



KHAZARS

KHAZARS (Ar., Pers., Turk., *Ḳazar*; Turk. of Turkey, *Hazar*; Old Rus'ian, *Kozar*; Medieval Hebrew, *Kozar* and *Qazar*; Greek, *Xazaroi* [pl.]), the name of a polyethnic tribal confederation in Eastern Europe, from the mid-7th century until the late 10th century, led by a Turkic tribe of the same name. The Khazar confederation/empire was possibly the most long-lived steppe power of Eurasia.

Origins. Parts of the territories of the Khazar state had been occupied in the past by Saka-Scythian tribes, some of whose remnants were later, possibly, assimilated by Turkic-speaking nomads. The related Alans (q.v.), as well as other Eastern Iranian groupings, also featured prominently in Khazar history. The population included both nomadic and settled groups, of Altaic (q.v.; mostly Turkic), Finnic, Ugrian, Slavic, Iranian, and North Caucasian stock. Contemporary sources often used the names “Khazar” and “Turk” interchangeably, reflecting thus the continuation of the Western Turkic Qaġanate (see [KHAGAN](#)) rule among the Khazars. The Khazar state, like many other steppe states, was imported into Western Eurasia. The kernel of the future Khazar confederation was made up of remnants of Attila's European Huns (q.v.; after 454 CE), Oġur and other Turkic tribes driven westwards by the Sabirs, and the Sabirs themselves driven westwards by the Avars (Juanjuan, Uar-Hun). After the Avar supremacy in Mongolia was shaken by the Celestial Blue Turks (Kök Türks/Türküts) in 552, some Avars and Hephthalites (q.v.) arrived in the Volgan-Pontic steppe after 557, where they subjugated some Oġur tribes, but were forced, by the attacking Turks, to migrate to



Pannonia about 567. The Khazars had nothing to do with the Akatzir/Akatir/Ḳotzir tribes or with *ksr* of the 6th-century Byzantine and Syriac sources (see Henning). Thus, Khazars definitely can not appear in genuine texts prior to the mid-7th century (see below). Until the emergence of the Khazar domination in Eastern Europe, which followed the fall of the Western Turkic Qaġanate in 659, the Khazars cannot be distinguished from their masters, the Western Turks (*On Oq*, “the Ten Tribes/Arrows”). When later texts named Khazars prior to the mid-7th century—in the last decades of the Sasanian dynasty in Persia, as an ally of Iran’s foes—they clearly meant the Western Turks, whose earlier dominion the Khazars inherited.

After the disintegration of the Western Turk rule in Western Eurasia (ca. 630-650?), a successor state emerged, that of the Oġuric Bulġars led by Qubrat/Koubratos of the charismatic Dulo [*jula?* cf. Hungarian *gyula*] clan. Their short-lived empire was destroyed by the ethnically—and probably linguistically—close Khazars. The Bulġars split into several groups; one was forced into the northern Volga-Kama basin, where they founded Volga Bulġaria (the present-day Chuvash/Ĉuvaš people and the pre-Mongol Muslim Bulġars of the Volga [nowadays Tatarstan] are their linguistic descendants); one part remained in the steppe zone of Black Bulġaria under Khazar suzerainty; one part, lead by Khan Asparukh (q.v.), migrated westwards and conquered Byzantine Moesia, populated then by Slavic-speaking tribes and by Romance-speaking Vlachs (present-day Bulgaria, or Danubian Bulgaria), having established there their typical nomadic conquest state (ca. 679). The Khazars saw their war against the Bulġars, whom they called by the Oġuric form *wnntr* (*Onoġundur; cf. Old Hungarian *Nándor*), as the founding point when their rule in the steppe has been established. After having conquered Bulġaria Magna in the steppe and forest region of Eastern Europe, the Khazars established their rule in parts of the Crimea, except for Byzantine Chersonese, and there they played an active role in dealing with Justinian II (r. 685-95, 705-711) during his exile, while the Danubian Bulġars also took their part in different plots.

The name of the Khazars. This has been variously explained as derived from the Oġuric form of the Uyghur tribe *Qasar*; from the Kidara Chionites (q.v.); from different Turkic verbal stems with meanings “to ramble, to roam,” with the same semantics as *qazaq*, “dissenter, freebooter,” cf. “Cossack” and “kazakh/kazaġ”; from the title *caesar* > Middle Persian *kēsar* (cf. Tibetan *dru-gu Ge-sar*, “Turk. Gesar,” and the Mongolian *Gesar*; for the existing theories,



see Golden, 2007, pp. 15-17); *Kwzr* is the spelling of the Hebrew *Book of Yosippon* and Judah Halevy (1075 or 1086-1141), while the Jewish Khazar tradition used *Kzr* for the tribe and *Qzr* for the *Qağan* (*Qzr kgn*); Arabo-Persian authors have *Kzr*.

Early history and the Arab-Khazar wars. The Muslims preceded the Khazars in Transcaucasia, beginning from 21/641-42, and not *vice versa*. Immediately after the first Arab raid in Transcaucasia, another one followed, with Balanjar/Balanger having been attacked in 22/642 (Ṭabari, ed. de Goeje, I, 2667-68) and 32/652 (Ṭabari, ed. de Goeje, I, 2889-91; probably, the present day Endere, Dāğestān [q.v.], later a Khazar capital, cf. Mas‘udi, *Tanbih*, p. 62). This was done by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Rabi‘a Bāheli, the Arab general and governor of Armenia under the caliph ‘Omar, contrary to the advice not to do so given by Šahrbarāz, the former Sasanian commander of Darband (q.v.; Ṭabari, ed. de Goeje, I, 2667). The Arabic sources name the pagan nomadic foes “Khazars”; these did not dare to fight the Arabs having seen them with awe, so these were able to proceed as far as Bayzā (q.v.; differently identified), 200 (or 20?) *farsangs* away. However, the Arabs withdrew, and this is how a pattern in the Khazar-Arab military intercourse was established—a deep penetration into the foe’s territory, then a retreat. In 32/652, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Rabi‘a Bāheli attacked Balanjar with a great army, but this time the “Khazars” risked an encounter with the Arabs and resisted them boldly, even though the Arabs used *majāniq* (catapults) and *‘arrādāt* (ballistae). The Arab commander was defeated and killed (Ṭabari, ed. de Goeje, I, 2889-92; ed. Ebrāhim, IV, pp. 304-5; Dunlop, 1954, chaps. 3-4). It was about this time, somewhere in the 650s, that the Khazar power became gradually discernible from that of the Western Turks. Still, circa 661-62 and in the 680s, the northern nomads who attacked Transcaucasia were known as Huns, not Khazars; Armenian sources (Movsēs Dasxuranc‘i, Asołig [q.v.], Łewond) report their attacks in Caucasian Albania (q.v.) in the early sixties and eighties of the 7th century. Much fighting was carried out for the control of Darband/Bāb al-Abwāb, formerly a Sasanian fortress to check the northern nomads. It is, however, clear, from Movsēs Dasxuranc‘i’s description of the mission of the Albanian-Gregorian bishop Israyēl to the capital of these attackers, Varač’an (located in the present day Qaytāq region of Dāğestān), in 681-82, that they were not Khazars, but Huns, possibly, with some connections to the Khazar Empire newly established in the north (ca. 670). The ruler of these Huns bore the Turkic title, Alp‘ Ilit‘uēr (*Alp il-teber/tever); the Huns worshipped the “King of the Sky,” Tāngrī Khan, associated with *Spandiat* (Av. Spəntō.dāta, Mid. Pers. Spandyād) as well, sacred



woods and lightning, and their shamanism as described by the source was typical Turkic; however, their mythology was possibly touched by Iranian pre-Zoroastrian motifs (Dowsett, pp. 155-56, 161), although one could explain these apparently Iranian motifs as part of Bishop Israyēl's attempt to translate Turkic myths into Iranian ones, more familiar to his Armenian-reading audience.

The Muslims retook Darband from the “Turks” in 95/713-14 and penetrated the steppe of present-day northern Dāğestān (Ṭabari, ed. de Goeje, II, pp. 1200, 1217; Ebn Tağrībardi, I, p. 255). Consequently, the Khazars invaded the realm of Islam, for the first time, in 99/717 (Kmosko, p. 361). Ḥātem b. al-No'mān Bāheli was sent to repel the invasion and returned with a triumph, bringing the first Khazar prisoners in chains (Ṭabari, ed. de Goeje, II, p. 1346; later, Khazar *golāms* became fashionable in the lands of the caliphate, see Golden, 2004). A few years later, the Khazars defeated the Arabs at Marj al-Ḥejāra in Armenia, and the Arabs fled to Syria (Ebn al-Aṭir, Beirut ed., IV, pp. 360-61; Bal'ami apud Dorn, p. 509). Jarrāḥ al-Ḥakami was appointed governor of Armenia and he proceeded northwards to Rubās (an Iranian-speaking territory) in Dāğestān (q.v.). *Barjik (on the form, see Shapira, 2016), “son of the accursed Qağan,” arrived with an army 40,000 strong, but the Arabs had the upper hand, and Ḥamzin and Tarḡu fell; their inhabitants were removed to Qabāla in Transcaucasia, where in later days Khazars were still found (Ṭabari, ed. de Goeje, II, p. 1453; Bal'ami apud Dorn, pp. 512-13; Balāḍori, tr. Hitti, p. 194). Jarrāḥ al-Ḥakami advanced to Balanjar defended by a wagons' barricade, as was common with the nomads, and the Arabs took the city, with each horseman in their army receiving 300 dinars. It seems that many of the inhabitants escaped, taking a route north to Volgan Bulḡaria. By spring, Jarrāḥ invaded Khazaria again through the Darial pass (Dar-e Alān) and operated beyond Balanjar, having subjugated the Alans in 106/725 (Ṭabari, ed. de Goeje, II, 1472; Ebn al-Aṭir, sub anno 106); the next year Jarrāḥ was removed and replaced by Maslama b. 'Abd al-Malek, who was appointed the ruler of Arminiya (Armenia). Maslama advanced from Darial and fought the Qağan for a month, but the Khazars fled under cover of a heavy rain; the next year they attacked Azarbaijan again. Jarrāḥ was re-appointed instead of Maslama, attacked the Khazars via Darial, and occupied the Khazar capital Bayzā.



Figure 1. The Khazar lands, ca. 650-850. Map created with Generic Mapping Tools (gmt.soest.hawaii.edu).

The next year (112/730) witnessed the greatest Khazar victory over the Arabs. The Khazars, under the command of the aforementioned Barjik, invaded Transcaucasia via Darial, while Jarrāḥ retreated to Bardā'a and then to Ardabil (q.v.). Instead of taking a position on Sabalān mountain (q.v.), Jarrāḥ engaged the Khazars on the plain of Ardabil. After a three-day long battle, the Muslims were all dead or had fled, with the Khazars taking much booty (Ebn al-Aṭīr, sub anno 112/730; Bal'ami apud Dorn, p. 519; Ṭabari, ed. de Goeje, II, 1531, 1595; a reference to the booty of Ardabil appears some 230 years later in the letter of Khazar King Joseph sent to Spain as evidence of Khazar prowess; Bal'ami's account kept the material abridged in Ṭabari; Shapira, 2016). The Khazars advanced to Diārbakr (see AMIDA) and Mosul, but were pushed back, and, in 113/731, Maslama entered Khazar territories as far north as Balanjar and then over the mountains of Balanjar to Samandar, while Christian rulers of Transcaucasia sided with the Khazars. However, there the desire to retreat



appeared, and the Arabs returned to Darband. A battle was fought with the pursuing Khazar army (cf. Dunlop, 1954, p. 78 n. 90). The Qağan was wounded while in his decorated tented car (**čadára*, Pers, *čādor* [q.v.], according to Erdal, 2007, p. 80), and the Arabs won the day.

We have an indication of the enduring Khazar-Byzantine alliance in the fact that a couple of years thereafter, Constantine, son of Leo the Isaurian, married Tzitzak, *Čiček (Turkic for “flower”; baptized Irene), the daughter of the Qağan, and their son, Leo IV (775-80), was known as “the Khazar.” In 740, Leo III and Constantine V defeated at Acroinon an Arab army that was plundering Anatolia. This victory represented a halt to the Arab expansion. Prior to that, in 114/732, the year of the Arab defeat at Poitiers/Tours by Charles Martel (732), Marwān b. Muḥammad (known in Georgian sources, because of his cruelty, as *Murvan Qru*, ‘the Deaf’) pushed past Balanjar with an army of 40,000; however, heavy rain stopped this campaign. In 110/737, Marwān declared that he was about to attack the Alans and received a truce from the Qağan; instead, he advanced again into the Khazar realm, with an army of about 150,000, past Balanjar and only then declared war. Having reached Bayzā, he pursued the Qağan, who fled to the land of Finno-Ugrian Burtās further north; Marwān’s forces advanced northwards on the right bank of the Volga, while the Khazar army under a Hazār ʿArḳān was following the left bank, until the Arabs had built a pontoon bridge and crossed to the left bank, destroying the Khazar army. The Qağan promised to accept Islam. Two *faqih*s (jurists) were sent to instruct him in his new religion, and Marwān departed for home, taking with him much booty and many prisoners.

Conversion to Judaism. Some Muslim historians state that the Qağan had become Muslim in 737 (Ebn Aʿtam Kufī, in Togan, 1939, p. 298, tr. pp. 301-2), but this conversion was short-lived. The Jewish philosopher and poet, Judah Halevy, writing in Spain in 1140, reported that the Qağan became a Jew 400 years ago (=740); however, he rather used the Khazar conversion as a pretext “to defend the despised religion” (*Ketāb al-ḥojjah wal-dalil fi noṣr al-din al-dalil*, as the original name of his *ha-Kōzari* was). A Georgian text, *Martyrdom of St. Abo of Tbilisi*, written in 786-787 (Bíró, 1975, p. 295; 1977, p. 259), tells of the conversion to Christianity, in Khazaria, and subsequent martyrdom, in Tbilisi, of a well-educated Muslim youth from Baghdad, *Ḥabīb/Habo /Abo, who came to Tbilisi with the local Kartlian ruler, Nerse. The description of Khazar ways of life in the last quarter of the 8th century as found in Abo’s *Vita* includes: the “Khazars sons of Magog” were Mongoloid (*sašinel p ‘irita*, “with horrible



faces”), pagan (“having no religious law”), blood-eating and savage (*k’ac velur*); they worshipped the Creator (*šemokmedi*), the Turkic God of Heavens *Tängri* (*Tāngrī*). The text makes mention of Christians in Khazaria, but there is no reference to either Muslims or Jews. However, in the 9th century, the Khazar royal house converted to Judaism, to be followed by their entourage, some members of the hardcore tribes of the confederation, and by individuals and groups beyond the Eteo-Khazar tribe (“real Khazars,” see Marquart, 1903, p. 41, n. 2). The extent of the conversion is unknown; the Muslim sources stress that the Jews were the smallest religious group.

The Khazar conversion to Judaism is ascribed in Jewish-Khazar and some Muslim sources, as well as hinted at in two Christian Slavic texts, to a religious dispute at the Khazar ruler’s court between a Jew, a Christian, and a Muslim, in which the Jew won. The Khazar conversion to Judaism was basically not different from the conversions of different Turkic states at about the same time, to stateless religions, like Buddhism or Manicheism, brought by Sogdian merchants, or to Nestorian Christianity and Islam slightly later. The role played in Khazaria by the Jewish counterparts of the Sogdian traders and missionaries in Eastern Eurasia should have been similar. In the 8th century, or maybe even earlier, Jewish merchants operated on the northern segment of the Silk Road (the first written document in the Persian language, though showing some Sogdian linguistic impact, is a Jewish business letter from Khotan [Dandān Öiliq, q.v.] in Western China, dated ca. 718 CE; there is also a 9th-century Hebrew fragment from Dunhuang [q.v.] and a closely related letter in Judeo-Persian from the early 9th century found in Xinjiang in 2004), albeit Sogdians as rivals were too hard to beat (on Sogdians, Jews on the Silk Road, and the Rāhdānites, see further Ebn Kordāqbeh, p. 153; tr. p. 116; Berger and Schwab; Cahen, 1964, 1972; Gil, 1974; McCormick, esp. pp. 688-95; Pletnyova; Utas; de la Vaissière, pp. 180 ff.; Wu Chi-yu).

Another factor in the conversion was the broader cultural context of the Šo’ubi movement and the “Abbasid mentality,” as is exemplified by the Samanids, who were both the Khazars’ neighbors and their most important trading partner; the Khazar understanding of what Judaism represented was deeply rooted in Islamic cultural concepts; this is evinced in particular in the fact that the conversion did not signify a break with the previous Turkic traditions of the Khazars (Shapira, 2005). Likewise, the Khazar view of the status of their Judaism in the surrounding geopolitical circumstances was basically Islamic: seeing themselves as an empire, their Judaism signified for the Khazars their



imperial status—not merely independence from both the caesar and the caliph, not a “neutral” religion, but the Third Force, the First Faith (*din Yisrā’el šehu dinō šel Avrahām*, ‘the Law/Faith of Israel is exactly the Law/Faith of Abraham,’ in the “Short Recension” of King Joseph’s reply to Ḥisday b. Šaprūt [ca. 915-975]). On the other hand, it seems that the Judaized Khazars, or at least some of them, were not eager to be counted among the descendants of Abraham, preferring to be the descendants of Togarmah. In the course of the 10th century, the Khazar “political class” was becoming more and more Muslim, not Jewish; Judaism kept the Khazar state from being absorbed by the Islamic world (which actually happened ca. 969), and this Islamic context of Khazar Judaism can partly explain why only Muslim authors, of all the Khazars’ contemporary neighbors, made mention of their Judaism at all.

The date of conversion and religious dispute. The exact date of the Khazar conversion is still disputed. Mas‘udi (*Moruj*, II, pp. 8-9), writing between 332-36/943-47, said that in the Khazar capital live “Muslims, Christians, Jews and pagans; the Jews are the king, his attendants, and the Khazars of his (the king’s) *jens*. The king of the Khazars had already become a Jew in the caliphate of Hārūn al-Rašid.” Mas‘udi immediately contradicted himself about the eteo-Khazar identity of the Jews, adding that since 332/943-44, the year when he began his book, Jews fled to Khazaria as the result of a forced conversion to Christianity by Romanus Lecapenus (r. 920-44). Mas‘udi added examples of earlier waves of Jewish immigration that one finds also in the Jewish-Khazar Correspondence (see in the Bibliography), where Babylonia, Byzantium, and Khorasan are specifically mentioned. The date of the conversion to Judaism, as given in Mas‘udi, has been explained differently by scholars: Demašqi (ca. 727/1327) combines the accounts of Mas‘udi about the anti-Jewish Byzantine Emperor (*šāheb qoštānaniya*) and Hārūn al-Rašid (p. 263, tr. p. 380), but ascribes his account to Ebn al-Aṭir (q.v.), whose *floruit* was 1160-1234. He says that the Jews expelled from Byzantium found in Khazaria an intelligent but simple people (*qawm ‘oqalā’ sādejin*) and the Jews offered the Khazars their religion, which the latter found better than their own and accepted. However, no such passage is found in Ebn al-Aṭir and Mas‘udi must be meant (Marquart, 1903, p. 6). Demašqi speaks later about the Khazar conversion to Islam, as a precondition to receive K̅v̅ārazmian (see CHORASMIA) support against the invading Turks, and attributes this, too, to Ebn al-Aṭir. It happened, he said, in 254/868 or 204/819-820 (p. 263, tr. p. 380); these dates, especially taking into account the death of Hārūn al-Rašid in 809 CE, are impossible. Probably this should be emended to *354/965, exactly the



date of the fall of Khazaria (see below). Bakri (d. ca. 487/1094) states that the king of the Khazars had been a Magian who then accepted Christianity; however, having doubts about this faith, he consulted his advisor who suggested a dispute between representative scholars of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. The Jews beat the Christian bishop and hired someone to poison the Muslim, and so they won and the Khazar king became a Jew (I, p. 44). This account has no parallels in other Muslim texts, but the tradition about a religious disputation and the role of a close advisor to the Khazar ruler has its exact correspondents in Hebrew accounts of the event. Eṣṭakrī (q.v.; pp. 220-26), writing about 320/932, said that the Khazar king, called in their language *bak* and *bāk*, is a Jew, and so is his court; the Khazars are Muslims, Christians, Jews, and idolaters, with the Jews being the smallest group. Eṣṭakrī's information was extensively used in the two versions of Ebn Ḥawqal (q.v.), edited by de Goeje and Kramers, and by Yāqut (II, pp. 436-40), with the latter blending it with information from the account of Ebn Faḏlān (q.v.). Ebn al-Faqīh (q.v.) wrote about 290/903 that “the Khazars are all Jews and have lately become so” (p. 298). Though admitting that the Khazar supreme ruler and his *i[x] šā [d]* and their entourage were Jewish, the Persian geographer Ebn Rosta (q.v.; p. 139)—based on the lost text of Jayhāni, who in turn, owed much to Moslem b. Abi Moslem Jarmi (fl. 231/846)—noted that Khazar paganism was similar to the religion of the Turks.

Some scholars opted for a date of the conversion slightly after 863 CE (Marquart, 1903, p. 23) or about 865 (Vernadsky, p. 351). Dunlop (1954, p. 115), tended to accept a date after 860. Other scholars, relying on a legendary version, opted for a multi-staged process of the conversion to full Rabbinical Judaism, from some “primitive” or “stoichaic” form of this religion (beginning ca. 740, the date given by Judah Halevy, and culminating ca. 800 or in the 840s; see Dunlop, 1954, p. 170; Pritsak, 1978, pp. 278-79; Ludwig, pp. 161-63), while Zuckerman connected the Khazar conversion directly with the failure of the Byzantine mission in 861 led by the Thessalonica-born brothers Cyril and Methodius to the Qaḡan (Zuckerman, 1995), leaving thus no time span for the two-staged conversion. In any case, it is clear that the Judaism as adopted in Khazaria was rabbinical, and not the Karaite one (Shapira, 2007a). Around 854 there *may have been* some religious problems in Khazaria, and some Muslims left to resettle in Islamic countries (Golden, 1980, p. 134). Now we have an indication of the earlier spread of Judaism in Khazaria. In 2002, a coin from a Viking hoard in Sweden was identified as having been minted by Jewish Khazars. The coin is an imitation of Arabic coinage and was minted in



837 or 838 in Khazaria, bearing the Arabic inscription *lā ilāha illā-Allāh wa Musā rasūl All āh* and a *tamḡ ā* seal (Kovalev, 2004, pp. 97-129, and 2005).

There are two primal Jewish versions of the conversion story: According to the popular one (the “Cambridge [or Schechter] Document”; see in the Bibliography below), many Jews were scattered among the Khazars from the old days, having no Torah. There was no king (*melekh*), but as soon as a Jew became a military leader, according to their ancient custom, he returned to Judaism. Afterwards, “this Jewish big chieftain,” pressed by the Muslims and the Byzantines, organized a religious disputation, and, at a moment of difficulty, the Khazar nobles sought Jewish books that were stored in a cave, certainly reflecting the memory of an old Turkic tradition. The books they found proved the veracity of the Jewish faith. It seems certain that the Cambridge Document, with its account of the cave, was seen by the Jewish majordomo of the Córdoba caliph, Ḥisday b. Šaprūt; this tradition was also known to Judah Halevy. Then, this heretofore unnamed Jewish military leader and promoter of Judaism had his name changed to *Sabriel* and was made king (*mlk*) over them. Before *Sabriel* was crowned, another reform took place, namely that “the men of the land appointed over them one of the sages as judge; they call him in the language of Khazar *kgn*; for this reason the name given to the judges who arose after him has been *kgn* until this day”. It is obvious that this text was written from the point of view of the descendants of *Sabriel*, particularly the vizier or *bek/mlk*, who claimed for himself a Jewish progeny. Remarkably, what is absent from the version of the Cambridge Document is the motif of the dream, in which God revealed Himself to the Khazar ruler through an angel.

Another, more developed, tradition appears in the “Reply” or letter of the Khazar ruler Joseph to Hisday b. Šaprūt. Joseph himself relates that there was one monotheistic king (*mlk*) called *Bwl’n*, under whose rule what was probably seen as the second Giving of the Torah took place. This still non-Jewish ruler was dubbed king—thus contradicting the version of the Cambridge Document. An angel revealed himself in a series of dreams to *Bwl’n*, saying to him, “I saw your conduct, and I was satisfied with your deeds,” the statement quoted—in Arabic—much later, in somewhat different wording, by Judah Halevy. *Bwl’n* asked the angel to reveal itself to “a certain chieftain of theirs,” who was probably the *qaḡan*. The angel did as asked, and the Khazars accepted Judaism. The Khazars hardly saw any difference between their ancient *Tāngr ī*, invisible and unique god of Heaven, who allots



kings their destinies, and the God of Israel. *Bwl'n* is called *mlk*, which is the same term used by the Cambridge Document to characterize *Sabriel*, leaving no doubt that *Bwl'n* and *Sabriel* were the same person (Shapira, 1998-99); in parallel Turkic dream-inspired conversion stories, the dream appears *first* to the supreme ruler, and *later* to his vizier, and a religious disputation follows, as was the case, e.g., with the conversion of the Uigurs to Manicheism; Joseph did not claim Jewish ancestry, and did not try to make his ancestor *Bwl'n*, who bore a Turkic name, an ethnic Jew, whereas the author of the Cambridge Document positioned his circumcised *Sabriel*, with his Hebrew name, as a Jewish (but heavily assimilated) Jew. This means that the author of the Reply of Joseph ascribed to Joseph's ancestor the dream of the *qağan*, something the author of the Cambridge Document was still unable to do, for this reason skipping the dream story altogether. According to some scholars, *Bwl'n* acquired his name from the Turkic word *bulan*, meaning "elk." However, it may be the case that the names *Bwl'n* and *Sabriel* are actually synonymous. The unusual name *Sabriel*, formed from the root meaning "to think, hope, believe, find out, understand," is unattested in other Jewish sources as a man's name, but is probably a translation of the Oğuz (see ĞOZZ) Turkic *bulan*, "one who finds out," or *bilen*, "one who knows." Within the dream, God promised *Bwl'n* that his descendants would rule for a thousand generations. This expression finds exact parallels in Turkic royal parlance. According to Joseph, his dynasty owes its royal status to the natural order of things, in accordance with traditional steppe peoples' views on sacred royalty. He also wrote that God sent *Bwl'n* to plunder the lands of the caliphate, and this war apparently was destined to prove the validity of the revelation and the new religion.

Next, God told *Bwl'n* to build a House for Him so that He may dwell in it, and articles that had been used in the tabernacle or in the Jerusalem Temple were prepared. It was only then that the religious disputation followed. Remarkably, Joseph's letter does not mention the cave full of books. This report about the construction of the sacred objects is a pious legend, whose purpose was seen to trace the origin of the office of the *bek/mlk* to the period prior to the religious disputation under the *qağan*, thus establishing the leading role of the *bek/mlk* in the process of Judaization. This construction of the articles that the Children of Israel had built in the Wilderness runs against everything that orthodox Judaism, whether Rabbanite or Karaite, stands for, and this activity was seen by some scholars as reflecting an early, "primitive" or "stoichaic" stage of the Khazar conversion to what some dubbed as "pure



Biblical Mosaism.” The tradition about the natural, *stoichaic* stage of the Khazar Judaism may have been coined in order to present the older Turkic religion as a certain form of, if not Judaism, at least monotheism, so as to describe the passage to proper Judaism as having been smoother than it actually was. Joseph emphasized his Rabbanite affiliation. This is evident not only from the very fact of the correspondence with the Rabbanite Jew from Spain, but also from his short quotations from three Rabbanite prayers; from his presenting himself as “the wise man who loves sages”; from the quote from the Rabbanite *Haggādāh shel Pésakh*; from the explicit statement that the Khazar ruler “brought in sages of Israel from different places and they explicated for him the Torah and arranged for him (the way of fulfillment of) the commandments/... he gathered in the sages of Israel ... and they explicated for him the 24 books (of the Hebrew Bible) and Mishnah and Talmud and the prayer books of the *hazzāns*”; from the reference to the *Yeshivoth of Jerusalem and Babylonia* as the sources of religious authority for the Khazar Jews; and, finally, from the mere mention of the festival of *Hanukkah*. However, in the view of the present author, the references to the articles used in the tabernacle or in the Jerusalem Temple and to the reform of the pious (and never-existing) King ‘Obadiah, as well as all the “Rabbanizing” references, were added to the document while it was being copied in Spain in the early 11th century.

Dual rulership. Turkic empires knew of dual kingship and bipartite rulership, with the supreme ruler ritually isolated and inactive, and with the lesser ruler actually in charge (Czeplédy, 1966). In the developed Khazar state as described by the late 9th and 10th century sources, the supreme ruler was the shaman-like *qağan*, whom the author of *Ḥodud al- ‘Ā lam* (q.v.), writing ca. 372/982-83 but working from older texts, called *tarkān-kāqān* (p. 193). The sacral isolation of the *qağan* developed gradually; in 862, we still have him described by Methodius, brother of St. Cyril, as the acting ruler, with a high-ranking advisor close to him (no doubt, the *beg*—or *qağan-beg*, *šad*, *yelig*—, called also king, *malik/melek*, by the Arabic, Persian, and Jewish sources). Ebn Rosta (writing ca. 290/902-3) called the Khazar king *ʿyšā*, and their supreme king (= *qağan*), *al-malek al-aʿzam*, he called *kazar-kāqān* (exactly as in the Hebrew Cambridge Document), noting that the latter does not execute any real power. Abu Saʿid ‘Abd-al-Ḥayy Gardizi (q.v.; d. 444/1052-53), who used sources almost identical with those of Ebn Rosta, had a better reading for the title of the Khazar king, *ʿyšād* (p. 272 n. 2); this title is nothing else but the Sogdian *ʿyšy* (from Av. *xšaēta*- *shining, radiant); the *qağan* was called by him *malek-e bozorg* and *kazar-k āqān*. Ebn Faḏlān wrote about 922, and he



called the Khazar king *k āqān-beh* (*pechi* in Byzantian sources), i.e., *beg (q.v.). Under this king are **kü/endü- k āqān* and *jāwšīğır*. The Great King, i.e., the *qağān*, is described as merely the bearer of *qut* (=Av. *x^varənah-*, see FARR[AH]), the royal fortune, and this description is followed also by Mas'udi (ca. 935 CE). Eştakri (q.v.; d. 346/957-58) and Ebn Ḥawqal (q.v.; d. 367/977-78), quoted by Yāqut, called the king *bek* and **yilig* (Byzantine *Ielech*) (Golden, 1975). The Hebrew sources distinguish between the *meleḵ* (the *beg*) and the *qazar-qağān*. The Old Rus'ian source probably differentiated between *knyaz'* and *kagan*.

Many modern authors connected the usurpation of the actual power by the *beg* with conversion to Judaism and/or with the revolt of the Qabars against the central authority (of unknown date and reported only by Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos), both taking place—allegedly—in the second half of the 9th century, but these views cannot be substantiated (Golden, 1983). Others thought that the defeat by the Arabs in 737 and the *qağān's* short-lived conversion to Islam were instrumental in the process of take over by the *beg* (Novosel'tsev, pp. 137-42). Golden (2007a) suggested that the growing power of the standing army of the eastern Iranian-Muslim ("K^vārazmian"; cf. Lewicki) Ors/Aorsoi/Urus/*al-orsiya* mercenaries, who were apparently bearers of the traditions of Iranian sacred monarchy, was here more at work than any other factor, including the conversion of the ruling groups to Judaism. In Mas'udi's times (*Moruj*, II, p. 10), the powerful vizier Aḥmad b. Kuyah (*Kuwayh?) was one of these Iranians (see Golden, 1993). In the mid-19th century, Avraham Firkowicz (1787-1874) used the account of the contest of religions of the Russian Primal Chronicle, as retold by N. Karamzin, to create two allegedly old documents in Hebrew in which St. Vladimir also sent his embassy to a Khazar prince, David, in the Crimea, for an analogous contest of religions; the documents have now been shown to be forgeries (Shapira, 2007d).

Race. Eştakri (p. 223) made mention of the pure-bred (*kāleş*) Khazars, or Eteo-Khazars (cf. discussion in Dunlop, 1954, pp. 93-94, n. 21); he also discerned between two kinds of the Khazars, stating that they do not resemble the Turks: one kind is swarthy similar to Indians, and is called Qara-Khazar (Black Khazars), the other being white and strikingly handsome. In the 20th century, this remark was frequently interpreted as either in racist or Marxist terms (in Turkic languages and—in Russian, as calques—"black people" means "un-noble oppressed masses," while "white bone" means



“nobles”), or even as a reference to Karaites.

Language. Many languages were spoken in the Khazar realm, with the Eteo-Khazar being only one of them. Arabic sources frequently confuse Turks and Khazars: Eṣṭakri stated in one place that the Bulḡar language is like the language of the Khazars, thus giving rise to the Chuvash-Bulḡar (or, Oḡuric) theory about the exact linguistic affiliation of the Khazar language, while stating in another place that the language of the Khazars is different from the languages of the Turks and the Persians, adding that the Khazar language has nothing in common with any other language (ed. de Goeje, pp. 222, 225). Hungarian scholars tend to view the Khazar language (so important for the earlier strata of the Hungarian history) as Oḡuric. So far, more than fifty “Khazar” words are known, with only one being Oḡuric (Sarkel, “the white fortress”) and with the bulk not supporting the Oḡuric theory (Golden, 1971, 1980, 2006; Erdal, 2005, 2007). However, it can be argued that the original language of the Eteo-Khazars, a comparatively small tribal minority, *could* have been Oḡuric, but later they could have switched to Common Turkic (or, even to a non-Turkic language, as can be grasped from Ya‘qub b. Ebrāhim’s remark that the Khazars who come to Prague speak Slavic, etc.). There was even an attempt to explain the name of the first Jewish Khazar king, Bulan, by an analogy with an Oḡuz form of much later date (Shapira, 1998-99). Examples of a ruling tribe switching to the language of their subjects are numerous (Franks, Danubian Bulḡars, Norsemen in Normandy, Scandinavian Rus’, Mongols in the Turkic world, etc.). Certainly an Oḡuro-Bulḡaric tongue was one of the languages spoken in Khazaria; nevertheless, our knowledge of the Khazar linguistic situation is far from being adequate. In addition, it is by no means certain that the bulk of Khazar Jews were Turkic-speaking. A/the Khazar language was the vehicle through which many North-Caucasian, including the Iranian Ossetic, and Turkic languages acquired a number of Hebrew words; there are Hebrew loan words also in the Oḡuric Chuvash, the fact being brought as an evidence for the Oḡuric nature of the Eteo-Khazar (Kuz’min-Yumanadi; at least one “Khazar” word is attested in Russian, *pakost’*, “dirt”). Some traits in grammatical inventory common to Chuvash and northern dialects of Azeri have been ascribed to the Khazar language (Gadzhieva and Serebrennikov).

Script. Khazar texts known so far are all written in the Hebrew language and script; it is not impossible that they used Hebrew characters also for writing their language(s); Ebn al-Nadim (I, p. 20) mentioned, writing after the fall of



Khazaria, that the Khazars used the Hebrew script. Short texts in unknown language(s), inscribed in unknown variant(s) of Turkic runes, have been found throughout the Khazar's territory. The runic word on the Hebrew "Kiev Letter" might come not from Khazaria (Erdal, 2005; 2007), but possibly from Danuban Bulḡaria (see below).

Khazar cities. Two earlier Khazar capitals, Samandar (probably an Iranian name) and Balanjar, have been located in the vicinity of Darband, to make easier conducting the war against the Muslims (probably, one was the winter capital, and the second one was the summer capital; on these capitals, cf. Mas'udi, *Tanbih*, p. 42; *Moruj*, II, p. 7). Samandar, known for its gardens and vineyards, is identified by some scholars with Qızlar/Kizljar or with Tarqu, and Balanjar with Verkhneie Ćir-Yurt, or Endere in Daḡestān. Later, the capital had moved to Itil/Atil (Turkic for the Volga river), somewhere at the estuary; it was located next to Ḳazarān (apparently Iranian, from "Khazars"), a major trading center; by the 10th century, the population of the twin city of Itil-Ḳazarān was composed of Muslims, Jews, Christians, and pagans. The king's palace was located on a nearby island. Some, beginning with Lev Gumilev (1912-92), believed that Itil went underwater, due to the changes of the level of the Caspian Sea. However, the site of Itil is said to have been found recently in the lower layers of a hill near the village of Samosdelka, 60 kilometers to the southwest of Astrakhan (q.v.).

Sarkel, located near the Volga-Don portage, was built for the Khazars by Byzantine engineers headed by Petronas, while using local techniques, in the mid-9th century; the city was supposed to provide defense from the Proto-Magyars. Sarkel/Bela Vezha (Old Russian for "white tower/fortress") was captured by the Rus' during their grand campaign against the Khazars, the event mentioned in the Old-Rus'ian *Primary Chronicle* under 6473/965: "Svyatoslav [the Rus'ian *knyaz*] went out against the Khazars; and the Khazars, having heard of this, went out with their *knyaz* [*and?] the Qaḡan, and came together in battle, and having fought, Svyatoslav defeated the Khazars and took their city [*and?] Bela Vezha" (author's translation; Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, p. 84); it is not clear whether Sarkel and the capital of Itil are meant. The city was excavated by the Artamonov teams during the 1930s and the late 1940, then submerged by the Tsimliansk reservoir.

The location of Bayzā is questionable. Other Khazar cities were Varačan (in Daḡestān), Samkerč (near Taman' on the Taman' peninsula), Kerch (for short periods of time), Ḳamlij (written also otherwise, possibly identical with Itil),



Sarišin, possibly identical with the post-Khazar Saqsın. Chufut-Kale and Mangup in the Crimea were claimed to contain Jewish graves from the Khazar period; however, all the “Khazar evidence” is forged (Shapira, 2002-3, 2007a, 2008); Kiev is said sometimes to have been founded by Jews, or Khazars, or Proto-Magyars, with no basis at all.

Khazar economy. The economy was built on a combination of livestock breeding, especially of sheep, and gardening (seasonal going out to the field is mentioned in the Reply of King Joseph). Trade in furs and in pagan slaves with the Muslim lands; taxes on the traders, especially on ships; and tribute from the conquered tribes were also important. Among the items of Khazar trade were furs, fish (esp. salted or smoked), candle wax, honey, jewelry, silverware, isinglass, and coins from the Muslim lands. After the fall of Khazaria, “Khazars” were seen in the Byzantine Empire as the providers/sellers of caviar (and fish?; see Kordosis).

Traders in Khazar merchandise were mostly Muslims (eastern Iranians, as it seems), the Rus’ Vikings, and, possibly, some Jews (albeit the evidence on is scarce). Eṣṭakri (p. 220) says that the slaves brought from Khazaria are idolators, for Muslims, as well as Jews and Christians, do not enslave those of their own religion. The Spanish Jew, Ya‘qub b. Ebrāhim, who failed to note Judaism in Khazaria, noted in 986 that the Khazar traders in Prague spoke Slavic. (On Khazar trade, coins, and economy, see further Haussig; Kovalev, 2004, 2005; Naumenko and Bezuglov; Noonan, 1982, 1983a, 1983b, 1984, 1985, 1987-1991, 1992, 1994, and 1995-1997; Pletnyova, 1996.)

The fall of Khazaria. According to an Old Rus’ian source, the fall of Khazaria was a result of Vikings/Varangians/Rus’ aggression (Artamonov, 1936; on the Rus’, cf. Pritsak, 1991, 2003; Stang, 1996). The reason for the conflict between the Khazars and the Vikings was the penetration of the Rus’ into the middle basin of the Dnieper. The Old Rus’ian *Primary Chronicle* (tr. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor) mentions, prior to the entry for the year 852, that the Khazars accidentally “found [Kievans] sitting on these mountains in the woods,” and it is presumed that Kiev was originally a Khazar outpost. Pritsak derived the name of Kiev from the name of the K̄vārazmian vizier of the Khazars, Aḥmad b. Kuyah, but this opinion is not widely accepted. Beginning with the 860s, the number of Eastern coins found in Varangian sites along the Dnieper increases, and according to Petrukhin (2005, pp. 77ff.; 2007, p. 258), this shows that power passed from the Khazars to another group, so that the version about a division of power in the region between



the Khazars and the Vikings, presented in the Rus'ian chronicle, is borne out by archaeology. However, the bulk of the Viking hoards with Oriental silver coins in the Kiev region begins only in the first quarter of the 10th century, at least 40 years after the chronicle's date for the Viking takeover of the city, but fitting well the latest reconstruction of the oldest Rus'-Khazar relations (see further Noonan, 1982; 1983a; 1983b; 1984; 1987; 1987-91; 1992; 1994; 1995-97). The Vikings entered the region from the North in several unrelated waves; the Old Rus'ian chronicle suggests that one group of Varangians took Kiev from another similar group (Oleg [or, Oleg and Igor] took Kiev from two other Vikings, Askold and Dir, in 882); these are mentioned under the year 860 in the Slavonic translation of the *Chronicle of George the Monk*, as continued by the Logothete (Istrin, p. 511), although the reference is missing from the Uvarov manuscript. In 883-85, according to the chronicle, Oleg conquered the Sever tribe (setting them a light tribute and forbidding them to pay tribute to the Khazars), and the Radimičs, who also had paid tribute to the Khazars. Oleg's tribute from the Radimičs was set at a щѣлягъ (*shch'lyag'*), which is probably the Norse *skillingr* ('shilling'; Novosel'tsev, 1990, p. 117, thought that this word was the Hebrew *šeleg*, 'snow'). It is well-known that the chronology of the Old Rus'ian chronicle in the very early stages of Rus'ian history is riddled with problems and inaccuracies. According to the chronicle, Oleg was active between 879-912/3, Igor between 912-45 (although born prior to 879), and both reigned, in a standard folk formula, 30 years and 3 years; while in the Novgorod Chronicle, junior manuscript, which retained an earlier if not always accurate chronology, Oleg was active between 879-922 and Igor between 922-945. The totality of the data based on the chronicles and outside sources, among them the Cambridge Document (ca. 949) and the "Kievan Letter," led Pritsak to correct the date of the Rus' conquest of Kiev from the years 880-890 given in the chronicle to the 910s; he put the events described in the Cambridge Document and the raid of the Rus' on Khazaria described by Mas'udi (*Moruj*, II, p. 20) in the 920s. Zuckerman placed the conquest of Kiev in a broad span between 910-30 and the events of the Kievan Letter and the raid described by Mas'udi in 940-944/5; the reign and activity of Oleg, in 911-41/945; and the reign of Igor, in a brief period of 941-45 (Zuckerman, 1995, p. 269).

The failure of the Christianizing mission of Romanos I Lekapenos (870-948) to the Alans mentioned by Mas'udi, the expulsion of the Byzantine priests, and the truce between the Alans and the Khazars described in the Reply of King Joseph took place in 931-32. This was followed by anti-Jewish persecution in Byzantium and the flight of Jews from Byzantium to Khazaria. Romanos hired



the Rus', who attacked Khazar holdings in the Taman peninsula. This was an attempt to involve the Rus' in Byzantine politics, which was now taking an anti-Khazar turn. According to the (Hebrew) Cambridge Document, the Khazars got the upper hand and set a condition to HLGW, i.e., Oleg, that he must make war on Byzantium. Oleg and his co-ruler Igor set out against Byzantium, but the Rus' ships were destroyed by the "Greek fire," as also mentioned in the Cambridge Document. Some of the ships escaped (these were the ships of Igor, who returned to Kiev and hastened in 944 to make peace with the Greeks after the overthrow of Romanos Lekapenos in December 944). Other ships, headed by Oleg, returned to the Khazars and asked them for passage via the Volga to the Caspian Sea. The Rus' attack on Byzantium in 941 continued for 4 months, according to the Continuator of Hamartolos (in George the Monk, pp. 914-16; Slavonic tr., Istrin, 1920, pp. 556-67) and Liudprand (pp. 139-40). In about 944, Oleg came down the Volga, with Khazar permission, and conquered the town of Barḍa'a in Azarbaijan (943/4 or 944/5; described in Ebn Meskawayh, II, pp. 62-67) where he soon died (mentioned also in the Cambridge Document and hinted at in the Old Rus'ian chronicle).

According to the Old Rus'ian chronicle, the new Rus'ian *knyaz* Svyatoslav, son of Igor, destroyed Khazaria in 965 and immediately turned on Danubian Bulḡaria, where he remained between 967 and 971: "6473/965 Svyatoslav went out against the Khazars; and the Khazars, having heard of this, went out with their *knyaz* [*and?] the Qaḡan, and came together in battle, and having fought, Svyatoslav defeated the Khazars and took their city [*and?] Bela Vezha [identified as Sarkel], and defeated the Yasses [Iranian forefathers of the Osset people] and the Kasogs [Circassians; see ČARKAS]; 6474/966 Svyatoslav defeated the Vyatičs and made them pay tribute; 6475/967 Svyatoslav went out to the Danube against the Bulgars, and having fought each other, Svyatoslav defeated the Bulgars and took eighty cities on the Danube and ruled in Perejaslavec, receiving tribute from the Greeks" (author's translation; Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, pp. 84-85). It is impossible to reconcile this version of events and their dates, including 965 as the year of the fall of Khazaria, with the non-Rus'ian sources, and the clue to understanding the circumstances of the fall of Khazaria lies in abandoning the dates and the sequence given in the Rus'ian chronicle.

According to Ebn Meskawayh (II, p. 209; tr., VII, p. 223), in 354/965 the Oḡuz Turks (possibly with Svyatoslav's help) destroyed Khazaria. Other Muslim



sources mention a Turk attack in 965, as a result of which the Khazars sought help from the K̅v̅ārazmians and the Šervānšāh, who made the Islamization of the Khazars a condition of their aid (Ebn al-Aṭir, Beirut ed., VII, p. 290; Demašqi, p. 263; tr. p. 380); only Moqaddasi (pp. 360-61) speaks of the Rus' attack as occurring after the Turk attack had been repulsed and the Khazars had converted to Islam. We should add, however, a late and distorted account of Demašqi (p. 263; tr. p. 380), quoting Ebn al-Aṭir (evidently, he means Mas'udi): hoping to receive aid from the K̅v̅ārazmians against a Turk attack, the Khazars agreed to convert to Islam; Demašqi dates this event 254/868 or 204/819, which is unacceptable; the date should be read as 354, and then we get 965. Ebn Ḥawqal (p. 15; cf. pp. 392-93) describes the targets of the Rus' attack as the cities of Volgan Bulḡar, Khazaran, Samandar, and Itil in 358/968-69 (discussed in Dunlop, 1954, pp. 241ff.), and this mention of cities leads us to read the earlier quoted Rus'ian passage as "and took their city and Bela Vezha".

Describing the defeat of Khazaria and Volgan Bulḡaria at the hands of the Rus' in 968/9 during his visit to the region, Ebn Ḥawqal probably paints a more accurate picture than does the Old Rus'ian chronicle. Ebn Ḥawqal emphasizes that, after the destruction of Khazaria, the Rus' turned immediately against Rum (i.e., the area of Byzantine cultural influence) and Andalus (which is next to Rum on his map), which leads us to accept the date of 968 appearing in the Byzantine texts (on attempts to "rescue" 965 as the date of the destruction of Khazaria, see Dunlop, 1954, p. 242ff.; Novosel'tsev, 1990, pp. 220ff.). In the first version of his work, written right after the defeat of Khazaria, Ebn Ḥawqal wrote: "In our days, nothing remains of the [Volga] Bulḡars, Burtās and Khazars, because the Rus' attacked them and took all their lands, and their refugees have scattered over the neighboring countries and are awaiting the time when the Rus' will make a peace accord with them and allow them to resettle in their own lands under the Rus'ian dominion." In the second version, he wrote: "The refugees had hoped to remain in the neighboring countries; I know that most of them chose to return to Itil and Khazaran under the government of Moḥammad b. Aḥmad Azdi Šervān-Šāh, who helped them out with troops, and they [the Khazars] begged them [the people of Šervān-Šāh] to make peace with them, so that they could submit to them" (p. 398): i.e., a political vacuum had been left in Khazaria. The Varangians had long sought to break through to the mouth of the Volga – the Reply of the Khazar King Joseph is filled with fear of this possibility; yet, just as this goal had seemingly been achieved, Svyatoslav shifted his campaign to the Danube. A reasonable



explanation of this situation is that the goals of the Rus' were not achieved under Svyatoslav, notwithstanding the declarations in the Chronicle. Evidently, Svyatoslav's victory was Pyrrhic. Already Barthold surmised that the Rus' had left Khazaria under pressure from the K̅v̅ārazmians, who had come to the aid of the Khazars on condition that they would convert to Islam. The beneficiaries of the fall of Khazaria were the Oğuz and the Pečenegs, and in this situation Svyatoslav's decision to move the center of his empire from the Dnieper to the Danube seems logical. So, in 968, the Jewish Khazar state was finished off by the joint attack of Turkic nomads and Kievan Vikings; the remnants of the Khazar polity were saved for a while by the conversion of the Khazars to Islam in 968-69.

Iranian sources on the Khazars. Khazars are still believed by some to have appeared on the historical stage first in the last decades of the Sasanian dynasty in Persia, as an ally of Iran's foes. An example for a post-Sasanian Zoroastrian passage in Middle Persian referring to the Khazars is in *Dēnkard* (noted by de Menasce, pp. 239-40; cf. Molé, p. 237; Golden, 1983, p. 140 n. 38, called attention to it for Khazar studies):

... čiyōn kēš ī Yišō ī az Hrōm ud ān (ī) *Mošeh az-iz Xazarān ud ān ī Mānī az-iz Turkestān tagīgīh ud čērīh ī-šān pēš būd bē burd ud ō wadagīh ud ōbastīh andar Himyārān abgand ud ān ī Mānī az Hrōm fīlsōfāyīh-iz anāftan (ed. Madan, I, p. 25, ll. 15-19)

“... just like the faith of Jesus from Byzantium, and the faith of Moses from the Khazars, and the faith of Mani from the Turks (Uigurs) took away the strength and the vigor that they had previously possessed, threw them into vileness and decadence amongst the Himyarites, and the faith of Mani even frustrated the Byzantine philosophy.”

This passage is one of the few non-Muslim sources to make note of Khazar Judaism. It was recorded after both the Jewish Khazar and Manichaean Uigur Qağanates were weakened or even destroyed, i.e., about the second half of the 10th century (note also *fīlsōfāyīh* from Greek *philosophos*), since it states that the result of the adoption of Judaism and Manichaeism by Khazars and Turks/Uigurs was the decadence of their countries. It is unlikely that this Zoroastrian testimony of the Khazar Judaism is first-hand, it was rather channeled through Muslim literature, and, in this case, this is a piece of evidence for the Zoroastrian-Muslim literary intercourse in Iranian lands.



In the Middle Persian apocalyptic work *Zand ī Wahman Yašt/Yasn* (ZWY; see BAHMAN YAŠT), 4.58, the name of Khazars supposedly occurs in a list of foreign nations who sought to destroy Iran. The passage enumerates, among others: Hyonites (q.v.; *hyōn*), Turks (*turk*), Khazars? (*htwl*), Tibetans (*tōbīd?*), Indians (**hindūg*), Mountaineers (*kōfyār?*), Chinese or, inhabitants of Central Asia (**čīnīg*), Kābulis (**kābulīg*), Sogdians (*subdīg*), Byzantines (*hrōmāyīg*). The reference to “Khazars” must be regarded as an anachronism; as to the problematic word in ZWY 4.58, two different emendations of it were suggested by H. W. Bailey (q.v.): one, to ḤPTL, ‘Hephthalites’ (q.v.; Bailey, 1930-32, p. 946), another, to ḤĜL, ‘Khazars’ (Bailey, 1943, p. 1ff.). Later, this view was modified by W. B. Henning (q.v.) and by Bailey himself (Henning, p. 505 n. 2; Bailey, 1954, p. 21), and the most recent editor of ZWY has read the word in question *Xadur* (Cereti, p. 192), which stands, as he thinks, for Khazars.

In Iranian sources surviving in Arabic, Khazars appear as Byzantine allies in the war against Šāpur II (q.v.), clearly a reminiscence of the joint attack by Heraclius (q.v.) and Jibġu (the Western Turk Qaġan) in the 620s, probably clouded with some remote memory of the Hunnic participation in the war of Kawād I (q.v.) against Edessa (q.v.). There are references to the Khazars as active already before Islam appearing in Arabic sources composed in the second half of the 9th century, i.e., about a century after Ebn al-Moqaffa’ (q.v.), Moḥammad b. Jahm and others had rendered the Sasanian *Xwadāy-nāmag* (Book of Kings) from Middle Persian into Arabic. To such sources belongs, for example, the work by Dinavari (q.v.; d. between 894 and 903), *Ketāb al-aḵbār al-ṭewāl* (q.v.), according to which Khazars were playing a prominent role in the Caucasus as early as the 6th century; or *Ketāb fotuḥ al-boldān* by Balāḍori (q.v.; d. 892), who reports about Khazar-Sasanian relations; or the *History* by Ṭabari (q.v.; 839-923), in which the name of the Khazars is a substitute for “Turks” and they are said to hold an important position in the epoch of Ḳosrow I (q.v.); or *Ketāb al-ḵarāj wa ṣan’at al-keṭāba*, written in the twenties of the 10th century by Qodāma b. Ja’far, where the Khazars appear, again, under Ḳosrow I. In these texts, we have numerous references to the epoch of Ḳosrow I, who is said to deceive the Khazar Qaġan (Qodāma, p. 259ff., quoted by Yāqut, ed. von Wüstenfeld, I, pp. 439-40 [s.v. Bāb al-abwāb]), to subjugate the kings of the Caucasus, and to build the walls of Darband; Ebn al-Faḳīh (early 10th century), whose information might go back to the *Xwadāy-nāmag* (quoted as *Aḵbār al-fors*) ascribed to Ḳosrow I Anušervān the building of the most important Khazar cities, like Balanjar, Samandar, and Ḳazarān; a similar tradition is known from Balāḍori and Ṭabari, and later, from local



Caspian chronicles. We are told that ambassadors from the Chinese, the Turks, and the Khazars were constantly at Ƙosrow's gate (Ṭabari, ed. de Goeje, I, p. 899); the same king kept three thrones of gold in his palace, reserved for the kings of Byzantium, China and the Khazars (Ebn al-Balki, p. 97), and according to Ebn Ƙordāqbeh (q.v.; p. 135), persons wishing access to the Persian court from the country of the Khazars and the Alāns were detained at Bāb al-Abwāb. There is no doubt that the Western Turk Qaġanate goes here under "Khazars," and then all the references to Khazars prior to the late 7th century are anachronistic.

In the mid-sixties of the 10th century, the work of Ṭabari was rendered into New Persian by Abu 'Ali Moġammad Bal'ami. The last events appearing in Bal'ami are dated to 842 CE, and his work contains material unattested in Ṭabari (derived partly from Ebn Aṭam Kufi). Ṭabari (d. 923 CE) and Bal'ami (d. ca. 997 CE) were contemporary with the heyday of the Khazar Qaġanate, but they believed that the Khazar Qaġanate was an uninterrupted continuation of the Turkish Qaġanate. Ḥamza Eşfāhāni, who wrote his *Ta'riḳ* ca. 961, in the time the Khazar Qaġanate was still in existence, and who had access to original Sasanian historical compositions (in some cases, independent of the *Xwadāy-nāmag*), included in his composition rare data on the Khazars.

Among the relevant New Persian compilations are *Ḥodud al-'ālam*, written in 982-83; *'Ajā'eb al-maḳluqāt* (q.v.) by [Pseudo-]Aḥmad Ṭusi, written in the second half of the 12th century; *Jahān-nāma* by Najib Bakrān, written in the early 13th century; and others, including some histories: *Zayn al-aḳbār* by Gardizi, written in the early 11th century; *Fārs-nāma* by Ebn al-Balki (q.v.); the anonymous *Mojmal al-tawāriḳ* (q.v.; 1126); and the work by Ḥamd-Allāh Mostawfi (q.v.), *Tāriḳ-e gozida* (completed in 1330). There are only few cases in which some genuine data on Khazars could be found; otherwise, we are facing anachronisms or semi-legendary material: Gardizi, for example, tells a legend about the eponymous ancestor of the Qirġizes who killed a Byzantine officer and fled to the Khazar Qaġan; a similar story is in *Mojmal al-tawāriḳ* (cf. Togan, 1939, pp. 294, 311, 328; Dunlop, 1954, p. 8, regarded this account as anachronistic). The information about the "Khazars" found in the *Tāriḳ-e gozida* is illuminating in that it is obvious that the names "Qebčāq" (q.v.), "Khazar," and "Turks" were used as mutually changeable synonyms (I, pp. 115, 120, 181, 574, 575, 582; cf. pp. 583, 588). Written by Ebn Esfandiār (q.v.) in 1216/17, *Tāriḳ-e Ṭabarestān* (I, p. 266) makes mention of the Rus' attack via the Caspian Sea in 909; this information was incorporated by Mawlānā Awliā'-



Allah Āmolī (q.v.) into his *Tāriḳ-e Rūyān* (ed. Sotuda, p. 105), written around 1359, but he added an apocryphal legend (ed. Ḳalili, p. 25; ed. Sotuda, pp. 29-30) about Khazars in the 6th century, putting them in the context of Jāmāsp, Balāš, Qobād (Kawād; qq.v.) and mentioning Khazar-Šaqlāb inroads to Darband, which seems to be taken from Bal’ami. These sources were used by Zāhir-al-Din Mar’aši, the much later compiler of *Tariḳ-e Ṭabarestān wa Ruyān wa Māzandarān*, who wrote in the 15th century. Though the texts are of younger provenance, there is no need to suspect their data on the Rus’ attack as problematic, for it is corroborated by other sources. Thus, the *History of the Caucasian Albanians* by Movsēs Dasxuranc’i (Kałankatuac’i) tells us that in 944, “a certain people of strange and foreign appearance called Rūzik attacked from the lands of the north, ... they reached Partaw [i.e., Barḍa’a], the capital of Albania, in not more than three days, and this city, unable to resist them, was put to the sword” (tr. Dowsett, p. 224 and n. 4), and the Persian *Ḥodud al-’ā lam* of 982-83 confirms that the Rus’ camped at Mobāraki, a large village at the gate of Barḍa’a (tr., p. 144; cf. also Ebn al-Aṭir, Beirut, VII, p. 182; Ebn Meskawayh, II, pp. 62-67, *sub anno* 332/943-44).

In the region of the Caspian Sea (called *Daryā-ye Ḳazar*, ‘Sea of the Khazars’) there was traditional ethno-historical lore combining together the Khazars, Alans, Rus’, Saqlāb and other Northern peoples. Afzal-al-Din Ebrāhim Ḳāqāni Šervāni (q.v.; d. between 1186 and 1199), who spent most or all of his life in the Caucasus, mentioned Rus’ and Khazars (p. 135), victories over Rus’ and Alans (pp. 139, 145), and Rus’ and Sarir (p. 476; cf. also pp. 36, 406; cf. Minorsky, 1945). Neẓāmi (ca. 1141-1203) in his *Eskandar-nāma* (q.v.) made the Khazars and the Rus’ to appear as Alexander’s enemies in the North; certainly he had the same events as Ḳāqāni in mind when he wrote on this Rus’-Khazar invasion. Some anachronistic information (“The king of the Khazars designated Payḡu” <*Jabḡub) is contained also in the 15th century Persian work by Mirḳvānd, *Rawzat al-šafā*. There are more anachronisms in our sources of the later dates, like the reference of Ebn al-Aṭir, *sub anno* 421/1030, to “the raid of Faẓlun the Kurd against the Khazars” (Beirut ed., VII, p. 194; cf. Dunlop, 1954, p. 253 n. 97), where are meant Faẓl b. Moḡammad of the Šaddādīd dynasty, who ruled at Ganja (q.v.), and Georgians and/or Abkhazians (Abḳāz, q.v.), not Khazars (Barthold and Golden, 1978, p. 1176b). This is a glaring example of how the Khazars were introduced into a text by later hands, because the Khazars were better known than other Oriental peoples.



The Khazar heritage. In the 20th century, Khazars were used to meet different and contradicting political and ideological ends; they fare widely in folk-history in many quarters.

In the 19th century, a significant portion of Hungarian Jewry underwent a process of deep cultural Magyarization, and in the special environment of the late Habsburg-period Hungary there emerged a new national mythology, which stressed a Khazar, non-Jewish, origin of Hungarian Jews, to match the Turkic, steppe-based origin of ethnic Hungarians. This new national mythology was designed to facilitate the assimilation of the Jews among the Magyars. In large part, this mythology forms the cultural background of the book by a Hungarian Jew, Arthur Koestler, *The Thirteenth Tribe* (1976); the book should be viewed as a reflection of that mythology (cf. also Telegdi). During the last decades, much ink was spilt to prove Khazar origins of different ethnic groups; among possible candidates to be physical descendants of the Khazars are the Saljuq family, the Qaraçay-Mulqar, the Qumuq, the 17th-century Turkmen tribe Aşaqlı-Khazar (near Hızır-Eli in K̄v̄arazm), Ashkenazic Jews, Kazakhs of Kazakhstan, early medieval Cossacks on the Dnieper, Don, and Terek, and many other groups, but there is no real evidence for any of these claims. Recently, two Israeli scholars claimed (unconvincingly) that Khazars never converted to Judaism and that all the documentation of this conversion should be disregarded or re-interpreted (Gil, 2011; Stampfer, 2014).

The image of Khazaria was generally positive until the early 1950s (in the Russian Empire, it was used in contrast to the negative “Mongol-Tatar yoke”); after an article in the Soviet newspaper “Pravda” signed by “P. Ivanov” (a pseudonym of Joseph Stalin, see Libin and Shapira, 2008) was published on 25 December 1951, in which the Khazars were declared a barbarous parasitic horde (as other “Tatar” and Turkic entities), the negative image became gradually adopted, even by Artamonov in his *Istoriia khazar*.

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The so-called “Hebrew-Khazar Correspondence” (ca. 960 CE) consists of four documents: (1) “Letter by Hisday b. Šapruṭ,” the Jewish majordomo of the Omayyad Caliph of Cordoba ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III (912-961), penned by Menaḥem b. Sāruq, to the Khazar ruler Joseph; text in Kokovtsov, 1932, pp. 7-19. (2) “Reply of the Khazar King Joseph” (Short Recension) to Hisday b. Šapruṭ, together with Hisday b. Šapruṭ’s Letter in a 16th century copy is kept in Oxford, UK; the text is extremely close or even identical with the Constantinople *editio princeps* by Yiṣḥaq Aqrīsh (*Qôl Mebassêr*, 1577); text in Kokovtsov, 1932, pp. 19-26. (3) “Reply of the Khazar King Joseph” (Long Recension); this is not an autograph, but a 13th-century copy, containing many errors in transcript, especially in non-Hebrew names. It is worth recalling that



this text passed through the hands of Abraham Firkowicz, and for this reason some scholars cast a shadow of doubt on the authenticity of this text. Some additions were made in Spain while copying this source (e.g., the never-existent “King ‘Obadiah” was inserted); text in Kokovtsov, 1932, pp. 26-33. (4) “Cambridge (or Schechter) Document,” a copy from the 12th century, found in the Cairo Genizah, which is a letter of a Khazar Jew, written, most probably, to the same Hisday b. Šapruṭ. The original must be dated ca. 342/954 CE. Dunlop (1954, pp. 156-57) made a plausible suggestion that it was written in Constantinople by a Khazar Jew and handed to Isaac son of Nathan (Yiṣḥaq bar Nāthān), the envoy of Hisday b. Šapruṭ, before the latter wrote his Letter to Joseph. It is kept in Cambridge, UK. The text is given in Kokovtsov, 1932, pp. 33-36; new edition in Golb and Pritsak, 1982, pp. 106-21; see also Schechter, 1912-13.) There are also other Hebrew texts relevant for the Correspondence. In the early 12th century, Yehudah b. Barzillay in *Sepher ha-Ittīm* mentioned the Reply, but probably had not seen the Letter of Hisday b. Šapruṭ. Avraham b. Dāwūd (the late 12th century, *Sepher ha-Qabbâlâh*), knew the Letter and the Reply; Judah Halevy certainly knew the *Corresepondence* in some form. (See further, Lévi-Provençal; Grégoire, 1934, 1937a, 1937b). “The Kievan Letter,” sometimes seen as coming not from Kiev, but rather to Kiev (see Golb and Pritsak; Erdal, 2005; 2007; Zuckerman, 2011).

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