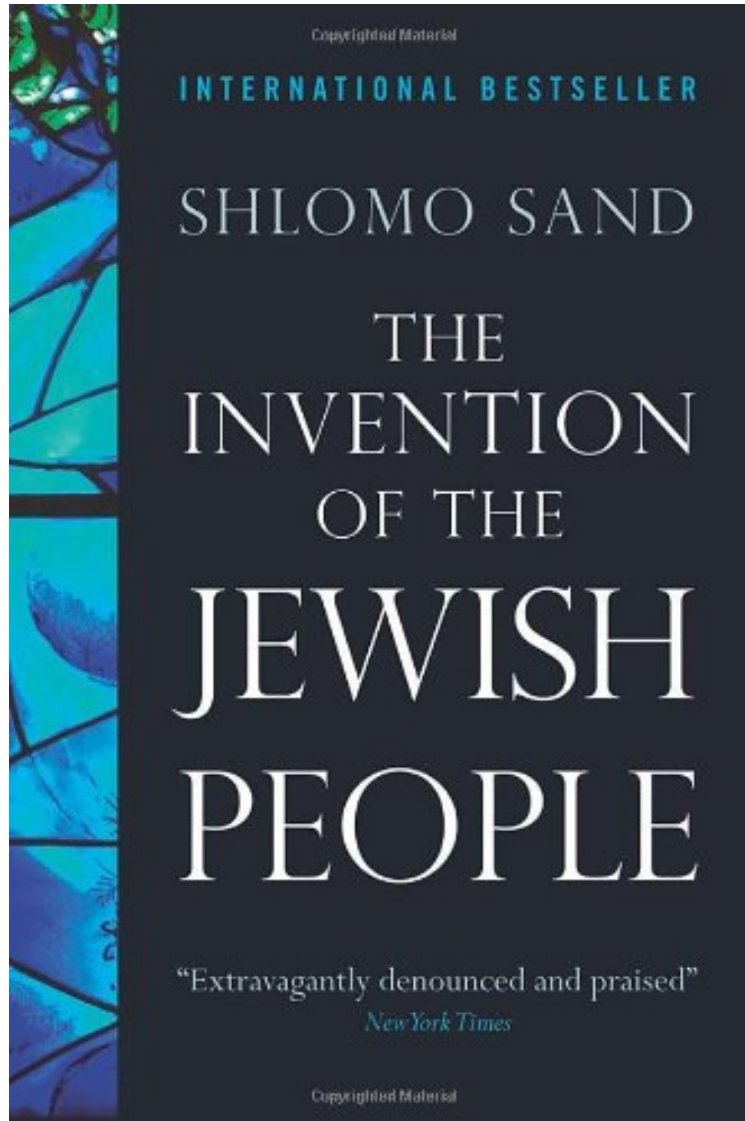


## The Invention of the Jewish People

*Shlomo Sand*

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**Shlomo Sand : The Invention of the Jewish People** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Invention of the Jewish People:

75 of 84 people found the following review helpful. Everyone Should Understand the Truths Within This BookBy CustomerI am not "anti-Semitic." Half the books I read are written by wonderful "Jewish" minds. But there is this horrible confusion in the world today that the people running Israel (and have been stealing from and murdering Arab people for decades) are "Jewish" by blood. They aren't. Almost all people in the Western, modern world today who are regarded as Jews are, for the most part, Russian/Khazarian. That's not a crime. That's fine. But we don't call Irish

people "Catholic," simply because many practice the Catholic religion. Worse yet, the original inhabitants of the Old Testament lands were Semitic...Arab/Phoenician, etc. They are brown or black-skinned (a fact mentioned in the Bible). This very well-written book, written by a Khazarian "Jew," addresses this confusion. Israel, and America's support of it, is the fault-line of the world. These misconceptions, and the Israeli lobby in America, are going to get us all killed. But not if we understood the details of Shlomo Sand's book. I am very grateful for having read it.107 of 119 people found the following review helpful. Reading the reviews is almost as interesting and revealing as reading the book.

By Bill Greenhalf

The basic premise of Shlomo Sand's book should be totally uncontroversial, I can see that the delivery might cause offense to some ultra Zionists, but it is common sense that no group of people could possibly remain racially pure while scattered across Europe and the middle East (and ultimately across the entire world). Jewish is on the one hand a term defining a religion, on the other a race, but more than both it has become a self defined term. If I say I am Jewish you will find it very difficult to disprove my assertion (I do not need to be circumcised, I do not need to go to synagogue and although you may believe my Mother will need to be Jewish - frankly I don't need to agree with you). If I tell my Children they are Jewish they will probably believe me. If my children tell their children they are Jewish they will almost certainly think they are Jewish and identify with every other person who says they are Jewish, regardless of DNA or religion. Anyone who believes that integration of "outsiders" as Jews over the many centuries of the diaspora has not made the Jews at the very least a hybrid group frankly needs to believe in a supernatural force. I would never wish to argue with someones faith - but a faith in a God who requires racial purity is just a little worrying. It is also a little worrying that so many obviously intelligent and reasonable people have taken such vehement offence when reading "The invention of the Jewish People". Perhaps it is the title? Perhaps it is a perceived threat to the state of Israel? I find the most frightening arguments those based on the DNA analysis. I am a molecular biologist, I have read with great interest the papers on mapping human population spread using DNA profiles. I read with some anxiety the description of these generally excellent works as 'phylogenetic'. I read with terror the way these papers are used to support 'phylogenetic' hypotheses. These papers describe links between people, they may explain common susceptibility to disease. They do not describe formation of new 'species' separate from other 'species' of humans. They can only be properly used to join people not to exclude them. The detractors of Shlomo Sand seem to want to say that a separate species has evolved that is Jewish. This is just simply wrong. The people living in Israel may have a right to the land because of conquest; because they are now a majority; or simply because they have got bigger and better weapons (there is a long history of people establishing nations on this basis). There is also a theological argument to say they have a right to the land because they believe themselves to be Jewish and God gave the land to the Jews (not an argument I find particularly convincing). They can provide a theological argument, they cannot provide a genetic argument. No one has a genetic right to any particular piece of real estate (Jewish or Palestinian).

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Judaism as an 'Imagined Community' (and not imaginary) as distinct from a Race

By Malleus Maleficarum

First things first - Shlomo Sand's book is provocative and full of ideas couched in language that may make certain Jews uncomfortable but the majority of the book is built around a sober and reasoned thesis that Jews are not an ethno-biological group but a community of association, created and set apart not by nature but through their own historical experiences and their reactions to the same. His work is primarily a survey of historiography (as opposed to history ab initio) and his main objective is to trace the origins, not of Jews themselves, but of the idea that Jews form an ethnic community distinct from their neighbours. This subsumes a very rich, inter-disciplinary approach that combines history, historiography and nationalism and is no distinct from other studies that seek to trace the rise of nationalism among various groups in the 19th century. The author's broad thesis is that Jews are more of a 'civic' community, rather than an ethnicity and for much of its initial history, Judaism was a proselytizing religion into which outsiders could convert and gain admission. The various diaspora of Jews in the Mediterranean that is talked about in the Bible and Josephus cannot be explained through natural demographics of a single group. I find this hypothesis quite straightforward and convincing and even the most robust critics of Shlomo Sand accept the above. According to the author, it was the opposition and hostility that Jews faced through history, firstly from triumphant Christianity in Antiquity and then European ethnic nationalism in the modern era that forced them to retreat into a more sharply defined ethnic self-conception - one which flew in the face of their history. One of the most powerful parts of the whole essay is where he traces the rise of Jewish ethnic consciousness as a reaction to the rejection of Jews from the emerging narrative of German nationalism (and other 'Eastern' nationalisms) - the triumph of ethnic consciousness in Germany over a more liberal, civic nationalism engendered equal but opposite reactions among Jews as well, who increasingly adopted an ethno-biological identification to create a space for themselves in a European polity where religion, language and nation were increasingly becoming articulated in racial terms. The author is at pains to show that proponents of 'Judaism as an ethnicity' are paradoxically adopting the same vocabulary of blood and race that characterized European anti-semitism in the early part of the 20th century. Once, Jews were persecuted for being an alien presence corrupting the pure racial identity of their nations - today, the acceptance of the 'distinctness' of Jews (of course, now a positive attribute) - lies at the heart of the state of Israel - something which in his views is incompatible with a just society because it condemns the 20% of Israel that is not Jewish to a subordinate status. Shlomo Sand ends his work calling for an end to the ethnic articulation of the Israeli

state which not only alienates segments of its population but also flies in the face of history. In his opinion, no unbiased review of Jewish history can fail to reach the conclusion, to paraphrase Benedict Anderson, the Jewish race is not a race at all, but an imagined community, where linkages have not been forged by blood but through the acceptance of Jewish norms and way of life by an eclectic mix of communities - hence, the state of Israel too, should become a modern imagined community, with adherence to a civic idea of nationalism, open to all, closed to none on account of unalterable biology. I can't end this review without making a reference to some criticisms, one in my view that is justified and the other less so. Firstly, the author is so at pains to prove his hypothesis that he makes some untenable assertions. One of my primary disagreements with him is about his view that the Bible should be read primarily as a book of religious instruction than as history - I find this reading untenable because the Bible to me is a chronicle of the historic evolutions of a community - here I am far more in sync with Richard Horsley and the fine contributors to his collection of essays in the fascinating book, 'In the Shadow of Empires: Reclaiming the Bible as a History of Faithful Resistance'. The other criticism, that of labeling him as anti-Semitic due to his reliance on the 'Khazar Hypothesis' to explain Ashkenazi communities in Europe, I find less convincing. Firstly, the originator of the Khazar hypothesis, Abraham Polak, was a Jew himself and the writer of the most famous popular exposition of the theory, Arthur Koestler, stated explicitly that he wrote this book because he believed that emphasizing the origin of European Jews in a Eurasian population would stop anti-semitism in its tracks. It's a farcical state of affairs when even discussing a theory explicitly put forth to counter anti-semitism is now considered anti-semitic. This is not the endorsement of the theory itself but a condemnation of some of the more hysterical criticism around it. In summary, this is an important book and one that will open up minds about how issues around race and identity are far more complex and usually far more artificial constructs than simple matters of biological fact. You may not agree with many things but I would find it hard to believe that anyone who reads this book with an open mind would come away feeling that the effort was not worth it

A historical tour de force, *The Invention of the Jewish People* offers a groundbreaking account of Jewish and Israeli history. Exploding the myth that there was a forced Jewish exile in the first century at the hands of the Romans, Israeli historian Shlomo Sand argues that most modern Jews descend from converts, whose native lands were scattered across the Middle East and Eastern Europe. In this iconoclastic work, which spent nineteen weeks on the Israeli bestseller list and won the coveted Aujourdhui Award in France, Sand provides the intellectual foundations for a new vision of Israel's future.

Sand's questions about how Israel's democracy can be liberalized and stabilized are thought-provoking and deserve serious discussion. *Haaretz* Perhaps books combining passion and erudition don't change political situations, but if they did, this one would count as a landmark. Eric Hobsbawm, *Observer* [Sand's] quiet earthquake of a book is shaking historical faith in the link between Judaism and Israel. Rafael Behr, *Observer* Anyone interested in understanding the contemporary Middle East should read this book. Tony Judt Extravagantly denounced and praised. *New York Times* No discussion of the region any longer seems complete without acknowledgement of this book. *Independent on Sunday*, Best History Books of 2009 A radical dismantling of a national myth. *Guardian* Almost too baseless to debunk. *Jewish Journal* About the Author Shlomo Sand studied history at the University of Tel Aviv and at the cole des hautes tudes en sciences sociales, in Paris. He currently teaches contemporary history at the University of Tel Aviv. His books include *The Invention of the Jewish People*, *On the Nation and the Jewish People*, *L'illusion du politique: Georges Sorel et le dbat intellectuel 1900*, *Georges Sorel en son temps*, *Le XXe sicle lcran* and *Les Mots et la terre: les intellectuels en Isral*.