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The **Khazars** were a Turkic semi-nomadic people from Central Asia who adopted Judaism. They founded the independent Khazar kingdom in the 7th century C.E. in the southeastern part of today's Europe, near the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus. In addition to western Kazakhstan, the Khazar kingdom also included territory in what is now eastern Ukraine, Azerbaijan, southern Russia, and Crimea. The name 'Khazar' itself seems to be tied to a Turkic verb meaning "wandering."

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Prehistory

The origins of the Khazars are unclear. The Khazars themselves traced their origins to Kozar, a son of Togarmeh. Togarmeh is mentioned in the Hebrew scriptures as a grandson of Japheth. Some historians looked for possible connections between the Khazars and the lost tribes of Israel, but modern scholars generally consider them to be Turks who migrated from the East. Scholars in the USSR considered the Khazars to be an indigenous people of the North Caucasus. More recently, some scholars have suggested connections with the Uyghurs. Since the Turkic peoples were never

ethnically homogenous, these ideas are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Armenian chronicles contain references to the Khazars as early as the late second century CE. These are generally regarded as anachronisms, and

Priscus relates that one of the nations in the Hunnish confederacy was called Akatziroi. Their king was named Karadach or Karidachus. Some have speculated that the Akatziroi were early proto-Khazars. D.M. Dunlop also connected the Khazars to a Uighur tribe called K'o-sa in Chinese sources.

Rise

Early Khazar history is intimately tied with that of the Gokturk empire, founded when the Asena clan overthrew the Juan Juan in AD 552. With the collapse of the Gokturk empire/tribal confederation due to internal conflict in the seventh century, the western half of the Turk empire itself split into two confederations, the Bulgars, led by the Dulo clan, and the Khazars, led by the Asena clan, the traditional rulers of the Gok Turk empire. By 670, the Khazars had broken the Bulgar confederation, leaving the three Bulgar remnants on the Volga, the Black Sea and the Danube.

The first significant appearance of the Khazars in history is their aid to the campaign of the Byzantine emperor Heraclius against the Sassanid Persians. The Khazar ruler Ziebel (sometimes identified as Tong Yabghu Khagan of the West Turks) aided the Byzantines in overrunning Georgia. A marriage was even contemplated between Ziebel's son and Heraclius' daughter, but never took place.

During the 7th and 8th centuries they fought a series of wars against the Umayyad Caliphate, which was attempting simultaneously to expand its influence into Transoxiana and the Caucasus. The first war was fought in the early 650 and ended with the defeat of an Arab force led by Abd ar-Rahman ibn Rabiah outside the Khazar town of Balanjar, after a battle in which both sides used seige machines on the others' troops. Several further conflicts erupted in the decades that followed, with Arab attacks and Khazar raids into Kurdistan and Iran. There is evidence from the account of al-Tabari that the Khazars formed a united front with the remnants of the Gok Turks in Transoxiana.

They are also known to have been allied with the Byzantine Empire during at least part of this period. In 704/5 Justinian II, exiled in Cherson, escaped into Khazar territory and married the sister of the Khagan, Busir. With the aid of his wife, he escaped from Busir, who was intriguing against him with the usurper Tiberius III, murdering two Khazar officials in the process. He fled to Bulgaria, whose Khan Tervel helped him regain the throne. The Khazars later provided aid to the rebel general Bardanes, who seized the throne in 711 as Emperor Philipicus.

The Byzantine emperor Leo III married his son Constantine (later Constantine V Kopronymous) to the Khazar princess Tzitzak (daughter of the Khagan Bihar) as part of the alliance between the two empires. Tzitzak, who was baptized as Irene, became famous for her wedding gown, which started a fashion craze in Constantinople for a type of robe (for men) called *tzitzakion*. Their son Leo (Leo IV) would be better known as "Leo the Khazar".

The Khazars, led by a prince named Barjik, invaded northwestern Iran and defeated the Umayyad forces at Ardebil in 730, killing the Arab warlord al-Djarrah al-Hakami and briefly occupying the town. They were defeated the next year at Mosul, where Barjik directed Khazar forces from a throne mounted with al-Djarrah's severed head, and Barjik was killed. Arab armies led first by the Arab prince Maslamah ibn Abd al-Malik and then by Marwan ibn Muhammad (later Caliph Marwan II) poured across the Caucasus and eventually (in 737) defeated a Khazar army led by Hazer Tarkhan, briefly occupying Atil itself and possibly forcing the Khagan to convert to Islam. The instability of the Umayyad regime made a permanent occupation impossible; the Arab armies withdrew and Khazar independence was re-asserted. It has been speculated that the adoption of Judaism (which in this theory would have taken place around 740) was part of this re-assertion of independence.

Although they stopped the Arab expansion into Eastern Europe for some time after these wars, the Khazars were forced to withdraw behind the Caucasus. In the ensuing decades they extended their territories from the Caspian Sea in the east (Many cultures still call the Caspian Sea "Khazar Sea"; e.g. "Hazar Denizi" in Turkish, "Bahr ul-Khazar" in Arabic) to the steppe region north of Black Sea in the west, as far west at least as the Dnieper River.

Khazar overlordship over most of the Crimea dates back to the late 600's. In the mid 700's the rebellious Crimean Goths were put down and their city, Doros (modern Mangup-Kale) occupied.

In 758 CE, the Abbasid Caliph Abdullah al-Mansur ordered Yazid ibn Usayd al-Sulami, one of his nobles and military governor of Armenia, to take a royal Khazar bride and make peace. Yazid took home a daughter of Khagan Baghatur, the Khazar leader. Unfortunately, the girl died inexplicably, possibly in childbirth. Her attendants returned home, convinced that some Arab faction had poisoned her (not unreasonable, all things considered), and her father was enraged. A Khazar general named Ras Tarkhan invaded what is now northwestern Iran, plundering and raiding for several months. Thereafter relations between the Khazars and the Abbasid Caliphate (less expansionist than its Umayyad predecessors) became increasingly cordial.

The Conversion to Judaism

Originally, the Khazars practiced traditional Turkic shamanism, focused on the sky god Tengri, but were heavily influenced by Confucian ideas imported from China, notably that of the Mandate of Heaven. The Ashina clan were considered to be the chosen of Tengri and the kaghan was the incarnation of the favor the sky-god bestowed on the Turks. A kaghan who failed had clearly lost the god's favor and was typically ritually executed.

Historians have sometimes wondered, only half in jest, if the Khazar tendency to occasionally execute their rulers on religious grounds led those rulers to seek out other religions.

At some point in the last decades of the 8th century or the early 9th century, the Khazar royalty and nobility converted to Judaism, and part of the general population followed. Some researchers have suggested part of the reason for this mass conversion was political expediency to maintain a degree of neutrality: The Khazar empire was between growing populations; Muslims to the east and Christians to the west. Both religions recognized Judaism as a forebear and worthy of some respect. The exact date of the conversion is hotly contested. It may have occurred as early as 740 or as late as the mid 800's. Recently-discovered numismatic evidence suggests that Judaism was the established state religion by c. 830. Some medieval sources give the name of the rabbi who oversaw the conversion of the Khazars as Isaac Sangari or Yitzhak ha-Sangari.

The first Jewish Khazar king was named Bulan which means "elk", though some sources give him the Hebrew name Sabriel. A later king, Obadiah, strengthened Judaism, inviting rabbis into the kingdom and building synagogues. Jewish figures such as Saadia Gaon made positive references to the Khazars, and they are excoriated in contemporary Karaite writings as "bastards"; it is therefore unlikely that they adopted Karaism as some (such as Abraham Firkovitch) have proposed.

The Khazars enjoyed close relations with the Jews of the Levant and Persia. The Persian Jews, for example, hoped that the Khazars might succeed in conquering the Caliphate (Harkavy, in Kohut Memorial Volume, p. 244). The high esteem in which the Khazars were held among the Jews of the Orient may be seen in the application to them — in an Arabic commentary on Isaiah ascribed by some to Saadia Gaon, and by others to Benjamin Nahawandi—of Isaiah 48:14: "The Lord hath loved him." "This," says the commentary, "refers to the Khazars, who will go and destroy Babel "—i.e., Babylonia—a name used to designate the country of the Arabs (Harkavy in "Ha-Maggid." 1877, p. 357).

Likewise, the Khazar rulers viewed themselves as the protectors of international Jewry. They were known to retaliate against Muslim or Christian interests in Khazaria for persecution of Jews abroad. Ibn Fadlan relates that around 920 the Khazar ruler received information that Muslims had destroyed a synagogue in the land of Babung, in Iran; he gave orders that the minaret of the mosque in his capital should be broken off, and the

muezzin executed. He further declared that he would have destroyed all the mosques in the country had he not been afraid that the Muslims would in turn destroy all the synagogues in their lands.

Government

Khazar kingship was divided between the khagan and the Bek or Khagan Bek. Contemporary Arab historians related that the Khagan was purely a spiritual ruler or figurehead with limited powers, while the Bek was responsible for administration and military affairs.

Khazar armies were led by the Bek and commanded by subordinate officers known as tarkhans. A famous tarkhan referred to in Arab sources as Ras or As Tarkhan led an invasion of Armenia in the year 758. The army included regiments of Muslim auxiliaries known as Arsiyah, of Khwarezmian or Alan extraction, who were quite influential and were exempt from campaigning against their fellow Muslims. Early Russian sources called Khazaran, their city, Khvalisy and the Khazar (Caspian) sea Khvaliskoye, possibly referring to these Khwarezmians.

In the Khazar Correspondence, King Joseph identifies himself as the ruler of the Khazars and makes no reference to a colleague. It has been disputed whether Joseph was a Khagan or a Bek; his description of his military campaigns make the latter probable. A third option is that by the time of the Correspondence (c. 950-60) the Khazars had merged the two positions into a single ruler, or that the Beks had somehow supplanted the Khagans or vice versa.

Settlements were governed by adminsitrative officials known as tuduns. In some cases (such as the Byzantine settlements in southern Crimea), a tudun would be appointed for a town nominally within another polity's sphere of influence.

Other officials in the Khazar government included Jawyshyghr and Kundur, but their responsibilities are unknown.

Religious toleration was maintained for the kingdom's three hundred plus years. Muslim sources report that the Khazar supreme court consisted of two Jews, two Christians, two Muslims, and a heathen, and a citizen had the right to be judged according to the laws of his religion. Some have argued that this configuration is unlikely, as a Beit Din, or rabbinical court, requires three members. It is therefore possible that as practitioners of the state religion, the Jews had three judges on the Supreme Court rather than two, and that the Muslim sources were attempting to downplay their influence. By the year 950 Judaism had become widespread.

Economic Position

The Khazars occupied a prime trade nexus. Goods from western Europe travelled east to Central Asia and China and vice versa, and the Muslim world could only interact with northern Europe via Khazar intermediaries. The Radanites, a guild of medieval Jewish merchants, had a trade route that ran through Khazaria, and may have been instrumental in the Khazars' conversion to Judaism.

No Khazar paid taxes to the central government. Revenue came from a 10% levy on goods transiting through the region, and from tribute paid by subject nations. The Khazars exported honey, furs, wool, millet, fish, and slaves. D.M. Dunlop and Artamanov asserted that the Khazars produced no material goods themselves, living solely off of trade. This theory has been refuted by discoveries over the last half-century, which include pottery and glass factories.

The Khazars are known to have minted silver coins, called Yarmaqs. Many of these were copies of Arab dinars, which were in widespread use due to their reliable silver content. Some surviving examples bear the legend "Ard al-Khazar" (Arabic for "land of the Khazars"); others the phrase "Moses is the Prophet of God" (a modification of the Muslim coin inscription "Muhammad is the Prophet of God").

Extent of Influence

See the Khazar Historic Maps (*http://www.geocities.com/ayatoles/*|)

The Khazar Khaganate was at its height an immensely powerful state. The Khazar heartland was on the lower Volga and the Caspian coast as far south as Derbent. In addition, from the late 600's the Khazars controled most of the Crimea and the northeast litoral of the Black Sea. By the year 800 Khazar holdings included most of the Pontic steppe as far west as the Dneiper and as far east as the Aral Sea (some Turkic history atlases show the Khazar sphere of influence extending well east of the Aral. During the Khazar-Arab war of the early 700's, some Khazars evacuated to the Ural foothills, and some settlements may have remained.

Khazar towns included:

- Along the Caspian coast and Volga delta:

  Atil; Khazaran; Samandar

- In the Caucasus:

  Balanjar; Kazarki; Sambalut; Samiran

- In the Crimea and Taman region:

  Kerch (also called Bospor); Feodosia; Gusliyev (modern Yevpatoria); Samkarsh (also called Tmutarakan, Tamatarkha); Sudak (also called Sugdaia)

- In the Don valley:

  Sarkel

- Numerous Khazar setlements have been discovered in the Mayaki-Saltovo region. On the Dneiper, the Khazars founded a settlement called Sambat, which was part of what would become the city of Kiev. Chernigov is also thought to have started as a Khazar settlement.

Numerous nations were tributaries of the Khazars. A client-king subject to Khazar overlordship was called an "Elteber". At various times, Khazar vassals included:

- The Pechenegs
- The Oghuz
- The Crimean Goths
- Volga Bulgaria
- Georgia
- Abkhazia
- Armenia
- Arran
- The North Caucasian Huns
- The Caucasian Avars
- The Kassogs
- Various East Slavic tribes
- Various early Rus polities
- Various Finno-Ugrian forest tribes such as the Mordvins
- The early Magyars
- The Lezgins
- Lazica
- The Burtas
- The Bashkir

Decline and Fall

Originally the Khazars were probably allied with various Norse factions who controlled the region around Novgorod and regularly travelled through Khazar-held territory to attack territories around the Black and Caspian Seas. By 913, however, the Khazars were engaged in open hostilities with Norse marauders. In the 10th century the empire began to decline due to the attacks of both Vikings from Kievan Rus and other Turkic tribes. It enjoyed a brief revival under the strong rulers Aaron and Joseph, who subdued rebellious client states such as the Alans and led victorious wars against Rus invaders.

At some point in the ninth century (as reported by Constantine Porphyrogenitus)a group of three Khazar clans called the Kabars revolted against the Khazar government. Omeljan Pritsak and others have speculated

that the revolt had something to do with a rejection of rabbinic Judaism; this is unlikely as it is believed that both the Kabars and mainstream Khazars had pagan, Jewish (both rabbinic and Karaite), Christian, and Muslim members. Pritsak maintained that the Kabars were led by the Khagan Khan-Tuvan Dyggvi in a war against the Bek. In any event Pritsak cited no primary source for his propositions in this matter. The Kabars were defeated and joined a confederacy led by the Magyars. It has been speculated that "Hungarian" derives from the Turkic word "Onogur", or "Ten Arrows", referring to seven Finno-Ugric tribes and the three tribes of the Kabars.

In the closing years of the ninth century the Khazars and Oghuz allied to attack the Pechenegs, who had been attacking both nations. The Pechenegs were driven westward, where they forced out the Magyars (Hungarians) who had previously inhabited the Don-Dnieper basin. Under the leadership of the chieftain Lebedias and later Arpad, the Hungarians moved west into modern-day Hungary.

The alliance with the Byzantines began to collapse in the early 900's, possibly as a result of the conversion to Judaism. Byzantine and Khazar forces may have clashed in the Crimea, and by the 940's Constantine VII Porphyrogentius was speculating in *De Administrando Imperio* about ways in which the Khazars could be isolated and attacked. The Byzantines during the same period began to attempt alliances with the Pechenegs and the Rus, with varying degrees of success.

The Rus warlords Oleg and Sviatoslav I of Kiev launched several wars against the Khazar khaganate, often with Byzantine connivance. The Scechter Letter relates the story of a campaign against Khazaria by HLGW (Oleg) around 941; this calls into question the timeline of the Primary Russian Chronicle and other related works.

Sviatoslav finally succeeded in destorying Khazar imperial power in the 960's. The Khazar fortresses of Sarkel and Tamatarkha fell to the Rus in 965, with the capital city of Atil following circa 967 or 969.

Khazars Outside of Khazaria

- Byzantine sources refer to a Khazar population living in Constantinople, including Khazar Jews.
- Khazar mercenaries served in the armies of the Caliphate and other Islamic states, as well as those of the Byzantine Empire.
- Khazar rabbinical students are known to have studied in Spain; Jewish sources also refer to Russian rabbis studying in England in the 1000's, but whether these were Khazars is unknown.
- Many Khazar Jews probably fled foreign conquest into Hungary and elsewhere in Eastern Europe. There they likely merged with local Jews and ensuing waves of Jewish immigration from Germany. They most likely did not, as Koester maintained (see below), constitute the dominant group within Eastern European Jewry.

Late References to the Khazars

There is debate as to the temporal and geographic extent of Khazar polities following Sviatoslav's sack of Atil in 967/9, or even whether any such states existed. The Khazars may have retained control over some areas in the Caucasus for another two centuries, but sparse historical records make this difficult to confirm.

The evidence of later Khazar polities includes:

- Svyatoslav did not occupy the Volga basin after he destroyed Atil. That seems to have been left to later waves of steppe peoples like the Kipchaks.
- ibn Hawqal and al-Muqaddasi refer to Atil after 969, indicating that it may have been rebuilt. Al-Biruni (mid 1000's CE) reported that Itil is in ruins, and does not mention the later city of Saqsin which was built nearby, so it is possible that this new Atil was only destroyed in the middle of the eleventh century. Even assuming al-Biruni's report was not an anachronism, there is no evidence that this "new" Atil was populated by Khazars rather than by Pechenegs or a different tribe.
- In 986 Khazar Jews were present at Vladimir's disputation to decide on the religion of the Kievian Rus. Whether these were Jews who had settled in Kiev or emmissaries from some Jewish Khazar remnant state is unclear. The whole incident is regarded by some scholars as a fabrication, but the reference to Khazar Jews (after the destruction of the Khaganate) is still relevant. Graetz alleged that these were Jewish missionaries from the Crimea, but provided no reference to primary sources for his allegation.
- In 986 a letter in Hebrew dated 4746 (985/986 CE) refers to "our lord David, the Khazar prince" who lived in Taman. The letter said that this David was visited by Russians to ask about religious matters- this could be connected to the Vladimir conversion which took place during the same time period. Taman was a Russian principality around 988, so this successor state (if that is what it was) may have been conquered altogether.
- There is the joint attack on the Khazar state in Kerch, ruled by Georgius Tzul, by the Byzantines and Russians in 1016, documented by Cedranus. Following 1016, there are more ambiguous references to Khazars that may or may not be using "Khazars" in a general sense (the Byzantines and Arabs, for example, called all steppe people "Turks"; before them the Romans had called them all "Scythians").
- In 1023 the Russian Chronicle reports that Mstislav (one of Vladimir's sons) marched against his brother Yaroslav with an army that included "Khazars and Kasogs". Kasogs were an early Circassian people. "Khazars" in this reference is considered by most to be intended in the generic sense, but some have questioned why the reference reads "Khazars and Kasogs", when "Khazars" as a generic would have been sufficient. Even if the reference is to Khazars, of course, it does not follow that there was a Khazar state in this period. They could have been Khazars under the rule of the Rus.
- Prince Oleg of Kiev was reportedly kidnapped by "Khazars" in 1078 and shipped off to Constantinople, although most scholars believe that this is a reference to the Kipchaks.
- Ibn al-Athir, who wrote around the year 1200, described "the raid of

Fadhlun the Kurd against the Khazars". Fadhlun the Kurd has been identified as al-Fadhl ibn Muhammad al-Shaddadi, who ruled Arran and other parts of Azerbaijan. According to the account he attacked the Khazars but had to flee when they ambushed his army and killed 10000 of his men. Two of the great early 20th century scholars on Eurasian nomads, Marquart and Barthold, disagreed about this account. Marquart believed that this incident refers to some Khazar remnant that had reverted to paganism and nomadic life. Barthold, (and more recently, Kevin Brook), took a much more skeptical approach and said that ibn al-Athir must have been referring to Georgians or Abkhazians. There is no evidence to decide the issue one way or the other.

- Abraham ibn Daud, a twelfth-century Spanish rabbi, reported meeting Khazar rabbinical students in Toledo, and that they informed him that the "remnant of them is of the rabbinic faith." This reference indicates that some Khazars maintained ethnic, if not political, autonomy at least two centuries after the sack of Atil.

Debate

Some historians, and particularly the non-historian Arthur Koestler (in a work, *The Thirteenth Tribe*, containing unsubstantiated speculation and plaigarized historical accounts), have proposed that Jewish Khazars are the ancestors of most or all Ashkenazi (Eastern European) Jews, but the idea is the subject of much debate. Recent genetic studies have demonstrated that Middle Eastern elements dominate the Ashkenazi male line (see Y-chromosomal Aaron), but the female line appears to have a substantially different history. Some have argued this suggests Middle Eastern men marrying into local European communities [1] (*http://query.nytimes.com /gst/abstract.html?res=F50C15F83F5D0C778DDDAC0894DA404482*)[2] (*http: //www.khazaria.com/genetics/abstracts.html*) meaning that Ashkenazis are either not related to Jewish Khazars or that Jewish Khazars represent only a small element of Ashkenazi ancestry rather than the dominant element suggested by Koestler.

Others critics of the Khazar-Ashkenazi theory have suggested these ideas are political and anti-Zionist in nature; many proponents of the Khazar theory of Ashkenazi origins argue that if Ashkenazi Jews are primarily Khazar in origin, then they would be exempt from God's promise of Canaan to Jews as recorded in the Bible, were one to ignore that the promise also applies to converts, and the fact that over half of Israeli Jews are not Ashkenazi. Some have countered that such charges of a political motive are not relevant to the core of the argument.

Khazar rulers

From Bruce Gordon's Regnal Chronologies - Eurasian Nomads (*http://www.hostkingdom.net/siberia.html*)

Early Khazar rulers

- Khozarig (Eponymous folk-ancestor)
- Karadach.....fl. 450's

Karadach was the king of the Akatziroi, a steppe nation allied to the Huns. He is described in the account of Priscus.

Khazar Khagans (Ashina dynasty) The Khagans were the supreme chiefs of the people, holding a position of much influence and spiritual authority, but not much actual day-to-day command.

- Ziebel (Same as Tun Yabgu Khan in Sogdiana).....618-630
- Interregnum.....630-650
- Irbis ? .....fl. 650

In this period of time (650's-680's), one will sometimes see references to a Khalga, fl. mid 660's, and a Kaban, fl. late 660's. Researchers should be aware that these names are derived from a single document, the *Djagfar tarikhy*, and that this document has been severely attacked by a great many scholars as being a mixture of factual data and outright fabrications. The *Djagfar tarikhy* purports to be a compilation of early Bulgar historical information, assembled (or at least written in it's present form) in the late 17th century. It has been used by Volgan Tatars to provide documentation for extending their antecedents in their region back in time by many centuries. It's critics claim it to be a forgery created by or at the behest of the Soviet Secret Police (then the NKVD) in the 1930's, for the purpose of creating divisiveness and factionalism within the ethnic Tatars of that era. It is known that the Soviet government did create spurious historical documents on several occasions. The historicity of people that it refers to is questionable therefore, so until such time as there may come to light additional documentation, Khalga and Kaban should be regarded warily at best.

- Busir (Ibuzir Glavan).....c.690-715

Busir Glavan took in the exiled Byzantine Emperor Justinian II and gave him his own sister (baptismal name Theodora). He later tried to kill Justinian to placate Tiberius III, causing Justinian's flight to Bulgaria and his ultimate restoration to the throne.

- Barjik.....fl. late 720's-731
- Bihar.....fl. c. 732

Bihar is the name given in some sources to the Khazar Khagan whose daughter Tzitzak married the future Byzantine Emperor Constantine V. Their son was Leo IV, called "Leo The Khazar".

- Prisbit (fem.)(Regent ?).....fl. late 730's
- To the Caliphate.....737-c. 740
- Baghatur.....fl. c. 760
- Khan-Tuvan (a.k.a. Dyggvi).....c. 825-830 d. ?
- "Tarkhan".....840's

Arab sources speak of "Tarkhan, King of the Khazars" during this period. Tarkhan can be both a proper name and a military rank, and it is unclear whether the sources refer to a Khagan named Tarkhan or are merely a confused reference to a general.

- Zachariah.....c. 861
- ??

Khazar Beks The Beks were warlords, military commanders who exercised considerable day-to-day authority, and were sometimes regarded by outsiders as the supreme lords of the Khazar Nation. It is not entirely clear that the individuals listed before 737 were or were not Bulanids, or were Beks - they may have been simply warlords. Nevertheless, their activity parallels that of later Beks, and so they are included.

- Yazir Bulash
- Chorpan Tarkhan.....c. 630
- Alp Tarkhan.....early 700's
- Tar'mach.....fl. c. 730
- Hazer Tarkhan..... ? -737
- To the Caliphate.....737-c. 740

Hazer's army was annihilated at Itil in 737: The Caliphate imposed Islam upon the Khazars. Nevertheless, the Caliphs could not adequately garrison Khazaria, and within a few years the Khazars were once again independent. The famous conversion to Judaism seems to have occurred about this time. The date of the actual conversion to Judaism is a matter of some controversy. According to Yehuda Halevi in *Kuzari* it occurred around 740, though some Arab sources point to a date closer to the end of the 700s/early 800's and more recent scholars postulated that 861, the date of St. Cyril's visit to Khazaria, was the year of the conversion to Judaism. The 2002 discovery of a coin hoard in Sweden further complicates the issue, as some of the coins bear dates from the early 800's and the legends "Ard al-Khazar" (Land of the Khazars) and "Moses is the Prophet of God". Since the coins date from 837 or 838, some scholars think the conversion occurred in 838. Bulan Sabriel was the Khazar ruler at the time of the conversion, but in the below list all the dates up to Aaron I are based on a presumed 740 conversion date.

Bulanid dynasty

- Bulan Sabriel.....fl. c. 740
- Obadiah.....c. 786-809
- Hezekiah
- Manasseh I
- Chanukkah
- Isaac
- Zebulun
- Manasseh II
- Nisi
- Aaron I.....fl. c. 900
- Menahem
- Benjamin.....fl. c. 920
- Aaron II.....c. late 920's -940
- Joseph.....fl. 940-965

Joseph corresponded with Hisdai ibn Shaprut, a Jewish vizier to Abd al-Rahman III, Caliph of Cordova. It is from this letter that the preceding list is taken. It is not entirely ruled out that the Bulanids were in fact Khagans rather than Beks, though their power certainly appears to be that of the

Beks. Moreover, it is possible that the positions merged in the 900's, as Joseph makes no reference to a colleague, instead referring to himself as "king of the Khazars."

In 969 Sviatoslav of Kiev sacked Itil, the capital of the Khazar Khaganate. Khazar successor states appear to have survived in the Caucasus and around the Black Sea. We know of two later Khazar rulers:

- David.....c. 986-988]]
- Georgius TzulIn Kerch)..... ? -1016

Georgius Tzul was captured by a joint Rus-Byzantine expedition and his state was destroyed. Shortly thereafter, the Kipchaks became masters of the Pontic steppe (see Cumans). However, there continue to be tantalizing references in Muslim sources of battles against "Khazars" in the Caucasus well into the late 1000's; whether Khazar states continued to survive or their name was used generically to describe Caucasian highlanders is unclear. The fate of the Jewish Khazars is unclear. Jewish travellers of the 1100s continue to refer to them in passing. Khazar Jews are known to have lived in Kiev and even to have emigrated to Spain, the Byzantine Empire, and Iraq. The majority may have gone to Hungary], Poland, and the Crimea, mingling with Jews in those areas and with later waves of Jewish immigrants from the west. Genetic testing has disproven that Ashkenazi Jews are primarily descended from the Khazars, but some admixture is highly probable. Note also that the name "Khazaria" survived, at least for a time, as the general label for the region of Crimea and the lands beside the Sea of Azov utilized by Genoese merchant-colonizers in the area.

See also

- Atil
- Balanjar
- Bulan (Khazar)
- Georgius Tzul
- Hisdai ibn Shaprut
- Khazar Correspondence
- Khazars in fiction
- Kiev
- Kievian Letter
- Samandar
- Schechter Letter
- Soviet Union

External links and references

- Khazaria.com (*http://www.khazaria.com*)
- Essay: Are Russian Jews Descended from the Khazars? (*http://www.khazaria.com/khazar-diaspora.html*)
- Bibliography of Khazar Studies (*http://www.khazaria.com/khazar-biblio/toc.html*)
- Kevin Alan Brook, *The Jews of Khazaria,* 1st ed., Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1999

- Douglas M. Dunlop, *The History of the Jewish Khazars,* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1954
- Norman Golb and Omeljan Pritsak, *Khazarian Hebrew Documents of the Tenth Century.*
- Nomads (*http://www.hostkingdom.net/siberia.html|Eurasian*)
- Historic Maps (*http://www.geocities.com/ayatoles/|Khazar*)

Categories: Jewish history | Russian history | Eastern European history

Results from FactBites:

The Jews of Khazaria (890 words)

- The book aims to capture the history of **Khazaria**, a Jewish state near the Caspian sea that reigned between the 7th to 11th centuries, starting as a small tribe and growing in size and in power.
- **Khazaria** was located roughly between of present day Hungary from its east and Persia in its west.
- **Khazaria** kept peaceful ties with the Byzantine Empire to the South.

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