

# BEYOND THE MOUNTAINS OF DARKNESS. The Search for the Ten Lost Tribes

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*Editor's Note:* This essay was extracted from Velikovsky's forthcoming book *The Assyrian Conquest* which is Vol. II of the *Ages in Chaos* series. It was written between the mid 1950s and mid-60s. A superb book on the Khazars which would serve as an excellent pendant to the present article is Arthur Koestler's *The Thirteenth Tribe* (N. Y., 1976). - LMG

*The following short discourse is not a part of the chronological problem discussed in Ages in Chaos and subsequent volumes of Velikovsky's reconstruction of ancient history; it deals with historical geography - the whereabouts of the places of exile of the Ten Tribes of Israel.*

The statement in II Kings 17:6 which relates how "the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes" has caused considerable deliberation among historians. The mystery of the Ten Lost Tribes even produced fantastic convictions such as the belief that the Britons are the descendants of the Lost Tribes who, after much wandering, reached Albion.

The information provided by II Kings 17:6 is also repeated almost verbatim in 18:11 . Additionally, in I Chronicles 5:26, the exile of the Transjordanian tribes - Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh - to Halah, and Habor, and Hara, and to the river Gozan is ascribed to "Pul, king of Assyria" and to "Tiglath-pileser [Tiglath-pileser], king of Assyria". Modern scholars consider Pul and Tiglath-pileser to be one and the same king, Pul having been his name in Babylonia.(1)

It is generally agreed that the location of Halah (in Hebrew with two letters *Kheth*, transcribed as h in scholarly texts), or Khalakh, is not given to identification.(2) As to Gozan, the texts of II Kings 17:6 and 18:1 1 speak of Habor by the river Gozan; also I Chronicles 5 :26 speaks of the river Gozan. In Isaiah 37:12, Gozan can be understood as a region or a people of a region. However, the correct translation of the two passages in the Second Book of Kings should be: "to the confluence (*habor*)\* of the river Gozan".

\*[Cf. Strong's Concordance of the Bible, p. 36 where (Hebrew section) habor is translated from the root word meaning "to join". - WBS]

Biblical scholars who sought the place of exile of, first, the two and a half tribes of Israel by Tiglath-pileser and then of all the tribes of Israel by Sargon, upon the fall of Samaria, decided that the river's name was Habor and Gozan was the region. They have therefore identified Gozan with Guzana, modern Tell Halaf in northeastern Syria. But this interpretation is a violation of the texts. In looking for a river Habor they thought to identify it with a tributary of the river Euphrates mentioned in Ezekiel I: 3 - "The word of

the Lord came . . . unto Ezekiel . . . in the land of the Chaldeans by the river, Chebar." However, the spellings in Hebrew of Habor and Chebar are different, the river Khvor (Chebar) is not Habor, and the latter is not a river at all. Furthermore, the so-called river Chebar is actually an irrigation canal.\*\*

\*\* [See *Atlas of the Bible* (ed. by J. L. Gardner, 1981), p. 145; also consult W. Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon* (Brown, Driver, Briggs), p. 460, "Kebar" - "a river (or perhaps a canal) of Babylonia, not at present identified. . ." - LMG/WBS. ]

In explaining why the misfortune of exile befell the population of the Northern Kingdom, the Book of Kings says that the Children of Israel "worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal" and "caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments" and "therefore, the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah only" (II Kings 17:17, 18).

"Removed them out of his sight" seems to signify that the people of Israel were removed far away out of every contact with the remnant of Judah, not even by chance messenger.

When one hundred and thirty-eight years later, in the beginning of the sixth century, the people of Judah were also led into exile - by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon - they did not find the exiled tribes of Israel in Babylonia, though they dwelt by the "river" Chebar (Khvor, *i.e.*, Khabur), which flows in the central region of that country.

It appears that the places to which the Ten Tribes were removed by the Assyrian kings must have been far more remote than northeastern Syria.

Assyria, with its capital cities of Nimrud (Calah), Dur Sharrukin (Khorsabad), and Nineveh - all on the Tigris - expanded greatly in the days of its warrior kings Tiglath-pileser, Sargon, and Sennacherib. Repeatedly, the Assyrian kings led their troops across the Caucasus northward. Not satisfied with the passage along the coastal road of the Caspian Sea, they also explored the mountainous passes. Sargon, the conqueror of Samaria, wrote in his annals:

I opened up mighty mountains, whose passes were difficult and countless, and I spied out their trails.

Over inaccessible paths in steep and terrifying places I crossed . . .(3)

The descriptions of Tiglath-pileser and Sargon of their campaigns in the north lead us to recognize that they passed the mountains of the Caucasus and reached the steppes between the Don and the Volga. When the barrier of the mountains was overcome, they could proceed northward in a sparsely populated area barren of natural defenses where they would meet less resistance than in the foothills of the mountains. It is unknown how far they may have let their armies of conquest march across the steppes, but probably they did not give the order to return homeward until the army brought its insignia to some really remote point: it could be as far as the place of the confluence of the Kama with the Volga, or even of the Oka, still farther north. The middle flow of the Volga would be the furthestmost region of the Assyrian realm.

The roads to the Russian steppes along the Caspian and Black seas were much more readily passable than the narrow paths along the river Terek and the Daryal Canyon that cut the Caucasus and wind at the foot of Mount Kazbek.

The fact that the "confluence of the river Gozan" is considered a sufficient designation suggests that it must have been a great stream.

A large river in the plain behind the crest of the Caucasus is the Don, and a still larger river - the largest in Europe - is the Volga. If the Assyrians did not make a halt on the plain that stretches immediately behind the Caucasus, and moved along the great rivers without crossing them to conquer the great plain that lies open behind the narrow span where the rivers Don and Volga converge, then the most probable place of exile might be reckoned to be at the middle Volga. The distance from Dur Sharrukin to this region on the Russian (Scythian) plain is, in fact, less than the distance from Nineveh to Thebes in Egypt, a path taken by Assurbanipal several decades later. Under Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, Assyrian armies repeatedly invaded "Patursi and Kusi" - Upper Egypt and Ethiopia (Sudan). But Assyrian occupation of Scythia is not mere conjecture: it is confirmed by archaeological evidence. "The earliest objects from Scythia that we can date," writes a student of the region's antiquities, "referred to the VIIth and VIth centuries B.C., are under overwhelming Assyrian influence. . . ." (4)

The exiles who were removed from Samaria, a city of palaces and temples, no doubt bewailed the capital they had heroically defended for three years against the army of what was, in its time, the world's most powerful nation. Therefore, it is quite plausible that they would call their new settlement Samaria (in Hebrew, Shemer or Shomron; Sumur in the el-Amarna letters).

On the middle flow of the Volga, a city with the name Samara exists and has existed since grey antiquity. It is situated a short distance downstream from the point where the Volga and the Kama join. Russian conquerors of the ninth century found this city in existence. The medieval Arab geographer Yakubi, basing himself on accounts of the ninth-century traveller Ibn Fadlan, speaks of the Khazars who dwelt in Samara. (5) This people dominated southern and eastern Russia possibly as early as the third, (6) but especially during the tenth and eleventh centuries. They passed the Caucasus mountains to participate in the wars of the Romans and the Persians, dominated the Ukraine as far as Kiev, concluded treaties with the emperors of Byzantium, and their influence and suzerainty sometimes reached as far west as Sofia. (7)

The ruling class of the Khazars used Hebrew as its language, and the Hebrew faith was the official religion in the realm of the Khazars. There was a system of great tolerance, unique in the Middle Ages, in respect to other religions. The Supreme Court was composed of two persons of Jewish faith, two Moslems, two Christians, and one idolater of the Russian population. But it was not a confusion of creeds as it had been in old Samaria, which tolerated many creeds, with the monotheism of Yahweh being a protesting ingredient of the confusion.

Were the Khazars or their ruling aristocracy converted to Judaism in a later age? This position was based on what was said in a letter of the Khazar king Joseph, written about the year 961, to the Jewish grandee, Hasdai Ibn-Shaprut, at the court of Cordoba. 'Abd-al-Rahman al-Nasir, the Moorish ruler of Spain, had asked the king of the Khazars to provide any available information about his people, Hasdai's brothers in religion. In the letter of reply, the Khazar king recited a tradition or a legend: advocates of three religions came to some prior king of the Khazars, and he picked the Jewish faith because the Christian and the

Mohammedan alike gave preference to the Jewish religion above that of their respective rival.\*

\*[Cf. A. Koestler, *The Thirteenth Tribe*, pp. 63-64. - LMG]

The story exposes its mythical character. In the seventh or eighth centuries of the present era, the adepts of the Jewish faith were persecuted by the Christians and also by the Moslems, and would hardly be chosen to represent the religion of the state. A similar legend of "choosing" a religion is told about Vladimir of Kiev: in this legend the Khazars were the delegates representing the Jewish faith.

Had the Khazars been converted to Judaism, it would be almost incredible that they would call their city by the name Samara. Samaria was a sinful city from the viewpoint of the nation that survived in Palestine after the fall of Samaria, and out of which eventually grew the rabbinical Judaism of later centuries.

The conversion to the Jewish religion would also not imply the adoption of the Hebrew language. It is remarkable that the state language of the Khazars was Hebrew; the king of the Khazars was quite capable of reading and answering a letter in Hebrew.

Long before the correspondence between Joseph and Hasdai of the tenth century, the Khazar monarchs had Hebrew names. The dynasts previous to king Joseph were: Aaron, Benjamin, Menahem, Nisi, Manasseh II, Isaac, Hannukah, Manasseh, Hezekiah, and Obadiah. A conversion to Judaism in the seventh or eighth century of the present era would bring with it names common to Hebrews in the early Middle Ages, like Saadia or Nachman; the Judaism of the early Christian age was rich in names like Hillel and Gamliel while Hellenistic names like Alexander or Aristobul were not infrequent. Again, the Biblical names of an early period would give prominence to names like Joab, Gideon, or Iftach; and a still older group of names would be Gad, Issachar, Zwulun, or Benjamin.

It is peculiar that some of the kings of the Khazars were called by the names used in Palestine at the time that Samaria was captured by the Assyrians. Hezekiah was the king of Jerusalem at that time (II Kings 18: 10), and the name of his son and successor was Manasseh. Obadiah was one of the most common names at that time and in the preceding century. It does not seem arbitrary to assume that the Khazars absorbed, or even originally were, the remnants of some of the tribes of Israel.

It is most probable that the religious reform among the Khazars, about which some tradition was preserved until the tenth century, is to be interpreted as an act of purification of the half-pagan religion that the exiles from Samaria brought into and developed in their new abodes on the Volga, and as an act of return to the old Hebrew religion of Yahweh. This might have been performed with the help of some Hebrews who perchance left the schools of Sura and Pumbedita, where the Babylonian Talmud was composed. Old Jewish authors(8) actually mention the fact that teachers of rabbinical Judaism were invited to the kingdom of the Khazars as early as the eighth century. Possibly, the name "Khazars", despite a difference in writing, is to be interpreted as "Those Who Return". A long, probably illiterate period, when Hebrew was used only in speech, may have preceded the period of revival of learning and purification of faith.

I would like to express here the belief that excavation in or around Samara on the Volga may disclose Hebrew signs of the eighth and seventh centuries before the present era. Other sites of old settlements on the Volga, too, may disclose remnants of ancient Hebrew culture.

The Hebrew (most probably also Assyrian) name for the Volga Gozan - seems to have survived in the name Kazan. The city of Kazan is located to the north of Samara, a very short distance beyond the place of confluence of the Volga and the Kama, two equally large streams. A tributary by the name Kazanka, or "small Kazan", flows there into the Volga.

In the days of the Khazar realm, the river Volga was called not by its Assyrian, nor by its present name, but by the name Etel (the name is given also as Itil or Atil). This name appears to derive from a Semitic root; it is also used by the medieval Arab geographers.

Many place names in southern Russia seem to be of Hebrew derivation. The name of the river Don may go back to the name of the Israelite temple-city Dan. The Caspian Sea is best explained as "The Silver Sea" from the Hebrew *caspi* (of silver). Rostov means "The Good Harbor" in Hebrew.\*

\* [In his original manuscript, Velikovsky had also intended to provide a possible Hebrew meaning for the place names Orel and Saratov. Unfortunately, he failed to do so. As it happens, Orel means "uncircumsised" in Hebrew while Saratov may mean "to make an incision" - names perhaps chosen to describe the inhabitants of the respective areas. LMG]

With our identification of Gozan - one of the places of exile of the Ten Tribes - as the Volga, we may now investigate the question, where is Khalakh, another place of exile mentioned in II Kings 17:6? This place name is generally regarded as unidentifiable.

The eastern coast of the Black Sea was the goal of the Argonaut expedition in its search for the Golden Fleece. This expedition, engineered by Jason, was undertaken on the boat Argo. The land on the eastern coast of the Black Sea was called Colchis in ancient times, and the region is still known by this name. In Russian literature it is called Kolkhida.

[\*!\* Image] Source: After Hammond/

I consider western Georgia - to which Colchis belongs - to be the Biblical Khalakh. Those of the expatriates of Samaria whose destination was Khalakh arrived there some decades after the Argonaut expedition, which was regarded by the later Greeks as an historical event and chronologically placed two or three generations before the Trojan War.(9)

In the mountainous region of western Georgia, adjacent to the Colchian coast, live the so-called Georgian, or Mountain Jews. They claim to be of the Ten Tribes of Israel, their ancestors having been exiled there upon the destruction of the kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians. Ben-Zvi (the second president of the modern state of Israel) tells of these people and their claims.(10) He writes that "there is no reason to doubt the existence of a continuous Jewish settlement in both the north and south of Caucasia, whose roots were laid in very ancient times, perhaps as early as the days of the Second Temple, perhaps even earlier". Yet he does not express any suspicion that Khalakh may have been Colchis.

The third place of exile of the Ten Tribes, according to the Book of Kings, was the "cities of the Medes". Is it also possible to locate this last destination? The Medes first appear in Assyrian annals in the time of Shalmaneser III: it was in his days that they started to penetrate across the mountains of Iran to infringe on

the boundaries of the Assyrian empire. They appear once again in the annals of Sargon II, who claims to have repelled "the distant Medes on the edge of the Bikni mountain".(11) Some scholars maintain that the homeland of the Medes, before their occupation of the Iranian plateau in the seventh and sixth centuries, was in Turan, that is, West Turkestan. Sargon's reference to "distant Medes" would then designate their homeland in Turan. In this context it is interesting to note that the Jews of Bukhara, the great trading city and metropolis of West Turkestan (Turan), claim direct descent from the Ten Tribes.(12) Some writers are even prepared to admit the possible veracity of this claim,(13) though no one so far seems to have attempted to place the "cities of the Medes" in this region. While the greater part of the Jewish community of Bukhara may well be descended from migrants from the time of the Babylonian Exile or the Diaspora of Roman times or even later, it is not excluded that the oldest group among them are remnants of those tribes dispatched by Sargon to the "cities of the Medes".

## REFERENCES

1. E.g., H. W. F. Saggs, *The Greatness that was Babylon* (N. Y., 1966), pp. 104, 557.
  2. H. Graetz, *History of the Jews*, Vol. I (Phila.), p. 265.
  3. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria II*, par.54.
  4. Ellis H. Minns, *Scythians and Greeks* (Cambridge, 1913), p. 263.
  5. Yakubi, *Kitab al-Buldan*, 262 (in *Bibl. Geogr. Arab*, VII, ed. De Goeje).
  6. Masudi hands down a tradition that the Sassanid king Ardashir fought against the Khazars. Masudi, *Muruj al-Dhabab*, ed. Barbier de Meynard and Pavet de Courteille (Paris, 1861-78), VI, 124ff.
  7. For general discussion and sources, see D. M. Dunlop, *The History of the Jewish Khazars* (Princeton, 1954).
  8. Jehudah bar Levi, *The Khazar*.
  9. Herodotus (II. 104) reports that, in his time, the people of Colchis practiced circumcision and claimed descent from Egypt. His inquiries in Egypt, however, evinced no remembrance of the Colchians from among the Egyptians, and Herodotus concluded that they must have been descended from the remnants of the army of the semimythical Sesostris. What the Colchians may have told Herodotus was the Mosaic tradition of the Exodus from Egypt; when the Greek historian inquired of them whether their ancestors had come from Egypt, if they were Jews, they would have had to answer in the affirmative. - JNS
  10. Itzhak Ben-Zvi, *The Exiled and the Redeemed* (Phila., 1957), p. 62.
  11. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria II*, par.54. The location of "Bikni mountain" is uncertain.
  12. See the eighteenth-century report of Joseph Maman of Tetuan, summarized in A. Ya'ari, "Emissaries of the Land of Israel" (Hebrew), (Jerusalem, 1951), p. 664.
  13. Itzhak Ben-Zvi, *The Exiled and the Redeemed*, p. 62.
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