

Khazar-Jewish Connection

The Historical & Genetic Inquiry into Connections with Khazars & the Jews With Misconceptions of Antisemitism

Abstract:

This paper presents a structured analysis of the claims surrounding the Khazar-Jewish connection, examining archaeological, genetic, and historical evidence. It critically evaluates the notion of Jewish lineage purity and its implications in relation to modern identity and land claims. Furthermore, it addresses the misapplication of antisemitism accusations when discussing these historical points and their theological implications.

Introduction

The history of the Jewish people, particularly the lineage of the Judahites, has been complex and interwoven with various groups throughout the centuries. Kevin Alan Brook's *The Jews of Khazaria* (3rd edition) incorporates updated archaeological and genetic findings that support the long-discussed notion of a Khazar conversion to Judaism. Additionally, a 2012 genetic study by Eran Elhaik suggests a Khazar connection to Ashkenazi Jewry. This evidence challenges claims that the Khazar theory is inherently antisemitic, as posited by organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League (ADL).

The Complexity of Jewish Lineage

Intermarriages and Conversions in the Biblical Record

The concept of Jewish lineage as an exclusively pure bloodline from Jacob has been historically tenuous. Instances of integration and conversion have occurred throughout biblical history:

- **The Exodus Narrative:** When the Israelites left Egypt, they were accompanied by a “mixed multitude” (Exodus 12:38), indicating early ethnic integration.
- **The Samaritan Population:** Following the Assyrian conquest of the Northern Kingdom in 720 BC, foreign populations were settled in the region, leading to a mixed population (2 Kings 17:24-41).
- **The Hasmonean Conversions:** John Hyrcanus forcibly converted the Idumaeans (Edomites) to Judaism during the Hasmonean dynasty, further blending Jewish identity with non-Israelite groups.
- **The Book of Ruth:** Ruth, a Moabitess, converted and became part of the lineage of King David, demonstrating that Jewish identity was historically tied to faith and practice, not just ancestry.

The Dispersion of the Northern Tribes

Around 720 BC, the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel, leading to the dispersion of the Ten Tribes. These groups largely assimilated into surrounding populations, forming the basis of later theories about their migrations. This dispersion contributed to the further diversification of the Israelite lineage, undermining the notion of a pure, uninterrupted bloodline from Jacob.

The Khazar Hypothesis: Historical and Genetic Considerations

The ADL concedes that some Jewish influence existed among the Khazars over a millennium ago. Historical documentation affirms that the Khazars, a semi-nomadic Turkic people, converted to Judaism in the 8th-9th centuries AD. Genetic studies remain inconclusive, but some, including Elhaik's research, suggest an Ashkenazi Jewish connection to Khazar ancestry. If accepted, this further substantiates the claim that modern Jewish populations, particularly Ashkenazi Jews, are not solely descended from Jacob but are a composite of various lineages.

Encyclopedic References Supporting the Khazar Theory

Several well-established encyclopedias have acknowledged the Khazar conversion and its potential role in shaping Ashkenazi Jewish ancestry:

- **The Jewish Encyclopedia** states that the Khazars were a non-Semitic, Asiatic people who converted en masse to Judaism in the 7th century and later migrated into Eastern Europe, contributing to the Yiddish-speaking Jewish population.
- **The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia** notes that Ashkenaz and Ashkenazim historically referred to Germans and that during medieval times, the Khazars were sometimes identified as Ashkenazim. It estimates that approximately 92% of modern Jews are Ashkenazim.
- **The Encyclopedia Americana** acknowledges that Ashkenazi Jews are historically linked to German lands and were instrumental in the rise of political Zionism, which ultimately led to the formation of the state of Israel.
- **The American Peoples Encyclopedia** states that the

Khazars officially converted to Judaism in 740 AD and, after their empire's decline, dispersed across Central Europe where they were identified as Jews.

- **The New Encyclopedia Britannica** affirms that the ruling class of the Khazars converted to Judaism around 740 AD, and some scholars have linked them to the ancestors of Eastern European Jews.

These references indicate that the idea of a Khazar-Jewish connection has historical legitimacy and is not merely a fringe theory. This further supports the argument that Jewish identity has been shaped by conversions and migrations rather than an unbroken ancestral lineage to Jacob.

The Ottoman Empire's Influence

The Ottoman Empire played a role in shaping Jewish demographics, particularly in Sephardic and Mizrahi communities, but its relevance to the Khazar hypothesis is limited. While the empire controlled large parts of Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa, its policies on Jewish migration and integration were more pronounced for Iberian Jews expelled from Spain rather than Khazar descendants. However, it did contribute to the broader Jewish diaspora's ethnic and cultural composition.

The Esther 8:17 Precedent

A significant biblical precedent for mass conversion to Judaism is found in Esther 8:17, where many people became Jews out of fear. This illustrates that not all who were identified as Jews in antiquity were direct descendants of Jacob, reinforcing the historical pattern of integration and conversion.

Reevaluating the Land Promise and Its Misapplication

Genesis 12:1-3 is often cited by evangelical Zionist Christians to justify exclusive Jewish claims to the land of Israel. However, this passage originally referred to Abraham as an individual, not the modern state of Israel. The inclusion of all nations in the Abrahamic blessing aligns with the New Testament understanding of faith-based inclusion rather than ethnic exclusivity.

The Role of Dispensational Premillennialism

Dispensational premillennialism has significantly influenced the misapplication of scripture concerning the modern state of Israel. This theological framework, popularized by John Nelson Darby and later the Scofield Reference Bible, promotes a futurist interpretation of biblical prophecy. It teaches that ethnic Israel remains central to God's eschatological plan, leading many evangelical Zionists to support modern Israel as a fulfillment of biblical prophecy. However, this view conflicts with a covenantal understanding that sees Christ as the fulfillment of God's promises, including those related to the land.

The Fallacy of Antisemitism Accusations

Labeling discussions on Jewish ancestry and historical intermingling as antisemitic lacks merit when considering that both Ashkenazi Jews and those from Abrahamic descent through Ishmael are Semitic. If individuals from an Ishmaelite background critique the modern Jewish identity and its lineage claims, it is illogical to label them as antisemitic. This accusation serves as a rhetorical shield to avoid scholarly debate on legitimate historical, theological, and genetic inquiries.

Conclusion

The evidence presented highlights that Jewish identity has always been fluid and shaped by historical migrations, conversions, and integrations. The notion of a pure, unbroken lineage from Jacob is historically untenable. Genetic and historical studies, including the Khazar theory, offer credible explanations for the diversity within modern Jewish populations. The misapplication of antisemitism accusations when discussing these topics hinders scholarly discourse and prevents an honest examination of historical realities. Additionally, the theological misinterpretation of land promises and the influence of dispensational premillennialism further complicate modern political and religious narratives. Recognizing these factors allows for a more nuanced and historically accurate understanding of Jewish identity and heritage.