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Mathias Dreyfuss, *Aux sources juives de l'histoire de France*. Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2021. 414 pp. €26.00 (pb). ISBN 9-78-2271121431.

Review by Julie Kalman, Monash University.

In many ways, Mathias Dreyfuss's *Aux Sources juives de l'histoire de France* is an extraordinary book. Dreyfuss takes historical documents relating to Jews as objects of history in themselves and asks how these objects were invented as archival sources. According to Yann Potin who wrote the volume's preface, Dreyfuss locates this history in the nineteenth century, the era of both the development of history as a discipline, and the "projet social et politique de la construction nationale" (p. 11). The nineteenth century was also, of course, the century following Jewish emancipation, and the question of the place of Jews in France, and in French history, was much discussed over the course of that century. Dreyfuss wishes to consider archives as objects, "dont il s'agit d'étudier l'historicité propre" (p. 22). He seeks to rethink the material and intellectual conditions that made possible the writing of a documentary history of Jews in France, from the late nineteenth century, through a study of what he calls the "politique des archives" with regard to Jews in nineteenth-century France (p. 32).

Dreyfuss' particular focus is on medieval sources. He moves back and forth in the book, between the material history of documents and the successive uses and interpretations that grew from them. Chains of treatment and the varying descriptions of documents written by different archivists are reconstituted in deep and painstaking detail. Dreyfuss brings to light how, on the one hand, the particular ways sources were identified influenced historical discourse, and on the other hand, how representations or prevailing ideas could influence the perception--and thus the classification--of documents. The book is structured around six examples of the ways in which documents became historical sources in different contexts across the century. In loose chronological order, Dreyfuss offers stories of processes of classification, selection, and omission, alongside the writing and rewriting of the history of Jews in France.

At the center of chapter one, "Une mémoire en négatif: les Juifs médiévaux dans les archives royales (années 1810--années 1860)," are medieval documents relating to Jews, essentially documents recording prohibitions and punishments placed on Jewish communities. These were held in the Trésor des Chartes, the most prestigious section of the Royal Archives. Dreyfuss charts the processes of gathering and classing that lead to the creation of the folder in which they were stored. He tracks missing documents and finds the reasons behind their misplacement. The author tracks, equally carefully, the uses made of these documents, from their importance as examples of precedent in laws relating to Jews, to the first hesitant uses of them as historical

sources. In the first issue in 1840 of the Jewish journal *Archives Israélites de France* Samuel Cahen, the founder of the journal, wrote of the folder “Juifs” that it bore witness to “nos anciens malheurs” (p. 116). By 1840, under the July Monarchy, the Royal Archives had become the “humus patrimonial pour l’histoire de France” (p. 117). Here, Dreyfuss argues, is an ambiguity: the presence of these documents where they were implied that Jews were at the center of new national histories as they were being written by figures such as Jules Michelet. But for Samuel Cahen, the founder of the *Archives*, the documents revealed what Dreyfuss called a negative history, as witness to the painful memory of medieval persecutions, defining the Jews as a community at the moment of their expulsion.

Chapter two, “Construire une mémoire positive de la présence juive médiévale: manuscrits hébraïques et fabrique des “sources judéo-françaises (années 1860--années 1900),” a companion chapter to the preceding one, traces the processes through which fragments of evidence of medieval Jewish life in France were classified, and re-classified, and the ways this interacted with understandings of the histories these sources represented. Dreyfuss focuses on two sets of documents in particular, both written in Hebrew and confiscated at the time of the expulsions of Jews from France in the fourteenth century. The first documents contain a list of words from the bible, along with their translation into French, written in Hebrew characters, and was most probably used for teaching. These were held in the Archives de l’empire until an exchange in 1862 saw them transferred to the Bibliothèque impériale. The second set of documents are the account books of one Héliot de Vesoul, a Jewish trader, also in Hebrew. These are held in the departmental archives of the Côte d’Or.

Dreyfuss brings to light the trajectories of these two sets of documents; where they were stored, how they came to be classified, and the different descriptions of their contents overlaid by different generations of archivists. They were, at various times, seen to be unclassifiable and of no interest, curious relics, and even misunderstood as the Talmud, a fact that Dreyfuss suggests might explain their unlikely survival. He also shows how, throughout the nineteenth century, these two sets of documents were co-opted for different disciplines and histories. For philologists, as their discipline came into being in the late nineteenth century, both the biblical terms and the account books made possible the reconstruction of medieval French. For local rabbis, Vesoul’s account books opened up the world of Jewish life in the region. In other words, at the heart of this chapter is a tension between the use of these sources as serving French philology or building a story of Franco-Jewish life. Key to this chapter is the idea that those who made use of these sources forgot the original reason for their presence in the archives, that is, that they had been confiscated from Jews at the moment of their expulsion from France. This forgetting enabled the writing of what Dreyfuss calls a positive history of medieval French Jewry; one that traced their presence in France, rather than their dispersal.

In chapter three, “La mémoire exhumée: les sources archéologiques de l’histoire des Juifs en France,” the sources move from paper to stone, as Dreyfuss explores the search for inscriptions, such as those found on gravestones, as a way of accessing France’s earliest history. In the context of what Dreyfuss, citing Odile Parsis-Barubé, calls “la fièvre archéologique” (p. 187), he tells the story of the discovery of archaeological remains of Jewish life in provincial France, as well as in Paris, in the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century.[1] The uncovering of Jewish remains offered proof of Jewish life across France, earlier than the evidence supplied in the documents that were the subject of the first two chapters. Did this proof, Dreyfuss asks, open a space for Jewish remains in the flourishing domain of “antiquités nationales”? (p. 182).

At the center of this chapter is the French Jewish scholar Moïse Schwab, tasked in 1897 by the Section d'archéologie du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques with building a synthesis of all information on Hebrew inscriptions discovered in France. Schwab undertook this work, as well as adding many references of his own. Dreyfuss works through stories of discovery, of decryption, and of the entry, of Jewish burial stones in particular, into museums, as the skeletons found at Jewish burial sites, and particularly the skulls, found their way into the Muséum d'Histoire naturelle, and became objects of study for anthropologists. Schwab's interest was not in the monuments as gravestones, with all that that implied (including the presence of a body nearby), but as sources that allowed for the study of medieval Jewish languages. At the same time, Dreyfuss shows how, for Christian archaeologists, the gravestones constituted evidence of the existence of a Jewish community, forever external and foreign to the communities among which they lived. This perspective left no space for consideration of the role Jews played in broader medieval life. Thus, it was the scholars themselves, both Jewish and non-Jewish, who prevented Jewish artefacts from becoming sources for a shared Franco-Jewish history.

Chapter four, "La mémoire disséminée: classification des archives et écriture de l'histoire locale des Juifs en France (v. 1830--v. 1880)," places at its center the secretary of the publication committee of the *Société des études juives*, Isidore Loeb, and the founding of the *Revue des études juives* (*REJ*) in 1880. The *REJ* sought contributions from both Jews and non-Jews, inviting them to write shared histories of Jews in France. Masses of Jewish documents were discovered as a result of the 1841 circular ordering the conservation and ordering of departmental archives. This opened up new perspectives on the writing of a shared Franco-Jewish history and showed how different scholars could come to contrasting conclusions from the same set of documents. Dreyfuss traces how initially, archivists making histories out of the documents they discovered, made mistakes, such as overstating the wealth of Jews in the medieval age. When Loeb himself went looking in the same archives, he found Jews, having taken French family names, living among the French in Paris, and cultivating vineyards in the countryside. But he was also able to trace the slow but steady process of their separation and impoverishment, leading to their expulsion.

Chapter five, "De la mémoire à l'histoire critique: les archives au service d'une historiographie de la 'coexistence pacifique'," returns once again to Loeb, and the intense and difficult atmosphere around Jews in France at the end of the nineteenth century. As the work of creating inventories of archives continued, and their contents were brought to light, history was becoming the "discipline reine" (p. 270), and new discoveries allowed for the constant reinvention of a national history. History became a political battleground, and Jewish history was embroiled in this. Thus, for example, archivists and historians argued over whether the popes were benevolent towards the Jews of the Comtat-Venaissin. Jews such as Loeb sought to counter the prevailing historiography that painted a gentle picture of relations between Catholics and Jews. It is in this context that Loeb developed his own methodology. Loeb was highly critical of medieval literary and narrative sources such as chronicles used to write anti-Jewish polemics. He believed that only archives could give true history. There was a growing awareness of the significance of notarial registers as sources in the early twentieth century, and Loeb used these as a basis for the history he wrote. The chapter revolves around Loeb and the methodology he developed, explored in characteristic depth by Dreyfuss, and Loeb's work in Carpentras, finding a "une masse conséquente de faits" that brought to light a story of Jews at the mercy of religious and secular authorities (p. 283).

Chapter six, “A la recherche des sources de l’histoire « intérieure » des Juifs de France,” moves away from the uses made of medieval documents. It focuses, rather, on sources produced internally to the community, that is, documents arising from the internal management of the community (*pinkassim*), and documents that were more for liturgical or genealogical use, such as *Memorbücher*, books established and preserved in Ashkenazi communities as obituaries, listing the well-known dead of the community as well as its martyrs, assassinated in the First Crusade. Here Dreyfuss explores how these documents belonging to Jewish communities became historical sources over the course of the nineteenth century. To what extent, he asks, did they enable the writing of an internal history of Jews in France? The State had no interest in such archives, and as such, these were not organized or classified. They were held in private collections or found in attics. Dreyfuss explores the availability and uses made of such archives in Jewish communities across France, including Metz, Carpentras, Bordeaux, Alsace, and Paris. He finds no “projet historiographique commun” relating to these sources (p. 359). Dreyfuss argues that nonetheless, all projects arising from the discovery of such sources show a definitive refusal on the part of Jewish scholars to create a history of Jews in France separated from the State (p. 359).

Dreyfuss has gone deep into the materiality of the sources whose story he tells. His work is painstaking. For the reader, this means that the detail can become overwhelming. An organigram of the archives into which Dreyfuss delves in each chapter would have been enormously useful here, just as some books include a family tree. At the same time, the way Dreyfuss insists on bringing the materiality of documents to the fore in this book is striking and fascinating. He is clearly very much at home in the archive.

There is, ultimately, a tension in his writing, between Dreyfuss as archivist and as historian. In coming down on the side of the archivist in his conclusion, there is a sense in which Dreyfuss does not do his own work justice. Dreyfuss does not take full advantage of the opportunity offered by his deep, granular research. In his conclusion he tells us, for example, that while Jews in central and Eastern Europe collected *pinkassim* and *Memorbücher*, and made inventories of them in France, such sources “n’ont pas joué...le rôle idéologique moteur dans la construction de l’histoire juive qui fut le leur dans les cercles historiques juifs polonais et russes de l’entre-deux-guerres” (p. 363). Instead, they were treated as the relics of an idealized community life. Here is a fascinating point that speaks not only to historians of French Jewry, but more broadly to those who work on the Jews of Europe at the fin de siècle. What was different about France? Dreyfuss leaves us wondering. Rather, he wishes to make the point that his approach, playing with the different lives of documents as they passed through various sets of hands, offers “une représentation plus complexifiée du ‘métier’ d’historien(ne)” (p. 369). There is no doubt that Dreyfuss’ approach leads us to think in greater and more illuminative depth about what those of us who work on French Jewish history consider to be sources, and how they come to be so. His exploration of the lives of Jewish sources in France’s long nineteenth century opens up a fascinating and important perspective on the contexts in which French Jews came to write their own history, and at the same time, what non-Jews made of Jewish sources. But his work has a greater significance, and it can only be hoped that others—or perhaps Dreyfuss himself—will take up the baton, and draw on his careful, detailed work to consider what it might give us, in terms not only of French Jewish history, but of French history more broadly.

## NOTES

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[1] On *la fièvre archéologique*, see Odile Parsis-Barubé, *La province antique: L'invention de l'histoire locale en France (1800-1870)* (Paris: Éditions du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques, 2011).

Julie Kalman  
Monash University  
[julie.kalman@monash.edu](mailto:julie.kalman@monash.edu)

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