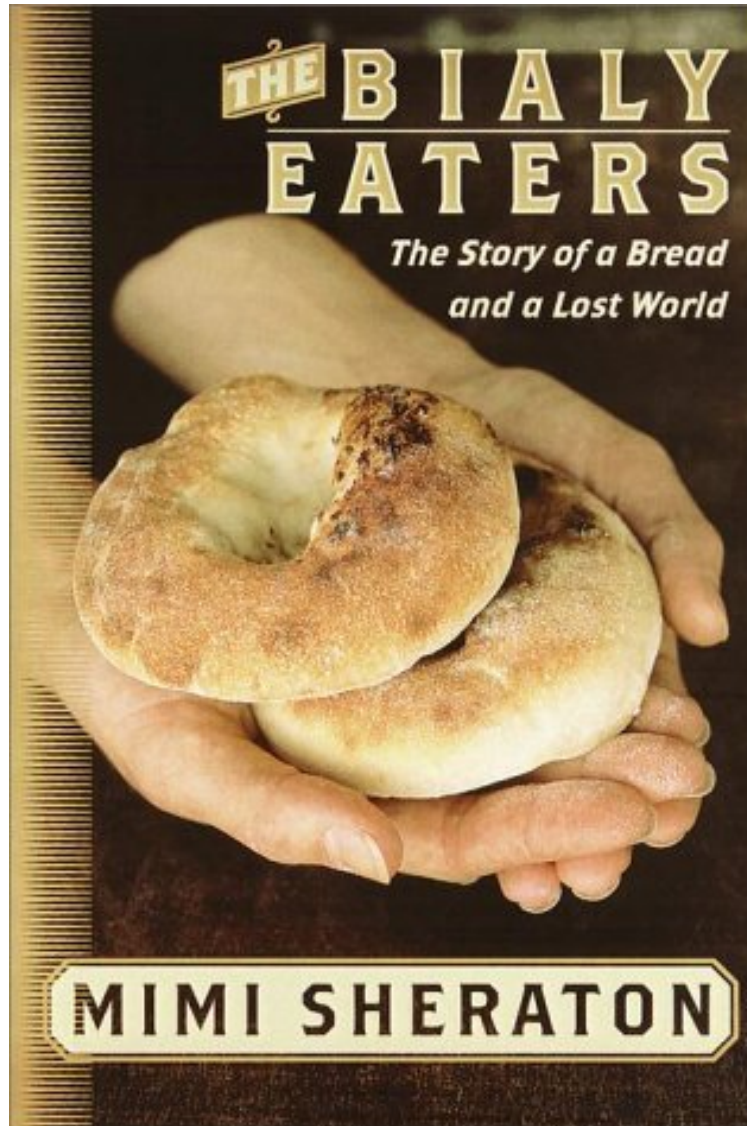


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The Bialy Eaters: The Story of a Bread and a Lost World

Mimi Sheraton

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Mimi Sheraton : The Bialy Eaters: The Story of a Bread and a Lost World before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Bialy Eaters: The Story of a Bread and a Lost World:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Deeply interesting, somewhat erratic By Craig Bolon Mimi Sheraton's book, *The Bialy Eaters* (Broadway Books Div. Random House, first edition 2000) is aptly titled. It is mostly a memoir about Jews of Bialystock before World War II--part of Russia before the end of World War I and of Poland afterward--also of those among them who emigrated to the U.S., Israel, Argentina and Australia, and of their offspring. It is not

mainly about bialys that Jews of Bialystock often ate or about bialy bakers who made them or make similar items today, although it has some observations on those topics. Bialystock's pre-War Jewish community was destroyed by Nazi invaders in one of the most brutal episodes of the terrible War. Ms. Sheraton managed to interview several survivors of the War, some who emigrated before the War and many of the community's offspring. In the U.S., components survive from what became a thriving expatriate community by the late nineteenth century, organizing a synagogue in 1865 and acquiring its present structure on the Lower East Side of Manhattan in 1905 (at 7 Willett St., see [www (dot) bialystoker (dot) org (slash) history.htm]). For a reader seeking authentic bialys of pre-War Bialystock and the early twentieth century in the U.S., Ms. Sheraton offers only a few hints. Bakers made them larger than ones common today, she writes, perhaps about 15 cm diameter versus about 10 cm common now. Crusts were baked crisper and darker than now, and flakes of onion emerged toasted, while "puffy, soft" interiors of the rims were maintained. A coat of poppy seeds tended to be the rule rather than the exception that it is now. However, her informers who remembered the past also conveyed that there was no one invariable style but a sea of differences, varying with neighborhoods and bakers. Unfortunately, Ms. Sheraton was not experienced at baking bread when conducting research for the book and so missed opportunities to ask questions that would interest bakers trying to recreate bialys as they were made in bygone days. A recent survey of the bakeries operating today that Ms. Sheraton cites turns up the shortcomings that she documented. Even Kossar's bakery on Grand St. in New York City--her favorite during the 1990s--has not recovered so far from compromising their products over the years since that era. In an epilogue at the end of the book, Ms. Sheraton attempts a recipe for baking good bialys in small batches. However, proportions are strange, and critical elements appear garbled. She says batches at Kossar's in the 1990s were 100 lb. flour, 7 gal. (58 lb.) water, 2 lb. salt and 1 lb. cake yeast. However, her recipe calls for 80 percent as much water by weight as flour--not 58 percent--and 4.4 percent as much salt--not 2.0 percent. Kneading such a mixture as much as indicated, if one can manage to do that, will produce an extremely sticky, slippery dough as elastic as a bungee cord--almost impossible to shape.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. chewy By Karl F. Riemer Habits are hard to break. Mimi Sheraton has been writing short articles for a long time. This is a pleasant book on a fascinating subject (fascinating to me - if not fascinating to you, why are you reading a review?) but the treatment is scattershot, superficial and highly anecdotal, like a collection of... magazine articles! I don't know the publishing industry but this is prime evidence of what I suspect happens: a lightweight book from a heavyweight author receives scant editorial oversight, ostensibly because none is needed but actually because no one is willing to step on illustrious toes. The result is competent, even adorable, sort of YA non-fiction, but it begs rewrite - to smooth the cadence, impose coherence to the narrative and act like a grown up book. Mimi Sheraton brings knowledge, skill and passion to her subject, her delicious, plaintive subject, but in this she's submitted a first draft based on desultory research and introspective musing - bang! it's in print - handsomely bound on the shelf. It's an inescapable treasure for anyone interested in bialystoker kuchen, from any of many angles, full of tantalizing seeds of information and pertinent affective backstory, but it could have been so much better.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Interesting read if you like bialy By shakyacres The book was interesting as I have been making my own bialys for several years. I grew up with Jewish bakeries in New York and appreciate a good bialy but never knew their history. I wish there were a few more recipes in the book but enjoyed reading this little bit of Jewish history.

A famed food writer tells the poignant, personal story of her worldwide search for a Polish town's lost world and the daily bread that sustained it. A passion for bialys, those chewy, crusty rolls with the toasted onion center, drew Mimi Sheraton to the Polish town of Bialystok to explore the history of this Jewish staple. Carefully wrapping, drying, and packing a dozen American bialys to ward off translation problems, she set out from New York in search of the people who invented this marvelous bread. Instead, she found a place of utter desolation, where turn-of-the-century massacres, followed by the Holocaust, had reduced the number of Jewish residents from fifty thousand to five. Sheraton became a woman with a mission, traveling to Israel, Paris, Austin, Chicago, Buenos Aires, and New York's Lower East Side to rescue the stories of the scattered Bialystokers. In a bittersweet mix of humor and pathos, she tells of their once-vibrant culture and iconic bread, reviving the exiled memories of those who escaped to the corners of the earth with only their recollections--and one very important recipe--to cherish. Like Proust's madeleine-inspired reverie, *The Bialy Eaters* transports readers to a lost world through its bakers' most beloved, and humble, offering. A meaningful gift for any Jewish holiday, this tribute to the human spirit will also have as broad an appeal as the bialy itself, delighting everyone who celebrates the astonishing endurance of the simplest traditions. "On a gray and rainy day in November 1992, I stood on Rynek Kosciuszko, the deserted town square of Bialystok, Poland, and was suddenly overcome by the same shadowy sense of loss that I had felt in the old Jewish quarters of Kazimierz in Cracow and Mikulov in Moravia. To anyone who knows their tragic history, these empty streets appear ominously haunting, especially in the somber twilight of a wet, gray afternoon. The damp air seems charged with echoes of silent voices and ghostly wings and the minor-key melodies of fiddlers on rooftops." As a slight chill went through me, I had vague intimations that I was at the beginning of an adventure. I could not guess, however, that what had started as a whimsical search would lead me along a more serious path that I was unable to forsake for seven years. Even now I

am not sure my quest is over, nor that I want it to be."The story began with my passion for the squashy, crusty, onion-topped bread roll known as a bialy and eaten as an alternative to the bagel. Widely popular in New York City and, to a lesser extent, elsewhere in the

.com As many of us know, bialys are chewy, onion-topped rolls, delicious with a cream-cheese schmeer. They originated in Bialystok, Poland, from which they--and the Jews who made and cherished them--have all but disappeared. In *The Bialy Eaters*, food writer Mimi Sheraton traces the history of this traditional treat and recounts her pursuit of it from Manhattan's Lower East Side (now bialy central) to Bialystok and elsewhere. Her book is principally a tale of the men and women, many pogrom and Holocaust victims, who have lived to recall the once plentiful kuchen. If the story lacks the thrust and imaginative life another writer might have given it, it is still a compelling blend of culinary investigation and poignant cultural evocation. After carefully drying and wrapping exemplary bialys from Kossar's bakery in Manhattan to take with her as memory jogs, Sheraton heads first to Poland. She encounters no true bialy in Bialystok (a hamburger-roll-like bun is proffered in its name), nor does she find one in Israel, Paris, or Argentina. Look-sees in Miami Beach, Florida; Chicago; Scottsdale, Arizona; and Beverly Hills, California, are more encouraging, but also reveal underbaked and undersalted versions made--horror of horrors--with cinnamon sugar, raisins, and blueberries. Her investigation achieves moving resolution, however, in the person of Pesach Szsemunz, an ex-Bialystoker and bialy baker who survived Auschwitz, Dachau, and "other concentration camps" and now lives in Australia. "In 1941," he writes Sheraton, "the Nazis came to us, and since then there are no more Bialystoker kuchen, no more kuchen bakeries, and no more Bialystok Jews. [No other] Bialystoker," he adds, "can tell you more." Yet, as Sheraton reveals in her touching book, bialys do live on, delighting those who eat them--a tribute to endurance itself and the power of everyday life. --Arthur Boehm

From *Library Journal*The bialy is a small, round yeast bread with an indentation in the center, topped with onions and, sometimes, poppy seeds. This bread was a staple of the 60,000 Jews who lived in Bialystok, a city in northeastern Poland, before they were murdered or forced to flee during the Holocaust. After having discovered the bialy in New York, Sheraton, cookbook author (*Food Markets of the World*) and former *New York Times* food critic, set out to investigate the history of this salty, crusty bread. She began her quest in 1992 with a visit to Bialystok, where she found a Jewish population of fiveDand no bialys. Undaunted, she tracked down and spoke with former Bialystokers throughout the world. With warmth and candor, Sheraton records her aging interviewees' memories, allowing them their anger as well as their longing for the bread of their lost home. A bialy recipe is included. Highly recommended.DJane la Plante, Minot State Univ., ND Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. United States, the small, round bialy is characterized by an indented center well that is ringed by a softer, higher rim, all generously flecked with toasted onions and, at its most authentic, with a showering of poppy seeds. I cannot remember when I first ate one of these fragrant rolls, but surely it was addiction at first bite . . ."-- From *The Bialy Eaters*