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Meredith L. Scott, *The Lifeline: Salomon Grumbach and the Quest for Safety*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2022. vii + 186 pp. Bibliography and index. \$127.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-90-04-51439-3; \$127.00 U.S (eb). ISBN 978-90-04-51489-8.

Review by Shannon L. Fogg, Missouri University of Science and Technology.

Drawing extensively on Salomon Grumbach's personal papers, Meredith L. Scott provides a biography of the Jewish-Alsatian journalist and socialist politician, tracing his professional work and international activism from the 1920s and 1930s through his death in 1952. Grumbach's early sociopolitical experiences, Scott argues, influenced his activities during the late 1930s and the Second World War, when he served as a key advocate for refugees while he himself was threatened by the Vichy regime's antisemitic persecution. In addition to exploring Grumbach's journalistic and political career, Scott documents his involvement in voluntary associations and places his work within a broader Franco-German context. She argues that Grumbach's earlier Jewish activism forged the networks that were critical to supporting resistance and humanitarian aid during the late Third Republic and under the Vichy regime. She sees Grumbach as fitting "a trend among Jews in modern France who were fully integrated into the public sphere of the Third Republic but pursued forms of social and political engagement that were uniquely Jewish, creating new spaces in which to articulate their identities and concerns" (p. 10). Understanding Grumbach's worldview, Scott asserts, requires a transnational framework and an appreciation of his commitment to internationalism.

This framing fits with recent trends in Jewish studies that examine Jewish internationalism and humanitarianism through a transnational lens.<sup>[1]</sup> While other studies tend to focus on transnational organizations (such as the American Joint Distribution Committee), wider movements (like socialism), or a specific time period (the First World War, the Second World War, the postwar period), Scott's work differs by focusing on an individual who worked within international organizations and movements across multiple decades. Scott draws on Talbot C. Imlay's definition of internationalism as "clusters of activity, some interconnected and some not, occurring in multiple spaces, at various speeds and intensities, and with different durations."<sup>[2]</sup> Imlay's definition comes from his study of international socialism, which fits with Grumbach's background as a socialist. Grumbach's politics are a major focus of the study; Scott also places Grumbach's activities within the context of Jewish internationalism, although this is less developed in the book. The work of Jewish organizations across national borders was especially active in addressing the refugee crisis created during the First World War and following the rise of Nazism in Germany, and Grumbach worked within and outside of these groups.

The book is arranged chronologically but focuses on Grumbach's relationship with associations, party politics, and the press throughout. Providing the longer context, rather than focusing exclusively on Grumbach's work during the late 1930s and the Second World War, allows Scott to demonstrate the continuities and changes in Grumbach's views. Grumbach was born in Hattstatt, a small town located in the then-German Haut-Rhin, in 1884. Following the Franco-Prussian War, his parents chose to remain in Alsace rather than relocate to France, but evidence suggests they continued to identify with French ideals despite being German citizens. Grumbach's upbringing in Alsace influenced his lifelong interest in Franco-German relations and his subsequent public engagement. He embraced French republicanism and viewed himself as an *Israélite*, adopting a secular and cultural view of his Jewish identity. He also joined the Social Democratic Party (SPD) as a young man. Scott traces his early ventures into voluntary associations, journalism, and socialist politics in Alsace to highlight the major themes that would influence his actions later in his life. Key in these years was the attempt to bridge French and German identities through a focus on democracy and peace. Expelled from France as a foreign enemy during the Great War and choosing not to report for duty with the German army, Grumbach retreated to Switzerland and spent the war years writing pieces that outlined his views on international cooperation and human rights. There was also a shift in his politics during the period from an idealized pacifist socialism to a more pragmatic approach to solving international issues. Following the Great War and the resulting territorial shift of Alsace-Lorraine back to France, Grumbach chose French citizenship and became increasingly involved in French politics.

Scott then examines Grumbach's work in the early interwar period when he continued to focus on Franco-German relations and the status of Alsace-Lorraine. While Grumbach did not officially take part in French legislative politics until he was elected deputy for Mulhouse-Ville in 1928, he was able to exert influence through other means and made connections that he would draw upon later. Grumbach joined the SFIO (French Section of the Worker's International) following the war, wrote for the socialist press, and worked with both the League of Nations and the Ligue des droits de l'homme (LDH). Both groups focused on human rights and fit with the worldview Grumbach had been creating since his youth. Once in the Chamber of Deputies, Grumbach expanded his relationships with members of the government and was recognized as a specialist in foreign affairs (especially related to Germany.) He was committed to fostering a lasting peace, but quickly recognized the potential dangers created by the Treaty of Versailles. As early as 1930, Grumbach warned deputies of the dangers of Hitler and Nazism and the potential threat that such right-wing movements posed to France. With the onset of the Great Depression and the growing popularity of National Socialism, Grumbach drew on his connections with the League of Nations, the SPD, and the SFIO to publicly raise the alarm about the Nazis and their extreme nationalism.

Although Grumbach's early assessments of the Nazis were correct and he worked to warn others of the impending danger, his calls for action went largely unheeded. However, his opposition to fascism, his intimate knowledge of the government, and his support of human and refugee rights meant many people would turn to him in the early 1930s for help. Scott explores Grumbach's work in the early 1930s after he lost his re-election bid in 1932. In this period, Grumbach used public appearances and the press to call attention to the threat of Nazism and he also began to place pressure on the French government to provide support for the refugees, immigrants, and asylum seekers arriving in France in increasing numbers. Grumbach wrote heavily antifascist articles for German-language papers in France and gave speeches in various venues that were

often viewed by others as alarmist. He advocated French military readiness, which contradicted Socialist pacifism, but represented (in his view) the best way to ensure European peace. It was these activities that made him visible to the thousands of refugees in France.

Scott's attention to the refugee crisis and the use of the hundreds of letters sent to Grumbach by refugees allows her to explore the challenges facing refugees. Grumbach's personal papers, now held at the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) in Paris, serve as a particularly rich source for the second half of the book. The Germans confiscated Grumbach's papers after his arrest in 1940 and many of the records were unavailable for over 70 years. First sent to Berlin and then to Moscow, the letters remained there until Grumbach's son requested their repatriation. Scott has mined these letters to examine individuals' situations and to demonstrate the ways in which Grumbach's previous work allowed him to serve as an intermediary between refugees and the government. She also demonstrates how humanitarian aid occurred beyond the boundaries of organizations by examining the work of one man. Scott argues that Grumbach's "work throughout the refugee crisis underlines the vivacity of Jewish life in interwar France; it reveals his ingenuity and resourcefulness as well as the deep commitment of other activists and leaders, many of whom were Jews" (p. 84). Although Grumbach did not join some of the Jewish organizations that responded to the refugee crisis, his previous activism and his political contacts helped him to connect people to resources in ways that others could not. He worked through the LDH, the SFIO, and the League of Nations to encourage refugee support and served as a liaison with numerous Jewish organizations. Refugees wrote to him specifically because of his Jewishness, his socialism, and his connections; they asked for employment help, material aid, and bureaucratic interventions on their behalf.

After his initial ventures into refugee aid in the early 1930s, Grumbach returned to elected politics during the Popular Front. However, instead of representing Alsace, the socialist was now deputy of Castres (Tarn). He continued to work on issues related to security and immigration and on behalf of the Jewish and political victims of fascism. He lobbied the state to change its policies to protect itself as well as those who had sought refuge in France, and when that failed to create widespread change, he worked to help individuals. As the number of people in need grew, Grumbach created individual files and standardized forms to keep track of the requests he received as well as the actions he was taking. Scott notes that there was no international infrastructure that was able to handle the refugee crisis in the mid-1930s. Grumbach believed that the League of Nations could do more to help refugees and he openly criticized its failings while working for reforms within France. Reforms at the national and international level remained limited, but Grumbach used his knowledge of the government and his network to help individuals, including those interned in camps on French soil.

With the declaration of war in September 1939, the government's focus shifted away from refugees—many of whom now faced arrest and imprisonment as alien enemies—and to the war effort. Grumbach's experience with helping refugees throughout the 1930s became even more important during the Second World War. In the period known as the "Phony War," Grumbach's reputation as someone who could help internees spread through word of mouth and the press. He received letters that detailed the extremely difficult conditions inside the camps along with pleas for liberation. In addition to helping the internees on an individual basis, Grumbach published articles condemning the camps and French immigration policies. In early 1940, the French government made some progress in enacting policies that led to the release of some internees, but with the Nazi invasion of Western Europe in May, fears related to Central

European refugees returned. Foreigners were again arrested and interned, and Jews were disproportionately affected by these measures. Grumbach's files related to his aid to refugees ends just before the German invasion and his story takes a different turn.

Grumbach was one of the small group of French politicians who opposed an armistice with Germany and who sailed to North Africa on 21 June 1940 in an attempt to re-establish the French government outside the hexagon. The twenty-six deputies and one senator who had left aboard the *Massilia* were arrested as traitors. Grumbach was returned to the metropole and placed under house arrest near Castres until he was interned in a hotel-turned-prison in the Indre. Grumbach had his French citizenship revoked and was soon transferred to another prison until he was released in March 1941. Once again under house arrest, Grumbach used his time to build relationships with members of the Resistance in the Cévennes, the site of his forced residence. Targeted for arrest in 1943, Grumbach and his wife went into hiding in February 1944 and managed to survive the war despite some close calls and thanks to the relationships he had built. Grumbach had been the object of antisemitic attacks throughout his political career, but Vichy's politics codified his exclusion as both a Jew and a socialist.

Grumbach returned to political life after the war and continued to focus on the things that had mattered most to him throughout his career: human rights, Jewish life, democracy, and peace. He re-engaged with the SFIO, began writing for the press, and restarted his work with international relief organizations. He was re-elected as deputy for Castres and focused on postwar issues related to Germany. He was also a member of the delegation to the UN that took part in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the end, Scott concludes that Grumbach's decades of work displayed a "remarkable continuity of purpose" (p. 170) that highlights the ways in which Jews were able to use political and associational spaces to promote equality and argue for rights. She writes, "Ultimately, Grumbach offers lessons that transcend national boundaries and specific historical moments, challenging us to rethink our ideas about resistance, mobilization, and activism. These lessons are neither relegated to the annals of French history nor restricted to the mid-twentieth century; Grumbach suggests ways in which--even today--individuals outside the halls of government might be able to engage the public sphere, broadcast their ideas, and join others who share their convictions" (p. 171).

Meredith Scott provides a detailed account of Grumbach's work with a particular emphasis on his political activity that was clearly influenced by his identity as a secular Jewish Alsatian. Her work also suggests there is still work to be done in transnational Jewish studies and on international humanitarianism. For example, Scott hints at the important role that Salomon Grumbach's non-Jewish wife, Wally, played in his efforts, calling her "his partner in political and organizational activities" (p. 21). A committed socialist, she was also instrumental in helping refugees find work and housing during the 1930s and was placed under house arrest with her husband in the 1940s. However, her activities are rarely mentioned throughout the book and appear as a literal footnote to her husband's actions. Engaging more with the role of married couples in humanitarian aid and the gendering of aid activities would further expand our understanding of individuals' influence outside of official channels. *The Lifeline* provides a richly supported story that adds nuance to some of the major events of the twentieth century from the perspective of one man's experiences.

## NOTES

[1] See for example Catherine Collomp, *Rescue, Relief, and Resistance: The Jewish Labor Committee's Anti-Nazi Operations, 1934-1945*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 2021); Jaclyn Granick, *International Jewish Humanitarianism in the Age of the Great War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); and Laura Hobson Faure, *A "Jewish Marshall Plan": The American Jewish Presence in Post-Holocaust France* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2022).

[2] Talbot C. Imlay, *The Practice of Socialist Internationalism: European Socialists and International Politics, 1914-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 12.

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