Did the Khazars Convert to Judaism?

Author(s): Shaul Stampfer

Source: *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Spring/Summer 2013), pp. 1-72

Published by: Indiana University Press

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/jewisocistud.19.3.1

Did the Khazars Convert to Judaism?

Shaul Stampfer

Abstract

The view that some or all of the Khazars, a central Asian people, converted to Judaism at some point during the ninth or tenth century is widely accepted. A careful examination of the sources, however, shows that some of them are pseudepigraphic, and the rest are of questionable reliability. Many of the most reliable contemporary texts that mention Khazars say nothing about their conversion, nor is there any archaeological evidence for it. This leads to the conclusion that such a conversion never took place.

Key words: Khazars, conversion, Hasdai ibn Shaprut, historiography

From the middle of the seventh century until sometime in the tenth century, the Khazars ruled an empire that spanned the steppes between the Caspian and Black Seas.[1] Not much is known about the culture and society of the Khazars.[2] They did not leave literary remains, and the archaeological finds have been meager. It seems that in their time they had an impact on the region; they helped block the northward spread of Islam and played an important role in developing East–West commerce.[3] The Khazar Empire was overrun by Svyatoslav of Kiev around the year 969, and little was heard from the Khazars after.[4] But though they are mostly forgotten today, a widely held belief that they or their leaders at some point converted to Judaism persists.[5]

The stories about the Jewish Khazars could simply be regarded as fantastic tales or legends. As such, they would certainly not be unique or even exceptional, either in the Jewish or in the general medieval context. They would fit in among the stories of the ten lost tribes,[6] of Jews

Shaul Stampfer, "Did the Khazars Convert to Judaism?," *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society* n.s. 19, no. 3 (Spring/Summer 2013): 1–72

living on the far side of the Sambatyon River,[7] of Prester John,[8] Alexander's wall or gate,[9] the Red Jews,[10] dog-men,[11] Solomon's seal,[12] Amazons,[13] Judeisapta,[14] and many others—stories that were very popular, often cited and once believed.[15] However, reports on the Khazar conversion to Judaism are taken seriously to this day. Reports about the Jewishness of the Khazars first appeared in Muslim works in the late ninth century. For these Muslim authors, the Jewishness of the Khazars was a curiosity and not an issue requiring serious attention. Reports also appeared in two tenth-century Hebrew accounts, and the Jewishness of the Khazars was far more significant for Jewish readers. The story reached a wider audience when the Jewish thinker and poet Yehudah Halevi used it as a frame for his book *The Kuzari*. However, little attention was given to the Jewishness of the Khazars in subsequent centuries.

Most descriptions of the conversion describe it as the result of religious concerns or a combination of religious and political interests; however, other possibilities have been raised, including the suggestion that it was the result of the influence of Jewish merchants passing through Khazaria[16] or the influence of rich Jewish businessmen.[17] Proponents of the theory of Khazar conversion generally agree that it "probably took place in stages. It began, as so often was the case, at the top, with the ruling house, perhaps episodically as early as the mid-eighth century (certainly after 737), but not extending at that stage much beyond the ruling strata."[18] From that point, most would also say that Judaization expanded, though it is not clear to what degree. Beyond this broad agreement, issues of timing, scope, and impact are matters of debate—largely because of contradictions in the sources.

Interest in the Khazar conversion grew in the modern period, especially in the twentieth century.[19] A key collection of Hebrew sources on the Khazars appeared in 1932,[20] followed by one of the most important and least-known studies on the topic, a six-volume history of the Khazars written by the Ukrainian scholar Ahatanhel Krymskyi.[21] Henri Gregoire published skeptical critiques of the sources, but interest in the topic remained,[22] and in 1954 Douglas Morton Dunlop brought the topic into the mainstream of accepted historical scholarship with *The History of the Jewish Khazars*.[23] Arthur Koestler's best-selling *The Thirteenth Tribe* (1976) brought the tale to the attention of wider Western audiences; the book's central thesis was that East European Ashkenazi Jewry was largely of Khazar origin. Many studies have followed,[24] including dissertations,[25] analysis of relevant materials from the Cairo Geniza,[26] and a collection of essays on the Khazars edited by Peter B. Golden, Haggai Ben-Shammai, and András Róna-Tas.[27] In addition to academic interest, including academic conferences and publications,

the story has also garnered considerable nonacademic and often anti-Jewish attention.[28]

Most recently, Shlomo Sand's 2009 bestseller, *The Invention of the Jewish People*, did much to pique interest in the thesis that the Khazars became Jews. Sand accepts the view that much of East European Jewry was descended from the Khazars and suggests that the absence of serious research on the topic "is no accident. No one wants to go looking under stones when venomous scorpions might be lurking beneath them, waiting to attack the self-image of the existing *ethnos* and its territorial ambitions."[29]

In 2012, Eran Elhaik attempted to link the Khazars with East European Ashkenazi Jews by means of DNA analysis.[30] Though his article has been widely cited and analyzed in the media, both peer reviewers and media writers have overlooked major flaws in Elhaik's work: he based his argument on the DNA of only 12 East European Ashkenazi Jews, and in the absence of Khazar DNA, he used Armenian and Georgian DNA as proxies, despite the fact that no conclusive link between the groups has been established.[31] Nevertheless, interest in the ties, imagined or real, between Jews and Khazars is not subsiding. New articles continue to appear on the topic, but many questions remain.[32]

Several years ago, Moshe Gil published an article in Hebrew on the topic of the conversion of the Khazars, concluding that it had never happened.[33] He surveyed the most important Muslim sources on the topic but did not deal in any detail with other sources, and even his analysis of the Muslim sources was brief. His article was translated into English, but it seems never to have been cited by any researcher. For all of the interest in the Jewishness of the Khazars, there has been no systematic critique of the evidence for the claim that some or all of the Khazars converted to Judaism. Such a critique is therefore long overdue. As a recent scholarly study states,

> scholars who have contributed to the subject of the Khazars' conversion have based their arguments on a limited corpus of textual, and more recently numismatic, evidence, which even at its most forgiving presents numerous difficulties. Taken together these sources offer a cacophony of distortions, contradictions, vested interests, and anomalies in some areas, and nothing but silence in others.[34]

Though the story of the Khazar conversion may have political and ideological repercussions, such readings have little if any place in academic discourse. I will deal here as much as possible with the simple question of what did or did not take place.[35]

Reasons for interest in the Khazar conversion vary. For some Jews in the past, this story was a source of encouragement in difficult times. Yehudah Halevi's *The Kuzari* describes how a wise Khazar king convened representatives of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism to publicly debate the merits of their respective religions. The king was so convinced by the arguments of the Jews that he and his court converted to Judaism. For many Jews, both in Islamic lands and in Christian ones, the story provided a model of how interfaith dialogues should be held—and how they should end.[36] As Simcha Assaf puts it,

> the conversion of the Khazars is undoubtedly one of the most amazing and beautiful phenomena in Jewish history in the period after the destruction of the temple. An important segment of an entire and powerful nation including its king and ministers take on themselves belief in Judaism and act in accordance with its traditions for hundreds of years.[37]

For others, the view that some or all of the Khazars became Jews lends credence to claims that the bulk of East European Jewry was not descended from "ethnic" Jews. This carries political implications with regard to the ties between contemporary Jews and the Land of Israel.[38] There are those who see religious and other consequences if contemporary Jewry can be shown not to be descended from the Israelites described in the Bible.[39]

The Khazars have also received their share of attention in Russia, mostly thanks to their presumed roles in the formation of the Russian state and in Jewish–Slavic relations.[40] Recent scholarship has also brought to light Stalin's obsession with the story of the Khazars and its impact on his views about Jews.[41] A number of important publications on the supposed conversion have appeared in Russian,[42] and to this day interest in the history of the Khazars does not stem only from scientific curiosity; for some, it is tied to a belief that the history of the Jewish Khazars is a key to understanding contemporary realities.[43] The Jewishness of the Khazars also aroused great interest among Hungarian Jews,[44] largely because of theories that Jewish Khazars immigrated to Hungary and played a role in the formation of the Hungarian state.[45] Likewise, there is significant Turkish interest in the Khazar conversion, perhaps because many regard the Khazars as a Turkish people. Not only was Koestler's book translated into Turkish, but the only translation of Kevin Alan Brook's *The Jews of Khazaria*, another key text, is also in Turkish.[46]

An examination of the historicity of the story of the Khazar conversion to Judaism presents methodological challenges. There is no

formula for measuring evidence to prove something did or did not happen, and history provides few precedents to help us consider whether such a widely attested medieval event actually took place.[47] In this case, there seems to be no option other than to examine each source for its reliability, then to consider the striking absence of material sources[48] and the silence of many medieval texts, before coming to conclusions.

Three questions should be considered at this stage. First, it is important to consider what is meant by the term *to be* or *to become Jewish*. The requirements of observing the Sabbath, kashrut, and the laws regarding sexual relations, to mention only a few elements of rabbinic Judaism, would have presented some serious challenges to a warlike and seminomadic Central Asian people. For this reason, there seems to be a widespread consensus among researchers that although the Khazars accepted Judaism, they did not necessarily adopt talmudic Judaism—though what they did adopt is rarely defined clearly.[49] Many assume that these Khazars adopted some syncretistic or partial form of Judaism. This possibility may serve as a ready answer for doubts as to how these converts could or would have adopted various elements of the complex mixture of rituals, religious laws, beliefs, and patterns of behavior that characterize Judaism. However, though it is simple to offer such an answer, it is less simple to imagine all that this could mean.

A fair amount is known about the adoption of Christianity and Islam in Central Asia, and not in every case did formal adoption of a religion reflect a total religious transformation.[50] The adoption of Judaism by the Khazars could be seen as a variant of this familiar phenomenon. Adhesion to Judaism without full conversion was a known phenomenon in antiquity. But it is unlikely that Khazar Jewishness could have been a phenomenon similar to the "God fearers" of antiquity—gentiles who chose to affiliate with Jewish communities without actually converting.[51] These groups, however, did not create an independent variant of Judaism, adhering instead to established Jewish communities—reacting, that is, to conditions that did not apply in Central Asia. The medieval case closest to the Khazars' is that of the Judaizers in Bulgaria, but there are many important differences between these Jews or Judaizers and the Khazars as well.[52] We might also consider the Judeo-Christian identification,[53] but it is unlikely that Judeo-Christians would be regarded as Jews. Yet another option is to claim that Khazar acceptance of Judaism involved the gradual acceptance of Jewish elements until full self-identification with Judaism evolved.[54] However, there is no evidence for this claim and, as we shall see, little logic to it. In the early modern period, Judaizing groups have adopted various biblical

practices—most notably observance of the Sabbath on Saturday. However, these practices came in the wake of increased study of the Bible and are not relevant to the case of the Khazars. It is also highly unlikely that the Khazars adopted Karaite Judaism.[55]

One might claim that Khazar Judaism did not involve adoption of Jewish rituals and laws but was a form of commitment to an abstract monotheistic theology. If so, it would have resembled Islam as much as Judaism, and there would have been no reason to refer to adherents of this belief as Jews. Moreover, those who wrote about the Khazars in the past generally thought that they knew a Jew when they saw one. When medievals—Muslim, Christian, or Jew—said "Jew," they meant a rabbanite Jew. By the early Middle Ages, lines that might have been unclear in the past were clearly drawn. Jews and non-Jews alike generally accepted that being Jewish involved a conversion ritual and a commitment to the entirety or at least to significant elements of rabbinic Jewish law.[56]

The second question we must consider concerns *who* could have converted the Khazars to Judaism, if they were converted. Both Muslims and Christians sent missionaries to Central Asia, apparently because local believers were not learned or trained enough to carry out conversions. The same limitations would have applied to Jews. Though there may have been Jews in Khazaria in the ninth and tenth centuries, and there were yeshivot in what is now Iraq, no reports have surfaced of rabbis going from Iraq to Khazaria to convert the Khazars or to teach them. As Alexander Kulik puts it, "The 'Khazarian' and 'Canaanite' theories, which are based on an assumption of a mass conversion of Turkic or Slavic tribes in Khazaria, not only do not offer adequate evidence of the phenomenon, but fail to explain the origin of those performing the conversions."[57]

Our third question is, Why would a nation or the leadership of a nation want to convert to Judaism? Some argue that adopting Judaism would have been a clever strategic move, enabling the Khazars to avoid taking sides in the conflict between Christianity and Islam.[58] However, no evidence has ever been adduced for this claim. As Mark Whittow notes, "no one but those in a state already shackled with Christianity would choose a religion so obviously productive of defeat. Islam was a religion of victory."[59] To accept Judaism would have been a problematic step and not at all a neutral stance.[60] Would Christians prefer that the Khazars accept the religion of the crucifiers of Christ over Islam? Would Muslims prefer that the Khazars accept the religion of the Jews, who were first to reject Muhammad, over Christianity? At best, this claim of political advantage is speculative. There is no evidence in the

sources that the Khazars had political grounds for conversion, and there is also no evidence that the Khazar leadership would have chosen a religion simply as a result of political calculations.[61]

Having noted some of the conversion story's weaknesses, I will now examine the primary sources to assess their reliability. References to the conversion appear in various medieval historical, geographical, and exegetical texts, which must be carefully and critically examined. If even one source can be proven reliable, then the question of Khazar conversion is decided. However, if all of the sources are revealed to be questionable, based on legends and not on facts, then it becomes worthwhile to consider indirect and circumstantial evidence regarding the question of the conversion of the Khazars to Judaism. That is what I have set out to do here. The discussion is organized around the religious or cultural group that transmitted each source, beginning with written sources and moving on to other types. The first sources are contemporary primary sources that refer to the conversion.

Documentary Sources

The most promising sources of information regarding the Jewishness of the Khazars in general and their conversion in particular are two, or arguably three, Hebrew texts. The first is what appears to be an exchange of letters between the Spanish Jewish leader Hasdai ibn Shaprut (915–c. 975) and Joseph, king of the Khazars. The correspondence opens with a letter written by Hasdai expressing interest in the history of the Khazars and the nature of their Judaism. A letter from a Spanish Jew is no proof of the Khazars' conversion, but it could be seen as proof that the author, who was well informed but lived thousands of miles away from the Khazar lands, *thought* that the Khazars had converted. However, the second letter, the reply of the Khazar king, might prove important for our purposes.

The Khazar ruler's letter, which includes a detailed history of the Khazars and their conversion, has been preserved in two versions that agree on the main points. Joseph refers to himself as "king of the Turks" and describes how many generations previously, Bulan, one of the first Khazar kings, was visited in his dreams by an angel who led him and later his vizier to recognize the true God.[62] In time, Bulan organized a religious disputation between Christians, Muslims, and Jews in order to determine which was the true religion. When the debate reached a stalemate, Bulan turned to both the Christians and the Muslims and asked them to compare the other religions. Both were naïve

enough to fall into the trap and agreed that Judaism was the truer of the alternatives, upon which the king and his people promptly accepted Judaism.[63] Bulan imported Jewish scholars, who taught him and his people the Torah and the commandments. He was succeeded by his grandson Ovadia, who built synagogues and study houses and gathered many scholars to teach him Torah and Talmud.

The authenticity of the letter has long been debated.[64] It is certainly old, as it was already cited within a century of Hasdai ibn Shaprut's lifetime. A well-known Spanish talmudic scholar named Judah of Barcelona (late eleventh–early twelfth centuries) mentioned the letter but added that he had doubts about the authenticity of the conversion story. Unfortunately, Judah did not spell out the reasons for his uncertainty, but it is unlikely he would have mentioned having doubts without good reasons.[65] Thus his reference to the letter does not provide strong support for its authenticity, but neither is it proof that the letter is not genuine.

The timing of the Khazar conversion according to Joseph's letter is not clear. In one version of the letter, the conversion is dated to 340 years before the letter was written, and at the time of the conversion, the Khazars already ruled over a kingdom. The other version does not specify a specific date but also describes it as far in the past. As the Khazar kingdom was overrun by 970, the latest possible date for the conversion would have been 630. However, we know from other sources that the Khazar kingdom was founded only in the middle of the seventh century.[66] Moreover, as we shall see below, reliable sources (Sallam the Interpreter and Cyril and Methodius) suggest that in the seventh century and later the Khazar leadership was not Jewish, nor was the nation, although Joseph's letter describes mass conversion as early as the seventh century.

The letter mentions that over the course of time, the Khazar kings built synagogues and study halls and gathered many Jewish scholars, giving them great wealth; the scholars expounded the Bible, Mishnah, Talmud, and more. However, none of the scholars are named, no other sources refer to grand synagogues or Jewish study halls, and no archaeological remains of Khazar synagogues have been found. In all of the rich literature produced in that time in the yeshivot of Jerusalem or Babylonia[67] or preserved in the Cairo Geniza, there is not one reference to scholars in the Khazar lands, nor are there references to migration of scholars to Khazaria. There is also no realistic description in the letter of how Jewish law was observed by the Khazar converts, though this would have been no small challenge for a rather warlike nation. Perhaps the author was exaggerating or embellishing the facts, but to

admit as much is simply another way of saying that the story, as recounted in the letter, could not have taken place.

There are also good reasons to doubt that the letter was actually written by a Khazar. A native Khazar would have thought in the Khazar language (likely a Turkic language),[68] and what he wrote, in any language, would reflect his mother tongue. However, the letter is written in a beautiful literary Hebrew.[69] Abraham N. Poliak and others have also noted that there are Arabisms scattered through the text.[70] The king could have hired a native Arabic speaker with a profound knowledge of Hebrew as his Hebrew secretary. But if such masters of Hebrew prose lived in Khazaria, it is all the odder that no other Khazar literary work besides this letter was preserved and that no references to Jewish scholarship in Khazaria exist.

The geographical descriptions in the letter are even more problematic. A king should be familiar with the geography of his kingdom. However, Joseph's letter does not display this kind of knowledge. The borders of the Khazar state described in the letter define an area far larger than the known borders of the empire in the lifetime of Hasdai. This led A. P. Novoseltsev to attempt to reconcile text and reality by stating that the author was describing the borders as they were a century or two before he wrote the letter, in order to impress Hasdai ibn Shaprut.[71] This is possible but feels forced.

Poliak noted[72] that although Joseph showed great familiarity with much of his empire, he seemed to know remarkably little about its eastern part, about the national groups that populated that area, or about trade routes and commercial ties with Khorazem (now Khiva). This is surprising, as trade with Khorazem was an important element of the Khazar economy. Poliak also observed that the geographical information in the letter is similar to the knowledge that a traveler coming from Constantinople to the Southern coast of Crimea could have obtained.[73] Moreover, there are also problems with the letter's references to Crimea.[74] Shapira points out that the letter pays disproportionate attention to Crimean geography, raising the possibility that its author was from Crimea.[75] In two detailed studies, Elena Galkina found additional problems with the letter's geographical accuracy.[76] Finally, the letter does not mention the main cities of the Khazar kingdom by name, something we would have expected of a king who was providing a description of his land.[77]

The letter's description of Khazar economic life is no less problematic. The Khazars were nomads who, though they may have partially adapted to agriculture and sedentary life, were often on the move with their flocks. As one later visitor to the region described it, "Al-Khazar is

an extensive district, . . . a wretched, depressing place. It abounds in grazing animals, honey and Jews."[78] However, the letter describes advanced Khazar agriculture—rich fields, vineyards, orchards—even though this was not in fact typical of the region. There is no mention of livestock. No less serious is the absence of reference to the important trade routes that went through Khazaria. Whittow notes, "In the ninth and tenth centuries the Arab geographers describe a state which has become essentially a commercial empire," but there is not a word about this in the letter, and there is no reason to think that Hasdai would have been uninterested in learning about trade.[79] Finally, the letter describes an urbanized kingdom of "villages, towns and fortress cities," though the archaeologist Valerii Flerov summarized his findings thus: "There were no cities in the Khazar qaghanate [kingdom]."[80] Difficulties also plague the letter's historical descriptions of the wars between the Arabs and Khazars.[81]

The problems with Joseph's letter—incongruous language, geographical and historical inaccuracies, and economic misconceptions—leave little alternative but to regard it as written neither by a Khazar king, nor by a member of his court, nor, for that matter, by anyone in Khazaria.[82] If the letter did not originate in Khazaria, it does not offer any proof that the Khazars converted.[83] I leave it to others to determine who wrote it and why and whether it is a fiction or a forgery.[84]

The creative production of historical sources is an old tradition in many European societies,[85] and the well-known *Donation of Constantine* (*Donatio Constantini*) is only one case of a text that was once widely accepted as genuine and later turned out to be anything but.[86] Medieval Jews did not differ from their neighbors in the production of such texts. In the course of the Maimonidean controversy in thirteenth-century Spain, one partisan forged a last will of Maimonides.[87] Another author "supplied" a letter of a famous Babylonian scholar, Hai Gaon.[88] The classic description in Abraham ibn Daud's *Sefer hakabalah* (The Book of Tradition) of how the study of Torah spread in the western Mediterranean is another Spanish invention.[89] One of the most important medieval histories, *Yosippon*, is attributed to Josephus but was probably written in Italy in the tenth century. Both the *Zohar* and *Sefer Yetsirah* (The Book of Creation) are pseudepigraphic and seem to be products of Spain, though their dates of composition are not certain. A pseudepigraphic Arabic text written in Spain by a Muslim at the time of Hasdai ibn Shaprut is quite similar to the correspondence attributed to him in its concern with buttressing identity.[90] In this context, a pseudepigraphic letter written by Arabic-speaking Jews in Spain and ascribed to the king of the Khazars would

not have been exceptional, especially given the power of the Khazar conversion story in the context of religious polemic, acting as proof that the biblical prophecy of a continuous Judahite kingship was being fulfilled.[91]

The second Hebrew document—the "historical account" of the Khazars, often called the Cambridge Document in reference to the text's current location or the Schechter Document after the first scholar to publish it—is even less credible as a source.[92] It describes Khazar leadership as partially descended from assimilated Jews who had come to Khazaria from Armenia. According to the document, Serah, the Jewish wife of Sabriel, a commander of warriors, convinced her husband to return to his Jewish roots. This aroused the anger of the Christian king of Macedon and the Muslim king of Arabia, whose fury could only be placated by a disputation between representatives of their religions and of the Jews. The debate was fortuitously resolved when the Jewish disputants found a library of Hebrew books that they were able, despite their being assimilated and lacking formal education, to immediately decipher and employ in their religious arguments. After the disputation and the full return to Judaism by the Khazar leadership, Jewish migrants from Christian and Muslim lands flowed into Khazaria.

This account contradicts every other existing account of the Khazars and their adhesion to Judaism; if this account is accurate, every other one is wrong. Both the Jewish ancestry of the participants in the dispute and the miraculous finding of the texts are unique to this account. According to this document, the kings of Macedon and Arabia are likely metaphors for the Byzantine emperor and the Muslim caliph. But the idea that those two figures would be angered by the religious practice of a Khazar general and that they would agree to send representatives to a religious dispute in far-off Khazaria strains even a credulous mind; moreover, Muslim and Byzantine sources make no mention of any of this. The miraculous discovery of the books, which are hidden in a cave, is certainly possible, but it is not very likely. Even less plausible is the claim that the finders, who had grown up without books and without a Hebrew education, were immediately able to read and understand them. Equally problematic is the claim that the episode resulted in large-scale Jewish migration to Khazaria from Baghdad, Khorasan, and Greece. No such migration is indicated in any other sources.[93] The author mentions that "they say in our land that our fathers were of the tribe of Simeon, but we cannot insist on the truth of this matter." The tribe of Simeon was not only one of the ten lost tribes but also a tribe that apparently ceased to be a recognized entity even in the biblical

period. The reference to this long-extinct tribe fits the tradition of the ten lost tribes, but it is an odd choice of ancestry.[94] The names Serah and Sabriel, cited in the Schechter text as names of Khazars, have rich intertextual meanings befitting a literary creation. In Jewish literature, Serah is the name of a daughter of Asher who reputedly lived for hundreds of years and revealed the burial place of Joseph to the Israelites in Egypt. Sabriel is the name of an angel.[95] In addition, there appears to be a significant disparity between the events described in this letter and events described in Russian sources.[96] Pavel Kokovtsov points out many similarities between this letter and the pseudepigraphic *Yosippon*.[97]

Though the author of the text had some familiarity with the realities and images of steppe life,[98] it is difficult to regard this letter as the authentic work of a Khazar Jew, and it is necessary to conclude that this text as well cannot be used as a source regarding events in Khazaria.

The third Hebrew document is a letter from a Jew appealing for assistance from his fellow Jews to help him cover a debt.[99] It is either addressed to the Jewish community of Kiev or sent from that community. The names of a number of individuals, which may be Khazar, appear in the letter, which also seems to have a Khazar symbol on it. The letter makes no reference to Khazar conversion or to the Jewishness of the Khazars and at best provides proof that there were Jews in Khazaria,[100] a point of undisputed fact. The question is whether Khazar conversion took place. Thus, like the others, this letter cannot serve as a source of information about a conversion to Judaism or about the Jewishness of the Khazar ruling elite. In short, none of the Hebrew texts are reliable sources of information on the Khazars and the Khazar conversion.[101]

Other documents on the topic merit attention. The only extant firsthand report of a visitor to Khazaria is the detailed report of Sallam the Interpreter (*al-tardjuman* or *torjuman*), who was sent by Caliph al-Wathiq in 842 to search for the mythical Alexander's wall. In his report, Sallam mentions having contact with the Khazars, but he does not refer to their Jewishness. Had they been Jewish, it is hardly likely that he would have ignored the fact.[102]

In 861 two brothers, Saint Cyril (Constantine) and Saint Methodius, prominent Greek churchmen who later invented the Slavic script, were sent as missionaries to the Khazars. We do not have a report written by them, but a contemporary letter written by Anastasius the Librarian refers explicitly to their mission to the Khazars.[103] However, Anastasius makes no reference to the Jewishness of the Khazars.[104] Had the Khazars or Khazar leadership been Jewish, it is unlikely that the missionaries would have received a warm welcome, and it is equally unlikely that Anastasius would not mention this fact.

The biography of Cyril, entitled *Vita Constantini* (Life of Constantine), a much later source, also refers to this mission. According to the biography, the Jews had been pressuring the Khazars to convert to Judaism, leading the Khazars to invite Cyril and Methodius to come and represent Christianity.[105] The account does not offer details as to the number of the Jews, how they were able to exert pressure on the Khazars, or why Judaism was appealing to the Khazars, but it does state that although many Khazars were impressed by Cyril, nonetheless the nation did not convert to Christianity. The earliest copy of the text is from the fifteenth century, and because the transmission of medieval Orthodox Slavic texts often involved complex processes of compilation and revision, we cannot simply assume that extant textual witnesses of *Vita Constantini* bear a close relationship to the original text.[106] If the text is reliable, it proves that in 861, the Khazars had not yet converted to Judaism, which would fit with the letter of Anastasius the Librarian. The report of Jewish attempts to proselytize the Khazars could be true, though it is not hinted at in Anastasius's letter; it could also be a later interpolation.[107]

A third contemporaneous source relevant to the Khazars is a letter of the patriarch of Constantinople, Nicholas, written around 914.[108] Nicholas mentions individuals who had come from Khazaria asking "for a bishop to ordain presbyters among them and to undertake the ministry concerning the pure faith of the Christians," and he informs the recipient that the archbishop of Cherson has been sent to Khazaria. Here as well there is no reference to the Jewishness of the Khazars—and this is already well into the tenth century.[109]

Nicholas also wrote a letter to the archbishop of Cherson in which he referred to the Khazars as "that deluded nation, so nearly ravished from the bosom of piety by the evil demon."[110] It is not clear what the term *evil demon* refers to. The phrase is used in a much later document, from 1391, where it clearly refers to Islam.[111] However, the phrase as used in Nicholas's letter could refer to other groups, perhaps including the Jews. In any case, the absence of references to Jews in Nicholas's first letter suggests that at least up until 914, the Khazars were not Jewish.

Another relevant document on the Khazars' conversion is found in the travelogue of Ahmad ibn Fadlan, who set off in 921 on a journey that brought him to the kingdom of the Bulgars, near Khazaria.[112] His lively description of the Khazars is therefore based on informants and possibly on literary sources but not on firsthand knowledge.[113] We do not have the complete text of ibn Fadlan's travel report but only a large fragment, found in 1923 in Meshed (Iran), that ends in the middle of the description of the Khazars and lacks any reference to their Jewishness. However, a long citation of ibn Fadlan by Yaqut ibn 'Abd Allah

al-Hamawi (1179–1229), who wrote long after the Khazar state had ceased to exist, contains the laconic comment that "the Khazars and their king are all Jews."[114] This same long quotation notes, "and the king has nine judges of Jews, Christians, Muslims, and idol worshippers. If a legal case arises for some people these [judges] adjudicate it."[115] This might have been written by ibn Fadlan, or it might have been added by Yaqut or by the copyist of ibn Fadlan whom he relied on.[116]

According to ibn Fadlan, the Khazar kings each had 25 wives and 60 concubines. In addition, if a king ruled for 40 years, he was put to death on the grounds that after so many years he would be confused and no longer sharp witted. Ibn Fadlan also reported that when a Khazar king died, his body was buried in a special house that was then flooded by a river; the individuals involved in the burial were killed so that the exact location of the burial could never be discovered. Almost all of this is in clear violation of Jewish law,[117] and it also seems rather fantastic.[118] Ibn Fadlan also makes no reference to observance of any Jewish rituals, even though Sabbath observance and other rituals might be expected to have aroused some attention.[119]

Ibn Fadlan's fascination with the bizarre, his lack of a critical sense with regard to stories he was told, and his lack of explanation for the conversion to Judaism weaken the claim that he can be regarded as a reliable source for Khazar conversion to Judaism. It would be simpler to claim that he relied uncritically on either an earlier source or a traveler for his story.

There are a number of relevant administrative texts or documents that were written contemporaneously with the Khazar Empire and reflect familiarity with the Khazars. They should be a valuable potential source of information on the conversion of the Khazars.

The earliest was written by ibn Khordadbeh (820–912), who was the director of posts and intelligence of the Abbasid caliph. His *Book of Roads and Kingdoms* contains one of the most extensive descriptions of the Jewish merchants known as Radhanites, who were reputed to have served as trade links between Europe and China. Ibn Khordadbeh wrote about these merchants, "Sometimes, also, they take the route behind Rome and, passing through the country of the Slavs, arrive at Khamlidj, the capital of the Khazars."[120] Ibn Khordadbeh does not state that the ruler of the Khazars had recently become a coreligionist of these traders. Given his detailed knowledge and his interest in Jewish traders, it is difficult to imagine that he would have overlooked a conversion of leading Khazars.

The second is *Kitab al-kharaj wa-sina'at al-kitaba* (Book of the Land Tax and the Art of the Secretary), written by Qudama ibn Ja'far (d.

948) in Baghdad late in the first half of the ninth century. The book could be termed an administrative encyclopedia. The author was a well-informed employee of the Abbasid regime, and the book was intended not to entertain readers but to serve as a practical work that provided a hierarchy of knowledge. The author gives careful attention to the status of minorities such as Christians and Jews and among other topics deals with geographical knowledge. In the course of his presentation, he devotes a fair degree of attention to the Khazars. If the Khazars were ever Jewish, it would have been at the time Qudama ibn Ja'far wrote. However, there is no such reference in his writing or even a hint of any link between Khazars and Jews.[121]

The third is *De administrando imperio* (On the Governance of the Empire), "a handbook of diplomacy enriched with a wide range of historical and antiquarian material" apparently edited in 952 by the Byzantine emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus.[122] The text refers to the Khazars, sometimes in great detail, in at least ten places,[123] classifying them among "the infidel and dishonourable tribes of the North" without any mention of Jewishness. The author was not enamored of the Khazars, to say the least:

> Know therefore that all the tribes of the north have, as it were implanted in them by nature, a ravening greed of money, never satiated, and so they demand everything and hanker after everything and have desires that know no limit or circumscription, but are always eager for more and desirous to acquire great profits in exchange for a small service.[124]

The author elsewhere is quite interested in Jews, who he believes are teaching Muslims to commit nefarious crimes against Christians. In his description of the capture of Rhodes by the Muslims, he is careful to note that the vandalized statue of the Colossus was purchased for scrap by "a Jew from Edessa."[125] Some of the references to Jews appeared in the sources he used, but it is significant that he left them in. If he was interested enough in Jews to do so, it is difficult to understand why he would not note that the Khazar leadership had embraced Judaism.

None of these texts refer to the Jewishness of the Khazars at the time they were written.

Historical and Geographical Accounts

The Cambridge Document and the Khazar king's correspondence with Hasdai ibn Shaprut were preceded and possibly inspired by or

based on shorter and less detailed reports in the works of certain Muslim geographers and historians. Even if the Hebrew letters are apocryphal, the reports they were based on might themselves be accurate,[126] and so they too must be evaluated for their legitimacy as evidence for the Jewishness of the Khazars. It is important to bear in mind that none of the Muslim writers who wrote in Arabic and whose works have survived had firsthand knowledge of Khazaria. The lands of the Khazars and Central Asia were far from their familiar world, and they all relied on written or oral sources. The level of knowledge and sophistication in many of these works is often impressive, especially when compared to the writings of contemporaries in other societies. However, we cannot assume accuracy in reports of locales that the authors never visited themselves. In addition, we cannot take for granted that they were interested in providing accurate descriptions of the peoples living in lands that were relatively inaccessible and out of regular commercial contact.[127] Often the goal of writers was to entertain readers rather than to enlighten them.

It must be remembered that for Muslim chroniclers and geographers, the religious identity of the Khazars was a trivial topic. It was not relevant to commercial or even political activity. Therefore, the topic did not call for fact checking, and few details were offered. In fact, long after the Khazars had been eliminated as a significant power, some writers still referred to the Khazar leader and his Jewishness as if he were at the height of his power, indicating the relative lack of interest that this topic generally aroused.[128]

Because the works of historians and geographers (or travelers) could transmit legends or rumors as well as they could transmit descriptions of reality, we need to examine the reports carefully for indications of accuracy and veracity. As Yehoshua Frenkel noted, "fantasy stories (*aja'ib*) constitute . . . a salient feature of the travelogues,"[129] necessitating vigilance from the historian. I will consider here all of the Muslim sources written before the mid-tenth century that refer to Khazar Jewishness, and I will examine internal and external evidence that can shed light on their veracity. I also tried to determine whether later sources preserved early materials that could be regarded as reliable, but this turned out not to be the case.

Most of the reports we have on the Khazar conversion come from works of descriptive geographical literature written by Iraqi and Iranian scholars who are generally classified as belonging to one of two schools—one often identified as the Jayhani tradition, after the author of a no-longer extant geography that was heavily cited by the scholars of this school, and the other known as the al-Balkhi school,

after its founder, which had a strong Iranian element and saw Mecca as its center.[130] The works of these writers combined novel contributions with large parts of the works of their predecessors.

Perhaps the earliest surviving Arabic text that refers to Khazar Jewishness is that of ibn Rustah, a Persian scholar (of the Iraqi school) who wrote an encyclopedic work on geography in the early tenth century.[131] Ibn Rustah never was in Khazaria but wrote of the Khazars, "Their supreme chief professes the religion of the Jews and so do Isha and the leaders and great ones who side with him. And the rest of them profess a religion similar to the religion of the Turks."[132] He added no other details, nor did he explain how this came to be.

There is no question that ibn Rustah was relying on a source, since he himself was never in Khazaria. The question that has to be asked is: What was his source and how reliable was it? There is a scholarly consensus that ibn Rustah derived much of his information from the works of Abu Abdallah al Jayhani (or Gayhani) who was a contemporary of his.[133] It is also possible that he based his description of Central Asia on the work of an earlier geographer, al-Garmi, who wrote in the mid-ninth century.[134] Since the works of al-Garmi and al-Jahyani are no longer extant, we have no way to learn much about the quality of the source from them.

It is possible to use some indirect and internal information to come to a better understanding of the utility of ibn Rustah's statement. In his description of the Khazars, he identifies a Khazar prince or regent as having the name or title Isha or Isa and notes that the Khazar capital was a city named Sarigshin. Neither the name or title of the ruler nor the name of the city is known as such in any other text.[135] The simplest explanation is that these terms are a corrupted form of an original. Irrespective of the identification, this means that the author was relying on second- or thirdhand sources.[136]

Ibn Rustah was writing before Patriarch Nicholas, who did not make note of the Jewishness of the Khazars, and some of the sources ibn Rustah might have used, such as al-Garmi, antedated the correspondence dealing with Cyril and Methodius from 861. His report also does not match the descriptions of ibn Khordadbeh, Qudama ibn Ja'far, and Constantine Porphyrogenitus. These are not simple issues, and accepting ibn Rustah's statement as accurate raises the question why the documents written during this period ignored this fact. If this difficulty is avoided by claiming that ibn Rustah used a more recent source, from after 861, it is noteworthy that he did not depict the conversion as a recent event. The difficulties with ibn Rustah are not a new discovery. James Montgomery writes, "Ibn Rusta's

information has, from time to time, been subjected to considerable scrutiny with a view to assessing the historical value of its yield. It has almost universally been found wanting."[137]

The close and critical reading of ibn Rustah could be regarded as hypercritical and unreasonably demanding of a medieval source. However, ibn Rustah himself would probably not agree. In the opening paragraph of his description of his hometown, Isfahan, he wrote that in his descriptions of other places in his book, he had to rely on sources that were of questionable veracity and were sometimes legendary in nature or were transmitted by persons of questionable reliability. This was because it was very difficult for him to get reliable information about far-away places. He contrasts this situation with his direct and accurate knowledge about his hometown.[138] In other words, he made no claims about the quality of his depiction of far-away places, and there is no reason to attribute to his work a greater value than he himself gave it.

Ibn Rustah's report that the Khazar leader and the elite of the Khazars were Jews was paraphrased by later writers such as Gardizi and al-Qurtubi. Therefore, these should be regarded not as three independent testimonies to the conversion of the Khazars but rather as one, and thus there is no need to analyze each in detail.[139]

Another oft-cited source, hailing from the al-Balkhi school, was written by a Persian scholar known as al-Istakhri, who wrote around the year 930. In his description of the Khazars, he reports,

> Their king is a Jew. It is said that his attendants number about 4,000 men. The Khazars are Muslims, Christians and Jews and among them are a number of idolaters. The smallest group is the Jews, most of them being Muslims and Christians though the king and his court are Jews.[140]

According to this report, the majority of the Khazars were Christian and Muslim. This contradicts Ibn Rustah's statement that in his time, the majority were pagans. It is possible that in the years between the two accounts, many of the pagan Khazars accepted Christianity or Islam. However, how this might have happened under Jewish leadership is not explained. Nowhere in his lengthy description of the Khazars does al-Istakhri explain how the Khazar king and his circle became Jewish, suggesting that he did not know.

It is not clear what sources al-Istakhri used. It seems that he relied on ibn Fadlan, the nature of whose work is discussed above, though he certainly used additional sources as well.[141] Here, as in the case of ibn Rustah, an examination of his description of the Khazars is revealing. Al-Istakhri recounted an interesting anecdote about the Khazars:

> The Khaghanate [position of ruler or king] is in a group of notables who possess neither sovereignty nor riches. When the chief place comes to one of them, they appoint him without regard to what his condition is. A reliable witness told me that he had seen in one of their markets a young man selling bread. They said that when their emperor died, there was none worthier to the Khaghanate than he, only he was a Muslim, and the Khaghanate is never given to any but a Jew.[142]

This is a fascinating story, though it seems unlikely that a young bread seller would really have been the best-qualified person to lead a major and warlike empire. It seems more likely that the moral of the story (told by a Muslim) is that even a Muslim bread seller is more qualified than a Jew for the post of *khaghan* (king). Ibn Hawqal, a writer who was a contemporary of al-Istakhri, said more or less the same, and it seems that he based his statement on al-Istakhri.[143] As a didactic story it might be useful, but this is clearly a secondhand report that cannot be taken as a depiction of reality. What is significant is that al-Istakhri also has to be used with caution.

One of the most cited sources on the Jewishness of the Khazars is al-Mas'udi (b. Baghdad 896, d. Cairo 956), a well-respected writer who was apparently interested in Jews and who wrote a detailed description of the Khazars in his book *Muruj adh-dhahab wa ma'adin al-jawhar* (The Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems).[144] His writing is realistic, leading Novoseltsev to consider al-Mas'udi's report to be the only source on the Khazars "worthy of belief."[145] However, Paul Wheatley wrote of him, "Al-Mas'udi was generally content to accept the testimony of secondary, somewhat dubious, sources at their face value. Only seldom did he investigate primary sources."[146] Therefore, he should be read carefully.

Al-Mas'udi wrote the following description of Itil, the Khazar capital:

> In this town are many Moslims and Christians, Jews and Pagans. The king [and] his suite . . . embraced the tenets of the Jews, in the reign of ar-Rashid. To this king flock the Jews from all the Moslim districts, and from the Byzantine Empire; for the emperor forced the Jews of his dominions to turn Christians, and loaded the converts with favours. The present Byzantine emperor is Armanus.[147]

Although the description of the Khazars continues for a few pages, only this passage mentions their Jewishness, but no other details about it are offered. In the continuation, al-Mas'udi, following al-Istakhri, states that "the majority of the population of this country

are Muslims," that the standing army is made up of Muslims, that the vizier is also a Muslim, and that complex legal decisions are ultimately decided by Muslim law. He does not explain why the Muslim majority was willing to tolerate a Jewish ruler or why the Jewish ruler accepted a secondary role in the legal system.

The best way to assess al-Mas'udi's description of the Khazars' Jewishness is to examine three of his statements related to the Khazar conversion that can be tested against outside sources—one on the status of Muslims in the Khazar state, another on persecutions of Jews in Byzantium, and the third on the date of the Khazar conversion.

Al-Mas'udi's first statement, on the status of Muslims in Khazaria, reads as follows:

> [T]here are many Muslims in this kingdom; . . . they are artisans, tradespeople, and merchants, who have been attracted by the justice and security (of persons and property) afforded by the government. They have a great public mosque the Minaret of which rises above the royal palace; and several private mosques where children are instructed in reading the Koran. If the Muslims and Christians, who are there, agree, the king has no power over them.[148]

This statement presents three problems. First, the report about a massive mosque and a multiplicity of Islamic schools is not corroborated by the reports of other Muslim authors. There are references to a mosque, but not one of such great dimensions, and they make no mention of instruction in private mosques. Second, the inability of the Khazar king to overrule Muslim decisions is not documented elsewhere and is probably not typical for rulers in the region.[149] These issues alone would merit attention, but there is a third and greater problem: this description appears to contradict another one. Al-Baladhuri (d. 892) wrote in his *Kitab futuh al-buldan* (Book of the Conquests of Lands) the following comment about the city Shamkur (now in Azerbaijan):

> In the year 240 the city was rebuilt by Bugha, the freedman of al-Mu'tasim and the governor of Armenia, Adharbaijan and Shimshat. He settled in it people from al-Khazar who, because of their interest in Islam came, and sought security. He also transplanted merchants to it from Bardha'ah and called it al-Mutawakkiliyah.[150]

The presence of Muslim refugees from Khazaria seeking security in Shamkur does not fit with a description of thriving Muslim life in Itil and a political framework in which Muslims held power. On the contrary,

it suggests that al-Mas'udi's description is exaggerated and inaccurate. Nevertheless, as al-Baladhuri lived about half a century before al-Mas'udi, it is possible, though not likely, that Islam flourished in Khazaria only after al-Baladhuri's death and that this new situation was what al-Mas'udi was reporting, though al-Mas'udi does not refer to recent improvements in the condition of the Muslim population.

The second statement concerns the persecution of Jews in Byzantium. Al-Mas'udi, who was generally well informed about what went on in Byzantium,[151] wrote regarding the emperor Romanus Lecapenus (d. 948), "The emperor forced the Jews of his dominions to turn Christians, and loaded the converts with favours. . . . Under these circumstances, many Jews took flight from the Byzantine empire into the country of the Khazar."[152]

We might expect that such dramatic events would have been mentioned in other contemporary sources,[153] but oddly enough, this is the only source regarding the persecution and the forced conversion of the Jews by Romanus Lecapenus. Moreover, when Romanus wrote to the Khazar ruler, he did not use hostile language but instead employed a diplomatic tone:

> To the Khaghan [*chaganos*] of Khazaria. A three-solidus gold bull. "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, our one and sole true God. Constantine and Romanos, Emperors of the Romans, faithful to God, to [name] the most noble [*eugenestatos*], most renowned [*periphanestatos*] Khaghan of Khazaria."[154]

This suggests that Byzantine ties with the Khazars were normal and correct ties—not at all what one would expect from al-Mas'udi's description.

The Vision of Daniel, a Byzantine Jewish source from this period,[155] contains a portion that reads, "And in his days the lowly people will dwell in tranquility. And afterwards there will arise a king who will persecute them by driving out and not by destruction but mercifully. He will set his face against God but he will not succeed."[156] *Driving out* qualifies for admission into the category of persecution, but it is not forced conversion. Nor does the term *merciful* fit al-Mas'udi's picture. In any case, it is clear that there were Jewish communities in Byzantium after the reign of Romanus, so unless there was mass Jewish migration to Byzantium after the death of Romanus or reversion of converted Jews to Judaism—both unlikely—it is necessary to conclude that the Jews of Byzantium were never forced to convert.[157] As Robert Bonfil recently wrote in a discussion of Byzantine Jewry, "There is no need to assume

that Romanus issued a formal decree of compulsory conversion, of which no evidence whatsoever has survived, beyond hearsay reports of foreign provenience."[158]

An eleventh-century text supports the view that there were no extreme persecutions of the Jews in the time of Romanus Lecapenus. The Nestorian metropolitan Elias of Nisibis compared the Byzantines to the Muslims in his book *Demonstration of the Correctness of the Faith*, written before 1046. He was critical of the Byzantines, who, according to him, deny Nestorians the right to build churches yet tolerate numerous Jews, offer them protection, and allow public worship and the construction of synagogues, even though the Jews say terrible things about Christianity.[159] His argument would have been substantially weakened had the Jews been persecuted within the last century, as his readers were well acquainted with Byzantine realities; it is difficult to imagine that he would have taken this risk. It is simpler to assume that no such persecutions took place and that Elias of Nisibis had good grounds for his claim.

As for the third statement, on the date of the Khazar conversion, al-Mas'udi explicitly dates this event to the reign of ar-Rashid, who died in 809. The conversion, according to al-Mas'udi, would therefore have taken place between about 790 and 809, a date that contradicts the picture of the situation in Khazaria derived from sources related to the mission of Cyril and Methodius. It also does not fit with a reliable contemporary Muslim source that refers to the Khazars, that of ibn Khordadbeh. The examination of these statements reveals that al-Mas'udi presents problematic information in all three cases. This does not prove that everything he said was false, but it does show that he was far from an ideal or reliable source.

Ibn Rustah and al-Istakhri both wrote that some of the Khazars converted to Judaism. However, some writers went further, saying that all of the Khazars, not just a circle of the ruling class, were Jews. This claim was first made by ibn al-Faqih al-Hamdhani, a contemporary and compatriot of ibn Rustah. In his *Mukhtasar Kitab al-Buldan* (Concise Book of Lands, probably written in the first years of the tenth century), he wrote: "[A]ll of the Khazars are Jews. But, they have been Judaized recently."[160] In other words, he dated the conversion to the late ninth century. He did not cite a source and seems to have relied on works that employed legendary or semi-legendary materials. He located the land of the Khazars in relation to the biblical and Koranic land of Gog and Magog, and he wrote of a huge wall of stones and lead that separated the land of al-Sisagan from the land of the Khazars. Whatever the identity of al-Sisagan, this is also clearly a fictional wall, probably a reference to the legendary wall of Alexander. He attributes the foundation of

Balanjer, which he saw as a Khazar city, to Balanjer, son of Japhet.[161] Thus, even if his source cannot be precisely identified, it was not first-hand information and not necessarily very reliable.

In general, ibn al-Faqih was not a critical historian. He tended to prefer written sources to direct knowledge, and he was interested in curiosities as much as significant facts.[162] According to R. Blachère, ibn al-Faqih reproduced a large number of legends, beliefs, and ideas from the geographical folklore of his time.[163] It is still surprising that he did not try to explain how such a remarkable conversion took place. We can only speculate as to why. Perhaps it did not interest him. Perhaps his written sources reported the fact but had no explanation—in which case the question simply passes to those sources. Another possibility is that ibn al-Faqih had no written sources about the Jewishness of the Khazars but did hear reports that the Khazars were Jewish, creatively reconciling the contradiction between oral reports and written sources by coming to the reasonable conclusion that if both were correct, then the Judaization must have taken place recently.

The report of Abu Ali Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Yaqub Miskawayh (932–1030) is even more problematic:

> In this year[164] news came to the effect that the Turks had invaded the territory of the Khazars. The latter invoked the aid of the people of Khwarizm [Khiva], who declined, saying: You are Jews; if you want us to help you, you must become Muslims. They all adopted Islam in consequence, with the exception of their king.[165]

According to other sources, it was not the Turks who invaded Khazaria but the Rus,[166] and though Miskawayh reports on the conversion, he does not report on whether the people of Khiva carried out their side of the bargain, even though these are obvious questions. The fate of the king is not reported. This lack of concern for details should not surprise us, as Miskawayh himself did not travel and relied on the reports of others.[167] Moreover, the goal he had set himself when beginning to write was not simply to document but to create a text that was didactic in nature. As one researcher put it, Miskawayh "wanted the experiences of nations to serve as examples to the generals, statesmen, and the people."[168] The details, in this case, do not seem to have been important.[169] However, for our purposes, a writer who is not concerned with details is a problematic source.

The only Muslim historian or geographer who seems to have visited Khazaria and to refer to the Jewishness of the Khazars is Muhammad al-Muqaddasi. Unfortunately for our purposes, he did so long after the

Khazars had ruled an empire. Born in the mid-tenth century, al-Muqaddasi based his classic work, *Akhsan al-taqasim fi ma'rifat al-aqalim* (The Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions), on his travels through the Islamic world.[170] Though he visited Itil, he did not see a Jewish king but only heard that there had once been one. Al-Muqaddasi noted:

> Itil is a large capital. . . . There are many Muslims here. Their king was a Jew. . . . I heard that al-Ma'mun invaded them from al-Jurjaniyya [in the region near Khiva] and overcame them, requiring the king to adopt Islam. Then I heard that an army from the Romaeans, called al-Rus, invaded them and took possession of their country.[171]

The reference to al-Ma'mun appears to be either to Khalif al-Ma'mun (813–33) or to the amir of Gurgandj, Abu 'l-'Abbas al-Ma'mun ibn Muhammad (d. 997). Neither possibility is very convincing. If the campaign took place in the time of Khalif al Ma'mun, we run into the same contradiction with documentary sources raised above in discussing ibn Rustah. If al-Muqaddasi meant the amir of Gurgandj, the campaign would be dated after the destruction of the Khazar Empire—a clear impossibility. Moreover, the biographies of both al-Ma'muns make no mention of a campaign launched from Khiva to Kazaria. Wilhelm Barthold summarizes the point simply: "In neither case is the story of the change of religion historical."[172]

A comment by al-Muqaddasi regarding Gog and Magog is indicative of his historiographical method. While listing differences of opinion about various places, he notes: "Some say the rampart of Yajuj and Majuj [Gog and Magog] is beyond al-Andalus; others say it is at the mountain pass of Khazaran, and that Gog and Magog are Khazars."[173] For al-Muqaddasi, despite his visit to Itil and firsthand familiarity with the Khazars, the Khazar identity of Gog and Magog remained a possibility. This statement says much more about al-Muqaddasi than it does about the Khazars. Al-Muqaddasi, like many of his predecessors, did not share the goals of modern historians and thus cannot be used—or judged—in the way that modern historians are used—and judged.

The last tenth-century source to consider is a statement by Abu'l-Faraj Muhammad bin Is'haq al-Nadim (died c. 995). He wrote in his book *Kitab al-Fihrist* (The Index of the Sciences, c. 988) that "the Bulgarians and the Tibetans write with Chinese and Manichaean, whereas the Khazar write Hebrew."[174] Wasserstein notes: "We hear nothing at all reliable about this from any other source, so it is difficult even to know how far we can accept that statement, let alone build anything on it."[175]

Certainly the claim that Bulgarian was written in Chinese characters adds little to al-Nadim's trustworthiness, and if this is the nature of al-Nadim's knowledge about the Khazars, it would seem that he cannot be used as reliable evidence for the Khazar conversion.

It seems that one or more of these Muslim geographers and historians influenced the earliest Hebrew reference to the Jewishness of the Khazars, found in a biblical commentary written by a Karaite scholar named Qirqisani. While explaining a verse that refers to Japhet (Genesis 9:27), he notes that some "are of the opinion that this verse alludes to the Khazars who accepted Judaism."[176] Qirqisani apparently lived in present-day Iraq in the first half of the tenth century. He was a knowledgeable scholar, but he had no firsthand information on the Khazars, so his statement is not that of an eyewitness. If he did not have an informant with direct knowledge, he was probably relying on one or more of the sources discussed above. In his other writings, he surveys the Jewish sects and groups of his time and describes in detail a number of Jewish communities as part of his survey of the Jews.[177] However, despite his interest in such groups, he makes no mention of Khazar Jews. In the commentary, Qirqisani is careful to note that he is citing the views of others but that he does not necessarily identify with their views. Thus, although this passage is evidence that accounts of Khazar conversion were known in Qirqisani's lifetime, it is not proof that he believed they had converted or that they indeed converted.[178]

Christian of Stavelot, a French monk best known for his commentary on Matthew, likely written between 865 and 880, refers to the Jewishness of the Khazars, but he was never near Central Asia, and so he also must have been influenced, directly or indirectly, by Muslim accounts or by a shared source. In his commentary, Christian wrote:

> We are not aware of any nation under the sky that would not have Christians among them. For even in Gog and Magog, the Hunnic people who call themselves Gazari, those whom Alexander confined, there was a tribe more brave than the others. This tribe has already been circumcised and they profess all the dogmata of Judaism.[179]

This short text is full of references to fantastic tales. Not only is the land of Gog and Magog legendary, but the Khazars as we know them were not Huns.[180] Almost every element of Christian of Stavelot's account is as legendary as Alexander's wall, with the exception of his account of the conversion of the Bulgars to Christianity.[181] Therefore it is difficult to see this report as conclusive or even partial proof that the Khazars converted to Judaism.[182]

Silence of the Sources

Having exhausted the sources[183] that mention the Jewishness of the Khazars,[184] it is necessary to examine the texts that might be expected to mention the conversion of the Khazars but that are seemingly unfamiliar with such an event. The conversion of a powerful nation or the leadership of such a nation to Judaism was not an everyday event. One might therefore expect to find responses and reactions in the writings of contemporary Jews and in the literature of neighboring peoples. However, such reports are nonexistent. This widespread phenomenon means that we have a case of an argument not just from silence but from a multiplicity of silences. A survey of the potential sources that do not mention the conversion story is striking.

The Byzantine state had many ties with the Khazars and had very good reasons to follow events and developments in Khazaria. Despite this fact, Byzantine and Middle Eastern Christian sources make no mention of the conversion to Judaism or of the Jewish identity of the Khazars.[185] The silence of Constantine Porphyrogenitus and of Elias of Nisibis was noted above. There is also no mention of the conversion of the Khazars to Judaism in the tenth-century chronicles of Theophanes Continuatus and Joseph Genesios.[186] Eutychius, a Melkite patriarch in Alexandria also known as Sa'id ibn Batriq (877–940), mentions in his *Annals* that the descendants of Japhet lived in Yagug, Magug, and Khazaria, among other places. He does not say that they were Jewish, though when describing Yemen he makes a point of mentioning that Jews lived there.[187]

Some early Russian sources refer to the Khazars, mentioning both Jews and Jews from Khazaria, but they do not refer to a Jewish king or to conversion to Judaism.[188] In a description of the conversion of Prince Vladimir to Christianity (in 988), the following story appears:

> The Jewish Khazars heard of these missions [to convert the prince] and came themselves saying, "We have learned that Bulgars and Christians came hither to instruct you in their faiths. The Christians believe in him whom we crucified, but we believe in the one God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Vladimir inquired about their religion. They replied that its tenets included circumcision, not eating pork or hare and observing the Sabbath. The prince then asked where their native land was, and they replied that it was in Jerusalem. When Vladimir inquired where that was, they answered, "God was angry at our forefathers, and scattered us among the gentiles on account of our sins. Our land was then given to the Christians." The Prince then demanded, "How can you hope to teach others while you yourselves are cast out and scattered abroad by

> the hand of God? If God loved you and your faith, you would not be dispersed in foreign lands. Do you expect us to accept that fate also?"[189]

If the conversation had taken place after the fall of a Jewish-ruled Khazar state, the reply should have referred to that fact, as it would have clinched the argument against the Jewish representatives. The story also appears to be typological and cannot be taken literally or used as a historical source.[190]

The story of the Khazar conversion to Judaism is absent in other literatures as well.[191] Dan Shapira surveyed Georgian and Armenian sources in which it would have been quite reasonable to expect reports on Khazar Jewishness and found that they contained "absolutely no direct reference to Judaism among the Khazars."[192] The detailed survey of Georgian sources edited by Vakhtang Goiladze contains no references to Jewish Khazars,[193] nor is there any such reference in early Bulgarian sources[194] or Syriac chronicles.[195] A seventeenth-century work by Ahmad ibn-Lutfullah, *Jami al-duwal* (The Compendium of Nations), based on the eleventh-century *Ta'rikh bab al-abwab* (History of the Gate of Heaven), contains a detailed history of Darband and Sharvan and says a great deal about the Khazars but not a word about their Jewishness.[196]

Even more notable is the absence of references to the conversion of the Khazars in Jewish sources. The closest large Jewish community to the Khazar lands was that of Iraq. A rich and variegated literature written there in the gaonic period has survived, including the work of Saadia Gaon, and though the literature contains references to Jews in Khazar lands, it provides no indication that the Khazar king or the political elite were Jewish.[197]

An Arabic fragment of an early medieval Jewish commentary on Isaiah, published by Abraham Harkavy, refers to the Khazars:

> They said "The Lord hath loved him" [Isaiah 48:14] refers to the Khazars who will go and destroy Babylonia . . . and when the prophet says "He will do His will" he means the will of God . . . and if you explain the verse as referring to the Khazars, you will say that the Khazars will carry out the will of God in Babylonia. "His arm" refers to God's arm and if you will explain the text as referring to the Khazars, you will say that they will do the will of God in Babylonia and God's arm which he will give to them means "with the courage of God that He will give" to whoever will destroy the Chaldeans and devastate Babylonia.[198]

Such a text would have been an ideal place to refer to the Khazars' acceptance of the Torah—had the commentator thought that they had indeed accepted it—but he did not refer to a conversion.

The Judeo-Arabic version of the *Apocalypse of Zerubbavel*, written in 970, apparently by a Jew from Mosul, contains an explicit reference to the Khazars but not to their Jewishness.[199] Yet another obvious place for a reference to the Jewishness of the Khazars, had they been Jewish, would be the chronicle of Nathan ha-Bavli (890–913). The author writes:

> Kohen Zedeq ben Yosef had been in charge of the academy in Pumbadita [i.e., Anbar] in his [Uqba's] days for about four years, when a difference of opinion and quarrels broke out between them on account of the jurisdiction of Khorasan. For the jurisdiction of Khorasan had in olden times belonged to Pumbadita, whence the dayyanim [judges] used to be sent thither and all the tax on her revenues used to go to Pumbadita. Uqba, however, wished the dayyanim to be sent to her [Khorasan] by himself in order to take possession of her and get hold of her revenues for himself alone to the exclusion of Pumbadita.[200]

At the time, Khorasan had active trade ties with the Khazar lands. Had the Khazars been Jewish, it would have been natural for them to transmit donations via Khorasan to the Babylonian Jewish community. The exilarch and yeshivot in Babylonia had huge expenses and such donations would have been welcome. Nonetheless, in the description of the argument between Kohen Zedeq and Uqba with regard to Khiva (Khorasan), there is no hint of donations from the Khazar lands, though this would have been an ideal place to mention them. In other words, not only are there no texts from Babylonia that refer to Khazars, but in a text that called for reference to Khazars there is no reference to the Khazars being Jewish.

Jewish travelers to the East likewise made no mention of the conversion of the Khazars, even though it would have interested their readers. Ibn Ya'qub, a Jew who traveled from Spain through Europe as far as Prague and Kraków in the mid-tenth century, wrote a report on his trip, from which only some quotations have been preserved. Luckily, one of these quotations refers to Khazars in Prague, but without mention of their being Jewish.[201] Later travelers, who might have heard about past events in the regions they visited, also make no reference to the Jewishness of the Khazars. For example, Benjamin of Tudela does not mention the Khazars in his famous twelfth-century travelogue. Petahyah of Regensburg, who traveled to the Muslim East shortly after Benjamin of Tudela, wrote that rabbanite Jews did not live in the lands of Kedar, but he made no mention of Khazars.[202] There is also no mention of the Khazars in a letter sent by the Jewish community of Worms to the Jewish community of Jerusalem in 960.[203]

This letter contained a question regarding reports of the imminent arrival of the Messiah. It was of course not necessary to mention the Khazars in this context, but had they converted to Judaism, it would have been understandable to regard the conversion as portending the coming of the Messiah and to refer to it. I also found no mention of the Khazar conversion or their downfall in Jewish–Islamic polemical literature, even though it could easily have been mentioned.[204]

Though most references to Khazar conversion appear in Muslim sources, it is important to note that most Muslim historians and geographers do not mention the conversion or Jewishness of the Khazars even though it likely would have interested them and even though they had access to many sources that are not available to us. Moshe Gil made this point, which was partially corroborated by Peter Golden, who noted that a sizable corpus of Muslim historical works take note of the Khazars (given the prolonged warfare between the Arabs and the Khazars, they could hardly have failed to do so) but are silent about Khazar Judaism. This corpus includes such important ninth- and early tenth-century authors as al-Ya'qubi, al-Baladuri, al-Tabari, and ibn A'tham al-Kufi (d. 926).[205] Gil lists eight early (pre-tenth century) Muslim historians who do not mention the Jewishness of the Khazars.[206] In his opinion, had the Khazars been or become Jews, these writers would not have ignored the fact. Religion was a topic all of these writers saw as significant, and conversion to Judaism was certainly exceptional enough to have deserved mention. A less important source that also makes no mention of the conversion, even though it could have been cited as an argument, is the curious early eleventh-century polemic *Khabar al-Yahud wa-l-Nasara* (Knowledge of Judaism and Christianity).[207]

The literature on the history of the Seljuqs, a Turkish group that created an empire in Central Asia in the early eleventh century, likewise makes no reference to the Khazars being Jewish. The Seljuqs had a particular interest in the Khazars because both Duqaq and Seljuq, founders of the Seljuq dynasty, had positions at the Khazar court and came into conflict with the Khazar ruling circles. Had the Khazars been Jewish, this would have been an obvious fact to mention in descriptions of court machinations and politics. One of the most important Seljuq sources, *Maliknama* (Book of Kings), was written for the second Seljuq sultan, Alp Arslan, who died in 1072, a century after the downfall of the Khazars. However, the extant part of *Maliknama* contains no reference to the Jewishness of the Khazars.[208]

Little is known about the Khazars after their defeat at the hands of Svyatoslav in or around 969. We might expect that if they were Jewish, some of the survivors would have fled to other Jewish communities,

but there are no reports of this.[209] A recent study of the language of Jews in Eastern Europe makes no mention of Turkic influence, either on the written language or, more significantly, on personal names.[210] The only reports of Jewish refugees from Khazaria are from Toledo,[211] a Spanish city thousands of kilometers away from Khazaria. If the reports are accurate, we cannot rule out the possibility that they were impostors. There is also no genetic evidence for ties between Khazars and either Chuvash or Hungarian Ashkenazi Jews.[212]

In addition to this broad textual silence, there is no material evidence for the conversion of the Khazars to Judaism or even for the presence of a significant Jewish community in Khazar lands. As Petrukhin and Flerov, Shingiray, Werbert, and others have pointed out, no significant (or even insignificant) material or physical findings have been discovered that can serve as evidence for conversion of the Khazars.[213] Archaeologists excavating in Khazar lands have found almost no artifacts or grave stones displaying distinctly Jewish symbols.[214] Perhaps the most important excavation of a Khazar site, at the fortress of Sarkel, has revealed no objects reflecting the Jewish identity of the Khazars. However, according to K. V. Kasparova, among the objects found was this item:

> Cast bronze figurine on an iron shaft: a man with rough features and hair swept back at the temples; with broad belt and mace in the extended right hand. The lower portion is missing, but it can safely be supposed to have been a horseman sitting upright on the saddle.[215]

Kasparova, basing herself on S. A. Pletneva,[216] explains this as "[p]erhaps representing Tengri Khan, the god of heaven and light, the Khan of all gods in the Khazar Khanate."[217] In her opinion, this object "illustrates the beliefs of the contemporary urban population." She reconciles this figurine with the story of the conversion of the Khazars by claiming that the peoples in the Khazar kingdom "continued to worship their pagan gods despite the official adoption of Judaism in the early 9th century."[218] In other words, no Jewish artifacts were found, but pagan artifacts were.

A systematic survey of early medieval graffiti found in Khazaria reveals no clear reference to anything Jewish.[219] Some claim that changes in the use of amulets with solar symbols[220] or the use of tamga (a purportedly Khazar symbol) on gravestones together with Jewish symbols[221] are evidence for the conversion of the Khazars, but on careful examination these are not convincing arguments, as Jews who were not of Khazar origin but who had migrated to the region could also have used these symbols.

Burial practices might also be expected to provide evidence of conversion. Shingiray writes:

> And this conversion, if it did indeed occur, just as any other conversion of Turko-Mongolian nomads, would have presupposed the adaptation of Judaism to their Turkic (Tangriist/Mazdean) pantheon, their religious ethical values, and their usual mythic complex in order for it to become a viable religion for that community. Whether this happened or not cannot be ascertained, because the ritual practices of those nomads do not reflect any dramatic changes in the religious discourse as far as we know it.[222]

Shingiray also notes, "Even from the time which preceded the Early Medieval Period and through most of the Khazar period (until the 10th century AD), nomadic burial practices manifested Mazdean traits and rituals that only began to change with the advent of Islam."[223] Peter Golden likewise notes that archaeologists have found that Khazars offered human sacrifices when burying great people, even after the date when they purportedly converted to Judaism.[224] Such a practice would violate Jewish law.

A unique *dirhem* coin recently discovered in a medieval hoard has been regarded by many as an unquestionable indication of the Jewishness of the Khazar elite.[225] However, a careful analysis shows that the coin actually supports the view that the Khazars and the Khazar leadership did not convert to Judaism. The dirhem was a widely used coin in medieval Eastern Europe and in the Khazar lands, but it was often in short supply in Khazaria. This made trade very difficult, as the Khazars often had to pay their trading partners in familiar coins. In these circumstances, Khazars, like other outlying regimes, had no choice but to mint coins themselves. In order to make certain that they would be accepted, the minters imitated the form and the appearance of the widely accepted Islamic dirhem. Minting dirhems posed certain religious difficulties for non-Muslim rulers, however. The standard dirhem had Arabic text around the edge that included not only the name of the ruling caliph and the year the coin was produced but also a statement that God was one and that Muhammad was his messenger. In other words, minting the coins was tantamount to making a religious statement. Some Christians solved this problem by adding discreet Christian symbols or miswriting the text.[226] For Jews, there could have been another solution: to change the name of God's prophet from Muhammad to Moses. The resulting coin would look like a dirhem, and the altered text would not attract attention, especially in lands where Arabic literacy was uncommon.

Indeed, in 837/38 an imitation dirhem was minted in Khazaria with precisely this change. The writing on the edge of the coin reads, "and Moses is the messenger of God."[227] However, though imitation dirhems were minted in Khazaria year after year, a dirhem with this inscription was minted only once. A number of these dirhems are extant, but they are all from the same emission.[228] Subsequent Khazar emissions featured the unaltered text referring to Muhammad. But if replacing Muhammad with Moses was such a good solution to the problem for a Jewish king, there would be no reason to do this only once. Had a ruler decided to mint coins without the Islamic content, it is difficult to understand why the decision would be reversed after a year. However, if a subordinate took the initiative to mint such a coin, assuming incorrectly that the ruler, pagan or not, would not object, it would not be difficult to understand a quick reversal. Therefore it is necessary to consider the possibility that the change was initiated by a Jewish mint master.

In the Middle Ages, Jews often served as minters for non-Jewish governments, and coins with Hebrew lettering were produced in medieval Poland and Hungary.[229] The rulers in these states had not adopted Judaism; rather, it was the minters who were responsible for the Hebrew. Closer to Khazaria, the Egyptian man of letters al-Maqrizi reports that the early Umayyads may have employed a Jewish minter named Somayr who was responsible for minting dirhems; according to al-Maqrizi, the coins were termed "Sumayri dirhems" by the public.[230] It is certainly possible that a Khazar ruler who needed to mint dirhems would have turned to a Jewish minter,[231] who might have thought that he could make a change in the text without difficulties. If this was the case, it is easy to surmise that the coins provoked a negative response from Muslims, from within Khazaria or from without, leading the ruler to order a return to the standard text. However, had the initiative been an ideological decision on the part of the ruler, on theological grounds, a return would have been no simple matter. The possibility that the Moses dirhem was the initiative of a Jewish minter is speculative, but a single minting of such a coin is not evidence for the Jewishness of the Khazars or their leadership. On the contrary, the quick reversal suggests the opposite.

If there was no conversion, it is possible to make sense of two parallel, frequently overlooked reports. The first concerns the spread of Christianity in Crimea during the period of Khazar rule.[232] In a contemporary letter, Antony, the archbishop of Bosporos, is reported to have converted the Jews of Kerch to Christianity in the mid-ninth century; the letter is unquestionably genuine.[233] It is unclear why a Jewish

king would acquiesce to Christian missionary activity, especially among fellow Jews, in his kingdom. In discussing Satuq, a Turkic ruler who converted to Islam, Reuven Amitai points out, "As befits a newly converted ruler and certainly the image that he would have cultivated and which would have been projected in later sources, Satuq adopted a Muslim public policy, which included fighting against infidel relatives and apparently encouraging conversion among the tribesmen."[234] There is no reason to think that a king who converted to Judaism would behave any differently. But if the king were not Jewish, such forbearance would be much easier to understand.[235]

Similar difficulties arise with accounts of the spread of Christianity among the Alans,[236] who converted to Christianity in the early tenth century, at a time when they were allied with the Khazars. Had the Khazars been Jewish, it would stand to reason that they would have encouraged the Alans to adopt their religion. Though we have some information about the Alans and clear evidence of Christianization, there is no evidence of Jewish influence, unless we assume that the destruction of some Christian churches could only have been done under Jewish influence—which is not a strong argument.[237] The second report describes the spread of Islam among the Bulgars when they were under Khazar rule.[238] Here as well, if that rule was Jewish, this tolerance is rather remarkable.

Conclusions, or Much Ado about Nothing

Could it be that the oft-repeated story of the Khazar conversion to Judaism has no historical kernel? Not every story has a basis in reality, and to make a claim for a historical kernel, it is necessary to bring evidence. In other words, once a source is shown to be problematic, it cannot be considered historically reliable without additional evidence.[239] Claims of a historical kernel need support;[240] repetition alone is no proof.[241] Stories are repeated because they are believable and not necessarily because they are true. Recent research on cognition and psychology explores the need for information that is "minimally counterintuitive," referring to the degree to which it contradicts our intuitions about the nature of reality. Ara Norenzayan and his colleagues make the following argument about minimally counterintuitive lists:

> [Lists] that contain only a few counterintuitive elements degrade less over time and produce superior recall in the long term (but not in the short term) over other templates that are either entirely intuitive or excessively

> counterintuitive. . . . This cognitive advantage also selectively predicts the cultural success of one type of culturally important narrative —folktales.[242]

The Muslim historians and geographers who wrote about the Khazar conversion to Judaism saw the story as minimally counterintuitive. They took for granted that people in far-off places behaved in strange ways. This was precisely the underlying assumption of the aja'ib discussed above. Khazars, living in the distant North, were prime candidates to regard as barbaric. As Aziz al-Azmeh wrote,

> [T]he representation of what was taken for the concrete disnature of barbarism was confined to the citation of indices of barbarity among various peoples, sometimes alongside quite plausible descriptions, or relegated to the literature on mirabilia where it could readily be construed as opposition to normality unadulterated by concrete knowledge of humanity.[243]

The Khazars were regarded by medieval Muslims as a particularly cruel and uncultured nation.[244] They were commonly mentioned in the context of Gog and Magog, the fearsome figures from the Bible and, pertinently, from Muslim tradition.[245] In light of these notions, common among Muslim writers, it is unsurprising that many Muslims accepted an account of Khazar conversion to Judaism. The Khazars, as northerners, fit easily into the category of barbarians who were expected to behave in unusual ways. Questions that Jews in the East might have asked about how the Khazars could observe the minutiae of Jewish law or why there was no contact between the Khazar converts and other Jewish communities would not have troubled Muslim storytellers. Similarly, in far-off Spain, Jews may have been a bit less skeptical and questioning. For them, Khazaria was so far away and so unfamiliar that they would not have had criteria to test the claims. Seemingly authoritative books emanating from the East might have been more convincing to them than they were to Jews on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea.

Ryan Szpiech has a different way of dealing with the factual accuracy of the story of the conversion of the Khazars and with the use of the story. He writes, "Leaving aside questions of the factual authenticity of these texts, we can approach them in terms of their dramatization of conversion and view them, in Omeljan Pritsak's words, as 'epic narratives' whose function is to convey myths of identity through the form of a vignette."[246]

All attempts to explain how the story of the Khazar conversion began are speculative. Moshe Gil, for example, points out that because *Jew* was an insulting epithet at the time, it could have been applied as an insult and subsequently some listener might have taken it as a statement of fact. Gil had the Bulgar khan in mind as the insulter, but this is not the only option.[247]

Another possibility is that a Muslim came across a Moses dirhem, concluded that the Khazars were Jews, and then explained this as resulting from conversion on their part. The story might also have developed from genealogical stories transmitted in Muslim tradition. One such story was ascribed to ibn Abbas, a cousin of Muhammad:

> Aba 'Abdillah al-Husayn ibn Ustadhuya told me from Abu Ishaq Ibrahim ibn al-Hasan, from Hisham ibn Lohrasp al-Sa'ib (?) al-Kalbi, from Abu-Mallh, from Ibn 'Abbas as follows: Abraham, on him be peace, did not marry except Sarah, until she died (Gen. 20-1), and then he married a woman from original Arabs called Qantura (Gen. 25, 1: Keturah) bint Maqtur. And they started travelling until they settled in a place in Khorasan where they multiplied and under this name (?) they subjugated all those who resisted them. Their story reached the Khazar who were descended from the son of Japhet, son of Noah. They betook themselves to them and made a pact with them and intermarried with them. Some of them stayed with them and the remainder returned to their country.[248]

Al-Tabari cites a somewhat different version, also attributed to al-Kalbi, in which some of Abraham's progeny, descended from "his third wife Qantura," settled in Khurasan. Abraham had taught them one of the names of God, and when they settled in Khurasan the Khazars came to them, recognized their superiority, and made them kings with the title *khaghan*.[249] Yet a third version was reported by Sergei Tolstov, who wrote that according to al-Kalbi, Isaac was the father of Khazar, Bzra (?), Khorezm, and Filya. In other words, the Khazars were descended from Isaac.[250] It is not a big leap to then regard them as Jewish.

It is curious and significant that almost none of the sources that mention the conversion of the Khazars agree on the circumstances or date of the conversion.[251] Scholarly attempts to date the conversion do not explain the contradictions but simply pick one report or another as authoritative and dismiss the others.[252] This is puzzling because if there was a common source of the information about the Khazar conversion, why should there be such confusion regarding the date? Why should an author replace a correct date with an incorrect one? However, this lack of agreement would not surprise sociologists who study rumor transmission, which is characterized by a "snowballing" effect, "the addition

of details often seen in the evolution of rumors. Indeed, far from remaining passive in relation to information . . . we seek to improve them to make them more persuasive to others."[253] The multiple variants of the Jewish Khazar story fit a situation in which the authors found laconic statements about conversion and explained them in different ways, filling in the gaps as best they could.[254]

It is possible to learn how the story of the Khazar conversion may have developed in the Muslim world by considering the depiction of the events written by 'Abd al-Jabbar al-Hamdani at the beginning of the eleventh century:

> One of the Jews undertook the conversion of the Khazars, who are composed of many peoples, and they were converted by him and joined his religion. This happened recently in the days of the Abbasids. . . . For this was a man who came single-handedly to a king of great rank and to a very spirited people, and they were converted by him without any recourse to violence and the sword. And they took upon themselves the difficult obligations enjoined by the law of the Torah, such as circumcision, the ritual ablutions, washing after a discharge of the semen, the prohibition of work on the Sabbath and during the feasts, the prohibition of eating the flesh of forbidden animals according to this religion, and so on.[255]

There is no other early text that deals in such detail with the ritual consequences of conversion to Judaism. However, not all the obligations listed were characteristic of rabbinic Judaism. Ritual ablutions for men and washing after a discharge of semen are discussed in rabbinic literature but were never widely accepted or practiced. In contrast, al-Hamdani does not refer to the complex laws prohibiting intercourse during and immediately after menstruation, even though these are central topics in Jewish law. Shlomo Pines, who published the text, raised the question whether the source was by a Muslim author or a Jew. Given the inaccuracies regarding Jewish law, the possibility that it was a Muslim source seems more likely. Pines also makes the following point, which is directly relevant to the development of stories about the Jewish Khazars:

> If 'Abd al-Jabbar's source was Islamic, it was probably some historical or geographical text. In that case 'Abd al-Jabbar himself must, in all likelihood, be credited with the assumption contained in the passage with which we are dealing, that the adoption of Judaism by the Khazars entailed their observing all the Jewish commandments. The knowledge of some of these commandments shown by 'Abd al-Jabbar in this connection is very much in character.[256]

Pines alludes here to the basic problem that historians, geographers, and in fact most people encounter when they attempt to transform a body of facts into a narrative. The simplest explanation for the text is this: 'Abd al-Jabbar was never in Khazaria, but he had a source that stated that the Khazars were Jews, and he knew that conversion to Judaism entailed acceptance of a variety of religious laws. In order to make sense of this in light of the knowledge he had, he concluded that the Khazars indeed undertook to observe halakhah, and therefore he filled in (imaginary) details for the benefit of his readers.

Much of my argument here is based on the startling lack of reference to the Jewishness of the Khazars in a very wide variety of sources that might be expected to show an interest in the topic, in addition to the fact that there is no strong evidence for the conversion. Arguments from silence are not popular among historians, as John Bagnell Bury notes:

> The records of ancient and medieval history are starred with lacunae; we are ignorant of whole groups of phenomena, or have but a slight knowledge of other groups; and what we do know must often be seen in false perspective and receive undue attention on account of the adjacent obscurities.[257]

Historians are rightly concerned that silence can be the consequence of the limited quantity of source material. At the same time, there are cases in which there is no other tool to apply;[258] an unwillingness to apply it allows false statements to be taken as reflecting reality. There are no simple criteria for determining whether a given claim from silence is well based. As John Lange notes, "Specific instances of the argument from silence have to be evaluated on their individual merits. There can be no wholesale conclusion from the foregoing, except perhaps that the argument from silence cannot be logically conclusive."[259]

The use of the argument from silence in the case of the Khazars is far stronger than the usual use of the argument, as in most cases the silence is demonstrably significant, though the concern remains that a given author may have had some unknown reason for avoiding mention of the topic. In the case of the Khazars, the fact that the silence is repeated in an entire range of sources—Jewish, Byzantine, Khazar, written, and archaeological—serves to multiply the improbability and strengthen the argument.[260] A counterargument to the argument from silence must provide an alternative explanation for the silence in question. In the case of the Khazars, this would entail multiple explanations that miraculously coincided.

In many respects, it is easier to prove that something not known happened than to show that something that is assumed to have happened never did. In the first case, all that is necessary is to bring one piece of evidence. To show that something did not happen, it is often not enough to show that there is no evidence for it. Once an idea is accepted, it often requires disproof to be rejected—and that is not always easy.[261] For many who have regarded the conversion of the Khazars as a fact, it may not be easy to accept the idea that it never happened. However, a clear examination of the evidence makes that conclusion inescapable.

To return to the titular question, Did the Khazars—or a significant group of Khazars headed by their king—convert to Judaism or not? The simplest and most convincing answer is that the story of Khazar Jewishness is a legend with no factual basis.[262] The Hebrew sources are pseudepigraphic, the Arabic sources are best understood as rumors, and the other sources are not convincing. In other words, there never was a conversion of a Khazar king or of the Khazar elite.[263] This means that many pages of Jewish history, Russian history, and certainly Khazar history have to be rewritten. If there never was a conversion, issues such as Jewish influence on early Russia and ethnic contact must be reconsidered.

To claim that the Khazar conversion actually took place requires proof that there are reliable sources, or at least one reliable source, and it also demands dealing with all of the sources that suggest otherwise, as well as the multiple silences described above.

Most of the facts and sources cited here have long been known. The issue of the Khazar conversion serves as a fascinating application of Thomas Kuhn's thesis on scientific revolution to historical research. Kuhn points out the reluctance of researchers to abandon familiar paradigms even in the face of anomalies. Instead, they prefer to come up with explanations that, though contrived, do not require abandoning familiar thought structures. It is only when "too many" anomalies accumulate that it is possible to develop a totally different paradigm—such as a claim that the Khazar conversion never took place.[264]

The history of the Khazars is an important topic in its own right and deserves to be studied seriously and carefully, without the unnecessary distraction of looking for hints of a conversion that never took place. The same is true for Jewish history. Research must be subordinated to facts and not to personal agendas. However, the story of the Khazar conversion is also worth studying as a literary creation that says a great deal about the authors, without trying to force it into a picture of reality. As Giles Constable writes, in a similar context, "To

the historian, the most interesting questions about forgeries and plagiarism are not who made them and how they were discovered, fascinating as they are, but why they were made and, if successful, accepted."[265] However, we must admit that sober studies by historians do not always make for great reading and that the story of a Khazar king who became a pious and believing Jew was a splendid story.

Notes

My usual research focus has been on early modern and modern Jewish history, but over the years I have had the opportunity to benefit from exposure to philological methods in Bible and Talmud scholarship with brilliant teachers such as Shamma Friedman and the late Moshe Greenberg. I try to distinguish between pilpul and peshat and I have learned that not every good story is rooted in historical fact. In writing this paper, I asked many for advice and criticism. There are few specialists in the field, and I solicited critiques from all of them; most responded. I also received critiques and comments from numerous friends and colleagues. None of them bear responsibility for my views, and not all agree with these views. I am grateful to Golda Akhiezer, Reuven Amitai, Gershon Bacon, Menachem Ben Sasson, Steve Bowman, Leonid Chekin, Miriam Frenkel, Yehoshua Frenkel, Moshe Gil, the late Jacob Goldberg, Zeev Harvey, Gerald Hawting, Sergei Kashaev, Natalya Kashovskaya, Nikita Khrapunov, Mikhail Kizilov, Roman Kovalev, Semion Kreiz, Alexander Kulik, Mark Kupovetsky, Daniel Lasker, James Montgomery, Moshe Rosman, Ján Šafin, Israel Shatzman, Irina Shingiray, Moshe Sluhovsky, Yohanan Petrovsky Stern, Sergei Tatrinov, Mark Tolts, Aleksandr Tortika, Dmitry Vasilyev, Steve Wasserstrom, Daniel Waugh, Paul Wexler, Dan Yardeni, and Israel Yuval, who helped me in many ways. Many of them had the patience to read drafts of this paper and to share their comments with me. Brian Horowitz, Aryeh Edrei, Aviva Stampfer, Yohanan Petrovsky Stern, Danny Schwartz, Michael Weingrad, and Ulrich Wyrwa gave me essential bibliographical assistance. Constantine Zuckerman, Dan Shapira, and David J. Wasserstein's views differ from mine, but nonetheless they gave me detailed and very valuable critiques from which I learned a great deal. I (and the readers) benefited from the exceptional editorial ability of Sarah Shectman of *Jewish Social Studies*. In this article I have no intention of providing a history of the research on Khazar Jewishness, a topic that would easily fill a book, but I do refer to key studies. The sources and literature on the topic of the Khazars are written in many languages, not all of which I can read. Elhanan Miller helped me with the Arabic sources and Danny Schwarz and David Satran with Latin. Aaron Maman advised me on fine points of Hebrew. I relied on secondhand summaries or reports of articles in Hungarian. I do not know of any significant secondary literature in

Arabic, Turkish, or Persian. I do not know the Khazar language, but as no one really knows what the Khazar language was and as there are no available sources written in Khazar, this was not a problem. I dealt directly with all the other sources and papers cited in this paper; all translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

1 On the Turkic origins of the Khazars, see Sergei G. Klyashtorny, "The Asian Aspect of the Early Khazar History," in *Florilegia Altaistica: Studies in Honour of Denis Sinor on the Occasion of his 90th Birthday*, ed. E. Boikova and G. Stary (Wiesbaden, 2006), 61–67.

2 One of the more original theories regarding their origins is that of Patrick T. English, who suggested that they were of African origin. See his "Cushites, Colchians, and Khazars," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 18, no. 1 (1959): 49–53.

3 The most useful introduction to the topic is the survey of Peter Golden, "The Conversion of the Khazars to Judaism," in *The World of the Khazars: New Perspectives*, ed. Peter Golden, Haggai Ben-Shammai, and András Róna-Tas (Leiden, 2007), 123–62. For a description that emphasizes the importance of the Khazars in the formation of the early Russian state, see David Christian, "The Kaghanate of the Rus': Non-Slavic Sources of Russian Statehood," in *Challenging Traditional Views of Russian History*, ed. Stephen Wheatcroft (Basingstoke, 2002), 3–26.

4 Lev Gumilev, who is not always the most reliable source, suggested that the end of the Khazar Empire might have been tied to a rise in the level of the Caspian Sea that flooded some of their centers. This claim, though interesting, does not affect our topic. See Lev Nikolaevich Gumilev, "Khazaria and Caspian (Landscape and Ethnos)," *Soviet Geography* 5, no. 6 (1964): 54–68 for a discussion of this idea. Shmuel Krauss thought he had found evidence for a Jewish Khazar population in Byzantium at the end of the eleventh century, but Jacob Mann showed that this was incorrect. See Shmuel Krauss, "Ha-shemot Ashkenaz u-Sefarad," *Tarbiz* 3, no. 3 (1932): 423–35, and Jacob Mann, "Ha-Ashkenazim hem ha-Kuzarim?," *Tarbiz* 4, no. 4 (1933): 391–94.

5 The Khazars were pagans. See Julian Baldick, *Animal and Shaman: Ancient Religions of Central Asia* (London, 2000), for a discussion of Central Asian religious thought.

6 See Zvi Ben Dor Benite, *The Lost Ten Tribes* (New York, 2009).

7 See Daniel Stein Kokin, "Toward the Source of the Sambatyon: Shabbat Discourse and the Origins of the Sabbatical River Legend," *AJS Review* 37 (2013): 1–28 and the sources cited there.

8 See Charles Beckingham and Bernard Hamilton, eds., *Prester John, the Mongols and the Ten Lost Tribes* (Aldershot, Engl., 1996), and Lev Nikolaevich Gumilev, *Searches for an Imaginary Kingdom: The Legend of the Kingdom of Prester John* (Cambridge, Engl., 1987).

9 Andrew R. Anderson, *Alexander's Gate, Gog and Magog, and the Inclosed Nations* (Cambridge, Mass., 1932).

10 See Andrew Gow, *The Red Jews: Antisemitism in an Apocalyptic Age, 1200–1600* (Leiden, 1995).

11 David Gordon White, *Myths of the Dog-Man* (Chicago, Ill., 1991).

12 See Rachel Milstein, *Solomon's Seal* (Jerusalem, 1996). I am grateful to Moshe Sluhovsky for suggesting that I look into Solomon's seal.

13 See Robert H. Hewsen, "The Geography of Pappus of Alexandria: A Translation of the Armenian Fragments," *Isis* 62, no. 2 (1971): 186–207. Hewsen mentions the Amazons and the Khazars in a common context on p. 200.

14 In medieval Austria, the story of a Jewish kingdom called Judeisapta, located on the Danube until it was conquered by the Romans in 384, was quite popular. This does not seem to be related to the Khazar story. See Leopold von Wien (Leopold Stainreuter), *Österreichische Chronik von den 95 Herrschaften*, vol. 6 of *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, ed. Joseph Seemüller (Hannover, 1909). For an interesting discussion in English, see Joseph Patrouch, *Queen's Apprentice: Archduchess Elizabeth, Empress María, the Habsburgs, and the Holy Roman Empire, 1554–1569* (Leiden, 2009), 76–78.

15 For a comparable reconsideration of a similar story, see Jean-Claude Schmitt, *The Conversion of Herman the Jew* (Philadelphia, 2010), and see Avrom Saltman, "Hermann's 'Opusculum de conversione sua': Truth or Fiction?," *Revue des Études Juives* 147, no. 1–2 (1988): 31–56.

16 Omeljan Pritsak, "The Khazar Kingdom's Conversion to Judaism," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 2 (1978): 261–81. This possibility will be discussed in somewhat greater detail below.

17 See the description of Ahatanhel Krymskyi's thesis in Oleg B. Bubenok and O. B. Khamrai, "Alternativna gipoteza A. U. Krymsovo pro chas i obstavini iyudaizatsii khozariv," in *Skhid i dialog tsivilizatsii*, ed. O. D. Vasiliuk and N. M. Zub (Kiev, 2012), 57. Before dismissing Krymskyi, we must remember that he was writing with Stalin's secret police looking over his shoulder.

18 Golden, "Conversion of the Khazars," 158–59.

19 For a survey of research and publications on the Khazars, see Peter Golden, "Khazar Studies: Achievements and Perspectives," in Golden, Ben-Shammai, and Róna-Tas, *World of the Khazars*, 7–57. For earlier studies, see Bernard Dov Weinryb, "The Khazars: An Annotated Bibliography," *Studies in Bibliography and Booklore* 6 (1963): 111–29; 11 (1976): 57–74. The comprehensive survey of the literature by Kevin Brook, *The Jews of Khazaria* (Lanham, Md., 2006), is also very useful, though his analysis is more problematic. See Nikita Khrapunov, review of *The Jews of Khazaria*, by Kevin Brook, *Ab Imperio* 2 (2008): 492–503. See also the impressive survey in Gyula Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica: Die byzantinischen Quellen der Geschichte der Turkvolker,* 2 vols. (Leiden, 1983), 1: 81–87. For a useful guide to material in Hebrew, see Menachem Zahari, *Kuzarim: Hitgayrutam ve-sifrut ha-historiyografiyah ha-ivrit* (Jerusalem, 2002). A survey of material in Russian can be found in Svetlana

Feigina, "Istoriografia evreisko-khazarskoi perepiski X v," in *Feodlanaya Rossia vo vsermirno-istoricheskom protsesse*, ed. V. Pashuto (Moscow, 1972), 225–34, and, more recently, E. A. Vashenko, *Hazarskaa problema v otechestvennoj istoriografii XVIII–XX vekov* (Saint Petersburg, 2006). The classic study of Avraham Harkavy, *Skazaniya evrejskih pisatelej o hazarah i hazarskom carstve* (Saint Petersburg, 1874), should not be ignored. For an interesting chapter-length survey in Polish, see Stefan Gasiorowski, *Karaimi w Koronie i na Litwie w XV-XVIII wieku* (Kraków, 2008), 100–126. See also the generally uncited but serious study of Vladimir A. Moshin, "Kad su Hazari preshli na zhidovsku vjeru," *Rijech* 27, no. 45 (1931): 8–10; 27, no. 46 (1931): 2–5; 27, no. 47 (1931): 7–10; 27, no. 48 (1931): 6–9; 27, no. 49 (1931): 6–8. For an early survey of interest in the Muslim world, see Yehoshafat Harkabi, *Arab Attitudes to Israel* (New York, 1974), 194–95. A short but important Spanish study is José María Millás Vallicrosa, "La conversión de los Jazares," *Sefarad: Revista de Estudios Hebraicos y Sefardíes* 4, no. 1 (1944): 191–94. For a recent Czech study, see Ján Šafin, "O výbere viery a chazarskej otázke na kyjevskej Rusi," *Historický časopis* 61, no. 1 (2013): 3–26.

20 Pavel K. Kokovtsov, *Evrejsko-khazarskaja perepiska v X veke* (Leningrad, 1932).

21 The author was arrested by the Soviet secret police in July 1941, before he could publish his research, and he was never seen again. Only now have parts of the work begun to be published. See Oleg B. Bubenok, Oleksiy Khamrai, and Vitaly Chernoivanenko, "Monografia A. Iu. Krymskogo 'Istoria khazariv z naidavnishikh chasiv do X viku,'" *Skhidnyi Svit* 3 (2011): 19–34, and the fragment of Krymskyi's book published in the same issue: Oleg B. Bubenok, Oleksiy Khamrai, and Vitaly Chernoivanenko, "A. U. Krymskyi pro obstavini iudeizatsii khazariv," *Skhidnyi Svit* 3 (2011): 246–70.

22 Henri Grégoire, "Le 'Glozel' Khazare," *Byzantion* 12 (1937): 225–66.

23 Paul Kahle wrote: "I indicated to Grégoire a number of points in which he could not be right, and I had the chance of discussing all the problems with him when he visited me in Bonn in December 1937. We decided to make a great joint publication—but political developments made the plan impracticable. So I proposed to a former Bonn pupil of mine, D. M. Dunlop, that he should take over the work instead. He was a scholar able to deal both with Hebrew and Arabic sources, knew many other languages and had the critical training for so difficult a task"; Paul Kahle, *The Cairo Geniza* (Oxford, 1959), 33.

24 See, for example, the useful survey of Dan Shapira, "Notes on Early Jewish History in Eastern and Central Europe: The Rus', Khazar and Bulgar Dimensions," *Archivum eurasiae medii aevi* 15 (2006/7): 125–58, as well as Grzegorz Rostkowski, "Konwersja Chazarii na mozaizm na przełomie VIII i IX w," in *Z dziejów sredniowiecznej Europy Srodkowowschodniej*, ed. Jan Tyszkiewicz (Warsaw, 1998), 7–15. For a different approach, see Paul Wexler, *Ashkenazic Jews: A Slavo-Turkic People in Search of a Jewish*

Identity (Columbus, Ohio, 1993). Pritsak, "Khazar Kingdom's Conversion," 261–81, sees the motivation as equally commercial and religious.

25 Dieter Ludwig, "Struktur und Gesellschaft des Chazaren-Reiches im Licht der schriftlichen Quellen" (Ph.D. diss., University of Münster, 1982).

26 Norman Golb and Omeljan Pritsak, *Khazarian Hebrew Documents of the Tenth Century* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1982).

27 Golden, Ben-Shammai, and Róna-Tas, *World of the Khazars*.

28 For a useful recent survey, see Robert Singerman, "Contemporary Racist and Judeophobic Ideology Discovers the Khazars, or, Who Really Are the Jews?," Rosaline and Myer Feinstein Lecture Series, Association of Jewish Libraries, Brooklyn, New York, 2004, http://www.jewishlibraries.org/main/Portals/0/AJL_Assets/documents/Feinstein/Robert%20Singerman.pdf, and idem, "The Jew as Racial Alien: The Genetic Component of American Anti-Semitism," in *Anti-Semitism in American History*, ed. David A. Gerber (Urbana, Ill., 1986), 103–29.

29 Shlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People*, trans. Yael Lotan (London, 2009), 247. The Hebrew and French versions appeared a year earlier. Sand goes on to write that "there never was a secular ethnographic common denominator between Jewish believers in Asia, Africa and Europe. World Jewry . . . was not a strange wandering nation" (248). It is understandable that genetic research troubles him and that he does not want to look under stones for troubling scientific evidence. Ironically, between the lines of his argument there appears to be a curious critique of the idea of a Palestinian nation.

30 Eran Elhaik, "The Missing Link of Jewish European Ancestry: Contrasting the Rhineland and the Khazarian Hypotheses," *Genome Biology and Evolution* 5, no. 1 (2013): 61–74.

31 For more details, see Shaul Stampfer, "Are We All Khazars Now?," Jewish Review of Books 17 (Spring 2014): 61–74.

32 See most recently, for example, the forthcoming article of Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, "Ein jüdisches Großreich? Religion und Mission im Reich der Chasaren," in J. Giessauf, ed. *Der 13. Stamm der Juden? Das Reich der Chasaren*.

33 Moshe Gil, "Ha-Kuzarim lo hitgayru," *Tsiyon* 75, no. 1 (2010): 5–14. Gil focuses on the Arabic sources related to the Khazars, whereas I have tried to cover all the sources—literary and nonliterary—and much of the secondary literature. Gil's article appeared in English (without mention of the fact that it had appeared earlier in Hebrew) under the title "Did the Khazars Convert to Judaism?," *Revue des Études Juives* 170 no. 3–4 (2011): 429–41.

34 J. T. Olsson, "Coup d'état, Coronation and Conversion: Some Reflections on the Adoption of Judaism by the Khazar Khaganate," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 23, no. 4 (2013), 496. He adds, "In the most general of terms then, previous treatments of Khazar conversion have been content to establish a date for conversion based upon a favoured selection of the extant sources, and little attempt has been made either

to explore the events surrounding the Khazar conversion, or to see how a particular scenario fits in with the remaining evidence" (498).

35 Despite current criticisms of the "positivist" approach, I maintain that it is nevertheless called for. For an opposing view, see Devin DeWeese, *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde: Baba Tukles and Conversion to Islam in Historical and Epic Tradition* (University Park, Pa., 1994), 312–13: "We may naturally cringe . . . at the 'fantastic' and miraculous elements in conversion stories, but I would argue that we go further astray if we attempt to extract a 'historical' core from these accounts, by 'demythologizing' them, than if we accept them wholesale as they stand. My point is not that we should regard the particulars of any conversion narrative as 'historical' fact but rather that we should accept the accounts for what they are—and that we should accept, in the process, that the traditional 'popular' understanding of these accounts might have been much more multivalent and much less simplistic than the assumptions of many specialists would imply. . . . We should not ask, 'What happened' but 'What did they say happened and what did it mean to them?'" I tend to agree with DeWeese's understanding of the nature of the texts, but I nonetheless think that an effort should be made to understand the reality behind the text.

36 On the reception of *The Kuzari*, see Adam Shear, *The Kuzari and the Shaping of Jewish Identity* (Cambridge, Engl., 2008).

37 Simcha Assaf, "Rav Yehudah al-Barceloni 'al iggeret Yosef Melekh ha-Kuzarim," *Jeschurun* n.s. 9–10 (Sept. 1924): 113. Assaf added: "A great deed like this had to have made a great impression on contemporaries and on later generations. . . . Because of the distance of the Khazar kingdom from Jewish centers and the weak ties between countries in this period, there are few Hebrew sources regarding the Khazars."

38 For example, see Arthur Koestler, *The Thirteenth Tribe* (London, 1976), and Sand, *Invention of the Jewish People*.

39 See, for example, Texe Marrs, *DNA Science and the Jewish Bloodline* (Austin, Tex., 2013).

40 On one of the most important of these writers, Artamanov, and his problems with the censors, see I. Erdélyi and M. Benko, "Some Problems of the Khazar Archaeology," accessed Feb. 23, 2014, http://repository.enu.kz/bitstream/handle/123456789/8299/KHAZAR-ARHELOGY.pdf. For a recent survey with references to previous surveys and to sources, see Dennis Ioffe, "Jews, Khazars and the Issues of Slavic Cultural History," in *(Mis)Understanding the Balkans: Essays in Honour of Raymond Detrez*, ed. Michel De Dobbeleer and Stijn Vervaet (Ghent, 2013), 385–405.

41 Alexander Libin and Dan Shapira, "Khazarskaya paradigma Stalina," *Parallelli* 10–11 (2009): 111–58, and see also Alexei Terechtchenko, "L'étrange relation de Staline et des Khazars," in *L'Empire Khazar vii–xi siècle, l'énigme d'un peuple cavalier*, ed. Jacques Piatgigorsky and Jacques Sapir (Paris, 2005), 79–95.

42 Vladimir Petrukhin, *Evrei i Slaviane, Tom 16: Khazary* (Jerusalem, 2005); idem, ed., *Khazary: Mif i istorija* (Moscow, 2010); and Valerii Flerov, *"Goroda" i "zamki" khazarskovo kaganata: Arkheologicheski realnost* (Moscow, 2011). See also Oleg B. Bubenok, "Prozelity v khazarskom kaganate: Istoricheskij obzor po voprosu pozicij iudaizma v khazarskom obshestve," in *Ukraïns'ka orientalìstika: Specìal'nij vipusk z ûdaïki*, ed. Vitaly Chernoivanenko (Kiev, 2011), 124–53, and Boris Rashkovski, "Khazarii: Problema vybora konfessional'noj orientacii," *Vostok* 1 (2010): 25–39. Rashkovski raises important questions but does not ask if the conversion really took place. A recent survey of Russian historiography on the Khazars is Vashenko, *Hazarskaa problema*.

43 See most recently Marlene Laruelle, "Conspiracy and Alternate History in Russia: A Nationalist Equation for Success?," *Russian Review* 71, no. 4 (2012): 565–80. Other important analyses are V. Shnirelman, *The Myth of the Khazars and Intellectual Antisemitism in Russia, 1970s–1990s* (Jerusalem, 2002), and Mikhail Kizilov and Diana Mikhaylova, "The Khazar Kaganate and the Khazars in European Nationalist Ideologies and Scholarship," *Archivum eurasii medii aevi* 14 (2005): 31–53. On one of the best-known of these historians, Gumilev, see Vadim Joseph Rossman, *Russian Intellectual Antisemitism in the Post-Communist Era* (Lincoln, Neb., 2002), 72–100.

44 See Mari Rethelyi, "The Racial Option in Modern Jewish Thought: The Case of the Hungarian Jews," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 12, no. 1 (2013): 17–34.

45 See Nora Berend, *At the Gate of Christendom: Jews, Muslims and "Pagans" in Medieval Hungary* (Cambridge, Engl., 2001), 60–61, who points out the difficulties with this theory. A recent attempt to revive the theory does not answer all the questions. See Constantin D. Rupa, "An 11th Century Philosophical Treatise Written in Banat and Its Surprising Revelations about the Local History," in *Procedia: Social and Behavioral Sciences* 71 (Jan. 28, 2013): 196–205.

46 Kevin Alan Brook, *Bir Türk Imparatorluğu: Hazar Yahudileri*, trans. Ismail Tulçali (Istanbul, 2005). For more references to articles and translations into Turkish on the conversion of the Khazars, see Hasan Demiroğlu, "Evreiskie Turki khazarskovo naselenia: Karaimi," in *Istoria evreiskoi diaspori v vostochnoi Evrope*, ed. M. Meltsin and A. Pilinpenko (Saint Petersburg, 2012), 51–57.

47 It is noteworthy that although there is a very large literature on belief in blood libels, very little has been written on why people stopped believing in them.

48 This absence does not mean that there were no Jews in Khazaria in the medieval period. However, it does not fit well with the claim that the Khazar leadership and a significant portion of the population were Jewish.

49 This is clearly presented in Rashkovski, "Khazarii," 25–39.

50 There is a rich literature on this topic. See, for example, Hugh Kennedy, "The Coming of Islam to Bukhara," in *Living Islamic History*, ed.

Yasir Suleiman (Edinburg, 2010), 77–91; Reuven Amitai, ''The Conversion of Teguder Ilkhan to Islam,'' *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 25 (2001): 15–43; DeWeese, *Islamization*; James Ryan, "Conversion vs. Baptism," in *Varieties of Religious Conversion in the Middle Ages*, ed. James Muldoon (Gainesville, Fla., 1997); Thomas S. Noonan, "Why Orthodoxy Did Not Spread among the Bulgars of the Crimea during the Early Medieval Era: An Early Byzantine Conversion Model," in *Christianizing Peoples and Converting Individuals*, ed. G. Armstrong and I. N. Wood (Turnhout, Belgium, 2001); and Andreas Kaplony, "The Conversion of the Turks of Central Asia as Seen by Arabic and Persian Geography: A Comparative Perspective," in *Islamisation de l'Asie centrale: Processus locaux d'acculturation du VIIe au XIe siècle*, ed. É. de la Vaissière (Leuven, 2008), 204–24.

51 See Paul Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor* (Cambridge, Engl., 1991), 127–66. Trebilco concludes that there was little if any syncretism and that the "God fearers" were attached to the Jewish communities. See also A. T. Kraabel, "The Disappearance of the 'God-Fearers,'" *Numen* 28, no. 2 (1981): 113–26, who points out that the phenomenon was apparently quite limited, and Irina Levinskaya, "The Inscription from Aphrodisias and the Problem of God-Fearers," *Tyndale Bulletin* 41, no. 2 (1990): 312–18. One of the most recent studies is Angelos Chaniotis, "Godfearers in the City of Love," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 36, no. 3 (2010): 34–44.

52 See Nikolaj Kocev, "The Question of Jews and the So-Called Judaizers in the Balkans from the Ninth to the Fourteenth Century," *Bulgarian Historical Review* 6, no. 1 (1978): 60–79.

53 On Judeo-Christianity, see Patricia Crone, "Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980): 59–95.

54 This is the view of Dan Shapira, "Hufut Kaleh: Sekirah historit," in *Matsevot bet ha-almin shel ha-Yehudim ha-Karaim be-Hufut Kaleh, Krim*, ed. Dan Shapira (Jerusalem, 2008), 346.

55 Ibid., 345, esp. n. 38, which discusses the sources and shows the impossibility of this view. Among other reasons, Karaites did not accept converts. Moskovich and Tukan are less emphatic but also find no linguistic evidence to support a claim that the East European Karaites are descended from the Khazars. See Wolf Moskovich and B. Tukan, "Caraimica: The Problems of the Origin and History of East European Khazars in the Light of Linguistic Evidence," *Slavica Hierosolymitana* 7 (1985): 87–106.

56 On this topic, see Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley, 1999), esp. 140–74.

57 See Alexander Kulik, "The Jews of *Slavia Graeca*," in *Jews in Byzantium: Dialectics of Minority and Majority Cultures*, ed. Robert Bonfil et al. (Leiden 2012), 307. Pritsak, in his article "Khazar Kingdom's Conversion," 261–81, concludes, "Had trained religionists approached the steppe warrior societies, their dogma and ideology would have been

totally alien and incomprehensible. It was precisely because they did not, and because the three conversions were achieved by unofficial merchant popularizers, that the events themselves went unrecorded in the respective religious centers of the time" (281).

58 For a summary of this view, see Golden, "Conversion of the Khazars," 152, and his citation of Artamanov there.

59 Mark Whittow, *The Making of Byzantium, 600–1025* (Berkeley, 1996), 227–28.

60 As Donald Rayfield, a specialist in Russian history who has also written on the history of Georgia, put it, "[T]he Khazars suicidally decided on Judaism as the religion for the elite, thus depriving themselves of the military support of their Islamic or Christian neighbours." See his review of Norman Davies, *Vanished Kingdoms: The History of Half-Forgotten Europe, Literary Review*, Nov. 2011, pp. 25–26. We have no other evidence for suicidal tendencies among the Khazars.

61 I know of no political scientists who specialize in medieval Central Asia. However, I consulted Ephraim Inbar, a political scientist and specialist in contemporary international relations and strategy, and he also questioned Judaism's strategic value to the Khazars. See also Veselina Vachkova, "Danube Bulgaria and Khazaria as Parts of the Byzantine Oikoumene," in *The Other Europe in the Middle Ages: Avars, Bulgars, Khazars, and Cumans*, ed. Florin Curta (Leiden, 2008), 353, who wrote, "In so far as the newly established powers preserved neutrality in the Middle Ages primarily on religious grounds, the decision of the khaghan to adopt Judaism in the ninth century might well be interpreted as his breaking neutrality. Furthermore, this act not only increased the distance between Khazaria, on one hand, Christian Byzantium and the Muslim world, on the other hand, but also removed the Khazar elite from traditional Tangrism."

62 The letter of Joseph, king of the Khazars, exists in two versions. The short version appeared in a volume entitled *Kol Mevasser*, edited by Isaac Aqrish, first published in Constantinople in 1577 and republished in Jerusalem in 1999. The long version was found by Abraham Firkovich, apparently in Egypt; a critical edition of the text, along with all the related texts, appears in Kokovtsov, *Evrejsko-khazarskaja perepiska*. A shortened translation into English of the exchange appears in Elkan Adler, *Jewish Travellers in the Middle Ages* (London, 1930), 22–36.

63 Descriptions of religious debates and conversions are not rare in Central Asia. See, for example, Amitai, ''Conversion of Teguder Ilkhan,'' 15–43. The theme of dreams as a form of prophecy was common in Islam and in other societies and has been the topic of much research. See James Montgomery, "Serendipity, Resistance and Multivalency," in *On Fiction and Adab in Medieval Arabic Literature*, ed. Philip Kennedy (Weisbaden, 2005), esp. 213–20.

64 The literature on this topic is too vast to survey here, and thus I have limited myself to what I see as the primary issues. For an important

early critique, see Grégoire, "Le 'Glozel' Khazare," 225–66. Had Grégoire written in a more moderate style, he might have had a greater impact. This topic is dealt with in detail by Boris Rashkovski, "Vnov' o poiske sledov hazarskogo iudaizma v pis'mennyh istochnikah," *Nauchnye trudy po iudaike: Materialy XVIII mezhdunarodnoj ezhegodnoj konferencii po iudaike*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 2011), 2: 72–94.

65 Assaf, "Rav Yehudah al-Barceloni," 113–17. The text reads, "and I saw in some versions a version written by King Joseph, son of Aaron the priest, the Khazar, who wrote to R. Chasdai, son of Isaac, and I did not know if the text was true or not. And if you will say that it is a fact [*she-hayah 'ikar*] that those Khazars are descended from the sons of Tugarma who converted, it is not clarified if what was written in the text was true or not, or falsehoods were written, or something was added, or there was a scribal error."

66 The 340-year period appears in the long version of the letter. The short version does not give a date but does report that between Bulan and Joseph there were 12 generations: Ovadiah (a grandson of Bulan), Hezekiah, Menashe, Hanukah (brother of Ovadiah), Yitshak, Zevulun, Menashe, Nasi, Menahem, Benjamin, Aharon, and Joseph. If we assume that a generation is 30 years, then about 360 years passed between Bulan and Joseph, which yields a similar date for the conversion. If we cut down a generation to 20 years, the date becomes more plausible, but there is still no resolution for the other difficulties.

67 However, Wasserstrom notes, the Babylonian geonim tended to ignore certain topics that were problematic for them. See Steven Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam* (Princeton, 1995), 35. However, it is not clear why the conversion of the Khazars to Judaism would be problematic to the geonim.

68 See Marcel Erdal, "The Khazar Language," in Golden, Ben-Shammai, and Róna-Tas, *World of the Khazars*, 75–108. It should be noted that Shapira found what he felt were Turkish calques in the letter; see Dan Shapira, "Judaization of Central Asian Traditions as Reflected in the So-Called Jewish-Khazar Correspondence," in Petrukhin, *Khazary*, 503–21.

69 Dunlop compares the letter attributed to Hasdai and the letter attributed to Joseph and offers convincing evidence that they were written by different authors. However, even if he is correct, this analysis does not provide evidence as to the time and place of authorship or the veracity of the contents; see D. M. Dunlop, *The History of the Jewish Khazars* (Princeton, 1954), 134–46.

70 Poliak noted that the author used Arabic not only for locations that were presumably familiar to his readers in their Arabic forms, such as Alaboab for Derbent (and not the Turkish Demirkapı) and Khorazem (and not the Turkish Harezm), but also for locations whose Arabic forms were not well-known. Kokovtsov, *Evrejsko-khazarskaja perepiska*, 110 n. 32, following Harkavi and Westberg, also notes that the text refers to a city as Batsna

instead of Patsna (in modern Turkish, Peçenek) and Bartanit instead of Partanit (Partenice or Paretnite in Crimea). Poliak writes, "Numerous names in version B [the "long" version] seem to have been borrowed from Muslim geographers," and he notes, "The most striking example is the Arabic form Tslawiyun." See Abraham N. Poliak, "Hitgayrut ha-Kuzarim," *Tsiyon* 6, no. 2 (1941): 106–12; 6, no. 3 (1941): 160–80; idem, *Khazariah: Toledot mamlekhet yehudit be-Eiropah* (Tel Aviv, 1951); idem, "Vostochnaia Evropa IX–X vekov v predstavlenii Vostoka," *Slaviane i ikh sosedi* 10 (2001): 84. Vladimir Minorsky, *Hudud al-Alam: The Regions of the World; A Persian Geography, 372 A.H.-982 A.D.*, trans. Vladimir Minorsky (London, 1937), 470, came to similar conclusions. The issue of Arabisms was also raised by Isaak Marcus Jost and Avraham Harkavy (see Dunlop, *History of the Jewish Khazars*, 144 n. 85) and merits further study. In a recent study, Rashkovski pointed out that many of these Arabisms can be explained without contradicting the possible Khazar origins of the letter, and so this argument should be used with caution; Rashkovski, "Vnov' o poiske," 72–103.

71 A. P. Novoseltsev, *Khazarskoe gosudarstvo*, 100, 154, as cited by Elena Galkina, "Danniki Hazarskogo kaganata v pis'me carâ Iosifa," in "Rossia I Crim," ed. Igor Nastenko, special issue, *Sbornik Russkovo istoricheskovo obshchestvo* 10, no. 158 (2006): 376–90, esp. n. 20.

72 See Poliak, "Hitgayrut ha-Kuzarim." See also Vladimir Minorsky, "A New Book on the Khazars," *Oriens* 11, no. 1–2 (1958): 122–45, esp. 131–32.

73 Poliak, *Khazaria*, 21.

74 The references to Crimea in the letter do not fit what we know from other sources. See Thomas S. Noonan, "The Khazar-Byzantine World of the Crimea in the Early Middle Ages: The Religious Dimension," *Archivum eurasiae medii aevi* 10 (1998/99): 220, and V. E. Naumenko, "K voprosu o kharaktere vizantiisko-khazarskikh otnoshenii v kontse VIII: Seredine IX vv," *Problemi istorii, filologii, kulturii* 12 (2002) 561 n. 17. Petrukhin also notes that despite the letter's claims, Kerch was no longer under Khazar rule in the mid-tenth century, which is when the letter was dated. See Vladimir Petrukhin, "Khazaria and Rus," in Golden, Ben-Shammai, and Róna-Tas, *World of the Khazars*, 251. Of course, one could claim that the author of the letter provided a traditional description of the realm, but this explanation does not solve other textual difficulties, in particular the numerous problems with the text's geography. For a recent attempt to deal with one of these problems, see David Tiriyaki, "Zur Lage der Burg 'Bur-q' im Briefe des Chasarenkoenigs Joseph," in *Uluslararasi karay calismalari sempozyumu bildirileri*, ed. Mehmet Alpargu et al. (Bilecik, Turkey, 2011), 809–13.

75 See Shapira, "Hufut Kaleh," 347 n. 52.

76 See Galkina, "Danniki Hazarskogo," 376–90. Galkina suggests possible solutions, but they are not simple. See also Elena Galkina, "Territoria Khazanskogo kaganata IX-pervoj poloviny X v. v

pis'mennyh istochnikah," *Voprosy istorii* 9 (2006): 132–45, esp. 138 (for what is missing in the account), 141 (for a short discussion of the "limitations" of the letter). Galkina does not consider the possibility that the letter itself is not genuine.

77 Dunlop, who accepts the veracity of Joseph's letter, discusses this problem. He mentions that Poliak asks why there is no information in the letter about Khwarizm (Khiva) even though it had important trade relations with Khazaria, and Dunlop concludes, "We simply do not know." We may disagree with Dunlop's views but it is impossible not to admire his honesty. See Dunlop, *History of the Jewish Khazars*, 150. For an original discussion—and more complications—see Andreas Kaplony, "Routen, Anschlussrouten, Handelshorizonte im Brief von Hasday b. Shaprut an den hazarischen König," in *Ibrahim ibn Yakub at-Turtushi: Christianity, Islam and Judaism Meet in East-Central Europe, c. 800–1300 A.D.; Proceedings of the International Colloquy, 25–29 April 1994*, ed. Petr Charvát and J. Prosecký (Prague, 1996), 140–168, esp. 147.

78 Muhammad al-Muqaddasi, *The Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions*, trans. Basil Collins (Reading, Engl., 1994), 289. The exact date of his visit to the region is not clear. He was born around 945 and died in 991, so it was late in the tenth century.

79 Whittow, *Making of Byzantium*, 229. On this topic, see Thomas S. Noonan, "Some Observations on the Economy of the Khazar Khaganate," in Golden, Ben-Shammai, and Róna-Tas, *World of the Khazars*, 207–44. Olga Krasnikova, "Chornomors'ka torgivla Kiïvs'koï Rusì ta Khozars'kogo kaganatu v IX-X stolitta," *Aktual'ni problemi vitchiznanoï ta vsesvitn'oï istoriï* 14 (2011): 23–30, claims that the traders themselves were Rus and not Khazars. Whether this claim is accepted, trade certainly merited mention.

80 Flerov, *"Goroda" i "zamki"*, 10. Even if he may have exaggerated, the point that Khazaria was not characterized by a high level of urbanization is well taken.

81 See the forthcoming article by Dan Shapira, "The Khazar Account on the Ardebil War and the Problem of Its Authenticity," in *Eurasia in the Middle Ages: Studies in Honour of Peter B. Golden*, ed. István Zimonyi and Osman Karatay (Leiden, forthcoming [2014]). Shapira tries to resolve the contradictions, but the question remains. I am grateful to him for sharing the article with me.

82 Among recent scholars, Poliak regards it as an apocryphal work and suggests that the correspondence was written in Spain by a single author in the years 1070–80 (Poliak, *Khazaria*, 19). Ankori, following Poliak, terms this source a "literary fiction"; Zvi Ankori, *Karaites in Byzantium* (New York, 1959), 70. This idea was developed by N. Berlin, *Istoricheskie sud'by evrejskogo naroda na territorii Russkogo gosudarstva* (Petrograd, 1919), 114–22, but received little attention at the time. Krymskyi also wrote in the late 1930s that the letter was apochryphal, but because his work was only published in 2012, it also received no

attention. See Bubenok, Khamrai, and Chernoivanenko, "A. U. Krymskyi," 266 n. 85. For earlier studies that denied the authenticity of the letters, see Josef Marquart, *Osteuropäische und Ostasiatische Streifzuege* (Leipzig, 1903), 5–27, and Grégoire, "Le 'Glozel' Khazare," 225–66. Johannes Kramers came to a similar conclusion; see Johanned Hendrik Kramers, *Analecta Orientalia: Posthumous Writings and Selected Minor Works* (Leiden, 1954), 142. Pritsak, who relied to some degree on the letter, called it an "epic narrative": "The authenticity of the correspondence, which continues to be controversial, is irrelevant here, because the conversion story is taken as an epic narrative, not an official contemporary account"; Pritsak, "Khazar Kingdom's Conversion," 272.

83 The most recent discussion of this is Mikhail Kizilov, *Krymskaya Iudea* (Simferopol, 2010), esp. 63–65.

84 Writing on medieval forgeries, Constable notes that "it may be wise to drop the terms forgery and fraud and to call them impostures or fictions." Though he was referring to literary creations in Christian society, his description seems equally applicable to this case. See Giles Constable, "Forged Letters in the Middle Ages," in *Fälschungen im Mittelalter: Internationaler Kongress der Monumenta Germaniae Historica, München, 16.–19. September 1986*, 6 vols. (Hannover, 1988–90), 5: 20. There is less literature on forgeries in the Muslim world. On the topic, see Abdelfattah Kilito, *The Author and His Doubles: Essays on Classical Arabic Culture* (Syracuse, N.Y., 2001), 67–77.

85 On the phenomenon, see Bruce M. Metzger, "Literary Forgeries and Canonical Pseudepigrapha," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91, no. 1 (1972): 3–24, who notes, "Among the several kinds of literary forgeries in antiquity, arising from diverse motives, that of producing spurious epistles seems to have been most assiduously practiced" (9–10).

86 See Anthony Grafton, *Forgers and Critics: Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship* (Princeton, 1990), which is not only edifying but is also a source of information on how to produce a high-quality forgery. For a more detailed study, see David Henige, *Historical Evidence and Argument* (Madison, Wisc., 2005). On the *Donation of Constantine*, see Lorenzo Valla, *On the Donation of Constantine* (Cambridge, Mass., 2007).

87 See Isaac Shilat, ed., *Iggerot ha-Rambam* (Maaleh Adumim, 1986), 798; for additional cases of pseudepigraphic letters attributed to Maimonides, see the sections on doubtful letters (659–92) and letters that Maimonides clearly did not write (693–99).

88 On this letter and its "utility" in the Spanish context, see Elliot Reuben Wolfson, "Hai Gaon's Letter and Commentary on 'Aleynu': Further Evidence of Moses de León's Pseudepigraphic Activity," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 81, no. 3–4 (1991): 365–409.

89 See Gerson Cohen, "The Story of the Four Captives," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 29 (1960/61): 55–131. I am grateful to Yom Tov Assis for reminding me of this. See also Sara Tsfatman, *Bein Ashkenaz le-Sefarad* (Jerusalem, 1993), on this story.

90 See David J. Wasserstein, "When Is a Fake a Fake and How Much Does It Matter? On the Authenticity of the Letter of the Descendants of Muhammad ibn Salih to the Descendants of Mu'awiya ibn Salih," in *Texts, Documents, and Artefacts: Islamic Studies in Honour of D. S. Richards*, ed. Chase F. Robinson (Leiden, 2003), 385–404.

91 Norman Roth, *Jews, Visigoths, and Muslims in Medieval Spain: Cooperation and Conflict* (Leiden, 1994), 86.

92 Solomon Schechter, "An Unknown Khazar Document," *Jewish Quarterly Review* n.s. 3, no. 2 (1912/13): 182–219. See now the new edition of the letter in Golb and Pritsak, *Khazarian Hebrew Documents*, 75–156. My interpretation differs radically from theirs.

93 Other problems have been raised by Kokovtsov, *Evrejsko-khazarskaja perepiska*. For chronological problems, see N. K. Chadwick, *The Beginnings of Russian History: An Enquiry into Sources* (Cambridge, Engl., 1946), 47. The question of migration from Byzantium is discussed below.

94 Kokovtsov was dubious as to the authenticity of the letter. See Kokovtsov, *Evrejsko-khazarskaja perepiska*, esp. v–xxxvi. His critique was echoed by Yaakov Lur'e, "Drevnaya Rus v sochinenie Leva Gumileva," *Zvezd* 10 (1994): 167–77. See also Constantine Zuckerman, "On the Date of the Khazars' Conversion to Judaism and the Chronology of the Kings of the Rus Oleg and Igor: A Study of the Anonymous Khazar Letter from the Genizah of Cairo," *Revue des Études Byzantines* 53 (1995): 237–70, who takes a different approach from my own. Zuckerman assumes that the letter is genuine and tries to link its contents to what we know about the time and place. However, he has to admit that the Jewish origin of the Khazar Jews is unlikely (242), though it appears to be a key element of the letter. He is also forced to explain away contradictions between this letter and the letter of Joseph as the products of substantial alterations to an original text (249). To fit all the named kings into a narrow time frame, he attributes very short reigns to one king after another (269). The careful edition of Golb and Pritsak and their commentaries are no more successful at reconciling history with the details of the letter.

95 See the pseudepigraphic *Testament of Solomon*, edited and translated in F. C. Conybeare, "Testament of Solomon," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 11, no. 1 (Oct. 1898): 1–45. The reference to Sabriel (Sabrael) is on p. 35. Golda Akhiezer informed me that "this name was quite common among Iranian, Kurdish and Bucharian Jews" (personal communication).

96 See Petrukhin, "Khazaria and Rus," 258–59, for contradictions between this letter and the Russian chronicle known as *Novgorodskaja pervaja letopis* (The Russian Primary Chronicle). The anachronistic use of the term *Russia* is a curious problem. See Roth, *Jews, Visigoths, and Muslims*, 268.

97 See the survey of Kokovtsov, *Evrejsko-khazarskaja perepiska*, xxviii–xxxii.

98 Yehoshua Frenkel pointed out to me that the letter fits Czeglédy's theory of sacred kingship among the peoples of the steppes; see K.

Czeglédy, "Das Sakrale Königtum bei den Steppenvölkern," *Numen* 13 (1966): 14–26.

99 See Golb and Pritsak, *Khazarian Hebrew Documents*, 1–71. The most recent study of this letter is Constantine Zuckerman, "On the Kievan Letter from the Genizah of Cairo," *Ruthenica* 10 (2011): 7–56.

100 As Alexander Kulik wrote, "Turkic and Slavic names that appear in the Kievan letter are not indicative of the ethnic origin of their bearers, especially when some of them attribute themselves to dynasties descended from Levi and Aaron. They could be migrants who adopted local names or descendants of converts"; Kulik, "Jews of *Slavia Graeca*," 307.

101 This point was made clearly by Pritsak and others. See Pritsak, "Khazar Kingdom's Conversion," 267.

102 See Emeri van Donzel and Andrea Schmidt, *Gog and Magog in Early Eastern Christian and Islamic Sources* (Leiden, 2010), esp. 187–91. The authors discuss the question of the authenticity of the report, concluding that it is genuine, though this has not been universally accepted.

103 See Johann Friedrich, *Ein Brief des Anastasius Bibliothecarius an den Bischof Gaudericus von Velletri* (Munich, 1892), 406. On possible motives for the mission, see George P. Majeska, "Patriarch Photius and the Conversion of the Rus" *Russian History* 32, no. 1 (2005): 413–18.

104 *Legenda Italica*, a later biography (apparently written around 1100 or perhaps a bit earlier), reports that Cyril/Constantine "set out and came to the Crimea, which was a very close neighbor of the land of the Khazars. And there he tarried awhile to learn the language of this race"; Anthony-Emil Tachiaos, *Cyril and Methodius of Thessalonica: The Acculturation of the Slavs* (Crestwood, N.Y., 2001), 50–51. The same source observes that Cyril/Constantine "converted all of them from the errors which they retained, through the faithlessness of the Saracens as also of the Jews." Thus, this text as well suggests that there had been no widespread conversion to Judaism. See F. Grivec and F. Tomsic, *Constantinus et Methodius Thessalonicenses: Fontes* (Zagreb, 1960), 61, for the complete text. I am grateful to Daniel Schwarz, David Satran, and David J. Wasserstein for their assistance with the difficult Latin text.

105 The text reads: "the Jews are counseling us [*ustjat ny*] to accept their faith and usages [*detel'*] and the Saracens, on the other hand, offering peace and many gifts, are pulling us to their faith." Hence, the Khazars appealed to the Byzantine emperor, "because of our old friendship and love," to send "a learned man" to present the Christian position, promising that "should he defeat the Jews and Saracens we will adopt your faith." See Golden, "Conversion of the Khazars," 140.

106 Francis Butler, "The Representation of Oral Culture in the Vita Constantini," *Slavic and East European Journal* 39, no. 3 (1995): 368. See also Harvey Goldblatt, "History and Hagiography: Recent Studies on the Text and Textual Tradition of the Vita Constantini," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 19 (1995): 158–79, who notes, "Vita Constantini must be examined not only as a source of factual information but also as a hagiographic

construct governed by a set of literary models and patterns" (159); idem, "Variance and Invariance in Cyrillo-Methodian Hagiographic Writings," *Russian History* 33, no. 2 (2006): 235–65; and M. van Esbroeck, "Le substrat hagiographique de la mission khazare de Constantine-Cyrille," *Analecta Bollandiana* 14 (1986): 337–48, regarding difficulties in using this source as a historical record.

107 Zuckerman and Shapira both see this source as giving a *terminus post quem* of 861 for a conversion of the Khazars. Zuckerman, "On the Date of the Khazars' Conversion," 237–70. For Dan Shapira's view, see Artem Fedorchuk and Dan Shapira, "Heker batai ha-almin ha-yehudiim shel Krim," in Shapira, *Matsevot bet ha-almin*, 33. He refers to the date 862.

108 Nicholas I, Patriarch of Constantinople, *Letters*, ed. and trans. R. J. H. Jenkins and L. G. Westerink (Washington, D.C., 1973), letter 68.

109 Zuckerman notes that this letter would not fit a reality in which the Khazars were Jewish and therefore suggests that the letter referred to a little-known Crimean people, the Khotzirs. It is hardly likely that such a group, living not far from Cherson, would have merited a bishop. It is simpler to claim that if the text says Khazars it means Khazars and that they were not Jewish. See Constantine Zuckerman, "Byzantium's Pontic Policy in the *Notitiae episcopatuum*," in *La Crimée entre Byzance et le Khaganat khazar*, ed. Constantine Zuckerman (Paris, 2006), esp. 222 (on the difficulty with the Jewishness of the Khazars), 223 (on dating the letters of Nicholas), 223–26 (on the possibility that the letter referred to the Khotzirs).

110 Nicholas I, *Letters*, letter 106.

111 See Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, "Conversion, Collaboration and Confrontation: Islam in the Register of the Patriarchate of Constantinople (14th Century)," *International Review of Turkish Studies* 2 (2011): 67.

112 Much has been written on Ahmad ibn Fadlan. A useful starting point is James Montgomery, "Ibn Fadlan and the Rusiyyah," *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 3 (2000): 1–25. In Russian, see the positive assessment of ibn Fadlan as a historical source in Andrei Kovalevski, "O stepeni dostovernosti ibn-Fadlana," *Istoricheskie zapiski* 35 (1950): 265–93, http://www.vostlit.info/Texts/rus15/Ibn_Fadlan/kov.phtml?id=1606.

113 For an additional and perceptive analysis of ibn Fadlan, see James Montgomery, "Pyrrhic Scepticism and the Conquest of Disorder: Prolegomenon to the Study of Ibn Fadlan," in *Problems in Arabic Literature*, ed. M. Maroth (Piliscsaba, Hungary, 2004), 54–55.

114 James E. McKeithen, "The Risalah of Ibn Fadlan: An Annotated Translation with Introduction" (Ph. D. diss., Indiana University, 1979), 160.

115 Richard Frye, *Ibn Fadlan's Journey to Russia* (Princeton, 2005), 74.

116 As he writes in a forthcoming study that he generously shared with me, Dan Shapira, in a personal communication, noted that it was very possible that ibn Fadlan took his description of the Khazars from Ahmed ibn Sahl al-Balkhi—who also never was in Khazaria. On Ahmed ibn Sahl al-Balkhi, see Michael Jan De Goeje, "Die Istakhri-Balkhi Frage," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 25 (1871): 42–58.

117 András Róna-Tas, *Hungarians and Europe in the Early Middle Ages: An Introduction to Early Hungarian History* (Budapest, 1999), 150, writes, "This ritual would suggest that, despite the fact that both the 'great' king and the commander were of Jewish religion, they were also sun worshippers." This is a creative resolution to the contradiction, but it is rather unlikely to have been approved by any rabbi or even para-rabbi.

118 As André Miquel put it, ibn Fadlan had a "taste for the bizarre." See André Miquel, *Géographie humaine du monde musulman jusqu'au milieu du 11. siècle* (Paris, 1967), 133, and see his discussion of the "marvelous" in ibn Fadlan (134–39). On ibn Fadlan's use of amazing stories told by the Bulgars, see James Montgomery, "Travelling Autopsies: Ibn Fadlan and the Bulghar," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 7, no. 1 (2004): 12. For a discussion of the reliability of the work, see Kovalevski, "O stepeni dostovernosti ibn-Fadlana," 265–93, who finds ibn Fadlan useful but cites a great deal of contrary evidence (see, for example, n. 289). Kovalevski does not refer to the Khazars as Jews, and we can only speculate as to what he might have written in a non-Stalinist period. DeWeese makes a similar comment regarding ibn Fadlan's account of the conversion of the Bulghars: "This account is attractive for its sober and straightforward approach to the adoption of Islam. . . . [N]evertheless it should not be accepted at face value, since it is already at variance, for instance, with the account of Ibn Rustah, which has the same king professing Islam already twenty years earlier"; DeWeese, *Islamization*, 75.

119 See Petrukhin, "Khazaria and Rus," 256–57, for a discussion of Fadlan's problematic description of a "sacral" king.

120 The translation is from Adler, *Jewish Travellers*, 3. On the Radhanites, see Moshe Gil, "The Radhanite Merchants and the Land of Radhan," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 17, no. 3 (1976): 299–328.

121 On the author, see Paul Heck, *The Construction of Knowledge in Islamic Civilization: Qudama b. Ja'far and his Kitab al-kharaj wa-sina'at al-kitaba* (Leiden, 2002). For a translation of ibn Khordadhbeh's text that refers to the Khazars, see Michael Jan De Goeje, ed. and trans., *Kitab al-Masalik wa'l-Mamalik auctore Abu'l-Kâsim Obaidallah ibn Abdallah ibn Khordadhbeh, accedunt excerpta e Kitab al-Kharadj auctore Kodama ibn Dja'far* (Leiden, 1889), 199–202.

122 See James Howard-Johnston, ""Byzantine Sources for Khazar History," in Golden, Ben-Shammai, and Róna-Tas, *World of the Khazars*, 176–93, for a detailed discussion.

123 Constantinus Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, ed. Gyula Moravcsik and R. J. H. Jenkins (Washington, D.C., 1967). For a complete list of references to the Khazars, see p. 312 in the index. The apparent reference to the Khazars as "infidels" is on p. 71.

124 Ibid., 67.

125 Ibid., 89; and see 67 (on infidel tribes), 71 (on characteristics of the northern tribes), 81 (on teaching Muslims to mistreat Christians).

126 For a similar conclusion, see Kramers, *Analecta Orientalia*, 142.

127 See the discussion of this and related issues in David J. Wasserstein, "The Khazars and the World of Islam," in Golden, Ben-Shammai, and Róna-Tas, *World of the Khazars*, 373–86.

128 See, for example, the writings of Yaqut ibn 'Abd Allah al-Hamawi.

129 Yehoshua Frenkel, "The Turks of the Eurasian Steppes in Arabic Geographical Literature," in *Mongols, Turks and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World*, ed. M. Biran and R. Amitai (Leiden, 2005), 233. See also Aziz al-Azmeh, "Barbarians in Arab Eyes," *Past and Present* 134 (Feb. 1992): 3–18.

130 Much has been written. A useful introduction is Marina Tolmacheva, "Geography," in *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia*, 2 vols., ed. Josef Meri (New York, 2006), 1: 285–86.

131 See S. Maqbul Ahmad, "Ibn Rustah," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 11 vols., ed. B. Lewis et al. (Leiden, 1986), 3: 920, who writes that ibn Rustah likely wrote between 903–13. On ibn Rustah, see Hansgerd Göckenjan and István Zimonyi, *Orientalische Berichte über die Völker Osteuropas und Zentralasiens im Mittelalter: Die Gayhani-Tradition (ibn Rusta, Gardizi, Hudud al-'Alam, al-Bakri und al-Marwazi)* (Wiesbaden 2001); the reference to the conversion of the Khazars in ibn Rustah is discussed on p. 52. See also Tolmacheva, "Geography," 285–86, who writes, "The Iraqi school . . . included . . . Ibn Rusta . . . Ibn al–Faqih . . . and al-Mas'udi. . . . [A]l-Mas'udi traveled extensively but . . . [his] personal experiences seem to have had little effect on . . . [his] geographical concepts." See also Vladimir Minorsky, "The Khazars and the Turks in the Akam al-Marjan," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* 9, no. 1 (1937): 141–50, esp. 149. It is interesting that ibn Khurdadbih apparently also had access to al-Jarmi's works—and does not mention the Khazar conversion. Göckenjan and Zimonyi conclude that "[d]ie Geschichte der Bekehrung der Pecenegen zum Islam und der Chazaren zum Judentum stammen jedoch nicht aus der Gayhani Tradition . . . sondern aus an anderen, noch unbekannten Quellen" (Göckenjan and Zimonyi, *Orientalische Berichte*, 45). In other words, they regard an unknown (to us) tradition or text as the common source(s) for the description of the conversion, and not the al-Jarmi tradition. Shorokhov points to the importance of the "anonymous" tradition, which he also dates to the mid-ninth century. See Vladimir Andreeivich Shorokhov, "Khazarski kaganat i sfera evo vliyaniya v IX v. (po dannim 'anonimnoi zapiski' i 'knigi putei i stran' ibn khordadbekha)," *Trudi istoricheskovo fakulteta Sankt Peterburgskovo Universiteta* 2 (2010): 88–98, esp. 93.

132 Ibn Rustah, *Kitab al-A'lak an-Nafisa*, ed. Michael Jan De Goeje (Leiden, 1892), 139.

133 The most recent systematic discussion of this school is in Göckenjan and Zimonyi, *Orientalische Berichte*. They cite the text of his description of the Khazars on pp. 51–54.

134 Goeckenjan and Zimonyi, *Orientalische Berichte*, 32–33, and see the references to Harkavy and Marquart. Al Jayhani himself seems to have relied on an earlier source, very likely al-Garmi, for descriptions of "far off" regions about which he did not have firsthand information. Thus even if ibn Rustah relied mainly on al-Jayhani, he may have been relying indirectly on al-Garmi.

135 Dunlop, *History of the Jewish Khazars*, 108, explains that these are archaic terms that appeared in the eighth-century sources ibn Rustah was relying on. On the term *Isha*, see Peter Golden, *Khazar Studies* (Budapest, 1980), 97–98, and on the name of the city, see Göckenjan and Zimonyi, *Orientalische Berichte*, 53 n. 15.

136 The term *ishah* in Hebrew can mean "woman," and one cannot rule out the possibility that a Jewish source was pulling a sort of practical joke by describing the warlike Khazars as being ruled by a woman.

137 James Montgomery, "Ibn Rusta's Lack of 'Eloquence,' the Rus, and Samanid Cosmography," *Edebiyat* 12, no. 1 (2001): 80.

138 See the translation into French of ibn Rustah's book by Gaston Wie, *Les Atours précieux* (Cairo, 1955), 175.

139 See Göckenjan and Zimonyi, *Orientalische Berichte*, 166 (on Gardizi), 225 (on al-Qurtubi).

140 Michael Jan De Goeje, ed., *Viae Regnorum descriptio editionis Moslemicae auctore Abu Ishák al-Fárisí al-Istakhrí* (Leiden, 1927), 220. The translation is from Dunlop, *History of the Jewish Khazars*, 92.

141 M. Kmoskó, "Die Quellen Istachri's in seinem Berichte über die Chasaren," *Körösi csoma archivum* 1 (1921–25): 141–48. See also C. A. Macartney, *The Magyars in the Ninth Century* (Cambridge, Engl., 1930), 8.

142 As translated in Dunlop, *History of the Jewish Khazars*, 97–98.

143 Golden, "Conversion of the Khazars," 145. According to André Miquel, "Ibn Hawqal," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3: 787, he was in the region of Khazaria in the years 961–69, but this is not reflected in his writing. There are no references to him after 973; ibn Hawqal claimed that Hasdai ibn Shaprut actually visited Khazaria (see Dunlop, *History of the Jewish Khazars*, 154), but this does not seem very likely, to say the least, as such a journey would have been quite a feat. Minorsky, "New Book," 132, regards this report as astonishing. Moreover, it would be surprising to find no references to such a journey in the Spanish Jewish literature and the only reference to it on a map by ibn Hawqal. Joseph of Barcelona should have known about it and would have had no grounds to doubt the veracity of the correspondence between Hasdai and Joseph. He probably would have mentioned the journey. See the discussion of S. M. Stern, "Shetei yediyot al Hasdai ibn Shaprut," *Tsiyon* 11, no. 1–3 (1946): 141–46, who also has doubts about the likelihood of such a journey. However, for a different point of view, see Boris Rashkovski, "Hasdaj ibn Shaprut i Abu-l-Kasim ibn Haukal': Khazarskaa diplomatia evrejskogo sanovnika v arabskom geograficheskom traktate," in Chernoivanenko, *Ukrains'ka orientalistika*, 154–69.

144 See Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible from Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm* (Nijmegen, 1993), 51–55.

145 Golden, "Conversion of the Khazars," 153. On al-Mas'udi, see Ahmad Shboul, *Al-Mas'udi and His World* (London, 1979).

146 Paul Wheatley, *The Places Where Men Pray Together: Cities in Islamic Lands, Seventh through the Tenth Centuries* (Chicago, 2001), 70.

147 Al-Mas'udi, *Meadows of Gold*, trans. Aloys Sprenger (London, 1841), 407.

148 Ibid, 410.

149 The following description illustrates this difficulty: "The Larisians and other Moslims in the country of the Khazar heard of the conduct of the Russians and they said to their king: 'The Russians have invaded the country of our Moslim brothers; they have shed their blood and made their wives and children captives, as they were unable to resist; permit us to oppose them.' As the king was not able to keep them quiet, he sent messengers to the Russians, informing them that the Moslims intended to attack them" (al-Mas'udi, *Meadows of Gold*, 419). A king who cannot control his subjects is not much of a king—and it is also doubtful that subjects who have enough power to wage war on their own would accept with equanimity a king who informs their enemy that they are about to attack. Reuven Amitai suggests as an explanation (personal communication) that kingship had different characteristics in Central Asia than in other regions. In addition, Dan Shapira points out (personal communication) that Islamic communities outside of Khazaria should have had significant contacts with the Islamic community in Khazaria, and they would have transmitted accurate information on the situation in Khazaria to geographers and other interested individuals.

150 Al-Baladhuri, *The Origins of the Islamic State (Kitab Futuh al-Buldan)*, trans. Philip Hitti (New York, 1916), 319. The year 240 A.H. corresponds to 854 C.E.

151 See Shboul, *Al-Mas'udi*, 227–84. At the same time, Shboul wrote: "Al-Mas'udi's clear testimony on this event which does not seem to be mentioned in other Arabic or in Byzantine sources is supported by indirect evidence derived from medieval Jewish sources" (169). As we shall see, these sources are not only indirect but also problematic.

152 Shboul, *Al-Mas'udi*, 407.

153 For example, there is no mention of such a persecution by the eleventh-century historian John Skylitzes, *Synopsis of Byzantine History*, trans. John Wortley (Cambridge, Engl., 2010), even though he devotes an entire chapter to the life and career of Romanus. See especially the recent article by Steve Bowman, "Jewish Responses to Byzantine Polemics from the Ninth through the Eleventh Centuries," *Shofar* 28, no. 3 (2010): 103–15. Dan Shapira brought to my attention Julius Aronius, *Regesten zur Geschichte der Juden in Fränkischen und Deutschen Reiche bis zur Jahre 1273* (Berlin, 1902), 53–54 n. 124, which refers to a report on the conversion of the Jews of Jerusalem to Christianity around the year 935 that called on Christians to encourage Jews in other places to convert.

There is no evidence indicating a flight of the Jews to Khazaria or an aggressive policy of Romanus against Jews.

154 Constantini Porphyrogeniti, *De Ceremoniis Aulae Byzantinae*, 2 vols., ed. J. Reiske (Bonn, 1829), 1: 690. The quotation is from a section that deals with protocol in official correspondence. See also Paul Stephenson's online translation, http://www.paulstephenson.info/trans/decer.html. Stephenson notes: "The extension of order to the non-Byzantine world led to the creation of what has been dubbed 'the hierarchy of states.' At the top of the hierarchy, after Byzantium, came the Sassanian Persians, then the Arabs and later the sultan of Egypt, with whom the emperor negotiated on terms of quasi-equality. Next came the khagan of the Khazars, and after this various western potentates, including the king of the Franks." See also Marlia Mundell Mango, "Hierarchies of Rank and Materials: Diplomatic Gifts Sent by Romanus I in 935 and 938," *Deltion christianikes archaiologikes hetaireias* 24 (2003): 365–74.

155 On the *Vision of Daniel*, see Andrew Sharf, *Byzantine Jewry from Justinian to the Fourth Crusade* (London, 1971); Robert Bonfil, "Hazon Daniel ki-te'udah historit ve-sifrutit," *Tsiyon* 44 (1979): 111–47; idem, "'Od 'al hazon Daniel ki-te'udah historit ve-sifrutit," *Tsiyon* 56 (1991): 87–90. Bonfil suggests that the vision was written before Romanus rose to power (Bonfil, "Hazon Daniel," 133).

156 See Sharf, *Byzantine Jewry*, 202. The original text is in Louis Ginzberg, *Kit'ei midrash ve-halakhah*, vol. 1 of *Ginzei Schechter* (New York, 1928), 320.

157 Sharf, *Byzantine Jewry*, 97–102, does describe persecution of the Jews by Romanus; however, he relies only on al-Mas'udi and materials related to Hasdai ibn Shaprut, which, as we shall see below, are problematic. See Shapira, "Hufut Kaleh," who raises the possibility of a return migration to Byzantium but does not cite any sources (347).

158 See Robert Bonfil, "Continuity and Discontinuity (641–1204)," in Bonfil et al., *Jews in Byzantium*, 95.

159 *Des Metropoliten Elias von Nisibis Buch vom Beweis der Wahrheit des Glaubens*, trans. L. Horst (Colmar, France, 1886), 42. The original text, in Arabic, has not been published. See also Juan Pedro Monferrer Sala, "Elias of Nisibis," in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, 5 vols., ed. David Thomas et al. (Leiden, 2010), 2: 738.

160 Ibn al-Faqih, *Kitab al-Buldan*, as cited and translated by Golden, "Conversion of the Khazars," 142. One scholar notes, "As an *adib* [gentleman scholar], not a dry geographer, Ibn al-Faqih is under no obligation to deal with his geographical material in a systematic way. . . . His geographical material is copiously enlivened with legendary or traditional matter"; J. F. P. Hopkins, "Geographical and Navigational Literature," in *Religion, Learning and Science in the 'Abbasid Period*, ed. M. J. L. Young, J. D. Latham, and R. B. Serjeant (Cambridge, Engl., 1990), 311.

161 See ibn al-Faqih al-Hamdani, *Abrégé du livre des pays* (Damascus, 1973), 344 (on the great wall), 345 (on Balanjer), 353 (on the location of the Khazars).

162 Miquel, *Géographie humaine*, 161.

163 R. Blachère, *Extraits des principaux géographes arabes du moyen âge* (Paris, 1932), 70.

164 354 A.H. = 965 C.E.

165 Abu Ali Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Yaqub Miskawayh, *The Eclipse of the Abbasid Caliphate*, 7 vols., ed. and trans. D. S. Margoliouth and H. F. Amedroz (Oxford, 1920–21), 5: 223.

166 See the clear summary in Dunlop, *History of the Jewish Khazars*.

167 M. S. Khan, "Sources of the Contemporary History of Miskawaih," (Ph.D. diss., Oxford University, 1958), 17.

168 B. H. Siddiqui, "Miskawayh on the Purposes of Historiography," *Muslim World* 61, no. 1 (1971): 22.

169 F. Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden, 1968), 141. Siddiqui had similar views: "History, to him, seeks to instruct; it draws our attention to the lessons which underlie the rise and fall of nations"; Siddiqui, "Miskawayh," 22.

170 See Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 56–58. For more on al-Muqaddasi, see Wheatley, *Places Where Men Pray Together*, 62–67.

171 Ibid., 293.

172 Wilhelm Barthold, "Khazar," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1st ed., 9 vols., ed. M. T. Houtsma et al. (Leiden, 1913–36), 2: 995.

173 Al-Muqaddasi, *Best Divisions*, 44.

174 Abu'l-Faraj Muhammad bin Is'haq al-Nadim, *The Fihrist of al-Nadim: A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture*, ed. and trans. Bayard Dodge (New York, 1970), 36–37.

175 Wasserstein, "Khazars," 384.

176 Ankori, *Karaites in Byzantium*, 67.

177 Leon Nemoy, "Al-Qirqisani's Account of the Jewish Sects and Christianity," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 7 (1930): 317–97. I thank Daniel Lasker for his clarification of the nature of the work.

178 An anonymous Byzantine-Karaite commentary on the book of Esther, apparently written in the eleventh or twelfth century, refers to the Khazars. See Michael Wechsler, "Ten Newly Identified Fragments of Saadia's Commentary on Esther," in *Pesher Nahum: Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature from Antiquity through the Middle Ages presented to Norman (Nahum) Golb*, ed. Joel Kraemer and Michael Wechsler (Chicago, 2012), 263. The commentator notes, "In this time of ours, moreover, we have seen in the land of Turkey that the Khazars worship a man" (134). It is not clear whether the author was referring to contemporary Khazars or to Khazars in the past. In any case, it is noteworthy that the author does not refer to the Khazars as Jews or as apostates for worshipping men. In other words, he knows about their patterns of worship, and they are not Jewish patterns.

179 Leonid Chekin, "Christian of Stavelot and the Conversion of Gog and Magog: A Study of the Ninth-Century Reference to Judaism among the Khazars," *Russia mediaevalis* 9, no. 1 (1997): 13–34 (see 18–21 on the

dating of the commentary). Chekin regards the use of "Gazari" instead of the more literary "Chazari" as a possible indication that Christian of Stavelot gleaned his knowledge about the Khazars from informants and not books (22–23).

180 Although imaginary, Gog and Magog were in many respects more important than some real nations. See Scott Westrem, "Against Gog and Magog," in *Text and Territory: Geographical Imagination in the European Middle Ages*, ed. Sylvia Tomasch and Sealy Gilles (Philadelphia, 1998), 54–75.

181 Anderson, *Alexander's Gate*.

182 For a different approach, see Chekin, "Christian of Stavelot." Zuckerman also analyzes this source carefully and uses it to "date" the Khazar conversion, though some problems remain. See Zuckerman, "On the Date of the Khazars' Conversion," 237–70, and idem, "On the Kievan Letter," 7–56.

183 I am ignoring the forged Mejelis Document. See the most recent study by Dan Shapira, "The Mejelis 'Document' and Tapani Harviainen: On Scholarship, Firkowicz and Forgeries," in *Omeljan Pritsak Armağanı / A Tribute to Omeljan Pritsak*, ed. Mehmet Alpargu and Yücel Öztürk (Sakarya, Turkey, 2007), 303–93. A Zoroastrian work known as *Denkart*, dated to the ninth century, mentions in passing the conversion of the Khazars to Judaism. The author does not state his source, nor does he provide any details. There is no way to check the reliability of the comment, but as it was written in Iran, it clearly was not based on direct information on the religious situation in Khazaria. See M. Mole, *La Légende de Zoroastre selon les textes pehlevis* (Paris, 1967), 277.

184 Pritsak, "Khazar Kingdom's Conversion," 280–81, argues: "Long-distance merchants alone were responsible for the conversions of the Uighurs, imperial Turks, and Khazars. The merchants' regular contacts made them familiar with these societies and allowed them to act as proselytizers of their respective faiths. The merchants presented their beliefs in a popularized version attractive to people unaccustomed to theological abstractions. Had trained religionists approached the steppe warrior societies, their dogma and ideology would have been totally alien and incomprehensible. It was precisely because they did not, and because the three conversions were achieved by unofficial merchant popularizers, that the events themselves went unrecorded in the respective religious centers of the time." The idea is fascinating, but there is no evidence for it in the case of the Khazars.

185 See Howard-Johnston, "Byzantine Sources," 163–93. George Huxley writes, "when Constantine Porphyrogenitus [mid-tenth century] was putting together his work on imperial foreign policy, relations with Chazaria had soured. The conversion of the rulers to Judaism was not the reason—the Porphyrogenitus does not even mention the matter. The trouble was the Chazars could not be expected to keep the Rhos in check"; George Huxley, "Byzantinochazarika," *Hermathena* 148 (1990):

80. The earliest reference I have found in a Byzantine source to Khazar Jews is in *The Life of Saint Zotikos*, a hagiography written or recorded by Akropolites (c. 1250–c. 1324). Two stories at the end of the collection refer to Khazar Jews living in Constantinople. Timothy Miller, who edited the text, has suggested that the stories are much earlier, though there is no evidence for an early date. In any case, the existence of some Khazar Jews in Constantinople is not relevant to the question of whether or not the king and elite converted to Judaism. See Timothy S. Miller, "The Legend of Saint Zotikos according to Constantine Akropolites," *Analecta bollandiana* 112 (1994): 339–76.

186 Telemachos Lounghis, "Byzantine Political Encounters concerning Eastern Europe (V–XI Centuries)," in *Byzantium and East Central Europe*, ed. Günter Prinzing (Kraków, 2001), 17–25.

187 Eutichio, *Gli Annali*, ed. Bartolomeo Pirone (Cairo, 1987), 43.

188 I will not go into detail here regarding sources for contact between Russians and Khazars from Tamatarkha or elsewhere. These are not very early, and the archaeological evidence for a powerful Jewish presence in Crimean cities is lacking. See, for example, the useful recent publication of Viktor Nikolaevich Chhaidze, *Tamatarha: Rannesrednevekovyj gorod na Tamanskom poluostrove* (Moscow, 2008). It should be noted that much of the "evidence" for Jewish settlement is problematic. For example, there is a tendency to identify every gravestone depicting a candelabrum with any number of branches as the gravestone of a Jew, even though the Jewish menorah, which is a form of candelabrum, has seven branches.

189 Samuel Hazard Cross and Olgerd Sherbowitz-Wetzor, *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), 97. *The Russian Primary Chronicle* was written in the early twelfth century on the basis of much earlier materials.

190 Henrik Birnbaum, "On Some Evidence of Jewish Life and Anti-Jewish Sentiments in Medieval Russia," *Viator* 4 (1973): 225–55, regarded the story as a late insertion and concluded that "the historicity of Vladimir's debate with the Jews as told in the Nestor Chronicle is in itself more than doubtful" (228); see also Aleksandr Koptev, "The Story of 'Chazar Tribute': A Scandinavian Ritual Trick in the Russian Primary Chronicle," *Scando-Slavica* 56, no. 2 (2010): 189–212. Other texts have been used to provide Russian sources or references to a Khazar conversion to Judaism. Paul Wexler, "Why There May Have Been Contacts between Slovenes and Jews before 1000 AD," *Slovensky jezyk* 1 (1997), refers to the "South Slavic and Rumanian tradition of associating Jews with legendary giants" (59) and to Saineinu, who "noted that Rumanian used both Tatar 'Turk' and Jidov 'Jew' to denote giants, a fact which he ascribed to the conversion of the Khazar Turks to Judaism" (60). However, there are many alternative explanations for this phenomenon other than the conversion of the Khazars to Judaism and the subsequent creation of images of Judaized Khazars as giant opponents. Wexler himself points out some of them and

also notes sources that suggest that the term *Zidovin* may not even apply to Jews (60 n. 11). See on this topic M. Vasil'ev, "Hors zhidovin: Drevnerusskoe âzycheskoe bozhestvo v kontekste problem Khazaro-Slavica," *Slavanovedenie* 2 (1995): 12–21. He clearly demonstrates the term's lack of relevance to Jewish Khazars.

191 A Greek text usually referred to as *The Report of the Gothic Toparch* could be cited as yet another case of silence; see, for example, Alexander Vasiliev, *Goths in the Crimea* (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), 83–117. However, Ihor Sevcenko, "The Date and Author of the So-Called Fragments of Toparcha Gothicus," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 25 (1971): 115–88, argues very convincingly that this source is an early nineteenth-century forgery and therefore cannot be relied on. The claim that the text is a forgery has been challenged by A. N. Sakharov, "Vostochnyj pohod Svjatoslava i 'Zapiska grecheskogo toparha,'" *Istorija SSSR* 3 (1982): 96–103; Ivan Bozhilov, *Anonim na Haze Bolgaria i Vizantia na Dolni Dunav v kraa na X vek* (Sofia, 1979); and S. Haritonov, "Srednevekovom pis'mennom pamatnike: Zapiska gotskogo toparha' v svazi s rezul'tatami arkheologicheskih issledovanij Eski-Kermena i ego okrugi," *Arkheologicheskie vesti* 10 (2003): 305–15, but Sevcenko remains more convincing. The recent article by I. P. Medvedev, "Novonaidenni tekst pisma Maksima Katilianosa: Eshche odna poddelka Karla Benedikta Gaze," *Bizantiiskii Vremennik* 66 (2007): 307–22, supports the claim that the source was forged; see Sevcenko's note there (322–23). I thank Mikhail Kizilov for the reference.

192 Dan Shapira, "Armenian and Georgian Sources on the Khazars," in Golden, Ben-Shammai, and Róna-Tas, *World of the Khazars*, 352. There is no reference to the conversion in the earliest version of *The Georgian Chronicle*, which is in Armenian. See the French translation, published by M. F. Brosset, *Additions et éclaircissements à l'Histoire de la Géorgie* (Saint Petersburg, 1851).

193 Vakhtang Goiladze, ed., *Caucasus in Georgian Sources* (Tbilisi, 2012); see the entry by K. Nadiradze, "Khazars," 310–12.

194 Vachkova, "Danube Bulgaria," 357.

195 Mark Dickens, "Medieval Syriac Historians' Perceptions of the Turks" (M.Phil. diss., University of Cambridge, 2004), and idem, "The Sons of Magog: The Turks in Michael's Chronicle," *Parole de l'Orient* 31 (2006): 433–50. Thus, for example, Elias of Nisibis makes no mention of the conversion; see Wolfgang Felix, "Elija bar Sinaja," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, 15 vols., ed. Ehsan Yarshater (Costa Mesa, Calif., 1997) 8.4: 363–64.

196 Vladimir Minorsky, *A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th–11th Centuries* (Cambridge, Engl., 1958). Reference to the Khazars' Jewishness is missing in an early twelfth-century chronicle published by Minorsky that refers a number of times to the Khazars; see Vladimir Minorsky, ed., *Abwab fi al-Sin wa-al-Turk wa-al-Hind muntakhabah min Kitab Tabai al-hayawan* (London, 1942), esp. 33 (text), 109 (commentary). According to Minorsky's translation, Isfandiyar refers to

Shirwanshah, king of the Khazars. It should be noted that Minorsky later corrected himself and wrote, "The surmise that in Ibn Isfandiyar Shirwan Shah stands for the 'king of the Khazars' is a misunderstanding." See Minorsky, "New Book," 139. See also Edward Browne, *An Abridged Translation of the History of Tabaristán Compiled about A.H. 613 (A.D. 1216) by Muhammad b. al-Hasan b. Isfandiyár* (Leiden, 1905), 199.

197 See the anonymous "Arabic Chronicle from the Creation to 1159 A.D.," in *Anecdota Oxoniensia: Mediaeval Jewish Chronicles and Chronological Notes*, 2 vols., ed. A. Neubauer (Oxford, 1895), 2: 89–110. For a (short) discussion of this work, see Rosenthal, *History of Muslim Historiography*, 139–40. On Saadya Gaon, see Abraham Harkavy, "Rav Sa'adyah Gaon 'al devar ha-Kuzarim," in *Semitic Studies in Memory of Rev. Dr. Alexander Kohut*, ed. G. A. Kohut (Berlin, 1897), 244–47. This topic was recently reexamined, though the picture did not change. See Boris Rashkovski, "Hazaria i hazary v biblejskih kommentariâh Saad'i Gaona," in Petrukhin, *Khazary*, 77–89.

198 See the text in Abraham Harkavy, "Divrei Avraham," *Hamagid* 21, no. 39 (1877): 357. Harkavy suggests that the commentary was written by either Saadia Gaon or Benjamin Nahawendi. Saadia Gaon was the later of the two; if the commentary was written by Benjamin Nahawendi, who lived in the ninth century, one could argue that he preceded the conversion, hence the lack of reference to the Khazars. However, if the author was Saadia, then the silence is significant. Harkavy cites other Jewish sources from that time that refer to the Khazars, but none of them refer to their Jewishness.

199 "A man will go out of the land of the Khazars with a large army; he will go up against the Byzantines and defeat them and the sword will devour the enemy for three months and they will live in fear three months and many of their cities will be destroyed"; Moshe Gil, "The Apocalypse of Zerubbabel in Judaeo-Arabic," *Revue des Études Juives* 165 (2006): 21; see also 1, 21 (on the identification of the author), 41, and 55.

200 I. Friedlaender, "The Arabic Original of the Report of R. Nathan Hababli," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 17, no. 4 (1905): 747–61.

201 See Kaplony, "Routen," 140–68, esp. 147.

202 See the translation into English of Petahyah's account in Adler, *Jewish Travellers*, 83, and Ankori, *Karaites in Byzantium*, 81. Petahyah, who lived in the twelfth century, long after the destruction of the Khazar Empire, refers in the present tense to kings of Meshech who, in the wake of dreams, converted along with all the inhabitants of their land. However, this is not a reliable source regarding the Khazars because it is so late and not firsthand. Moreover, nothing is known about a kingdom of Meshech in the twelfth century. The relative silence of medieval Jewish sources apart from the ones analyzed below is discussed by Boris Rashkovski, "K voprosu ob otnoshenii k Hazarii v evrejskih istochnikah X veka," *Problemy evrejskoj istorii* 1 (2008), 72–85. Rashkovski points out that some medieval Hebrew sources referred to the Khazars but not to

their conversion, and he deals with the difficulty of reconciling this silence with the story of the conversion. On the genre of Hebrew travelogues and Petahyah in particular, see Ayelet Oettinger, "Making the Myth Real: The Genre of Hebrew Itineraries to the Holy Land in the 12th–13th Century," *Folklore* 36 (2007): 41–66, and Yehoshua Prawer, "Tiurei masa' ivriyim be-Erets Yisrael ba-tekufah ha-tsalvanit: Ha-meah ha-12," *Katedrah* 40 (1986): 31–62.

203 Adolph Büchler, "Relation d'Isaac b. Dorbelo sur une consultation envoyée par les Juifs du Rhin en l'an 960 aux communautés de Palestine," *Revue des Études Juives* 44 (1902): 238.

204 See, for example, Samau'al al-Maghribi, *Ifham al-Yahud: Silencing the Jews*, ed. and trans. Moshe Perlmann (New York, 1964).

205 Golden, "Conversion of the Khazars," 142. He also notes that ibn A'tham al-Kufi (d. 926) referred to the conversion of the Khazar king to Islam but had nothing to say regarding other religions in Khazaria. It is difficult to assume that he would have refrained from mentioning the conversion of the Khazars to Judaism, had he known of it.

206 Abu Muhammad Abdallah ibn Muslim ibn Qutaiba, Abu Ja'far Ahmad bin Yahya bin Jabir Baladhuri, Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, Ahmad Abu Muhammad ibn A'tham al-Kufi, Abu Bakr Ahmad al-Hamdani ibn al-Faqih, ibn Rustah (though see below for a different opinion), Mukhammad Abu'l-Qasim ibn Hawqal, and the anonymous author of Hudud al-'Alam.

207 See David Thomas, "Khabar al-Yahud wa-l-Nasara," in Thomas et al., *Christian-Muslim Relations*, 5: 0640–42.

208 See A. C. S. Peacock, *Early Seljuq History: A New Interpretation* (London, 2010), esp. 27–35. I am grateful to Yehoshua Frenkel for bringing this source to my attention. Of course, it is possible that there were references to the Khazar conversion in the lost part.

209 See Dan Shapira, "Mapat Firkovich," in Shapira, *Matsevot bet ha-almin*, 104 n. 68; idem, "Hufut Kaleh: Sekirah historit," 347; and idem, "Karai mizrakh Eiropah u-rikam ha-Turki," in Shapira, *Matsevot bet ha-almin*, 435–44. Shapira is also puzzled by the absence of references to refugees. He offers possible explanations but finds no sources to support them. He also mentions the theory that links Khazars and Karaites and emphatically rejects it.

210 Alexander Kulik, "Jews and the Language of Eastern Slavs," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 104, no. 1 (2014): 105–43.

211 See Abraham ibn Daud, *Sefer ha-kabalah*, ed. and trans. Gershon Cohen (Philadelphia, 1967), 93: "We have seen some of their descendants in Toledo, scholars who informed us that their legal practice conforms to rabbanite usage." No doubt some individuals told Abraham ibn Daud that they were descended from Khazars. However, Khazaria is far from Toledo (more than 5,000 km), and there were no direct trade routes between them, so it is difficult to imagine how refugees were able to get from the Central Asian steppes to Spain. Therefore, the possibility of

"pious" dissembling on the part of migrants to Toledo from the East cannot be easily dismissed. G. Cohen, the editor, notes, "whether or not the so-called Khazar correspondence is genuine, ibn Daud and the courtier class certainly thought it was" (281). On the theory that East European Karaites or Krymchaks are descended from the Khazars, see Mikhail Kizilov, "The Krymchaks: Current State of the Community," in *The Euro-Asian Jewish Yearbook, 5768 (2007/2008)*, ed. M. Chlenov et al. (Moscow, 2009), 63–89, esp. 76. Y. Kuzmin-Yumanadi, "O gebraizmah v chuvashskom âzyke," *Sovetskaya turkologia* 2 (1987): 69–76, on the influence of Hebrew in the Chuvash language, does not provide proof of conversion.

212 See Antonio Arnaiz-Villena et al., "HLA Genes in the Chuvashian Population from European Russia: Admixture of Central European and Mediterranean Populations," *Human Biology* 75, no. 3 (2003): 375–92, esp. 382, table 3, and C. R. Guglielmino and Judit Béres, "Genetic Structure in Relation to the History of Hungarian Ethnic Groups," *Human Biology* 68, no. 3 (1996): 335–45.

213 Vladimir Petrukhin and Valerii Flerov, "Iudaizm v khazarii po dannim arkheologii," in *Istoria evreiskovo naroda v rossi ot drevnosti do rannevo novovo vremen*, ed. Alexander Kulik (Moscow, 2010), 151–63. See also Irina Shingiray, "On the Path through the Shadow Empire: The Khazar Nomads at the North-Western Frontier of Iran and the Islamic Caliphate" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 2011), and the various articles of Bozena Werbart, including "Khazars or Saltovo-Majaki Culture," *Current Swedish Archaeology* 4 (1996): 199–221.

214 See, for example, the comprehensive study by A. N. Aibabin, *Etnicheskaya istorii pannevizantniskovo Krima* (Simferopol, 1999), which has a chapter on Khazars but no references to Judaism. It should be noted that the excavated graveyard in Chelarevo (Serbia) that is sometimes cited has yielded fascinating materials, but they are not related to the Khazars—if only because Chelarevo is far from the Khazar lands. As Shapira writes in "Notes on Early Jewish History," 146–47, "the archeological finds in Chelarevo in Vojevodina, which have no connection with the Khazars, suggest some of the pseudo-Avars practiced a form of Judaism." He refers to R. Bunarjich, "Chelavo: Nekropol i poselenie VIII–IX vekov," in Petrukhin, *Khazary*, 522–31.

215 K. V. Kasparova, "The Khazar-Slav Fortress Sarkel-Belaya Vezha," in *Treasure of Khan Kubrat: Culture of Bulgars, Khazars, Slavs*, ed. K. V. Kasparova et al. (Sofia, 1989), 82.

216 Svetlana Alexandrovna Pletneva, *Ot kochevij k gorodam: Saltovo-Majackaja kul'tura* (Moscow, 1967), 178–79.

217 Kasparova, "Khazar-Slav Fortress," 82.

218 Ibid., 72.

219 See V. E. Flerova, *Graffiti Khazarii* (Moscow, 1997).

220 Pletneva, *Ot kochevij k gorodam*, 179, writes that in the mid-ninth century, amulets with solar symbols went out of use, apparently as a result of the conversion to Judaism. What she does not say is that few amulets were

found for the period before the mid-ninth century, that such symbols were not classic symbols of the "pagan" Tengri faith of the Khazars, and that other burial practices, such as animal and possibly human sacrifice, that are far less consistent with Judaism, remained in practice.

221 Such gravestones certainly exist. See E. Lûcenko, "Drevnie evrejskie nadgrobnye pamyatniki, otkrytye v nasypyah Fanagorijskogo gorodisha," *Tretij mezkdunarodnyj sezd orientalistov*, 2 vols; ed. W. Grigorieff (Saint Petersburg, 1879–80), 1: 573–80, and see his illustrations at the end of the volume, which are often reproduced without citation. See also the discussion of Viktor Nikolaevich Chhaidze, "Khazarskaya tamatarha: Kul'turnyj sloj Tamanskogo gorodisha VII-X vv" (Ph.D. diss., Institute of Archaeology, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, 2007). This indicates integration of Jews into the local culture, not an unknown phenomenon, and possibly proselytism. However, the use of tombstones by Khazars is not known from other regions under Khazar rule. Thus the existence of these tombstones in Crimea, not at all the heart of the Khazar Empire, is hardly proof that the Khazars or their leadership converted to Judaism. Moreover, tamga signs were employed by many—not only by Khazars. See Alexander Fetisov, "The 'Rurikid Sign' from the B3 Church at Basarabi-Murfatlar," *Studia patzinaka* 4, no. 1 (2007): 29–44, esp. 32.

222 See Shingiray, "On the Path," 118.

223 Ibid., 635; Shingiray finds no evidence of the identification of Khazars with Judaism and no material sources that would support such a claim. In a private communication, she wrote that Khazar burial practices were not Jewish and that therefore, if they considered themselves to be Jewish, this was a nonnormative type of Judaism. See Shingiray, "On the Path," for discussions of Mazdean burial practices.

224 Peter Golden, "Khazarskii iudaizm v svete pismennikh istochnikov," in Kulik, *Istoria evreiskovo naroda*, 136 n. 39.

225 Roman K. Kovalev, "Creating Khazar Identity through Coins: The Special Issue Dirhams of 837/8," in *East Central and Eastern Europe in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Florin Curta (Ann Arbor, Mich., 2005), 227. A dirhem (the word is derived from the Greek *drachma*) was a silver coin of about three grams that was widespread in the Muslim world.

226 G. Rispling, "Coins with Crosses and Bird Heads: Christian Imitations of Islamic Coins?," *Fornvännen* 82 (1987): 75–87.

227 Roman Kovalev, "Creating Khazar Identity," 227.

228 Ibid.; Kovalev focuses on explaining why the change took place but does not explain the more interesting question of why it was so short lived.

229 Dan Shapira, "Khazars and Karaites, Again," *Karadeniz Arastırmaları* 13 (Spring 2007): 44 n. 4, also raises the point that a mint maker could have initiated the change.

230 See Adel Allouche, *Mamluk Economics: A Study and Translation of al-Maqrizi's Ighathah* (Salt Lake City, Utah, 1994), 59–60. See also David J.

Wasserstein, "Sumayr," *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, 5 vols, ed. Norman A. Stillman (Leiden, 2012), 4: 420–21. Even if we may question whether such a person existed, it is significant that the author of the story saw it as believable for his listeners.

231 Roman Kovalev, "What Does Historical Numismatics Suggest about the Monetary History of Khazaria in the Ninth Century: Question Revisited," *Archivum eurasiae medii aevi* 13 (2004): 97–129, esp. 112–15. According to Kovalev, some of the coins minted that year bear the name Jalil\Khalil, apparently the name of the minter. However, this was not a common name among Jews. If the minter of the Moses dirhem was Jewish, it is necessary to assume that two minters were active that year or that the otherwise unknown Jalil\Khalil was the exceptional Jew with the atypical name.

232 See Noonan, "Khazar-Byzantine World," 207–30.

233 See Howard-Johnston, "Byzantine Sources," 170–71 n. 28; Zuckerman, "Byzantium's Pontic Policy," 201–30. Howard-Johnston explains his reasons for dating the letter to 858–67 and refers to Zuckerman's dating it a decade later. For our purposes, the date makes no difference.

234 Reuven Amitai, "Towards a Pre-History of the Islamization of the Turks: A Re-Reading of Ibn Fadlan's Rihla," *Cahiers de Studia Iranica* 39 (2008): 279.

235 For a discussion of this problem, see Gerald Mako, "The Islamization of the Volga Bulghars: A Question Reconsidered," *Archivum eurasiae medii aevi* 18 (2011): 199–223.

236 For a recent discussion of some of the issues and difficulties, see Oleg B. Bubenok, "Osnovanie alanskoi mitropolin i nachalni etapi khristianizatsia alanov severnovo kavkaza," *Drinovski zbirnik* 5 (2012): 190–99. See also Sergey Ivanov, "Religious Missions," in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire*, ed. Jonathan Shepard (Cambridge, Engl., 2008), 305–32, esp. 320–22. He points out that a number of sources deal with missionary work with the Alans and give no hint of opposition from Jews or Khazars.

237 Irina Arzhantseva, "The Christianization of North Caucasus (Religious Dualism among the Alans)," in *Die Christianisierung des Kaukasus*, ed. Werner Seibt (Vienna, 2002), 17–36. Arzhansteva refers to the destruction of some Christian churches, but this is not evidence for the Jewishness of the Khazars unless we assume that only Jews could have done such a thing. M. Karaketov's attempt to point out Jewish and Khazar terms and customs among the Karachaevs, who may be descended from Alans, is interesting but far from proof; see M. Karaketov, "Khazarsko-iudeiskoe nasledie v traditsionnoi culture karachaevtsev," *Vestnik evreiskovo universiteta* 1, no. 14 (1997): 102–10.

238 DeWeese also describes conversion to Islam by the Bulghars: "Islam was adopted [in the early tenth century], by all accounts, when the Bulghar state was subject to the Khazar qaghan [king], by a ruler with a title indicating his subordinate status"; DeWeese, *Islamization*, 74. See also

the discussion above regarding the letters of Nicholas I, patriarch of Constantinople, and Zuckerman, "Byzantium's Pontic Policy," 201–30.

239 For a similar problem (and resolution), see P. P. Tolochko, "Mif o khazaro-iudesikom osnovanii Kyive," in *Rosiiskaya archologiy* 2, no. 2 (2001): 38–42, who deals with accounts that purportedly describe Kiev as founded by Khazar Jews but finds these claims baseless.

240 As Avraham Malamat writes, "The received tradition can indeed be utilized in reconstructing early events, but criteria must first be established by which the historical kernel may be identified and distinguished from later accretions"; Avraham Malamat, "The Proto-History of Israel: A Study in Method," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman*, ed. Carol L. Meyers (Philadelphia, 1983), 308. For a description of this phenomenon in a different context, see Hans Christian Andersen, "Kejserens nye Klæder," *Eventyr* 1, no. 3 (1837): 107–11.

241 As Simon Szyszman puts it, "Des erreurs fondamentales, à force d'avoir été répétées par d'autres, sont devenues des dogmes"; Simon Szyszman, "La question des Khazars: Essai de mise au point," *Jewish Quarterly Review* n.s. 73, no. 2 (1982): 189.

242 Ara Norenzayan et al., "Memory and Mystery: The Cultural Selection of Minimally Counterintuitive Narratives," *Cognitive Science* 30 (2006): 531–53.

243 Al-Azmeh, "Barbarians," 12.

244 There was a series of wars between the Khazars and the Arabs during the eighth century, so it is not difficult to understand negative images of the Khazars in Arab eyes in the early ninth century. On these wars, see Gerald Mako, "The Possible Reasons for the Arab-Khazar Wars," *Archivum eurasiae medii aevi* 17 (2010): 45–57; Khalid Yahya Blankinship, *The End of the Jihad State: The Reign of Hisham Ibn 'Abd al-Malik and the Collapse of the Umayyads* (Albany, N.Y., 1994); Wilferd Madelung, "Apocalyptic Prophecies in Hims in the Umayyad Age," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 31, no. 2 (1986): 141–85, esp. 174.

245 See van Donzel and Schmidt, *Gog and Magog*. See also O. Livne-Kafri, "Some Observations on the Migration of Apocalyptic Features in Muslim Tradition," *Acta orientalia academiae scientiarum hung* 60, no. 4 (2007): 467–77, esp. 470 n. 10.

246 Ryan Szpiech, *Conversion and Narrative: Reading and Religious Authority in Medieval Polemic* (Philadelphia, 2012), 102–3.

247 Gil, "Ha-Kuzarim lo hitgayru," 5. A very different type of source may shed light on how the term *Jew* was used. The mid-ninth-century correspondence between Khan Boris of the Bulgars and Pope Nicholas included the following: "You ask about what should be done concerning many people in your country who you claim have been baptized by some Jew, though whether he is Christian or pagan you do not know. Of course, if these people have been baptized in the name of the holy Trinity or in the name of Christ alone, as we read in the Acts of the

Apostles [Acts 19:5]—for as St. Ambrose explains, it is one and the same thing—it is agreed that they should not be baptized again. But first, inquiry should be made into whether this Jew was a Christian or a pagan or if he later became a Christian, although we do not think that what the blessed Augustine says about baptism should be disregarded"; "Medieval Sourcebook: The Responses of Pope Nicholas I to the Questions of the Bulgars, A.D. 866 (Letter 99)," http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/866nicholas-bulgar.html, which follows *Epistolae Karolini aevi (VI): Hincmari archiepiscopi Remensis epistolae (Die Briefe des Erzbischofs Hinkmar von Reims)*, ed. Ernest Perels, trans. W. L. North (Berlin, 1925), 568–600. It is important to note here that the topic is not conversion to Judaism but conversion to Christianity by means of a Jew, which, though unlikely, was seen as ignoble and as possibly nullifying the conversion.

248 See Vladimir Minorsky, "Tamim ibn Bahr's Journey to the Uyghurs," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 12, no. 2 (1948): 285.

249 William M. Brinner, *The History of al-Tabari*, 3 vols. (Albany, N.Y., 1987), 2: 129. I am grateful to Gerald Hawting for this reference. See also ibn Sa'd, who wrote: "He (ibn Sa'd) said: He taught them one of Allah's names with which they invoked for rains and succour from Allah. The people of al-Khizr came to those who dwelt in Khuràsàn and said: He must be the best of mankind or king who taught you this name, so they called their kings Khaqan"; Brinner, *History of al-Tabari*, 1: 160.

250 Sergei Tolstov, *Po sledam drevnekhoresmiiskoi tsivilitzatsii* (Moscow, 1948), 228, notes that the Muslim genealogist ibn al Kalbi (d. 819) provided a genealogy that related the Khazars and the people of Khwarizm. Tolstov himself came to far-reaching conclusions about the influence of Khwarizm Jews on the conversion of the Khazars to Judaism, but these have been effectively rebutted. See M. Artamanov, *Istoria Hazar* (Saint Petersburg, 2002), 294.

251 Dates suggested are as follows: letter of Joseph: 630; al-Mas'udi: 790–809; al-Muqaddasi: shortly before 833 or shortly before 997; ibn al-Faqih al-Hamadhani: between 850 and 900; *Vita Constantini*: after 860; Christian of Stavelot: before 880.

252 Ahatanhel Krymskyi made a systematic effort to reconcile all the sources but was forced to construct an explanation that dated the conversion late in the ninth century. See Bubenok, Khamrai, and Chernoivanenko, "A. U. Krymskyi," 246–70. Two recent attempts are Chekin, "Christian of Stavelot," 13–34, and Zuckerman, "On the Date of the Khazars' Conversion," 237–70. Zuckerman's readings are ultimately unconvincing; though he claims that "[t]hree of these letters . . . are so specific in the matters discussed that one would never suspect a forgery" (240), I do. My denial of the historicity of the conversion story may be radical, but it obviates the necessity to deal in detail with the contradictions.

253 Jean-Noël Kapferer, *Rumors: Uses, Interpretations, and Images* (Piscataway, N.J., 1990), 84; see also Nicholas DiFonzo and Prashant Bordia, *Rumor Psychology: Social and Organizational Approaches* (Washington, D.C., 2007), 137, who suggest that details are added when there is great interest but little is known.

254 Similar issues arise in biblical research. Rudolph Bultmann developed what was termed "the law of increasing distinctness," claiming that in oral traditions, stories became longer, details were added, and unnamed persons and places were given names. However, others have pointed out that although this did take place, it is not a law or necessarily even a general tendency. In other words, multiplication of detail is understandable but is not proof that a text is late. See Leslie Keylock, "Bultmann's Law of Increasing Distinctness," in *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation*, ed. G. F. Hawthorne (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1975), and E. P. Sanders, *The Tendencies of the Synoptic Tradition* (Cambridge, Engl., 1969), 24, 88–190.

255 Shlomo Pines, "A Muslim Text Concerning the Conversion of the Khazars to Judaism," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 13 (1962): 45–55.

256 Ibid., 50.

257 John Bagnell Bury, *Selected Essays* (Cambridge, Engl., 1930), 52.

258 For a detailed discussion, see David Henige, "The Race Is Not Always to the Swift: Thoughts on the Use of Written Sources for the Study of Early African History," *Paideuma* 33 (1987): 53–79, esp. 65–69, entitled "Conspicuous by Their Absence: The Argument from Silence."

259 John Lange, "The Argument from Silence," *History and Theory* 5 (1966): 300–301.

260 This meets David Henige's criterion that the argument "works best when the silence is so comprehensive, yet so counterintuitive, that any general argument needs to account for it"; Henige, *Historical Evidence*, 176.

261 See, for example, Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London, 1971), or the many studies on the blood libel.

262 This was not only Gil's opinion. It is shared by Mikhail Lipkin, "Rossia v poiskah Khazarskogo carstva," *Lekhaim* 9, no. 10 (2007): 204–5. Shingiray, "On the Path," 118–19, writes: "While the historical reality of the Khazar conversion to the Jewish faith is hotly debated, the evidence for it in fact is very superficial. If the Khazar ruling elite had chosen Judaism as its imperial religion (which would not have been so unusual in the political context of the ninth–tenth centuries), it was most certainly not a scriptural form of Jewish doctrine but their own interpretation of it based on oral culture, with an adherence to pantheism (noted by some Islamic sources) and typical tendencies of the frontier *ghuluww* (extremism), where Judaism, Mazdaism, and Islam were closely interconnected and were engaged in a lively dialogue with each other (something that currently tends to be underestimated by historians)." However, none of the sources that reported the conversion of the

Khazars referred to their Judaism as an "exceptional" Judaism different from the Judaism their readers were familiar with.

263 An example of a widely accepted opinion that turned out to be inaccurate is that of the philosophical academy in the city of Harran in the ninth century, which was said to have preserved a living tradition of teaching Greek philosophy. This has recently been disproven. See Joep Lameer, "From Alexandria to Baghdad: Reflections on the Genesis of a Problematical Tradition," in *The Ancient Tradition in Christian and Islamic Hellenism*, ed. Gerhard Endress and Remke Kruk (Leiden, 1997), 181–91.

264 See Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, 1970), 90: "Almost always the men who achieve these fundamental inventions of a new paradigm have been either very young or very new to the field whose paradigm they change." This may apply to me, but it certainly does not apply to Gil, who published his pathbreaking article at the age of 89.

265 Giles Constable, "Forgery and Plagiarism in the Middle Ages," *Archiv für Diplomatik, Schriftgeschichte, Siegel- und Wappenkunde* 29 (1983): 2.