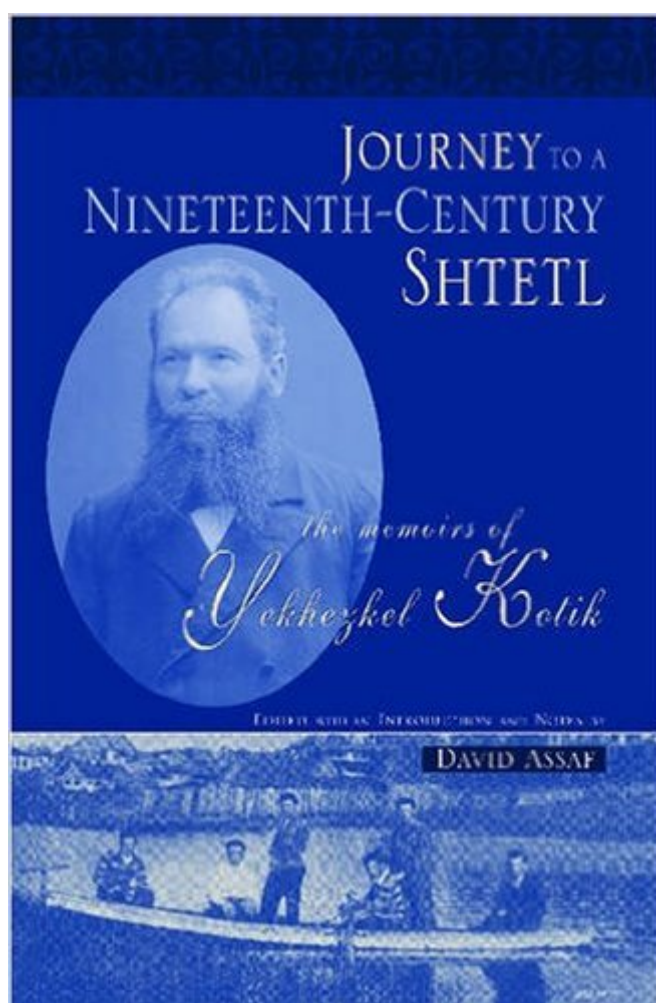


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Journey To A Nineteenth-Century Shtetl: The Memoirs Of Yekhezkel Kotik (Raphael Patai Series In Jewish Folklore And Anthropology)



Synopsis

Originally published in Warsaw in 1913, this beautifully written memoir offers a panoramic description of the author's experiences growing up in Kamieniec Litewski, a Polish shtetl connected with many important events in the history of nineteenth-century Eastern European Jewry. Although the way of life portrayed in this memoir has disappeared, the historical, cultural, and folkloric material it contains will be of major interest to historians and general readers alike. Kotik's story is the saga of a wealthy and influential family through four generations. Masterfully interwoven in this tale are colorful vignettes featuring Kotik's family and neighbors, including rabbis and zaddikim, merchants and the poor, hasidim and mitnaggedim, scholars and illiterates, believers and heretics, matchmakers and informers, and teachers and musicians. Stories of personal warmth and despair intermingle with descriptions of the rise and decline of Jewish communal institutions and descriptions of the relationships between Jews, Russian authorities, and Polish lords. Such events as the brutal decrees of Tsar Nicholas I, the abolishment of the Jewish communal board known as the Kahal, and the Polish revolts against Russia are reflected in the lives of these people. The English edition includes a complete translation of the first volume of memoirs and contains notes elucidating terms, names, and customs, as well as bibliographical references to the research literature. The book not only acquaints new readers with the talent of a unique storyteller but also presents an important document of Jewish life during a fascinating era.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Okay, so I Google myself. That's how I discovered this astonishing memoir, published (1913) in Warsaw in Yiddish, by a man who may or may not be my blood. I read the Hebrew translation in 2001 and corresponded a bit with Editor/Translator Dr. Assaf, a professor of Jewish History at Tel Aviv University. Assaf is a thorough and inspired scholar. The Hebrew edition was superb, and the English edition is, too. Yekhezkel Kotik was born into one world and lived long enough to die in another, one in which nearly all physical remnants of the old were vanished. An essentially medieval culture, on the periphery of the Russian Empire, unchanged for nearly a millennium, was in the course of Yekhezkel's adulthood swept away by the ripples of modernity which swept through the Russian Empire. Kotik was born in a small town in the Belarus-Lithuanian region of the Pale of Settlement, at a time when most men expected to spend their entire lives within a few kilometers of the spot where they came into the world. The 19th Century, however, did not end as it had begun. The emergence of industry, global commerce and the fundamental transformations of political economy which devolved from and fueled these tectonic shifts set people in motion to an unprecedented degree. Kotik's adult life was strikingly modern. He resettled himself several times in different towns in Belarus and the Ukraine, operating (with generally disappointing results) a series of businesses. He came to rest in cosmopolitan Warsaw, where he opened what turned into a thriving coffee house much favored by the city's Jewish intellectuals, artists, activists, bon pensants and bon vivants. Yekhezkel flourished in this milieu, and became locally famous as an organizer and promoter of all manner of cooperative societies.

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