

Tauben, Sara Ferdman. *Traces of the Past: Montreal's Early Synagogues*, Montreal: Véhicule Press, 2011. 171 pp. With a portfolio of photographs by David Kaufman.

In *Traces of the Past* Sara Ferdman Tauben presents her revised Master's thesis on Montreal's early synagogues.<sup>1</sup> Within four chapters, divided according to themes and time periods, the reader is taken on stroll down memory lane of the architectural and cultural heritage of old Jewish Montreal. The first chapter, "Harbingers of Great Institutions", focuses on what was prior to the mass Jewish migration that arrived on Canada's shores during the early decades of the twentieth century. The earliest uptowners and downtowners were Shearith Israel (now called the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation), Shaar Hashomayim, and Temple Emanu-el, where they gradually moved up the socio-economic ladder, developing ever-more opulent houses of worship as they leapfrogged into more affluent neighbourhoods. The number of synagogues at this was relatively small compared to what would come later.

In "Here and There: The Dispersion of Shuln and Shuleach", the second chapter, we learn about Montreal's mushrooming early twentieth-century Jewish population and how this led to congregational fragmentation. Preference was given by those newly arrived for small, informally-constructed house of worship-community centres that were socially intimate and comprised of fellow *landsman* from places of origin in the "old country". What Tauben studies here, and describes in great detail remains the nostalgic, halcyon image of Montreal's immigrant Jewish enclaves. Shuln were diverse and plentiful, along with other aspects of Jewish socio-religious infrastructure, though not architectural monuments in their own right.

However, like the harbingers, many of Montreal Jewish immigrants and first generation Canadians soon moved up the socio-economic ladder. In the third chapter we learn about their places of worship, "The Synagogues of the 'High Windows'",

such as B'nai Jacob, Adath Israel, and Beth Yehuda. A small number of these buildings still protrude into the city's skyline today. These were the halls where the classically trained cantor-chazzanim sang, and an emphasis was placed on aesthetics in order to attract the less involved. According to Tauben, these synagogues came with some controversy. Rabbis such as Yehoshua Herschorn criticized the large synagogues with the "High Windows", arguing that the congregants lost their sense of communal yiddishkeit that only the smaller, more intimate shuln could provide. From a socio-religious perspective Rabbi Herschorn was correct. However, Tauben makes the observation that even after the flight to the post-1945 suburbs, such as to Côte Saint-Luc and Hampstead, the majority of affiliated Jews in metropolitan Montreal continued to frequent Orthodox synagogues. Despite the presence of Temple Emanuel, Reform congregations did not proliferate, like they did in many American urban areas. In a certain way this was the lasting legacy of Montreal's shuln and shuleach. This finding, as well as others pertaining to the formation of a cohesive Montreal Jewish community that included day schools, community centres, etc., is the subject of the Conclusion.

Within the Epilogue is presented the current state of preservation – or the lack thereof – of Montreal's historic synagogues as well as where many of the old congregations are today (amalgamated in the suburbs). Inserted within the front and backmatter are maps demarcating the locations of historic synagogue buildings. There is also a descriptive walking tour that the reader can use to bring a greater understanding of Tauben's research – a useful tool. Placed within the centre of the book is a colour portfolio of thirteen historic synagogues that exhibit the state of a dozen of these buildings from the summer of 2000. Hopefully these materials, in addition to Tauben's narrative, will foster greater appreciation for Montreal's historic synagogue buildings and their preservation. Identified on many of these buildings is defacement of Jewish symbols and Hebrew inscriptions by contemporary owners.

Tauben's *Traces of the Past* is the paramount authority on Montreal's historic synagogues, and perhaps the best study yet to-date on Canadian synagogue architecture, despite its focus on a single location. The book's shortcoming is that the concluding analysis is scant (three and half pages) considering the amount of energy, work, time, and effort the author invested in this work. This might disappoint an academic reader, desiring better-developed findings. The findings presented are almost exclusively of a Judaic Studies background, the degree that Tauben obtained. While valuable and insightful, discoveries pertaining to architectural history and heritage conservation – materials and themes presented throughout the rest of the book – could also have been made. Nonetheless, Tauben has set a high standard for future research in Canadian synagogue architecture and *Traces of the Past* is a book this reviewer will use frequently as a secondary source and reference.

### Endnote

<sup>1</sup> Sara Ferdman Tauben, *Aspirations and Adaptations: Immigrant Synagogues of Montreal, 1880s-1945* (Master Thesis, Concordia University, 2004).

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Théorêt, Hughes. *Les Chemises bleues: Adrien Arcand, journaliste antisémite canadien-français*. Sillery: Septentrion, 2012. 410 pp.

One of the most controversial issues in the field of Canadian Jewish studies involves the nature of French Canadian antisemitism at the beginning of the twentieth century. It is an issue that has transcended the normal small audience for scholarly articles and books to involve a wider discussion in op-ed articles and other media in both French and English. Hughes Théorêt enters squarely into the midst of this controversy with his biography