

Rein, R. (2012). *Los Bohemios de Villa Crespo. Judíos y fútbol en la Argentina* (series: *Nudos de la historia argentina*). Buenos Aires: Sudamericana (Random House Mondadori S.A.), pp. 216.

Rein, R. (2015). *Fútbol, Jews and the Making of Argentina* (translation from Spanish by M. Grenzeback). Stanford (California): Stanford University Press, pp. 226.

In the opinion of the present reviewer, a potential reader of this brief assessment of Raanan Rein's work (he is the Elias Sourasky Professor of Latin American and Spanish History, Vice President of Tel Aviv University and the Head of S. Daniel Abraham Center for International and Regional Studies) first of all deserves a brief explanation concerning the reasons behind the decision to review simultaneously both editions of his volume. The reason is fairly simple: only through reading both of them is one able to fully grasp the author's praiseworthy intention, which seeks to combine the popularization of historical research (the Spanish language edition is one of the volumes in the series *Nudos de la historia argentina*, which discuss important problems in Argentine history, and are published by acclaimed academics; they are intended for a wider audience and hence are not overburdened with elements typically found in academic publications) with academic thoroughness and method (the English language edition contains not only extensive academic apparatus – i.e., footnotes, a well-structured bibliography, index – but also an interesting selection of photographs and a new concluding chapter; the modified title deserves attention too: all the potentially confusing references to the local Argentine specificities have disappeared).

The size of Rein's book is not overwhelming; nevertheless, the abundance of subjects it touches upon is impressive. For example: the history of Jewish immigration to Argentina, the history of Jewish life in Buenos Aires, the history of Villa Crespo (it is one of the districts of Buenos Aires; because of its central location it served as an important cultural, economic, political and social center; it is famous for a historically strong Jewish presence too), the history of sports club Club Atlético Atlanta (nowadays it is widely considered

to be a Jewish club, but as Rein shows it is rather more complicated). Of course, the above mentioned threads are skillfully placed in the wider context of Argentina's social or political trends.

In the face of the above embarrassment of riches one may ask: what are the central topics of the reviewed book? Fortunately, the answer is rather straightforward, as Rein seems to be mainly preoccupied by two aspects. First, the relation between sports and ethnicity in the context of immigrant and multicultural Argentine society (or rather the immigrant and multicultural microcosm of Villa Crespo). And second, the social history of Jews in that country, which we may figuratively name as unofficial. What this means is that Rein is carefully looking at a certain example of Jewish social activity (i.e. related with Club Atlético Atlanta), which takes place beyond the official institutions of Jewish life (religious, educational etc.). The methodological consequence of such an approach is hard to underestimate: thanks to this, it is possible to try to analyze the social activities of Jews who are not affiliated with official Jewish institutions (or who actually are affiliated but at the same time are also active beyond them). Hence the picture of Jewish life in Argentina and in Buenos Aires in particular becomes more colorful and nuanced. What is more, the extra-communal activities usually lead towards intense contacts with members of other groups, which in turn provokes Rein to ask interesting questions regarding the identity of such Jews.

In order to present the phenomenon of Club Atlético Atlanta and the context in which it grew and become a successful sport and social organization (of course Atlanta does not belong to the short list of Argentina's greatest clubs but nevertheless it was able to produce a number of world class players like Luis Artime, Hugo Gatti or Carlos Timoteo Griguol), Rein divides the book into seven chapters. The first part is a brief but at the same time very handy sketch discussing the history of Jewish immigration to Argentina (it includes interesting observations on the early stages of the making of Jewish-Argentine identity, for example expressed in the songs written by Vilnius-born "Jewish Gardel" Javel Katz; the author also reminds the reader that not all the sectors of Argentine society were welcoming towards Jews). In the second chapter, the history and specific identity of Villa Crespo is discussed. That intriguing combination of cosmopolitanism and *porteño* localism probably found its best expression in the works

of writers like Leopoldo Marechal and César Tiempo, and musicians such as Ben Molar and Osvaldo Pugliese, who were strongly connected with the district. Chapters 3 and 4 finally bring to the stage Club Atlético Atlanta, founded in 1904. In spite of its continuous problems (the lack of a proper football stadium), the club quickly became an important feature of sporting, social and cultural life in Villa Crespo (it had a library, it organized balls, it was open towards the needs of children and women etc.). The following two chapters deal mostly with Atlanta's fascinating ties with politics. First it was a kind of deep immersion in Peronism (what draws attention is the heavily ideological language present in the club's documents of that period); later it had a complex relationship with left-wing politics, included communism, mostly through the figure of Atlanta's charismatic and somewhat contradictory president León Kolbowski. In Rein's opinion, he is a perfect example of the successful integration of Jews into wider Argentine society. The last two chapters (the ultimate is the book's epilogue) are devoted to Atlanta's perception as a Jewish club. From the organizational point of view, it is hard to argue that it is a Jewish club although many of its members (the so-called *socios*) are of Jewish origin. Nevertheless, the club is perceived as Jewish mostly due to the character of the district it comes from. Hence, on the one hand Atlanta's supposed Jewishness was imposed on the club by outside forces (e.g., the supporters of rival teams describing the club as such in their often anti-Semitic chants). On the other hand, however, the club still has a substantial number of supporters with Jewish origins, who take certain pride from the fact that their small and modest club (David) from time to time is able to beat the non-Jewish Goliaths. The wonderful proof of Atlanta's integrating potential is the fact that such a traditionally Jewish perspective co-exists with a similar narrative, but this time shared by many of its non-Jewish fans, who perceive the club's achievements as examples of the triumphs of Argentina's character *vis-à-vis* foreign imperial forces.

C.L.R. James in *Beyond a Boundary*, his 1963 classic meditation on the nature of West Indian cricket, famously asked: "What do they know of cricket who only cricket know?" Raanan Rein's book is a multilayered answer to a similar question. If perceived from a proper angle, football can become an important element of economic,

political or social history. It can help to fill the gaps left by the students of other fields. Let us hope that Rein is going to pursue his academic interest in football and that his work is going to inspire followers in Argentina, Latin America and the World.

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