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Helen M. Davies, *Emile and Isaac Pereire: Bankers, Socialists and Sephardic Jews in nineteenth-century France*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015. xiii + 266 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. £65.00 (hb) ISBN 978-0-7190-8923-7; £14.99 (pb) ISBN 978-1-7849-9356-6.

Review by Jeffrey Haus, Kalamazoo College

The subjects of Helen M. Davies's biography, Emile and Isaac Pereire, were complicated figures who led important lives. Born in 1800 and 1806 respectively, they grew up as emancipated Sephardic Jews in Bordeaux as that city began to decline after the end of the French slave trade. After the early death of their father, the family suffered ongoing financial pressures that limited the brothers' formal educations and drove them into the business world at an early age. As a young man, work prospects compelled Emile to move to Paris. Isaac later followed, and together they spent the next fifty or so years building a business and financial empire rivaled by few in France save their co-religionists, the Rothschilds. Along the way, they joined the Saint-Simonians, played central roles in constructing the modern French rail and banking industries, bought a vineyard, and made a lot of money. Throughout all of their activities, they built networks of family, friends, and associates that helped them build and manage the railroad and financial networks that made them rich.

Davies portrays these two men as inseparable pieces of a matching set. In her telling, the elder Emile early on assumed a paternal role for his younger brother, and they remained close associates after Isaac's arrival in Paris. Rare was the business decision in which both brothers were not involved to some extent. Their families lived together, residing in a Parisian compound nicknamed the *Hotel Pereire*; the widowed Isaac even married Emile's sixteen-year-old daughter although he was twice her age. This close relationship frames the entire narrative as Davies explores the different personal and business relationships that shaped their lives and exploits. The tale begins in the context of Bordeaux, where the fatherless Pereires inherited two important commodities: a capacity for hard work, and a community which provided them with crucial economic support and professional mentoring when they could just as easily have fallen into permanent financial ruin. This support structure rested upon extended family and friendship connections; these same networks would facilitate first Emile's move to Paris, and then Isaac's.

Indeed, relationships and social networks permeate the narrative and eventually form the main focus of the book. Two early chapters describe the brothers' involvement in the Saint-Simonian movement, which combined a faith in the transformative power of modern technology and commerce with the notion of social responsibility. Here, the family network proved pivotal: Emile's brother-in-law, Olinde Rodrigues, served as secretary to Saint-Simon himself and introduced him to the Pereires. Isaac threw himself deeply into the movement, wrote numerous articles for a Saint-Simonian newspaper, and remained under the sway of the philosophy for the rest of his life. Emile adopted a more practical approach, distancing himself from the movement and some of its more controversial characters while retaining its vision of a future changed by technological advancement and innovation. Most importantly for the Pereires, the Saint-Simonian movement linked them with a group of like-minded associates. These men would subsequently

aid the brothers' business ventures, even after the Saint-Simonians' brief, shining moment as an influential political and social force ended in the 1820s.

The Pereires' initial foray into big business involved developing the first passenger rail service in France, the Paris-St-Germain line. They prepared for this venture, finding two mentors—one of whom they met at the funeral of a fellow Saint-Simonian—who took them to England to learn British management and engineering techniques. They later drew on the network of former Saint-Simonians for introduction to their initial chief financial backer (and later business rival), James de Rothschild. Railroads, Davies argues, were an industry in close harmony with Saint-Simonian principles—they also happened to be extremely profitable if properly managed. The brothers made a success of the first line and built an array of railroad lines upon that initial achievement. They eventually owned multiple lines, and Emile especially proved shrewd in navigating the governmental and financial challenges of railroad construction. As the business grew, they came to employ a number of friends and relatives in key positions, securing their internal support structure while continuing to expand their business and financial contacts outward.

They followed a similar path in pursuing their other major innovation: the establishment of France's first large-scale investment bank, the *Crédit Mobilier*. As Davies shows, after the fall of the July Monarchy in 1848, the Pereires served as financial counselors to the new President of the Second Republic, Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte. Shortly before declaring himself Emperor, Louis-Napoleon approved the establishment of the *Crédit Mobilier*. The Pereires parlayed this success into the creation of other financial institutions, some of which supported their expanding railroad and maritime businesses. With a hand in both the investment banks and in the firms receiving the funds, the brothers stood to make handsome profits—which they did.

Davies juxtaposes their entrepreneurial successes with the context of their private lives. In doing so, she illustrates just how closely their business and management networks mirrored their family ones. Sons, sons-in-law, and cousins found places of responsibility in Pereire companies; many relatives married within the business. In this manner, the brothers followed what Davies identifies as a pattern within French capitalism. Their wives engaged in charity as befitting women of their class, and the family consumed more conspicuously as their wealth grew. Late in their lives, the end of the Second Empire and the fall of the *Crédit Mobilier* threatened their business with ruin. While many of their investors suffered, the Pereires were saved by their diversification into Spanish banks and railroads. They died wealthy men, and their family enterprises continued into the twentieth century.

This book reflects meticulously focused research, especially when one considers the scope of two such active entrepreneurial careers. Davies gained access to the Pereire family archive, and these documents enrich her depictions of their private lives. The brothers wrote to each other and to their wives constantly, and these letters offer a glimpse into what made them so successful. The creation of personal or business networks requires not just luck, but the skill and qualities necessary to take advantage of opportunities when they arise. Upon gaining the ear of a James de Rothschild or Louis-Napoleon, Emile knew how to turn that access into material and political support for his grand economic vision. For his part, Isaac proved an able manager of the brothers' holdings. Both men demonstrated a devotion to their work that bordered on obsession. Davies should be commended for organizing such a vast sweep of material into a coherent and readable narrative. She also ably explains some of the finer points of the key financial transactions that made the brothers such wealthy men, all while keeping track of a wide array of personalities that peopled their lives.

Chronologically and conceptually, the Pereire brothers' personal and family networks paralleled their engagement in constructing a French network of railroads and financial institutions. The railroads helped to unite France geographically, economically, and eventually culturally; a modern banking system created a foundation for the pursuit of such capitalist projects. In this manner, the Pereire brothers helped to build the French nation. At the same time, by fusing their family and business, they entered into French high

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society, often despite their Jewish heritage. Consequently, Emile and Isaac Pereire connected the north and south of France while simultaneously connecting their sense of being French with their sense of being Jewish. In the end, the one was inseparable from the other. After so carefully outlining both sets of networks, Davies might have engaged more fully their symbolic importance at each stage of the Pereires' careers. This point, though, represents not a criticism but a suggestion of how one might consider the brothers' broader cultural significance in each of the spheres Davies outlines.

Overall, Helen M. Davies's book constitutes a valuable contribution to our understanding of the development of France during the *longue durée*. Those seeking insight into the economic history of the July Monarchy and Second Empire--as well as aspects of Sephardic family and private life--will learn much from the lives of Emile and Isaac Pereire.

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