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Dujovne, Alejandro. *Una historia del libro judío: la cultura judía argentina a través de sus editores, libreros, traductores, imprentas y bibliotecas* [A history of the Jewish book: Argentine Jewish culture as seen through its publishers, booksellers, translators, printing houses and libraries]. Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2014. 302 pp. ISBN 9789876294362

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Alejandro Dujovne's detailed monograph on the Jewish book in Argentine culture accomplishes three important scholarly tasks.

First and foremost, it constitutes one of the most extensive analyses available of the overall importance of Jewish culture in Argentina, particularly in Buenos Aires and its known Jewish neighborhoods. The study of Latin American Jewry, in terms of its historical appearance and diffusion in Spanish and Portuguese-speaking countries (to one degree or another, there are Jewish communities in all Latin American countries) and in terms of current social and cultural issues, has grown exponentially in the past three decades. There continues to be, albeit almost exclusively written in Spanish and Portuguese, a sustained contemporary cultural production, much of it very visible and mainstream: no other immigrant group in Latin America can show such a sustained editorial and scholarly output, except possibly in the realm of social history. For example, although the citizens of Buenos Aires of Italian descent approach a simple majority, there is no evidence of a unique Italo-Argentine cultural consciousness, as there is for a Jewish-Argentine one, perhaps because Italo-Argentine heritage has simply become the backdrop of so much of urban Argentine society. Yet, for example, while there are many Argentines of Syrian-Lebanese descent, there are few structural parallels between a Syrian-Lebanese-Argentine consciousness and a Jewish-Argentine one (indeed, one might argue that Brazil presents quite a contrary circumstance, with a tendency in some quarters to inflate a specifically Syrian-Lebanese-Brazilian presence).

Second, Dujovne performs a careful, statistically-based sociohistorical analysis of the full range of the Jewish book in Argentine society, concluding that this set of materials includes Jewish books imported into Buenos Aires; the vast array of Jewish books produced in Argentina; and the extensive inventory of Jewish books published in Spanish translation in Argentina. This last is, to be sure, an ongoing editorial phenomenon. Defining the Jewish book in terms of both content and language (i.e, books written in recognized Jewish languages such as Hebrew, Yiddish, and, to a far lesser extent, Judeo-Spanish [Ladino]), Dujovne's analysis takes into account both specialized publishing operations devoted preponderantly to Jewish language materials and more

¹All translations into English provided by the reviewer.

mainstream ones that bring out both Argentine Jewish authors in Spanish and translations into Spanish of foreign Jewish authors. The panorama, as one might expect, is an impressive one. Dujovne highlights one such of the former types of publishing ventures, the Editorial Israel, which from 1937 to 1964 published seventy-two works in Spanish and “al menos una en hebreo” ([at least one in Hebrew]; p. 204). One might argue that this is not exactly a major inventory, but Dujovne considers it a crucial case study and frames his discussion in bibliographic terms as the “creation of a catalog”: how does a publisher’s commitment to and insertion in the book trade take on a particular profile and, thereby, fulfill a particular sociohistorical role in a cultural production based on the book? In the example of Editorial Israel, the answer has everything to do with the diffusion in Argentina of the international conversation regarding Zionism, since that publishing operation was especially vigorous in bringing into the Argentine market a significant array of publications that would inform Argentine Jewish commitments to Zionism and the Israeli homeland.

Dujovne complements his analysis of publishing operations by exploring, handily aided by maps, the logistics of book distribution in Buenos Aires vis-à-vis printing houses, bookstores, and cultural institutions, including library collections. This dual material focus (the book as cultural object, and the production/ distribution/ archiving chain based on that cultural object) illustrates very eloquently how prominent the Jewish book has been in Argentine society, to a degree that no other immigrant group can approach. To be sure, the Jewish publishing output of Buenos Aires has not match that of the cultural center of Warsaw or the great immigrant community of New York, but it certainly deserves to be recognized along with these two centers as a powerful pole in the field of Jewish book publishing.

Finally, Dujovne’s study contributes to our understanding of the configurations of Jewish culture in Buenos Aires from the time of the first major Jewish immigration at the end of the nineteenth century through the present day, when the awareness of a distinctive Jewish-Argentine cultural consciousness still holds sway despite emigration, dispersion, laicization, and assimilation, all of which militate against it. For a student of Argentine cultural studies, this is, certainly, the most interesting aspect of Dujovne’s study, as it charts the thematic and linguistic parameters of the circulation of Jewish books in Argentina. In addition to the significant matter of the extent of the publication of Yiddish-language books in Buenos Aires, mostly by eight principal imprints (such as the legendary series *Dos Poylishe Yidntum*), there is also the extensive translation into Spanish of foreign Yiddish publications. The latter also includes translations into Spanish of works written in Yiddish in Argentina, such as José Rabinovich’s important social-realist narratives *Tercera clase* ([*Third class*], 1944), and there is also the occasional Spanish-language work by an Argentine author published in Yiddish translation, such as Manuel Gálvez’s *Historia de arrabal* (*In a forshodt: roman* [A story of the outskirts], 1923).

This active book publication of course complemented Yiddish-language periodicals, which included the two important newspapers *Di Prese* and *Di idishe tsaytung*. Dujovne’s treatment of this material falls mostly in the chapter aptly titled “Los libros que no deben faltar en ningún

hogar judío’. La traducción como política cultural, 1919–1938” (““Books that every Jewish household must have.’ Translation as cultural politics, 1919–1938”). Dujovne makes the point that translating works in Yiddish and other languages into Spanish for the Argentine Jewish community was not just a commercial enterprise, but, rather, derived from the sociohistorical and ideological principles that drove the thriving intellectual and cultural pursuits so characteristic of Argentine Jewry. (It is worth pointing out that throughout his study, Dujovne makes use of the preferred Argentine spelling *ídish*, defying, so to speak, the unreasonable prescription by the Real Academia Española of the form *yidis*—unreasonable because it is based on English, while the Argentine form is based on Yiddish itself.)

One aspect of Dujovne’s study that invites future research is the role of Jewish libraries in Buenos Aires. Dujovne pays necessary homage to their strong presence in all of the Jewish neighborhoods of the city (p. 242n153), as, one might add, the strong tradition of municipal libraries in Argentina; however, detailing them lies beyond the scope of his study, despite the obvious fact that he would have consulted major library collections in the course of his research. Buenos Aires was a leader in Latin American in the creation of municipal free-access libraries, and many Argentine writers, Jewish and otherwise, acknowledge the importance of these libraries in their cultural formation. Indeed, Argentina’s most famous writer, Jorge Luis Borges (a strong defender of Jewish cultural traditions) earned his living working in one such institution. While Dujovne, although he includes reference to libraries in his title, does not analyze them in detail, it is important to call to the readers’ attention major Jewish community resources, such as those of the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (Argentine Israeli Mutual Aid Society; AMIA), partially destroyed by a car bomb in 1994, and the Sociedad Hebraica Argentina (Hebrew-Argentine Society; SHA). These continue to be important to scholarly research in Argentina on the social and cultural histories of Jews in that country. In addition to not going into depth about Jewish-Argentine libraries, Dujovne also leaves unexplored major Jewish collections held privately.²

In sum, this monograph is a major contribution to Argentine and Jewish cultural history, not only providing information about the details and extent of Jewish publishing in Argentina but also describing how this cultural production has been so much more significant in Buenos Aires than in any other Latin American cultural center. Of course, this has much to do with the size of the Buenos Aires Jewish community, historically two or more times the size of the next largest

² Editor’s note: regrettably, Dujovne was not aware of, or did not have access to three pertinent articles published in *Judaica Librarianship*. Rita Saccal and Irene Münster reviewed, in two successive articles in volume 9 (1995), the four Jewish libraries and three Jewish archives active in Argentina post the July 1994 bombing of the AMIA building, and more specifically, the “history, organization, and current financial situation of the Library of the Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano”. In volume 4 (1988), Barry Walfish published a survey of contemporary Jewish publishing in Argentina, accompanied by a “List of Yiddish and Hebrew Works Recently Reprinted in Argentina”. Two of the three articles are now freely available in electronic format via the journal’s online platform. These are the full citations: 1. Saccal, Rita F. and Irene L. Münster. “Judaica Libraries and Archives in Argentina.” *Judaica Librarianship* 9 (1995): 123–125. doi:[10.14263/2330-2976.1194](https://doi.org/10.14263/2330-2976.1194); 2. Münster, Irene L. and Rita F. Saccal. “The Library of the Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano (Latin-American Rabbinical Seminary).” *Judaica Librarianship* 9 (1995): 125–130. doi:[10.14263/2330-2976.1195](https://doi.org/10.14263/2330-2976.1195); 3. Walfish, Barry. “Recent Jewish Publishing in Argentina: A Mixed Blessing.” *Judaica Librarianship* 4, no. 2 (Fall 1987–Winter 1988): 62–67.

community, São Paulo, but it also has much to do with both the long-standing, prestigious nature of book culture in Argentina and the well-developed educational system that insured immigrants a participation in the overall intellectual life of Argentine society.

Dujovne's study would have been immeasurably enhanced by a name index.