

## COMPTES RENDUS / BOOK REVIEWS

ANCTIL, Pierre – *Histoire des Juifs du Québec*. Montréal: Boréal, 2017. Pp. 498.

Pierre Anctil's *Histoire des Juifs du Québec* represents the culmination of four decades of the author's scholarly work on Jews in Quebec. It is a remarkable book from two perspectives. The first is that it stands as the first comprehensive, single-authored, scholarly history of the Jews in the province of Quebec. The second is that it is written in French and aimed at a francophone audience.

Here is why this is remarkable. There exist several good scholarly works covering much the same subject-matter as Anctil's *Histoire des Juifs du Québec*. A distinguished example is the late Gerald Tulchinsky's *Canada's Jews: A People's Journey* (2008). However, these works were written in English, by Jewish Canadians, and had as their subject the Jews of *Canada*, of which the story of Jews in Montreal and Quebec represents an extremely important part. Thus Anctil's concentration on Montreal and Quebec, to the practical exclusion of the rest of Canada, is something new on the scholarly scene.

Also, Anctil, a product of both Quebec's Quiet Revolution and the simultaneous evolution of the Roman Catholic Church's attitude toward Jews following Vatican II, is neither Jewish nor anglophone. He is a Québécois scholar who has sought to understand and describe the many ways in which the centuries-old presence of Jews in Montreal has made a significant difference in the evolution of Quebec as a whole. Like all authors, he hopes his book will find the widest possible audience. Nevertheless, he clearly understands that, in its present linguistic garb, it is primarily addressed to an audience of Quebec francophones, and is only secondarily directed to scholars of Canadian Jewish studies, many of whom are bilingual but nearly all of whom write primarily in English and are naturally oriented to the English-language scholarship in their field.

The result is that Anctil's *Histoire des Juifs du Québec* presents the reader with its own unique perspective on the significance of the Jewish presence in Quebec and, in particular, the often fraught historical relationship between Jews and French Canadians. Anctil is aware, painfully so, that French Canadians have been widely portrayed as more virulent antisemites than Anglo-Canadians. He certainly does not deny the existence of French Canadian antisemitism in the early and mid-twentieth century, when the burgeoning Jewish community of Montreal encountered a rapidly urbanizing French Canadian proletariat in Quebec's metropolis. However Anctil believes that much of the antisemitism to be found in Quebec in that era was the result of the Catholic Church's traditional anti-Jewish teachings. Another important element in that story is the lack of meaningful interaction between French Canadians and Jews caused by the effective closure of the French Catholic school system to Jews and the Jewish community's clear linguistic and cultural goal of assimilation to anglophone Quebec.

However, there is more to Ancil's take on antisemitism in Quebec than that. Ancil clearly feels that much of the popular attribution of antisemitism to French Quebec stems from a tendency in English Canada to blame French Canada for an antisemitism that it itself practiced, though perhaps not quite as openly. This is not a new situation. One could trace this back to the observation of the celebrated Montreal Jewish writer and journalist, A. M. Klein, in his 1944 essay "The Tactics of Race Hatred." Klein wrote, "editorial writers go out of their way to give the impression that the entire province of Quebec is a domain of intolerance.... This is simply not the truth and one has a right to question the motive of such wholesale prosecution ... either the pious defence of a discriminated minority is being used as an instrument of denigration against the French-Canadian minority; or the crusader ... is pointing to Quebec antisemitism only to draw attention off his own. Ancil's interpretation of Quebec antisemitism will almost certainly be the subject of lively academic discussion, in both English and French, entirely as it should be. His assertion, for instance, that the "Achat Chez Nous" movement in French Canada was not always anti-Jewish in its focus ("n'a pas toujours pris au cours de l'histoire une coloration antijuive," p. 317) requires further discussion.

What cannot be debated, however, is that, essentially for the first time, we are now able to access scholarly studies of antisemitism in Quebec from Ancil and several other francophone scholars of Quebec, many of whom are Ancil's students and colleagues. One especially robust expression of this is found in a 2015 issue of *Globe: Revue Internationale d'Études Québécoises* on antisemitism in Quebec, edited by Ancil and myself. Approximately ten years ago in an article titled "Quebec Anti-Semitism and Anti-Semitism in Quebec" and posted to the website of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, Morton Weinfeld pointedly wrote that "French Quebec has not come to a full societal resolution of its attitude towards the Jews." Ancil's latest book, much of his other scholarly work, as well as the growing volume of work of the Quebec scholars he has taught and influenced, bring a distinct and important voice to Quebec's societal discussion of its Jewish community as well as to the evolution of the scholarly community that researches the history of the Jews of Quebec and Canada. Collectively, we are beginning to hear an answer to Weinfeld from francophone Quebec.

Because Ancil writes his *Histoire des Juifs du Québec* primarily for a Québec francophone audience, we can discern another large concern of the author. He seeks to make the history of the Jewish minority in Quebec a subject for discussion in mainstream Quebec public discourse, which does not always give proper attention to the history of cultural and religious minorities. He primarily writes not for an audience of francophone Jews in Quebec, though such an audience undoubtedly exists. He rather writes for an audience of Quebec francophone academics and intellectuals who are often Quebec nationalists. For that reason, among many other details, Ancil takes care to present the Jewish contribution to Quebec political life at length, including extensive portraits of several Jews who became unsuccessful candidates for the Parti Québécois, whose sovereigntist platform received little support within the Quebec Jewish community, and who received but a miniscule proportion of the vote in their ridings (p. 417-419).

A century ago, practically speaking, it was only Canadian Jews who cared to write and interpret their community's history. They received very little encouragement or interest in this activity from university-based scholars in Canada. A generation ago, when Anctil began his scholarly work, the coming of Jewish studies to universities meant that the Jewish experience in Canada began to be interpreted by university-based scholars, many of whom were Jewish. Scholars with non-Jewish backgrounds tended not to become engaged in this field and Anctil, a non-Jewish francophone scholar deeply engaged in this study, was fairly unique at the time.

The scholarly situation prevalent a generation ago has changed. It is now the case that the academic study of the Jewish presence in Quebec attracts great interest from students regardless of their ethno-religious-linguistic heritage. This welcome process brings to the academic discussion of Jews in Quebec important new voices and perspectives. Anctil's latest book most certainly marks a major milestone in this process. We can and should look forward to further enrichment and cross-pollination from this quarter.

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BLEASDALE, Ruth – *Rough Work: Labourers on the Public Works of British North America and Canada, 1841-1882*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018. Pp. 403.

Bertolt Brecht once famously asked who built the pyramids. Ruth Bleasdale has spent much of her career answering even more probing questions about not just who built the canals and railways in mid-nineteenth century British North America and Canada, but what their life was like and how it changed over time. With great empathy and studious balance, this book carefully presents her findings. Initially, most labourers were immigrant Irish Catholics, but as early as the late 1840s their work camps were home to an increasingly varied mix of local residents, Americans, and Europeans. Despite the temporary nature of these camps, they were also home to many wives and children. If regional Irish factional identities marked many of the earliest labour struggles on the canals, this had already given way to more coordinated movements against mechanisation that challenged work place authority by the 1850s. In the much more diversified work forces of the 1870s, labourers successfully organized short-lived unions and even established alliances with skilled workers as they struggled for better wages in the bleak years of depression. Bleasdale concludes that it is in the lived experiences of these thousands of unskilled working men and women rather than amongst skilled male workers where we should look for the fertile ground that permitted the rapid growth of the Knights of Labour in the 1880s.