

Dan D. Y. Shapira, "Some Notes on Jews and Turks", *Kavadeniz Araştırmaları*, Sayı: 16, K15 2008, s.25-38.

SOME NOTES ON JEWS AND TURKS*

Dan D.Y. Shapira**

It is expected from a Jew to begin a sketch about a millennium of Turkic-Jewish coexistence in the Middle East with expressing his gratitude for the Ottoman hospitality shown to the Jews exiled from *Sepharad* in 1492.¹ At that time, the Ottoman Empire comprised Macedonia, Greece, Albania, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, parts of Romania, Southern Ukraine and the Crimea, parts of Circassia, and Western Anatolia. It was only a generation later that the Ottomans captured Eastern Anatolia, Syria, Egypt and the *Hidjâz*. Back in 1492 the Ottoman Empire was a European state motivated by a push westwards, to the *Red Apple* (*Kızılelma*); at first defined as Constantinople, but after 1492 identified first as Rome, then Vienna.² By 1492 the Ottomans already had a long, established history of absorbing refugees and fugitives from the Lands of Christendom, while Catholic Spain was finishing her own *djihâd* against Islam by expelling Jews and Muslims. So it was only natural that the Ottomans received the Spanish refugees with open arms, and it is sufficient to cite the common wisdom attributed to Bayâzid II, who said that Ferdinand and Isabelle made their country poorer and his richer, to understand the pragmatic considerations underlying this Ottoman policy.

* The author would like to express his gratitude to Dr. Deborah Tor, a colleague and a friend, whose insights contributed significantly to development of this paper. All the shortcomings lay with the author.

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¹ Compare *Jewish-Turkish Encounters. Studies in Jewish-Turkish Relations Throughout the Ages*, ed. Mehmet Tütüncü, SOTA, Haarlem 2001.

² F.W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans*, New York 1973, pp. 737-740; C. Finkel, *Osman's Dream: The Story of the Ottoman Empire 1300-1923* 2006; K.C. Pinto, "Rome or Vienna: Which one was the 17th century "Kızıl Elma" (Red Apple) of Ottoman Territorial Ambitions? A possible resolution of the debate through a map at the Topkapı Saray Museum in Istanbul" (forthcoming).

However, I should like to recall that the greater part of the Near East had been ruled during the millennium preceding the Ottomans by dynasties, armies, or tribal confederations that could be called, with more or less justification, "Turkic". These were the forces which shaped the Near East and Islam as they are today and it seems to me that it is not possible to understand either without internalizing this insight.

Jews Meet Turks

The first Turkic-Jewish encounter was of course much older than 1492, and should be seen in the greater context of the history of the Silk Road. The Turkic partners to this encounter were Iranian-speaking Sogdians, who played the most significant role in spreading religion, writing and administration in the Eurasian steppe in the first centuries of the Common Era, having been successful in helping to organize the first Turkic nomadic empires. *Türk Tatsız olmaz, Tat Türksüz olmaz*, says the Turkic proverb: "There can be no Turkic nomad without a settled commerce-oriented non-Turk, and there is no settled commerce-oriented non-Turk (mostly Iranian) without a Turk"; this is how it worked in the steppe. In the 8th century, or maybe even earlier, Jewish merchants operated on the northern segment of the Silk Road (as testifies the first written document in the New Persian language – though showing some Sogdian linguistic impact –, which is a Jewish business letter from Khotan (Dandân-Uyliq) in Western China, dated 718 CE),³ albeit Sogdians as rivals were too hard to beat. These Jewish merchants, known sometimes as Râdhânites, or Râhdânites,⁴ worked from the Danube to Western Siberia, and, as previously stated, some of them arrived as far eastwards as Khotan, though it seems that they preferred the more western regions where Sogdians were not so prominent.⁵

³ See Bo Utas, "The Jewish-Persian Fragment from Dandân-Uyliq", *Orientalia Suecana* XVII (1968), pp. 123-136; there is also a 9th century Hebrew fragment from Dunhuang, see Ph. Berger, M. Schwab, "Le plus ancien manuscrit hébreu", *Journal Asiatique*, XIe série, II (1913), pp. 139-175; Wu Chi-yu, "Le manuscrit hébreu de Touen-houang", *De Dunhuang au Japon. Études chinoises et bouddhiques offertes à Michel Soymié*, Collège de France, Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, Hautes Études Orientales, 31, ed. by J.-P. Drège, Genève 1996, pp. 259-291. There is also a closely related new letter in Judeo-Persian from the early 9th century found in Xinjiang in 2004.

⁴ See Ibn Khurdadbeh, *Kitâb al-Masâlik wa'l-Mamâlik*, ed. de Goeje, Leiden 1889, p. 153; translation: p. 116. See Cahen 1964: C. Cahen, "Y-a-t-il eu des Râhdânites?", *Revue des études Juives* 3 (1964), pp. 499-505; C. Cahen, "Quelques questions sur les Radanites", *Der Islam*, 48 (1972), pp. 33-334; M. Gil, "The Râdhânite Merchants and the Land of Râdhân", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 17 (1974), pp. 299-328; Etienne de la Vaissière, *Histoire des marchands Sogdiens*, Bibliothèque de l'Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises (Vol. XXXII.), Collège de France, Paris 2002, pp. 180ff.; (on a Sogdian ostrakon from Taman: p. 242, with bibliography); M. McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy. Communications and Commerce AD 300-900*, Cambridge UP 2002, pp. 688-695.

⁵ However, Sogdian artefacts have been found in the Crimea and on the Taman peninsula (Etienne de la Vaissière, *Histoire des marchands Sogdiens*, Bibliothèque de l'Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises (Vol. XXXII.), Collège de France, Paris 2002, p. 242, with bibliography); some scholars considered even the name of the Crimean port Sudak (Sogdeia, Soldaia) as reflecting the name of these Eastern Iranian traders.

Khazar Conversion to Judaism

It is known that Eastern Turks were converted by these Sogdian international traders to Nestorian Christianity, Manichaeism and Buddhism; and the role of their Jewish counterparts in Khazaria, that of a combination of a religious mission and trade, should have been similar. Khazar domination in Eastern Europe was, more or less, a continuation of that of the Western Türkic Qağanate (collapsed about 659 CE), ruled by the *Türküts*, or *Kök Türks* ("Celestial Blue Türks"). The Khazar Empire was fighting for her place under the sun against the Arab Khalifate – and sometimes against the Byzantines – and for them conversion to an international religion constituted something like a ticket of entry into the club of superpowers. It should be remembered that all the Turkic nomad empires of the steppe opted for a stateless and geopolitically neutral religion. For the Khazar royal house (and an unknown number of other Khazars and members of subject tribes), the conversion to Judaism was worked out on the model well known from the Sogdian-Eastern-Turkic encounter, with a significant difference: sandwiched between Byzantium and the Khalifate, the Khazars chose to be the third force and the earliest religion.

The exact date of the Khazar conversion is disputable.⁶ Now we have an indication of earlier spread of Judaism in Khazaria: in 2002, a coin from the Viking "Spillings Hoard" of Gotland, Sweden was identified as having been minted by Jewish Khazars. The coin is an imitation of Arabic coinage and contains the fictitious mintmark "Madīnat as-Salām 779-80". Numismatists have concluded that it was actually minted in 837 or 838 in Khazaria.⁷ This Khazar conversion to Judaism could have taken place only in the cultural context of the Šu'ūbite movement and 'Abbāsīd mentality, for the Khazar understanding of what Judaism and its status are was deeply enrooted in Islamic cultural concepts; this is evinced in particular in the fact that the conversion did not signify a break with the previous Turkic traditions of the Khazars. It seems that the Judaized Khazars, or at least some of them, were not eager to be counted among the descendants of Our

⁶ Some scholars opted for the date of the conversion slightly after 863 CE (J. Marquart, *Osteuropäische und ostasiatische Streifzüge. Ethnologische und historisch-topographische Studien zur Geschichte des 9. und 10. Jahrhunderts (ca. 840-940)*, Leipzig 1903, p. 23), or about 865 (G. Vernadsky, *Ancient Russia, New Haven 1943*, p. 351); Dunlop tended to accept a date after 860 (D.M. Dunlop, *The History of the Jewish Khazars*, Princeton 1954, p. 115), while Zuckerman recently connected the Khazar conversion directly with the failure of the Byzantine mission (861) led by the Thessalonica-born brothers Cyril and Methodius to the Qağan (C. Zuckerman, "On the Date of the Khazars' Conversion to Judaism and the Chronology of the Kings of the Rus' Oleg and Igor", *Revue des études Byzantines* 53 (1995), pp. 237-270).

⁷ These Khazar *dirhams* bear the Arabic inscription *la llāha illā-LLāh wa Mūsā rasūlu ALLāh* (instead of *wa Muḥammada rasūlu ALLāh*) and a *tamğa*, were intended for circulation in the Caliphate, and proclaimed the Biblical identity of the Khazars (R.K. Kovalev, "What Does Historical Numismatics Suggest About the Monetary History of Khazaria in the Ninth Century? - Question Revisited", *Archivum Eurasiae medii aevi*, 13 (2004), pp. 97-129; *ibid.*, "Creating Khazar Identity through Coins: The Special Issue Dirhams of 837/8", *East Central Europe in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Florin Curta (Ann Arbor, 2005), pp. 220-253). However, an analogy with the earlier Polish coins (12th century) bearing inscriptions in Hebrew may suggest that the fact that the coins bore Jewish inscriptions tells us about the identity of the minters, rather than that of the rulers.

Father Abraham. In the °Abbâsîd world it gradually became *kosher* to profess one religion and to belong to another ethnicity, as is exemplified by the Sāmânîds, who were both the Khazars' neighbors and their most important trade partners. Likewise, the Khazar view of the status of their Judaism in the surrounding geopolitical circumstances was basically Islamic: seeing themselves as an Empire, their Judaism signified for the Khazars their Imperial status - not merely independence from both the Caesar and the Khalifa, not a "neutral" religion, but the Third Force, the First Faith (*dîn Yisrâ'el šehû dînō šel Avrâhâm*, the Law / Faith of Israel is exactly the Law / Faith of Abraham, as stated in the Short Recension of the King Joseph's reply to Hisdai Ibn Shaprut⁸). Their Judaism thus was neither an aberration nor an accidental occurrence, but an integral and important component of their political self-awareness.

The Khazar conversion to Judaism drew and continues to draw almost obsessive interest. Some argue that their conversion was the main reason for the final collapse of their empire in the second half of 960s - forgetting that Khazaria existed as a polity longer than any other steppe state, and that Danuban Bulgaria, with her Byzantine Orthodoxy, fell at the same time as Jewish Khazaria - while others, especially in the Turkish Republic, choose to ignore the conversion completely. On the other hand, the Hebrew *Book of Yosippon*, written in Italy - perhaps at Ibn Shaprut's invitation - when the Khazars were still at the height of their strength, ignored their Judaism while making mention of their Turkic genealogy.

Unlike their other steppe counterparts, the Manichaean and Buddhist Uigurs and the Christian Danuban Bulgars, the Khazars were a part of the Middle East. They were not the first Turks in our region to convert to one of the revealed Monotheist religions - Turkic *ghulâms* who chose to remain strangers in the Khalifate were.⁹ However, the Khazars were the ones who passed to their Turkic kin the legacy of Turkic tribal supremacy combined with an adherence to a kind of Monotheistic orthodoxy, a cherishing of the class of savants, and a sense of mission to universal rule. In fact, the Khazars prepared the way taken by the Seljuks and the Ottomans after them.

Khazaria Destroyed

According to Ibn Miskawayh, in 354h / 965 the Oghuz Turks¹⁰ destroyed Khazaria; while the lately edited Russian Primal Chronicle¹¹ ascribes the deed, *s.a.*

⁸ Edited in P.K. Kokovcov, *Jevrejsko-xazarškaja perepiska v X veke*, Leningrad 1932.

⁹ See D. Ayalon, *The Mamlūk Military Society*, London 1979; *ibid.*, *Islam and the Abode of War. Military slaves and Islamic adversaries*, Variorum, Great Yarmouth, Norfolk 1994; R. Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks*, Cambridge University Press, 1996; P.B. Golden, "Ghulâms of Khazar origin in the °Abbâsîd Caliphate", *Journal asiatique*, 292(1) (2004), pp. 279-309.

¹⁰ Ibn Miskaweih (+421/1030), *The Eclipse of the Abbasid Caliphate*, ed. N. T. Amedroz, transl. by D. S. Margoliouth, Oxford 19216 Vol. 2, p. 209; transl. V, p. 223; Ibn al-Athir (+630/1234), VIII, 196, VII, 416 (Beirut ed.: VIII, p. 565); Dimashqi (+727/1327), ed. Mehren, p. 263; transl. Mehren. 1874, p. 380; Khazar-Oghuz hostilities at about the same time are noted in Biruni, *Athar*, p. 236.

965, to Svyatoslav, the Kievan prince of the Rus'. However, the contemporary Muslim sources mention a *Turkic* attack in 965, as a result of which the Khazars sought help from the Khwârazmians and Shirvân-Shâh, who made the Islamization of the Khazars a condition of their aid; only al-Muqaddasi (947-1000, wrote in 985-997) speaks of the Rus'ian attack as occurring *after* the Turkic attack had been repulsed and the Khazars had converted to Islam.¹² It seems that in 968 Svyatoslav finished Khazaria off. The Russian Primal Chronicle mentions the Khazars going out to fight the Rus' with their *knyaz* [*and?] the Qaġan, probably with Khwârazmian support, but it is unclear how the Rus', supposedly so eager under Svyatoslav to break through to the Volga, benefited in the end. Ibn Hawqal describes the rout by the Rus' of the cities of Volgan Bulgar, Khazaran, Semender, and Itil in 358h (968/969),¹³ and this mention of *cities* leads us to read the earlier-quoted Russian Primal Chronicle passage as "*and took their city and Belaja Veža.*" The forced conversion of the Khazars to Islam took place in 968/9, *i.e.*, in the year ה"כשח, which, according to Sa'adia Gaon, was to be the end of the world. This theme was raised in the correspondence of Hisdai Ibn Shaprut with the Khazar King Joseph, which shows that the Khazars were aware of apocalyptic expectations, and it is unsurprising that a defeat in the year supposed to be "the year of miracles" demoralized them. The following year (969) the Fatimids, whose Khalifate had been established in 910, conquered the Land of Israel and ruled it through Turkic (and Sudanese) soldiery.

What happened to the Khazars?

There are a number of theories stressing the Khazar contribution to what became Eastern-European "Ashkenazic" Jewry. However, there is no doubt that after the fall of Khazaria the majority of the Judaized Khazars, and finally, their Qaġan, too, converted to Islam. Some "ethnic" Jews and Khazar proselytes emigrated elsewhere, *i.e.*, to Byzantium.¹⁴ Less than a century after the collapse of Khazaria, the Spanish Jewish author, R. Abraham ibn Da'ud, mentioned in his *Book of*

¹¹ S.H. Cross and O.P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, Medieval Academy of America Publication No. 60, Cambridge 1953.

¹² Ed. M.J. de Goeje (B.G.A., III), Leiden 1877, pp. 360-361. al-Muqaddasi, Muhammad ibn Ahmad. *The Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions: A Translation of Ahsan al-Taqaṣim fi Marifat al-Aqalim*, Trans. Basil Anthony Collins, Reading, UK 1994. We should add, however, as indirect evidence, a late and distorted account of al-Dimashqi (727/1327) quoting Ibn al-Athir (evidently, this is al-Mas'udi): hoping to receive aid from the Khorezmians against a *Turkic* attack, the Khazars agreed to convert to Islam. Al-Dimashqi dates this event 254/868 or 204/819, which is nonsense. Evidently, we should read the date as 354, and then we get 965! See ed. Mehren, SPb 1866, p. 263; Mehren, translation, Copenhagen 1874, p. 380).

¹³ Ed. J.H. Kramers (Leiden & Leipzig 1938-39), I, p. 15, cf. II, pp. 392-393; discussed in Dunlop (D.M. Dunlop, *The History of the Jewish Khazars*, Princeton, New Jersey 1954), p. 241ff.

¹⁴ Cf. the 11th century Byzantine tales about Khazar Jews in Constantinople, S.T. Miller, "The Legend of Saint Zotikos According to Constantine Akropolites", *Analecta Bollandiana* 112 (1994), pp. 339-376, and *ibid.*, "The Miracle Tales of Saint Zotikos, Khazars, and the Jews of Pera", *Seventeenth Annual Byzantine Studies Conference, 8-10 November 1991: Abstracts*, Hellenic College, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, Brookline, MA 1991, pp. 17-18.

Tradition (Sépher haQabbalah, composed in 1161), that he met Rabbanite Khazarian Jewish students who studied Judaism in Toledo (ורייגתהש מירוזכ מימע) לכו תונברה תעד לע אוהש ועידוהו טורפש נב קחצי 'רב אישנה יאדסח 'רל רפס חלש סכלמ פסויו (תונברה תעד לע מתיראשש ונועידוהו סימכח מהינב ינבמ המוטילוטב וניארו ומע).¹⁵ The wording - "Khazar nations" and "their remainder" - is important, for it implies that not only Eteo-Khazars, but also other tribes in their realm had been Judaized; and that only a small part of them persisted in their Judaism. It is possible that these Khazar Jews – whose proselyte identity was still known – were attracted to Spain rather than to Ashkenaz because of their earlier contacts with the Jews of this country in the days of King Joseph and Ibn Shaprut.¹⁶ It is true that early medieval Kiev possessed the district known as *Kozare* in the western part of the town, although there is indication that this district had any Jewish connections. Khazars are mentioned, together with Alans and Circassians, as a military force subjugated to the princes of Rus' and active in internal Rus'ian politics with a surprising frequency in the Russian Primal Chronicle after the collapse of their state,¹⁷ especially in the 12th century; but, again, there is nothing implying their Jewishness. As the case of the Seljuk family (see below) clearly indicates, Turkic proselytes were not so deeply Judaized as to retain this identity after their state had been crushed. On the contrary, the Jewish district *Židove*, together with the "Jewish gate", *Židovskie Vorota*, were located in the western part of the city, signifying thus, possibly, a Jewish migration from the *West*. The well known "Kievan Letter" in Hebrew, containing Turkic names of Jews and allegedly

¹⁵ The *Sépher haʿIttim* by R. Yehudah al-Barseloni (circa 1100), some 140 years after the *Hebrew Khazar Correspondence* and some 40 years before *HaKozari* by Yehudah Halevy, quotes from Ibn Shaprut's Letter, from King Joseph's Reply and from the *Cambridge Document*, see S. Assaph, "י-י", *Yeshurun*, 11 (November-Dezembe 1924), pp. 113-117 (p. 113).

¹⁶ Many Jews from "Canaan" (Slavic-speaking countries) arrived in Western Europe in the time of Rashi, as shown by the Slavonic glosses of his disciples, about half of which may be identified as specifically Western Slavonic; a Jew from Vladimir (Liudomir) in the Western Rus', who traded in Cologne, is mentioned in 1171; Avraham of Sernegov [בגורס] / Černigov / Černihiv studied in London in 1181; R. Moshe b. Yitzhak *nessi'ah* in England in the 13th c. quoted R. Yehuda-Itze-Iche of Černigov (A. Harkavi, *Ha-Yehudim u-Sfat Ha-Slavim*, Vilna 1867, p. 62). It is noteworthy that we do have references to Jews from Slavic-speaking countries in Ashkenaz and Zarephath in the times of Rashi and his disciples, but the only references to Khazar Jews in the West are from Spain. However, Jews from Ashkenaz taught in Spain Jews from Cnaan in later epochs, too: R. Asher b. Yehiel haAshkenazzi (d. 1397) had in Toledo two students from Cnaan – R. Asher b. Sinai of Russia and Yonathan of Bohemia, see *Kelaley HaRo"Sh*, 51:11; I. Berlin, *Istoričeskija sud'by jevrejskago naroda na territorii russkago gosudarstva*, Peterburg 1919, p. 174.

¹⁷ The reference to an embassy of Khazar Jews to the Rus'ian prince Volodymer *s.a.* 986 is a literary invention, see now D. D.Y. Shapira, "Remarks on Avraham Firkowicz and the Hebrew *Mejelis 'Document'*", *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 59:2 (2006), pp. 131-180 (the full version in D.D.Y. Shapira, "The *Mejelis 'Document'* and Tapani Harvianen: On Scholarship, Firkowicz and Forgeries", *Omeljan Prūsak Armağanı / A Tribute to Omeljan Pritsak*, ed. By Mehmet Alpargu & Yücel Öztürk, Sakarya 2007, pp. 303-393), cf. also D. D.Y. Shapira, "Nynešnje sostojanije pripisok rukopisej Pervoj Kolekcii Firkoviča", *Proceedings of the 11th International Conference on Jewish Studies*, Part 1, Moscow 2004, pp. 102-130.

coming from a Khazar-Jewish community of 10th century Kiev,¹⁸ is now considered to have been sent from Bulgaria to Kiev¹⁹ during Svyatoslav's time; the purpose of the letter was to persuade the Jewish community of Kiev (and possibly, indirectly, Svyatoslav's mother, the ruling princess Olga) to help the Jewish community of Preslavec-Kievec occupied by Svyatoslav's Rus', and as such, it has no bearing on the question of what happened to the Judaized Khazars (or, to the Jews of Khazaria). In contrast to the popular view, there is no connection between the Khazars and the Turkic-speaking Eastern European Karaites of later times.²⁰

Historically, some have preferred to see in Khazaria an exercise, almost a proto-Zionist one, in Jewish statesmanship in the Exile.²¹ Arab delegations in the UN, at the time of the discussion about the partition of the Land of Israel / Palestine, used the claim that the "Jews", namely the Ashkenazic Jews, are not Jews at all, but rather Judaized Turks. Some of the Arab and Islamic regimes and other anti-Zionists still cling to this claim, and a short search on the web will illustrate how widespread this baseless claim has become. A Hungarian Jewish anti-Zionist author, Arthur Koestler, also cited widely on the web, claimed in his *The Thirteenth Tribe*, which became an international bestseller, that Anti-Semitism is senseless since the Ashkenazic Jews are not Semites but Khazar Turks. However, the reader of his book should have been warned that in the 19th century a significant portion of Hungarian Jewry underwent a process of deep cultural Magyarization, and in the special intellectual and nationalistic environment of late Habsburgian Hungary there emerged a new national mythology, which stressed a Khazar, non-Jewish, origin of Hungarian Jews, to match the Turkic, steppe-based origin of ethnic Hungarians. This new national mythology was designed to facilitate the assimilation of Jews among the Magyars. This is the mythology that forms the cultural background of *The Thirteenth Tribe*.²²

On the other hand, after the Soviet Union disintegrated, the leaders of some new post-Soviet political entities and other political activists there embraced the

¹⁸ Published and analyzed in N. Golb & O. Pritsak. *Khazarian Hebrew Documents of the Tenth Century*. Ithaca 1982, pp. 26-27, 31-32.

¹⁹ M. Erdal, "The Khazar Language", *Khazars*, ed. by V. Petrukhin, W. Moskovich, A. Fedorchuk, A. Kulik, D. Shapira (*Jews and Slavs*, Vol. 16), Gesharim, Jerusalem & Moscow 2005, pp. 125-139 (p. 131) [Russian]; *ibid.*, "The Khazar Language", *The World of the Khazars: New Perspectives. Selected Papers from the Jerusalem 1999 International Khazar Colloquium*, ed. H. Ben-Shammai, P.B. Golden, A. Roná-Tas, Brill, Leiden 2007, pp. 75-108 (p. 95ff.). The phrase *בְּרִיּוּק לְשׁ לְהַק מְכַל וְנָא מִיַּעֲדוּמ* should be translated not as "we, the community of Kiev, (hereby) inform you" but as "we inform you, the community of Kiev"; in other words, the letter was sent not from Kiev but to Kiev. This view has also been expressed orally by a whole range of specialists and attentive readers besides Marcel Erdal.

²⁰ See D.D.Y. Shapira, "Khazars and Karaites, Again", *Karadeniz Arařtırmaları*, (IV/13) (*Black Sea Studies in memoriam of Omeljan Pritsak (1919-2006)*), 2007, pp. 43-64.

²¹ As exemplified in the very name of the important book by A. Polak [Poliak], *Kāzāriyāh. Tōledōth Mamlākāh Yehūdīth be'Eyropāh*, Tel-Aviv 1944.

²² Cf. Also P. Wexler, *The Ashkenazic Jews: A Slavo-Turkic People In Search of a Jewish Identity*, Slavica Publishers, Inc., Columbus, Ohio 1993.

Khazars as both their own forefathers²³ and as a link between themselves and Israel / Jews, with the double aim of ridding their ethno-political national memory of too many Islamic vestiges and paving the way to Washington. Some writers even stress the supposed common background of the Jews of Israel and the Turks of Turkey.

Khazars, Jews, Seljuks?

However, there *is* a Jewish-Khazar-Turkic connection, but it lies elsewhere: as already stated, in 965-989 the Ghuzz Turks and Syatosolav, the Rus'-Viking prince of Kiev, destroyed the Khazar state. In the face of their impending destruction, the Khazars pleaded with the Khwārazmians and the Shirwān-Shāh for help, which was granted on the condition of the Khazars' becoming Muslims. Once the destruction of their polity left them without a binding center, the different tribal groupings of the former Khazar realm dispersed. One of these groups was a tribal confederation named after Seljuk (whom some identify with his father Tuquq-Temir-Yalıq, of the Oghuz Qınıq tribe). Seljuk fled from the former Khazar territory circa 985 to Djand, where he became a Muslim.²⁴ But all his four sons, the founders of the Seljuk dynasty, bore Biblical names uncommon among Muslims, such as Mikha'il, Yunus, Musa, Isra'il (=Arslan); other, similar names are found among the later members of the dynasty, such as Da'ud and Suleiman. Our sources do not state that Seljuk was a pagan prior to his Islamization, and it is obvious that the choice of Biblical names testifies to a former Jewish²⁵ or Christian affiliation.²⁶ The Khazar affiliation of the Seljuk family had been focus of legends, some of them reported by writing, and scholars paid due attention to them: Seljuk fought the Khazar Qağan, or Tuquq served in the Khazar army, the Khazar king raised Seljuk after he had lost his father, but Seljuk humiliated the king and was exiled from his realm; Seljuk came back to his tribe to find that a war had erupted between them and the Sāmānids (819-999), etc.²⁷ If the family had some Jewish background, there is another case to demonstrate, as in the case mentioned by Abraham Ibn Da'ud, that not only ethnic Khazars had converted (the Seljuk family was Oghuzic, hence certainly not Eteo-

²³ See P.B. Golden, "The Khazars and the Kazakhs: New Perspectives; A review of B. B. Irmukhanov, *Xazary i Kazaxi: Svjaz' vremjën i narodov*, Almaty 2003", *Archivum Eurasiae medii aevi* 14 (2006), pp. 281-297.

²⁴ The breakaway of the Seljuks, about 985, from the post-Khazar political formation[s], was caused partly by the pressure of the Qipchaqs and others within the Kimek union on the Oghuz tribal union, see P.B. Golden, "The shaping of the Cuman-Qipchaqs and their world", *Il Codice Cumanico e il suo mondo. Atti del Colloquio Internazionale Venezia, 6-7 Dicembre 2002, a cura di Felicitas Schmieder e Peter Schreiner*, Centro Tedesco di studi veneziani, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, Roma 2005, pp. 246-277, p. 259.

²⁵ V. Barthold-Gibb, *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion*, London 1928, p. 287; V. Barthold, *Histoire des Turcs D'Asie Centrale*, Paris 1945, p. 42; however, Ibn al-Athir ascribed the Islamization to Tuquq, Seljuk's father, or to Temir-Yalıq, who was a *بيغو / بيغو* *.

²⁶ D.N. Dunlop, *History of the Jewish Khazars*, Princeton 1954, pp. 258ff.; C. Cahen, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey*, London 1969, pp. 19ff.

²⁷ V. Barthold-Gibb, *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion*, London 1928, p. 10.

Khazar), but also other tribes in the Khazar realm, and that their Judazation was only skin-deep.

About 1025 the Seljuk tribal union moved southwards, and about 1030 Seljuk's followers, called now after him, migrated to Khorâsân. In the battle of Dandânqân (23/05/1040) the defeated Sultan Mas'ûd Ghaznî, son of Mahmûd Ghaznî (998-1030), and now the Oghuz tribes have become the masters of Eastern Iran and the Northern shore of the Caspian Sea. In the summer month Sî'afar, 435h/1043CE, ten thousand tents of Turks embraced Islam in Balâsâghun and in Kâshghar,²⁸ so only the Mongol Tatars and Khitai remained outside the Islam. However, in 1055 the Seljuks entered the capital of the Khalifas, Baghdad.²⁹ Shortly before the southern movement of the Seljuks, which was about to change forever the Middle East and to contribute so significantly to developing of the "Sunnite orthodoxy", there were persecutions of Christians and Jews in Jerusalem (1009-1020)³⁰ by the Isma'ili Fatimid ruler al-Hâkim (996-1021); the proclaimed aim of these persecutions was to unite all the religious under Isma'ili reinterpretation of the development of the revealed religions, and in Jerusalem al-Hâkim's officer in charge to carry out this divine work was a Turkic commander, Yârûkh Tekin. In 1056, only a year after the Seljuks got Baghdâd as their prize, there happened expulsion of Christian from Jerusalem and closure of the Sepulchre, just shortly restored. The situation with the Christian pilgrimage in the Holy Land worsened, especially after the final breaking-up between the Western Roman Church and the Byzantine Orthodoxy in 1054, when the Latin pretension in the Holy Land went higher and higher. Meanwhile, the Seljuks' push westwards accelerated, to the heart of Byzantine Anatolia, until Alp Arslan captured the Byzantine emperor, Romanus IV Diogenus, in the battle of Manzikert (25.09.1071) and opened before the Turkic tribe the way to was about to become their future homeland, Turkey. In the 1070s (1071, 1073, 1077?) the Seljuk commander Atsız son of Avaq plundered the Land of Israel, having been invited by the Fatimids who had hoped that he would crush the Bedouins. But instead supporting the Fatimids, Atsız established himself strongly in the land as a semi-independent ruler, with a limited understanding of the geopolitical situation. His irresponsible actions put the Western Christian pilgrimage in the Holy Land under a severe threat, being among the most serious causes for the Crusades, to come some twenty years later; he also assigned Byzantine churches to the Monophysites in Jerusalem. However,

²⁸ Cf. Ibn al-Athir, IX, p. 520; Beirut ed., VIII, p. 396; Miskawayh, II, p. 181; Bar Hebraeus, s.a. 1046, a communication from the Nestorian Metropolitan of Samarqand to the Catholicos, brought to the attention of the Khalifa, about a people who are like unto the locusts in their swarms who have come westwards to Kâshghar, see *The Chronography by Gregory Abû'l Faraj, the son of Aaron, the Hebrew Physician Commonly Known as Bar Hebraeus*, transl. E.A.W.Budge, Oxford & London 1932, Vol. I, p. 186; pp. 204-205; cf. P.B. Golden, "The shaping of the Cuman-Qipchaqs and their world", *Il Codice Cumanico e il suo mondo. Atti del Colloquio Internazionale Venezia, 6-7 Dicembre 2002, a cura di Felicitas Schmieder e Peter Schreiner*, Centro Tedesco di studi veneziani, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, Roma 2005, pp. 247-277, p. 252ff.

²⁹ The interesting question of the Qarakhanid-Seljuk interaction of early dates yet needs to be investigated; cf. C. Cahen, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey*, London 1969, pp. 11-13.

³⁰ The Sepulchre was destroyed in 1009; the Jews began to be persecuted from 1012.

in Jerusalem. However, Turks and Seljuks demonstrated no real interest in Jerusalem. Albeit Tutuṣ, brother of Mālik-Šāh (the head of the House of Seljuk), and his lieutenant, Artuq (and his sons, Ilghazi and Sukman, after him) checked Atsız, nevertheless, the irreversible damage had already been done and the atmosphere of the last days prevailed in the land. Under Atsız the Jewish population underwent incredible suffering and the year 1075 (פ"ש"א) was year of the doom for the Jews; as to the Christians, they believed the year 1092 to be the year of the End Days. After the Turcoman-Seljuk occupation of the Holy Land the ties between the local Christians and the Byzantine Empire, the enemies of the Seljuks, were cut off, and as a consequence, the Western Church became more involved in the Holy Land. The Turkic persecutions of the Christians and their actions against the Christian pilgrimage cause this negative dynamics which has developed into the Crusade (1095-1099, with Crusaders' victory in Anatolia, 1097, and capture of Jerusalem, 1099), with the Fatimids initially hoping that the Crusaders would eliminate the Turks in al-Šām.

Kuffār-al-Turk

More than some six decades later, R. Benjamin of Tudela (traveling between 1160-1173?) told a fascinating, though obviously fictitious, story about pagan Mongoloid *Kuffār-al-Turk*, "the Turkic infidels", in Arabic. Some of the characteristics of these *Kuffār-al-Turk*, as described by Benjamin of Tudela, suit perfectly the pagan Turkic tribes. The affection of these tribes to Jews should be noted, and Benjamin, inserting elements of older Jewish legends about the Lost Tribes, was the first to document the legend about the kingdom of Prester John.³¹ After having noted that among the Jewish communities under the jurisdiction of the Babylonian Exilarch are those of Babylonia, Sinear, Persia, Khorasan, Seba or Yemen, Diyar-Bakr, Kuth, which is the land of the Mountains of Ararat, Alania encircled by mountains on all sides except the passage of the Iron Gate made by Alexander the Great, and the land of Sykryh,³² R. Benjamin goes to describe these pagan Turks:³³

³¹ A. Neubauer, "מיטבשה תרשע ירינע", *Sammelband*, IV, Berlin 1888; M.N. Adler, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, London 1907; V. Slessarev, *Prester John, The Letter and the Legend*, Minneapolis 1959; C.F. Beckingham, *The Achievements of Prester John, SOAS Inaugural Lecture*, London 1966; C.F. Beckingham, *The Quest for Prester John, Boyle Memorial Lecture 1979*, BJRL, London 1980; E. Ullendorf, "The Hebrew letters of Prester John to the Pope and to Emperor Frederick Barbarossa", *Sixth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Tel-Aviv, 14-17 April, 1980, ed. G. Goldenberg, A.A. Balkema, Rotterdam & Boston 1986, pp. 509-517; סורג סהרבה, "תוכלמו מיטבשה תרשע", *סורג סהרבה*, 48 (1991), מע' 41-5. Compare now D. D.Y. Shapira, "Judaization of Central Asian Traditions as Reflected in the so-called Jewish-Khazar Correspondence, with Two Excurses: A. Judah Halevy's Quotes; B. Eldad Ha-Dani, and An Appendix", *Khazars*, ed. by V. Petrukhin, W. Moskovich, A. Fedorchuk, A. Kulik, D. Shapira (*Jews and Slavs*, Vol. 16), Gesharim, Jerusalem & Moscow 2005, pp. 503-521.

³² *Sykryh* can probably be reconstructed as **Ksryh* and would thus seem to be a reference to Khazaria.

³³ Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela: Travels in the Middle Ages*, English translation, Joseph Simon, Pangloss Press 1993, p. 83ff.

Thence it takes twenty-eight days to the mountains of Naisabur by the river Gozan. And there are men of Israel in the land of Persia who say that in the mountains of Naisabur four of the tribes of Israel dwell, namely, the tribe of Dan, the tribe of Zebulun, the tribe of Asher, and the tribe of Naphtali, who were included in the first captivity of Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, as it is written (2 Kings xviii. 11): "And he put them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan and in the cities of the Medes". The extent of their land is twenty days' journey, and they have cities and large villages in the mountains; the river Gozan forms the boundary on the one side. They are not under the rule of the Gentiles, but they have a prince of their own, whose name is R. Joseph Amarkala the Levite. There are scholars among them. And they sow and reap and go forth to war as far as the land of Cush by way of the desert. They are in league with the Kuffār-al-Turk, who worship the wind and live in the wilderness, and who do not eat bread, nor drink wine, but live on raw uncooked meat. They have no noses, and in lieu thereof they have two small holes, through which they breathe. They eat animals both clean and unclean, and they are very friendly towards the Israelites. Fifteen years ago they overran the country of Persia with a large army and took the city of Rayy; they smote it with the edge of the sword, took all the spoil thereof, and returned by way of the wilderness. Such an invasion had not been known in the land of Persia for many years.

לא רפיכ מע תירב [ילתפנו רשאו וולבוו ד טבש מהו לארשימ מיטבש העברא] מהל שיו
מה יכ ייי התוש הניאו מהל תלכוא הניאש המוא איהו תורבדמב מינחיו חורה ידבוע מהש דרות
מינטק מירות ינש מהל שי תאה מוקמבו מיפא ילעב מהו לשובמ יתלב אוהש תומכ יח רשב
הרשע שמח מויהו. לארשי יבהוא מהו תואמטו תורוהט תומהב לכ מילכואו חורה מהמ אצויש
הללש לכ תא וחקלו ברה יפל התוא וכחו ייר תנידמ תא וחקלו לודג ליחנ סרפ קראל ואבש הנש
סרפ תוכלמ לכב הוה רבדכ הארנ אל מימי המכל מויהמו רבדמה דרד מהל וכלהו

When the king of Persia heard thereof his anger was kindled against them, and he said, "Not in my days nor in the days of my fathers did an army sally forth from this wilderness. Now I will go and cut off their name from the earth." A proclamation was made throughout his Empire, and he assembled all his armies; and he sought a guide who might show him the way to their encampment. And a certain man said that he would show him the way, as he was one of them. And the king promised that he would enrich him if he did so. And the king asked him as to what provisions they would require for the march through the wilderness. And he replied, "Take with you bread and wine for fifteen days, for you will find no sustenance by the way, till you have reached their land." And they did so, and marched through the wilderness for fifteen days, but they found nothing at all. And their food began to give out, so that man and beast were dying of hunger and thirst. Then the king called the guide, and said to him, "Where is your promise to us that you would find our adversaries?" To which the other replied, "I have mistaken the way." And the king was wroth, and commanded that his head should be struck off. And the king further gave orders throughout the camp that every man who had any food should divide it with his neighbour. And they consumed everything they had including their beasts. And after a further thirteen days' march

they reached the mountains of Naisabur, where Jews lived. They came there on the Sabbath, and encamped in the gardens and plantations and by the springs of water which are by the side of the river Gozan. Now it was the time of the ripening of the fruit, and they ate and consumed everything. No man came forth to them, but on the mountains they saw cities and many towers. Then the king commanded two of his servants to go and inquire of the people who lived in the mountains, and to cross the river either in boats or by swimming. So they searched and found a large bridge, on which there were three towers, but the gate of the bridge was locked. And on the other side of the bridge was a great city. Then they shouted in front of the bridge till a man came forth and asked them what they wanted and who they were. But they did not understand him till an interpreter came who understood their language. And when he asked them, they said, "We are the servants of the king of Persia, and we have come to ask who you are, and whom you serve." To which the other replied: "We are Jews; we have no king and no Gentile prince, but a Jewish prince rules over us." *They then questioned him with regard to the infidels, the sons of Ghuz of the Kuffār-al-Turk, and he answered: "Truly they are in league with us, and he who seeks to do them harm seeks our harm." Then they went their way, and told the king of Persia, who was much alarmed.*

ילעב מה יכ מהל ורמא מהו דרות לא רפוכ דמ קוג ינב ³⁴סינמוכה* רכד לע מתוא ולאשו
דלמ דחפיו סרפ דלמל ודיגיו הלאה מישנאה ינש ובושיו ונתער שקבמ מתער שקבמ לכו מתירב
לודג דחפ סרפ.

And on a certain day the Jews asked him to join combat with them, but he answered: "I am not come to fight you, but the Kuffār-al-Turk, my enemy, and if you fight against me I will be avenged on you by killing all the Jews in my Empire; I know that you are stronger than I am in this place, p.87 and my army has come out of this great wilderness starving and athirst. Deal kindly with me and do not fight against me, but leave me to engage with the Kuffār-al-Turk, my enemy, and sell me also the provisions which I require for myself and my army." The Jews then took counsel together, and resolved to propitiate the king on account of the Jews who were in exile in his Empire. Then the king entered their land with his army, and stayed there fifteen days. And they showed him much honour, and also sent a dispatch to the Kuffār-al-Turk their allies, reporting the matter to them. Thereupon the latter occupied the mountain passes in force with a large army composed of all those who dwelt in that desert, and when the king of Persia went forth to fight with them, they placed themselves in battle array against him. The Kuffār-al-Turk army was victorious and slew many of the Persian host, and the king of Persia fled with only a few followers to his own country.

It is clear that R. Benjamin spoke of Ghuzz who belonged to the Seljuk sphere, had been Islamized a century ago, and, as such, R. Benjamin would never have styled them "infidels". It is true that these Ghuzz have been waging war against Sanjar (1096-1157, ruled 117-1157) in 1153, shortly before Benjamin's

³⁴ Gruenhut's Hebrew edition (Jerusalem 1904) has variants: סירפוכה / סירפוכה / סינמוכה.

journey, with Sanjar taken prisoner by these rebel tribes. Most probably, Benjamin's source reflected an earlier literary tradition³⁵ combined with impressions of the Ghuzz and Buddhist Qara-Khitai advancements.³⁶

Mongols Provoked, Khwârazmian Interlude, Crusaders Expelled Mamlûks Invited

Similarly to the way different Turkic groupings provoked, unwillingly, the Crusades in the late 11th century, other Turkic groups contributed significantly, unwillingly as well, to the collapse of the Crusaders. Seven decisive years, 1205-1212, witnessed the meteoric expansion of the Khwârazmian Empire under °Alâ al-Dîn Muḥammad Ibn Tekeş (1200-1220), on the expense of the waning Seljuks and the Qara-Khitay.³⁷ Samarqand has become his capital, but in 1219-1221 Çinggiz Khân's Mongols invaded the Khwârazmian Empire, with the proclaimed aim to punish the Khwârazmians for their treacherous treatment of the Mongols' embassy, and destroyed their state. The Khwârazmian army fled westwards, pursued by the Mongols, and invaded Northern °Irâq, Georgia and Azerbayjân, but in 1231 the Mongols crushed this ephemeral Khwârazmian state-in-exile, with Khwârazmians escaping in every possible direction, with some of them trying to take the Seljuk possessions in Rûm and al-Şâm. Though the years 1241-1243 marked Mongol invasions into Hungary and Northern Italy, in the Land of Israel, 1241 was a peaceful year between the Crusaders and Muslims, but in 1244 the ruler of Egypt, al-Malik al-Şâleḥ Nadjm al-Dîn called upon the fleeing Khwârazmians to help him, and they invaded the land and butchered the Christians of Jerusalem, which earlier that year had come under Crusaders' rule. The Khwârazmian plague was, in fact, *coup de morte* for the Crusaders. On 17.10.1244 the Khwârazmians and their Mamlûk Egyptian allies won the day at Harabiyyeh near Askelon and massacred the united force of the Crusaders and the Damascene Mamlûks, with the remains of the Crusader state collapsing in 1247 and causing thus the Crusade of St. Louis IX of France; the death of al-Malik al-Şâleḥ Ayûb has changed the situation, but only for a while. In 1258 the Mongols still were on pursuit after the fleeing Khwârazmians and Hülâgü took and destroyed Baghdad; in 1260 the Mongols took Aleppo, and in March the same year Damascus surrendered without fighting. Later the same year the first Mongol

³⁵ According to Nizâm al-Mulk (killed by Ismailis in 1092), *Kuffâr-al-Turk* attacked Balâsâghun circa 943 CE, and it is possible that Benjamin owed his information to a source similar to that of Nizâm al-Mulk. Compare also al-Athir (ed. Tomberg, IX, pp. 297-8; Barthold, *Turkestan, Soçinenija*, I, p. 242; cf. *ibid.*, V, p. 543), who reported in 1017/8 an attack of some 300,000 tents of the tribes of the Turks who had come from Şin, among them the Khitây, against Balâsâghun, and who were beaten off by the Qarakhanids. Bar Hebraeus, *s.a.* 1014, mentioned 22 tribes of the Khetâ numbering 200,000, who invaded the Qarakhanid lands, but were beaten off.

³⁶ In the 14th century, R. Shelomo of Urganç, Khwârazm, who composed a Hebrew-Persian dictionary *Sepher haMelitsah*, used *kwfry* and *xtây* as synonyms, see W. Bacher, *Ein Hebräisch-persisches Wörterbuch aus dem Vierzehnten Jahrhundert*, Tübingen 1900, p. 19 n. 1; pp. 13-14.

³⁷ Cf. M. Biran, *Qaidu and the Rise of the Independent Mongol State in Central Asia*, Curzon Press, 1997; *idem.*, *The Empire of the Qara Khitai in Eurasian History: Between China and the Islamic World*, Cambridge 2005.

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attack on the Land of Israel took place, but on 02.09.1260 the army of Baybars, which included Khwârazmian, Kurdish, and Turcoman and Mamlûk Egyptian units was victorious at °Ayn D̲jâlûd,³⁸ and the Crusaders were no more relevant.

These two episodes, of inviting a Crusader invasion and its knockout, throw light on the inner politics of different forces in the Eurasian steppe, echoes of whose fights raised dust of war in our country.

³⁸ See R. Amitai-Preiss, "Mongol Raids into Palestine", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 2 (1987), pp. 236-255; *ibid.*, "In the Aftermath of 'Ayn Jalut: The Beginnings of the Mamluk-Ilkhnid Cold War", *Al-Masāq*, 3 (1990), pp. 1-21; *ibid.*, *Mongols and Mamluks*, Cambridge University Press, 1996.