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Uncensored History: Who Were the Khazars?

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"You (the Jews) will never be able to live here in peace, because you left here black and came back white." – Gamal Abdel Nasser, President of Egypt (1952)

There is an unknown empire that is barely mentioned in western history books, education institutions, in the media or in Hollywood. The name is not mentioned anywhere especially in the West, and that is why most people never heard about it. It was called Khazaria, it was an empire that still remains relatively unknown today.

So what was Khazaria? Its origins date back to the middle ages (c.650-950), its inhabitants were mostly semi-nomadic Turkic people made up of multiple ethno-linguistic groups that came from Eastern, Western, Northern and Central Asia as well as from parts of Europe and North Africa. Many languages that were spoken belonged to the *"Turkic Language family"* as they shared many cultural traits and similar histories that shared common ancestries. Today, Turkic ethnicities include Azerbaijanis, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz people, Uyghurs, Uzbeks and several other groups. However, during the eighth and ninth centuries, the Khazars, a warlike Turkic people converted to Judaism who had dominated a vast area in Southern Russia and the Ukraine in what was known as Khazaria until they were destroyed by Russia.

What happened to the Khazarian empire and its people since their destruction has been debated, in fact it is a conundrum, a mystery in a sense on what happened to the Khazars.

Some historians have speculated that the Khazars are the ancestors of the Ashkenazi Jews. It was well-known that Jews were persecuted throughout Christian Europe which allowed some to migrate to the Middle East while others went to the Kingdom of Khazaria which was considered a "beacon of hope" for Jews who were able to live in peace since the ruling Khazars were considered tolerant of the Jews. Khazar rulers had allowed Jewish refugees from Byzantine and Persia to call Khazaria their home.

It was those actions of the Khazar rulers who discovered Judaism and soon adopted the religion. In an interesting article from 2014 by Jim Wald from *The Times of Israel 'Leaked report: Israel acknowledges Jews in fact Khazars; Secret plan for reverse migration to Ukraine'* argues that *"it is well known that, sometime in the eighth to ninth centuries, the Khazars, a warlike Turkic people, converted to Judaism and ruled over a vast domain in what became southern Russia and Ukraine"* he continued *"what happened to them after the Russians destroyed that empire around the eleventh century has been a mystery"* a mystery indeed. Wald says that the Khazar hypothesis is an attempt by the Arabs to deny Jewish claims to the land of Palestine:

> *Arabs have long cited the Khazar hypothesis in attempts to deny a Jewish historical claim to the land of Israel. During the UN debate over Palestine Partition, Chaim Weizmann responded, sarcastically: "It is very strange. All my life I have been a Jew, felt like a Jew, and I now learn that I am a Khazar." In a more folksy vein, Prime Minister Golda Meir famously said: "Khazar, Schmazar. There is no Khazar people. I knew no Khazars In Kiev. Or Milwaukee. Show me these Khazars of whom you speak"*

Jim Wald claims that prominent researchers have come forward with their observations on the gene pool from today's Jews that led them to the Khazars:

> *Contrarian Hungarian ex-communist and scientist Arthur Koestler brought the Khazar hypothesis to a wider audience with The Thirteenth Tribe (1976), in the hope that disproving a common Jewish "racial" identity would end antisemitism. Clearly, that hope has not been fulfilled. Most recently, left-wing Israeli historian Shlomo Sand's The Invention of the Jewish People took Koestler's thesis in a direction he had not intended, arguing that because Jews were a religious community descended from converts they do not constitute a nation or need a state of their own. Scientists, however, dismissed the Khazar hypothesis because the genetic evidence did not add up. Until now. In 2012, Israeli researcher Eran Elhaik published a study claiming to prove that Khazar ancestry is the single largest element in the Ashkenazi gene pool. Sand declared himself vindicated, and progressive organs such as Haaretz and The Forward trumpeted the results*

Let's begin with one of the books mentioned by Wald, Arthur Koestler's *'The Thirteenth Tribe'* which claims that *"what is in dispute is the fate of the Jewish Khazars after the destruction of their empire, in the twelfth or thirteenth century"* and that's where the problem begins because its *"various late mediaeval Khazar settlements are mentioned in the Crimea, in the Ukraine, in Hungary, Poland and Lithuania."* This is where Koestler's observation on the issue of where the Khazars settled over the years following their empire's destruction by the Russians:

> *The general picture that emerges from these fragmentary pieces of information is that of a migration of Khazar tribes and communities into those regions of Eastern Europe – mainly Russia and Poland – where, at the dawn of the Modern Age, the greatest*

concentrations of Jews were found

So Khazar tribes ended up in parts of Eastern Europe, southern Russia and Poland:

> *This has led several historians to conjecture that a substantial part, and perhaps the majority of eastern Jews – and hence of world Jewry – might be of Khazar, and not of Semitic Origin. The far-reaching implications of this hypothesis may explain the great caution exercised by historians in approaching this subject – if they do not avoid it altogether*

What was interesting about Koestler's analysis points to the fact that the Khazars have bloodlines in Crimea, Poland and southern areas of Russia:

> *Thus in the 1973 edition of the Encyclopaedia Judaica the article "Khazars" is signed by Dunlop, but there is a separate section dealing with "Khazar Jews after the Fall of the Kingdom", signed by the editors, and written with the obvious intent to avoid upsetting believers in the dogma of the Chosen Race: The Turkish-speaking Karaites [a fundamentalist Jewish sect] of the Crimea, Poland, and elsewhere have affirmed a connection with the Khazars, which is perhaps confirmed by evidence from folklore and anthropology as well as language. There seems to be a considerable amount of evidence attesting to the continued presence in Europe of descendants of the Khazars*

Historian and Emeritus Professor of history at Tel Aviv University, Shlomo Sand published *'The Invention of the Jewish People'*, a controversial book that pinched a nerve among Israeli society. In a 2014 article written by Sand in The Guardian, *'Shlomo Sand: 'I wish to resign and cease considering myself a Jew'* describes his thoughts on being a Jew in Israel which was a bold move by the historian. Here is his opening statement on the matter:

> *During the first half of the 20th century, my father abandoned Talmudic school, permanently stopped going to synagogue, and regularly expressed his aversion to rabbis. At this point in my own life, in the early 21st century, I feel in turn a moral obligation to break definitively with tribal Judeocentrism. I am today fully conscious of having never been a genuinely secular Jew, understanding that such an imaginary characteristic lacks any specific basis or cultural perspective, and that its existence is based on a hollow and ethnocentric view of the world. Earlier I mistakenly believed that the Yiddish culture of the family I grew up in was the embodiment of Jewish culture. A little later, inspired by Bernard Lazare, Mordechai Anielewicz, Marcel Rayman and Marek Edelman – who all fought antisemitism, nazism and Stalinism without adopting an ethnocentric view – I identified as part of an oppressed and rejected minority. In the company, so to speak, of the socialist leader Léon Blum, the poet Julian Tuwim and many others, I stubbornly remained a Jew who had accepted this identity on account of persecutions and murderers, crimes and their victims.*
>
> *Now, having painfully become aware that I have undergone an adherence to Israel, been assimilated by law into a fictitious ethnos of persecutors and their supporters, and have appeared in the world as one of the exclusive club of the elect and their acolytes, I wish to resign and cease considering myself a Jew*

It can be said that Sand's statement upset the Zionist community:

> *Although the state of Israel is not disposed to transform my official nationality from*

"Jew" to "Israeli", I dare to hope that kindly philosemites, committed Zionists and exalted anti-Zionists, all of them so often nourished on essentialist conceptions, will respect my desire and cease to catalogue me as a Jew. As a matter of fact, what they think matters little to me, and still less what the remaining anti-Semitic idiots think. In the light of the historic tragedies of the 20th century, I am determined no longer to be a small minority in an exclusive club that others have neither the possibility nor the qualifications to join.

By my refusal to be a Jew, I represent a species in the course of disappearing. I know that by insisting that only my historical past was Jewish, while my everyday present (for better or worse) is Israeli, and finally that my future and that of my children (at least the future I wish for) must be guided by universal, open and generous principles, I run counter to the dominant fashion, which is oriented towards ethnocentrism

Sand's controversial book *'The Invention of the Jewish People'* which was published in 2009 explores how genetics research involved what he calls Zionist mythology corrupting the true outcome of the common biological origin of what is a "real" Jew is by adopting genetic anthropology and linking it to stories found in the Holy Bible:

Zionist pedagogy produced generations of students who believed whole-heartedly in the ethnic uniqueness of their nation. But in the age of scientific positivism, nationalist ideology needed more substantial reification than the "soft" materials produced in the humanities. The biological laboratories were called upon to provide it, and at first they did so in fairly subduedmanner. Nurit Kirsh, who in recent years completed her doctoral dissertation at Tel Aviv University, has investigated the early stages of genetics research in Israel.^" Her conclusion is unambiguous: genetics, just like archaeology at the time, was a tendentious science subordinated to the national historical concept, which sought at all costs to discover a biological homogeneity among the Jews in the world. The geneticists internalized the Zionist myth and, consciously or not, attempted to adapt their findings to it. As she sees it, the main difference between the Zionist anthropologists in the pre-State period and the new scientists in Israel was that genetics became less prominent in the public arena in Israel. Research findings that, despite their ideological bias, were published in international scientific journals were hardly noticed in the Hebrew-language media. This meant that their pedagogical function in the general education system was marginal*

Sand gives another example of a British scholar by the name of Arthur E. Mourant who was influenced by a mentor who literally believed that the British people were the descendants of the *"Ten Lost Tribes"*, so you know where this is going:

In 1978 Oxford University Press published The Genetics of the Jews, by a team of researchers headed by Arthur E. Mourant.' This British scholar was influenced by a much-loved mentor who belonged to a sect that believed the British people were descendants of the "Ten Lost Tribes," hence his interest in the Jews. For much of his life, the enthusiastic Mourant believed that he and all the people around him were authentic Jews. When the British forces capturedPalestine, he was convinced that this signaled the beginning of salvation. Years later, he set out to discover the common biological origin of the "real" Jews, and adapted his genetic anthropology to the biblical story. As the Israeli genet-icist Raphael FaUc described it, the British scientist "first fired his arrows, then drew the target around them"^^ To Mourant and his colleagues, the marked differences between Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews notwithstanding, they all

had to have a single common origin. By examining the frequency of A and B alleles in separate communities, he strove to show that the genes of Jews fromdifferent regions displayed a higher degree of uniformity than could be found when those same subjects' genes were compared to those of their non- Jewish neighbors. But if the genetic findings did not exactly support the ideological purpose, it would be necessary to search for other results.

Although Mourant's theory was weak and unfounded — the application of genetics to such diffuse categories as "Ashkenazi" and "Sephardic" was senseless, as they represent varieties of religious rituals — it legitimized and invigorated the search for the Jewish gene in the life sciences at Israel universities

The New York Times came out with a scathing article criticizing Sand's book shortly after its release which claims that Jews from Central and Eastern Europe including American Jews can be traced to the Khazars in *'Book Calls Jewish People an Invention'*:

History of the Turkic peoples (Public Domain)

Since Professor Sand's mission is to discredit Jews' historical claims to the territory, he is keen to show that their ancestry lines do not lead back to ancient Palestine. He resurrects a theory first raised by 19th-century historians, that the Jews of Central and Eastern Europe, to whom 90 percent of American Jews trace their roots, are descended from the Khazars, a Turkic people who apparently converted to Judaism and created an empire in the Caucasus in the eighth century. This idea has long intrigued writers and historians. In 1976, Arthur Koestler wrote "The Thirteenth Tribe" in the hopes it would combat anti-Semitism; if contemporary Jews were descended from the Khazars, he argued, they could not be held responsible for Jesus' Crucifixion.

By now, experts who specialize in the subject have repeatedly rejected the theory, concluding that the shards of evidence are inconclusive or misleading, said Michael Terry, the chief librarian of the Jewish division of the New York Public Library. Dr. Ostrer

said the genetics also did not support the Khazar theory

While the *New York Times* continued its attack on professor Sand, it does admit that the Jews of Khazaria where converts:

> *That does not negate that conversion played a critical role in Jewish history — a proposition that many find surprising given that today's Jews tend to discourage conversion and make it a difficult process. Lawrence H. Schiffman, chairman of the Skirball department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies at New York University, said most historians agree that over a period of centuries, Middle Eastern Jews — merchants, slaves and captives, religious and economic refugees — spread around the world. Many intermarried with people from local populations, who then converted.*
>
> *There is also evidence that in antiquity and the first millennium Judaism was a proselytizing religion that even used force on occasion. From the genetic research so far, Dr. Ostrer said, "It's pretty clear that most Jewish groups have Semitic ancestry, that they originated in the Middle East, and that they're more closely related to each other than to non-Jewish groups." But he added that it was also clear that many Jews are of mixed descent.*
>
> *"The ancient admixed ancestry explains the blond hair and blue eyes of Ashkenazi Jews whose grandparents and great-grandparents all lived in shtetls two and three generations ago," Dr. Ostrer said. They brought the genes for coloration with them to Eastern Europe. These genes were probably not contributed by their Cossack neighbors"*

The conclusion from the article emphasizes that Professor Sand's take on Jewish history is *"A mingling of myth, memory, truth and aspiration similarly envelopes Jewish history, which is, to begin with, based on scarce and confusing archaeological and archival records"* continued *"Experts dismiss the popular notion that the Jews were expelled from Palestine in one fell swoop in A.D. 70. Yet while the destruction of Jerusalem and Second Temple by the Romans did not create the Diaspora, it caused a momentous change in the Jews' sense of themselves and their position in the world."* They accuse Sand of generating an old myth by using the same tactics as the Zionists in how they manipulate history to justify their narrative so that they are recognized as the indigenous people of Palestine which is now known as Israel:

> *Professor Sand accuses Zionist historians from the 19th century onward the very same scholars on whose work he bases his case of hiding the truth and creating a myth of shared roots to strengthen their nationalist agenda. He explains that he has uncovered no new information, but has "organized the knowledge differently." In other words, he is doing precisely what he accuses the Zionists of shaping the material to fit a narrative.*
>
> *In that sense, Professor Sand is operating within a long established tradition. As "The Illustrated History of the Jewish People," edited by Nicholas Lange (Harcourt, 1997), notes, "Every generation of Jewish historians has faced the same task: to retell and adapt the story to meet the needs of its own situation." The same could be said of all nations and religions. Perhaps that is why on both sides of the argument some myths stubbornly persist no matter how often they are debunked while other indubitable facts continually fail to gain traction*

Review31 based in the UK interviewed Sand and asked him how he became interested in Israel's historical background and the myths within the bible *"What was it that made you go looking for that information?"*his response was the following:

> *In the framework of the Masters Studies programme at Tel Aviv University I invited a very famous researcher on the Bible. This is the first time that something started to move inside me. This very, very careful guy gave a lecture and he said that the exodus from Egypt never happened. He said that the kingdoms of David and Solomon are myths. I decided to write a book about this discovery, to compose the Bible as a historical book, because Shlomo Sand and all the children in Israel are studying the Bible as a historical book, not as a theological book. Now, after Simon Schama accused me, and he wasn't the only one, I understood also that the insistence of Zionism, of Zionist historiography, Zionist politics about the concept of a people, has to do with the fact that people have territories. And then I understood that I have to move into understanding what is a homeland, what is a national territory; and that is the second book.*
>
> *I went back to the ancient times like always, and I could find the political concept of modern homeland only in two cases in the past in western civilization: the Greek one, and the Roman one before the empire, in the republic. In Judaism there isn't any traditional patriotism, any tradition of homeland. Palestine, Judea, it wasn't the homeland of the Jews. And I discovered that the Christians were much more attached physically to the land. And very quickly I discovered that the first Zionists were not Jews; they were your [British] ancestors*

In 2012, Eran Elhaik, an Israeli-American geneticist at the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health at the time published a study titled 'The Missing Link of Jewish European Ancestry: Contrasting the Rhineland and the Khazarian Hypotheses'claimed that the Khazar ancestry is one of the main elements in the Ashkenazi gene pool. *Sciencedaily.com 'New study sheds light on the origin of the European Jewish population.'* The article explains Elhaik's controversial findings, *"Elhaik's findings strongly support the Khazarian Hypothesis, as opposed to the Rhineland Hypothesis, of European Jewish origins."* What the difference between the Rhineland and the Khazarian Hypothesis?:

> *The Rhineland Hypothesis has been the favoured explanation for the origins of present-day European Jews, until now. In this scenario Jews descended from Israelite-Canaanite tribes left the Holy Land for Europe in the 7th century, following the Muslim conquest of Palestine. Then, in the beginning of the 15th century, a group of approximately 50,000 left Germany, the Rhineland, for the east. There they maintained high endogamy, and despite wars, persecution, disease, plagues, and economic hardships, their population expanded rapidly to around 8 million in the 20th century. Due to the implausibility of such an event, this rapid expansion was explained by Prof Harry Ostrer, Dr Gil Atzmon, and colleagues as a miracle. Under the Rhineland Hypothesis, European Jews would be very similar to each other and would have a predominant Middle Eastern ancestry.*
>
> *The rival explanation, the Khazarian Hypothesis, states that the Jewish-convert Khazars — a confederation of Turkic, Iranian, and Mongol tribes who lived in what is now Southern Russia, north of Georgia and east of Ukraine, and who converted to Judaism between the 7th and 9th centuries — along with groups of Mesopotamian and Greco-Roman Jews, formed the basis of eastern Europe's Jewish population when they fled eastward, following the collapse of their empire in the 13th century. European Jews are*

thus expected to exhibit heterogeneity between different communities. While there is no doubt that the Judeo-Khazars fled into Eastern Europe and contributed to the establishment of Eastern European Jewry, argument has revolved around the magnitude of that contribution

Elhaik defined his hypothesis by focusing on the origins of the Khazars that included various tribes:

The competing "Khazarian hypothesis" considers Eastern European Jews to be the descendants of Khazars. The Khazars were a confederation of Slavic, Scythian, Hunnic–Bulgar, Iranian, Alans, and Turkish tribes who formed in the central–northern Caucasus one of most powerful empires during the late Iron Age and converted to Judaism in the 8th century CE. The Khazarian, Armenian, and Georgian populations forged from this amalgamation of tribes were followed by relative isolation, differentiation, and genetic drift in situ. Biblical and archeological records allude to active trade relationships between Proto-Judeans and Armenians in the late centuries BCE, that likely resulted in a small scale admixture between these populations and a Judean presence in the Caucasus. After their conversion to Judaism, the population structure of the Judeo–Khazars was further reshaped by multiple migrations of Jews from the Byzantine Empire and Caliphate to the Khazarian Empire

Elhaik declared that the Jews are an *"assortment of Tribes who accepted Judaism"* in other words, *converts:*

Although both the Rhineland and Khazarian hypotheses depict a Judean ancestry and are not mutually exclusive, they are well distinguished, as Caucasus and Semitic populations are considered ethnically and linguistically distinct. Jews, according to either hypothesis, are an assortment of tribes who accepted Judaism, migrated elsewhere, and maintained their religion up to this date and are, therefore, expected to exhibit certain differences from their neighboring populations. Because both hypotheses posit that Eastern European Jews arrived at Eastern Europe roughly at the same time (13th and 15th centuries), we assumed that they experienced similar low and fixed admixture rates with the neighboring populations, estimated at 0.5% per generation over the past 50 generations. These relatively recent admixtures have likely reshaped the population structure of all European Jews and increased the genetic distances from the Caucasus or Middle Eastern populations. Therefore, we do not expect to achieve perfect matching with the surrogate Khazarian and Judean populations but rather to estimate their relatedness

Elhaik concluded in his hypothesis that European Jews have genes that trace back to the Khazarian empire:

We compared two genetic models for European Jewish ancestry depicting a mixed Khazarian–European–Middle Eastern and sole Middle Eastern origins. Contemporary populations were used as surrogates to the ancient Khazars and Judeans, and their relatedness to European Jews was compared over a comprehensive set of genetic analyses. Our findings support the Khazarian hypothesis depicting a large Near Eastern–Caucasus ancestry along with Southern European, Middle Eastern, and Eastern European ancestries, in agreement with recent studies and oral and written traditions. We conclude that the genome of European Jews is a tapestry of ancient populations including Judaized Khazars, Greco–Roman Jews, Mesopotamian Jews, and Judeans and

> *that their population structure was formed in the Caucasus and the banks of the Volga with roots stretching to Canaan and the banks of the Jordan*

After World War II, there was a vision, an idea for a Jewish homeland by mainly European Jews whose genes can be traced to several ancient populations including *"Judaized Khazars, Greco–Roman Jews, Mesopotamian Jews, and Judeans"* in a place called Palestine and the rest is history.

*

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