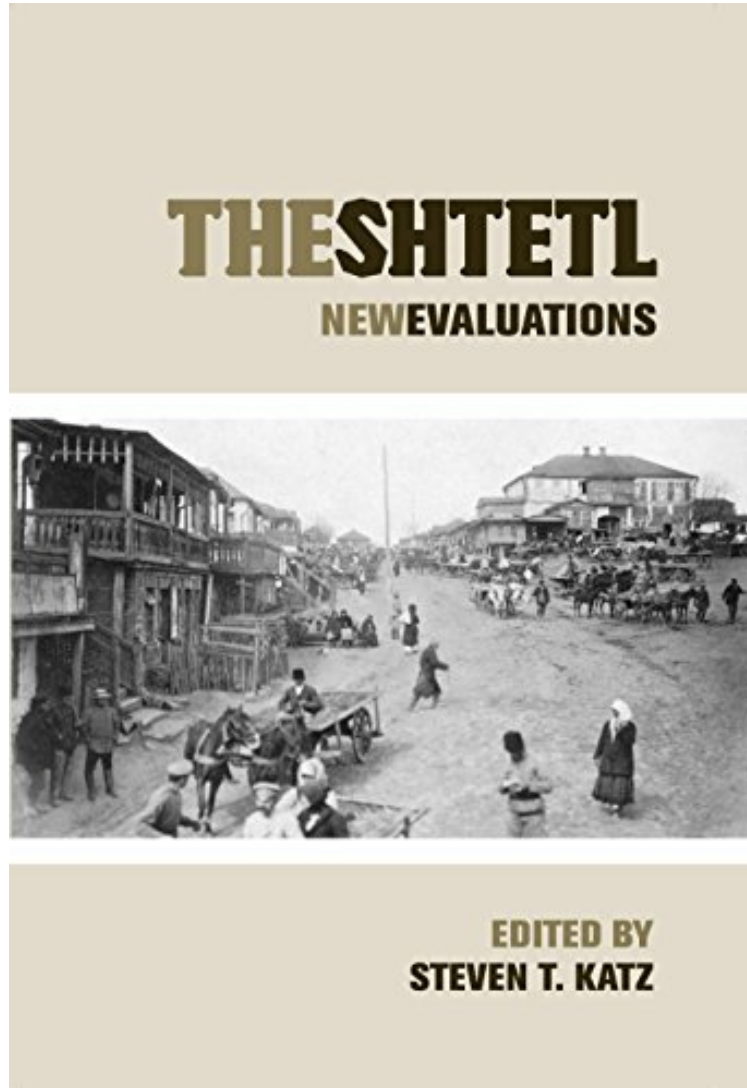


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From Brand: NYU Press : The Shtetl: New Evaluations (Elie Wiesel Center for Judaic Studies Series) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Shtetl: New Evaluations (Elie Wiesel Center for Judaic Studies Series):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Includes Seldom-Mentioned Facts About Jewish Life in the Shtetl By Jan Peczkis This work focuses on the historical, sociological, and literary implications of the shtetl. I focus on a few topics. The shtetl lacks a precise definition. However, as late as 1939 (the eve of WWII and the soon-thereafter Nazi

German-made Holocaust), and notwithstanding trends towards urbanization, some 50% of Poland's Jews still lived in small towns the shtetlekh. (Samuel Kassow, p. 122).

MEMORIAL BOOKS DUBIOUS. INTRODUCTION TO JEW-ON-JEW VIOLENCEIn common with works on this subject, this one discusses pogroms. However, it goes beyond that, and shows that violence was also something that Jews did to other Jews. Author Samuel Kassow, referring to the non-objectivity of memorial books, comments, (quote) Another key source that reflected the changing society of the shtetl was the weekly newspaper. Such publications contain valuable contemporary accounts that serve as a counterpoint to the nostalgic accounts that were published in many of the post-war memorial books (YIZKER BIKHER)The memorial book [of Glebokie] depicted an image of a Jewish community that lived in peace and harmony. But in an editorial from October of 1931, the shtetl newspaper bemoaned the fact that on SHABES SHUVA (the Sabbath between Rosh Hashona [Rosh Hashanah] and Yom Kippur) fights had broken out in three different synagogues. Gentiles like to fight in taverns, the newspaper complained, We prefer to fight in the synagogue. On Yom Kippur of 1932 a fight over who would lead a service in the synagogue resulted in a mass brawl that spilled into the street. On this, too, the memorial book was completely silent. (unquote). (p. 128).[Clearly, YIZKOR books are of questionable historical reliability. This has broad implications. YIZKOR books commonly have an obvious Polonophobic undercurrent, and make various accusations against Poles. The statements against Poles, contained in YIZKOR books, should not be believed unless corroborated by objective sources of information.]

POLITICAL JEW-ON-JEW VIOLENCEViolence by Jews against other Jews also occurred in the context of the political disputessuch as those that developed when the KEHILLES expanded beyond religion and became politicized. Samuel Kassow remarks, (quote) The trend to democratization and wider mobilization of the shtetl community was also reflected in the changing role of the local Jewish community councils, the KEHILLES. Before World War I these councilsrun by a small clique who handled religious issues and the cemetery--usually excited little interest among the wider Jewish population. By 1928, however, new government legislation had changed the legal parameters of the KEHILLES and had widened their potential to serve as political arenas in the Jewish community. Elections were often intense and hard fought and exposed political rifts in the community. Political parties, coalitions of Hasidim and prayer houses, and personal cliques all contested these elections, which were sometimes marked by violence, especially when the Orthodox AGUDAT YISROEL used Polish law to overturn Bundist and Zionist victories. In the shtetl of Sokolow, after the AGUDA used Article 20 to cancel a POALEI TSIYON (Labor Zionist) victory, the POALEI TSIYON invaded the KEHILLA building and smashed the furniture. (unquote). (p. 130).With reference to Article 20 in the quote above, author Samuel Kassow clarifies how the AGUDAT YISRAEL and the Polish government had made common cause against militant Jewish atheism. He comments, (quote) Article 20 disqualified those who openly proclaimed their hostility to religion. It reflected the inclination of the Pilsudski government to support the orthodox AGUDAT YISROEL in Jewish politics. (unquote). (p. 137).

ARE COMMUNIST JEWS STILL JEWS? HAVING IT BOTH WAYSNowadays, many authors (for example, neo-Stalinist Jan T. Gross) would have us believe that Jews who became Communists were no longer Jews. Is this so?Author Henry Abramson suggests that Jews who joined what Abramson calls purely socialist parties [as opposed to "Jewish socialist parties"], such as the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, often jettisoned their Jewish identity completely, essentially subsuming any specific Jewish aspect of their political views within the overall platform of their party. (p. 94). As Abramson makes clear, this was true only of SOME Jews who became Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. In addition, the walking away from ones Jewishness, or subsuming ones Jewishness within a political program, is hardly synonymous with no longer being Jewish!If one defines Jewishness as an ethnicity, then one cannot possibly stop being a Jew. On the other hand, if being a Jew is dependent upon being recognized by the Jewish community as being a Jew, then one must ask if there was at least a substantial minority of Jews who would recognize Jewish Communists as Jews. Let us focus on the latter.Consider Karl Marx. Some have said that Marx was not a Jew because he had been baptized a Christian and because he was anti-Semitic. In contrast, other Jews thought that Karl Marx was antagonistic only to Jewish religion, and that Jewish religion and Jewish culture could be separated. (Abramson, p. 95).The reader must realize that quite a few Jewish authors recognize Karl Marx as a Jew. In fact, many commentators (including Jewish commentators) have listed Karl Marx alongside Sigmund Freud and Albert Einstein, as the three greatest Jewish thinkers of the 19th and 20th centuries. Obviously, Karl Marx is variously considered a non-Jew, or a Jew, depending upon the commentators and their motives. They cannot have it both ways!In addition to all this, Jewish communities recognized Jewish Communists as valid Jews, as proved by the fact that they accepted the bodies of deceased Jewish Communists for burial in Jewish cemeteries. Furthermore, the State of Israel recognizes Jewish Communists as Jews and welcomes them as Jews. For example, Jewish Communist Solomon Morel fled to Israel, and was given haven there, to escape justice for his crimes against the Polish people.

JEWS UNDERGOING SELF-ATHEIZATION AND SELF-COMMUNIZATION CAN REMAIN OBSERVANTAny notion that Jewish Communists are in some way no longer Jews evaporates in the face of basic facts. A non-observant Jew, whether Communist or not, is recognizably still a Jew. [In fact, very many of the worlds Jews today are non-observant, but this does not make them any less Jews.]Conversely, there is no contradiction between a Jew being Communist and being observant. Yehuda Bauer comments, (quote) This does not mean to say that most Jews did not keep the Sabbath, keep kosher homes, or visit

synagogues, at least during the holidays. But a person could belong to a secular Zionist group or vote for the Bund or even demonstrate against the rabbis, and yet observe these basic traditions. However, the religious ties were definitely loosening, especially with the younger generation, many of whom were members of decidedly secular Zionist youth movements. These younger people may have argued with their elders, but respect for parents was such that convinced Marxist youths would go to the synagogue because their parents did. In a very typical incident in the shtetl of Kurzeniec, in Belarus, a member of the Marxist-Zionist HASHOMER HATZAIR youth movement, whose mother had been an active Communist, but whose father was strictly observant, was asked in a postwar interview when he received the call (by another member of HASHOMER HATZAIR) to join the forest partisan group of which he was a member. His answer was: on a Friday evening, after the blessing of the candles. (unquote). (pp. 256).

ZYDOKOMUNAA SOMEWHAT VALID TERM? Unlike those who are dismissive of the term Zydokomuna [Judeo-Communism], author Henry Abramson realizes that the term Zydokomuna has some basis in fact, (quote) Considering again the Communist Party, prominent Jewish figures such as Trotsky and Zinoviev, as well as the participation of Jews in the dreaded CHEKA, lend some credence to the widespread view of the Judo-Kommuna. (unquote). (p. 94). Of course, we need to go far beyond the likes of Trotsky and Zinoviev. As we have seen, Jewish support for Communism went much deeper than membership in organizations that were openly Communist. Moreover, there is no sharp line between socialists and Communists. Let us pursue this further. Henry Abramson writes, (quote) Another major group was the POALEI-TSION [POALE ZION] (Workers of Zion), a hybrid party that emphasized a socialist interpretation of Zionism: in other words, whereas the POALEI-TSION agreed with Herzl's vision of a homeland for the Jews in Palestine, they argued that this homeland should be securely founded on Marxist principles. Their popularity in the shtetl was considerably lower than that of the General Zionists (they only won 6 percent of the popular votes in the elections mentioned above, for example), but they were very effective in translating their small numbers of dedicated followers into actual pioneers in Israel, and they are largely credited with the creation of the kibbutz network there. (unquote). (p. 93). [This supports Polish scholar Feliks Koneczny who, in his JEWISH CIVILIZATION, had suggested that the pioneering agricultural communities in Eretz Israel were an experimental form of Communism in a rural setting.]

Dating from the sixteenth century, there were hundreds of shtetls Jewish settlements in Eastern Europe that were home to a large and compact population that differed from their gentile, mostly peasant neighbors in religion, occupation, language, and culture. The shtetls were different in important respects from previous types of Jewish settlements in the Diaspora in that Jews had rarely formed a majority in the towns in which they lived. This was not true of the shtetl, where Jews sometimes comprised 80% or more of the population. While the shtetl began to decline during the course of the nineteenth century, it was the Holocaust which finally destroyed it. During the last thirty years the shtetl has attracted a growing amount of scholarly attention, though gross generalizations and romanticized nostalgia continue to affect how the topic is treated. This volume takes a new look at this most important facet of East European Jewish life. It helps to correct the notion that the shtetl was an entirely Jewish world and shows the ways in which the Jews of the shtetl interacted both with their co-religionists and with their gentile neighbors. The volume includes chapters on the history of the shtetl, its myths and realities, politics, gender dynamics, how the shtetl has been (mis)represented in literature, and the changes brought about by World War I and the Holocaust, among others. Contributors: Samuel Kassow, Gershon David Hundert, Immanuel Etkes, Nehemia Polen, Henry Abramson, Konrad Zielinski, Jeremy Dauber, Israel Bartel, Naomi Seidman, Mikhail Krutikov, Arnold J. Band, Katarzyna Wieclawska, Yehuda Bauer, and Elie Wiesel.

The book is a must-buy for all libraries.-AJL Newsletter This important and comprehensive collection provides a fascinating re-evaluation of one of the main locations of Jewish life in Eastern Europe down to the Holocaust and beyond.-Antony Polonsky, Albert Abramson Professor of Holocaust Studies at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Brandeis University The quality of the essays is uniformly good, and after reading them, readers will be fully acquainted with the elusive concept of the shtetl. The essays are well documented.-Choice "Talk about stereotype busting! Not only are we forced to readjust our sights . . . but in the best moments of Katz's collection we learn how to distinguish what is factually true from what is mythically imagined. Even more importantly, we begin to see . . . the world of the shtetlach that the fog and night of the Holocaust forever destroyed."-New Jersey Jewish News [A]nyone looking to really understand the Jewish past, not just the romanticized version of it, will find this book a perfect antidote.-The Reporter About the Author Steven T. Katz is Slater Professor of Jewish and Holocaust Studies and former Director of the Elie Wiesel Center for Judaic Studies at Boston University. His many publications include The Holocaust in Historical Context.