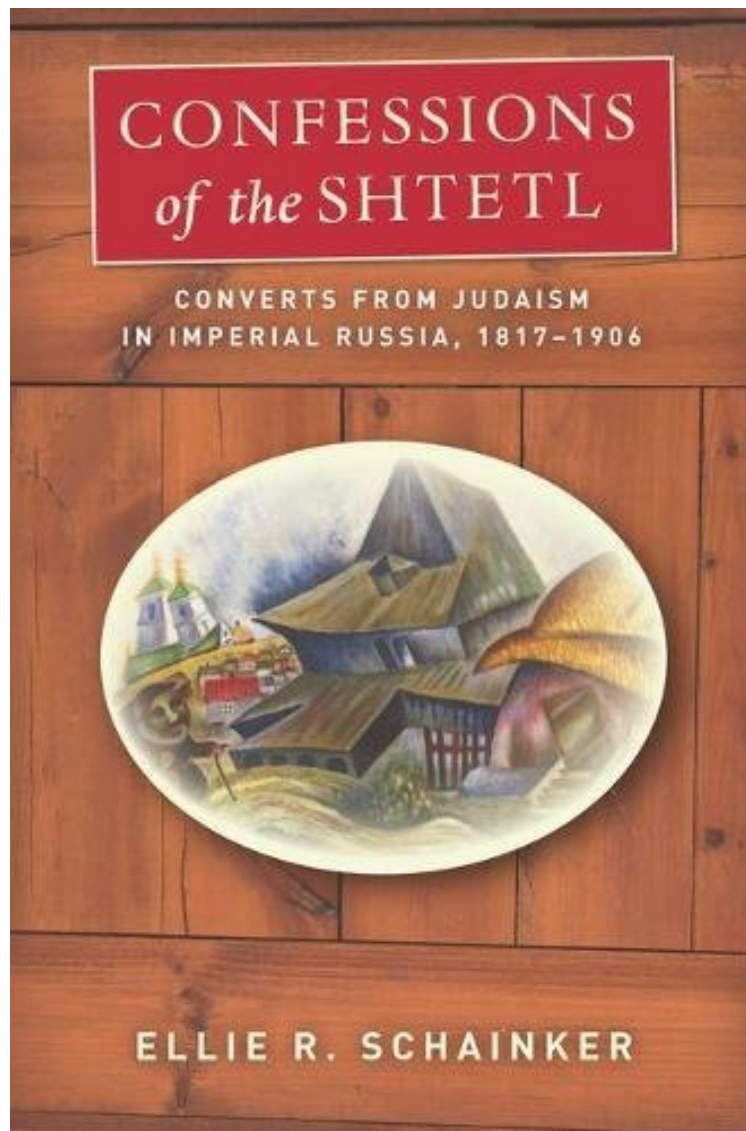


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## Confessions of the Shtetl: Converts from Judaism in Imperial Russia, 1817-1906 (Stanford Studies in Jewish History and Culture)

*Ellie R. Schainker*

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**Ellie R. Schainker : Confessions of the Shtetl: Converts from Judaism in Imperial Russia, 1817-1906 (Stanford Studies in Jewish History and Culture)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Confessions of the Shtetl: Converts from Judaism in Imperial Russia, 1817-1906 (Stanford

Studies in Jewish History and Culture):

Over the course of the nineteenth century, some 84,500 Jews in imperial Russia converted to Christianity. *Confessions of the Shtetl* explores the day-to-day world of these people, including the social, geographic, religious, and economic links among converts, Christians, and Jews. The book narrates converts' tales of love, desperation, and fear, tracing the uneasy contest between religious choice and collective Jewish identity in tsarist Russia. Rather than viewing the shtetl as the foundation myth for modern Jewish nationhood, this work reveals the shtetl's history of conversions and communal engagement with converts, which ultimately yielded a cultural hybridity that both challenged and fueled visions of Jewish separatism. Drawing on extensive research with conversion files in imperial Russian archives, in addition to the mass press, novels, and memoirs, Ellie R. Schainker offers a sociocultural history of religious toleration and Jewish life that sees baptism not as the fundamental departure from Jewishness or the Jewish community, but as a conversion that marked the start of a complicated experiment with new forms of identity and belonging. Ultimately, she argues that the Jewish encounter with imperial Russia did not revolve around coercion and ghettoization but was a genuinely religious drama with a diverse, attractive, and aggressive Christianity.

"This important contribution to the history of imperial Russia and its Jewish subjects explores religious borderlines through riveting case histories. Ellie Schainker provides a far more nuanced account of the relationship between Jews and their neighbors in Russian villages than any scholarship to date. *Confessions of the Shtetl* illuminates the role of conversion in the context of the kahal, of women as active participants, and of local governments and Jewish subjects as they struggle to overcome religious ambiguities." (Elisheva Carlebach Columbia University)"The corner of Russian Jewish life opened up by this unsentimental, lucid work is, on the whole, startlingly new. Ellie Schainker shows herself to be a prodigiously clear-headed historian in a study that encompasses Russian imperial law as well as everyday life with its choices made of a medley of desperation, expediency, conviction and, not infrequently, love." (Steven J. Zipperstein Stanford University)"What makes this book so novel and stimulating is its investigation into the very concept of "Jew" vs. "Christian" and showing how the blurring of confessional lines caused by conversion forced official and everyday individuals to react, sometimes in surprising ways. For anyone interested in European history, the intricacies of religious and inter-ethnic toleration, and of course Jewish studies, this book is highly recommended." (Theodore R. Weeks EuropeNow)About the AuthorEllie R. Schainker is the Arthur Blank Family Foundation Assistant Professor of History and Jewish Studies at Emory University.