

The Jews of Palestine

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1 Apr 2022 By Hamutal Bar Yosef Gefen £18.65 Reviewed by Michael PintoDuschinsky

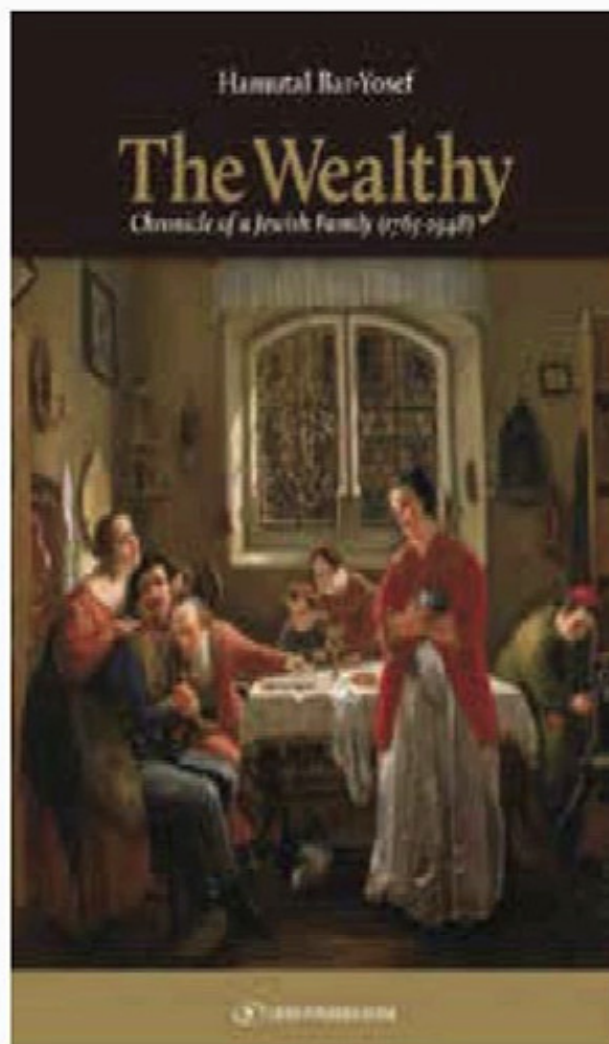
The Wealthy: Chronicles of a Jewish Family 1763–1948

The author of this absorbing historical novel is a retired professor of literature at Ben Gurion University whose poetic works have won multiple prizes. She was a child in a kibbutz during the 1948 War of Independence, which saw the death of her elder brother.

Her novel, *The Wealthy*, tells of events leading from Jewish oppression in 18th-century Poland to

riches and assimilation in 19th-century Germany and in Britain before the First World War; and then to the central character's close engagement with Zionism and his son's decision to make his and his family's life in the Jewish national home. The central figure is based on Sir Alfred Mond, the Liberal member of Parliament

Who founded Imperial Chemical Industries in 1926, and whose father, Ludwig Mond, had succeeded in applying scientific know-



ledge gained at university in Heidelberg to industrial uses, before migrating from Kassel to Lancashire in 1862.

The increasingly wealthy Ludwig strove for social acceptance by donating Italian renaissance paintings to the National Gallery. Backed by Ludwig's money and married to a non-Jewish wife, Alfred entered the House of Commons in 1906, became a baronet in 1910, rose under David Lloyd George's coalition governments and, in 1928, became Lord Melchett. By that time, his journey to assimilation had gone into reverse. Strongly affected by Chaim Weizmann, Mond (in the novel, reincarnated as "Richard Heimstatt") became a generous, active Zionist.

In her strikingly sensual style of writing, Bar Yosef evokes the sights, sounds and smells of everyday life during the British Palestine Man-

date. Its focus on the role of Jewish business magnates in fostering the Jewish national home contrasts with the more familiar story of left-wing kibbutzim. Not without minor historical errors, Bar Yosef brings readers face to face with a group of Jews based around Manchester and London who played major, sometimes conflicting roles in Zionist history: the Marks and Spencer clan, the Montagu and Samuel family, and Rufus Isaacs (the only Jew ever to become a marquis).

Choosing pioneer life in Palestine over a rich life as a still unaccepted outsider in Britain, the hero's son encounters a range of local issues: legally complex disputes between Jewish immigrants and class-riven Arab farmers, absentee landlords,

and Haj Amin al Husseini's hostile Islamism. Recently arrived inhabitants of the new kibbutzim and moshavim face plagues of locusts and the dangers of malarial swamps, not to mention Jewish political divisions, lack of employment, and deep cultural differences between Jews from Yemen and Russia.

Before her story reaches its unexpected climax, Bar Yosef perceptively depicts a vivid mosaic of life in Palestine from the early 1920s to the formation of the Israeli state in 1948.

Her love for Israel is detectable throughout her novel, though, in a long life beset by tragedy, and hardship in the early days of the new

state, it is a love without illusion.

Michael Pinto-Duschinsky, a Holocaust survivor from wartime Hungary, is a political scientist. A former member of the UK Commission on a Bill of Rights, he is a consultant to many international organisations, including the policy planning staff of the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office



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