
H-France Review Vol. 17 (July 2017), No. 106

Daniel Lee, *Pétain's Jewish Children: French Jewish Youth and the Vichy Regime, 1940-1942*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. xiv + 274 pp. Maps, table, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$110.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-0-1987-0715-8.

Review by Kirrily Freeman, Saint Mary's University.

Daniel Lee's richly textured and thoroughly researched book exposes the spaces of coexistence that put French Jewish youth in cooperation with the *État Français* in the early period of the Vichy regime, from 1940-1942. Lee uses a range of primary sources from French, American, and Israeli archives, supplemented with diaries, memoirs, correspondence, and dozens of interviews conducted in France, Israel, Belgium, and the United Kingdom to argue that, in the unoccupied zone at least, certain projects of Vichy's National Revolution—namely youth and agricultural policy—made room for French Jews. Likewise, Jewish youth in France, represented in particular by the EIF (*Éclaireurs Israélites de France*, or Jewish scouts) saw the opportunity offered by the new regime to realize their existing goal of creating a “New Jewish Man.” In their ambition to return to the land and to reinvigorate young people through physical labor, French Jewish youth movements and the Vichy government shared a common project.

This common project produced some surprising moments: Jewish boy scouts parading in front of Pétain's headquarters at the Hotel du Parc, Jewish youth recruited to the regime's leadership training school at Uriage, Vichy funds supporting a Zionist commune in the Tarn, and the observance of Passover in the *Chantiers de Jeunesse*, the regime's compulsory national service programme. Lee in no way uses these examples to downplay Vichy's anti-semitism, but rather illustrates that conflicting priorities—in particular, the tension between regeneration and exclusion, coupled with the improvised and contradictory nature of policy-making in the first two years of the regime—created a moment in which cooperation and coexistence between French Jews and the Vichy government was possible and even desired. While remaining fully cognizant of the horrors French Jews suffered after 1942, Lee argues that to view the wartime history of French Jews solely through the prism of persecution, rescue, and resistance is to overlook the plurality of their experiences.

The multiple facets of Jewish experience in the early years of the Vichy regime are, then, explored in seven thematic chapters. Chapter one profiles French Jewry on the eve of the defeat and occupation, with particular emphasis on the EIF and its dual project of a return to the land and the “New Jewish Man.” The example of the EIF illustrates the ways in which Zionism and assimilation overlapped for young French Jews, and how Jewish and French identities were cultivated and reconciled. Chapter two surveys Vichy's projects for national regeneration, in particular the regime's ruralism and emphasis on youth, but also its exclusionary policies and the complicated relationship between Social Catholicism, which had found renewed influence with the advent of the *État Français*, and the “Jewish Question.” Chapter three charts Jewish youth movements' responses to Vichy, and chapter four highlights various points of intersection which saw young Jews participating in Vichy youth organizations. Chapters five and six are devoted to a case study of Lautrec, the EIF agricultural commune in the Tarn which brought Jewish youth, many of whom were refugees or evacuees from the Occupied Zone and the “lost

provinces” of Alsace and Lorraine, in contact with the land and peasant life, but also with Jewish religious practices, cultural traditions, and Zionism. Chapter seven is devoted to Jewish participation in the *Chantiers de Jeunesse*, and highlights the surprising, albeit short-lived, acceptance of Jews and the observance of Jewish traditions in this Vichy program. Through these case studies, Lee combines local and national perspectives in order to illustrate both the “texture and subtleties of the period, drawing out the immense variety of choices and experiences to reveal the multifaceted nature of everyday life” and to reveal broader patterns and ranges of attitudes that “local factors alone do not adequately explain” (pp. 18-19).

Readers may be divided on the significance to afford this moment of coexistence between French Jewish youth and the Vichy regime—a window which Lee admits represents only a partial and temporary convergence. Two years of highly circumscribed, deeply contingent cooperation between some elements of the Jewish population in France (young, predominantly male Jews in the unoccupied zone who were ideologically oriented towards regenerationist projects rooted in the land and physical labor) and some elements of the Vichy regime (inspired largely by Social Catholicism and for whom the Jewish Question was secondary, rather than integral, to national rebirth) may strike some readers as too fleeting and ultimately too inconsequential, given the murderous period that followed. But others readers will no doubt value the way this book asks new questions, complicates a number of narratives that have become entrenched both in the historiography and in popular understandings of the Vichy regime and the occupation period, and nuances our interpretations of Vichy antisemitism and of Jewish responses to the National Revolution. This process of rethinking, alongside Lee’s meticulous research, makes *Pétain’s Jewish Children* a valuable contribution to scholarship on wartime France.

Kirrily Freeman
Saint Mary's University
kirrily.freeman@smu.ca

Copyright © 2017 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for edistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of *H-France Review* nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of *H-France Review*. The views posted on *H-France Review* are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172