

RAANAN REIN: *Argentina, Israel, and the Jews: Perón, the Eichmann Capture, and After*. Trans. Martha Grenzeback. Bethesda, MD: University Press of Maryland, 2003.

Over the past twenty years, the field of Latin American studies has witnessed a proliferation of research on the history of the region's Jewish population. For the most part, these studies have focused primarily upon the themes of Jewish immigration and the acculturation of Jews to the surrounding Latin and Catholic society. In *Argentina, Israel, and the Jews*, historian Raanan Rein advances our view of Latin American Jewry into the political realm as well, examining the complex triangular relationship between Argentina's Jewish community, its government, and the state of Israel, in the critical era from 1946-1962 which witnessed both the rise and fall of Juan Perón and the establishment of the new Jewish state.

In particular, Rein's thesis rests upon two fundamentally related assertions. First, he argues that throughout this period, Argentina's relationship with the state of Israel was directly tied to its larger relationship with the United States, and that "Argentina used its favorable policies toward Israel to mobilize support in the local Jewish community and to improve Argentina's image in Western public opinion and strengthen relations with the United States" (xix). Second, he concludes that the interests of Israeli foreign policy were often quite different from those of the local Jewish community, and that the actions of the Jewish state after 1948, "did not always accord with Argentine Jews' struggle for equal rights and integration" (232). This was especially true under the Perón regime from 1946-1955, and later during the Eichmann affair from 1960-1962, when Israel's kidnapping and trial of the mastermind of Hitler's "Final Solution" touched off a brutal wave of nationalist anti-Semitism in Argentina.

In the chapters dealing with the Peronist period, Rein notes the many ways in which Perón attempted to attract Jewish political support for his populist coalition as part of a larger effort to revise his international image as a fascist sympathizer and improve his relations with the United States. To this end, Perón offered numerous concessions to the Jewish community on matters of immigration, made the fight against anti-Semitism an integral part of his state policy, and even consented to the creation of a special Jewish Peronist political group, the Organización Israelita Argentina (OIA), to represent Jewish interests before the state and propagandize for the government within the Jewish community. Yet, his efforts largely failed to overcome endemic Jewish mistrust over his nationalist and military origins, and in successive elections, areas containing large numbers of Jewish voters tended to support the opposition

parties. At the same time, however, Rein demonstrates that Perón did succeed in establishing positive relations with the state of Israel which worked greatly to the benefit of both countries. Although Argentina initially abstained on the United Nations vote to partition Palestine in 1947, it quickly recognized the new Jewish state in February 1949, and later became the first Latin American country to establish a diplomatic legation in Tel Aviv. On dozens of occasions, Perón spoke publicly of his admiration and praise for Israel, and in 1950, he further signed an extensive bilateral trade agreement with the fledgling new state despite the fact that Israel exported few products which Argentina specifically needed. According to Rein, these actions were intended to recruit Jewish political support not only at home, but more importantly in the United States, where Perón believed that Jews exerted a great deal of influence over U.S. policy-making decisions. For their part, the Israelis responded by reciprocating Perón's gestures of friendship and goodwill despite the fact that the OIA competed with local Jewish organizations and the community viewed the Argentine President with suspicion and unease.

This incongruity between Israeli and local Jewish interests in Argentina was further underscored in May 1960, when Israeli special agents kidnapped Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann in violation of Argentina's sovereign rights. Although the action proved to be one of the seminal triumphs in the history of modern Israel, it was an unmitigated disaster for the Argentine Jewish community, for whom "life was no longer quite the same" (196). Officially, diplomatic relations were restored between the two countries within a matter of months, yet the incident left Argentine Jews exposed to accusations of "dual loyalty" on the part of Argentine nationalists and the community suffered from a series of retaliatory attacks both following the kidnapping and execution of Eichmann. One of the consequences of this massive increase in anti-Semitism was a wave of emigration in which some 12,900 Jews left Argentina between 1960 and 1965. In addition, fallout over the Eichmann crisis also helped contribute to the 1962 military coup which overthrew the largely sympathetic government of Arturo Frondizi and eventually led to the rise of nationalist military regimes that were much more hostile to local Jewish interests.

Building on the research of scholars such as Haim Avni, Leonardo Senkman, and Ignacio Klich, Rein's work goes far to advance our understanding of Argentine-Jewish history in the political arena, and to consider the unique set of problems which Jews faced in the turbulent years following the Second World War. His research is extremely meticulous and the book benefits from Rein's years of experience in Argentine, Israeli, American, and European archives. Rein's language skills are also important, enabling him to utilize Spanish, English

and Hebrew sources at the same time. In particular, his chapter on the response of the Israeli Hebrew press to the Peronist regime makes new material available to Latin American and U.S. scholars who would not normally have access to such publications. In presenting his discussion on the Peronist era, Rein is able to weave together the findings of previous studies into a single authoritative account, while his chapters on the Eichmann affair and its repercussions are highly original and present an array of new evidence from governmental and Jewish archival sources. A diplomatic historian by trade, Rein is at his best in discussing the Eichmann case, and the narrative here is especially crisp and engaging.

At the same time, however, the book's diplomatic focus also causes Rein to overlook many of the wider implications of this triangular relationship upon the development of the Argentine-Jewish community itself. Admittedly, this is not the goal of the work, yet one would have liked to see more attention to the impact of Perón's pro-Zionist statements and policies upon the conquest of the local Jewish community by Zionist political parties in the years following World War II. Moreover, Rein tends to ascribe Perón's motivations in recruiting Jewish support primarily to international concerns, without fully considering the importance of ethnicity itself as a tool for political mobilization in Perón's "New Argentina." Indeed, Jews were not the only ethnic group Perón recruited as a community, and his cultivation of Jewish nationalism in the form of Zionism to curry Jewish political favor actually mirrored his actions towards Argentines of Italian, Spanish, German, and Arab descent as well.

These criticisms, however, do not detract from the larger value of the work. In particular, *Argentina, Israel, and the Jews* is an excellent example of the pioneering new research being done in Latin American Jewish history, and is certain to serve as a source of ideas and inspiration for Latin American and Jewish historians for years to come.

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EDNA AIZENBERG: *Books and Bombs in Buenos Aires: Borges, Gerchunoff, and Argentine-Jewish Writing.* Hanover and London: Brandeis University Press, University Press of New England, 2002.

Durante la última década, estudiosos en variadas disciplinas de la cultura latinoamericana han comenzado a repensar la presencia de los judíos, una minoría predominantemente extranjera que ha sido relegada a una dolorosa invisibilidad.