Good evening. I am very excited to stand here tonight and lecture about the HAPAG and Jewish emigration in the early 20th century. But, before I begin, allow me to briefly introduce myself and how I came to study HAPAG and Albert Ballin.

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My name is Gur Alroey, today President of the University of Haifa, but first and formost, I am a historian specializing in early 20th-century Jewish migration from Eastern Europe to the United States in general and through the German ports in particular.

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I also live in Kibbutz Afikim in the Jordan Valley. I won’t go into detail now about what a kibbutz is? or why its form of settlement is unique in Israel and worldwide. I will just mention that, like every kibbutz, we have a water tower and a cowshed, and next to the cowshed there’s a large orange container marked "Hapag-Lloyd." That’s how my interest in the shipping company and its historical connection to Jewish migrants began.

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As an enthusiast of old books, I acquired rare books published by the HAPAG at different times, both containing rich and important information about the shipping line. The first book was published in 1907 and contains an invitation from the HAPAG board of directors to review the book and learn about the company. The author was Kurt Himer, and the designer was Emil Orlik. The second book was published in two volumes and also provides valuable information about HAPAG.

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One of my favorite images in Himer's book is the one before you. A few days before their departure, the family was photographed by HAPAG’s official photographer, and the image was published in the company’s official volume released in 1907. Three generations appear in the photograph: a grandfather, parents, and three children. The father’s gaze is intense, a slight smile plays at the corner of his lips, his beard is well groomed, and he seems full of hope for the future and at peace with the decision he has made. The mother, too, appears confident and determined.

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By contrast, the grandfather and the children seem somewhat less enthusiastic. The eldest child, wearing heavy boots and a coat, looks calm and composed, while his two younger siblings look gloomy and somewhat distrustful. The grandfather's expression conveys skepticism, discomfort with the situation, and perhaps also with the decision itself, revealing his inner turmoil.

The photographer captured them in a moment suspended between worlds: just before they arrived in America, but not yet fully separated from Europe.

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Why was HAPAG so important for the Jewish people?

Between 1881 and 1914, about 2.5 million Jewish migrants left Eastern Europe for the United States. It was, in every sense, a modern Exodus. Most migrants came from the Russian Empire so-called **Pale of Settlement.** They typically crossed the border illegally or through official border stations and travelled by train to European ports, from which they sailed to the United States and other country of destinations.

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It was a long and risky journey.

This is why information bureaus for emigrants were established in the Pale of Settlement, offering detailed information on every aspect of migration—including shipping companies. Notice how many bureaus operated across the Pale of Settlement. The bureaus distributed both oral and printed information. Here is one of many Yiddish-language booklets produced for Jewish migrants.

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In the guidance booklets, there was a table listing the departure days from European ports and for each country and the cost. On the next slide, you can see the distribution of Jewish migrants by shipping company. I must admit that I still struggle to explain the high percentage of migrants traveling via the East Asia line, but I believe it was jointly operated by HAPAG and Norddeutscher Lloyd. We can clearly see that half of all Jewish migrants sailed from German ports. This had a tremendous impact on the German economy—from small business owners who profited from migration to the owners of ships companies.

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In the guidance booklets for the Jewish immigrant also instructed the Jewish emigrants how to cross the border. Some crossed the border illegally, while others passed through border checkpoints that were established following the cholera outbreak in Hamburg in 1892.

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One of the most fascinating and important documents I found in the archives is a letter sent by about thirty Jewish immigrants to Albert Ballin from the border station in Illowo near the Polish border.

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The thirty Jewish migrants at the inspection station in Illowo, wrote an *"open letter"* (*A ofener brif tsu Herr Ballin*) addressed directly to Albert Ballin. I would like to read the letter together with you:

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In light of the role that you play in the German port, we are addressing the following questions to you, Mr. Ballin:

1. Do you know, Mr. Ballin, how the Jewish emigrants in the holding camps are being abused and harassed?

2. Do you know that the German shipping companies support the holding camps along with their agents in Russia both morally and financially and that they are responsible for all the crimes and acts of shame that this band of thieves and robbers has committed?

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3. Do you know, Mr. Ballin, that the holding camps [and] a wide network of agents in Russia support the trafficking of emigrants over the border with all the associated dangers to their lives? They compel them and do everything within their power to get this defenseless mass of illegal emigrants over the border in order to get at them to blackmail while they are in this condition, without rights, under the threat of being handed over to the Russian border patrol.

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4. Do you know, Mr. Ballin, that this year at the holding camp Illowo there were two suicides: Mr. Vaznyansky advised a desperate Jewish man to hang himself and the man did hang himself in the synagogue of the holding camp; out of desperation another Jewish man attacked the officials with a knife, wounded several, was captured and brought to a [military] prison where he hanged himself?

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5. Do you know, Mr. Ballin, that Jewish men, women, and children who were waiting to go to France were held in the holding camp for a long time living in filth until the children got lice, scabies, and scurvy?

6. Have you ever, Mr. Ballin, seen a holding camp? Do you know what one looks like? Don't they call Castle Garden in New York "the island of tears"? So must one call your holding camps "the islands of the devil." No other name is right for this place. As was Dreyfus on Devil's Island, immigrants are tortured there, women abused, and people hear only disparaging insults and are very often slapped around.

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After complaining about the conditions at the border station, they turned to Ballin with the following request:

Others do not receive better treatment than we do, **but** we Jews are a people of orphans, and no one in the world will come to our aid. Since you are of Jewish origin, you must be aware of the inhuman suffering of your people and take responsibility for the misery endured by the Jewish emigrants at the inspection station under your authority.

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The letter was signed by 33 migrants, including Moshe Leizerowitz, who was held for 15 days with the threat of being expelled back to Russia with his eight children; Motel Lemelsohn, who missed his ship to Argentina in Bremen due to unnecessary delays and was left penniless; and Azriel Shirer, who claimed to have been tortured for 11 weeks at the station. It is doubtful whether Ballin ever received or replied to the letter.

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The significance of this letter lies not only in the immigrants' complaints about their treatment at the border station, but also in the image of Albert Ballin that emerges from it. The emigrants knew exactly who is the owner of HAPAG and they saw him as a fellow member of the Jewish people—and therefore believed it was his duty to help them.

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Despite the migrants' complaints, I want to focus on Ballin's tremendous contribution to Jewish migration and to the Jewish people. From the mid-19th century the shipping companies recognized the economic potential of transporting the "human cargo" —hundreds of thousands Europeans who seeking passage to the New World.

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Unlike sailing ships that depended on wind and carried only a few dozen migrants, steamships could carry hundreds. Ballin was the visionary who converted large sections of his ships for migrant transport, creating vast steerage halls between the upper and lower decks, making migration far more affordable.

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The competition between the shipping companies for European immigrants significantly lowered the cost of passage. This competition reduced ticket prices and opened new and direct routes to major American ports across the Atlantic. Indeed, the number of migrants increased year after year.

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Official HAPAG data shows remarkable growth in migrant transport:

- 1897: ~73,000 migrants
- 1899: >100,000 migrants
- 1901: >211,000 migrants
- 1906: >432,000 migrants

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The revolution that Ballin led in the world of shipping caused a sharp drop in ticket prices and enabled millions to leave Europe. Ballin was among the first to grasp the economic power of migration. The direct line between Hamburg and New York made the modern Jewish exodus much easier. Hundreds of thousands of Jews were able to ulfil their dream and immigrate to America.

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Let us take a moment to look at Ballin's fleet in 1913 — an impressive one. On each voyage, a single ship carried thousands of immigrants to the American continent. Let us focus on one ship, the *Amerika*, to understand how many immigrants sailed on a single voyage. In first class there were 594 passengers; in second class, 274; and in third class, 2,435. The crew numbered 570. In total: 3,873 people. It was a town at high sea.

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Jewish migrants feared sea voyages, as Jewish journalist Joseph Roth once wrote:

The Eastern Jew is afraid of ships. He doesn't trust them. For centuries he has been living in the interior. The steppes, the limitlessness of the flat land, these hold no terrors for him. What frightens him is disorientation. He is accustomed to turning three times a day toward Misrach, 'the East'.

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But they feared staying in Eastern Europe even more. The causes of Jewish and non-Jewish migration are well known: rapid population growth, poverty, lack of opportunity—and for Jews, pogroms and political persecution. However, without railways and steamships, mass migration would not have been possible. Ballin's innovations helped lower ticket prices and made migration more feasible despite the risks.

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Jewish migration had an immense impact on the Jewish people and transformed it beyond recognition. It can be said with a high degree of certainty that any Jew who made the decision to emigrate saved his own life and the lives of his family members. If we multiply that story by hundreds of thousands of similar ones, then this courageous decision to emigrate also saved the Jewish people from destruction and annihilation.

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In contrast, those who stayed behind—who were the majority—sentenced themselves and their families to death. Six million were murdered in the Holocaust.

It was Jewish emigration that saved the Jewish people, and at the heart of that story stands **Albert Ballin**.

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Next month we will mark the beginning of the new year. Over the past two days, I have walked through the beautiful streets of Hamburg, already decorated for Christmas. I would like to wish you a happy new year in the spirit of the Jewish New Year postcards from the early twentieth century:

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‘For a good year – Shifskarte.” --- “Für ein gutes Jahr – Shifskarte’

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