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Berliner Luftmenschen. Osteuropäisch-jüdische Migranten in der Weimarer Republik, by Anne-Christin Saß (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2012; pp. 493)

Verfolgt von Land zu Land. Jüdische Flüchtlinge in Westeuropa 1938-1944 by Insa Meinen and Ahlrich Meyer (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2013; pp. 332)

Migration history has come a long way in the past decades. Long gone are the days when population movements, particularly those across national boundaries, were regarded as exceptional phenomena, precipitated by particular crises, and analysed overwhelmingly on the macro level, through such processes as assimilation and integration into the receiving societies. Instead, drawing on insights offered by Eugene M. Kulischer and others as early as the 1940s, scholars have increasingly come to regard large-scale migrations as permanent features of the international system and to explore them with increasing sophistication, as highly complex, multi-faceted, transnational events that need to be examined from multiple perspectives. At the same time, the interconnections between wars and other crises and particular waves of migrations, especially different types of forced migrations, have come under close and imaginative scrutiny as well. The result has been a rapidly growing and intellectually stimulating scholarly literature, which keeps on expanding rapidly. The books under review here are two successful and noteworthy additions to this body of historiography.

Anne-Christin Saß's study, a revised version of her doctoral dissertation, is the more conceptually and methodologically ambitious of the two. Her focus lies on the lives of East European Jewish migrants in Weimar-era Berlin, and her primary objective is to reconstruct the 'lifeworlds' (*Lebenswelten*) of these often rather societally marginalized migrants. In good part, Saß endeavours to deconstruct the blanket term '*Ostjuden*', which was typically applied to Jewish immigrants of East European origin by German citizens, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, usually with a derogatory connotation. In a series of long, thoroughly

researched chapters she successfully highlights the diversity of the Jewish migrants and their identities, caught between the uncertain present in Berlin, the fading past and its traditions further to the east, and the dream of onward migration to destinations such as North America or Palestine, which was an aspiration for many. She also breaks down traditional juxtapositions between the Jewish migrants from Eastern Europe, the established Jewish communities in Germany, and wider non-Jewish society in the Weimar Republic, highlighting different forms of interactions and transfers between the three groups. In the process, Saß portrays Berlin as a transitional and transnational space, an ‘East European-Jewish centre of migration and a nodal point of a multi-faceted Jewish diaspora culture’ (p. 437). Hers is an exciting, innovative study that links with current trends in the study of the social and cultural history of migration. It is an important and insightful contribution, even if at 493 pages the book is somewhat longer than it needs to be; stricter editing could have condensed the text further without forfeiting core substance.

Insa Meinen and Ahlrich Meyer explore another broad topic that has received extensive attention recently: the relationship between forced migrations and genocide. As the title of their co-authored book indicates, the study focuses on Jewish refugees in Western Europe between 1938 and 1944, particularly those who managed to escape from Nazi Germany (including Austria) to Belgium, the Netherlands, and France. The authors pursue a twofold objective. Firstly, they provide extensive statistical information about the people involved, showing, among other things, that Jewish refugees from the Reich in Belgium, Netherlands, and France during the German occupation totalled roughly 50,000, fifty percent of whom were ultimately murdered in the Holocaust (p. 273). The information about cross-border movements of Jewish refugees between Belgium, Netherlands and France during the German occupation is especially revealing, accentuating the very extensive efforts which many refugees undertook to escape from their persecutors – albeit all too often in vain. The

book's second objective is particularly commendable. Meine and Meyer go to considerable lengths to describe the fates of individuals and families caught up in the Nazi machinery of destruction. Drawing on very extensive, multi-archival source material, mostly composed of the bureaucratic records of Nazi officials and their collaborators, they paint a large number of vignettes that briefly but eloquently -- and often very movingly -- describe the steps that individual Jewish refugees took to avoid incarceration, deportation, and death. The vignettes are all the more poignant for the fact that in almost all cases they end with the murder of the individual(s) concerned.

For all its strengths, the book does have weaker points as well. Although it claims to be a study of Jewish refugees in Western Europe, its empirical focus lies overwhelmingly on Belgium, as a temporary refuge and a transit station for those who hoped to make their way to France and, ultimately, to countries beyond Nazi control. The book is therefore not really a full history of Jewish refugees in Western Europe, despite what its title claims. The study also remains rather vague on the precise relationship between the refugee movements it describes and the wider history of the Holocaust that lurks steadily in the background. The authors refer to 'a close connection' between 'policies of expulsion and extermination' and describe 'the forced emigration from Germany' as a 'precursor to the "Final Solution"' (p. 278), but they do not really develop these important points further. Closer elaboration on the relationship between forced migrations and genocide under Nazi rule would have enhanced the book, particularly as a contribution to the evolving, and often controversial, historiography on these topics. However, the study remains a considerable achievement, particularly in its efforts to pay attention to the life histories of individual victims of the Holocaust, and it deserves a wide readership among historians of the Holocaust and of migrations more generally.

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