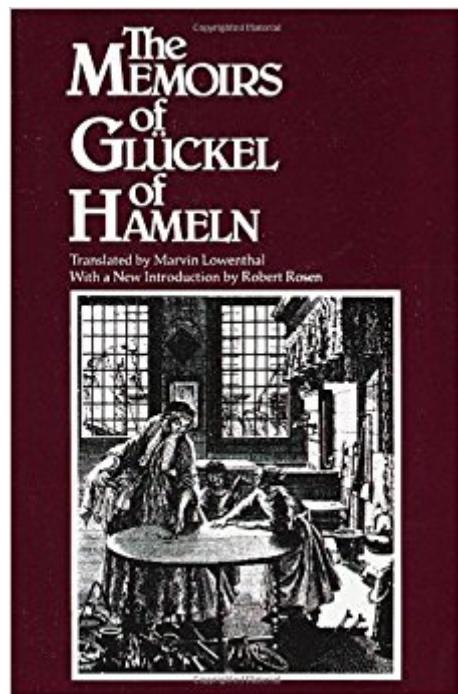


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The Memoirs Of Gluckel Of Hameln



Synopsis

Begun in 1690, this diary of a forty-four-year-old German Jewish widow, mother of fourteen children, tells how she guided the financial and personal destinies of her children, how she engaged in trade, ran her own factory, and promoted the welfare of her large family. Her memoir, a rare account of an ordinary woman, enlightens not just her children, for whom she wrote it, but all posterity about her life and community. Gluckel speaks to us with determination and humor from the seventeenth century. She tells of war, plague, pirates, soldiers, the hysteria of the false messiah Sabbatai Zevi, murder, bankruptcy, wedding feasts, births, deaths, in fact, of all the human events that befell her during her lifetime. She writes in a matter of fact way of the frightening and precarious situation under which the Jews of northern Germany lived. Accepting this situation as given, she boldly and fearlessly promotes her business, her family and her faith. This memoir is a document in the history of women and of life in the seventeenth century.

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Customer Reviews

Text: English, Yiddish (translation)

Begun in 1690, this diary of a forty-four-year-old German Jewish widow, mother of fourteen children, tells how she guided the financial and personal destinies of her children, how she engaged in trade, ran her own factory, and promoted the welfare of her large family. Her memoir, a rare account of an ordinary woman, enlightens not just her children, for whom she wrote it, but all posterity about her life and community. Gluckel speaks to us with determination and humor from the seventeenth

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This book possesses a cheerfully wistful charm. Picture a busy Jewish female version of Pepys, who instead of sailing to court every day, conducts a precious gem business on a continental scale and manages an enormous family well enough to produce twelve surviving children. It's a story about Germany (and surrounding countries) with an obvious focus on the institutionalized persecution and exploitation of Jews. Gluckel neatly dodges the plague and marries off a number of children well, but she and her husband come in for their share of bad luck, bad health and even worse business partners before the tale has been well told. The translation is airy and engaging with some very neat anecdotes. All in all, a colorful glimpse into late 17th early 18th century European life of a well educated, clear thinking woman.

I loved this book. Perhaps I should say that I like old memoirs and journals, particularly by women [and there are so few of them!] and that I also enjoy reading historical documents and about history of certain places and certain centuries. That may be one of the biases of these lines. I might also add I am not Jewish. What is fascinating and intriguing is how this person, living 400 years ago, comes out alive and well, in this text. That we understand her and her motives, her sense of humor. We commune with her preoccupations which give or take small differences are preoccupations we have today: the raising of offspring; providing what you can to insure your child's future better than your own; guidance through religious beliefs and wisdom against false new religious leaders; the conduct of ethical and profitable business. Gluckel also reveals surprising details of everyday life. For instance, she required special permissions to travel and to stay within the borders of towns for being Jewish; she travels more frequently than I expected, despite her being a woman, despite the difficulties of lodging, despite her Jewishness. Sickness is awful anytime but here we see how absolutely dreadful it could be even for a well to do merchant family. She also comandeers her business decisively and dynamically. Her errors in judgment are few for anyone, in any century! And she loves her husband, and she is loved by him, even though she probably had an arranged marriage just like the ones she provided for her children. I love this book because Gluckel puts me

in touch with the 17th century daily life, but more than that, she reminds me of the infinite chain that links us all; and in particular infinite connection that all women share, Jewish or not. Gluckel simply reminded me of the universality of our experiences, transcending centuries, religions and cultures. Few books can do that.

My ancestress Gluckel, much beloved by social historians as a very rare primary source about the life of German Jews in the seventeenth century, was a semi-literate, pious, loving and incredibly feisty lady. Her autobiographical story is both exhilarating and melancholy; after a lifetime of successful struggles to earn a good livelihood for her family after her husband's early death, she ended her life as a perhaps not overly welcome guest in the home of one of her sons in law. She writes her book at night when she cannot sleep, for her children's instruction "...and for my own consolation". Her tale is fascinating even though her main interests, dowries, trade and moral tales, are not ours. Her business took her all over Germany; roads were insecure, the treatment of Jews varied but was seldom welcoming, debtors defaulted, creditors pressed, children acted imprudently, marriages had to be arranged and rearranged. She introduces us to a colorful and scary world of ordinary people. Quite lovely!

An honest real account by a very clever woman. If you're an armature history buff like myself, I highly recommend reading

I bought this book not knowing what to expect. I thoroughly enjoyed reading it. It tells the story of a Jewish widow in the 17th and 18th centuries. Her concerns are very down to earth, and reading it you feel almost as if she is talking directly to you. How often do we hear these voices from the past?

Anyone wanting to get a profound insight into the life of Jews in Germany during the 17th Century as told with true life experiences by an outstanding mother, wife and businesswoman of the time, must read this book. My wife and I bought two so that we could read and discuss every paragraph together, and we really got caught up in the emotions and life experiences of this era in Jewish and German history. Told in simple language and with profound true life experiences and deep religious belief, as only this extraordinary Jewish woman could have transposed us to this era and the everyday life and the hardships and tribulations of German Jews already then.

Very informative if you're interested in middle class and medieval commerce. Also, what it was like

to live in medieval Europe in general (plague, etc) and be Jewish there (hint: not so welcoming).

I've read and re-read this book because it's just so wonderfully written. Her words are spiced with religious ideas and quotes. Within Gluckel's life story are many little stories that are so entertaining. This book is also a window into what Jewish life was like at that time.

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