prevent the Arab from taking his things, but the broad-shouldered Arab stevedore put his hand on his shoulders to quiet him and said to him in Yiddish, “Yafo neyt ganev,” which means, “There are no thieves in Jaffa.”70

In his book Shanah rishonah (First Year), Shlomo Tzemach wrote:

Already before the ship anchored . . . we saw boats and small fishing vessels shooting toward us like arrows from all sides. . . . They suddenly surrounded us, shrieked, wrestled with us for our bags and suitcases, and we went onto the boats overshadowed by their burning eyes and the exposure of their white teeth, and they hastened like thieves. . . . We were taken in the arms of the sailors who carried us here and there and threw us from hand to hand like balls until we were inside the boat . . . and a broad-chested, big-faced, big-nosed, and big-mouthed Arab rubbed his face against us, enjoying it immensely. . . . The same broad-chested Arab took up position in the center like a cantor with his choir and began singing, and the eight sailors responded. . . . The staccato rhythm of their intonation and the rhythm of the beating of a drum blended with the swaying of the bodies and the movement of their arms and of the oars. I sat there bewildered and depressed. I had not expected this kind of welcome.71

The travelers’ initial shock, as a result of this unexpected experience of being surrounded and brought down into the boats in the midst of shouting and turmoil, made the passengers confused and, in particular, caused them to make wrong decisions under pressure. Sheinkin, the director of the information office in Jaffa, wanted to warn the travelers of what to expect and sent a letter to the information office in Odessa in which he asked the office to explain to the travelers what awaited them at the port:

You must also tell the passengers not to be impatient, not to be in a hurry to get off the ship, and not to be overawed by the shouts and cries of the
Arab sailors. . . . Teach the travelers to Palestine the importance of the words “Shwaia, shwaia,” and tell them that if they say this to the Arabs suddenly appearing on the ship, they will calm down a bit and not shout “Yalla! Yalla!”—a cry that has something contemptuous about it.72

Sheinkin also asked the information office to impress upon the travelers going to Palestine the importance of their external appearance:

Likewise, ask them to pay attention to order and cleanliness, so that the local people will not behave contemptuously toward them . . . and tell them that when they get off the ship they should tidy themselves up a bit and clean up their clothes and put some order into their baggage so that there will not be rags and packages everywhere and all kinds of tiny parcels. Such precautions bring respect to the visitors and also sometimes reduce expenses.73

But more than advice was involved. The Jaffa office asked for a man of their choice to be appointed who would meet the passengers on the shore, take care of their luggage, and alleviate as much as possible their initial shock on reaching the place. In July 1907, an agreement was made between Resnick, a local hotelier, and the committee of the town of Jaffa, whose representatives were the rabbi of Jaffa, Abraham Yitzhak Hacohen Kook, and Dr. Haim Hissin, Sheinkin’s deputy at the information office: “We have appointed D. Resnick to take [the travelers] off the boats and bring them ashore at Jaffa, and to bring them with all their belongings, whatever their weight and number, to a place where they will receive further instructions.”74 By means of this agreement, Resnick became the official representative of the Hovevei Zion in Jaffa, who were responsible for the travelers’ safety and took care that they would not fall into the hands of crooks. The payment Resnick asked for bringing the travelers ashore with their baggage was three francs per man or woman and a franc and a half for travelers sailing on a half-price ticket. No payment was made for children who traveled on the boat free. The responsibility for objects lost en route fell on Resnick, who had paid a deposit of 500 francs.75

Unfortunately, Resnick himself proved to be a crook who exploited the agreement in order to raise excessive sums of money from the immigrants. “Two weeks ago, we heard that the executive committee of the Hovevei Zion negotiated with Mr. Resnick and appointed him to bring down [from the ships] all the Jews coming to Palestine for a three months’ stay, at a rate of three francs per person,” wrote Hillel Arnov, a hotelier in Jaffa and one of Resnick’s competitors. “Finally, the thing stopped, and the owners of the boats were also forced to reduce the
price to three francs, and I was later surprised to learn that David Resnick, the ‘community representative’, took five francs per person.”⁷⁶ Perhaps the competition between the two hoteliers and the struggle for a livelihood led to hostility between them and mutual recriminations, but Sheinkin, in a letter to the Odessa information office, also gave his opinion of Resnick:

Concerning Resnick, after all the complaints, we did not find him guilty of any great offenses, but he is no saint. He is a hotelier and a man of the seafront typical of such people of his age, not a Zionist and not an idealist and definitely not one of us. He has undoubtedly tried to make a ruble on the side, and who knows what has gone on between him and the harbor officials or between him and the shipping agent?⁷⁷

The First Night in Jaffa

When the immigrants reached Jaffa, they looked for somewhere to stay so that they could rest after the long sea voyage, visit the town and the surrounding area, and begin to search for employment and a place to live. The number of hotels greatly increased when the immigrants began to come, and by 1907 there were ten. “The Ashkenazi immigration to Jaffa created this phenomenon,” wrote Zeev Smilansky in 1907. The increase in the number of immigrants arriving in the town—and thus in the need for places to stay—made the hotel business one of the most profitable and successful in Jaffa in the period before World War I. Smilansky observed that, before the waves of immigration reached Jaffa, the hotel rooms “were in small attics and tiny little apartments.” When the immigrants arrived, the hoteliers realized the economic potential of the business and thus expanded it and increased the number of rooms, so that “now they are all situated on higher floors and in more spacious apartments.”⁷⁸

The hoteliers, as discussed above, took advantage of the shock of the immigrants’ initial encounter with the port of Jaffa and “ambushed” the travelers, bringing them to the hotel and making every effort to ensure that they would stay there for as long as possible. “Another sore point is the question of lodging places,” wrote Haim Ridnik, an immigration official of the Palestine office at the port of Jaffa, in a report he wrote:

The hoteliers and the people from the boats already on the ship fall upon the immigrant with great shouts and cries and, frightened for his luggage, he hands himself over to some hotelier. And if one of them is obstinate
and goes down to the shore, his fate is even worse, for they open his belongings in the middle of the street among a crowd of people, and he and his family get pushed around . . . and he stands there confused, depressed, and full of bitterness.79

The struggle over the immigrants led to an abundance of acts of deception and exploitation, which began the moment the immigrant left the ship. “The Jewish middleman has also developed at the expense of this immigration,” we read in Ha-poel ha-tsair. “An ugly type is coming into being who smells out every hole and crack and seeks out any Jew with a farthing in his pocket.”80 The hotelier Resnick exploited the concession he received to help the travelers coming down from the ship in order to take them to his cramped and dirty hotel. The services he provided there were second class and cost three francs a night. For this reason, Sheinkin wanted to separate the concession granted to Resnick from the question of hotel accommodation and to protect the immigrants from being taken to his hotel against their will. In a letter to the information office in Odessa, Sheinkin wrote:

Travelers think that because Resnick is entrusted with taking them off the ship, they will also obtain the best and most reliable lodgings. Thus, many of them come to his cramped hotel, which, like other second-class hotels, is not very distinguished for its cleanliness. Sometimes, rich people arrive there who are willing and able to pay an extra franc a day (four francs instead of three), providing they get a clean and spacious room. And I say once again, Resnick’s hotel is no worse than others of the second class, but not everyone has to stay there, and in other words, you [the Odessa information office] do not have to recommend it. When they come ashore, they should be able to select the hotel they want.81

As in Odessa, the immigrants were sometimes taken to brothels masquerading as hotels, and they sometimes found themselves in hotels that were beyond their means and spent all their money in a few days. In order to lengthen their stay in the hotel, the proprietors were in the habit of “losing” passports and tazkras—a loss that forced the immigrants to wait for a few days in the hotel until their affairs were set in order:

They get taken to hotels they cannot afford or to hotels that deliberately exploit the immigrant, or to houses in a street unsuitable for families because there are grown-up girls there suspected of prostitution. And then the hoteliers find ways to take their tazkras, and they mislay them, and the documents are lost, and they delay their guests unnecessarily for some days (if they have missed the train or the coach) and use up their money. When the immigrant does finally catch his train, the hotelier buys his
ticket for him, giving it to him at the very moment when the train leaves
the station, and then he quickly passes the ticket and the note to the hand
stretched out of the window but does not have the time to give him the bill
and the change.\textsuperscript{82}

Sheinkin and Ridnik, who as part of their job accompanied the im-
migrants from the moment they left the ship to the time they left the
customs, had very strong views on the hoteliers. "Most of the hoteliers
are rabid anti-Zionists who condemn all Zionist institutions and repre-
sentatives and speak evil of the country, and the immigrant’s soul is
filled with bitterness and despair," wrote Ridnik.\textsuperscript{83} And Sheinkin wrote,
"It is no secret that many mean-spirited and corrupt hoteliers are con-
temptuous of Zionists and make propaganda against what they do, and
use every opportunity to poison the minds of visitors with fabricated
nonsense."\textsuperscript{84}

The solution proposed by Ridnik was to create an immigrants’
house: "to rent some building near the port where the immigrant could
rest from the strain of the journey and leave his things, without being
under pressure to look for lodgings."\textsuperscript{85} But Ridnik’s idea was not put
into practice because of budgetary difficulties, and the hoteliers con-
tinued to exploit the immigrants.

The immigrants did not expect a reception of this kind when they
came to Palestine. The situation was similar to that in other countries of
immigration, but the people who chose to go to Palestine perhaps
thought that there they would be spared the “speculators, usurers, and
moneylenders of every kind”\textsuperscript{86} who set about exploiting them the mo-
ment they got off the ship. It was perhaps precisely because of their high
expectations of the country, which were different from those of travel-
ers to America, that these immigrants fell prey to the crooks more eas-
ily. Moreover, it should be remembered that Jaffa was first and foremost
a port town that subsisted from immigrants and visitors. The hoteliers
were primarily business people and not representatives of the Zionist
movement in the country. They understood the financial potential of
the new wave of immigration that began to arrive in the country in
1904, and they exploited it to the full. As often happens, immediate fi-
nancial gain overruled ideological considerations. It was thus not sur-
prising if Agnon’s Isaac fell victim to exploitation by a hotelier: “The
landlord wasn’t mistaken about Isaac, but Isaac was mistaken about
the landlord. This house was an inn and the landlord was an innkeeper
and all his efforts with Isaac were simply to be paid for room and
board."\textsuperscript{87}
Prostitution and White Slave Trading

Palestine, as a place of immigration, attracted not only pioneers imbued with ideological passion who came to the country "to build and to be built," but also crooks, thieves, and pimps who found plentiful opportunities for their dubious activities in Jaffa. The most striking of these negative phenomena in the period of immigration from the beginning of the twentieth century to the outbreak of World War I was the arrival of pimps and procurers, which led to the spread of prostitution in the country—especially in Jaffa, the chief port at that period. This wave of immigration brought with it a new type of prostitute in the region, of Ashkenazi origin:

Prostitution, as we know, is not an alien growth in the East in general and in the Arab world in particular. Ten measures of prostitution were given to the world, and the East took nine! And it is no secret that there is not a single brothel in Syria and Palestine where you will not find a significant number of Jewesses. But our Ashkenazi sisters were not to be found in this muck, they were not to be found there at all, or only once in a blue moon.88

Prostitution flourished in Jaffa in the period of immigration, but many of the writers and editors of the newspapers at the time kept their distance from reporting on this phenomenon or even deliberately ignored it. Zeev Smilansky, the principal of the first kindergarten in Jaffa and one of the founders of the Ha-poel Ha-tsair party, for example, wrote a wide-ranging article on the Jewish community in Jaffa that was published in *Ha-omer* and did not mention prostitution at all.89 The subject may have been deleted from the article by the journal’s internal censorship, or the writer may have censored it himself, but the matter is addressed specifically in the manuscript of the article in Smilansky’s private archive. “We have to point out,” wrote Smilansky,

that together with the new waves of Jewish immigration that are washing over Jaffa, a fair amount of dirt and filth has also been swept in. A few have opened taverns in which people sin and get drunk, and we should hide our faces in shame that the new Jews engage in such occupations. And not only that, but licentiousness is spreading among the new Jews. Among the hoteliers there are some who are pimps who provide prostitution for their guests. They often get their “live merchandise” from the new immigrants, and how dreadful it is that a Jew who has fled from a country of persecution should sell his daughters into shame! Because of these pimps and whores we are disgraced in the eyes of the other inhabitants of the town.90
The trade in prostitution began to flourish in Jaffa with the arrival of the immigrants. The pimps, who understood the economic potential of this activity, began to set up brothels that served both the Jewish and non-Jewish population and the crews of the ships that came into the port. The Jewish community found it hard to accept this new “trade,” and the arguments put forward against the spread of brothels were based not only on a moral condemnation of the phenomenon but also on a fear of “what people will say”—in other words, of a lowering of the status of the Jews in the eyes of the Arabs, who unlike the Europeans were not tolerant of houses of prostitution:

One of the most depressing sights in this country are the houses of prostitution continually being opened by people whom others to our misfortune call Jews because they have not yet left the Jewish community. This does terrible harm to our country. While in Europe certain things are considered important and the public shows acceptance in matters of vice and prostitution, the Arab with his strange tradition concerning modesty is like an innocent babe in comparison with European attitudes.91

Thus, their real fear was that the Arabs would be unable to distinguish between Jewish prostitutes and ordinary Jewish women, and that they would consequently regard both of them as immoral. “They regard all the ‘Muscovite’ women as cheap and promiscuous,” and so behave toward them with a “sexual vulgarity that they would never dare to do in the case of Sephardi women and, still less, of German or English Christian women.”92

Many complaints about the spread of brothels and the moral degradation it brought to the town were made to Kook, the rabbi of Jaffa. The petitioners asked the rabbi to root out the phenomenon, which they felt brought shame to the Jewish community. Among the people who lived there were even some who placed the blame on him, claiming that he did not take sufficient interest in matters relating to the community and that he was “over-spiritual.” The rabbi replied that he knew that “traders in women were becoming increasingly common in our town,” and he “had begun several times to make some attempt to repair [the situation], but I must honestly admit that to my great regret I had little success.”93 In a port, brothels were a social necessity. Sailors who spent weeks at sea, immigrants far from their families, or simply bachelors—all these sought relief for their desires, and when there is a demand, there is always someone who will supply what is needed. The rabbi of Jaffa was powerless to oppose this phenomenon.

Many of the brothels were thus set up by Jewish immigrants from Russia who had settled in the town. The clients were sailors, local
people, and immigrants like themselves, but the question remains: who were the prostitutes? Where did they come from and how did they arrive? In this respect, Palestine was not different from other countries of immigration such as the United States and Argentina. Moreover, the organizers of this trade knew that, if they came to a shtetl in the Pale of Settlement and asked to marry a woman and take her to America or to Buenos Aires, this would immediately arouse suspicion. This would not be the case, however, if someone wanted to take his “wife” to Palestine. The pimps realized that the girl’s family would not suspect that a white slave trade was developing in Palestine and was growing rapidly, and they therefore made use of the Zionist ideology in order to carry out their schemes.

In the case of Palestine, their method of operation was very simple. A handsome young slave trader would come to one of the many towns in the Pale of Settlement and begin to court one of the local girls. He would shower her with money and jewels and win her confidence and that of her parents. After a time, when he was convinced that the girl had fallen in love with him, he proposed marriage to her and a life of plenty in Palestine. The common image of Palestine was of a land of piety and asceticism, on the one hand, and of Zionist pioneering, on the other. Thus, the young man could entice the girl to join him on a “Zionist expedition” to Palestine, where she was sold to one of the brothels in Jaffa or in one of the stops on the way: Istanbul, Alexandria, or Port Said.

This trade, if it is allowed to develop, will have a glorious future in Palestine. A young trader arrives in a town in Russia or Galicia and begins to look for a match among the girls of the place, but he puts himself in danger if he dares to tell his “fiancée” or her parents that he is about to travel to Argentina or to some large maritime city. But this does not apply to Palestine. Palestine is believed in the Diaspora to be all piety, asceticism, and Judaism. And everyone knows that today Palestine is also attractive to the younger generation. Who could object to such a journey? In whom would such a journey arouse suspicions?

Another operational strategy of the slave traders was to spot girls among the immigrants already on their way to Palestine. A pimp would arrive in Odessa—the principal port of departure for Palestine—and would put up at one of the lodging houses that received travelers sailing to the country. He usually introduced himself as a farmer from Palestine with a property in Petah-Tikvah or Rishon-le-Zion, and after gaining the confidence of the travelers who were interested in hearing about the country or who simply wanted news of their relatives, he tried
to gain the confidence of one of the girls and to entice her to come to Palestine with him on his own passport. In this way, he said, she would be saved unnecessary expenses. The unsuspecting girl usually did not see through this “Zionist” pretence and agreed to go along with him.

In Ziditz’s lodging house in Odessa (where all the less well-to-do immigrants to Palestine put up), there was a farmer from Petah-Tikvah who said wonderful things about Palestine and its inhabitants, helped the travelers and gave them advice on what to do on the journey, etc., and casually proposed to take one of the girls on his passport.96

But “when they reached Palestine, they learned that this was a total fabrication, and the farmer from Petah-Tikvah” was revealed as an imposter: “When the group of travelers later arrived in Palestine, they found that this very same ‘farmer’ from Petah-Tikvah had now become a wealthy merchant from a town in Russia, a widower in search of a wife.”97

The prostitution trade in Jaffa was conducted quite openly, like any other business in the town. “The band of white slave traders, which is headed by a man from Jaffa, and all of whom to our great shame are Jews and one of whom is a recipient of halukah [charitable funds] has recently become established in our town,” we read in the newspaper Ha-herut. The pimps rented an apartment near the seafront and, according to the paper, “carried on their vile and despicable trade quite openly, without any shame.”

The writer of the article, who signed himself “X,” complained of the indifference of the Jewish community and its lack of interest in the matter:

If we continue to take our distance and watch all this coldly and with indifference as we have done until now, how will it all end? Where is the recently founded organization with the impressive title “The Society for the Protection of Women in Jaffa,” and why is it sleeping? Why is it taking its afternoon nap when it has such enormous opportunities for action?98

The pimps not only imported women into Palestine but also exported them overseas:

But there is an even more depressing fact: there are signs that our country is becoming a center for white slave trading in general. Many new faces have appeared in Jaffa (and, to a lesser degree, in Haifa and Jerusalem). These people frequent lodging houses and taverns a great deal; they are to be found on the seafront and on the ships, and they engage in a constant exchange of correspondence with people abroad. The more young
and handsome ones have begun to match themselves up with the poor girls of the country. Last month, there were two occurrences, one an import and the other an export. . . . If we do not find a way of immediately eradicating this evil, Palestine will enter into competition with the great centers of prostitution in the world and become a sort of Buenos Aires. There are two sides to the picture: on the one hand Palestine can provide plenty of raw material for other countries because of the poverty of its inhabitants, and on the other hand these filthy people can find their "booty" abroad more easily if they are helped by Palestine.99

With the spread of the phenomenon in Palestine, a Society for the Protection of Women came into being there. In May 1911, its head, Bertha Pappenheim, visited the country: "Last Saturday night, Mrs. Pappenheim of Vienna gave a talk at the library about the trade in women. The hall was packed. She spoke for about half an hour and depicted this despicable trade in the darkest colors."100

Pappenheim (1859–1936) was a feminist social worker of German-Jewish origin who founded the alliance of Jewish women who fought the white slave trade. In her lectures and writings, she not only drew attention to the causal connection between poverty and prostitution but also stressed the basic connection between prostitution and the social and religious oppression of women.101 Her arrival in Palestine and her lecture on the subject illustrates the growth of the phenomenon in the country. It is very likely that representatives of the newspaper Ha-ahdut were present at the lecture, because about a week later an article entitled "The White Slave Trade in Our Country" appeared, embodying Pappenheim’s feminist approach:

So long as the status of women in the home, in society, and in the workplace is a low one, so long as fathers see their daughters as ne’er-do-wells and deprive them of education and the national spiritual inheritance . . . the Jewish woman in the land of national rebirth will be ensnared by the white slave traders. . . . Only national schools and a broad and comprehensive moral and social education of girls while they are still young . . . only the massive participation of women in the aspirations of the people, in its social creativity in the present and future, can rescue the Jewish woman and our Jewish society from the white slave trade.102

Conclusion

The hardships experienced by the travelers to Palestine—from leaving the Pale of Settlement to arriving in Jaffa—were not so different from those experienced by their brethren who traveled to America. Both
groups attracted dubious characters who tried to steal the little money they had. The acts of swindling and deception practiced on the immigrants to Palestine were sometimes more sophisticated than those perpetrated on the immigrants to America. Quite often, the swindling involved a “mobilization” of the Zionist ideology and of the idea of a return to the land of Israel. The innocent travelers could not have imagined that spurious “Zionists” would exploit them and take their money by means of deception.

The sea voyage also involved a great deal of hardship, especially for impecunious immigrants who traveled on deck in third or fourth class. Their encounter with the East and coming off the ship at the port of Jaffa, with the sailors and stevedores screaming and jumping on the travelers, also formed part of the sea voyage from Odessa or Trieste to Palestine. There can be no doubt that, under these conditions, the romantic halo surrounding the return to the ancestral land after an exile of 2,000 years was somewhat tarnished.

The rise of prostitution and the white slave trade in Palestine show that not all of those who came to the country were idealistic pioneers inspired by the vision of realizing Zionism. Such people were, in fact, a small minority. They were accompanied by dubious and negative characters. They exploited the period of the great immigration and the temporary situation of the immigrants in order to make a profit, and they saw the country as a business opportunity. The majority of immigrants were unfortunate people who had left Europe in the hope of finding some consolation in Palestine. They were not ideologically motivated but attempted, quite simply, to pursue their existence and to locate a means of livelihood and better opportunities for survival.

Notes

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1 “Halaley ha-emigratsyah,” Hazman, July 17, 1907, p. 2.
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tion,” American Jewish History
4 Ha-zman, July 17, 1907, p. 2.
5 Ibid.
6 Sholem Aleichem, The Adven-
tures of Mottel, the Cantor’s Son
7 Ha-yom, Jan. 13, 1907, p. 2.
On the Central Information Of-
Fice in Berlin, see also Mark
Wischnitzer, To Dwell in Safety
10 See Wischnitzer, To Dwell in
Safety, 106–12. For a more de-
tailed account, see Gur Alroey,
“Bureaucracy, Agents and Swin-
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11 Samuel Janovsky, Divrei ha-
arakhah, zikhronot, ktavim nivha-
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12 Ibid.
13 Ha-tsofeh, Mar. 20, 1905, p. 3.
14 For Jaffa, see Margalit Shilo,
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Menahem Sheinkin in Jaffa Dur-
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27, 1909, p. 10.
17 Central Zionist Archives (hereaf-
ter CZA), A 24, file 60/6. From a
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Odessa emigration committee by
18 Ha-zman, June 23, 1907, p. 3.
19 From Beit Ha-am’s letter of com-
plaint to the Odessa Committee.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid., p. 2.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Afed, “Hed Erets Israel,” Ha-
26 Menahem Sheinkin, Yedies vegen
Erets Yisroel (Vilna, 1908).
27 For the sake of comparison, see
the booklet for the Jewish immi-
grant to Canada published by the
St. Petersburg information office,
Canada, Algemeine yedies vegen land
far di vos vilen forn ahin (St.
Petersburg, 1909), the booklet published
for the immigrant to Argentina by
the same publishing house and in
the same year, Argentina: Argentina
yedies vegen far di vos vilen forn ahin
(St. Petersburg, 1909), and the
booklet for immigrants to Amer-
ica, Die Fareinigte Shtaten on
Amerike: Algemeine yedies on onvizun-
gen far di vos vilen forn ein dem land
(St. Petersburg, 1908).
28 See Sheinkin, Yedies vegen Erets
Yisroel, 3–4.
30 On the price of the sea voyage from Trieste, see CZA, L2, file 84.
31 "Ha-istsiah le-Erets Israel," Ha-olam, June 4, 1912, p. 15.
32 On the price of sailing tickets to America, see Die Vereinigte Shtaten fun Amerike, 6–8. In the years before World War I, the tickets became cheaper, but the sea voyage to America was always more expensive than the one to Palestine.
35 Sheinkin, Yedies vegen Erets Yisroel, 6–7.
36 CZA, A 24, file 51/2, letter from Sheinkin to the Odessa information office, July 10, 1907, p. 5.
37 David Smilansky, Ir noledet (Tel Aviv, 1981), 27.
38 See Sheinkin’s letter to the Odessa information office, p. 5.
39 Sheinkin, Yedies vegen Erets Yisroel, 10.
40 See Sheinkin’s letter to the Odessa information office, p. 4.
41 See David Kushnir, Mosheh haiti bi-yrushalayim, Ha-ir ve he-mahoz be-einav shel Ali Ekrem Bey 1906–1908 (Jerusalem, 1995), 37.
42 Ibid., 38.
43 Hashkafah 8, no. 70 (June 24, 1908): 3.
44 Sholem Aleichem, Mottel, the Cantor’s Son, 180.
45 See Shemuel Avitzur, Nemal Yaf be-gaavato uvi-Shkiato (Tel Aviv, 1972), 28.
46 On the route from Trieste to Jaffa, see CZA, L2, file 84; on the route from Odessa, see CZA, A9, file 28. From the information at my disposal, it appears that, out of the 30,000 immigrants who reached Palestine in the years 1904–14, 20,000 of them, a quarter of whom were under the age of 14, left from the port of Odessa. The rest left from the port of Trieste. For further details on the composition of the aliyah, see Alroy, “Jewish Immigration at the Beginning of the 20th Century,” 73–114.
47 Ha-herut, Jan. 20, 1911, p. 3.
49 Shai Agnon, Only Yesterday (Princeton, 2000), 30.
50 Ha-poel ha-tsair, July 27, 1911, p. 20.
51 Haya Rotenberg, Sefer meuhar (Tel Aviv, 1987), 115.
52 Smilansky, Ir noledet, 22.
54 Smilansky, Ir noledet, 24.
55 CZA, A24, file 51/2, letter of Menahem Sheinkin to Usishkin, July 10, 1907, p. 4.
57 CZA, A192, file 1231, letter from the Palestinian office to David Yudelevich, Jan. 26, 1912.
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66 Smilansky, Ir noledet, 27.
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69 Agnon, Only Yesterday, 34.
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71 Shlomo Tzemach, Shanah risho-
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One may find a similar descrip-
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72 See Sheinkin’s letter to the 
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78 Zeev Smilansky, Ha-yishuv ha-
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85 Haim Ridnik report on immi-
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87 Agnon, Only Yesterday, 40.
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89 See Smilansky, Ha-yishuv ha-
90 Labour Archives, Zeev Smilan-
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138. Ha-meir was a popular sci-
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93 Ben Avraham, “Jaffo,” Ha-herut, 
Oct. 13, 1910, p. 3.
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