The Forgotten Diaspora (1)



Preface:

The following analysis is more re-assessment than revelation. When it comes to the present topic, it's not as if a plethora of new evidence has suddenly emerged that challenges the conventional wisdom.* For the most part, all I'm doing here is evaluating the evidence that has always been there; and pointing out where it leads. Those of us who are not concerned with upholding a ramshackle dogmatic edifice are fine with this.

Meanwhile, those who stake their claim on such an edifice tend not to welcome interlopers. I am such an interloper. As an outsider looking in, I come to the topic with fresh eyes; and—so far as I can ascertain—the benefit of impartiality. What follows might be described in the way that James C. Scott referred to his book, **Against The Grain**: "A trespasser's reconnaissance report".

As I show in my essay, “Genesis Of A People”, the etiology of Beth Israel turns out to be a consecrated house of cards. “House of cards” is apropos, as—like most national origin stories—it is unable to withstand dialectic perturbations. Remove a single base card, and the entire dogmatic edifice collapses.

Iconoclasts who have noble motives don’t set out to be contrarians; and certainly aren’t looking to be pariahs. They are simply trying to set the record straight, even if it means going against the grain. Pandering has no place in scholarship; so “The Forgotten Diaspora” caters to no particular ideological camp. After all, the world does not furnish facts to suit the sensibilities of any given partisan.

When considering a distant past that happens to be shrouded in mists of uncertainty, it is tempting to engage in gratifying conjecture—especially when that conjecture flatters one or another target audience. Here, though, I attempt to provide elucidation rather than speculation; and I imagine that nobody will find it tremendously ingratiating.

Whenever one engages in an inquiry into an ideologically-charged topic, it is important to ensure that one does not simply replace one bit of dogmatism with another. To be anti-dogmatic is to reject ALL dogmas, not just unpalatable ones. With this in mind, I am careful to not transplant an old set of spurious suppositions with a new (more appealing) set of spurious suppositions, and glibly call that progress.

One cannot help but speculate a bit when putting forth a (counter-)hypothesis regarding a sparsely-documented period of history. Be that as it may, I resist the temptation to proffer an assortment of mere hunches. The available evidence is what it is; and deduction leads where it leads.

Given the paucity of relevant documentation on the matter under consideration, the verdict is not conclusive; and—alas—may never be. It would be disingenuous to not concede this. That being the case, I end up taking a somewhat Bayesian approach to the matter. I effectively ask: If the counter-thesis had been the case, then what sorts of things would we most likely find in the historical record? That we don’t find ANY of those things indicates that the probability the counter-thesis holds water is quite low. As it happens, the clues we have all end up pointing to (roughly) the same conclusion:

Ashkenazim began as the [k]Hazarian diaspora just over a thousand years ago. Is this the final word on the matter? No. Is it currently the most likely hypothesis? Yes.

Of course, this might change should new information present itself. Inquiries are, by their nature, open-ended. In keeping with the spirit of FREE inquiry, this monograph should be seen as a point of departure rather than as the final word on the matter. This is simply to say that it is a step (hopefully, an important step) within an on-going process; not a destination. If this monograph does nothing else, it should urge others to look into the matter further; and hopefully learn some interesting things about world history along the way.

Those of us who value Truth await further insight from those who—going forward—contribute to the discussion in good faith. (After all, what gets the serious inquirer up in the morning isn't what he already knows, but what he still hasn't yet figured out.) There is surely still plenty out there waiting to be uncovered. It is in this spirit that this ensuing monograph was done.

This point is especially salient considering (what is currently) an inadequate archeological investigation. Much work remains to be done. So I hope this monograph will instigate further research. As it turns out, this inquiry is about far more than just Ashkenazi provenance; it ends up leading us down heretofore unexplored paths regarding the ancient Steppe Peoples.

I assure the reader that there is no dastardly agenda here to promote Turkic ancestry amongst an un-related ethnic group; or to elide Semitic ancestry wherever it actually exists. Is it a bad thing that Ashkenazi Jews might have Turkic ancestry? Of course not. Are they every bit as Jewish as Sephardim and Mizra[c]him (that is: Jews who can trace their bloodlines back to, say, the Maccabean revolution and the Hasmonean Kingdom) of Classical Antiquity? Of course. Why? Because bloodlines don't matter. (Consider Sammy David Jr.: After he converted, being black didn't make him any less Jewish.)

One formidable didactic obstacle that seems to remain in our path is the persistence of the (spurious) Occident-Orient dichotomy. This fundamentally-flawed paradigm constrains our thinking—causing us to lose sight of the fact that, at the end of the day, we are all human. The history of mankind is not so much a story of ethnically-pure tribes interacting with one another, but of constant miscegenation and

segregation. Genotypes and cultures are constantly merging and bifurcating; and rarely along discrete lines. Once we let go of coveted reveries about unsullied bloodlines, we can begin to look at world history with clearer eyes.

Another matter worth briefly addressing:

There have existed–from time to time–some anti-Semitic parties who espouse the "Khazar theory" for their own (deranged) reasons; resulting in a negative stigmatization of said theory. Most recently, we've heard about the nutty conspiracy-theory peddled by Black Hebrew Israelites, as propounded in "Hebrews To Negroes: Wake Up Black America" (an outlandish screed that mixes references to said theory with Holocaust denialism and the claim that non-African Jews are not authentically Jewish). To associate the thesis-in-question with such baleful parties and their daffy beliefs is a grave mis-step. **

It's worth noting that the present thesis was openly embraced by preeminent Jewish scholars until the advent of Revisionist Zionism, whereupon it was aggressively eschewed. To the present day, such right-wing ideologues resent those who have the gall to challenge their preconceived notions of racial identity; as it subverts the Biblical narrative on which their political agenda depends.

During the course of my investigation, might I have missed something? It is, of course, entirely possible that there is some earth-shattering bit of evidence, or a key line of reasoning, that escaped my attention. In arriving at what seem to be decisive conclusions, we must always be cognizant of our own fallibility. The difference between someone like me and a hidebound ideologue is that I wholeheartedly welcome the occasion should such oversights to be brought to my attention. I come away from this project with the attitude: "By all means, poke holes in my theory. I'm all ears." Indeed, if even a single factual error—or a flaw in my deductive reasoning at some point—were brought to my attention, I would be grateful.

In sum: Having Turkic ancestry does not make Ashkenazim less authentically Jewish. Would Spinoza have cared whether his Jewish ancestry was more Semitic or more Turkic? Almost certainly not. (It was the former.) Would Michel de Montaigne have cared? Almost certainly not. (It was the former.) Would Karl Marx have cared? Almost certainly not. (It was the latter.) Would Albert Einstein have cared? Almost

certainly not. (It was the latter.) Do *I* care? No. And neither should anyone else. Why not? Ethno-centric thinking played no role in a humanist worldview. God willing, such a worldview will eventually prevail.

{* Consider the overthrowing of the “Clovis First” theory of homo sapiens in the Americas—a development that occurred in light of relatively recent archeological discoveries. A more analogous case to the matter at hand: In 1912, the German scholar, Alfred Lothar Wegener proposed the phenomenon known as “continental drift”: the precursor to plate tectonics. He was initially a pariah in the geological community. When he died in 1930, there was still inconclusive evidence for his theory. Alas, it was not until the late 1950’s (with the advent of gravimetry, the bathymetry of deep ocean floors, and the development of seismic imaging technology) that the theory was—finally—fully embraced by the world. Prior to the discovery of the magnetic properties of the oceanic crust, there was insufficient reason to take such an outlandish-seeming hypothesis seriously. Imagine if continental drift—like, say, biological evolution—had significant RELIGIOUS implications. Surely, there would have been far more push-back had plate tectonics threatened to upend a sacred applecart…rather than merely disrupting conventional knowledge in academia.}

{** The fact that Nazis believed that circles were round should not move us to question the definition of circles. The notion, “If a fascist believes it, it must be wrong” is specious. When Guglielmo Marconi pioneered wireless communication in the 1890’s based on a revolutionary understanding of radio-waves, nobody dismissed the idea because he was a fascist. And so it goes: Black Hebrew Israelites invoke the [k]Hazarian diaspora not because they care about actual history, but because ideologues are eager to seize on whatever facts happen to be convenient for their absurd theories (in this case: that the African population accounts for the lost tribes of Israel). Theirs is an ethno-centric worldview—ironically: the very thing that accounts for those who obstinately DENY the present thesis.}



BACKGROUND:

Ernest Renan once noted that “Getting its history wrong is part of being a nation.” Renan said this in 1882 during his famous lecture, “What Is A Nation?” at the Sorbonne–in Paris, France. After quoting this line, renown historian, Eric Hobsbawm elaborated on the larger point: “To be a Fenian or an Orangeman, I would judge, is not so compatible, any more than being a [Revisionist] Zionist is compatible with writing a genuinely serious history of the Jewish people; unless the historian leaves his or her convictions behind when entering the study. Some nationalist historians have been unable to do so.” This was an understatement, to say the least. By “convictions” here, Hobsbawm was primarily referring to biases in favor of the anointed in-group. {48}

Before embarking on this inquiry, we might note the formidable power of the “illusory truth effect”: the tendency to embrace misinformation when we have been routinely exposed to NOTHING BUT that information for as long as we can remember. Favored dogmas calcify; and eventually serve as the substrate for a psychical / social homeostasis—a homeostasis on which many come to depend. To have those “truths” challenged can be quite jarring. Naturally, we will be inclined to reject any information–out of hand–that undermines the narrative to which we have become accustomed. This is especially so when that narrative has been rendered sacrosanct by an entire community.

As a consequence of the illusory truth effect, we cling to cherished beliefs even in the face of an alluvion of countervailing evidence. In such cases, obstinacy is seen as a kind of virtue—to wit: as a sign of unwavering commitment.

Vested interests, then, are a disqualification when it comes to serious inquiry. This maxim is quite straight-forward. Want a penetrating critical analysis of the Church of Latter-Day Saints? Don't ask a Mormon. Want a frank assessment of Scientology? Don't ask a Scientologist. Want the inside scoop of the Watchtower society? Don't ask a Jehovah's Witness.

Coveted beliefs can be very stubborn things. In some cases, sanctified dogmas are actually **strengthened** when ardent believers are presented with contradictory evidence. (The tendency to dig in our heals when coveted beliefs are debunked is known as the "backfire effect".) Sanctified dogmas, it turns out, are extremely difficult to dislodge from their hallowed perch; and successful memes are designed for self-preservation.

There is an explanation for this lamentable predilection: We are often at the mercy of ingrained mental habits—habits that are required to maintain a semblance of psychical / social stability. Our default, then, is not epistemic flexibility; it is epistemic rigidity. We are, after all, eminently pragmatic creatures; and hold fast to whatever seems to be (currently) working within the incumbent meme-plex. There is, in other words, a prodigious amount of memetic inertia, leading to what is referred to as the "continued influence effect". Hence the slew of confirmation biases that characterize virtually all human rationalization. In the midst of all this, upsetting a sacred apple cart is a surefire way to become persona non grata amongst those who deem the (debunked) lore to be sacrosanct. Sacred cow-tipping is guaranteed to render one a pariah within a community of committed ideologues.

Ego plays a significant role in "sticking to one's guns" even when one's beliefs are confronted with contradictory evidence; and—per the backfire effect—ESPECIALLY when one's beliefs are confronted with contradictory evidence. This is—in part—because people really, really, really don't like to be wrong; especially about something on which they have staked their claim–or even their very identity.

But there's even more to the illusory truth effect. When communal, people base their identities on certain believes being "true". In the event that identities are collective, this becomes a TRIBAL matter as well as a personal matter. So abandoning the belief is not merely a matter of saving face; it jeopardizes the (false)

pride of the in-group, as it compromises the integrity of their collective identity. The epistemological calculus here is oriented more on social considerations than on anything resembling an objective assessment (or pretenses thereto). Whenever there are vested interests, partiality reigns supreme; and bias runs amok.

Dogmatic edifices are notoriously brittle; so cannot withstand much strain. As with a house of cards, just a bit of disruption jeopardizes the structural integrity of the entire conceptual framework. So no unsanctioned information can be tolerated.

A sanctified dogmatic system is born of a community of True Believers desperately wanting certain things to be SEEN AS true; as the subsistence of their movement—and the success of their ideology—depends on that perception. The moment a party is shown to have a vested interest in that dogmatic system, that party forfeits its right to be considered impartial interlocutors. Scholarship is only (genuine) scholarship when it is utterly disinterested. Alas. Few are able to remain sanguine when it comes to assessing the available evidence, and follow it wherever it might lead.

It should go without saying; yet–remarkably–it is a maxim that is rarely heeded: Impartiality is a prerequisite for any serious scholarship. For many, though, doing history often involves some sort of (oft un-recognized) bias. This is especially so when it comes to SACRED histories, as there is a vested interest in upholding a foregone conclusion. Once something is sanctified, deep-seated prejudices are invariably at play. This is why confirmation bias is the perennial hobgoblin of those seeking to corroborate OR refute a pet theory. {1}

Alas, such partiality is something to which we are all susceptible. It is for this reason that those who aspire to perspicacity are obliged to enter into a critical analysis with a kind of DIS-confirmation bias–which is simply to say: Inconvenient as it might be, they make a concerted effort to find any and all evidence that might undercut whatever theory they are considering. (“Here’s what it would take to disprove this theory. So I will now assiduously seek out whatever that might be; and let the chips fall where they may.”) Disinterested investigation not only requires one to set aside even the most hallowed of “received wisdom”; it requires that one does not have any investment–one way or another–in what the verdict ends up being.

Vaunted etiological accounts are especially ripe for rationalization. It makes sense, then, that national origin myths generally take the form of just-so stories. Invocations of Providentialism lend a veneer of credence to even the most spurious

of claims. Flights of fancy become inviolate; and a hefty dose of divinely-ordained entitlement can't help but ensue. And, as if often the case, a strategically-tailored account is employed to establish a privileged status for the exalted in-group.

The architecture of an etiological myth–being as it is self-serving–involves some combination of obfuscation (of inconvenient truths) and confabulation (of useful fictions). This comes in handy, as it legitimizes the desire agenda. Thus a contrived legacy is parlayed into a longed-for destiny. When the viability of a creed is at stake, one finds oneself operating in a skewed incentive structure.

The problem that arises for hidebound ideologues (those engaged in—nay, dependent upon—dogmatic escapades) is that serious inquirers now avail themselves the scientific method–replete with high standards of archeological verification and a firm understanding of philology, anthropology, and evolutionary psychology. The process of vetting claims includes a concerted attempt to expose–and eliminate–conflicts of interest when conducting any inquiry.

In the midst of all this, what is an ideologue left to do?

A prerequisite for confabulation is the deliberate elision of that which the confabulation is designed to replace. The present monograph exposes not only what is being elided by dishonest interlocutors; it makes the case that Reality-denial IN GENERAL is typically involved in the promulgation of a dubious ideological agenda.

The best way to expose Reality-denial is to provide an explication of the Reality being denied. (Behold HOW MUCH must be obfuscated in order to persuade people that a despised theory is fallacious.) When it comes to the oft-derided "Khazar theory", the "there's no evidence" assertion only works by denying all the evidence. In providing all the evidence, the following monograph illustrates how far ideologues will go to evade the truth. For virtually everything adumbrated forthwith must be denied. As will be made clear forthwith, doing so entails a monumental amount of dissimulation.

The chances that one is deluding oneself about a proposition is proportional to how ardently one wants it to be true. Carl Sagan once noted that it requires a "courageous self-discipline" to check this tendency.

He cautioned that “we should pay attention to how badly we want to believe a given contention. The more badly we want to believe it, the more skeptical we have to be.” When it comes to issues in which there is a staunch vested interest in upholding sacrosanct “truths” (as with the sanctified dogmas of a religion), we find that those who work most ardently to suppress information are likely those who should be challenged the most. This principle is no more salient than when it comes to disabusing ourselves of highly-coveted national origin myths.

The fetishization of Semitic provenance animating Judaic ethno-centricity offers a case study. The prime example of a vociferous–often militant–campaign of information-suppression is the Revisionist Zionist’s elision of the [k]Hazarian origins of the Ashkenazim. Like anything done in bad faith, this program of disinformation is undertaken in the service of the continued promulgation of a faux history on which their ideology is based. {2} Debunk the faux history, and the ideology collapses.

Right-wing ideologues are fully aware of this; so, naturally, they don’t want their just-so-story debunked. {3}

As is often the case, anyone with the gall to set the record straight is summarily vilified by those who’s sacred applecart has been upset. It’s as if pointing out that some of the world’s Jewish people are not descendants of Semitic peoples were somehow a sign of anti-Semitism. (This requires one to suppose that anti-racism were ITSELF a kind of racism.) However, all the present thesis does is counter an ethno-centric worldview, thereby undercutting claims of blood and soil. That’s a good thing. {43}

We shouldn’t be surprised, then, that the REAL history of the Ashkenazim is often dismissed with a scoff by those who subscribe to the Revisionist (read: right-wing) version of Zionism. A paroxysm of pearl-clutching is typically followed by the huffy proclamation: “There is no evidence for that!” In reality, virtually ALL the evidence points to the present thesis. And—so far as I could find—NO evidence exists to refute it. {121} Indeed, there is even evidence in the NAME ITSELF. From whence did the moniker “Ashkenaz” come? Lo and behold: It derives from the Assyrian term for the people of the Eurasian Steppes: “Ashkuza”. {42}

What prompts this line of inquiry regarding Ashkenazi provenance? As it so happened, just prior to the time Ashkenazim emerged in vicinity of the Rhine valley, a Jewish kingdom almost 2,000 kilometers to the east had just been overtaken–precipitating what was likely a displacement westward.

The Jewish kingdom was that of the [k]Hazars.

But why bother? The aim here is not so much to corroborate one hypothesis or another; it is to show the lengths to which some ideologues will go to bury evidence in order to uphold the (chimerical) credence of what they deem to be a foregone conclusion. In this case, as we'll see, they are forced to deny virtually ALL the available evidence in order to accomplish this feat. The onus, then, is on such actors to address all the evidence adumbrated forthwith; and to show HOW ELSE such things might be explained were the present thesis (which explains every bit of it) NOT true. Though not inconceivable, this would be a monumental task—an attempt that anyone sincerely interested in the truth would welcome. In fact, much of the following monograph was spawned from my own attempt to do exactly that. At every turn, in seeking to discover some bit of possible falsification of the oft-derided "Khazar Theory", I only uncovered yet more evidence for it. I ended up only further corroborating the thesis I was diligently striving to refute.

This is, after all, how science works. My own methodology is as follows. Due to the lack of conclusive evidence either way, I employ somewhat of a Beysian approach to the matter. Thus, only part of what is done here is show that IF the thesis were true, then THESE are the sorts of things we would expect to find in the historical record (which, it turns out, we do); and THOSE are the sorts of things we would expect NOT to find in the historical record (which, it turns out, we don't). For this accomplishes only a tenuous kind of corroboration. It merely shows that the historical evidence is COMPATIBLE WITH—though does not necessarily confirm—the thesis.

Compatibility only goes so far, as it only establishes plausibility. It is necessary, then, to go further. The more crucial part of what is done here is as follows: IF the conventional explanation (the counter-thesis) were true, then THESE are the sorts of things we would expect to see (which, it turns out, we do not); while THOSE are the sorts of things we would expect NOT to see (which, it turns out, we do). This is far too much of a coincidence to dismiss. What this effectively accomplishes is showing that it is highly implausible that the counter-thesis is true. As an explanation for what the historical record shows, the present thesis works best. In other words, the "Khazar theory" is most likely true.

Since it is the latter heuristic that is more powerful, it can be used to debunk MANY myths. For example, in order for the 9/11 conspiracy theory (the contention that the terrorist attacks of September 2001 were a secret U.S. government plot) to be true, it would need to be the case that every last person involved in the conspiracy (and there would have been many) would need to have remained mum in the decades since. This scenario is so highly unlikely as to induce a chuckle; and goes further than any amount of hard evidence to falsify what is quickly revealed to be an untenable hypothesis.

What of the salient timeframe for the present inquiry? I place the latest temporal threshold at somewhere in the vicinity of the late 14th or early 15th century. That serves as a **“terminus ante quem”** to the analysis of the origins of Ashkenazim as a distinct ethnic group. Pursuant to the Sephardic-Ashkenazic intermixture that transpired since the period-in-question (roughly, the 10th century thru the 14th century), miscegenation and cultural melding occurred—as would be expected, as these communities were both denizens of Beth Israel. Therefore developments since that temporal threshold are rather beside the point. Tellingly, most of those who vociferously argue against the “Khazar theory” focus on developments since the 15th century. Other than a nod to Rashi–who was Sephardic–, they do not say a word about the five centuries prior to this temporal threshold. As it happens, those are the only centuries that truly matter for the inquiry at hand. Such evasion speaks volumes.

To reiterate: There is no absolute certainty when it comes to the present thesis. Admittedly, it requires a modicum of conjecture (and some educated guesses). The counter-thesis, though, requires one to account for mountains of circumstantial evidence that go against it. Presuppositions are fickle things, and we all tend to gravitate toward those that are most gratifying. Be that as it may, those with no vested interests (who quite literally don’t care one way or the other what the verdict might be on the matter) are most qualified to assess things. And those who’s conclusions FLOUT their own vested interests are almost certainly on to something.

So do the Ashkenazim have Semitic provenance? Almost certainly not.

It’s worth noting that the [k]Hazarian origins of the Ashkenazim used to be openly discussed, even within Beth Israel. Early proponents of the theory included:

- Polish scholar, Tadeusz Czacki (b. 1765)
- Ukrainian scholar, Isaac Baer Levinsohn (b. 1788)

- Russian scholar, Avraam Yakovlevich Harkavy (b. 1835)
- Australian scholar, Joseph Jacobs (b. 1854)
- Polish scholar, Maksymilian Gumplowicz (b. 1864)
- Hungarian scholar, Samuel Krauss (b. 1866)
- Russian anthropologist, Samuel Weissenberg (b. 1867)
- Lithuanian historian, Julius Brutzkus (b. 1870) openly wrote about the [k]Hazarian background of Jews in the region, and even documented the [k]Hazar origins of Kiev.
- American scholar, Maurice Fishberg (b. 1872)
- Polish scholar, Itzhak Schipper (b. 1884)

All ten of these scholars were Jewish. The examples go on and on. In the 1880's, the (Jewish) secretary of the "Alliance Israélite Universelle" in Paris, Isadore Loeb, put forth the theory that the [k]Hazars accounted for Ashkenazi origins. Tellingly, he saw it as a way to DEFUSE anti-Semitism. (He pointed out that the ubiquity of miscegenation in all populations rendered the strange preoccupation with pure bloodlines moot. He was right.)

In 1883, Ernest Renan noted that the "conversion of the kingdom of the Khazars has a considerable importance regarding the origin of Jews who dwell in the countries along the Danube and in southern Russia." He was correct–though he neglected to include the rest of eastern Europe in his assessment.

The history of Jewish scholarship on this topic is long, and continued into the 20th century—though, in the advent of Zionism, with ever-increasing push-back. Here are **sixteen** more notable examples:

1. At the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919, renown Jewish scholar, Joseph Reinach noted that the majority of "Russian, Polish and Galician Jews descend from the Khazars, a Tatar people from the south of Russia who converted to Judaism en mass at around the time of Charlemagne [in the 8th century]."
2. Arguably the greatest Jewish historian of the 20th century, Salo Wittmayer Baron of Columbia University, was forthcoming about the Eurasian origins of the Ashkenazim in his "A Social And Religious History Of The Jews" (1937).
3. In his "Khazaria: History of a Jewish Kingdom in Europe" (1943; updated in 1951), the famed Jewish historian, Abraham Nahum Polak concluded that the [k]Hazar theory was, indeed, correct. Polak was the founder of the Department of Middle Eastern History at Tel Aviv University.

4. In the now out-of-print “What You Should Know About Jewish Religion, History, Ethics, and Culture” (1955), Rabbi Sidney L. Markowitz noted: “The first Jews to settle in Lithuania in the 11th century came from the land of the Khazars, on the lower Volga River, from Crimea on the Black Sea and from Bohemia… The Khazars had welcomed the Jews and later had been converted to Judaism. When the Khazars were overrun by the Mongols [author’s note: false] and Russians, the Jews settled in Lithuania–whose rulers at that time were extremely tolerant.”
5. Famed Russian archeologist, Mikhail Artamonov published his landmark work, “Istoriya Khazar” in 1962.
6. Eurasian historian, Douglas Morton Dunlop (Columbia University) published “The History Of The Jewish Khazars” in 1967, providing some key insights.
7. In “Finding Our Fathers: A Guidebook to Jewish Genealogy” (1977), Dan Rottenberg noted that “some East European Jews, and perhaps a great many, are descended from the Khazars.”
8. Omeljan Pritsak’s “The Khazar Kingdom’s Conversion To Judaism” (1978) is self-explanatory.
9. Peter Benjamin Golden’s “Khazar Studies: A Historico-Philological Inquiry Into The Origins Of The Khazars” (1980) offers insights into the relevant linguistic history. The following year (1981), Csanad Balint published “Archeological Addenda” to this work.
10. Norman Golb and Omeljan Pritsak’s “Khazarian Hebrew Documents Of The Tenth Century” (1982) provides a thorough analysis of the historical record.
11. In “Great Moments In Jewish History” (1999), Robert Slater noted: “The descendants of the Khazars reached eastern and central Europe. There is substantial evidence that some of them settled in Slavic lands, where they took part in establishing the major Jewish centers of eastern Europe… It is also widely believed that many Khazarian Jews fled to Poland to avoid forced baptism. Moreover, some of the groups that migrated from eastern to central Europe have been called Khazars and may have originated in the former Khazar Empire. Some apparently fled into northern Hungary, where, to this day, there are villages that bear such names as Kozar and Kozardie.” These latter settlements constitute what came to be called “Oberlander” Jews.
12. Kevin Alan Brook’s “The Jews Of Khazaria” (1999) addresses the role of Judaism in the Empire.
13. Haggai ben Shammai and Peter Benjamin Golden’s “The World of the Khazars [New Perspectives]” (2007) paints a helpful picture of the Empire.

14. In “The Story Of Yiddish: How A Mishmash Of Languages Saved The Jews” (2008), Neal Karlen noted: “The population explosion of Eastern European Jews can probably be accounted for by the voluntary mass conversion to Judaism in 740 by the Turkic Khazars, who had settled on the steppes of southern Russia.”
15. Peter Benjamin Golden’s “The Conversion Of The Khazars To Judaism” from “The World of the Khazars: New Perspectives” (2007) and “Turks And Khazars: Origins, Institutions, And Interactions In Pre-Mongol Eurasia (2010) offer further scholarship.
16. Christopher Beckwith’s “Empires Of The Silk Road: A History Of Central Eurasia From The Bronze Age To The Present” (2011) provides much of the relevant historical background.

In other words: The theory is nothing new. (Also see the work done by Thomas Schaub Noonan and Glen Shake.) In fact, the [k]Hazarian provenance of the Ashkenazim only started to be dismissed as a “fringe theory” in the post-War era. With the advent of Revisionist Zionism, where there was a clear geo-political agenda (ethnic cleansing in Palestine based on etiological myths), the proposition is now characterized as inimical to Jewish interests; as Jewish interests have been inaccurately equated with the agenda of right-wing Zionists (i.e. those who fashion the Abrahamic deity as a cosmic real-estate agent).

It is therefore disingenuous to associate any presentation of the [k]Hazarian history of the Ashkenazim as a devious scheme to denigrate eastern European Jewry. On the contrary, it is simply a matter of recognizing historical reality; thereby rescuing Judaism from the very ethno-centric conceptualization that has hobbled its most laudable endeavors to reform. (If there is one thing that all humanists can agree on, it’s that an obsession with bloodlines never ends well.)

As is plain to see from the above list, this is a theory that plenty of honest Jewish scholars have been propounding for quite some time. Indeed, it is a theory anyone would espouse by simply looking at the evidence. In other words: It is a conclusion that would be adduced by any inquirer who was unconcerned with promoting one or another ideological agenda. {4} Surely, if this explanation were some cockamamie hypothesis pushed by perfidious interlocutors, so many (Jewish) scholars would not have espoused it. On the contrary, they surely would have ADDRESSED such perfidy in no uncertain terms.

Yet we find no such rebukes…that is, prior to the post-War era. Indeed, it is only in the past couple generations that mere discussion of this topic has come to be seen as a third rail; and thereby deemed verboten in Reactionary circles. This has especially been the case in the advent of the ethno-nationalist ideology known as Revisionist Zionism. Alas. Today, if one were to go on Wikipedia, one would find this theory derided as "fringe" and "discredited"—an assertion that is based on nothing more than the sentiments of the party who wrote those words.

The theory-in-question is even sometimes (spuriously) associated with anti-Semitism–which, of course, makes no sense; as the thesis is that the subjects aren't Semitic. (Frankly, the world's Turkic people should be PROUD of the fact that their was a thriving Jewish Kingdom, enduring for centuries, in their history.) Only racists would take such a statement (that the ancestors of a haplo-group hailed from one place rather than another) as a disparagement. And, indeed, that is precisely what we find when we encounter interlocutors who vehemently denounce the present thesis: apologists who's point of departure is ethno-centricity (not to mention, an obsession with bloodlines). There's nothing wrong with having Turkic ancestry. And there is nothing about having Semitic ancestry that privileges anyone over anyone else.

Granted, many anti-Zionists have embraced the theory; but that makes perfect sense, as the theory is a solid argument against Zionism (that is, Zionism in its most right-wing form); undercutting, as it does, the claims of blood and soil made by that ideology's proponents. That some ACTUAL anti-Semites have been known to espouse aspects of the theory (in order to promote their own odious agenda) in no way discredits it. If a fascist says the sky is blue, others who make the same claim are not ipso facto implicated in his fascism…let alone complicit in his opprobrious agenda (simply by dint of having concurred on that particular point). As it turns out, the sky really is blue. {5}

The present work is not a summary of what the above scholars wrote. (This is for two reasons. First, I have not read all of their works cover to cover. Second, I have no interest in simply re-hashing what has already been said.) What follows here are my own points—things that I have noticed, insights I've gleaned.

In this monograph, I will primarily make use of circumstantial evidence; as–regrettably–that is all we have at our disposal. The key, of course, is to treat such evidence as pieces of a puzzle…and then see if it can all be put together to yield a

coherent picture. Evidence of certain circumstances is–after all–an indication of what actually happened. As it turns out, ALL the (available) evidence points in the same direction.

More to the point: The profusion of evidence turns out to be more than enough to infer what actually occurred (as well as HOW and WHY it occurred). While the verdict isn't conclusive; it should suffice for our present purposes. What IS the present purpose? Not merely to show where the evidence takes us, but to show how dishonest ideologues must be in order to evade what turns out to be an unavoidable conclusion.

I come at the question from many different angles. As will become apparent, taken together, the observations made in this monograph constitute various aspects of a SINGULAR explanation. If the conclusion here turns out to be errant, this would be an incredible coincidence.

And what of falsifiability? We might go so far to say the following: To refute the present thesis, one would only need to produce a single document that unequivocally asserted the Ashkenazim's (ethnically) Semitic origins; and which explained how / why some Sephardim suddenly came to be in the Rhineland at THAT particular point in time—replete with a different tongue, and a novel version of the creed fully intact. Given the surfeit of available evidence on the matter, it is obvious why no such document exists. {6}

Fortuitously, there is a fair amount of documentation of the relevant era (though any perspicacious historian would very much wish for there to be more). Some of it needs to be taken with a grain of salt, of course; but, so far as I can ascertain, virtually all of the documentation comports with the present thesis. Note, for example, the trove of [k]Hazarian documents from the early 10th century discovered by Solomon Schechter in the Genizah at Fustad (an ancient Jewish storehouse in Cairo, Egypt). This collection of documents included correspondences written by Jewish [k]Hazars that made reference to Oleg of Novgorod–a key player in the relevant history, as we shall see.

According to the Schechter letter, many Alans as well–being as they were [k]Hazar vassals during the 8th and 9th centuries–were adherents of Judaism. (In the early 10th century, the Byzantines took control of the Alans, and promptly mandated that they institute a staunchly anti-[k]Hazar posture.) And what of dissent? It is telling that one of the first to obdurately deny that there was a Jewish Empire located in the

Eurasian Steppes was Joseph Stalin–who's virulent anti-Semitism (nay, racism against anyone of the wrong ethnic background) drove him to condemn any historian that discussed such matters. Why? Because it was unconscionable to him that his Slavic ancestors would have once paid tribute to Jewish sovereigns. {43}

Mention of the [k]Hazars in chronicles actually goes back to the writings of Theophanes the Confessor c. 800. Documentation of the [k]Hazars is available in several other sources. Here are **sixteen** of the most notable:

- The correspondences from the Karaite rabbi, Eldad ben Mahli "ha-Dani" of Abyssinia [a.k.a. "Elchanan the Danite"] (9th century)
- The "Administrando Imperio" [Governance Of The Empire] by Byzantine Emperor, Constantine VII "Pophyro-gennotos" [esp. chapters 10-12 on the Turkic peoples; spec. the Pechenegs] (c. 950)
- The "Gestae Saxonicae" [Deeds Of The Saxons] by Saxon chronicler, Widukind of Corvey (10th century)
- The "Kitab al-Tanbih" by Arab geographer / historian, Al-Masudi (10th-century)
- The "risala" [travelogues] of Arab geographer / historian, Ahmad ibn Fadlan of Baghdad, in which he wrote extensively about the Turkic peoples of the Eurasian Steppes at the time—especially the Volga Bulgars, who interacted with the Kumens, [k]Hazars, Avars, and Slavs (10th century)
- In 977, the traveler, Abu al-Qasim ibn Ali ibn Hawqal of Nisibis composed his "Surat al-Ard" [Face Of The Earth], in which he described trading routes of the [k]Hazars and Volga Bulgars (spec. with respect to Kiev, the Byzantines, and the Silk Road). He did not seem befuddled by this; as he might have been had he found that they were EUROPEAN Jews in that region. (What in heaven's name were Sephardic Jews doing way over THERE?!)
- The "Tajarib al-Umam" [Experiences of Nations] by the Persian chronicler (and Buyid official), Ibn Miskawayh (late 10th / early 11th century)
- The "Gesta Ham[ma]burgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum" [Deeds of the Bishops of Hamburg, which covered the history of the region from c. 788 to the time it was written c. 1073] by Adam of Bremen (11th century)
- Kara-Khanid ethnographer, Mahmud ibn Hussayn of Kashgar (11th century)
- The "Synopsis of Histories" by Byzantine historian, Ioannes Scylitzes [Romanized "John Skylitzes"] (late 11th century)
- The writings of Catalan rabbi, Yehuda ben Barzillai [Judah of Barcelona] (c. 1100)

- The “Gesta Principum Polonorum”, composed between 1113 and 1118, recounts—among other things—the congress that took place between the Polish Duke, Boleslaw “the Brave” and Holy Roman Emperor Otto III; convened at Gniezno around the time the [k]Hazarian Diaspora would have asserted its new identity as “Ashkenazim”.
- The “Chronica Slavorum” by Helmold of Bosau (12th century)
- The travelogues of Bohemian rabbi, Peta[c]hiah ben Yakov of Regensburg [Bavaria], who linked the Jewish communities of eastern Europe (e.g. the Crimean Karaites) to their [k]Hazarian forebears (late 12th / early 13th century)
- The writings of the Catalonian rabbi, Moses ben Na[c]hman of Girona [a.k.a. “Nachmanides”; “Ramban”] (13th century)
- The accounts of the Byzantine minister, Constantine Akropolites (13th century)

That’s not all. In the 10th century, when the Sephardic scholar, Hasdai [ben Isaac ben Ezra] ibn Shaprut of Jaén caught wind that there was a Jewish kingdom in central Asia, he wanted to be involved in the correspondences that were being conducted by the rabbis in Cordoba. The most notable exchange involved two (Jewish) ambassadors of a Croatian king—both of whom had come to Cordoba: “Mar” Saul and “Mar” Joseph. Hasdai ended up composing a letter to the [k]Hazarian khagan. In it, he talked about his fellow Andalusian Jews (i.e. Sephardim); and sought information about the [k]Hazars (regarding their beliefs, their origins, and how they had managed to establish their own Jewish kingdom in that far-away land). In other words, Hasdai was much more earnest to learn about the [k]Hazars than is most of Beth Israel today; and far more curious about them. Tellingly, he did not find it problematic that they were TURKIC Jews. In fact, he seems to have been quite intrigued by them. This correspondence is now referred to as the “Schechter Letter”. {90}

When the [k]Hazar king, Joseph, sent a letter to Hasdai, he informed the scholar that he and all his people, indeed, followed the Jewish creed. “We have seen descendants of the Khazars in Toledo, students of the wise; and they have told us that the remnant of them is of the rabbinical Faith.” The key part of this statement is “the remnant of”, indicating an abiding [k]Hazarian Jewish community in the 10th century. In other words, those who would come to be the Ashkenazim.

Unfortunately, the only other Slavic text that chronicles this era in detail is the First Chronicle of Novgorod, which only goes back to Vladimir's son, Yaroslav "the Wise" (who's reign began c. 1019). (Note that "slav" means "glory".) Even that relatively early chronicle does not start going into detail until the 12th century. {7}

In the 9th century, the Persian scholar, Abu Zayd Ahmed ibn Sahl of Balkh (Khorasan) studied under the famed expositor, Al-Kindi, and wrote about the geography of central Asia and eastern Europe. His student (Abu Ishaq Ibrahim ibn Muhammad al-Farsi of Istakhr) then composed the "Routes Of The Realms". Such documentation offers windows into how people at the time perceived the geo-political landscape.

In his "Book of Traditions" (c. 1161), the Andalusian rabbi, Abraham ben David of Toledo (alt. "Ibrahim ibn Dawood") wrote: "You will find the communities of Israel spread abroad…as far as Daylam and the river Atil where there dwell the Khazar peoples, who became [Jewish] proselytes." This statement indicates that there was still a Jewish community through the late 12th century…people who were direct descendants of the [k]Hazars.

Also notable is a comment in a report by the Italian diplomat, Giovanni da Pian del Carpine in the 1240's which references the "Kumani Brutakhi, qui sunt Iudii" [Kuman Brutakh peoples, who are Jewish]. The Kumans were a Turkic peoples related to the [k]Hazars. {8}

Though we wish there was more, there is still quite a bit of documentation. Alas. The obduracy with which the history is denied by Revisionist Zionist propagandists is mind-boggling. It is routine for such ideologues to scornfully denigrate any explication of the ACTUAL history of their forebears (i.e. the explanation presented here) as the "[k]Hazar myth". Yet as we shall see, just a little research demonstrates how easily such a second-order myth (the myth that something is a myth) can be refuted. {3}

So who REALLY WERE the ancestors of the Ashkenazim? Well, insofar as we are only concerned with Judaism as a Faith, it shouldn't matter. Fealty of Mosaic law, after all, transcends ethnicity; and has nothing whatsoever to do with racial considerations. Insofar as this is the case, exactly from whom one happens to be descended is beside the point. (To say some Jewish people have these ancestors instead of those ancestors does not make them any less Jewish. Beth Israel is a community of FAITH,

not a monolithic ethnicity.) So long was we deny a racialist conception of the term (as we should), belonging to one haplo-group as opposed to another does not entail that a person has any less of a claim to Judaism.

Yet ancestry matters very much to those who are obsessed with claims of unsullied bloodlines (a.k.a. racists); especially insofar as those bloodlines can be tied to a certain tract of land (i.e. their alleged “homeland”). Such is the nature of any preoccupation with “blood and soil”. (For further discussion, see my essays “Genesis Of A People” and “The Land Of Purple”. To illustrate this point, other examples of “blood and soil” will be provided later in this essay.)

But wait. If it doesn’t matter, then why even bother with the present thesis? As stated earlier: I aim to show the lengths to which obdurate ideologues will go to obscure history in order to uphold of a (bogus) “sacred history”–the subsistence of which their ideology depends upon.

Here’s the thing: The moment one insists that bloodlines **should** matter, we should all recoil in disgust. One way that we can combat such thinking is by debunking the faux histories that are constructed around an ethno-centric worlview. Therein lies my motivation for this monograph.

But why the extent of this effort? In order to show THAT something is being obfuscated, it must first be shown WHAT, exactly, has been obfuscated. This requires making the case for the real historical explanation. (Well, there’s that; and I’m also a stickler for setting the record straight.) Hence the disquisition that follows. {1}

The point cannot be reiterated strongly enough: My goal is not so much to tout a certain verdict–a verdict that shouldn’t really matter one way or the other. Rather, it is to show that a program of deliberate obfuscation exists–specifically when the issue is broached amongst Reactionaries. In order to carry out this task, it is necessary to show that what REALLY happened does not correspond with what many unscrupulous expositors claim to have happened. The larger point, though, is that it DOESN’T MATTER whether or not the ancestors of the Ashkenazim belong to one ethnic group or another.

The sad fact that, for some, it DOES matter–and matters so much that they are moved to rewrite history–is what the present monograph demonstrates. This is, of course, one of many instances in which ethno-centrists seek to fabricate history in a gambit to support their odious ideology. Alas, there remain some for whom special bloodlines still matter.

At the end of the day, whether or not significant parts of Beth Israel have Semitic forebears should be seen as patently irrelevant…just as whether or not any given American's ancestors came over on the Mayflower is patently irrelevant. (When it comes to national legitimacy, the mere suggestion that "pure stock" is a salient consideration should make any decent person cringe.) For Revisionist Zionists, however, it is imperative that the ENTIRETY of Beth Israel can trace its lineage back to ancient Judea…lest the case for their agenda collapse. They adamantly deny the present thesis because they NEED it to be un-true.

One would think that the only Jewish Empire to ever exist–a bastion of religious tolerance, as well as a beacon of pluralism during the Dark Ages–would be a source of pride for Beth Israel. Indeed, one would think that the [k]Hazar legacy would be something the world's Jewish people would celebrate. The catch: In doing so, Judeo-Supremacists would be deprived of their rational for demanding "lebensraum" in Palestine. This would be a salutary development for those of us who care about human rights.

So what REALLY DID happen?



RELEVANT HISTORY:

From the 7th thru 10th centuries, the [k]Hazars dwelled the Pontic / Volga / Caspian Steppes, from the northern coast of the [k]Hazar Sea (what we now refer to as the "Caspian Sea") to the north-eastern coast of the Black Sea. Their territory extended westward into Sarmatia (what is now the Ukraine). {88} The early Slavic conquerers (i.e. the Rurikids: rulers of Kieven Rus) referred to this area as the "Polovtsian" Steppes. It makes sense, then, that they often labeled Tatars (spec. Kumans, Kipchaks, and [k]Hazars) "Polovtsy". Tellingly, this exonym pertained to Turkic peoples who had migrated from the Eurasian Steppes into Eastern Europe during the 11th century. So when we look for mention of "[k]Hazars" in documents from the era, they are not necessarily referred to **as such** by those who encountered them. {90}

Lo and behold, many of the "Polovtsy" were Jewish. The Slavic peoples of the LATE Middle Ages (that is: those who lived during the 13th thru 15th centuries) would likely have referred to the [k]Hazarian diaspora in this manner—categorizing them together with non-Jewish Turkic peoples who had come to Eastern Europe from the Eurasian Steppes during the HIGH Middle Ages (that is: between the late 10th and early 13th century). Bottom line: In our search for references to the [k]Hazars, we must realize they were not always CALLED "[k]Hazars". Ethnonyms are fluid, and often the result of shifting geopolitical exigencies. {64}

In the medieval Occidental vernacular, the relevant area (the Eurasian Steppes) was known as "Tartary" / "Tatarstan"; hence the vague label "Tatars" (typically used as a derogatory term for Turkic-Mongol peoples of Eurasia). Thus "Jewish Tatars" is often just a Euphemism for Jews descended from the [k]Hazars. {44} The [k]Hazars asserted a unique ethnic identity pursuant to the dissolution of the Gök-turk Khaganate; and the demise of the Alans as a domineering power in the region. {9}

The figure who seems to have initiated the [k]Hazars as a distinct ethnic group was a leader of the "Onok" (Western Turkic) Khaganate in the Eurasian Steppes: Tong Yabghu of the Ashina, who–incidentally–was a contemporary of Mohammed of Mecca. (He ruled from 618 to 630.) The [k]Hazar Empire seems to have begun in the late 660's. Over time, they came to dwell primarily in the land between the Caspian and Black Seas, to the north of the Caucasus mountains. Ending up in the northern Caucuses was possibly due to pressure from the hegemonic Tang Dynasty, pushing out of China. Those descendants of the Ashina eventually expanded to eastern Sarmatia.

At its peak, the [k]Hazarian domain stretched all the way to the Cimmerian Bosporus (the Kerch Strait, south of the Sea of Azov), where the settlement of Tamantar-khan was located (on the Taman peninsula); and even to the (newly established) city of Kiev, farther north. There were several major [k]Hazarian cities–most notably: Balanjar, Samandar, Samosdelka, Sarighsin [alt. “Saksin-Bolgar”; later Mongolian “Sarai Batu”], Sugda / Sougdaia [Tatar: “Sudak”], Sarkil [alt. “Sarkel”; on the Lower Don], and the imperial capital: Atil [“Khamlij”] (on the northern end of the [k]Hazar Sea, near the mouth of the Volga River).

Sarkil was a vital mercantile hub, as it was situated at the nexus of the most important trade routes in Eurasia. Its location was precisely where the Volga, Don, and Danu Apr (Dnieper) Rivers intersect, and thus on the waterways that connected the Black / Azov Sea with the [k]Hazar (Caspian) Sea…as well as to locations to the north. Samandar was known for its wine vineyards; while Atil served as a market for silks from China and India—brought by merchants of the Silk Road. The [k]Hazar Empire also included the ancient Greek port-city of Theodosia (later re-named “Kaffa” by the Genoese) in the Crimea, on the Black Sea.

During the Middle Ages, merchants of the Silk Road used an offshoot of Syriac (Sogdian) as a prominent language. But for cultural / linguistic interaction, there were more than just the merchants on the Silk Road. Those who traveled its many byways represented a resplendent mosaic of creeds, some Buddhist, some Tengri-ist, some Manichaean, some Syriac Christian, and some (Radhanite) Jewish. The interaction of Persian and Old Turkic cultures occurred all across Eurasia. There was even some linguistic admixture in the Caucuses—notably at Arda-bil (Persian for “holy place”) and at Dar-bent (Persian for “blocked gateway”; alt. “Derbent”). The latter city was known as “Demir-kapi” in Old Turkic [iron gateway], which was rendered “Bab al-Hadid” in Semitic tongues.

Meanwhile, geo-political interaction between the Byzantines and [k]Hazars routinely occurred north of the Black Sea, at Khersones[os] (alt. “Cherson”) and throughout Sarmatia (what is now Ukraine).

The confluence of Turkic tribes in the relevant region (what came to known as "[k]Hazaria") likely included vestiges of the Tatar / Oghuric peoples, a vaguely defined family of peoples and tongues associated with the nomadic Turkic peoples of the Steppes during the Middle Ages, as well as the Alans (especially the Burtas). {31} This was in conjunction with:

- The Patzinaks (alt. "Baganaks" / "Becheneks" / "Pechenegs") from the west
- The [upper] Volga Bulgars from the northeast (the region later referred to as Tatarstan: which became the land of Kazan). To this day, Kazan Jews are a remnant of their Turkic ancestors.
- The Kumyks, Kimeks, Kumans, and–most significantly–the Kipchaks (all of whom were affiliated with the Kangar Union) from the east. (The medieval Kumyk capital, "Anzhi-Kala" was on the [k]Hazar Sea. It meant "Pearl Fortress"; and is now the Dagestani city of Makhach-kala.)

The predominant religion of ALL these peoples was Tengri-ism; which would enter its heyday under the Mongol Empire. A pre-Mongolic (possibly Avar) element can be adduced due to the use of the military honorific "Tar-khan" in [k]Hazarian nomenclature.

Interestingly, the 9th-century Benedictine monk, Christian Druthmar of Stavelot referred to the [k]Hazars as Hunnic (reflecting a European legacy of stigmatizing non-Christians from the Eurasian Steppes as primitive barbarians). {12} Whether or not they were descendants of the Huns is entirely beside the point. The same supposition was made about the Magyars, and–for that matter–anyone else that was associated with the ancient Scythians. {42}

This salmagundi of peoples was subjected to the influence of Bulgars from the west–primarily as a result of the conquests of the great conquerer, Asparu[k]h in the late 7th century. Consequently, the lingua franca of [k]Hazaria ended up being a hybridization of Bulgar and other Turkic tongues (primarily an Oghuric tongue; the same roots as modern Chuvash).

Farther east were the (Kipchak) "Kangars" [alt. "Kangli"], a Turkic people who ruled from their capital, Utrar (alt. "Otrar"; referred to as "Faryab" in Persian / Sogdian), located on the Jaxartes River (referred to as "Syr Darya" in Persian / Sogdian), which flowed from the Hindu Kush into the Sea of Aral ("aral" is Turkic for "islands"). Oghuric peoples who remained to the east of the Ural Mountains included the Kyrgyz / [k]Hakas, Kazakhs, Chulym Tatars, and Shorian Tatars (a.k.a. the "Mras-Su")

—all of whom descended from the Kara-Kalpak branch of the Kipchaks. This common origin accounts for their similarities to the Turkic groups with whom we are concerned in the present monograph: Oghuric peoples like the Bashkirs, Kumyks, and Chuvash; and—yes—the [k]Hazaks.

Prior to the Samanids, Chach-Kand (Slavicized to “Tashkent” by the Russians) and Samar-Kand were part of the First (Göktürk) Turkic Khaganate, then the Kara-Khanids, who spoke the Karluk language. Uzbeks and Hazaras also descended from the Karluk branch (pursuant to the Mongol infusion)…which was NOT Oghuric. Indeed, the Oghuric line of Old Turkic is not to be confused with the Oghuz line, which descended from the Bozoks: a different offshoot of the Kimek-Kipchak confederation. They originated well south of the Syr Darya, across the Kyzylkum desert, closer to the more southern river (the Amu Darya) in what is now Türkmen-i-stan and Khwarazm—the capital of which was [Old] Urgench. {106}

In the late 10th century, Al-Muqaddasi wrote about the (Oghuz) “Türkmen” in Khorasan and Transoxiana (the region south of the Aral Sea that is now southern Uzbek-i-stan and all of Türkmen-i-stan) in his “Ahsan al-Taqasim fi Marifat al-Aqalim”. And in the 11th century, the Kara-Khanid scholar, Mahmud al-Kashgari wrote about the Oghuz line in his “Diwan Lughat al-Turk”. This accounts for the ethno-genesis of the Seljuks, who would eventually become the Ottoman Turks.

The Seljuks—who had converted to a militant version of Sunni Islam—initially operated out of Nishapur (in Khorasan), but then re-located their capital as they transitioned westward. Their hegemony brought them westward through Persia and across northern Mesopotamia (the Buyids were no match for the armies of Tughril)…then up into Anatolia, where they would later become known as Ottoman Turks (pursuant to the ascent of Osman “Ghazi” in the late 13th century). Their dialect of Oghuz is what eventually became “Türkçe”; hence the English term, “Turkish” for the Turks of Anatolia. Once the Ottoman capital was moved to Constantinople (re-christened “Istanbul”), the Seljuk’s ethnic identity was re-branded “Türkler” (rendered “Turkish” in English) from what had been “Turkmaniyya” in Arabic (i.e. the Türk-men people). Upon the collapse of the Ottoman Empire (in the advent of the First World War), the nation-State, “Türkiye” (rendered “Turkey” in English) was established. None of this had anything to do with the Oghuric branch of Old Turkic; or with the Turkic peoples of the Eurasian Steppes—whether “Tatars” or [k]Hazars.

The path of the Seljuks is marked by later incarnations of Oghuz Turkic in the region where they originated (Türkmen south of the Aral Sea; Salar in Xin-jiang). As the Seljuks migrated westward, vestiges of that Turkic language remained along the way—in part due to the prominence of the "Ak Koyunlu" [White Sheep] and "Kara Koyunlu" [Black Sheep] over the course of the 14th and 15th centuries. Traces are still found across Persia (Khorasani, Chaharmahali, and Kashkai) as well as in northern Mesopotamia and the southern Caucuses (Azeri). {92}

I digress. By the end of the 7th century, the [k]Hazars boasted a formidable empire. Testament to this fact: There is still a town in Wallachia (present-day Romania) that was referred to as "Kozar-Var" [Khazar Castle]. They'd even settled the site that would later be christened "Kiev"–based on the Turkic "Kui" for riverbank, and "Ev" for settlement. (The "Kozare" district in Kiev was named after the [k]Hazars.) In fact, through the 18th century, central Ukraine and Crimea were still being referred to as [Land of] "Casari". {11} {60} {87}

But why JUDAISM? The supposition that the [k]Hazars may have adopted Judaism due to refugees fleeing Byzantine lands is without evidence. (The idea that the ruling class of a thriving empire would suddenly adopt the religion of a few refugees from a foreign land is rather far-fetched.) The most likely candidate for the origins of such refugees would have been Phanagoria–a trading hub on the Taman peninsula. But that area was under (pagan, Onogur) Bulgar control in the 7th century, then under [k]Hazar control from the late 7th century until the demise of Georgios Tzul c. 1016.

Being a merchant culture in the Eurasian Steppes, it is quite possible that the [k]Hazars adopted Judaism from the "Radhanites": Jewish merchants who operated across the known world–from the Iberian Peninsula to China. (They seemed to have gotten their moniker from the Persians, for whom the moniker "Rah-Dan" means "one who knows the way".) The Radhanites dominated the Silk Road UNTIL the collapse of the [k]Hazar Empire.

It was during the 8th century (in the advent of the Abbasid revolution in Dar al-Islam) that the [k]Hazars began converting to Judaism. {105} At around that time, the Khagan known as "Bulan" (alternately referred to by the Judaic honorific, "Sabr-i-El") claimed to have been visited by an angel–thereby receiving a revelation from the Abrahamic deity. It was this visitation that inspired his own conversion. {13}

King Obadiah–a descendent of Bulan–established synagogues and Jewish schools throughout [k]Hazaria. For two centuries, the Jewish contingent in [k]Hazaria burgeoned…until it became the largest Jewish community in the world. This is attested in the logs of the well-traveled Jewish merchant, Eldad ha-Dani in the 9th century. Tellingly, the Byzantine cynosure, Saint Cyril (after whom the Russian script was named) is recorded as having gone to [k]Hazaria (c. 860) in an attempt to convert the populace away from Judaism, but to no avail.

It comes as little surprise that, today, the [k]Hazars are rarely talked about. For, given conventional wisdom, it seems odd to suppose that the only Jewish Empire in history was TURKIC, not Semitic. {14}

The version of Judaism in [k]Hazaria was most likely something akin to Karaite, which had been developed in the 8th century on the outskirts of northeastern Persia. (During Late Antiquity, small Jewish communities had migrated as far east as Bukhara and Merv.) This can be surmised based on the fact that the [k]Hazars would not have had mainline Rabbinic sources available to them. Consequently, it is unlikely that they availed themselves of–or were even much familiar with–the Talmudic tradition popular amongst Mizra[c]him (Jews who were indigenous to the Levant), Sephardim (the diaspora across the Mediterranean basin), and the various cadres of scribes at the Talmudic academies in Mesopotamia. Karaite Judaism does not make use of Mishnaic Law (that is: the oral tradition that proliferated amongst Talmudic scholars). Instead, it relies solely on the contents of the Hebrew Bible as it originally existed: in Babylonian Aramaic. This would, indeed, be the kind of Judaism we would expect were a distant people to adopt the Faith “from scratch”. (It is conjectured that the rabbi involved in the initial conversion of the [k]Hazarian leadership, Isaac ha-Sangari, may have been a Karaite.)

Also worth noting are the Khavars / Kabars, who were alternately referred to as the “Khalyz” / “Khvalis” / “Khalyzians”. These were [k]Hazarian rebels who defected to the Magyars and Pechenegs between the 830’s and 850’s. (At one point or another, ALL these Turkic tribes had been vassals of the [k]Hazars. The Khavars seem to have been related to Avars and Bulgars as well.) Lo and behold: Their Faith was Judaism.

Archeological evidence backs this up. The “Also-Szent-Mihaly” inscription in Mihai Viteazu (Transylvania) states that the Karaites were Khavars (that is: that the Khavars were Jewish). Khavar / Khalyz graves at Chelarevo (in the Carpathian / Pannonian Basin) dating from between c. 800 and c. 1000 contain Turkic-Mongol skeletal remains; and use Judaic iconography. (This archeological evidence is

discussed by Gabor Vekony and Istvan Erdelyi.) The Jewish Faith of the Khavars / Kabars was attested in “De Administrando Imperio” by Byzantine Emperor Constantine VII (from the 10th century); and in the accounts of Joannes Kinnamos of Galicia (from the 12th century). (Also reference the research of Paul Robert Magocsi in his 2010 work: “A History of Ukraine: A Land And Its Peoples”; p. 62.)

The [k]Hazar Empire was pluralistic, so accommodated a diversity of ethnicities. Even as Judaism predominated, the empire’s populace included a mixture of Eastern Christian (i.e. Syriac; esp. Nestorian), Muslim, and Tengri-ist communities. (There may have even been a smattering of Zoroastrians, Manichaeans, and Buddhists.) There was clearly a burgeoning Jewish population in the capital, Atil, on the Lower Volga River; as well as a significant Jewish presence in the northern Caucasus–specifically in the city of Samandar. There was even a Turkic Jewish (i.e. Krymchak / Tatar) presence at Kaffa (Greek “Theodosia”, rendered “Feodosia” by the Kieven Rus) and at Karasu-bazar (now “Bilogorsk”) in the Crimea. The archeological evidence makes this clear: A synagogue was erected in Kaffa c. 909 by a Turkic-speaking people.

In the 860’s, the [k]Hazar imperium lost control of its western frontier to the Varangians of Kievan Rus, who were led by the famed king, Rurik. Even so, the prevalence of Judaism continued amongst the general populace. The final demise of the [k]Hazar Empire would come in the late 10th century with the rapacious conquests of the (pagan Slavic) Rurikid ruler, Svyatoslav Igorevich, who pushed his dominion–under the aegis of Kievan Rus–eastward into the Pontic steppes. {123}

So what do we know about the [k]Hazars? Bulan seems to have been their first Jewish leader. The most famous Jewish ruler of the [k]Hazars was the Bulanid king, Joseph, who ruled until the late 960’s from the [k]Hazarian capital, Atil. {10} There still exist records of correspondence between Joseph and the Andalusian Jewish diplomat for the caliph of Cordoba: Hasdai ben Isaac ben Ezra “Ibn Shaprut” (dating from the late 960’s). {39} {90} It was Joseph who was ousted when [k]Hazaria was overrun by Svyatoslav Igorevich (an event that is attested in Joseph’s aforementioned correspondence). The [k]Hazar imperium had already been weakened by revolts (especially by the Khavar / Kabar segment of its population).

Svyatoslav brought the polity of [k]Hazaria within Slavic dominion. A panoply of [k]Hazarian-Slavic miscegenation invariably ensued. Tellingly, early Russian sources refer to the captured region as “Volost Kazarskaya”: Land of the [k]Hazars. {67}

Here's the thing: From the ascension of Bulan to the ousting of Joseph was over two centuries–more than enough time for significant conversion to have occurred throughout the [k]Hazarian populace. By the time the [k]Hazars were completely brought within the fold of Kievan Rus (in the late 10th century), Judaism had come to predominate amongst them. Moreover, it had been fully embraced by the Empire's ruling class, which means the Faith was taken very seriously by those who were calling the shots.

It might be noted, though, that not everyone in [k]Hazaria converted to Judaism. As mentioned, [k]Hazarian culture was renown for being atypically pluralistic. Due to the religious freedom in the [k]Hazar Empire, there were people of ALL Faiths living side-by-side, including some Muslims. (As mentioned: In addition to the Abrahamic religions, the indigenous Turkic Faith of Tengri-ism would have likely persisted; though it would soon thereafter be primarily associated with the Mongols.)

Be that as it may, Judaism eventually came to predominate the Empire. What little historical documentation we now have bears this out. In the 860's the Benedictine monk, Christian Druthmar of Stavelot stated that the [k]Hazars had adopted Judaism "IN FULL". This may have been slightly hyperbolic, but it certainly conveyed the scope of the Faith in the [k]Hazarian realm. {12}

In his travelogue, the "Risala" c. 922, the (Arab) scholar of the Volga Bulgars, Ahmad ibn Fadlan noted: "The Khazars and their king are all Jews." And in his "Mukhtasar Kitab al-Buldan" [Concise Book of Lands] c. 930, the Persian historian, Ibn al-Faqih of Hamadan noted: "All of the Khazars are Jews. Yet they have been Judaized only recently." (Here, "recently" indicates that they had not descended from the Beth Israel of Antiquity; but, rather, had only emerged as a Jewish community during the Middle Ages.) And throughout the Middle Ages, Slavic, Turkic, Syriac, Georgian, Armenian, and Arab peoples wrote about the Jewish [k]Hazars—a characterization that would not have made sense had the creed been constrained to a small cadre of aristocrats.

That the [k]Hazars were primarily Jewish was clearly the prevailing impression around the world. {15} Had all these expositors been referring to ONLY the [k]Hazarian elite, this specification would have been made at some point. It never was. It comes as no surprise, then, that Medieval Russian epics refer to Kieven Rus defeating the "Jewish Giant" from Eurasia.

So where does this leave us? In order to make the claim that the Ashkenazim of eastern Europe are primarily Semitic (i.e. NOT Turkic), one would have to suppose that two things happened:

First Option: Short of being completely wiped out (by some sort of genocide) pursuant to the conquests of Svyatoslav, virtually the entire [k]Hazar population would've had to have abruptly converted OUT of Judaism.

Second Option: There would've had to have been a sudden, massive migration of (Semitic) Jewish people FROM the Levant (and/or from someplace where Jews from the Levant had migrated in the not-too-distant past; i.e. the Mediterranean basin) and/or from western Europe TO northeastern Europe at some point before 1000 A.D. This would need to have occurred in order to account for the preponderance of Jewish people that ended up in the region rather suddenly. This would need to have occurred shortly after Svyatoslav's conquests in [k]Hazaria. {16}

There is zero evidence that EITHER of these events occurred. Moreover, there are plenty of reasons why such events would not have made any sense.

Regarding the first option: Svyatoslav was pagan; so had no interest in evangelism–let alone in religious persecution. In other words: His concern was territorial conquest, not religious hegemony. This means that, upon being overtaken, the [k]Hazarian Jews would not have suddenly been coerced into converting out of their Faith (to paganism). {17} Instead, they would have found themselves in a situation that was tolerable even if unpalatable. Their society had been overtaken by a power that–while not supportive of their institutions–was probably indifferent to their (Jewish) Faith. So there would have been some incentive to seek greener pastures–though not with any sense of urgency.

Regarding the second option: The population of Jewish people seems to have SUDDENLY grown in what is now Germany, Poland, Greater Lithuania (including Belarus and Latvia), and northern Ukraine around this time (the 10th and 11th centuries); which means that some geo-political event must have spurred a SUDDEN mass-migration. During the relevant period (the century or two preceding the Crusades), nothing of the kind occurred on the Italic peninsula, on the Balkan peninsula (Greece and Dacia), or anywhere in Anatolia. Nor did anything of the kind occur in either the Iberian peninsula (Andalusia), Gaul (Gallia), or the Frankish lands (Frankia). (At that point, the relevant areas in France would have been Occitania in the south and Lotharingia in the northeast.)

In considering the aftermath of the [k]Hazarian diaspora, the question arises: How plausible is it that an entire religious community—once the sovereigns of a geographical region—can come to be absent from that region? History furnishes us with a few case-studies—from the Jews of the ancient Talmudic academies in Babylonia (now Iraq) to the Muslims of medieval Andalusia (now Spain): both almost entirely gone. Vanished? No. Just displaced. {110}

The conclusion, then, is quite straight forward: The [k]Hazarian Jews must have GONE SOMEWHERE. But WHERE? More to the point: How can we be so sure that the Jewish remnant of [k]Hazaria ended up in eastern Europe rather than somewhere else? Following the [k]Hazar Empire's downfall, Jews who wanted to live elsewhere had an option to go in one of four basic directions. Let's look at each in turn:

Possibility One: Egress southward–across the Caucasian mountains–into Seljuk territory would have been extremely unlikely for two reasons.

First: The Seljuk Turks had recently left the (tolerant) Faith of Tengri-ism for a virulent strain of (Hanafi) Sunni Islam. This "Salafi" zealotry would go into overdrive in the 1030's with the ascension of Tughril. Ethnically, the Seljuks were primarily Oghuz peoples hailing from well east of the [k]Hazar (a.k.a. "Caspian") Sea, and slightly to the south, in Khorasan. {114} This was a time of rapacious Seljuk conquest; so any migration in that direction (over the Caucuses mountains–into Shirvan and the Armenian plateau on the other side) would have offered only peril. {24}

Second: The topography would have been a formidable obstacle. For a pastoral people (of agrarians and merchants) seeking to emigrate from [k]Hazaria, traversing the Caucuses Mountains would not have been a viable option. Note that by 1071, the Seljuks had conquered as far as Manzikert in western Anatolia (in addition to Antioch, Edessa, and Nicaea); yet EVEN THEY deemed attempts to traverse the Caucuses mountains (to expand northward) a quixotic venture. If the mountain range thwarted some of the world's most voracious conquerers, it surely was not a viable option for bands of migrating families–including women and children–with rickety horse-carts.

Possibility Two: Egress eastward, farther into the Eurasian Steppes was not an option either. This would have entailed venturing into the realm of the Kumen-Kipchaks—heading toward Talas / Taraz, Shavgar, Balasagun, Samar-kand, Chach-Kand (Tashkent), Utrar, Kashgar, Bukhara, Bish-kek, Tash-kent, Eni-Kent, and [Old] Urgench.

At the time, the (Oghuz) Yabgu maintained sovereignty over that region–which was traditionally Kumen-Kipchak. (Farther to the northeast was the Kimak Khanate.) Though the Yabgu were primarily Tengri-ist, it was THEY who had allied with the Kieven Rus in the siege of the [k]Hazar Empire. (!) (This alliance was attested in the chronicles of Abu al-Qasim ibn Hawqal of Nisibis, who was in the area at the time.) Meanwhile, many of the (upper) Volga Bulgars, operating out of the cities Kazan and Bolghar slightly to the northeast (and who were never on good terms with the [k]Hazars) converted to Islam in the 10th century. They would have harbored only resentment toward their former subjugators.

Hence there was only hostile territory to the east. {114}

Things would only become more menacing by the 1020's, as the (non-Seljuk) Oghuz became increasingly militant (and hegemonic), aggressively pushing westward into the eastern frontier of the former [k]Hazaria. If anything, that rampage would have forced any remaining [k]Hazars to seek refuge by fleeing WESTWARD, into Europe. And so it went.

Possibility Three: Egress northward, deeper into Kieven Rus (and into much colder climes) would have been an utterly pointless–nay, foolhardy–venture. Frigid temperatures and the barren land of tundra held no prospects to an agrarian people, or for merchants.

The only other option for egress, then, was westward.

Bear in mind: The Turkic tribes of the Eurasian Steppes had been nomadic peoples for hundreds of years–going back to the heyday of the Huns. Hence it would have been perfectly natural for a band of such people to uproot themselves and relocate as the need arose–in the Middle Ages just as in Late Antiquity. Indeed, the westward movement of Eurasian peoples had a very long history going back to the Iron Age–with the Cimmerians. The Turkic origins of some of the communities that came to be categorized as "Slavic" actually dates back to the Scythians, followed by the

Massagetae and Sarmatians…ALL of whom originated in the Eurasian Steppes. (Later, Turkic tribes like the Alans, Avars, and Bulgars also migrated westward, though they did not adopt a Slavic identity.)

There is no evidence for Jews anywhere significantly east of the Rhine Valley (that is: in east Frankia: Saxony / Thuringia / East Frankonia / Bavaria) prior to c. 1000. How can this be adduced? During this time, there are no records of a Jewish presence (yet) in key geo-political locations (like Regensburg, Merseburg, and Magdeburg). At no point are Jews mentioned in the annals of Henry "the Fowler" of Saxony, founder of the Ottonian dynasty. Nor are any mentioned in the records of the monumental Battle of Lenzen: when the Saxons pushed the Slavs out of the region c. 929. Nor are any mentioned in accounts of either Count Thietmar or Gero Magnus. There WERE, however, Magyars impinging on the region. (Hence the Battle of Riade in 933.)

Prior to c. 1000, when we find accounts of a small Jewish presence in northern Europe, it was only to the west: in Lotharingia–notably: during the tenure of Bruno the Great (Henry the Fowler's son) in Cologne. When Jews finally appear in the historical record in Saxony / Thuringia / East Francia / Bavaria, it is when the [k]Hazarian diaspora would have arrived. Indeed, the sudden incidence of Judaism in Lusatia / Silesia at THAT PARTICULAR TIME (just after c. 1000) can be explained in no other way.

The sudden appearance of Jews in Ashkenaz would not have been due to the expulsion from France, as that did not occur until 1182. {40} NOR would it have been due to the expulsion from England, as that did not occur until the last decade of the 13th century (in a vulgar twist of irony, merely 75 years after the Magna Carta). {18} The first major Jewish migration from western Europe to eastern Europe occurred in 1343, to Poland, at the behest of Casimir the Great.

If one looks at a comprehensive map of the migrations of Jewish people over the course of the Middle Ages, one will not find a single arrow pointing from ANYWHERE in Europe to destinations east of the Rhine Valley (the land of Ashkenaz) prior to the 12th century. Yet significant Jewish communities suddenly appeared there (in the 11th century) nevertheless. They could have only come from the east. So who would those migrants have been?

The [k]Hazarian diaspora.

The suggestion that a massive migration suddenly occurred northward, from the Italic peninsula OVER the Alps seems a bit of a stretch…as is the suggestion that a massive migration suddenly occurred northward from the upper Balkan peninsula over the Julian and Dinaric Alps (then over the southern Carpathian Mountains). Are we to suppose that, all of the sudden (the late 10th / early 11th century), massive numbers of Jews on the northeastern Mediterranean rim were moved to undertake the arduous task of traversing such terrestrial obstacles, deeper into the Holy Roman Empire…without any discernible motive…and without any identifiable impetus? Supposing such an event occurred flies in the face of common sense. Pace the existence of the trading route known as the “Amber Road”, this was a highly unlikely course. {19} {79}

Yet, short of accounting for a sudden LATERAL surge of Jewry into the Rhineland, we are forced to make such a supposition; if, that is, we are to entertain an alternative to the present explanation–an explanation that accounts for BOTH a motive and an impetus at exactly the time we should expect.

So WHAT OF the Jewish people of the eastern Mediterranean basin? As it turns out, the oldest Jewish community in the world, the Romaniote Jews, traces its origins back to Greece (esp. Thessalonika) in Late Antiquity, as attested in the travelogues of Benjamin of Tudela from the 12th century. But there is no evidence that Ashkenazim can trace their origins back to the Romaniotes.

It is said that Samuel of Speyer (late 12th century) was from the Sephardic “Kalonymos” family of the Italic peninsula (Romanized to “Kalonymus”). There are, it turns out, apocryphal tales of Kalonymos progeny settling in Lotharingia as early as the 10th century. However, none are corroborated by historical evidence (a matter I explore in the Appendix). The earliest attested “Kalonymos” in the region is referred to as “Kalonymus ben Meshullam” (purportedly the son of the Roman Halakhist, “Meshullam the Great”). Said to have lived in the late 11th century, he is now primarily associated with Worms and Mainz.

This apocryphal figure played a role in tales about the (equally apocryphal) Amnon of Mainz. He is sometimes even featured in legends about the composition of the “Unetanneh Tokef”. The lines between fact and fiction here are quite blurred. {32}

And what of the oft-touted Kolonymos lineage? What we DO know about this storied family is limited. (Again: I explore this topic in the Appendix.) It settled in the “Hachmei Provence” of Occitania (primarily at Narbonne and Lunel) at some point in

the 11th century. (There are records of Jews settling in southeastern France dating back to a small presence in Valentia in the 6th century; and some may have settled as far north as Orléans.) This community (known as the “Hachmei Provence”) had been founded in the 8th century by Makhir ben Yehudah Zakkai. It is associated with such figures as Merwan “ha-Levi” and Moses ha-Darshan–both of whom lived in the 11th century; and is best known for Abraham ben David (from the 12th century) and “Isaac the Blind” (from the late 12th / early 13th century). {119}

Here’s the thing: ALL these historic figures remained in the south of France. The famed Kalonymos ben Todros lived in Narbonne in the 12th century. The famed Kalonymos ben Kalonymos lived in Avignon in the late 13th / early 14th century. In other words: During the period in question, there does not seem to have been any discernible tendency for the Jews of Occitania to move up to the Rhineland. This makes sense, as there was no impetus for doing so at the time.

When descendants of the Kalonymos family would have eventually made it as far north as Lotharingia, it must have been at some point after the 12th century. {32} In other words: Even when we consider the most likely candidate (family) for a northward migration to the Rhineland from southwestern Europe, we find no evidence. The record is clear: The original Ashkenazim had a background that had little to do with migrations from the Mediterranean basin.

The Eurasian Steppes, however, were a different story. In the advent of the [k]Hazar Empire’s demise, the region would have become a slightly less hospitable place for Jews (though not perilous). Svyatoslav’s heir, Vladimir “the Great” of Novgorod (r. 980- 1015), who had converted to Christianity, was seeking to convert pagans under his dominion. Those not of the Abrahamic Faith would have been oppressed; and thus compelled to either convert or flee. Being Abrahamic, Jews may well have been given a pass. While some [k]Hazarian Jews and Tengri-ists may have opted to acquiesce and become Christian, things probably began to look increasingly dire for non-Christians (especially pagans). By THAT point, there were surely plenty of Jews who would have seen an exodus westward as a viable–nay, appealing–option. Though not in immediate peril, they were probably keen on finding a new place to call home.

But let's back up. What of Jews of the period prior to c. 1000 A.D. (spec. during Late Antiquity)? Pursuant to the eviction of most Jews from Palestine under the Roman Empire (esp. after the Bar Kokhba revolt in the 2nd century), the diaspora scattered Beth Israel…

- **Eastward into Mesopotamia.** Hence the establishment of the Talmudic academies at S[h]ura, Pum-nahara, Pum-bedita, and Nehardea in the 3rd century. (The academy at Pum-bedita would be relocated to Mahuza [a.k.a. "al-Mada'in"] in the 4th century.)
- **Westward across the Mediterranean basin.** This means: into north Africa (esp. Elephantine in Egypt, though eventually along the Maghreb) as well as the Balkan, Italic, and Iberian peninsulas. Hence the Romaniotes in Greece, as well as the efflorescence of Jewish scholars in Morocco and Andalusia during the Middle Ages).

It is therefore prudent to surmise that the only Semitic Jews are those who are descendants of the Maccabees of the 2nd and 1st century B.C. and/or descendants of the Sadducees and Pharisees of Late Antiquity (that is, up until the revolt against Roman Emperor Heraclius c. 614-630)…all of whom went in one of those two directions. In other words: The portion of Beth Israel with Semitic ancestors are those Jews who ended up either in the Mediterranean basin (the Sephardim) or in Nabataea / Idumaea and Mesopotamia (the Misra[c]him).

Looking farther to the east, another query is worth making: From whence did the (Turkic) Jews of Bukhara / Samarkand[a] come? The first synagogue was erected there in 1620. The community seems to have emerged in the region at some point during the Middle Ages, though—here's the catch—not BEFORE the [k]Hazar Empire; and probably not AFTER the Seljuk Turks overtook the region. This was the heyday of the Silk Road. As such, the only Semitic Jews who would have traveled this route would have been the Radhanites. Turkic Jews would only have emerged there from an indigenous population.

Pace a small group of Bukharan Jews from Persia, there is no record of a diaspora from the Middle East that ended up in region between the Jaxartes and Oxus rivers (e.g. Bukhara and Samarkand[a]) during Late Antiquity. Consider that such a migration would have involved going across all of Mesopotamia AND all of Persia, northward over the Kopet Dag mountains, across the barren Kara-kum Desert, and into the land of the Oghuz Turks. Such a large-scale migration is rather far-fetched. {113}

Barring some scant evidence for tiny enclaves in central Gaul, prior to the downfall of the [k]Hazar Empire, the farthest north in Europe that Jewish communities could be found were the Alps and Pyrenees. As mentioned, Jews primarily settled in Occitania (southeastern France), though a few may have made it as far north as Valentia–or possibly even Orléans–as early as the 6th century. There would have been no motive to settle deeper into the Holy Roman Empire (e.g. the Burgundian lands) during the post- Carolingian era.

On the Balkan peninsula, few-if-any Jews would have ventured north of the Balkan (Sharr / Pindus / Pirin / Rila) mountains–on the other side of which was nothing but violent turmoil. Indeed, lands to the north of that mountain range were a crucible of on-going hostilities between the Byzantines, Kieven Rus, Bulgars, Magyars, and Pechenegs. Certainly, no Jews would have made it past the southern Carpathian mountains. Why would have they even tried?

As for the Italic peninsula, there was the issue of the terrestrial impediment known as the Alps.

This includes the Julian and Dinaric Alps, a formidable range of mountains stretching across Carantania (Slovenia and northern Croatia, at the north end of the Baltic peninsula), which would have also obstructed movement northward from the Mediterranean basin. Hence: When it comes to topography, ingress to Lotharingia would have needed to have been LATERAL–that is: from northern France and/or from somewhere to the east. The genesis of the earliest Jewish enclaves north of these mountain ranges are shrouded in mystery; yet we know that their beginnings POST-dated the [k]Hazar Empire.

The earliest Jewish presence in northern Europe seems to have occurred at **Cologne**, a municipality in East Frankia (Lotharingia). {21} A small community of Jews had settled at the behest of bishop Bruno “the Great” in the 10th century. {58}

Though Jews would not have been inclined to venture unbidden to that area prior to said overture, it IS POSSIBLE that a small cadre of Jews dwelled in Cologne in the centuries prior to Bruno’s invitation. However it is reasonable to assume that a significant number would not have existed in the city prior to this point, as–during the 9th century–the Carolingians were aggressively converting everyone in the area (spec. pagan Saxons and Frisians) to Christianity. Moreover, the Vikings razed the

city in 882. (Raping and pillaging by Norsemen was not uncommon in that region up to the 10th century.) Bruno's invitation was probably the beginning of Jewish presence.

Understanding the geo-political exigencies of the time furnishes us with additional historical context. By the 10th century, the Saxons had beome Roman Catholic. Around this time, the Magyars (a Turkic people related to the Chuvash who had diverged from [k]Hazar dominion c. 862) had made major inroads into Eastern Europe. In 924, the (Christian) Ottonians begrudgingly agreed to pay tribute to the (pagan) Magyars in return for the latter ceasing their violent incursions. (For more on this, see Postscript 1.) Suffice to say: Turkic peoples from the Eurasian Steppes making inroads into Eastern Europe was nothing new. (The Alans eventually made it all the way to the Iberian Peninsula!)

Soon thereafter, though, the power of the Ottonians was ascendent. Subsequently, the Saxons transitioned from subjugation to resistance…and then went on the offensive. By 955, German King Otto had defeated the Magyars in the storied battle of Lechfeld. {73}

By the time Otto had subdued the Turkic (Magyar) peoples in his domain, it was not uncommon for people to migrate from northern France to Germanic lands. In the 960's, the famed Christian cleric, Adalbert of Alsace-Lorraine went to be educated in Mainz…and eventually became the first archbishop of Magdeburg. {41} So it is no surprise that some of those heading in that direction at the time may have also been Jewish.

In recognizing that the [k]Hazarian diaspora moved westward, we might ask: Who else might have done so? That is: What of eastern EUROPEANS who engaged in a westward migration? During the Dark Ages, the Germanic tribes of the Prussian / Pomeranian (Baltic) lands opted to retreat to the west, back across the Elbe and into the Rhineland–which offered fecund countryside beyond the reach of the "Wends" (Slavs). (The first Prussians / Pomeranians were descendants of the Germanic tribes of Antiquity.) It's safe to assume that a few centuries later (that is: in the late 10th century), an isolated band of Turkic peoples seeking more hospitable climes would have had similar reason to ALSO move westward; with their sites also set on the same verdant environs. (The Franks would not start pushing back into the lands east of the Elbe until the 12th and 13th centuries.) So around this time, the [k]Hazars were not the only peoples–let alone the only Turkic peoples–moving into Europe from the east.

In addition to the Magyars making inroads into eastern Europe, there was also a major influx of Avars and Bulgars farther to the south. (Not until Otto's aforementioned victory over the Magyars at Lechfeld, and the concomitant hegemony of the Slavs, did such incursions cease.) But the [k]Hazarian Jews were different: They may have been Turkic, but they were not pagan; and they were clearly not trying to conquer anyone. Moreover, being traders and farmers, they would have been more than willing to adapt their native tongue to the indigenous (Germanic) tongue–as merchants tend to do with their consumer-base. Being unassuming nomadic Jews, they would not have posed a threat to Christendom; and certainly would not have been seen as a threat to the local cynosures–who surely welcomed commerce from pliant new subjects.

The [k]Hazarian nomads' choice of the Rhineland as a viable destination was made especially conspicuous due to the "Magdeburger Recht" [Rights of the People of Magdeburg], instituted in the 10th century by Otto–who, by then, had become Holy Roman Emperor. This decretal was issued at EXACTLY the right time. It likely served as an inducement to the disaffected [k]Hazarian Jews, as it conferred local autonomy to municipalities in the region–thereby creating a political climate that would have been (comparatively) hospitable to those of the Jewish Faith.

The political appanage accorded to this region accounted for the rise of the Gentile barons along the Rhine in the 11th century–a felicitous condition that would endure for the next couple centuries. Being as they were BARONS (who were happy to be emancipated from the ecclesiastic dominion of the Holy Roman imperium), they did not care much about religion; they cared about MONEY. So these Gentile lords (known as "burghers") would not have had any truck with the influx of (non-rabbinical) [k]Hazarian Jews into their patchwork of mini-fiefdoms. The Turkic people from the east were–after all–primarily farmers, merchants, and craftsmen (read: sources of tax revenue), not proselytizers (that is: possible headaches).

A clue that the Jewish people who settled in this region were not of a Semitic background is the decision by some to use "schultheize" (later rendered "Schultz") as a surname. The term referred to someone tasked by manor lords to collect dues from merchants and peasants. This would have been a viable station for the new immigrants. Clearly, those with Sephardic (read: Hebraic) origins would not have been inclined to adopt such a label. The name would have only been adopted by people of non-Semitic heritage who felt obliged to employ a new onomastic. As we'll

see, the [k]Hazarian diaspora ended up opting for local (Germanic) nomenclature BY DEFAULT. (The tendency for Ashkenazim to adopt Germanic vocational names as FAMILY names will be discussed later.)

As far as candidates for hospitable environs went at the time (to wit: places that were suitable for migrant Jews searching for a new homeland), the Rhineland would have certainly stood out. It should come as no surprise, then, that the [k]Hazarian diaspora ended up there.

But the question remains: What occurred in the Rhineland PRIOR TO the influx of [k]Hazarian Jews? When it comes to a Jewish presence, the answer is: not much.

Let's take a look at notable Sephardim in the Rhineland during the pre-Ashkenazic era. In the late 10th / early 11th century, Gershom ben Judah taught in Metz. (He had purportedly studied under Yehuda "Leon[tin]" ben Meir in Mainz.) His student, Yaakov ben Yakar of Mainz, would be a mentor of Rashi. As mentioned, it was only during the 11th century that a small amount of (Sephardic) Jews from western / southern Europe began to settle in Lotharingia–mostly in the Rhineland. After the first tiny enclave in **Cologne**, there were five primary locations:

Mainz [known at the time as "Magonta" / "Maguntia"]: The first dependable record of a Jewish figure in the city was the Sephardic "gaon", Judah ben Meir (a.k.a. "Léon[tin]")…or so the story goes. (As with so much at the time, this seems to be based more on hearsay that hard documentation.) That was toward the end of the 10th century. There is also mention of Eliezar ben Isaac "ha-Gadol" teaching in the area. A small community seems to have emerged in the early 11th century, led by a student of Judah ben Meir: Gershom ben Judah of Metz (a.k.a. "Me'Or ha-Golah"; "The Light of the Exile"). And as mentioned earlier, there was an apocryphal tale about an "Amnon", who lived during the 11th century. A sign that the Jewish community was quite limited at the time is that the first Synod at Mainz did not occur until 1196. (There was another Synod at Mainz in 1233.) Also of note were Eliakim ben Meshullam (who was also associated with Worms and Speyer). Some students of Gershom ben Judah also settled in Mainz—notably: the rabbi, Eliezer ben Isaac "ha-Gadol" and the Tosafist, Elijah ben Mena[c]hem "ha-Zaken".

Speyer [German: “Speier”; Frankish: “Spira”] (located at the site of the Roman “Civitas Nemetum”): Isaac ben Asher “Ha-Levi” (a.k.a. “Riba”) was the most notable figure. A small number of Jews from Mainz relocated to this city at the behest of bishop Rüdiger Hu[o]zmann in the late 11th century (during the Salian epoch)–most notably: Judah ben Samuel. {56}

Lorraine [including Alsace], **Troyes** [now “Champagne”], and **Worms**: Shlomo Yitzchaki (a.k.a. “Rashi”) arrived at these locations toward the end of the 11th century; and seems to have started small communities in each of them by c. 1100. (Rashi is sometimes mentioned along with the aforementioned Eliezer ben Isaac “ha-Gadol”.) Note that the famed Synod of Takkonot (at Troyes) did not occur until 1078 (followed by another one in 1160).

Records of these Jewish enclaves prior to the Renaissance are quite sparse. So, thus far, there were a few Sephardim tentatively venturing into Lotharingia—mostly to teach.

Bear in mind that there had been Jews in Metz, France since at least as far back as the 9th century. We first hear of Jews in Bingen via a reference by Benjamin of Tudela in the late 12th century. And we don’t hear of Jews in Würzburg until after that. There were some tiny Jewish communities in the region by the end of the 11th century–which had only recently been established. How do we know this? The Rhineland massacres of 1096 occurred in Cologne, Trier(s), Speyer, Worms, and Mainz…as well as in Magdeburg (at the northern end of the Elbe River, in Saxony), Saxony (at the southern end of the Elbe River, in Bavaria), and even in Prague (in Bohemia). These were not yet burgeoning Jewish centers. (In Regensburg, the city’s Jews were few enough for the authorities to quickly round up—in the course of a weekend—and subject to a hasty forced baptism in the Danube.)

These were the LAST Sephardim in the Rhineland before the [k]Hazarian diaspora began populating the area (that is: prior to Ashkenazim becoming the predominant Jewish presence). It is a mistake, then, to portray these figures as early Ashkenazim. (Some of their TEACHINGS may have eventually had some influence on some of the first Ashkenazim; but that does not mean that Ashkenazi Jews were their descendants. It would be surprising if such prominent figures had NOT left any Judaic legacy in the region.)

To reiterate: There was certainly no MAJOR Jewish presence in northeastern Europe prior to the 11th century. And THEN…there was a sudden influx…from…somewhere. In keeping with this timeline, the first synagogue to be erected in the region (at Erfurt) was built shortly after 1100. {22}

The [k]Hazarian migration is the only thing that could possibly account for the sudden appearance of a significant number of Jews in this region at THAT particular point in time. {16} To put this in temporal perspective, note that synagogues had existed in southern and western Europe since Late Antiquity–including at Delos and Sepphoris (in Greece), at Ostia and Bova Marina (in Italy), and even at Barcelona (in Spain). Yet NONE existed in northeastern Europe before 1100. To suppose that Jewish communities had been settled in the Rhineland any earlier, we are forced to believe that–unlike anywhere else in Europe–they inexplicably waited for OVER A MILLENNIUM before finally opting to build a synagogue.

Archeology reveals the chronology—and thus direction—of migration, as well as the period during which it occurred. Looking at the timeline of the earliest synagogues established in locations between the the eastern end of the Mediterranean basin (e.g. western Anatolia, the Balkan peninsula, and the Italic peninsula) and Lotharingia (spec. east of the Rhine) is very revealing. If Sephardim had migrated FROM the eastern end of the Mediterranean basin TO Lotharingia, we would expect to find the oldest instances farthest southeast, with increasingly recent instances as we move northward…ending up in Ashkenaz by the 11th century. Instead, we find the EXACT REVERSE.

Jewish communities started settling in the vicinity of Vienna in the late 13th / early 14th century. In Hungary, the earliest instances are from the late 14th century. In the Balkans, the earliest instances are from the early 15th century. Nothing in northwestern Ukraine (Volhynia / Podolia / Polesia / Galicia) until the late 16th century. Nothing in Wallachia (Romania) until the late 17th century. Nothing in Bulgaria until the mid-19th century! The sites BEGAN in Lotharingia, and then occur LATER as one moves south-eastward. Thus: The archeological record shows Ashkenazim migrating downward, not Sephardim migrating upward…meaning the origin of the Ashkenazi population must be explained in some way other than Sephardim coming northward from the eastern end of the Mediterranean basin. {20}

So what ever happened to the original Sephardic enclaves in Lotharingia? To wit: How can we be so sure that they DIDN'T end up CONTINUING to migrate into Eastern Europe (thereby accounting for the emergence of the Ashkenazim)? Let's start with Rashi, as he was the first prominent Jewish figure in the area (who was Sephardic). As it turned out, the majority of those who followed Rashi eventually ended up back in central France. That is: They did not continue to reside in Ashkenaz. His star pupil, Joseph ben Simeon Kara ("Mahari") remained in Troyes. His other star pupil, Simhah ben Samuel of Vitry, ended up in central France. Rashi's other notable students were Meir ben Baruch of Worms (a.k.a. "Meir of Rothenburg") and Isaac ben Asher "ha-Levi" ("Riba"), who flourished in Speyer… where his mentor, Eliakim ben Meshullam taught (after having himself studied at Mainz and Worms). HIS student was the tosafist, Meir ben Samuel…who promptly relocated in north-central France (at Ramerupt).

In the 12th century, both of Rashi's famed sons-in-law, Meir ben Samuel ("RaM") and Judah ben Nathan ("RiBaN")–both of whom hailed from Ramerupt–remained in France, attending Talmudic schools in Lorraine. The sons of the former (Samuel / "RaSh-BaM", Isaac / "RiBaM", and Jacob / "Rabbeinu Tam") remained in Troyes (northern France). The sons of the latter ended up teaching in Paris. These men were not Ashkenazi; they were Sephardim of northern France during the 12th century. (Eliezar ben Joel "ha-Levi" (a.k.a. "Ra'avyah") is said to have taught in Bonn. But it is unclear what his background may have truly been.)

Also in the 12th century, Judah ben Samuel ben Kalonymos "ha-[c]Hasid" of Speyer (later associated with Regensberg) considered himself the progeny of the Jews of "Zarfat" (France). He even used French vernacular in his writings (spec. the "Sefer Ha-[c]Hasid"); something no Ashkenazi Jew would have done. (See the Appendix for more on the alleged ancestry of Judah ben Samuel "ha-[c]Hasid".)

Later in the 12th century, Rashi's most famous great-grandson, Isaac ben Samuel "the Elder" of Ramerupt ("Ri ha-Zaken") ended up teaching at the yeshiva in Dampierre, in north-central France…where his son, Elhanan ben Isaac would live. His famous pupil, Judah ben Isaac Messer Leon, ended up in Paris.

Rashi's legacy in "Zarfat" was clear.

Other notable French Tosafot of the late 12th / early 13th centuries included Samuel ben Solomon of Falaise ("Sir Morel"), Jacob of Orléans (who lived primarily in central France, though he ended up in London), Samson ben Abraham of Sens ("Rash-ba"),

Je[c]hiel ben Joseph of Meaux [Paris] (“Vivus Meldensis”), and Moses ben Shneor of Évreux. None were in Lotharingia. Asher ben Je[c]hiel (the “Rosh”)—along with his famed son, Jacob ben Asher (“Ba’al ha-Turim”)—hailed from Cologne; yet he opted to migrate to Toledo in Andalusia c. 1300. During the 12th and 13th centuries, Isaac ben Asher “ha-Levi” of Speyer (a.k.a. “Riba”) taught in Lorraine; Joseph Kim[c]hi of Narbonne (as well as his sons, David and Moses) taught in Occitania.

The prevailing direction of migration was clearly not eastward. It was in the opposite direction.

The Sephardic figures who had moved eastward into Lotharingia (Cologne, Speyer, Worms, Mainz, etc.) over the course of their lives were going back to their roots in “Zarfat”. They were not the progenitors of the Ashkenazim. It was very rare for any Tosafist to migrate east of Lotharingia during this period. They remained in “Zarfat” through the 13th century. Meir ben Baruch of Worms (a.k.a. “Meir of Rothenburg”) trained in both Paris and Würzburg. He was not referred to as “Ashkenazi”; rather, he was known as “the greatest Jewish leader of Zarfat”.

To reiterate: The major Talmudic schools were in Lorraine and Hachmei Provence (Occitania); where many of Rashi’s students ended up.

Jacob ben Asher ben Je[c]hiel (a.k.a. author of the “Arba’ah Turim”, on which Joseph ben Ephraim Karo would base his landmark work) was born in Cologne c. 1269. He moved with his father to Andalusia and ended up pursuing his career in Toledo. The first Talmudist to appear in Austria was Avigdor Cohen ben Elijah, who—after studying under the famed Tosafist, Simha ben Samuel of Speyer (himself a student of Eliezer ben Samuel of Metz)—moved to Vienna, where he taught Meir ben Baruch of Worms (who would go on to teach in Rothenburg, Bavaria). {81} Soon thereafter, the Sephardic expositor from France, Isaac ben Moses (a.k.a. the “Riaz”) pursued his career in Vienna, Austria. {82}

So by the 13th century, we find that a few Sephardim were (tentatively) venturing into Germanic lands; though hardly enough to account for the burgeoning population of Ashkenazim across Eastern Europe. It wasn’t until 1528 that George the Pious (the Margrave of Ansbach) extended an invitation to Jews to establish a small community in Bavaria (specifically, in Fürth). It makes sense, then, that the first synagogue wasn’t built there until 1617.

This trend persisted even into the 15th century–as with the famed pedagogue, Judah ben Eliezer ha-Levi of Mainz, who ended up migrating to the Italic Peninsula (to teach in Padua). Clearly, Sephardim in the region preferred moving away from, rather than farther into, Ashkenaz.

In sum: All these prominent Jewish figures were indicative of an overwhelming trend. There was clearly NOT a major movement of Sephardim from France into Eastern Europe during the relevant period; which would have otherwise accounted for the sudden emergence of Ashkenazim. Pursuant to the arrival of the [k]Hazarian Diaspora in the Rhineland, the tendency for Sephardim in Lotharingia was to migrate back WESTWARD. And yet…the population of Jews in Lotharingia BURGEONED. If not Sephardim, then from whence did they come Not from the frigid shores of the Baltic. Not from the high slopes of the Alps. They came from the EAST. {20}

More ethnographic work needs to be done on eastern Europe between the 9th and 15th centuries. Unfortunately, when it comes to ethnography in the Middle Ages, data is quite sparse. Even where it exists, it is largely based on hearsay and speculation (rather than on a meticulously-conducted census).

Inevitably, some Sephardim eventually entered the Ashkenazi orbit. Notable were the progeny of the famed French Tosafist, Elhanan ben Isaac ben Samuel Jaffe of Dampierre (himself a descendent of Rashi). But such people (e.g. the Jaffe family) did not migrate to Eastern Europe until the end of the 12th century. This says nothing about the origins of the Ashkenazim; it just reminds us that—over the centuries—some parts of Beth Israel gradually interspersed with other parts. {22}

In Eastern Europe, such latter-day miscegenation would account for the modest percentage of Semitic genes that are now found in the Ashkenazi (Turkic) haplo-group. Miscegenation—by definition—dilutes ethnic purity over time, and often elides ethnic origins. When it comes to Turkic peoples who migrated into Europe, a notable case-study is the Gagauz: a (Kipchak) Turkic people who came to have predominantly European features, and remain Christian to the present day. The Gagauz seem to have descended from the Kutrigurs / Utigurs, who originated in the Pontic Steppes; and are likely related to the Bulgars and Kumens. The difference, of course, is that they have no reason to elide their Turkic provenance. {120}

So when did the miscegenation between the Jews of Western Europe and the Ashkenazim begin? After the violent expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula by the Roman Catholic rulers (pursuant to the Reconquista, which culminated at the

beginning of 1492), SOME Sephardim may have ended up in Eastern Europe. This may have been, in part, due to the favorable immigration policies of the Polish-Lithuanian rulers, who'd been working with the [k]Hazarian Diaspora for centuries. {116} But the majority of expelled Sephardim migrated SOUTH, into north Africa; and others made their way into the relatively hospitable Ottoman Empire. (In 1492, Ottoman Sultan Bayazid II invited the Jews who'd been expelled from Spain to settle in his empire.)

Why the favorable treatment of Jews by the Polish-Lithuanian rulers? There's no simple explanation. But a plausible hypothesis is that the Polish ruler from 1333 to 1370, Kazimierz III (a.k.a. "Casimir the Great") had motivations to be favorable to the Jewish people in his realm (including Silesia and Volhynia-Galicia) due to having a Jewish mistress: Esterka of Oposzno. As it turns out, "Esterka" was the Sogdian version of "Esther"; used by traders along the Silk Road through the Dark Ages. {62} Casimir was known for favoring marginalized communities. He made it a point to stand up for Jews against the Slavic nobility and Christian clergy; and introduced democratic reforms that were remarkable for the era. (Accounts of this can be found in the writings of the 16th-century Sephardic Chronicler, David ben Shlomo Ganz; who was from the Rhineland.)

It's worth noting that it was not until the 17th century that we see the efflorescence of MODERN Jewry in Eastern Europe (that is: Ashkenazi Jews asserting their identity as it now exists); whereupon the Ashkenazim adopted an identity that was entirely divorced from their Turkic forebears. Interestingly, it was in the middle of the 17th century that the Khamel-nytsky rebellion occurred—resulting in the deaths of over a hundred thousand Jews in Volhynia and Podolia at the hands of indigenous Ruthenians and Zaporizhian Cossacks. This travesty was catalyzed—in large part—by a simmering resentment over the status of Jewish "arendators" (that is: the favorable treatment of Jews by the Polish-Lithuanian "szlachta" [nobility]). The (adamantly Christian, ethno-centric) Cossacks had always harbored enmity toward Turkic peoples (as well as the region's Polish-Lithuanian rulers).

So what happened? The vehemently anti-Semitic "starosta" [chief administrator], Bohdan Khamel-nytsky of Chyhyryn [Chigirin] (who identified as Cossack) forged a temporary, strategic alliance between the (Kumen- Kipchak) Crimean Tatars and the Hetman Cossacks in a gambit to bolster his revolt against the despised Polish-Lithuanian rulers (who, to reiterate, had been hospitable to Jews in the region for centuries). The rebellion usurped power from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, massacring numerous Jewish communities in the process.

This devastating turn of events would have served as a catalyst. It is likely that, following this traumatic event, Ashkenazim made it a point to shed their Turkic identity. Thereafter, they would define themselves—above all else—as Eastern European Jews, besieged by hostile Gentile forces from all sides. A contra-distinction between them and other Turkic peoples would have made sense; as they no longer had anything in common with the Turkic tribes of the era (many of whom were, by then, Muslim); nor did they have any incentive to engage in trade with them.

Such exigencies would set the stage for two notable developments in the 18th and 19th centuries: Hassidic Judaism (which opted to circle the wagons, as it were) and early Zionism (which sought a safe haven for the denizens of Beth Israel). Hence the appearance of the “mestechko” (diminutive of “mesto”) and the shtetl (diminutive of “shtot” / “stadt”): designated cordons for small Jewish communities scattered across the Pale Of Settlement. With this revamped identity, there would emerge an ardent desire to find a land that Jews could call their own (see my essay: “The Land Of Purple”).

For those contending that Rhineland Jews did NOT come from the [k]Hazars, the implication is that the entire Jewish population of [k]Hazaria vanished shortly after c. 1000. In other words: We are expected to believe that an entire kingdom of Jews simply dissolved into the ether. As already mentioned, this could only mean one (or both) of two things:

1. The FAITH OF an empire’s worth of people–around two million souls–somehow evaporated within a couple generations. Not only is there no evidence for this; it makes no sense. {17}
2. There was a genocide of all [k]Hazars…by someone…for some reason. By whom? Why? No plausible answer is forthcoming.

So what of the numbers involved in the [k]Hazarian diaspora? There is no solid census data on the population of the [k]Hazar Empire at the time of its downfall at the end of the 10th century, let alone of exact percentages of religious affiliation amongst the general populace. (The vast majority–if not the entirety–of the ruling class were Jewish.) The best guesses place the population of the Empire at roughly two million at its peak–a significant portion of which were likely Jewish. By the time a distinctly [k]Hazarian people were defunct (that is: by 1071), it is quite possible that some of those who were Jewish had drifted away from their Jewish identity…or even

converted to another Faith. But that eventuality would have STILL left on the order of **hundreds of thousands** of disaffected Jews seeking a place to call home. As with all diasporas, we find a wayward ethnic group seeking greener pastures.

Unsurprisingly, the record of this transitional period are quite sparse.

It was only when Jewish communities started burgeoning in Eastern Europe (during the Renaissance) that records become more robust. The High Council for Judaic jurisprudence for the Rhineland was not established until the 12th century. This indicates that Jewish activity did not go into full swing until AFTER a major influx of [k]Hazarian Jews from the East. If Jews had been there all along, an earlier council would have been warranted. And so it went: The the first occurrence of such an event was not until just after the arrival of the [k]Hazarian Jews. The timing of the establishment of the High Council indicates there was no significant presence of Jews in the region prior to c. 1100.

We've already addressed the VIABILITY of a westward migration of these Turkic Jews from Eurasia; but what would have motivated said migration? In other words: If the (non-Semitic) Judaic descendants of the [k]Hazars steadily migrated westward during the Late Middle Ages, what incentive might they have had to move? As mentioned, in the generation following Svyatoslav's conquest (and the collapse of the [k]Hazar Empire), things were most likely not ideal yet probably not unendurable–as there were not likely pogroms against the quiescent Jewish communities scattered across the countryside.

As it turns out, the (sudden) desire to venture west would have been largely due to the fact that there emerged virulent anti-Semitism in Kievan Rus (read: Tsarist Russia) at—lo and behold—around the same time the influx of Jews into the Rhineland occurred. Note that Tsarist regimes were initially ethnically Bulgar (read: pagan) going back to the 10th century; yet–as mentioned–they eventually transitioned to Christianity as the dominion was Slavicized (in keeping with the hegemony of Kieven Rus). It is no surprise, then, that the Slavic rulers came to have an increasingly religious (read: theocratic) agenda as time progressed.

To repeat: Svyatoslav's son, Vladimir "the Great" of Novgorod came to power in the late 10th century; and converted to Christianity–an evangelical Faith. It was he who is most responsible for Christianizing the region (starting c. 988). {23} Vladimir's contempt for non-Christian activity was likely the first impetus for the migration of [k]Hazarian Jews westward, beyond the realm of Kievan Rus, and thus out of reach

of said persecution…ultimately to join the small (Sephardic) Jewish enclaves that already existed in the six locations listed above: Cologne, Mainz, Speyer, Alsace-Lorraine, Troyes, and Worms. Be that as it may, Vladimir is not known to have persecuted those who were Jewish; and was even known to have been relatively amicable with Jewish leaders. This stands to reason, as he would have had no ax to grind with them (being, as they were, people of the Abrahamic tradition). His main animus was toward pagans.

It is prudent to surmise that Vladimir was most likely indifferent to Jews…so long as they did not cause any problems. This is merely to say that while he may not have endorsed their Faith, he was probably not hostile to it. (There was no support for Judaism, but neither was there persecution…yet.) Again, we come to a situation where a disaffected community would have been seeking greener pastures…even as they may not have been in immediate peril. The threat would set in with the advent of the Tzars, who soon became more zealous (read: oppressive) with their Christian Faith. {122}

And so it went: To distance themselves from the increasingly theocratic Tzars, the [k]Hazarian Jews eventually migrated westward toward the Rhineland–that is: through Sarmatia / Ruthenia (what is now Ukraine). {88}

The route of migration was roughly as follows: The Donbas (i.e. the Donets [River] Basin; what would later be the eastern-most region of Ukraine) was primarily a nomadic nether-land in western [k]Hazaria; though, at their peek, their domain would reach as far as Kiev. {87} The first phase, then, would have been crossing the Dnipro River (a.k.a. the “Dnieper”), which had represented their western-most frontier, into Severia. Then…

- Onwards through Ruthenia. The Kieven Rus referred to this region variously as “Volhynia”, “Galicia”, and “Lodomeria”, and—of course—as (part of) Kieven Rus. {88} It is worth noting that, during the Middle Ages, the ethnic inter-mixing of this region was extensive, and territorial affiliations were perpetually in flux. Such an exigency precludes simplistic categorization schemes. Over time, the region to the northwest of the Black Sea (that is: between the Carpathian Basin and the Dnieper River) was variously claimed by the Pechenegs, Bulgars, Magyars, Avars, and even the western-most [k]Hazars: all Turkic peoples who—other than quibbling amongst each other—were routinely interacting with the Byzantines to the south and the Slavs to the north. {99}

- Onwards through the lowlands of Polesia and/or the uplands of Podolia (at the northern edge of Galicia-Volhynia). This route may have taken them as far south as Bessarabia / Moldavia.
- Onwards through the flatlands skirting the Oder River…through Silesia and Moravia / Bohemia, north of the Sudeten Mountains; and even into the hills and meadows of Lusatia / Sorbia. This included the land of the Vistulans (north of the Carpathian Mountains, in what would later be called "Lesser Poland"). This course may have taken them as far north as the coastal lowlands of Pomerania (which was still pagan), through Turovian Rus (what is now southern Bela[ya]-Rus); at the time, a Drevlyan area associated with the principality of Kiev.
- They would have then headed westward through the meadows, vales, and hillocks of Bohemia / Moravia and Silesia. Such a route made sense, as Jewish merchants (that is: Radhanites and [k]Hazars) had been familiar with the trading hub at Pr[z]emyshl for centuries. During that time, Pr[z]emyshl—a city in Bohemia / Moravia—was ruled by Polans (spec. the Lend[z]ians / Vistulans), prior to be overtaken by the Piast dynasty. {95} It seems to have been a common destination for those traveling north from Kiev (which, recall, had previously been a [k]Hazarian city). {87}
- From Silesia, the migration would have proceeded westward through Bavaria and Frankonia (in East Frankia)…then onward into the Rhineland (part of Lotharingia).

The movement westward was likely leisurely and intermittent, following a meandering path; which is simply to say that the migration was not rushed. It was a diaspora seeking greener pastures, not a harried exodus seeking sanctuary from immediate danger. It moved westward in an ad hoc manner; and did not necessarily have a specific destination in mind from the get-go. Eventually, the Rhineland would have emerged as a viable haven—what with the Magdeburger Recht that had just been issued by Emperor Otto. Along the way, these (mostly Jewish) Turkic nomads would have primarily encountered relatively hospitable environs rather than hostility. Nevertheless, they seem to have been motivated to continue westward, beyond the frontiers of the Kieven Rus.

This migration occurred primarily during the Ottonian Dynasty, who's primary antagonists were the (Slavic) Poles, (Turkic) Magyars, and (Hellenic) Byzantines. The migration would have been completed during the Salian Dynasty.

Others of the [k]Hazarian diaspora settled along the way, remaining west of the Dnieper River, in Crimea–beyond the reach of persecution of both the Kieven Rus and Byzantines. It is likely that–initially–these migrants did not (yet) opt to settle in what is now Poland or Greater Lithuania, as the realm was under the (very religious) Piast Dynasty at the time; not to mention various unfriendly Slavic tribes. Consequently, it was not (yet) adequately hospitable.

An alternate way to view this westward migration is to couch it in Turkic terms. Thus the [k]Hazarian diaspora moved from Khazar-Orszag / Levedia (at the eastern edge of Ukraine), through Etel-kuz / Etel- köz (the Ukraine), and onward into Eastern Europe. The possible destinations would either be a more southern region like Pannonia (as with the Magyars) or to a more northern region like Bohemia / Moravia / Silesia, Lusatia / Sorbia, Bavaria, and eventually to the Rhineland… depending on which Turkic tribe was migrating, why they were migrating, and at what point in time they were migrating. This is a reminder that several westward migrations (of various Turkic peoples) occurred during this period; often due to some sort of displacement. Such displacement could have been either culturally or militarily-induced, depending the geo-political exigencies of the lace and time. (To reiterate: The Alans ended up migrating all the way to Andalusia!)

From whence did these alternate geographical labels come? After the Avars were ousted from the region, the Donbas was controlled by a Magyar tribal leader known as “Lebedi” / “Levedi”: predecessor to the fabled Magyar patriarch, Almos. Hence “Levedia”. In the early 9th century, the Kangars (a sub-group of the Pechenegs that had been displaced by the [k]Hazars) arrived, forcing the Magyars to cede the territory and subsequently move farther west. Meanwhile, “Etel-köz” translates literally to “river[s] middle” (meaning “between rivers”; possibly referring to the land between the Dnieper and Volga).

I explore the connection between the Magyars and [k]Hazars in **Postscript 1**. For now, it’s instructive to note that, in the early 10th century, Byzantine Emperor Constantine VII “Porphyrogenitus” wrote that the Magyars “had dwelled since the days of old next to Chazaria, in the place called Levedia.” He added that the Magyars “lived together with the Chazars for [many] years, and fought in alliance with the Chazars in their wars.” The background here is worth noting. Pursuant to an uprising against the K[h]agan, the (Jewish) Khavar / Kabar tribe of [k]Hazaria merged with the early Magyars in their migration westward–settling in what is now

Hungary (accounting for what came to be called “Oberlander” and “Untarlander” Jews). The Magyars are known to have Ural-Altaic (i.e. Turkic) origins–which makes perfect sense given the [k]Hazarian infusion. {74}

The record is quite clear. The [k]Hazar population in Hungary increased when the ruling Magyar Grand Prince, Taksony (who was pagan and on good terms with the Turkic peoples of the Eurasian steppes) invited [k]Hazarian Jews to settle in his realm in the 960’s. Already residing there were another Turkic people, the Khavars / Kabars, who had–ironically–sought refuge there in the 9th century from the [k]Hazars (even though they themselves were, in large part, Jewish).

We’ve noted the antipathy toward non-Christians by the Christianized Slavs (esp. the Tsars of Kievan Rus); but wasn’t there a skein of EXPLICIT anti-Semitism in the Holy Roman Empire at the time? Indubitably. Yet in the relevant period (the 11th century), migrating to Lotharingia (spec. the Rhineland) may have appeared to pose a lower risk of persecution than would have remaining in the dominion of the Kieven Rus. This was especially the case in the advent of the aforementioned “Magdeburger Recht” issued by Holy Roman Emperor Otto. It is quite possible that the Roman Catholic Church would have seemed to the [k]Hazarian Jews to represent less peril than the Christianized Slavic rulers (or, later, the Tsars), who were–by that point–wreaking havoc on their original homeland. Note, for instance, that in 1074, German king (soon to be Holy Roman Emperor) Henry IV offered a tax abatement for the Jews of the ShUM cities (Speyer, Worms, and Mainz). {72}

Put plainly: Up until the onset of the Crusades at the end of the 11th century, the coast was (relatively) clear in the Rhineland…and certainly more favorable than was the Tsarist dominion. Note that even after the Crusades began, the bishop of Triers offered refuge to wayward Jews.

Once it became safer, there was eventually a migration into what is now northwestern Ukraine (spec. Volhynia), via the route outlined above; though they would nto have remained there during their initial (westward) migration. Records for Jewish communities in that region did not emerge until the 12th century–which accords with the present timeline.

The infamous Rhineland massacres occurred in 1096. {26} The violence was instigated by the mass- hysteria of the First Crusade (which had begun the prior year). Before that, there is no record of a pogrom in the region. It might also be noted that the denizens of Pomerania did not start converting to Christianity until

the 1120's (due to the missionary work by Otto of Bamberg); so there would not have been any religious oppression in that area up until (at least) that point in time. In other words: Relatively safe passage for migrant Jews would have existed during the relevant period (i.e. most of the 11th century).

Later, Jews were able to settle slightly farther back east (in Greater Lithuania) at the behest of the Grand Duke of Poland, Boleslav "the Pious" of Kalisz; but that was not until the 13th century. Jewish settlements appeared in Grodno on the Nemunas and in Bohemia on the Vltava. This is why the oldest synagogue erected in the area was the one at Josefov in Prague (now the site of the "Alt-neu Schul") in late 13th century. {20}

Another catalyst for Ashkenazim coming back eastward was the hysteria in Europe from the Black Death. Especially severe reactions to the plague occurred in Cologne, Mainz, and Frankfurt. Used as scapegoats for the inexplicable affliction, Jews there were aggressively persecuted…and eventually, in 1349, massacred. To escape such violence, they migrated en masse into the Lithuanian / Polish realm; and to points even farther east. All this is well- documented.

It makes sense, then, that the first Jewish presence in what is now Greater Lithuania (spec. Latvia) was in the 14th century, mostly in Vilnius. This seems to have begun at the behest of Grand Duke Gediminas in the 1320's. As it turns out, this is EXACTLY when the "Lipka Tatars" (i.e. Turkic Jews) are recorded has having first settled in the region. (!) There are Karluks still in Lithuania to the present day.

Abiding Tengri-ism is instructive regarding how we might identify vestigial creeds. Many Lipka Tatars–dwelling in the region formerly known as Greater Lithuania–are STILL Tengri-ist. Others are Muslim. By contrast, the vast majority of Karaim remain Jewish; yet–in acknowledging their Turkic ancestry–they do not consider themselves Ashkenazi. Many Volga Tatars (esp. the Chuvash) are Tengri-ist to the present day; though many have converted to either Islam or Eastern Orthodox Christianity due to geo- political exigencies (and probably lots of social pressure). Some Kalmyks, Mari, Mansi, and Khanty are also still Tengri-ist. Other descendants of the Kipchaks include the Bashkirs (of Badzhgard) and Kryashens (of Astra-Khan and Kazan), both of whom still practice Tengri-ism. Meanwhile, many of the Mordvin, Erzya, and Moksha people remain pagan, as they were not as influenced by Judaism–dwelling, as they did, on the periphery of the [k]Hazarian orbit.

Interestingly, other Volga Tatars like the Mishar (also descendants of the Kipchaks) were never Christianized by the Slavs; and did not convert to Islam until the late 13th / early 14th century (under the Golden Horde). This is a reminder that ethnic identities change over epochs. How quickly we in the modern world are inclined to disregard the way things may have been before our own era. It is easier to simply assume that the legacies we NOW covet are an accurate way to gage history. Most ethnic groups are what they are NOW because they underwent a metamorphosis. When succumbing to the trappings of ethnocentric thinking, we are apt to believe things as they are now is how things have been ALL ALONG. We must disabuse ourselves on this misconception.

Later, yet more Jewish communities were invited into that region at the behest of the Grand Duke of Lithuania, Vytautas of Trakai (a.k.a. “Vitold the Great”) in the early 15th century. Again, this corresponds with reports that he extended an invitation to TATARS. (!) How had these Tatar refugees gotten to Europe IN THE FIRST PLACE? Given the history outlined here, the answer is obvious.

Thus the [k]Hazarian diaspora (now fashioned as “Ashkenazim”) proceeded by tentatively coming back (slightly) eastward–that is: into Greater Lithuania, including what is now the Baltics, Poland, and Belarus.

Another pertinent fact: In the early 1200’s, there was a sudden influx of rabbis (by some estimates, as many as 300) from northern Europe into Palestine. Why this timing? And why so suddenly? This seems odd, as the (vehemently anti-Semitic) Crusades were still being undertaken (esp. through the campaigns of Catholic fanatic, King Louis IX of France). The explanation can only be that at that time, there had recently emerged a Jewish population in northern Europe–to wit: a new reservoir of rabbis, some of whom had an interest in traveling to the city of David (an option that may have been unavailable to them until then). Granted, some of those rabbis may have come from Normandy (or other places in northern France, like Troyes); but certainly not all of the them. To account for a sudden desire for rabbis IN THAT REGION to visit the Holy Land AT THAT PARTICULAR TIME (yet no earlier), there must have recently emerged a community of Jews for whom such a pilgrimage was a new prospect.

Another question is worth asking: In light of the demise of the [k]Hazar Empire, for how long did the region of [k]Hazaria continue to be known as such? When the famous Maghrebi / Andalusian cartographer, Muhammad al-Idrisi of Sebta created his famous map of the known world for the Sicilian King Roger II of Palermo c. 1154,

he labeled the region “Ard al-Hozar”: Land of the [k]Hazars. Within it, he designating the cities of Sharkil (as “Al-Baida”), Atil, Samandar, and Balanjar. He labeled “Ard Burtas” and “Ard Bulgar min Al-Turk” to the north, “Arminia” to the south, and “Bilad Allanai” [Country of the Alans] to the west. Sure enough, the Caspian Sea was labeled “Bahr al-Hozar”. He even placed a city named “Hozaria” on the eastern coast of the Black Sea. (The map is fascinating, as it places the north at the bottom, the south at the top.) The problem, of course, is that Svyatoslav had conquered the [k]Hazars almost two centuries earlier (c. 965-969). Al-Idrisi, it seems, was under the impression that the [k]Hazars qua [k]Hazars were still around. The question, then, is: What might have given him this impression? We can only speculate. Chances are, Al-Idrisi was not necessarily aware of their displacement, nor of specific migration patterns; as he was concerned with geography, not with ethnography. And it is plausible that the north Caucuses may have STILL been known by their earlier name, Slavic hegemony or not.

Let’s fast-forward to the modern era. By the time the so-called “Pale of Settlement” was established in eastern Europe at the end of the 18th century, how ethnically Semitic the indigenous practitioners of Judaism might have been is–to put it mildly–debatable. It is reasonable to surmise that it was not much, if at all. The Pale of Settlement stretched from Greater Lithuania (spec. the Baltic region) down to Ruthenia (spec. Volhynia; now northwestern Ukraine). The northern portion of the Pale Of Settlement is now mostly Latvia / Lithuania, Poland, and northern Belarus; the southern portion is now southern Belarus and northern Ukraine. As we have seen, most of the Jewish people in this area would NOT have originally come from the Mediterranean basin. {20}

To summarize: The majority of Jews who first came to settle in eastern Europe had come from the Pontic / Volga Steppes. This population was effectively the [k]Hazarian diaspora. At that point in history, the non-Semitic contingent of Beth Israel accounted for a small minority of global Jewry (i.e. those who subscribed to Mosaic law yet were not Christian); as over 97% of the world’s Jewish people was Semitic. To reiterate: It was the Sephardim of the Mediterranean basin and the Mizra[c]him of the Middle East (originally dubbed “Mu-starab-im”: those who are Arab) who likely boasted what remained of Beth Israel’s genetically Semitic origins.

Not coincidentally, it was ALSO in the late 11th century that the aforementioned Talmudic academies in Mesopotamia became defunct–an eventuality that corresponded with the demise of the Babylonian Exilarchate. For at that point (the end of the Masoretic era), the center of Judaica was making the transition to the

West, especially to Andalusia; as Maimonides attests. {52} It was around this same time that the famed Talmudic academy at the Occitanian port-city of Narbonne (in the south of France, on the Mediterranean coast) was established (where Jews had been present since Carolingian King Pepin “the Short” invited them to settle in the city in the 760’s). Obviously, Jews were not evacuating the Mediterranean basin at that time; they were SETTLING IN it.

The famed Talmudic academy at Kairouan (in Morocco) was established around the same time. European Sephardim were NOT migrating en masse to northeastern Europe; they were planting further roots on the Mediterranean basin. So the only way to account for new Jewish communities emerging in the newly- coined “Eretz Ashkenaz” is from another source.



FURTHER ANALYSIS OF RELEVANT EXIGENCIES:

In discussing the activities on the Pontic Steppes in the late 10th thru early 12th centuries, it is important to acknowledge that we are talking about a time and place that few thoroughly understand. How much archeology has been conducted there? Not nearly enough. (How often do you hear about archeological digs in Kalmykia?) {85}

Today, few are very familiar with the Pontic Steppes—or even with the wider Eurasian Steppes—and its long history. Even fewer people have first-hand experience of that far-away land, which rarely plays into an Occident-centric (a.k.a. "Orientalist") view of history. Trying to figure out what happened in the region a millennium ago is not easy; as not many are even inclined to pursue a line of inquiry that is NOT oriented around Occidental sensibilities. Where to begin? We might imagine a Turkic people dwelling in yurts, riding on horseback, and trading their wares across a vast landscape. Some were Tengri-ist; many were Jewish. But as Turkic nomads do not fit well into standard Judiac lore, there is little incentive for those interested in Jewish history to look into the matter.

This topic warrants much further study. The inquiry would focus on Nomadic peoples—primarily farmers and merchants—between the northern shores of the Caspian Sea and the Donbas, during the relevant period (i.e. prior to the 15th century). Artifacts exhibiting Turkic runes accompanied by menorahs? Iconography is only a start. Haplo-group analysis (i.e. genetic comparisons) might also be conducted—as with, say, the Bulgars, Mari, Chuvash, Tatars, and Mordvins of the Volga River basin (vis a vis Ashkenazi Jewish communities; especially those that have remained insular over the centuries).

It should be emphasized that the moniker, "Ashkenaz" (the label that came to associate Eastern European Jews with Germany) was derived from the Assyrian name for people of the Pontic Steppes (and possibly the northern Caucuses): "Ashguza" [alt "As[h]kuzai"]. This only makes sense if those in the Middle East who used the moniker in the Middle Ages (and thus predominantly spoke Aramaic / Syriac) had the people of [k]Hazaria in mind. Thus the etymology of the name for Eastern European Jews is literally: **people from the Eurasia**. (!) It is a striking irony that the Ashkenazim's name for themselves betrays their ACTUAL origins. Rather than eliding their non-Semitic origins, the endonym broadcasts it. {42}

Indeed, there is evidence that this ethnonym pre-dated (Turkic) Jews' arrival in the Rhineland; so was not limited to that geographical designation. Consider the fact that, prior to the establishment of the nation-State of "Israel", Turkic-language-speaking Jews in the Crimea (i.e. Crimean Tatars) ALSO referred to themselves as "Ashkenazi". (!) Clearly, this term did not exclusively refer to the Rhineland. Jewish Tatars (read: Turkic Jews) living in myriad places adopted the label. So it makes sense that the ethnonym was ALSO adopted by the [k]Hazarian diaspora—to wit: fellow Turkic Jews. {64}

In any case, it is highly unlikely that SEPHARDIM would have re-dubbed the Rhineland “Ashkenaz”, as the Germanic lands were already referred to as either “German[i]a” (as in the Talmud) or as “Al[e]mania” / “Allemagne” (as in the writings of Occitanian Jews like, say, David Kim[c]hi of Narbonne). While there might have been some reason for Sephardic writers to alter ethnonyms, there would have been no warrant to alter long-established toponyms.

At no point would a Sephardic Jew have said: “Well, I guess I’m an Ashkenazi now.” Even once settled in the Rhineland, such an alteration of self-identification (involving a gratuitous onomastic switch) would not have made any sense.

The first oblique reference to “Ashkenazim” came from Rashi toward the end of the 11th century, who referred to them in passing; and spoke of them as OTHERS. But the first MAJOR reference to a group of a foreign Jewish community located in eastern Europe was not until the 13th century. It was made by Shlomo ben Avraham “ibn Aderet” of Barcelona (a.k.a. the “RaShbA”) in one of his “Responsa” (correspondences, wherein doctrinal queries were addressed). Shortly thereafter, there were some references to “Ashkenazim” by Asher ben Je[c]hiel of Toledo (a.k.a. the “Rosh”) in HIS “Responsa”. Such correspondences were conducted with fellow Sephardim (on the Iberian peninsula, in France, on the Italic peninsula, in Greece, and across the Maghreb—from Morocco to Egypt). The only other interlocutors for whom such “Responsa” may have been intended were the Mizra[c]him scattered across the Middle East.

It’s also worth noting that in some pre-Zionist (medieval Judaic) literature, [k]Hazaria was often referred to as the “mother of the diaspora”! Moreover, medieval Slavs referred to [k]Hazaria as “Zemlya Zhidovskaya” [Land of the Jews]. And, as stated earlier, when Kievan Rus conquered the [k]Hazars, they referred to it as “the Jewish Giant from Eurasia” in their historiographies. Again, this all makes sense in light of the actual (non-Semitic) origins of that segment of Beth Israel.

Around the time of the [k]Hazarian diaspora, the settlers of Volhynia were the Buzhans, centered at [k]Holm (Slavic: “Chelm”), which was seized by Kieven Rus c. 981. Lo and behold: The Buzhans originally hailed from “Astra-khan” on the shores of the [k]Hazar (Caspian) Sea. That city’s name was a variant of the Turkic “Tar-khan”. Again, we see examples of OTHER Turkic peoples venturing westward from the Eurasian Steppes…indicating that the rational for doing so was not unique to displaced [k]Hazars.

Today when we look at some Slavic-ized Turkic peoples, we see that the cultures of the Tatars and Chuvash retain the clearest vestiges of a Turkic background–both linguistically AND religiously. (To this day, some are still Tengri- ist!) It is likely that many of the Tatars are descended from the Kuman and/or Pecheneg peoples (mentioned earlier), and continue to speak a Kipchak language. The Chuvash seem to have descended from the Sabirs, who–like the [k]Hazars–spoke an Oghuric language. And as we'll see, residual elements of Turkic (Kipchak) exist in the Judaic "Karaim" language–vestiges of their [k]Hazarian heritage.

To reiterate: At the time, it was not uncommon for Turkic tribes to venture westward and settle in Eastern Europe. Take the Ugric peoples, for another example. The Magyars made it all the way from the Ural region to the Pannonian / Carpathian Basin (around the Danube, in what is present-day "Hungary"), even as their brethren, the Ostyaks / Khanteks (a.k.a. the "Khanty") and Voguls (a.k.a. "Mansi") remained in central Asia. During the Middle Ages, the Alans eventually made it all the way to the Iberian Peninsula. (!) The migration of cultures from central Asia westward toward Europe continued to occur into the modern era—as with the Turkic-Mongol "Kalmyks", who brought Tibetan Buddhism from Dzungaria (the northwest corner of present-day China) to the North Caucasus. (More about them later.)

In considering this history, another question arises: Did any [k]Hazarian Jews REMAIN in Eurasia? Indeed, if some [k]Hazars stayed behind, that would be further corroboration that many were there to begin with. Sure enough, we find Jewish communities in Udmurtia AND Kazan–both in medieval "Tatarstan". (Modern Ashkenazim started arriving in that region only about a century ago.) How did THEY get there? There is only one plausible explanation: the present thesis. Indeed, they are the remnant of their [k]Hazarian forebears. Note that other Turkic peoples in the region eventually converted to Eastern Orthodox Christianity–as with the Kryashen and Mari (both of whom are typically characterized as "Tatar").

Back in the 10th century, many of the [k]Hazarian Jews were traders who would have been well-traveled; so were likely already familiar with Eastern Europe. In fact, there had been regular mercantile interaction between the [k]Hazar Empire and Eastern Europe (the Byzantine realm) for centuries. {9} It makes sense, then, that they deemed a lateral (westward) move to be the most prudent course in the advent of their empire's demise.

Topography helps explain the route. As they moved across Sarmatia / Ruthenia (the land north of the Black Sea that is now Ukraine) toward Volhynia, they would have been diverted in a more northward direction by the Carpathian mountains, up toward Silesia and Lusatia…across Moravia / Bohemia…then across Frankonia / Bavaria…and finally into Lotharingia.

In the 10th century, the Ottonians had their hands full with the Polabian uprisings on the eastern frontier of their realm, across the Elbe. (Beyond them were the Pomeranians and Polans.) In other words, the Germanic Christians were too preoccupied with pagan peoples who were making trouble—as with the various Slavic tribes and the indigenous “Baltic Prussians”—to be concerned about peaceable Jewish farmers / merchants.

We might also consider CULTURAL compatibility. Indeed, another reason that settlement in the Rhineland was workable was the kind of Judaism practiced by the [k]Hazars, vestiges of which seem to remain in the Karaite community to the present day. Practitioners of Karaite-adjacent Judaism were likely afforded more leeway when interacting with Gentile populations–as it was non-rabbinical, and thus more amenable (read: less threatening) to Christian environs than were Jews who were involved with the Talmudic tradition (and who were thus more overtly touting their religion). As mentioned, local Gentile barons (“burghers”) were unconcerned with religious matters; they were primarily seeking lucre. So it is reasonable to assume that they would have welcomed the arrival of new patrons. Peaceable farmers and traders were, after all, an additional source of tax revenue, irrespective of Faith.

To reiterate: The [k]Hazars were largely a merchant culture, so this situation was workable for all involved.

Considering all of this, when it came to [k]Hazarian Jews seeking to emigrate from their forfeited homeland, a lateral migration westward–toward the Rhineland–was the clear choice. It seems to have been THE ONLY choice. And that is, indeed, what occurred.

What is pertinent here is the goings-on in Europe during the late 10th thru early 12th centuries. As we’ve seen: At that point in time, there was no pressing need for the Jews of Spain and southern France to venture farther into the lands of the Holy

Roman Empire. YET there was a sudden influx of Jews into Lotharingia nevertheless. Where did they come from? We have seen that the only plausible explanation is from lands to the east.

When assaying the circumstances in which the [k]Hazarian Jews found themselves in the late 10th / early 11th century (in the advent of their empire's downfall), there remains the matter of opportunity. Is it reasonable to assume that Svyatoslav afforded these wayward [k]Hazars passage across his realm…into lands beyond the western boarder? Being pagan, the imperial ambitions of the Slavic ruler were not theocratic in nature. He therefore would have likely been indifferent to a quiescent Turkic community–even as it became nomadic.

Such indifference was not imprudent considering any movement of [k]Hazars would not have threatened his power. There was no reason for Svyatoslav to explicitly grant them safe passage; yet he was probably ambivalent to the prospect. In any case, the Slavic king had his hands full with the Bulgars and Pechenegs, who's militancy was surely a priority. It makes sense, then, that he was not especially concerned with movements of peaceable Jews (that is: so long as they did not cause him any problems).

The same went for Svyatoslav's successors: his sons Yaropolk and Vladimir. Even though "Vladimir the Great" started Christianizing the realm c. 988, he was more preoccupied with putting down revolts than with the location of the (deferential) agrarian Jewish community under his rule. He was especially occupied with suppressing the troublesome "White Croats". So it is safe to assume that he would have been relatively unconcerned with peasants who might have been slowly migrating to the west, minding their own business.

By the time of emigration, the [k]Hazars were no longer members of an empire; so migrants were unlikely to harbor an imperialistic mentality. The [k]Hazarian Diaspora was likely comprised of a nomadic people with pastoral sensibilities. It make sense, then, that they were primarily farmers and merchants seeking a pastoral lifestyle.

It is anyone's guess how this displaced group of people might have thought of themselves during this transitional epoch. Their self-image surely would have undergone a metamorphosis–from one generation to the next–as they gradually made their way westward, looking for a new homeland. (It is quite possible that they thought of themselves as "Kalman", Turkic for "Remnant"; see **Postscript 1**.) In any case, it is reasonable to posit that, over the course of a few generations, they

would have steadily shed their identity as [k]Hazars. As they arrived in new lands, it would surely have been their Mosaic creed by which they were identified, not their affiliation with a defunct empire. They were practitioners of the Abrahamic Faith, not "[k]Hazars". (Indeed, the latter mode of identification probably would have posed problems; and there would have been no incentive to press the matter.) Their Jewish identity transcended their ethnic background; as least for the time being.

This proclivity to shed the Turkic aspect of their heritage would surely have been motivated by the fact that, in medieval Europe, Turk-IC peoples came to be (myopically) associated with Turk-ISH people. {31} This was the result of the Ottoman Empire becoming the primary face of "Turks" in Occidental geo- politics (at the end of the 13th century). Naturally, those Turkic peoples NOT affiliated with Dar al-Islam were inclined to disassociate themselves from Ottoman Turks–a dissociation most blatantly illustrated by the Magyars. (How often do Hungarians highlight their Turkic provenance?)

The [k]Hazarian Jews were no different in this respect. That these (disaffected) migrant peoples would have primarily distinguished themselves as Jews (i.e. as part of Beth Israel) makes perfect sense; for their creed would have been the most salient aspect of their identity. After all, they were no longer denizens of [k]Hazaria. So, as far as they were concerned, that they were Turkic would have been rather beside the point. Indeed, it was probably their Faith that buoyed them during this period of transition–which, we might suppose, was a time of disenchantment.

It should come as little surprise, then, that there is no document stating anything like "We Ashkenazim, who are the former [k]Hazars…" Such a specification–or something equally explicit–would have been rather pointless. {7} Between the late 10th and early 12th centuries, these nomadic peoples would have refashioned themselves–even going so far as to abdicate Turkic surnames in favor of monikers that tied them to the new places in which they settled (as we'll see forthwith). Meanwhile, since they did not play a pivotal role in the geo-politics of the time, there was no warrant for OTHERS to document this transitional epoch. What was going on with the [k]Hazarian diaspora? Nobody cared. Why would they?

And so it went: Following the demise of the [k]Hazar Empire in the late 10th century, the wayward Jews of the Eurasian Steppes had plenty of motive AND opportunity to migrate laterally–westward–into Eastern Europe, where they had likely caught wind that a few small Jewish enclaves (as we have seen: primarily at Troyes, Alsace-Lorraine, Cologne, Mainz, Speyer, and Worms) had recently been established.

Meanwhile, there is no pressing reason that European Jews (i.e. Sephardim) would have moved to migrate northeastward, toward the Rhineland; so, unsurprisingly, the vast majority did no such thing.

As mentioned earlier: By the early 1200's, there was a sudden migration of rabbis from Europe into Palestine. This indicates two things.

First: The focal point of the world's Jews (including Europe's Sephardim) was still the Middle East–where the Talmudic academies were located. That explains why–during this era–virtually all correspondences by Sephardim in southern / western Europe were directed toward the Maghreb, Egypt, Palestine, and Mesopotamia—as with "geonim" like Aaron ben Meir of Palestine and Sa'adia ben Yosef of S[h]ura (in the 10th century); then Hai ben Sherira of Pum-bedita (in the 11th century). ZERO Sephardic correspondences were directed toward the Rhineland at that point in history. Notably, when Maimonides left Andalusia seeking greener pastures, he opted for Palestine, not the Rhineland. (More examples of this trend will be discussed forthwith.) Barring some minor inroads (mentioned earlier), Lotharingia was simply not a place where much Judaic activity was occurring; at least, not until the arrival of the [k]Hazarian diaspora. It is the arrival of these Turkic exiles that would lead to the establishment of the first MAJOR Jewish presence in that region.

Second: Pace the intermittent turmoil of the Crusades, there would have been a relatively hospitable environment in the Levant. The evidence indicates that under Ayyubid / Seljuk (then Mamluk) control, the Middle East was likely more hospitable to Jews than was much of the Holy Roman Empire (which was vehemently anti-Semitic). It is no surprise, then, that Maimonides opted to move from Cordoba to Palestine to serve the Ayyubid leadership there. The record shows that those in Muslim lands were quite amicable with the small Jewish communities in their dominion during the relevant period (the 11th and 12th centuries). {24}

Granted, there was still the sporadic threat of (fanatical) Christian Crusaders with whom Palestinian Jews needed to contend; though this was not sufficiently dire to deter a few prominent "geonim" from operating at the Talmudic academies in the region. (And this is not to say that there was NO anti-Semitism in the Levant. Such danger, though, was more attributable to Crusaders than to Ayyubids / Seljuks.) When the small community of Jews in Haifa were besieged by hostile forces c. 1099, it was by the invading Christians (i.e. the Crusaders), not the region's Muslims. The same went for Acre, Safed, Tiberias, Ramla, Caesarea Palaestina, Ashkelon, and Gaza City. And when it came to Jerusalem, Jews fought side by side with MUSLIMS

when defending the city against the Crusaders. {26} On the whole, during the Middle Ages, escaping peril wasn't the deciding factor for Jews who opted not to reside in Palestine. If anything, many Jews were in Palestine because they felt SAFER there (under Islamic rule).

So what of possible northward migration of a few Jews into Lotharingia from France and the Mediterranean basin AFTER c. 1100? It strains credulity to think that Sephardim would have suddenly been inspired to move northward at that particular time, farther INTO the Holy Roman Empire (where persecution may have been more likely) were there not some compelling reason–a reason that trumped the risk of augmented peril. There would have needed to have been at least intimations of safe harbor in isolated places–as with the hospitality offered by the aforementioned bishop of Speyer: Rüdiger Huzmann.

The six Lotharingian cities listed earlier had recently become what might be considered isolated sanctuaries, which explains the minor presence of Sephardim there prior to the arrival of the [k]Hazarian diaspora. However, even that assurance was precarious–as attested by the Rhineland massacre of 1096. {26}

When European Jews DID eventually migrate toward the Rhineland, it occurred after the [k]Hazarian diaspora had already established an "eretz Ashkenaz". To reiterate: Such a migration only makes sense if there were an over-riding motivating factor–that is: something that made doing so more appealing than, say, migrating toward Palestine…where persecution would have been LESS likely (during periods of Muslim control). {26} That motivation is plain to see: A major presence of Jewish people who had already come to that region from elsewhere (to wit: from the Eurasian Steppes) and established formidable communities there. As we've seen, pursuant to the [k]Hazarian diaspora, THAT was–indeed–the case.

Surely, by then, the word had gotten out that some Jewish communities—hailing from who-knows-where—were subsisting in the Rhineland. Be that as it may, the northward / eastward migration (of SOME Sephardim) would have occurred WELL AFTER the 12th century. Sure enough, that's precisely what the record shows. Indeed, it is no secret that Sephardim did eventually venture eastward. In 1528, the Margrave of Ansbach, George the Pious, extended an invitation for Jews to start settling in Bavaria (specifically, in Fürth). But it wasn't until 1617 that the first synagogue was built there.

There is another indication that there was not a significant Jewish presence in (what came to be dubbed) “Ashkenaz” much BEFORE c. 1100…and that soon AFTER c. 1100 there was a major Jewish presence…for some reason. Behold the emergence of anti-Semitic tropes in precisely THAT region at THAT particular time (i.e. over the course of the 12th century). For it was then that certain pernicious myths about Jews suddenly appeared in Ashkenaz–most infamously: the blood libel and the rumor of Jews poisoning wells.

But why THERE? And why THEN? Granted, anti-Semitism was nothing new. The Roman Catholic Church had been scorning Jews as Christ-killers since the 4th century (when the Magisterium and the Roman Imperium consolidated; see my essay, “Genesis Of A Church”). But why didn’t such calumny occur–in the form of these particular urban legends–anywhere else in Europe, and why no at any time during the previous millennium? As it happened, anti-Semitism took on a new tenor in the centuries following the arrival of the [k]Hazarian diaspora. Indeed, a NEW DEVELOPMENT prompted a new wave–nay, a new KIND–of anti-Semitism in the Rhineland c. 1100. For it was THEN and THERE that the aforementioned anti-Semitic tropes were born.

There eventually would be a (somewhat limited) migration of Jews from western Europe to eastern Europe–primarily in order to escape the scourge of Inquisitions being conducted across the Holy Roman Empire. That did not occur, though, until the 15th and 16th centuries–long after the aforesaid Jewish communities had been established in the Rhineland by the [k]Hazarian diaspora. Even then, the migration of Semitic Jews (i.e. Sephardim) to “Ashkenaz” was primarily from Roman Catholic France. Some “Marranos” (Jews from Andalusia) came to Altona (Hamburg) in the late 16th century; and even then, remained segregated from the local Ashkenazim. (In other words: Sephardic migration north-eastward accounted for only a modest portion of West European Jewry; and, even then, only centuries after the fact.)

Yet, again, we find a tendency for Sephardim to migrate AWAY from Ashkenaz rather than toward it. For when Andalusia fell back into the hands of the Roman Catholic Church c. 1492, the vast majority of its Jewish population (who were fleeing the Inquisitions) migrated SOUTHWARD–across the Mediterranean–to the Maghreb and even into the Levant, retaining their Sephardic identity. (After fleeing the Inquisition, one Andalusian community even settled in Vlorë, Albania! Clearly, the tendency was not to move toward the Rhineland.) Never, at any point, is there record of a single Sephardic Jew opting to redefine himself as Ashkenazi. Why not? No circumstance ever existed where such a move would have made any sense.

YET…we sometimes hear the refrain: The Ashkenazim appeared in eastern Europe due to the Jews of the rest of Europe moving northeastward. This is false. If anything, Sephardic migration was in the opposite direction.

So what of the role of Ashkenazim in Judaic lore PRIOR TO the arrival of the [k]Hazarian Diaspora? Consider this: Of the major Jewish figures we hear about from the 10th thru 12th centuries, NONE are Ashkenazi. Why not? Turkic Jews were not (yet) seen as falling within the orbit of Beth Israel. In fact, the vast majority of European Jewry was located in the Iberian Peninula—notably: Hasdai [ben Isaac ben Ezra] ibn Shaprut of Jaén, who operated out of the center of Jewish culture: Cordoba. {90} When Dunash ben Labrat "ha-Levi" (a Berber originally from Fez, Morocco) was seeking to venture somewhere, Baghdad and Cordoba were his destinations. Behold TWENTY MORE Jewish icons during the relevant period. All were from Andalusia:

- **10th century:** Mena[c]hem ben Jacob ibn Saruk and Judah ben David Hayyuj —both of Cordoba.
- **Late 10th / early 11th century:** Jonah / Merwan "Ibn Jana[c]h" of Cordoba (who was also affiliated with Zaragoza).
- **11th century:** Samuel ibn Naghrillah "ha-Nagid" of Cordoba (also affiliated with Malaga and Granada), Samuel ibn Nagrillah of Merida, and Solomon ben Judah "Ibn Gabirol" of Malaga (also affiliated with Cordoba, Valencia, and Zaragoza). This last figure is known to history as "Avicebron".
- **Late 11th / early 12th century:** Moses ben Jacob ibn Ezra "ha-Sallah" of Granada, Judah ben Samuel "ha-Levi" of Toledo (also affiliated with Tudela and Grenada), Bahya ben Joseph "ibn Pakuda" of Zaragoza, and Abraham bar Hiyya "ha-Nasi" of Barcelona.
- **12th century:** Abraham ben Meir ibn Ezra of Tudela (who taught in Cordoba), Abraham ibn David of Cordoba (a.k.a. "RabaD"), Zerachiah ben Isaac "ha-Levi" Yitzhari of Girona, and Joseph ben Jacob ibn [t]Zaddik of Cordoba.
- **Late 12th / early 13th century:** Mena[c]hem ben Solomon "ha-Meiri" of Catalonia, Judah ben Solomon "al-Harizi" of Toledo, and—of course—Moses ben Maimon ben Joseph of Cordoba (a.k.a. "Maimonides").
- **13th century:** Abraham ben Samuel Abulafia of Zaragoza, Solomon ben Abraham "ibn Aderet" of Barcelona (a.k.a. the "RaShbA"), and Moses ben Na[c]hman of Girona (a.k.a. "Nachmanides").

Both Maimonides and Nachmanides eventually migrated to (Ayyubid) Palestine. Why? Because not being a Turkic Jew, the prospect of going to the realm of "Ashkenazim" would not have made much sense.

During this period, NOBODY talked about Jews to the east as "Ashkenazim". For instance, the Kabbalist, Moshe ben Shem-Tov of León (a.k.a. "Moses de León") seemed not to be aware of so-called "Ashkenazi" Jews. There was the Semitic diaspora (primarily Sephardim and Misra[c]him); and there seems to have been oblique awareness of some rather exotic Jews who had emerged in the realm of the barbarian Slavs…way off to the east…who had unfamiliar cultural practices and unfamiliar tongues…and seem to have made their way into Eastern Europe.

Other prominent "geonim" during this period operated out of Kairouan, in Morocco. Most notable of these figures were [c]Hanan-El ben [c]Hus-i-El ben El-[c]Hanan and Nissim ben Jacob—both of whom lived in the late 10th / early 11th century. Meanwhile, Judah ben David Hayyuj made his mark in Fez in the 10th century.

As we've seen, many Jewish scholars were denizens of the "Hachmei Provence" in Occitania (southern France)—as with Isaac the Blind. {119} Some, like Berechiah ben Natronai Krespia "ha-Nakdan" of Normandy, were in northern France. The rest of the "Geon-im" were in the Middle East—as with A[c]hai of Shabha, Dodai ben Na[c]hman, Sa'ad-i-yah ben Yosef, and Aaron "ha-Kohen" ben Meïr. At the time, the majority of work was coming out of the Talmudic academies at Sura and Pumbedita in Mesopotamia. Bottom line: Before the 13th century, "Ashkenazim" (designated as such) do not make an appearance in the (official) history of Beth Israel.

To reiterate: The list of Andalusian writers of the era is quite long; even as we hear nothing about any Ashkenazi writers during this important epoch in Jewish history. Why not? Because "Ashkenazi" was not yet a thing. Had the Ashkenazim emerged from a migration of Sephardim eastward, there would not only have been a record of it; there would have certainly been SOME point made about an adjustment of identity—something to the effect: "We Rhineland Jews, whose ancestors were Sephardim, now consider ourselves Ashkenazim."

It's worth recapitulating the point: Barring allusions to "Ashkenazim" by Rashi (who saw them as OTHER), the first major references to a group of foreign Jews in eastern Europe occurred in the 13th century. The earliest of those references was by Shlomo ben Avraham "ibn Aderet" of Barcelona (a.k.a. the "RaShbA") in one of the many "Responsa" he composed during his career—which were primarily addressed

to Jews on the Iberian peninsula, France, the Italic peninsula, the Maghreb, and the Levant. Then came references to “Ashkenazim” by Asher ben Je[c]hiel of Toledo (a.k.a. the “Rosh”), who’s family had originally hailed from Cologne or Mainz, and who also wrote many “Responsa”. He clearly did not see these foreign Jews as some break-away sect of Sephardim.

This brings us back to the key point: For the time being, the migration trend was clearly NOT of Sephardim moving into Lotharingia. {52} The appearance of Ashkenazim in the Rhineland was clearly due to an influx from elsewhere.

Let’s now proceed into the 14th century. When the famous Occitanian rabbi, Aaron ben Jacob “ha-Kohen” was expelled from France in 1306, he moved to…Majorca. Had there been a trend of migration of Sephardim from France to the Rhineland, surely that destination would have made more sense. But such was not the case. At the time, there was no reason for a Sephardic Jew in France to go to the Rhineland: the land in which those foreign (Turkic) Jews had settled—what with their strange ways and stranger language.

When the famous Catalonian scholar, Nissim ben Reuven of Barcelona / Gerona (a.k.a. the “RaN”) conducted correspondences with key rabbis from across Beth Israel, the letters were addressed to interlocutors across Iberia, southern Europe, north Africa, and the Middle East. As with the aforementioned “Responsa”, NONE of those dialogues were with anyone in eastern Europe. Why not? The Turkic Jews were not yet involved in the Talmudic discourse. Heck, they did not even speak a recognizable tongue.

Later in the 14th century, when the famous Jewish philosopher, “Shem-Tov” ben Isaac Shaprut of Tudela was urged to leave the region (Navarre) due to local war, he opted to relocate next door, to Tarazona (Aragon); not to Lotharingia. Even in the 15th century, there was very little tendency for Sephardim to venture into eastern Europe.

Meanwhile, Ashkenazim (read: descendants of the [k]Hazarian diaspora) were continuing to fan out. Judah ben Eliezer “ha-Levi” of Mainz (a.k.a. “Mahari Minz”) immigrated from the Rhineland to the Italic Peninsula c. 1462. While in Padua, his son, Abraham, would be ostracized from the Ashkenazi community, per a decree by the prominent Ashkenazi rabbi, Jacob Pollak of Lublin. Why? For straying from Ashkenazi precedent. It seemed not to go over well that he was commiserating with Sephardim…with their alien Rabbinic / Talmudic ways.

Even more telling, during the expulsion of Jews from the Iberian Peninsula in 1492, virtually no Sephardim headed toward Lotharingia. The Italic Peninsula seems to have been a common choice at the time. Notably, Isaac ben Judah "Ab-Rabban-El" of Lisbon—who had been living in Toledo—opted to relocate there.

These examples are, of course, anecdotal. The question, then, is whether or not these prominent figures are indicative of a wider trend. I submit that they ARE indicative; as there is no countervailing evidence to suppose otherwise. The alternative would be to assume these notable men were all anomalies—that is: doing something different from what the majority of other Jews were doing at the time. Statistically, this would be highly unlikely. That said, more ethnographic research is warranted on this matter. For now, we can only engage in deduction based on the data that is currently available to us. Though only a small sample set is provided here, it should suffice for the present purposes.

To sum up: Even after c. 1100, the net flow of European Jews was in the opposite direction than it would have been were the emergence of Ashkenazim to be explained by any migration other than the [k]Hazarian diaspora. {20}

That was almost a millennium ago. It is now estimated that Ashkenazim are genetically 10-20% Semitic–exactly what we might expect had there been sporadic miscegenation with some of their Semitic brethren over the course of the intervening centuries. {28} It is now known that Ashkenazim originated from a relatively small, isolated group—perhaps numbering only in the thousands—which split off from Middle Eastern ancestors over 20,000 years ago. (!) This would explain the migration of homo-sapiens into the Eurasian Steppes during the Mesolithic period; thus accounting for the (Neolithic) ancestors of the Turkic peoples: primarily Haplogroup **G-M285**..from which the Ashkenazi sub-group **G1a1** (L201, L202 and L203) emerged. This genetic lineage eventually intermixed with Europeans, accounting for the presence of the **G1c** cluster in the Ashkenazi genome. {29} In spite of this, we hear the same refrain ad nauseam: Genetic testing has refuted the "Khazar theory". This is simply not true. {121}

Genetic testing makes clear that Ashkenazim originated as a DISTINCT HAPLO-GROUP; and only SUBSEQUENTLY mixed with Semitic denizens of Beth Israel (who would have come northward from the Mediterranean basin at some point AFTER the [k]Hazars' arrival in the Rhineland). By the same token, genetic tests reveal that they only started mixing with Europeans about eight centuries ago. {57} The fact is that Ashkenazim resemble people of Middle Eastern decent about as much as Slavs,

Poles, and Germanic peoples. To wit: Not at all. (Note: While Turkic, hailing as they did from the Pontic Steppes, the [k]Hazars had a relatively fare complexion.) In light of history, this makes perfect sense.

Genetically, we DO know that Ashkenazim can all trace themselves back to a relatively small group about a millennium ago. How else are we to explain the so-called “genetic bottleneck” that occurred at THAT particular point in time? Said bottleneck did not pertain to all of world Jewry; it pertained solely to the ancestry of Ashkenazim. In reality, this unique genealogical attribute was more a conical pattern proceeding from an origin point c. 1000 than it was a hyperboloid with a very narrow neck c. 1000. In genetic terms: A temporal cone (which subsequently fanned out over the past millennium) is found exclusively with regard to the number of Ashkenazim; and originated with a community comprised of only a few hundred—or perhaps a few thousand—people at exactly the point in time the [k]Hazarian diaspora would have arrived in eastern Europe. {118} This “genetic bottleneck” is NOT found when we look at Sephardic numbers over the course of the Middle Ages (that is, Jews on the Italic peninsula, in Occitania, on the Iberian peninsula, and in the Maghreb)…or even with Mizrachim (Jews located in Egypt and the Levant; a group that includes Musta’arabi Jews).

How is it that this occurred only with Ashkenazi ancestors? If Ashkenazim had been descendants of Sephardim, such a conical pattern would not exist; as it would instead be a smooth genetic transition from European Jewry before c. 1000 to European Jewry after c. 1000—with the community simply splayed out over a wider area (i.e. eastward into East Frankia). {30}

The origin-point of the cone would have been the kernel of the Ashkenazi community—that is: the remnants of the [k]Hazars who’d made it into the Rhineland. There is no plausible scenario in which the population trend over time would have been a hyperboloid—with such a narrow neck at that exact point in time. Such a scenario would entail a large population that temporarily shrunk—as if experiencing a verging genocide before recovering. Prior to c. 1000, there was no discernible Ashkenazi presence in eastern Europe. What DID exist, though, was a Turkic diaspora coming from the east.

In spite of all this, many Ashkenazim today (spec. those obsessed with Semitic bloodlines) work diligently to ensure their non-Semitic ancestry remains entirely obscured.

In an ideal world, nobody would care about bloodlines. (Go back far enough, and we're all Africans.) Alas. For ideological reasons (spec. involving claims of ethnic purity), Judeo-Supremacists would prefer that they were NOT revealed to be a melange of Turkic (including even, perhaps, Avar and Alan), Slavic (including Varangian), and north Caucasian instead of Semitic. For openly recognizing this fact would fatally undermine the gilded etiology favored by Reactionaries–especially as it relates to right-wing Zionist designs on Palestine (which is racially-based, as attested by the theocratic ethno-State that has existed there since 1948). After all, their ideology is predicated on (the positing of) unsullied bloodlines (a.k.a. racial purity). It is only via a farcical historiography that such spurious claims regarding "blood and soil" can be made. (To illustrate the point, several other instances of this odious mindset will be enumerated in the last section of this monograph.)

By the 12th century, there was an efflorescence of Judaism across Eastern Europe–from the Rhineland, through the Slavic lands, down to present-day Ukraine. Eventually, the "Pale of Settlement" would fan out even farther: up to the Baltics and down to the Balkans. It is no coincidence that Jews emerged in Livonia (esp. Riga, its commercial center) pursuant its incorporation into the Hanseatic League. As already mentioned, the Jewish presence in Greater Lithuania thereafter increased. In the 14th century, the Grand Duke, Gediminas invited Jews into Vilnius. In the 15h century, the Grand Duke of Lithuania, "Vitold the Great" extended his own invitation.

The famed rabbi, Peta[c]hiah ben Jacob of Regensburg [Bavaria] was a Radhanite who brought his career to Bohemia in the late 12th century. Peta[c]hiah is notable for having explored his ancestors' homeland–spending time amongst the Kipchaks and venturing into the north Caucuses (before heading to Mesopotamia and the Levant). He did nothing to hide this fact–unabashedly writing about the scattered remnants of the [k]Hazars, including the Crimean Karaites. {22} In the 13th century, Bavaria would be home to such icons as Isaac ben Isaac "ha-Lavan" [Isaac the White] and Isaac ben Moses "Or Zarua". It was around the same time that the first Jews arrived in Danzig (Pomerania).

At the western periphery of the "Pale of Settlement", beyond the reach of the (Orthodox Christian) Tsars of Kieven Rus, Jewish communities often found themselves within the orbit of the (theocratic) Holy Roman Empire. So it was inevitable that–in spite of the sporadic measures of accommodation enumerated

above (starting with Holy Roman Emperor Otto's "Magdeburger Recht" in the 10th century)–there would eventually occur oppression of the Jewish people by the Catholic Church. {26}

Douglas Morton Dunlop (a scholar of Eurasian studies at Columbia University) offered helpful observations on this matter. In the Magyar city of Pozsony (later "Pressburg"; now "Bratislava"), Dunlop noted that "as late as 1309, a council of the Hungarian clergy…forbade Catholics to inter-marry with those described as 'Khazars'." This decision was validated by the Vatican in 1346, as anti-Semitism was at a fever pitch. (The issue was not bias against Turkic blood, as the Catholic Church was regularly seeking to convert non-European peoples.) Clearly, there were Jews in the region who were still being referred to as "Khazars" into the 14th century. Even after they'd been driven from their original homeland, the [k]Hazarian Jews were STILL forced to contend with prejudices in their newly-adopted "eretz Ashkenaz".



LANGUAGE:

For Ashkenazim, "Yiddish" originally referred to "leshon Ashkenaz" (alt. "loshn Ashkenaz"), which was generally taken to mean "language of the foreigner"—that is to say: the language spoken in the place that came to be dubbed "Ashkenaz": a toponym based on the new ethnonym of those foreign (Turkic) Jews. This term for the Turkic Jews' strange language was in contradistinction to "loshn-koydesh" [sacred vernacular; i.e. medieval Hebrew]. Later, the new tongue would be referred

to as “Yiddish-Taytsh”, roughly meaning “Jewish semiotic” (effectively a Judaic creolization of Turkic, Slavic, and Germanic). NONE of this would have made sense for formerly Sephardic people who deigned to adopt a new dialect. Yet…in light of the present thesis, it makes perfect sense.

None other than Rashi himself used this nomenclature in his Zarfatic writings. This indicates that–UNLIKE Ashkenazi Jews–he saw the Germanic tongue as categorically foreign. Tellingly, the same epithet was also used by Mizra[c]hi (Palestinian) Jews to refer to the attacking Crusaders. (!) Rashi was clearly not a progenitor of the Jewish people who embraced the Germanic tongue (i.e. the soon-to-be “Ashkenazim”). For him, “Ashkenaz” was a pejorative for THE OTHER. He would not have referred to fellow Sephardim in this manner, even if they were seen as a divergent sect. This only makes sense if he saw that Jewish community as foreign.

To further assess the credence of the present thesis, it is helpful to evaluate linguistic developments. Throughout the region-in-question (including what came to be known as the “Pale of Settlement”, stretching from Lithuania down to Volhynia), many Jews came to speak a Judaic derivative of High German: Yiddish–a language that has no Semitic roots. {31}

The etymology of “Yid[d]ish” is itself quite telling. It is a variation on “Yehud[i]” with the suffix “-ish” appended. So it is simply an alternate way to say “Jewish”. This indicates that it was thought of primarily as a language for Jewish people—a peculiar way to think of a language; for, as we will see, other Judaic creole tongues were referred to according to the country / ethnicity with which they were associated.

There are other insights we might glean from the nomenclature. “Yid[d]ish” is sometimes used as a modifier for “Taytsh” [alt. “Taitsh”], which is an Ashkenazic colloquialism for “German”. This word choice is revealing, as “taytsh” actually means “translation” (as in “fartaytshn”). Hence “Yid[d]ish Taytsh” is taken to mean “Judeo-German”, yet literally means “Judaic translation”. Also revealing is the term “ivre taytsh” [translation of Hebrew], which was used to refer to Yiddish renderings / explanations of Hebrew texts. Descendants of Sephardim would not be inclined to refer to such texts in this way, nor would they be inclined to treat such material as foreign. This indicates that, when Yiddish emerged as a new tongue, the Ashkenazim had only recently come to Hebrew texts. (Again, they were likely acquainted with Jewish scripture in Aramaic / Syriac, and possibly Sogdian.)

So what of Old Turkic? A preliminary point to make: Turk-IC is not the same as Turk-ISH. The Turkish language is based on the Oghuz line of Old Turkic, brought to Anatolia by the Seljuk Turks in the 11th century; and eventually adopted by their descendants, the Ottoman Turks as a lingua franca. (Other Oghuz languages include Gagauz and Azeri.) This is to be contrasted to the Old Uyghur line, spoken by the Tatar / Oghuric peoples of the Eurasian Steppes, which led to the Kipchak family of tongues. The [k]Hazarian diaspora would never have ventured through Anatolia (that is: down through the southern Caucuses and Armenia, and subsequently into the lands south of the Black Sea). Therefore any theory that Yiddish somehow originated in Anatolia is spurious. In any case, what we now refer to as “Turkish” did not exist c. 1000. (The Seljuks hailed from central Asia; and thereafter moved westward.) Ottoman Turkish developed from the Oghuz branch of Old Turkic. (The Oghuz who remained behind now speak Turkmen.) More to the point: The Ottomans did not establish themselves AS SUCH until three centuries later; whereupon they asserted a “Turk-ISH” identity (to wit: Ottoman Turks). For more on this topic, see the work of linguist, Paul Wexler; as well as insights from geneticist, Eran El- Haik. {69} {71}

Wexler hypothesizes that Yiddish has primarily Slavic (esp. Sorbian)–and even Persian–rather than Germanic roots. The present thesis does NOT depend on that being the case. Wexler also hypothesizes that Ashkenazim had Slavic–and even Caucasian–ancestral origins (in addition to their Turkic origins); though he erroneously conjectures that this may have had something to do with Anatolian influences. (It is highly unlikely that the [k]Hazarian diaspora ended up in Anatolia–that is: where Turk-ISH people ended up.) One way or another, Wexler’s hypothesis would not affect the conclusions drawn here.

Suffice to say: Some Slavic influences would be unsurprising considering the conquests of Svyatoslav Igorevich and his heirs–which invariably would have precipitated some intermixture of Turkic peoples with the (Slavic) Kieven Rus. After all, pursuant to ANY conquest, miscegenation invariably ensues. It should be noted that various Turkic peoples still live in the upper Caucuses EVEN TODAY–as with the Balkar, Karachay, Kalmyk, Kumyk, Ghalghai (Ingush), and Nakh peoples. Others in the area (notably: the Adyghe / Circassians) came to be ethnically mixed (Caucasian, Bulgar, Tatar, Slavic, Arab, and Turkish). Most ended up converting to either Islam or Christianity.

It is important to rectify any confusion about the linguistic genealogy of the different Turkic branches; as the ramification of languages was a bit convoluted during most of the Middle Ages. The [k]Hazarian diaspora would have spoken a tongue from the Oghuric branch of Old Turkic (shared by the Bashkirs and Sabirs); while “Tatars” (a vague term for various Turkic peoples—from the Avars and Bulgars to the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz / [k]Hakas) spoke variants of Kipchak-Kumen. This taxonomy is misleading; as those languages were ALL likely of the same lineage—a fact demonstrated by the Chuvash (an Oghuric Turkic people related to the Volga Tatars) and the Kumyks (who, like Karaite Jews, still speak a Kipchak-Kumen language). In a sense, then, ALL Turkic peoples of the Eurasian Steppes were “Tatars”; and there was not a fundamental difference between the Oghuric and Kipchak-Kumen linguistic branches during the Middle Ages. {91}

So which Turkic peoples STILL LIVE in the former [k]Hazaria? The Kalmyks. As it happens, “Kalmyk” means “Remnant” in the local vernacular. These were among the Turkic peoples of the northern Caucuses known in the Middle Ages as the “[Vai-]Nakh”. Eventually, the indigenous Turkic population combined with a Mongolic people (Oirats) who had migrated from Dzungaria (near the Tamim Basin) in the 1620’s. Upon their arrival in the northern Caucuses (a process that culminated c. 1630 in what was, at the time, the Turkic Astrakhan Khanate), the Oirats seized power. Consequently, the (gentrified) Kalmyk population transitioned from Tengri-ism to Tibetan Buddhism (that is: the Faith that was endemic to Dzungaria). That new regime ruled over Astrakhan, Kalmykia, and Dagestan—that is: the northern Caucuses—in what used to be central [k]Hazaria. (Note: Many Kalmyks—specifically those who identified more with their Oirat heritage—ended up migrating back east to Dzungaria in the 18th century in order to evade Tsarist oppression.) To the present day, the Kalmyks of the northern Caucuses trace some of their language, sartorial practices, cuisine, and folklore back to the [k]Hazars. {109} Meanwhile, the Circassians were sometimes referred to as the “Kashak” in ancient sources; meaning that those who now speak “Kabardian” and “Adyghe” are remnants of their diaspora.

Note that another Turko-Mongolic people who still live in the region are the Nogais. This is an ethnic group that characterized both the Crimean and Astrakhan Khanates. Jews who remained in the region—known as “Kavkazi”—speak a hybrid of (Turkic) Azeri and (Persian) Judeo-Tat (alt. Juhuri / Juvuro), the latter of which was itself a hybrid of Aramaic and Middle Persian.

To fully understand how Old Turkic evolved into the variety of modern Turkic tongues, it is important to understand the fundamental difference between the two major lineages: Oghuric and Oghuz. This distinction shows why it is misguided to try to find similarities between Old Yiddish and, say, Ottoman Turkish. {92}

The Oghuric speakers never ventured south of the Caucuses mountains, and certainly never lived in Anatolia. In the 10th century, the Persian traveler, Abu Ishak al-Farsi of Istakhr (a.k.a. "Al-Istakh[a]ri") noted that the language of the [k]Hazars was different from the language of the (Oghuz Turkic) Seljuks of the Middle East, yet resembled the language of the (Oghuric Turkic) Bulgars far to the north. This is a very telling comment; as it attests that, by that time, the [k]Hazarian diaspora spoke a somewhat hybridized language—namely: one that incorporated elements of Oghuric and—once in Eastern Europe—indigenous Eastern European tongues. How so? The Bulgars ALSO came to use what was effectively a Turkic-Slavic hybrid. Bulgar is a case-study in the degree to which the Turkic provenance of a tongue can dissipate over time. Today, vestiges of Turkic in modern Bulgarian are so sparse that the language is now categorized as primarily SLAVIC. This makes sense, as medieval Bulgarians became Eastern Orthodox Christian, and their lingua-franca was therefore primarily dictated by the (prescribed) liturgical language: Old Church Slavonic (as attested by the Codex Zographensis from c. 1000). They abandoned their Turkic identity; and their Turkic linguistic roots along with it.

The fact that few traces of the Turkic provenance of the Bulgarian language—or, for that matter, the Hungarian language—remain reminds us that what happened with the [k]Hazarian diaspora was not unheard of. Indeed, there are some rough analogies between these two—nay, three—cases. With their new identity, the Bulgars were determined to purge their newfangled culture of their pagan origins in Old Great Bulgaria (i.e. Volga Bulgaria; read: western [k]Hazaria). Their revamped (Christian) identity took on a distinctly Danubian ethos; entirely disconnected from its Turkic roots—vestiges of which remain…in the form of Bashkir, Chuvash, and other Tatars in the original homeland. (Unfortunately, the Sabirs no longer exist.) The culmination of this process is recounted in the "Boril Synodic" [Book of Boril] from c. 1211-14. Similarly, Yiddish is now categorized as primarily GERMANIC. (For how a similar thing happened with the Magyars-cum-Hungarians, see Postscript 1.) It comes as no surprise, then, that Bulgarians today do not include the Onogur ruler, Kubrat Khan in their national origin story; but rather affiliate themselves with a folk-hero who had nothing whatsoever to do with their actual (Turkic) provenance: the Roman military leader, Theodore of Heraclea Pontica. We are thus furnished with

another case-study of a Turkic people asserting a novel identity; which entailed eliding their Turkic origins. As a consequence, Bulgarian is no more seen as a Turkic language than is Yiddish. {120}

This is yet another reminder that ethno-centricity is not merely based on conceit; it is based on somewhat delusive thinking. For it invariably behooves participants to honor a confabulated historiography—as erroneous as it is self-serving. The Bulgars converted from Tengri-ism to Christianity c. 864—during the reign of King Boris-Michael. They thus slowly redefined themselves as an Eastern European people rather than as former Steppe peoples. Meanwhile, the [k]Hazarian diaspora would retain its creed (Judaism), yet eschew its Turkic identity in favor of an Occidental one—thereby adopting a more European ethos.

These parallels are instructive.

Another indication of the influence the language of the Tatars had on the development of Old Yiddish (effectively: a hybridization of Oghuric elements and Germanic elements, with a smattering of Slavic influences) comes from the 11th century. In his “Diwan Lughat al-Turk”, the Kara-Khanid lexicographer, Mahmud ibn Husayn of Kashgar (a.k.a. “Al-Kashgari”) discussed the recent expansion of Turkic language influences into Eastern Europe. In other words: **This was a known phenomenon at the time**.

A key point to consider: That the Sephardim in 11th-century Lotharingia (notably, Rashi) used a language that exhibited no Germanic influences (they used Zarfatic, which was from France) indicates that Sephardim in that area were NOT adopting Germanic lexemes during the relevant period. This means that Old Yiddish did not emerge amongst Sephardic Jews who happened to reside in the Rhineland; but amongst OTHERS who practiced Judaism and had recently started arriving in the area…and were thus more apt to adopt Germanic lexemes. (Rashi’s tongue, Zarfatic, was NOT a precursor to Old Yiddish.) Couple this insight with the fact that Rashi referred to the Ashkenazim as OTHERS, and the conclusion is quite clear: Ashkenazim did not come from Sephardim. They came from somewhere else. And the only “somewhere else” was from the east.

Had the Ashkenazim been former Sephardim, there would be traces of linguistic intermediaries—especially linguistic vestiges of Zarfatic. There weren’t. In fact, into the modern age, many in the Pale of Settlement continued to use Turkic terms like “kabak” (squash), “bülbe” (potato), “solet” (meat and potato stew), “knish” (meat-

filled dough), “titun” / “tyu-tyun” (tobacco), “kaplak” (coarse cloth), “torba” (bag), “kh[a]lat” (jacket), “brislak” (vest), “brust-tukh” (bodice), “patsheyle” (female head wrap), and “kolpik” [from “kalpak”] (fur hat)…to mention a dozen. {102} “Yarmulke” is, of course, the most explicitly Turkic term still used—to the present day—by Ashkenazim. There is no likely scenario in which Sephardim who had migrated into Eastern Europe would have adopted such vernacular (thus jettisoning long-used Sephardic terminology for no apparent reason). This was all lexical residue from the Ashkenazi Jews’ Turkic past. {50}

Why not MORE? Well, happily, we have another case study available to us—where Steppe languages from the the Ural region migrated westward into eastern Europe. The Uralic tongue of the Magyars (modern Hungarian) is not exactly a treasure trove of Turkic lexemes either. {111} Why not? Mother tongues dissipate as dominant tongues take over. Such changes happen during geo-political—and cultural—transitions. Even so, we can usually find SOME vestiges if we look hard enough. {112}

In sum: When some contend that there is no clear linguistic genealogy from Common Turkic to the earliest incarnation of Yiddish, one need only retort that there is no path from Zarfatic to Old Yiddish either; and that, had the latter been the case, there would almost certainly be glaring vestigial features—either lexically or grammatically. There are none.

To understand the linguistic process by which [k]Hazarian would have morphed into Old Yiddish, it is necessary to take into account the process of “re-lexification” by which the latter was formed. In assaying the retained grammatical structure of Old Turkic, we find that the native vocabulary was gradually transplanted with Slavic and Germanic lexemes—as would be expected. Hence a nascent Turkic tongue (with traces of Sogdian, due to progenitors’ participation on the Silk Road) underwent a metamorphosis as it encountered linguistic influences from Slavic (mostly Sorbian) and Germanic (mostly Bavarian) peoples during its migration westward from the Pontic Steppes—through Bohemia / Moravia, then Silesia, then Bavaria—toward the Rhineland. As it happened, the [k]Hazars would have ALREADY been well-versed in Old Slavic—especially Sorbian (replete with Severian and Drevlian variants) as a result of to their trading patterns from the previous few centuries. {95}

The Silk Road is an important factor here. Not all Jews who were merchants across Eurasia were Radhanites. Some would have been [k]Hazars. In any case, the record shows that Beth Israel was not the monolithic group so often portrayed in Judaic

historiography. Far from homogenous, world Jewry was a diverse tapestry of different peoples from different places—some of whom were Semitic, some of whom were not. The preponderance of evidence belies the over-simplified tale of all the world's Jewish people being a singular diaspora emanating from Judea via pristinely Hebrew bloodlines. {93}

Bear in mind: Subsequent linguistic accretions that occurred in Yiddish during the Pale of Settlement are a moot point, as they would have been adopted long after the fact; so say nothing about Ashkenazi origins. (Those who take umbrage with the present thesis are often quick to point to Hebraic elements that eventually made their way into the Yiddish vernacular.) The question is: How did Yiddish ORIGINALLY exist? Surely, a lot happened in the intervening time—much of which would have masked the Turkic provenance of the earliest speakers. Predictably, Hebrew terms were steadily incorporated into the lexicon, as Ashkenazim slowly became acquainted with the Talmudic tradition—starting in the 16th century. Assaying what happened LATER is beside the point when we're inquiring into where something BEGAN.

With regard to the Halakha, the process of syncretism amongst Ashkenazim went into overdrive in the advent of Joseph ben Ephraim Karo's commentary on Yaakov ben Asher's "Arba'ah Turim" (the "Beth Yosef"; summarized as the "Shulchan Aruch") in the 1550's. Even then, the adoption of the Talmudic tradition—theretofore an exclusively Sephardic phenomenon—by Ashkenazim was tempered by the commentary of a rabbi from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: Mojzesz ben Isserl ben Josef of Kazimierz (alternately rendered "Moshe Isserles", meaning "Moses Israel"; a.k.a. "ReMa"), who operated out of Krakow. Naturally, there was some push-back from some Ashkenazim against the incorporation of the (foreign) Talmudic tradition into their own Mosaic creed. {94}

While Karo was himself Sephardic (he was from Toledo, in Andalusia), he was seen as speaking for all of Beth Israel; and eventually came to be known—even amongst Ashkenazim—as "Mar-an" ("Our Master"). This attests to the degree of memetic transference that ultimately occurred—from the Semitic part of Beth Israel to the Turkic part of Beth Israel. ReMa's campaign to stave off Sephardic influence was to no avail. Ashkenazim eventually adopted the Talmudic paradigm, and embraced the Rabbinic legacy that had been sustained by the Sephardim since the era of the Zugot (through the Tanna-im, Amora-im, and Savora-im…to his contemporaneous Gaon-im). The Mishnaic and Masoretic canon, which had been entirely foreign to the [k]Hazars, soon became a part of their descendants' repertoire.

As might be expected, some protest came from Ashkenazim who were reticent to adopt the Talmudic / Rabbinic traditions of the Sephardim. This was attested by the array of invective composed the Karaites at the time. Such reluctance was short-lived. By the time Elijah ben Zalman "ha-Gaon" of Vilna was redacting the "Sefer Yetzirah" [Book Of Creation] and Moses Mendelssohn was contributing to the Haskalah (also in the 18th century), Ashkenazi culture had fully incorporated the Talmudic tradition into its own.

To reiterate: Such memetic accretions occurred long after the fact; and therefore tell us very little about the origins of Ashkenazim. So those who argue AGAINST the [k]Hazarian origins of Ashkenazim by citing such developments ("Look at the Hebraic elements found in modern Yiddish!") are engaged in misdirection. Any developments after c. 1500 are completely beside the point. Exigencies during the relevant period (the 11th thru 15th centuries) are not to be confused with later developments in Ashkenazi Judaism—like, for instance, that of [c]Habad Hassidism, which was inaugurated by Menachem Mendel of Haradok [Vitebsk] and Shneur Zalman ben Baruch of Liozna [Lyady] in the 18th century. {97}

So why don't we have any Jewish liturgical material in Turkic from the Early Middle Ages? If the [k]Hazars were, indeed, predominantly Jewish, wouldn't there be at least SOME record of it in a [k]Hazarian language? Well, not if it was all destroyed.

But wait. The fact that there are no surviving documents from a thriving, quasi-literate kingdom is rather odd, is it not? Yes and no. {101}

Here's what would refute the present thesis: If we DID have oodles of [k]Hazarian documents, and **(A)** none of it indicated anything about their relation to the Jewish Faith and/or **(B)** at some point it mentioned OTHER Jews (i.e. those who were not fellow [k]Hazars) who were identifiable as (antecedents to) Ashkenazim. **(A)** would effectively mean: "Judaism, you say? Most of us are not that." **(B)** would effectively mean: "Ashkenazim, you say? We're not them." Either would refute the thesis that Ashkenazim were a later incarnation of the [k]Hazars.

Documentation by the [k]Hazars themselves would, of course, be tremendously helpful. But what we now have from them is, well, virtually nothing. Clearly, all relevant material—insofar as it existed at one point—was lost and/or destroyed. Destroyed by whom? Probably by the Slavic conquerers who felled their empire… and, within a few generations, had converted to Christianity. Pursuant to said

conversion, the Slavs / Varangians would have probably dispatched much of the non-Christian material that remained within their domain—[k]Hazarian and otherwise.

Meanwhile, the [k]Hazarian exiles themselves slowly migrated across Kieven Rus with whatever they could carry—or were allowed to carry—in their horse-drawn carts. Disaffected nomads tend not to transport libraries.

Bottom line: There was surely some [k]Hazarian literature that existed at one point. The fact that none of it remains tells us that—however much of it there may have been—it was entirely lost and/or destroyed; which accounts for the paucity of documentation with which we are now dealing. The lack of such documentation is not evidence of non-Jewishness; it merely attests to the fact that no documentation —of ANY kind—survived.

Extensive scholarship has been devoted to tracing the phylogeny of the potpourri of Turkic languages that eventually came to exist; yet only a minuscule amount of attention has been paid to the metamorphosis of the [k]Hazarian lingua franca (from the Oghuric line) to the Germanized “Yiddish” tongue that emerged during the High Middle Ages. Given the present thesis, though, it should come as no surprise that vestiges of the population’s Turkic roots are evident in the Yiddish vernacular.

Notable is the term for the Judaic headpiece: the “yarmulke”. The term is based on the Turkic “yargmuluk”, meaning “protective dome / canopy” (i.e. a cap); NOT, as some have contended, from the Talmudic phrase “fear of the king” (which, in any case, was from Syriac). Tellingly, this well-known neo- Turkic lexeme was used across Eastern Europe…instead of the Hebraic “kippah” (which, as it happens, ALSO means “protective dome / canopy”). This convention would have been rather odd had the Ashkenazim’s roots been Semitic; especially considering the term pertains to an overtly religious item (which normally warrants etymological continuity).

Well, then, what about female headdress? The head-wrap worn by Ashkenazi women is called a “tikhl” instead of a “mitpa[c]hat”. The latter is based on the Hebrew term for cloth, “tipa[c]h” (with the prefix “mi- ” meaning “from”, and “-at” appended at the end). Some attribute the Yiddish term to the German word for cloth, “tuch”, which derived from the Old / Middle High German “tuo[c]h” (the word that would have been in use during the relevant period). This is possible, though unlikely. (“Tikhl” probably does not have any relation to the Bavarian terms, “tu[s]che[r]l” or “tiachal”.)

It is more likely that “tikhl” shares its origins with that of the Turkic (spec. Chuvash) term for a woman’s head-wrap: “tukhya”. It might possibly even be a melding of the Turkic and Germanic lexemes. In any case, it remains a mystery why the Ashkenazim opted for “tikhl” in lieu of EITHER the Hebrew term for a cloth covering (“mitpa[c]hat”) OR the term used by Sephardim at the time (“pe’ar”). Clearly, there was a disjuncture in vernacular. {68}

Also notable is the Yiddish term for prayer, “davnen”, which is unique to Ashkenazi Jews; and is decidedly different from the traditional Hebrew term, “tefillah”. {61} Needless to say, propitiation is an integral part of a sacred creed: a holy act with a specific name. Why, then, would a term be used that was different from the one used in rabbinic (Mishnaic / Masoretic) lore? Had the Ashkenazim come from a Sephardic background, this would have entailed jettisoning a Hebraic moniker in order to adopt a term with an alternate etymological background–a highly unlikely scenario. Meanwhile, there were two words for soul / spirit in Old Turkic (which seem to have come from Sogdian or Middle Persian): “khut” and “dukh”; while “-nen” / “-nan” was the Turkic suffix for “in” / “of”. In Old Yiddish, the term for a priestly blessing was “dukh-nen” [in/of the soul]. {61} The same goes for “shul” (from the German “schule”) instead of the Hebraic “yeshiva” or “bet[h] midrash”. Under no circumstances would Sephardim have jettisoned the Hebrew term for “place of scriptural study” in favor of a Gentile term.

There are numerous examples. Ashkenazim opted for “zelik” (from the German “selig”) instead of “kodesh” for “holy”; which became a popular given name in Ashkenazi communities. They also opted for Sieg[e]l instead of “Khatam” (meaning “signet ring”; the original talisman known for exhibiting the seal of Solomon). For “pious”, Ashkenazim use the term “frum” instead of the Talmudic “khumra”. Tellingly, the 12th-century Tosafist (and maternal grandson of Rashi), Jacob ben Meir ben Samuel of Troyes never used the term, “frum”. This likely means that it had NON-Sephardic origins. And for “redeem”, Ashkenazim adopted “oysleyzn” from the Germanic “erlösen” [redeemed] / “erlöser” [redeemer] instead of the Hebraic “geul” / “go- el” (or even the Aramaic “yeshuah”). This would be rather odd had the Ashkenazim been from a Sephardic background. Other notable lexical transplants include the Germanic “stern” instead of the Hebraic “kokab” [alt. “kochav”] for star.

When moving into a new region, for a (Talmudic) Jewish community of Semitic heritage to suddenly eschew Hebraic (Mishnaic / Masoretic) terminology in favor of a patently non-Jewish vernacular would have made no sense.

Then there are everyday items. The Yiddish word for potato (“bulbe”) comes from the Turkic “bülbe”. The Yiddish word for noodles (“lokshe”) comes from the Turkic “laksha”. The Yiddish word for a sac (“torbe”) comes from the Turkic. The Yiddish word for a long garment for men (“kaftan”) comes from the Turkic. The Yiddish word for “happiness” (“glik”) is likely derived from the Old Turkic “got-lik”. Etc.

How in heaven’s name would Turkic lexemes have been incorporated into Ashkenazi vernacular if they’d split off from Sephardim? Even something as simple as the Yiddish salutation, “welcome” seems to have Turkic undertones: “borekh-habo” (a locution that–ostensibly–has something to do with blessings).

Moreover, if the first Ashkenazim had a tradition that was couched in Hebrew (as did the Sephardim), they would not have opted to transition to Germanic onomastics in lieu of Semitic nomenclature. Note, for instance, the use of the Germanic name “Loew” / “Löwe” rather than the Hebraic “Ari” / “Arya[h]” / “Aryeh” (alt. “lah-yish”) for “lion”. {75} This is peculiar, as the iconic animal is often associated with Judah (“Yehuda”)…and even with god himself (“Ari-El”). No Semitic Jew would have been inclined to adopt this Germanic lexeme IN LIEU OF the Hebraic lexeme. Meanwhile, “A[r]slan” is Old Turkic for “lion”, and remains a common Ashkenazic given name. When Sephardim would alter Biblical (i.e. Hebraic) names, they typically just modified their morphology—as with, say, “Elias” for “El-i-jah”.

Other Turkic given names occur sporadically amongst Ashkenazim—as with “Irek” [liberty] and “Ai-gul” [moon-flower]. {27} Other Turkic lexemes that crop up in Ashkenazi onomastics include “silu” [beautiful] and “güney” [south]. Also notable is the use of the Old Turkic “Kaplan” [alt. “Kaplun”] in lieu of the Hebraic “tigris” for “tiger”. Then there’s “Mendel”, the diminutive of the German for “man”, in lieu of the Hebraic name, “Mana[c]hem”. “Sorkin” seems to have something to do with “Sarah”. Why the Germanic when the Hebraic was available?

Some other (normally Hebraic) given names ended up having a Slavic bent–as with “Rivka” instead of Rebecca, or “Rashka” instead of Rachel. Again: This is a peculiar onomastic choice considering these were Biblical names. Meanwhile, “Bog-dan” is Slavic for “god-given” (alt. gift from god). Why would a Jewish family, in adopting a surname, abandon a coveted religious term (the Hebrew “min[c]hah”) in favor of a foreign onomastic…unless, that is, they didn’t have such a term in their repertoire in the first place?

There are myriad other indications of the NON-Talmudic provenance of Ashkenazim. “Alt-S[c]hul[er]” was coined as the term for the original (“old”) synagogue in Prague (instead of, say, “Beth Midrash” or “Beth Knesset”). Using the German word for “school” for a synagogue is probably not something Sephardim would have been inclined to do. Another telling clue is “Roth” instead of the Hebrew “Edom” for “red”. Nobody with a Semitic background would have been inclined to use “Rothstein” in lieu of the medieval Hebraic “Adamah”. “Roth[en]schield” is another interesting case (see Postscript 1).

An adumbration of Old Turkic vernacular can be found in the “Diwan Lughat-i Turk” from the late 11th century. Composed by a Kara-Khanid scholar from Kashgar, the work documents the migration of Turkic peoples and Turkic LANGUAGES into eastern Europe in the preceding century or so. (Good luck getting your hands on a copy. I suspect it is a treasure trove of lexical gems.) For the present inquiry, a point of departure would be to identify cognates between Old Turkic and Old Yiddish—specifically those that have roughly the same meaning. (My own observations, here, are surely only the tip of the iceberg.)

We might then consider a work in Old Turkic vis a vis Old Yiddish. For the former, we might look to the **“Irk Bitig”** (Book of Divination) from the 9th century (which would need to be transliterated from Old Turkic runes). The best sources of early Yiddish would be either the **“Dukus Horant”**, a Judaic adaptation (from the 14th century) of the Germanic legend of Kudrun (from the previous century), or the **“Shmuel-Bukh”** (Samuel Book) from the 15th century. {83} In juxtaposing these works, we would find that it was during the intervening five to six centuries that the preponderance of linguistic metamorphosis would have taken place—whereby the [k]Hazarian diaspora abandoned their native (Turkic) tongue and adopted a palpably Germanic one. It makes sense, then, that the groundbreaking Ashkenazi tract, the **“Vitry Ma[c]h[a]zor”** was not composed until c. 1100 (about a quarter-millennium after the “Irk Bitig”). That is to say: It was only composed once a distinct ethnic identity had been asserted in the new land: Ashkenaz.

Another indication that there was an independent Jewish community amongst the Turkic peoples is the emergence of the Old Bulgarian Book of Enoch. This text (a.k.a. the “Book of the Secrets of Enoch”; alt. Second Enoch) was unrelated to the original Book of Enoch, and was clearly not in the Mishnaic / Masoretic tradition. (Thus: Judaic scripture originally composed in a Slavic rather than Semitic tongue.) Remarkably, the first manuscripts of this book emerged amongst the Bulgars–a Turkic people who, it should be noted, originally hailed from the Pontic Steppes.

While clearly drawing on antecedent Judaic lore (as with, say, the exaltation of Melchi-zedek), the text does some strikingly anomalous things–notably: designating the central place of worship for the ancient Israelites as “Ahuzan”. (!)

In light of all this, it is also important to look for countervailing evidence to the present thesis. Here, this would entail identifying cognates between, say, Zarfatic (including its Occitanian variant, Shuadit; used by none other than Rashi) and Old Yiddish. Doing so would help ascertain whether or not the Ashkenazim might have a Sephardic background. (Surely, traces of Zarfatic would crop up in the Yiddish vernacular if Ashkenazim had Sephardic provenance.) So far as I’ve found, though, no such cognates exist—an absence that would be inexplicable had the Ashkenazim hailed from western Europe. There are no vestiges of Tosafot in the “Dukus Horant”—a peculiar absence had its authors come from a Sephardic tradition. The work was clearly not composed by those who had a Zarfatic linguistic background. {70}

Another indication of the Turkic origins of medieval Yiddish is its grammar. Intriguingly, its periphrastic conjugation is neither Germanic nor Semitic in nature. (MODERN Hebrew incorporates periphrastic conjugation, UNLIKE Classical / Mishnaic Hebrew. As it turns out, it adopted this grammatical feature from Yiddish; so using this particular feature of the new lingua-franca as evidence of its speakers’ Semitic origins would be question-begging.)

Ashkenazim also opted for the Germanic “Weiss” instead of the Hebraic “Laban” for “white”. This is odd, as “Laban” is a Biblical name that was familiar to all Jews. (It was Isaac’s brother-in-law.) Also note “Taub[er]” / “Daub[er]” (from the Middle High German “tube”) instead of the Hebrew “Yonah” for one associated with a dove. This is peculiar, as “Jonah” is a Biblical name.

We also encounter generic terms like “Liub-wine” (later rendered “Lewin” / “Levin”), meaning “dear friend”, which is often—erroneously—conflated with names based on “Levi”. (The Anglicized version of that lexeme was “Leof-wine”.) If we were to suppose that “Levin” pertained to the Levites, we would be forced to posit an onomastic incongruity. For instead of “ben Levi” (which would be consistent viz. Hebraic nomenclature), we encounter “Levinowitz”, “Levinson”, and “Levinski” (where the “v” is sometimes “w”). Those surnames use Germanic / Nordic / Slavic patronymics for the (Hebrew) Biblical name of a hallowed tribe—entailing an odd etymological disjuncture.

Granted, some aspects of (the predominantly Germanic) Yiddish may be attributed to Slavic influences. However the language retains both definite and indefinite articles, which must be from linguistic sources other than Slavic. This may well be indicative of Turkic origins. (The Germanic elements of Yiddish are evident in its verb-second syntax, as well as significant parts of its lexicon.) Worth noting is the use of the suffix "-te" in Yiddish for the female version of something; which is from Babylonian Aramaic, not from (the Middle Aramaic-inspired) Masoretic Hebrew that is palpable in Sephardic vernaculars. Interestingly, the Yiddish term for grandfather, "[d]zeyde" has Slavic roots. This is a peculiar choice, as it is used in lieu of "saba", the root of which is the Hebrew word for father: ab[a]. Both "ab[a]" and "am[a]" are basic words in the (Semitic) Jewish lexicon—words that one would presume would not be transplanted by Gentile terminology—especially when it comes to anyone with Semitic provenance.

Further work needs to be done on the vernacular of Old Yiddish by (impartial) linguistic scholars. A complete survey of the Yiddish vernacular goes beyond the scope of this essay. But the available evidence is in keeping with the present thesis.

It is worth taking pause, and posing the question: If the Ashkenazim's ancestral tongue was Turkic, then why aren't there MORE traces of it in Yiddish than there are? For even after the adoption of a highly Germanized tongue, one would still expect to find vestiges of the abandoned Turkic vernacular. Yes and no. Keep in mind: The ALTERNATIVE to the present explanation is that the forerunner was a (Sephardic) Zarfatic tongue, for which we find ZERO traces. That disappearance would be even more implausible, as there was a long-lived Talmudic tradition by that time…which would need to have been entirely discarded by the break-away sect. Ockham's Razor provides us with the most likely explanation: the Ashkenazim had a provenance that was not Sephardic.

As mentioned, for indications of how Yiddish emerged from Turkic roots, the best place to look is the 14th-century proto-Yiddish epic, **"Dukus Horant"**. As would be expected, the work that exhibits palpably Turkic linguistic features. It is based on an old Germanic legend about a dastardly Norman prince, Hedinn (alt. "Hartmut") and his dealings with a fictional Germanic king: Hogni (alt. "Hagen[a]"). More specifically, it was about Hedinn winning the hand of Hogni's beautiful daughter, Hild[r] / Hilde (alt. "Kudrun" / "Gudrun"). In the Ashkenazic rendering, Hartmut (as "Horant") is made the hero instead of the villain. He must prove himself to Hilde's father (cast as a Byzantine king: "Hagen") by going through various trials. The fact that Ashkenazim resorted to antecedent Germanic lore to write their first epic is

quite telling. It shows that they eschewed the folklore that they'd previously had at their disposal, and were seeking an alternative. In no other instance can there be found material created by a Jewish community that was disconnected from the Mishnaic / Masoretic (read: Talmudic) tradition; and was composed in a language with no Hebraic precursors. It's not like the Talmudic tradition was bereft of parables; or lacking in endogenous folkloric material. It already had a surfeit of both. (Note, for example, the fables compiled by Berechiah ben Natronai Krespia "ha-Nakdan" in the late 12th century: the "Mishle Shu'alim".) The [k]Hazarian diaspora, on the other hand, WOULD have been looking to appropriate whatever useful Gentile material they encountered; as they had a limited Judaic heritage from which to work.

What of the native [k]Hazarian language? Might there be any clues there? Alas, we don't know much about their particular dialect of (Oghuric) Turkic. The [k]Hazars referred to Saturday (the Sabbath) as "shabat kun"–a clear mark of their Jewish culture. We know that this was not the result of a Semitic background; for the Kuman peoples–who spoke Kipchak and were not Jewish–ALSO came to use the term for that (auspicious) day of the week; being, as they were, vassals of the [k]Hazar Empire (ref. Kevin Alan Brook's "The Jews Of Kazaria"). The terms used by the [k]Hazars for all the other days of the week–which had no religious significance–did NOT have Hebraic etymologies. This means that the [k]Hazars treated this particular day in a unique manner, labeling it according to Judaic convention…even as they retained the Turkic vernacular for all things secular (e.g. the other six days of the week). In other words: The use of this term for the Sabbath day was due to semiotic pertinence rather than linguistic inheritance. {115}

Meanwhile, by the 10th century, the [k]Hazars seem to have adopted a variant of the Samaritan alphabet for their writing. This indicates that there were Semitic ORTHOGRAPHIC influences in [k]Hazarian lore; and it was not Hebraic. More to the point, [k]Hazarian lore was derived from sources that did not use either Mishnaic or Masoretic Hebrew (i.e. sources used by Sephardim). In sum: Their lore was–in part–Abrahamic lore, yet it was not conveyed via Hebraic means (as was always the case with Sephardim–from Maghrebis to Andalusians to Tosefot). Their Judaic material come to them via alternate intermediaries. Such sources likely came to the Pontic Steppes via Persia at some point in Late Antiquity. It is possible that such memetic transmission occurred via the peoples known as the "Mishars" (alt. "Nizhgars"), as

well as the Burtas and the (Jewish) Radhanites: Persian and Eurasian peoples–many of whom traveled the Silk Road and used Sogdian; some of whom were reported to have converted to Judaism.

Note, though, that it was not until the last days of the empire that some [k]Hazarian documents were written using this quasi-Samaritan script. The empire even came to use that script on some of its coinage. {25} Pursuant to the first Muslim conquests of the 7th century, many Samaritans were displaced to Persia, which is precisely the route by which Judaism would have come to the [k]Hazars. (Keep in mind, the Samaritans recognize only the Torah…which explains why, to this day, Orthodox Jews refuse to consider Samaritans properly "Halakhic".) And so it went: The so-called "kadmonim", founders of the Ashkenazi Halakhic tradition, trace back to–you guessed it–about a thousand years ago. That the [k]Hazars used the Samaritan alphabet makes sense, as it was not uncommon for Samaritan script to be used to compose works stemming from Babylonian Aramaic–as demonstrated by the "Tulida".

[k]Hazarian coinage from the 9th century praised Moses as the "messenger of god"…in Samaritan script. In his "Kitab al-Fihrist", the 10th-century Arab historian, Abu al-Faraj Muhammad ibn Ishaq al-Nadim even commented that the [k]Hazars wrote using a Hebrew-like script. {25} Unsurprisingly, other [k]Hazarian coinage was written in variants of Turkic script (i.e. Old Turkic runes, which were used for Kipchak in its earliest phase). Archeology has even uncovered syncretic iconography, combining the Judaic menorah with various ancient Turkic symbols. (!)

That's not all. The necropolis at Chelarevo in the Balkans had a cache of Turkic artifacts from the 8th and 9th centuries–likely from the Bulgarian Khanate (which was primarily Tengri-ist until c. 864 when their leader, Boris converted to Christianity). Many of those ALSO made use of the menorah. (!)

The Bulgar Khanate bordered the [k]Hazar Empire along the Dnieper river; and the two peoples shared iconography–as attested by the Treasure of Nagy-Szent-Miklos. The use of menorahs on such artifacts would be inexplicable but for the current thesis.

Another key point: The origins of the Ashkenazi Hebraic dialect–which was eventually established for liturgical purposes–seems to be largely disconnected from the Mishnaic / Masoretic Hebrew of the Talmudic (spec. Amoraic) tradition. The discrepant origins of these two medieval renderings of Hebrew is very telling. Note

that the medieval incarnation of Hebrew (spec. Masoretic) is primarily traced to Andalusia…and, even further back, to the Mishnaic Hebrew of the “[c]Hazal” and “Geonim” (which would have been based on Babylonian Aramaic). The Ashkenazi dialect of (pseudo-)Hebrew was a post hoc creation that was completely unrelated to the discursive practices found in the Talmud.

As would be expected from the timeline of events, Yiddish did not emerge as a distinct language until the late 13th century. The oldest surviving text that incorporated this new hybrid language was a liturgical document (“ma[c]h[a]zor”) from Worms written c. 1272. The text primarily used a Germanic lexicon and grammar…along with various Slavic, Turkic, and even Syriac terms. (There were no distinctly Hebraic elements.) Tellingly, this document is rarely made available to the public. This is to be juxtaposed with the aforementioned “Vitry Ma[c]h[a]zor”: a ruling on liturgy from c. 1100; so called because it was composed in Vitry (northeastern France) by a student of Solomon ben Isaac of Troyes (a.k.a. “Rashi”): Simhah ben Samuel. THAT tract was composed in the Zarfatic idiom; and was done to rebut the liturgical positions of those pesky foreign Jews to the East: the Ashkenazim. (It has also palpable influences from the “Seder Amram Gaon” and the “Halakhot Gedolot”.)

It was not until the late 14th century that Yiddish came to be a full-fledged language, as attested by the earliest instance of an distinctly Yiddish document: the “Cambridge Codex” from c. 1382 (discovered in the archives of the Ganiza at Fustat in Egypt). The codex was comprised of four texts: “Gan Eden”, “Avraham Avinu” [Abraham Our Father], “Moshe Rabbeinu” [Moses Our Teacher], and “Yosef Hatzadik” [Joseph the Righteous]. As we might expect, the material is slightly discordant with standard Biblical narratives. In the codex, there is a segment from the German epic, “Kudrun”…which was not composed until the mid-13th century. (That epic was likely inspired by the Norse “Hjadningavig”; a.k.a. the “Saga of Hild”.) Would Sephardim have been inclined to incorporate Varangian lore into their literary repertoire?

Also in the Cambridge codex is a segment from the aforementioned “Dukus Horant”, which was composed in the 14th century; and was also inspired by “Kudrun”. This indicates that the earliest Ashkenazim were dealing with fairly recent material (that is: recent at the time). In its initial iteration, Yiddish literature seems to have been more influenced by Germanic material than by Hebraic material–exactly as we would expect given the origins of the Ashkenazi Jews. What we see here is a disconnection from their Turkic roots, leaving a folkloric vacuum to be filled by what was at hand IN THAT REGION.

Another thing worth noting: Literature that was exemplary of the hallowed Sephardic legacy in France–like the “Pirkei Avot” and the “Ma[c]hz[o]r Vitry”–did not circulate amongst the Ashkenazim during this period: a peculiar liturgical omission had the Ashkenazim been the progeny of that community. We should recall that when they first arrived in Lotharingia, the [k]Hazarian diaspora would not have conjured Yiddish from whole-cloth. Insofar as they abandoned their ancestors’ Turkic tongue, they would have begun using the lingua franca of their new home: medieval German. Sure enough, “Adir Hu” is a medieval German hymn sung by Ashkenazim for Seder. Why would this exist given that there later came to be a Yiddish version of “E[c]had mi Yodea”? The only explanation is that, for these newly-arrived Jews, the origin of the hymn was not Semitic.

It is also very telling that the first time the topic of the origin of Ashkenazim (and Yiddish as a distinct language) was broached was not until the 16th century (by the Frankonian philologist, Elia Baxur)! This means that the issue was not a major focal point until modern times. It only started to become a point of contention when the “aliyah” (in-gathering of the diaspora in the Holy Land) started to become modish in certain precincts–prompting the need to contend with why Yiddish was, well, Yiddish. (The eventual solution was to eschew it in favor of a modern version of Hebrew.)

As philology is not my vocation, the examples provided presently should suffice to make the point at hand: Over the course of the 12th and 13th centuries, Yiddish was developed as a new-fangled language for a new-fangled people, who asserted a novel identity after the westward [k]Hazarian migration into “Ashkenaz”…which was itself an appellation retained from the [k]Hazars’ use of the Assyrian moniker for people of the Eurasian Steppes: “Ashkuza”. If even a dilettante like me can notice such things; surely there is much more for (impartial) scholars to offer.

When it comes to connecting the relevant dots, I leave it to (disinterested) philologists (spec. those who are well-versed in Turkic languages and in Yiddish) to do the rest. As with any other serious inquiry, those with conflicts of interest (that is: vested interests in certain conclusions) should be disqualified from such a project.

One thing that might be useful is a timeline of Hebrew terms being incorporated into Yiddish vernacular. It does not seem as though this has yet be done; and it would reveal much about what was and was not present during the tongue’s inception. There are, of course, some contemporary Yiddish words that have Hebrew etymologies—as with “[c]hutzpah”, “sim[c]ha”, “meshug[gen]a[h]”, and

“mishpocha[h]”. However, such Hebraic terms were not incorporated into the Ashkenazi vernacular until the modern era (that is: long after the fact); so they are not indicative of the language’s origin.

One of the more popular objections to the present thesis pertains to onomastics. The contention is simple: There are very few PROPER nouns with Turkic roots used in Yiddish (that is: Turkic NAMES used by Ashkenazim). This is entirely beside the point. There is far more to linguistics than onomastics.

It makes perfect sense that Jewish communities did not retain Turkic surnames; as–naturally–there was an inclination to assert their identity as Jews (in contradistinction with other Turkic peoples). After all, as time went by, the [k]Hazarian diaspora sometimes opted to write using a Samaritan script (then, later, a pseudo-Hebraic script), not the prevailing Turkic script. Surely, they would have adopted names that were consummate with their (re-vamped) identity. Even so, family names like Burak, Khanum / Khatum, Kazan, Krak[h]mal, Kagan[ek], and Perchek exist to the present day amongst Ashkenazim. Kulaga is from the Bashkir “külägä”, a variation on the Old Turkic “kölge”. Lipka is literally the name of a Tatar ethnic group.

The vast majority of Jews in the region ended up adopting Germanic surnames for non-religious vocations. This was an onomastic convention that had no precedent in the Semitic (i.e. Judaic) tradition. While most Ashkenazim ended up adopting occupational surnames (typically ending with “-man[n]”; or even the patronymic “-[s]so[h]n”), almost no Sephardim opted to do so. This discrepancy is hard not to notice. {45}

When adopting a surname, some Ashkenazim even retained the Turkic term for a vocation–as with “Bak[k]al” (food vendor) and “Pamuk” (weaver). “Kilimnik” (carpet tradesman) combines the Old Turkic word for carpet (“kilim”) with the Slavic suffix used to designate an affiliation (“-nik”; as in “Kramnik”). (Here, the Germanic suffix would be “-man[n]”; while the Hebraic suffix would be “-um”.) {66} The Turkic term was used in lieu of the Hebrew terms: “shatiac[h]” and “marvad”. This alternate onomastic would not have occurred were the people to have had Sephardic ancestry. (It would not have made sense for them to have eschewed the Hebraic term in favor of the Turkic term.) Again, we find an exigency that would be inexplicable but for the present thesis.

Already mentioned is the Turkic origin of “Schwartz”. Surnames like “Jeljasze-wicz”, “Sulkie-wicz” / “Sulko-wicz”, “Achmato-wicz”, and “Abakano-wicz” have Lipka Tatar roots. “Khan” (often rendered “Kahan” or “Kahn”) is self-explanatory. And, of course, there is the surname “Kagan”. It is no secret that “k[h]agan” means “ruler” in Old Turkic. {33}

These are merely the most obvious examples of vestigial Turkic onomastics. Surely other Turkic surnames went the to wayside over time as the “Ashkenazi” identity came to the fore. Keep in mind, we are talking about a linguistic metamorphosis over the course of a thousand years. Countless Turkic surnames invariably disappeared into the local vernacular over the centuries. For example, in Greater Lithuania, there are Jews with the surname “Shahn”…which is inexplicable lest we suppose the moniker was either a variant of the Persian “Shah” or had a “g” in it at some point (meaning it was derived from the Turkic “Shagan”). The genealogy of names is a funny business; and etymology is nothing if not quirky. {49}

But wait. There are still other residual traces. **“Bak[h]shi”** is derived from the (Krymchak) Turkic word for (alternately) “garden” / “gift”. There are Ashkenazi names like Sevim and Khanum / Khatum–all with Turkic backgrounds. Other etymologies are unclear. While “karman” was Hebrew for orchard / garden, it was also Turkic / Slavic for basket / pocket. And “korchma” was used in both Old Slavic and Old Turkic for tavern / inn.

The Mas[h]hadi surname “Kaganovi[t]ch” was used by descendants of Jewish merchants of the Silk Road (likely Radhanties), who would surely have interacted with peoples of the Eurasian Steppes. The given name **“Kozar”** derived from a melding of Slavic and Turkic. The popular given name, **“Lazar”** (the Slavic / Turkic version of “Eleazar”) has Magyar and Bulgar roots. {34} (We discussed the Italic surname, “Kalonymus”, earlier. For more on that surname, see the Appendix.)

And it is likely that “Sagan” came from **“Shagan”**, a Turkic surname that is still used by Azeris and Kazakhs. It is possible that the name is related to the Aramaic term for Babylonian priests, “segan”–an honorific that had propagated along the Sogdian trade-routes. That is to say: The term exists as a result of the predominant language of the Silk Road during Late Antiquity. (It is almost certainly NOT derived from the Polish word for “kettle”.) Considering the location of the [k]Hazar Empire, it makes perfect sense that this popular Ashkenazi surname has Sogdian origins. (Note that the area just east of Rothenburg, in Silesia, came to be called “Sagan”.) This

was no anomaly. Other neo-Aramaic words were incorporated into the [k]Hazarian vernacular via Sogdian–primarily religiously-significant terms like Messiah (in its Syriac form), hell ("tamu[k]"), and paradise ("us[t]mak").

When it comes to juxtaposing (Semitic) Sephardim against (non-Semitic) Ashkenazim, another contradistinction is worth noting. Rarely did European Sephardim (i.e. the Jews of Andalusia and France) come to have family names based on the places in which they settled; as they tended to retain their Judaic surnames. There were a handful of cases where Sephardic families ended up with toponymic surnames. The difference is that they were ALREADY surnames (as with, say, "Toledano", "Salvador", or "Touro"), and were simply adopted–primarily from Arabic, Berber, Spanish, Portuguese, (Occitania) French, or Italian. None were sui generis. The use of such exogenous family names amongst Sephardim, then, was part of the natural course of events.

By contrast, Ashkenazim DID end up establishing novel family names based on places they settled during the Middle Ages–names that were concocted BY THEM for precisely that purpose. A moment's thought reveals an indubitable fact: Only a change in ethnic identity would have prompted such a widespread change in surnames (to names that were sui generis); and–more to the point–a change in this particular manner (to wit: identifying with a new PLACE, but not necessarily with a new RELIGION). So…while it did happen from time to time, entirely newfangled onomastics based on PLACE was not nearly as common amongst Sephardim as it was with those Ashkenazim.

How does this comport with the present thesis? People who ALREADY resided in the region–or in Europe in general–would not have been moved to convert to Judaism; as there was no Jewish evangelism (and there was certainly plenty of dis-incentive to leave Christianity). The only explanation, then, is that the first Ashkenazim were people who were already Jewish, yet came from somewhere without a Semitic onomastic. Consequently, they arrived with surnames that they were inclined to jettison…and replace with names that were NOT associated with Christianity yet WERE associated with their new homeland. Heck, they called themselves people of "Ashkenaz", an endonym that would not make any sense if they thought of themselves in Semitic terms. As we've seen, this applies even if they had the Biblical figure in mind. {42}

And so it went: Many of those in the [k]Hazarian diaspora opted for toponyms when they settled in Europe. When toponymic, the new surname was sometimes in reference to an entire region–as with:

- “Frankel” for **Frankonia**
- “O[e]streicher” for **Austria**
- “Bayer” for **Bavaria**
- “Schlesinger” for **Silesia**
- “Litwak” for **Lithuania**
- “Gurdji” for **Georgia**
- “Valadji” for **Wallachia**
- “Pollack” for **Poland**
- “Unger” for **Hungary**

…and, of course, “Deutsch” for those living in Germany. A surname could refer to general places—as with “Friedlander”. It could even simply mean “villager”–as with “Dorfman” or “Berger”. “Flecker” means a clearing in the woods. “Nordhaus” simply means a house in the north.

Most often, though, the toponym was based on a specific place. Here are FIFTY examples:

In the Rhineland / Lotharingia: Dreyfus for Treves / Trier[s], Oppenheimer for Oppenheim, Mintz for Mainz, Spiro / Shapiro / Sapir / Speier for Speyer, Epstein for Eppstein, Ettlinger for Ettlingen, Bacharach for Bacharach am Rhein, Florsheim, Landau, Hammerstein, and Heilprin / Heilbron[n]er / Halper[in] for Heilbronn.

In Saxony / Frankonia: Heller for Halle, Garti for Gartach (Württemberg), Eisenberg, Lipsky for Leipzig, Kissinger for Kissingen, Berlin, and Friedland[er] for Göttingen.

In Bavaria / Austria: Ruttenberg for Rothenburg, Auerbach [literally “meadow-brook”], Sulzberg, Linzer (Linz), Roth for Roth bei Nürnberg, Ginsberg for Günzburg, and Wiener for Vienna.

In Prussia / Pomerania / Silesia / Bohemia / Moravia: Wolin, Horowitz for Horovice, Gutfeld for Gutenfeld, Altschul[er] and Prager for Prague, Brandeis for Brandys, and Brin for Brno / Brünn.

In Poland: Danziger for Gdansk, Warshauer and Breslau for Warsaw, Krakauer for Krakow, and Posner for Posen.

In Greater Lithuania: Vilner for Vilnius, Twersky for Tverai, Persky for Pershai, Pinsky for Pinsk, Minsky for Minsk, Smolyansky [alt. “Smelyanski”] for Smolensk, and Gordon for Grodno.

In Volhynia / Galicia: Tartakover / Tartakower for Tartakov, Brody, Borsuk, Gulko, and Zaderikhvost.

And in Hungary: Budun for Buda[pest]. Some who descended from Magyars simply ended up with the surname “Madjar”.

Jewish families that settled in these places would have had alternate surnames prior to that time (as their progenitors lived elsewhere before they lived there). This means that they opted to change those surnames after arrival. What is telling is that almost no Sephardim opted to do this when THEY settled in Europe. Why not? Well, they ALREADY HAD (Jewish) surnames. Granted, a few Sephardim eventually adopted local surnames, some of which may have been toponymic (as with, say, Toledano); but that was certainly not the norm. {86}

Bottom line: Such disparate onomastic practices between Sephardim and Ashkenazim attests to two different heritages.

Also worth noting are names ending in “-thal” (German for “valley”), “-feld” (German for “field”), and “-berg” (German for “hill”): common toponyms. Other suffixes include “-baum” (tree), “-blum” (flower), “-blatt” (leaf), “-stein” (rock), “-bach” (stream), “-hoff” (farm), and “-heim” (home). (The suffix “-heim” led to names like bettel-heim [beggar’s home].) “Gaster” meant “guest” (from the German; though with an “-er” oddly appended at the end). It’s difficult to imagine a Sephardic family in Andalusia adopting the surname “Invitado” (or in France adopting the surname “Invité”). In the Rhineland, the [k]Hazarian diaspora probably did, indeed, initially feel as though they were guests—that is: visitors in a new land.

Sometimes, kinds of topography were combined—as with, say, Wiesen-thal **(meadow-valley)**. Also worth noting are surnames ending in “-berg”–as with Korn-berg **(grain hill)**, Grün-berg **(green hill)**, Steinberg **(stone hill)**, Eisenberg **(iron hill)**, Weisselberg **(white hill)**, Goldberg **(gold hill)**, Kronenberg **(crown hill)**, and Weinberg **(wine hill; i.e. vineyard)**. This occurred with many geographical descriptions–as with, say, Grunwald (green forest). A potpourri of other surnames was adopted–clearly from a people who were seeking new monikers to assimilate. “Rosenthal” means **“rose valley”**. {51} Meanwhile, there’s Rosenberg (named after a town in the Rhineland) **[rose hill]**, Bloomberg **[flower hill]**, Rosenstein

[rose stone], Rosenfeld **[rose field]**, Rosenblatt **[rose pedal]**, Rosenbaum **[rose tree]**, and Rosenblum **[rose flower]**. (Of course, no Ashkenazim adopted "Rosenkranz" [rosary]; though "Blumenkrantz" was adopted.)

In no other scenario did Jewish people (elsewhere in the world) do this; as there was no reason to do this. (This does not discount instances in which some Jews adopted local names for themselves: a ubiquitous phenomenon. Hence we should not be surprised that some Andalusian Jews are named Esperanza, Merkada, Nina, or Zafiro.)

In many cases, Ashkenazim opted to make use of Germanic terms in lieu of Hebraic terms when transitioning to their new lexicon. Take, for instance, "finkelstein" **[spark stone]**. This was the term adopted for pyrite…instead of the Hebrew "bareketh". For a Semitic people, such a choice would have been rather odd, as it names one of the twelve tribal stones of the breastplate of a high priest (ref. Exodus 28:17). Any community coming from a Hebrew-based background would not have been inclined to transplant a Biblical term (which they would have already been using) for a Gentile term.

We've already mentioned the use of the non-Semitic "schultheize" (later rendered "Schultz") for a surname (a local term having to do with mercantile dealings). Ashkenazim also opted for the Germanic "Fechter" instead of the Hebraic "Lochem" for fighter. Meanwhile, they opted for the Germanic "Volf" in lieu of the Hebraic "Ze'ev" for wolf; and for the Germanic "Bär" / "Bër" in lieu of the Hebraic "Dov" for bear. ("Tov" means "good" in Hebrew.) The same goes for the aforementioned Yiddish term, "shul" (place of scriptural study): also taken from German. ("Yeshuv" was evidently not in the vernacular of the early Ashkenazim.)

Recall the peculiar treatment of Solomon's fabled signet ring, on which his seal was engraved. Why would have practitioners of Judaism opted for "S[i]egel", the Germanic term for "seal", when "hotem" was already an auspicious Hebraic term amongst Sephardim? Ashkenazim adopted the surname because it was affiliated with a trade: those who made the signet for wax seals. There was clearly a population of Jews in Ashkenaz about a millennium ago who were shopping for new surnames; and who did not already have a Hebraic vernacular from which to work.

Clearly, the Jewish community that came to known as "Ashkenazim" did not have a Semitic background. If they DID, the incumbent liturgical terminology would have been retained even as their lingua franca changed.

The “Kozare” district in Kiev does not shy away from advertising its Turkic–specifically, [k]Hazar–origins. And, as mentioned earlier, the medieval name for central Ukraine and Crimea was “Casari”–a label that was used on maps until the 18th century. (!) These were clearly vestiges of an earlier Turkic nomenclature. {49} Meanwhile, France was typically referred to as “[t]Zarfat” (alt. “Sarfat”) in by Sephardim; yet–tellingly–it seems never to have been referred to as such by the Ashkenazim.

How did Ashkenazi Jews refer to Sephardic Jews—and, for that matter, to the regions known as “Sepharad” and “Zarfat”—in the 11th thru 14th centuries? It’s safe to assume that if there were exonyms in one direction, there were exonyms in the other direction. The Ashkenazim clearly thought of France in different terms than the Sephardim, who had been there since Late Antiquity. It would make no sense that Sephardic Jews who (hypothetically) ended up in the Rhineland suddenly, and for no apparent reason, to stop referring to France by the name that had always been used by their forebears.

The Jewish people who came to be known as “Ashkenazim” had a decidedly different perspective on the various languages of their Jewish brethren to the west (i.e. in France). Had they COME FROM France, surely they would have exhibited traces of Zarfatic (and/or Ladino) in their tongue. No such linguistic residue exists in Yiddish.

The question, then, is: Did Ashkenazim use different terminology than Sephardim when it came to referring to, well, Sephardim (as well as to France and the Iberian peninsula)? This is something to look into. Tellingly, Sephardim referred to Ashkeanazim as “Jews from the Caucuses”, “Yehudim Kuzari”, and—pejoratively—as “Tudesco”.

And what of Sephardim who (eventually) DID end up coming into Eastern Europe? Lo and behold: The surname “Vlach” / “Bloch” was the Old Slavic term for “foreigner”, which seems to have been used to refer to those in Ashkenaz who hailed from the Italic peninsula or somewhere else from southeastern Europe (possibly the Balkan peninsula, Wallachia, or the Danubian Plain). Clearly, Jewish people coming from elsewhere in Europe were not thought of as being of the same ethnic background…even as they eventually came to be part of the greater Ashkenazi community.

The onomastics of the Ashkenazim is exactly what we would expect given where they came from and where they ended up.

It’s worth recalling that during the Middle Ages, the only other notable language spoken by Jews in Eastern Europe was the Kara-im language, which was the product of efforts to meld medieval Hebrew with…you guessed it: Turkic. This would make no sense unless Turkic was an autochthonous linguistic element (that is: the lingual starting point for the indigenous population).

Note that Kara-im dialects like Halych (in Galicia-Volhynia; now western Ukraine) and Troki (in Lithuania) are distinct from the Crimean Tatar dialect. (As is Kumen, Kumyk, Kalmyk, Kazan, [Balkan] Kara-chay, and Kara-kalpak; Kara-im is a neo-Kipchak language.) When it comes to Jews who speak Kara-im, the point is simple: There would have been no reason to try to meld the liturgical language of Judaism with Turkic languages had there not been a significant number of Turkic Jews (i.e. Jews who’s incipient tongue was Turkic) that warranted doing so.

And what of the southern-most part of the Pale of Settlement? As it happens, the Krymchaks (a.k.a. Jewish Tatars; spec. the Crimean Karaites) STILL use a Judaic tongue that has distinctly Turkic roots. {31}

All this is yet more corroboration of the present thesis. It shows that any contention that the Ashkenazim primarily emerged in northeastern Europe due to an EASTWARD migration of Jews from the WEST (prior to the 11th century) is fallacious.

Another point worth noting: If the majority of Ashkenazim had originally hailed from the west / south of “Ashkenaz”, they likely would have done in Germany what Jewish people had done in virtually EVERY OTHER region: created a creolization of Hebrew with the indigenous language. Note that this happened ALMOST EVERYWHERE ELSE that Jews found themselves:

- **Lusitanic** in Portugal
- **Ladino** (and its variants: Haketia and Tetuani) primarily in Andalusia. Here, Hebrew melded with Castilian Spanish; with a dash of Arabic and Frankish; and even some Ottoman Turkish and/or Byzantine Greek for those farther east. This was also in the midst of Mozarabic—an Iberian variant of Arabic infused with Galician.
- **Zarfatic** in Frankish lands (“Zarfat” was the Sephardic name for France) {70}
- **Shuadit** in Occitania (a distinct variant of Zarfatic used by Rashi)
- **Italkian** on the Italic peninsula
- **Yevanic** (Judaeo-Greek; including Romaniot[e] and Karaitika) in Greece
- **Gruzinic** in Georgia

- **Dzhidi** / **Latorayi** (Judaeo-Persian) in Persia; including its offshoot, **Bukhori** (Judaeo-Tajik; Judaeo-Hamedani) amongst Bukharan Jews in Transoxiana
- **Hulaula** / **Didan** (Judaeo-Azeri) in the southern Caucuses
- **Lishan[a] Deni** (Judaeo-Kurdish) in Nineveh
- **Judaeo-Arabic** in Palestine; including Judaeo-Yemeni in southern Arabia (often referred to as “Te[i]mani”)

Those are a dozen of the most well-known instances. ALL had a Hebraic substrate. Amongst Mizra[c]him (Arab Jews), communities also melded Hebraic vernaculars with Berber (in the Maghreb). And in Mesopotamia, they even melded Hebrew with its antecedent, Aramaic, yielding **Yahudic** (Judaeo-Aramaic).

Also notable is **Judeo-Tat** (a.k.a. “Juhuri”; “Juvuro”), which later emerged in the Caucasus (and closely resembles the aforementioned “Didan”). That was a synthesis of Middle Persian and Sogdian; and was effectively a creolization resulting from the centuries of commerce along the Silk Road. This illustrates the fact that there were alternatives to Yiddish available to the [k]Hazarian diaspora.

Another illustration of a cultural confluence was the Alans: a Perso-Turkic people from the Eurasian Steppes whose language was ALSO a synthesis of Middle Persian and Sogdian. As it happens, they originated in the north Caucuses as well; and—via modern-day Ukraine—they migrated to Europe (though farther to the south than did the [k]Hazars).

Wonder how far a Turkic people could have made it into Europe? Behold the Alans, who made it all the way to the Iberian Peninsula. (!) The Alans did not change their identity during their migration westward; as they had no reason to do so. Though they DID shed their original identity as “Aryan[a]”—the etymological basis for their ethnonym, which was also the basis for the Sarmatian “Rhoxolani” and “Alanorsoi”. {64}

The [k]Hazars were not the only Turkic people to undergo an identity reboot upon arriving in Europe. The Gagauz, who’s Turkic ancestors were the Kutrigurs / Utigurs of the Pontic Steppes, have considered themselves European Christians for many centuries. Meanwhile, the Ossetians (of the Caucuses) have Alanic provenance; yet they no longer consider themselves Turkic. The Ossetian tongue is a hybridization of Persian (likely due to Sogdian) and Old Turkic. Modern Hungarians (Magyars) have embraced an explicitly Occidental identity, having shed any allegiance to their Turkic provenance (see **Postscript 1**).

Hybridization with Semitic antecedents was clearly the prevailing trend wherever Jews happened to settle over the centuries. Yet–remarkably–such lingual hybridization did NOT happen with the Ashkenazim. Are we to suppose that this is some uncanny coincidence?

This exception is especially odd, as a creolization of Hebrew with Slavic DID (fleetingly) exist: Knaanic. For the Ashkenazim, the fact that Yiddish prevailed over Knaanic is very telling. It means that the Jews of the German lands most likely derived their lingua franca from some OTHER hybridization (to wit: German was melded with a non-Semitic tongue…**with which they were more familiar than even Slavic**).

The most interesting case is the emergence of Yevanic in Anatolia, which had Semitic (mostly Aramaic) elements, yet also incorporated TURKIC elements. (“Yevan” / “Yawan” was the Biblical name for Greece, likely a variation on “Ionia”.)

Yevanic seems to have originated in Chalkis (a.k.a. “Negroponte”) amongst Hellenized Jews, so may have merged with the language used by Jews in Anatolia at some point during the Middle Ages. Note that inscriptions from much earlier, such as those in Thessalonika (e.g. the synagogue of the agora in Athens) and on the island of Delos, were Samaritan, not Judaic.

The Romaniote Jews were always distinct from Sephardim. Tellingly, “Romaniote” derives from the medieval term for the Byzantines: the “Rhomaioi”; which means that particular Jewish identity would have been established at some point in Late Antiquity.

Another query is worth posing: Did there arise any instances in which Sephardim felt obliged to adapt their endogenous Hebraic vernacular to an indigenous Turkic language? As it turns out: yes. Lo and behold: Sephardic Jews hybridized Hebrew and Azeri–yielding the creole tongue listed above: Didan, which is used by Sephardim who ended up in what is now Azerbaijan.

This corroborates the fact that, even when adopting new vernaculars, Sephardim ALWAYS retained the Hebraic linguistic element of their Semitic forebears. It comes as no surprise, then, that Sephardim in the Rhineland ESCHEWED Yiddish even as Ashkenazim in the Rhineland EMBRACED it.

Both Juhuri and Lishan Deni (Didan) demonstrate what happens when Sephardim incorporate Turkic into a Semitic vernacular. Were the Ashkenazim originally Sephardic, they would have done the same sort of thing. What was done by Azeri Jews, who had a Sephardic background shows what WOULD happen were Sephardim to have mixed a Hebraic tongue (like Ladino or Zarfatic) with a Turkic tongue. **Yet no Hebraic hybridization occurred amongst the Ashkenazim.** Yiddish, which is essentially a de facto Judeo-German, exhibits palpable traces of the Turkic origin of its speakers.

Note that, amidst all of this, Sephardim were still composing material IN HEBREW through the 12th century—as attested by chronicles of the Rhineland massacres by the Tosafists, Solomon ben Simson and Eliezer ben Nathan (both of Mainz).

It is worth noting that there is a smattering of Slavic elements in Yiddish. For example, in Yiddish, “koval” became slang for “maverick”. It seems to have been a variation on the Old Slavic term for blacksmith: “kuznets” (which, it turns out, was also used as an Ashkenazi surname). Shall we conjecture that Sephardim migrated from the Iberian peninsula, France, and/or the Balkans into Slavic lands and subsequently–during the Renaissance–incorporated that region’s lexemes into their already-established vernacular? It is feasible. But with regard to this particular case, doing so would not have made much sense; as the Hebrew term for blacksmith had long-been “napa[k]h”–as in Isaiah 41:7, 44:12, and 54:16 (also used in First Samuel 13:19). Meanwhile, the Saxon term for blacksmith was “schmied”, the basis for “schmidt”; which became a popular Ashkenazi surname. If the Ashkenazim had emerged as a distinct community due to a SCHISM (a separation from Sephardic forebears), we would need to conjecture that the Hebraic term was jettisoned in favor of these other (foreign) terms–a scenario that seems far-fetched. It is far more likely that, upon arriving in Eastern Europe, the [k]Hazarian diaspora eschewed the Turkic term “tarkhan” in favor of the Slavic “koval” and Germanic “schmied” as they asserted their new ethnic identity.

Bottom line: The so-called “split” between the Sephardim and the Ashkenazim in north-central Europe is a myth. There is no evidence for a schism in Beth Israel in that region—or in ANY region—at that point in time. {108} As it happens, there’s only one other explanation for two disparate versions of the creed suddenly finding themselves in proximity to one another: Two pre-existing Jewish communities ENCOUNTERED each other…either by one or both of them migrating to the region in

which the encounter took place. The Sephardim had already been in Western Europe for many, many centuries. The new arrivals must have come from somewhere else. (Hint: They didn't come from the North Pole.)

In the 16th century, there was finally a (doctrinal and ethnic) reconciliation between these two Jewish communities with disparate provenance—that is: between the "Beit [house of] Joseph Karo" (Sephardic / Talmudic) and the "Darchei [way of] Moses Isserles" (Ashkenazi / non-Talmudic) via the former's "Shulchan Aruch". There would have been further motivation for this reconciliation that that point is history, as European Jewry was in the midst of a series of pogroms from Andalusia to "Ashkenaz". Not only was the Spanish Inquisition carrying out its horrors across the Iberian Peninsula (following the expulsion of Jews in 1492), there was systematic persecution of Jews in Germany beginning c. 1509. Such tribulation would have likely prompted a call for solidarity across the Sephardic-Ashkenazi divide. It was time for Beth Israel to unite.

Other clues are worth considering. In the 10th century, a [k]Hazarian Jewish community, which had settled in what is now the Kievan "Podil" (in Ruthenia, along the Dnieper River; formerly the land of the Polans; which, by that time, was ruled by Kieven Rus), penned a letter using Old Turkic runes. In this Kievan letter, the authors signed off with the hallmark [k]Hazar "hokurüm": "ilik" [I read it thus]. (Ref. Norman Golb and Omeljan Pritsak's "Khazarian Hebrew Documents of the Tenth Century"; Peter B. Golden's "The World Of The Khazars".) Behold a distinctly Jewish document with signature [k]Hazar features.

What else happened in the late 10th / early 11th century? Another Turkic language (that of the Magyars: Old Hungarian) adopted the Roman script, even as it retained much of its old vernacular. This transition occurred at the behest of Grand Prince, Stephen (ref. the chronicles of Simon of Keza). Other Turkic tribes made a transition from Old Turkic runes to a more Occidental (i.e. European) orthography–as with the Esegel Bulgars, who may have been affiliated with the [k]Havars (ref. the "Zayn al-Akhbar" by Abu Said Abd al-Hayy ibn Zahhak of Gardiz). This occurred in the lower Volga area–in Pannonia (by the Carpathian Basin). These other case-studies demonstrate that Turkic peoples who found themselves in the Occidental orbit ended up shedding much of their Turkic heritage; though vestiges remain if we care to look. (The "catch", of course, is that not everyone cares to look.) {76}

In terms of disjunctive literary heritage, we might consider the circulation of the "Meshal ha-Kadmoni[m]" [Fables of the Ancients] by the Sephardic author, Isaac ben Solomon "Ibn Sahula" of Castile. The book was composed in the 13th century; yet the work was not rendered in Yiddish until the last decade of the 17th century–over four centuries later! Had Ashkenazim been familiar with these fables all along, then why the long delay in translating it into their lingua franca? Recall that Yiddish material had been in use since at least as far back as the 14th century, when Ashkenazim composed the "Shmuel-bukh" and "Dokus Horant" discussed earlier.

We might also note that the "piyyut" (Jewish liturgical poem) known as "Akdamut" [Aramaic for "Introduction to the Words"] is recited by Ashkenazim–but not by Sephardim–on Shavuot. Supposedly, it was originally composed by Meir ben Isaac (also known by the sobriquet: "Nehora[i]", which is the Aramaic term for "light") while he was the cantor at Worms…so the story goes. However, this is probably an urban legend, as it was reputed to have been written AFTER his son was killed in the riots of the first Crusade (that is: after the spring of 1096). Meir is said to have died in 1095.

Here's the thing: That Ashkenazi verse was rendered in crude Aramaic. But no Sephardic piyyutim were ever rendered in Aramaic; they were all Hebraic–as with, say "Adon Olam" (the Ashkenazi version of which ended up omitting two of the twelve strophes). This crude Aramaic survived as such (as opposed to Hebraic derivatives like Masoretic) due to the fact that it propagated along the Eurasian Steppes–along the Silk Road, where Sogdian incorporated parts of the Syriac lexicon. For similar reasons, there is no hint of "Yahudic" (a creole language from Mesopotamia used by Mizra[c]him) which resembled Masoretic Hebrew.

Also rendered in crude Aramaic are the piyyutim composed by the Ashkenazi rabbi, Ephraim of Bonn in the 12th-century. A credible explanation for this is NOT that some Sephardim suddenly decided to start rendering their Hebraic poetry in an alternate Semitic language (i.e. crude Aramaic). It makes more sense that [k]Hazarian Jews, seeking to render liturgical material in an ancient Semitic language, opted for the most logical option available to them. {55}

The non-Sephardic heritage of the Ashkenazim is made especially clear by the fact that from the initial instantiation of a distinct ethnic group (the Ashkenazim), the Sephardim exhibited contempt for this newly- emerged Jewish community. Such explicit alterity speaks volumes. Sephardic Jews routinely leveled criticisms of Ashkenazi Jews for the latter's treatment of Judaic lore. For the Ashkenazi brand of

Judaism boasted an aberrational “minhagim” that other medieval Jewish communities clearly found foreign, and even quite vexing. (We will explore this cultural disjuncture in the next section.)

It is apparent, then, that the Ashkenazim’s Judaica did not come from anything with which the Sephardim were familiar. So it is no surprise that all the earliest “Tosafot” hailed from France and Andalusia, NOT from Ashkenaz. Had these figures all been part of the same community, sheer probability dictates that there would have been a mixture of both Sephardim and Ashkenazim from the beginning.

There is extremely limited demographic data (self-identified Sephardim vis a vis self-identified Ashkenazim) from the relevant period, so we are left to use the activities of prominent Judaic figures as a metric for what transpired. To unravel what seems to be a confounding statistical eventuality (that is: “Tosafot” exhibiting exclusively Sephardic characteristics EVEN IN ASHKINAZ), let’s consider the earliest attested Ashkenazi patriarch: Shlomo Yishak of Troyes (“Rashi”). It is important to note that Rashi spoke and wrote in Zarfatic (a Frankish variation of Hebrew); and identified with the (Occitanian) SEPHARDIC tradition. When referring to Ashkenazim, he employed the phrasing of alterity. He clearly did not think of them as an extension of his fellow Sephardim. And he most definitely did not think of HIMSELF as Ashkenazi.

Recall that Sephardim referred to the [k]Hazars as the “Kuzari”; as with the 12th-century rabbi, Judah “ha-Levi” of Toledo in his most famous work, “In The Defense Of The Despised Faith”; where he used quasi-fictional tales involving [k]Hazarian Jews (that is: parables based on historical events) to illustrate his points. At the time, it was not considered strange that he did this. Europe’s Sephardim were aware of their Turkic brethren to the east, and clearly thought of them as an ethnically foreign community (though ostensibly part of Beth Israel). {59}

So when did Ashkenazim no longer self-identify as [k]Hazars; and adopt the liturgical norms of the rest of Beth Israel? It was not until the 16th century that Jewish expositors in Eastern Europe began routinely engaging in Talmudic commentary. Most famous was Solomon Luria of Poznan (a.k.a. “Maharshal”), who’s famed grandmother (Miriam Shapira-Luria of Konstanz) hailed from the Rhineland. Others like Yaakov ben Yusef of Lublin (a.k.a. “Jacob Pollak”) and his two famed pupils—Shalom Sha[c]hna of Lublin and Moshe ben Isserl of Kazimierz [Moses, son of Israel] (a.k.a. the “Rema” of Krakow)—likely had Ashkenazic ancestors, and became

interested in Talmudic lore. These men were notable because they were pioneers in the region…YET they were doing something that Sephardim had already been doing for over a thousand years.

It makes sense, then, that it was not until the 16th century that we find any Ashkenazim connected to the Tosafist tradition–notably: the Talmudist, Bezal-El ben Abraham and the mystic, Isaac ben Solomon Luria (both of whom spent most of their lives in PALESTINE). Shortly after the Sephardic Halakhist, Joseph ben Ephraim Karo wrote the “Shul[c]han Arukh” c. 1563 (while living in Palestine), the aforementioned Talmudist, Moshe ben Isserl of Kazimierz wrote a response in an effort to effect further Ashkenazi understanding of the Halakha. (The “Rema” was from a merchant family that had recently been displaced from Regensburg, c. 1519.) {77}

It is clear that, by the 16th century, Ashkenazim had become interested in familiarizing themselves with the Talmudic tradition—which seems to have been a relatively recent development in their liturgical repertoire. Pursuant to Karo’s landmark work, Beth Israel became more unified across Europe—creating consensus where before there had been significant disparity. Such conciliation served to elide much of the liturgical disjuncture that had stemmed from the disparate provenance of Ashkenazim vis a vis Sephardim. {78}

The question remains: During this pivotal time, why did prominent Sephardic figures in the relevant part of the world (the Rhineland) not remain where the immortal Rashi had staked his claim? Once we consider the [k]Hazarian diaspora, a possible explanation for their (seemingly unprompted) transition back westward into France presents itself: Being Jews of (Talmudic) Sephardic heritage, those who were the heirs of Rashi’s legacy experienced marginal incompatibility with the newly-arrived (non-Talmudic) peoples from the East. So it is reasonable to surmise that, in the advent of the sudden influx of the [k]Hazarian Jews into the Rhineland, many of the Jews of Sephardic heritage opted not to remain. As we’ve seen, only centuries later (beginning in the 16th century) did Talmudic lore make an incursion into Eastern European Jewry.

There is another telling sign that this is, indeed, what occurred: The Ashkenazim REJECTED the Hebraic script that had been created by Rashi–a script that had palpable ties to the (Mishnaic / Masoretic) Sephardic tradition. Until as recently as the 19th century, an alternate script (known as “Mashket”) was instead used by

Ashkenazim to write Yiddish. Why would Jews who considered themselves inheritors of Rashi's vaunted legacy eschew that very legacy? The answer is obvious: They were NOT inheritors of that legacy; as they had a non- Sephardic background.

Meanwhile, non-Ashkenazi Jews who lived in the Rhineland (that is: Sephardim) continued to NOT write in Yiddish through the 16th century–as attested by the Sephardic chronicler, David ben Shlomo Ganz, who's writings weren't translated into Yiddish until a century later. In other words, Sephardim in the area refused to write in Yiddish. It should be emphasized how revealing this fact is. By Ganz's time, a Yiddish retelling of the chivalric romance, **"König Artus Hof"** (itself an adaptation of the German romance, "Wigalois"), entitled "Vidvilt" / "Widuwilt", had just been written (c. 1600).

Strikingly, it was not until the early 16th century that Ashkenazim rendered their own (Old Yiddish) version of the "Adir Hu" prayer. (To reiterate: Ashkenazim had been composing in Yiddish since the 14th century.) It's worth noting that the **"Mlokhim-Bukh"** [Kings Book] was composed in Old Yiddish. Why the need for a book about Babylonian captivity in a non-Semitic language when the rest of the world's Jews already had plenty of material (the "Aggadah") at their disposal, IN HEBREW (whether Mishnaic or Masoretic) on that topic? The Ashkenazim created their own version; and did so using the Germanic style of the "Nibelungenlied" for the verse. It strains credulity to think Sephardic writers would have felt compelled to undertake such a project.

Jacob ben Isaac Ashkenazi of Lublin composed his famed Yiddish annotation of the Hebrew Bible, the "Tsene Rene" [Go Forth And See; alt. "Tseno Ureno"] in the last decade of the 16th century. The Old Yiddish **"Mayse-Bukh"** [Story Book] would be published in 1602. {54} Yiddish was embraced by certain Jews in the region; and they weren't Sephardic.

Sephardim who spearheaded the "Haskalah" (Jewish Enlightenment) in the 1770's considered Yiddish a corrupt language; so refused to use it. Even Sephardim who lived in the Rhineland opted for German (and/or Ladino and/or Hebrew) in lieu of Yiddish; something those of the same community who INVENTED Yiddish would certainly not have done. {63}

Considering all the above linguistic evidence, it is plain to see that the supposition that the Ashkenazim USED TO BE Sephardim is unfounded.

The alterity between Sephardim and Ashkenazim worked both ways. This is for myriad reasons, as we shall see.

(This monograph is continued in a separate posting: part 2, which includes all Endnotes, Postscripts, the Appendix, and Author’s Note.)