RA01

THE KHAZAR QUESTION

Empire, conversion and the limits of historical continuity

COMPLETE SOURCE-BASED STUDY

A critical comparison with Peter David Beter's "thousand-year war" account.

Tempus omnia revelat.

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What this volume establishes

Khazaria was a historical state, not a state invented by twentieth-century polemics. Its history belongs to the medieval steppe, the Caucasus, the Black Sea and the Caspian world. The historical problem begins when evidence for that state is used to establish claims of much later descent, permanent collective hostility or secret political coordination. Those are different propositions and require different evidence. [S02, S08]

This first volume concerns the medieval foundation: political formation, territory, institutions, trade, religious evidence, relations with the Rus' and the disappearance of independent Khazar power. Beter enters the study as a modern interpreter. The principal comparison is with Topic 3 of Audio Letter 50, dated 30 September 1979. [S01]

The central findings are not an all-or-nothing verdict. The state and its regional importance are firmly grounded. A Jewish ruling circle is the prevailing reconstruction in the specialist works consulted, although the conversion's historicity has a published scholarly challenge. Its date, extent and narrative details need qualification. The later evidence does not establish a continuously organised thousand-year war. [S02, S03, S06]

RA01 does not substitute for the separate volumes on Jewish identities and languages, religious interpretation, ancestry, Zionism, finance, the Russian Revolution or current conflicts. Brief references to them mark the limits of this volume; they are not a claim that all those subjects constitute a single historical organisation.

MEDIEVAL EVIDENCE / MODERN CLAIM / EDITORIAL ASSESSMENT

> **A state, a religious conversion and a modern conspiracy allegation are three separate research questions.**

Sources / source notes: S01, S02, S03, S06, S08

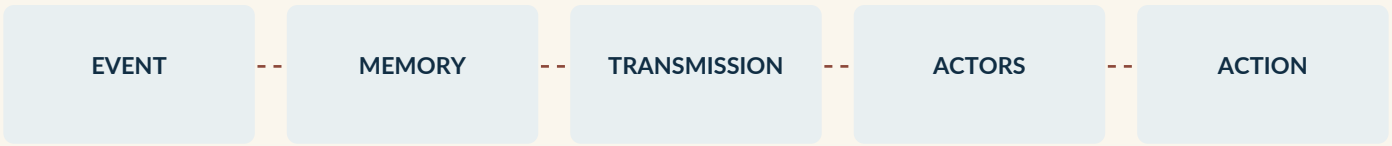
How to read the evidence

A source can establish that a statement was made without establishing that the statement was true. This distinction applies both to a medieval royal letter and to a twentieth-century tape report. The first task is to identify who speaks, when the text was composed, how it survives and which audience it addresses. Only then can we ask what independent evidence supports it.

This study uses four working categories: well supported; qualified or disputed; not established in the consulted material; contradicted or materially distorted. These are editorial assessments of particular propositions, not grades assigned to peoples. “Not established” is not the same as “impossible”. Conversely, “possible” is not sufficient for a positive historical conclusion.

Several primary accounts are consulted in modern translations or through explicitly identified scholarly discussion. The bibliography distinguishes full texts, translated extracts and records or abstracts. We have not inspected original manuscripts, collated every recension, excavated sites, independently analysed coins or DNA, or re-transcribed the recordings. This is an AI-assisted source-based study for public reading, not a peer-reviewed critical edition.

Citation codes such as [S03] refer to the source register. Where a source is being described, the wording says “reports”, “presents” or “argues”. Historical reconstructions and our reasoning are separately identified. A diagram visualises an argument; it does not add evidence to it. Page numbers refer to this edition, and the English and Slovak versions follow the same section order.



Every link needs its own evidence.

No inherited guilt. No presumption of innocence or guilt for an author’s individual claims: test each claim.

Sources / source notes: Editorial analysis.

01 / A polity of the medieval steppe

The safest starting point is the emergence of an independent Khazar power in the seventh-century reorganisation of the western Turkic world. “Turkic” here names a linguistic and historical family; it does not mean citizenship of modern Turkey. Khazar political authority incorporated communities with differing languages, livelihoods and origins. A ruling ethnonym must not be mistaken for a description of every subject. [S02]

It is therefore misleading to picture the khaganate as a modern nation-state populated by a single biological lineage. Some people belonged to a governing group; others lived in towns, cultivated land, raised animals, traded or owed tribute. Political dependence could change without the local population being replaced. “Khazar” may identify a ruler’s people, a political association or an inhabitant of a wider region, depending on the source. [S02, S05]

Older histories sometimes push the name much further back, identifying earlier Huns or other northern peoples as Khazars. The problem is retrospective naming: an author may apply a familiar later label to earlier groups. Similar names and a later claim of descent do not prove an unchanged people across centuries. Shapira’s treatment is particularly restrictive about attributing early appearances to Khazars as a distinct political formation. [S02]

For our analysis, the essential distinction is between antecedents and the state itself. Earlier Turkic, Hunnic and Caucasian connections can be investigated, but the existence of a seventh-century polity does not certify every earlier ethnographic story. A chronology should show where identification becomes firmer, rather than convert uncertainty into an impressively ancient origin.

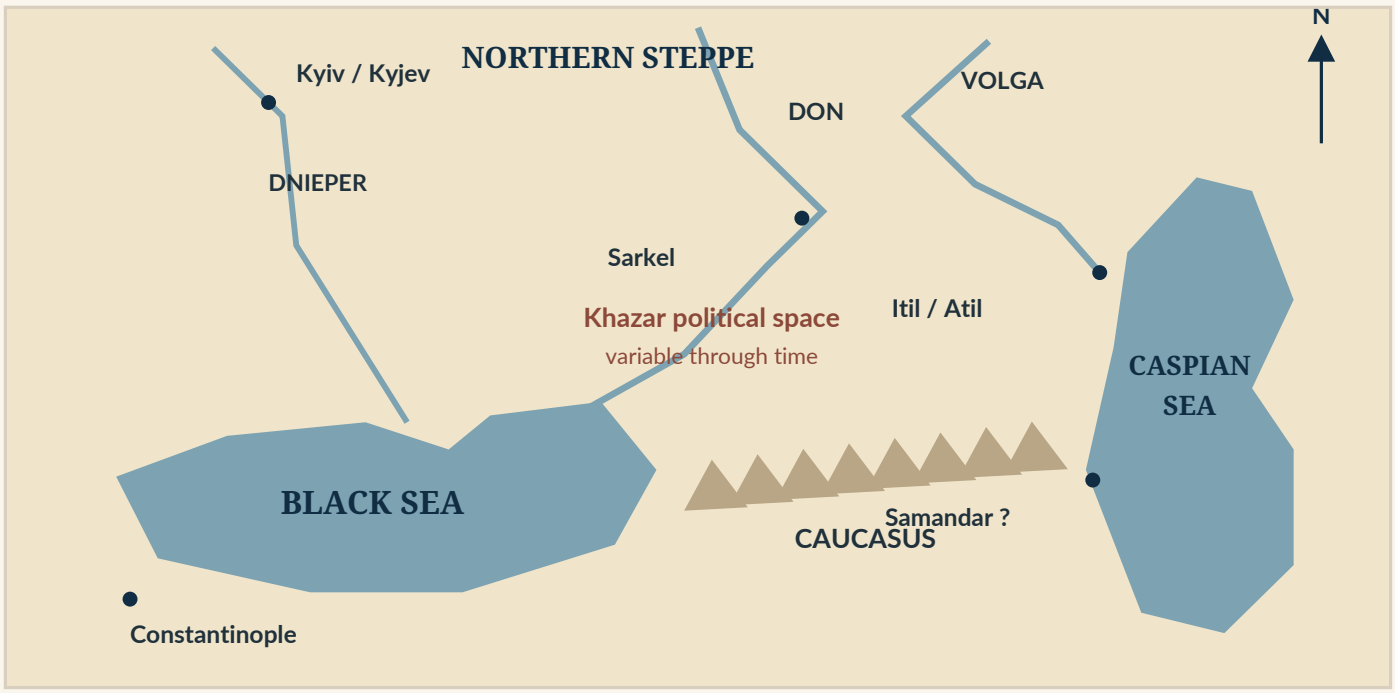
Sources / source notes: S02, S05

02 / Between two seas

The lower Volga, the Don corridor and the northern Caucasus provide the main geographical frame. Khazar influence also reached parts of the northern Black Sea world, including areas within present-day Ukraine. This is a geographical explanation, not a claim that a medieval dominion was identical to any present-day state. The distinction matters especially around the Dnieper and Crimea. [S02, S10]

The map is deliberately schematic. It identifies seas, rivers, regional relationships and approximate locations. It does not draw one supposedly exact boundary for three centuries of changing power. Control of a crossing, collection of tribute, commercial presence and settlement are different things; a coloured map can hide that difference.

Itil, also rendered Atil, is associated with the lower Volga; the name is itself connected with the river. Balanjar and Samandar belong to the Caucasian part of the story. Sarkel marks the Don and the movement between river systems. The precise identification of some sites is disputed, so the diagram uses approximate locations rather than presenting reconstruction as a surveyed archaeological plan. [S02, S05]



Orientation only · no fixed borders · approximate sites [S02, S05]

Sources / source notes: S02, S05, S10

03 / Rulers, subjects and institutions

Descriptions of Khazar rule distinguish a sacral ruler, the khagan, from a deputy with executive and military functions, commonly called the beg or bek. The terminology is not perfectly consistent across authors. The account transmitted through Yāqūt describes restricted access to the great khagan and a deputy who conducts affairs and leads forces. [S05, printed p. 19]

This is evidence for a particular institutional arrangement, not evidence that the entire state followed one timeless constitutional model. Golden cautions against assigning the origin of dual kingship to a specific religious reform or coup without sufficient support. The existence of two offices does not by itself identify the date, actors or motive of their creation. [S03, pp. 155–157]

A modern reader may be tempted to equate the sacral ruler with a religious figurehead and the deputy with a prime minister. The analogy helps only briefly: these were not parliamentary offices, and their legitimacy, obligations and relationships belonged to a different political culture. The safest explanation keeps the original titles and describes the reported functions.

The same caution applies to labels such as “Jewish state”. A court’s religion may influence dynastic legitimacy and public ritual without describing every town or household. We must separately examine the court, military recruitment, local communities and legal practices. In a multilingual polity, no single office or symbol can serve as a census of the inhabitants.

04 / Trade, taxation and coercion

Khazaria’s position mattered because goods, people and information moved through its river and overland connections. The source transmitted by Yāqūt mentions markets, baths, customs revenue and agricultural activity; the correspondence attributed to Joseph also includes a seasonal movement into fields and vineyards. Neither account is a modern economic survey, but both undermine a picture containing nothing except war and tribute. [S04, S05]

Tribute and tolls were nevertheless forms of power, not automatically voluntary services. Enslaved people belonged to the commercial world under discussion alongside furs and other commodities. Recognising trade and urban life must not turn into a romantic description of an innocent marketplace. Historians can identify economic organisation while also naming exploitation and violence. [S02, S08]

Two opposing simplifications should be avoided. The first treats a tax-taking empire as proof of the unique moral defect of a people. The second assumes that commercial success guarantees fair treatment. Neither follows. The questions are concrete: what was collected, from whom, by which officials, under what conditions, and with what consequences?

Feldman’s 2022 study gives particular weight to shifting trade routes and a weakening revenue base in explaining decline. That is an explanatory proposal worth testing against military narratives, not a measured account book for the entire khaganate. It suggests a mechanism: changes in routes could reduce a ruler’s ability to sustain political and military relationships. We should compare this mechanism with alternatives rather than announce a single cause. [S08, pp. 78–79]

Sources / source notes: S03, S05, S02, S04, S08

05 / Byzantium, the caliphate and the frontier

Khazar rulers operated among powerful neighbours and steppe competitors. Arab–Khazar warfare in the Caucasian frontier was substantial; Shapira's synthesis identifies the great Khazar victory near Ardabil in 730 and Marwān's countervailing campaign of 737 as important episodes. The account of the latter includes a ruler's acceptance of Islam under military pressure, not proof of lasting Islamisation of the entire population. [S02]

Relations with Byzantium cannot be compressed into perpetual Christian–Jewish warfare. Diplomatic cooperation, dynastic relations and military tension belong to different moments. Byzantine assistance with the fortress of Sarkel during the reign of Theophilos is an especially useful example of practical cooperation. Its chronology is usually placed in the ninth century; dates should not be made more exact than the evidence permits. [S03, S08]

For a strategic frontier, a religious difference can matter without explaining every choice. A treaty might protect a route, a marriage might strengthen a dynasty, and an expedition might change who collected revenue. The historian has to establish the connection in each case. Shared religion is not proof of alliance; different religion is not proof of permanent enmity.

Religious persecution and retaliation must also be examined, not edited out to create an ideal of harmony. Yet an incident involving a ruler and a community remains an incident with particular actors and circumstances. Converting it into a permanent characteristic of every Christian, Muslim or Jew would replace explanation with collective accusation.

Sources / source notes: S02, S03, S08

06 / The archive is not a single voice

The evidence survives in different genres: royal correspondence, geographical description, chronicles, saints' lives, philosophical dialogue and material finds. Their purposes differ. A ruler may legitimise a dynasty; a missionary's life may demonstrate the truth of a religion; a court manual may advise policy. These differences affect the questions each source can answer. [S03, S07, S11]

A copied text has at least two dates: the time described and the date of the surviving witness. Sometimes there are more: an earlier source, a compiler who quotes it, a manuscript copy and a modern editor's reconstruction. That chain is not a reason to reject the text automatically. It is a reason to avoid calling all of its sentences eyewitness testimony.

Montgomery's edition of Yāqūt's excerpts makes this visible. The reader is not simply holding Ibn Faḍlān's original travel notebook. The text passes through quotation, compilation and modern editorial decisions. Its Khazar section is valuable precisely when read with those qualifications. [S05]

Independence is equally important. Two modern pages can repeat the same medieval report. A later geographer can borrow from an earlier one. Counting repetitions as separate confirmations would exaggerate the evidence. For each important proposition, the best next question is not "How many sites say this?" but "How many genuinely independent lines of testimony are there?"

This volume's source register is deliberately candid about access. Stampfer's dissent is represented from the published abstract, not by a claim to have refuted every page of his article. Zuckerman's date is presented as a scholarly reconstruction, with its discussion in Golden, not as a directly observed event.

Sources / source notes: S03, S05, S06, S07, S11

Source case file / Objects, sites and silence

Written testimony is not the only evidence, but material evidence does not interpret itself. A coin has an inscription, a mint attribution, a date or date formula, and a find context. A building has phases of construction and use. A grave may reveal practices without telling us every aspect of the occupant's identity. The historian must connect those observations to a defined proposition.

Sarkel illustrates why a site and a political story should be distinguished. Shapira describes its excavation before submergence by the Tsimliansk reservoir. That archaeological history supports investigation of a real fortified settlement. It does not certify every later narrative about why a ruler attacked it or which modern people descend from its residents. [S02, "Khazar cities"]

The lower Volga presents a different problem: identifying Itil with a particular excavated site. Proposed identifications should be called proposals, and a modern discovery claim should not silently become a permanent certainty. In our schematic geography Itil is located approximately at the lower Volga, not marked as an uncontested surveyed footprint. [S02]

The absence of a decisive religious structure or inscription can weaken a specific claim, but its force depends on what survived and what was actually investigated. Conversely, a religiously suggestive object cannot establish a mass conversion. Positive and negative evidence both need a denominator: which sites, periods and social groups have been sampled? [S03]

The paintings in this edition are newly composed illustrative reconstructions. They are not facsimiles of Khazar manuscripts, portraits from life, archaeological plans, or evidence for specific costumes. No generated map or inscription is used to authenticate a historical claim.

> **An artefact requires a context. An illustration is not an artefact.**

Sources / source notes: S02, S03

07 / Hasdai and the king's reply

The correspondence associated with Hasdai ibn Shaprut and King Joseph gives us a Jewish representation of Khazar rule. In the translated extracts, Hasdai seeks information about a distant polity; Joseph supplies a genealogy, a conversion story and an account of his dynasty. The religious debate associated with Bulan and the reforms associated with Obadiah are parts of this narrative. [S04]

This is not a population register. A royal claim about ancestors and faith is evidence of how authority was represented to a recipient. It may preserve historical information, but its theological and dynastic design must remain visible. A literary account of the winning religion does not allow the historian to reconstruct verbatim speeches exchanged centuries earlier.

The modern edition introduces an additional trap: bracketed explanations are not Joseph speaking. The Fordham selection explicitly includes Marcus's introduction and explanatory insertions, including proposed dates and interpretations. A careful quotation must separate the medieval text, the translator's rendering and the editor's note. [S04]

The correspondence survives in a textual tradition with disputed details and different versions, rather than as an original sealed letter available for our inspection here. Golden's source discussion is essential background. Neither its acceptance by scholars nor doubts over particular passages justify treating the entire correspondence as self-authenticating or worthless. [S03, pp. 145–150]

Our working conclusion is limited: this is important testimony to a tradition of Jewish Khazar kingship. It does not establish that every inhabitant converted, identify all later descendants, or certify a political programme continuing into the twentieth century. Those propositions require evidence outside the letter.

Sources / source notes: S03, S04

08 / Conversion: evidence and disagreement

Three questions are often mistakenly collapsed: did any rulers adopt Judaism; when did that happen; and how many people followed? The specialist synthesis by Golden and the more recent Iranica article accept a Jewish ruling stratum. The Arabic material they examine is particularly important because the evidence is not confined to a Jewish royal self-description. [S02, S03]

Reports do not describe the population consistently. In some, the ruler and his circle are Jewish; others use much broader expressions. In the material edited by Montgomery, a Jewish king coexists with Muslim, Christian and other inhabitants. Such descriptions cannot be converted directly into percentages. “The Khazars” can denote different social or political groups in different passages. [S05, pp. 17–23]

Shaul Stampfer’s 2013 article challenges the historicity of the conversion itself. His abstract argues that the positive texts are unreliable or pseudepigraphic, that important sources are silent, and that the conversion never occurred. That is a serious published dissent, not merely an internet rumour. This edition records the argument from its abstract and does not claim a full manuscript-level adjudication of it. [S06]

The editorial assessment here follows the better-established reconstruction in the consulted full studies: a Jewish ruling circle is a reasonable and substantial historical conclusion, while the precise process and scale remain open. It is stronger than a claim based on one late legend, but not equivalent to a universally agreed fact about an entire people.

The conclusion should therefore be written carefully: “Khazar rulers and at least part of their milieu are widely understood to have adopted Judaism.” “Every Khazar became Jewish overnight” makes a substantially larger claim which the sources do not support.

Sources / source notes: S02, S03, S05, S06

09 / Why there is no simple conversion date

The familiar date “about 740” belongs to a particular reconstruction associated with later conversion traditions. It should not be presented as a date certified by a contemporary register. Other reconstructions favour the late eighth or ninth century, and a proposal associated with Zuckerman places the decisive change around or after the mission of Constantine–Cyril in 861. Golden discusses the disagreements rather than treating one precise year as settled. [S03, pp. 149–156; S07]

Numismatics adds a different kind of evidence. Golden discusses imitative dirhams associated with the Khazars and an issue dated 837/838 containing a formula about Moses in place of the usual reference to Muhammad. Attribution and interpretation are crucial: an inscription may support a religious message at a mint or court, but it cannot tell us the faith of every person in a territory. [S03, p. 156]

The coins and the written traditions do not simply align into a perfect sequence. A historian must decide whether different reports concern a first conversion, consolidation, reform, memory or a literary construction. A multi-stage explanation is possible, but adding stages solely to reconcile every inconsistency can produce a story more detailed than its evidence.

This volume therefore uses a broad working window and presents the competing dates as proposals. The purpose is not to hide uncertainty: it is to prevent the reader from confusing a useful approximate chronology with an anniversary documented to the day.

The methodological lesson is portable. When a narrative’s larger argument depends on one apparently precise date, examine how that date was obtained before building causal explanations on top of it.

10 / Coexistence without a golden-age myth

The accounts of a religiously mixed population are among the most interesting parts of the Khazar dossier. They include Muslims, Christians, Jews and people described by outsiders as pagans. Legal arrangements differentiated by community appear in the descriptions. This is evidence for organised diversity; it is not a charter of equal citizenship in the modern sense. [S03, S05]

In the same transmitted material that describes religious plurality, there is a report of violent retaliation by a ruler against a mosque after a synagogue elsewhere had been destroyed. The account deserves to be named as a report of coercion, not softened into harmless cultural difference. It also requires the same scrutiny of transmission and context as the more favourable descriptions. [S05, printed p. 23]

Coexistence and persecution are not mutually exclusive descriptions of a society across long periods. A place may admit different communities, distinguish their legal standing and still experience retaliatory violence. The error is to select only the detail that supports either an ideal tolerant kingdom or an intrinsically cruel people.

An ethical assessment can be clear without turning into collective accusation. Enslavement, killing and religious coercion harm people; historical context helps explain them but does not make them good. Responsibility, however, belongs to acts and actors, not to a supposedly inherited moral nature.

This distinction is especially important in a publication connected with a modern polemic. We should not replace an anti-Khazar caricature with a pro-Khazar myth. A source-based history must allow an institution to be sophisticated, commercially important and capable of injustice at the same time.

Sources / source notes: S03, S07, S05

11 / Khazaria and the Rus': contact before conflict

The Primary Chronicle's origin narratives connect early Rus' power with earlier tribute relationships and tell of successive rulers establishing authority. Their value is substantial, but they were shaped within a later narrative of dynastic and Christian history. A chronicle's retrospective origin story should not be treated as a birth certificate for a modern nation. [S09]

Early Rus' activity combined travel, trading, military expeditions and changing relations with local populations. The correspondence between archaeological movement, narrative chronology and political authority is not always exact. Scholarly debate over the dates of Oleg and Igor, highlighted by Zuckerman, shows why a familiar chronology still needs source criticism. [S07]

To say that one ruler displaced another as recipient of tribute is not the same as saying taxation disappeared. The Chronicle's descriptions of Rus' relations with Byzantium also include coercion and payments. Its contrasting portraits cannot simply be rearranged into peaceful Slavs against uniquely predatory Khazars. [S09, section 4]

The term Rus' is retained here to avoid projecting the modern Russian state backwards. The historical legacy also concerns Ukraine and Belarus. Medieval political relationships do not furnish a shortcut for deciding present borders or rights. Such decisions cannot be extracted from an old ethnonym. [S07, introductory note]

Our analytical focus is narrower: which rulers and communities interacted, what kind of relationship is reported, and what changed? Contact, competition and occasional cooperation may all belong to the same regional history. A single permanent religious front would have to be demonstrated, not assumed.

Sources / source notes: S07, S09

12 / 965, 969 and the problem of “the end”

The Chronicle places Sviatoslav’s defeat of the Khazars and the capture of Bela Vezha, conventionally identified with Sarkel, under the year 965. The relation between this entry, Itil’s fate and Ibn Ḥawqal’s evidence associated with 968/969 is not perfectly resolved. Sources and modern interpretations differ over the sequence, targets and attribution of the attacks. [S02; S08, p. 78]

It is safer to describe a major weakening of Khazar power through the campaigns and transformations of the 960s than to assert that every institution and community vanished on one day. Sviatoslav also fought in the Balkans; his relations with Byzantium changed from cooperation to war. His death in 972 belongs to that wider sequence, not to an uninterrupted alliance. [S10]

Three forms of ending should be distinguished: the destruction or capture of a town; the loss of a dynasty’s effective independence; and the disappearance of an ethnonym. These events can be separated by decades or centuries. A chronicle’s victory notice may support the first without proving the other two.

Economic and military explanations are not necessarily rivals. A weakened fiscal base may make a polity vulnerable to attack; an attack may redirect commerce; a political alliance may alter routes. Feldman stresses economic mechanisms, but the available evidence does not warrant reducing every change to one quantified cause. [S08]

The conclusions for Beter’s reading are important: the decline of the major khaganate was already far advanced before the event he foregrounds in 1016. A late campaign against an entity called Khazaria cannot stand in for the whole earlier history. This is a chronological limitation, independent of whether we approve of any ruler or religion.

Sources / source notes: S01, S02, S08, S10

13 / What 1016 can — and cannot — explain

Beter connects the baptism of Vladimir, which he dates to 989, with a subsequent joint Rus'–Byzantine attack in 1016. The Chronicle's conventional conversion narrative is generally associated with 988. The one-year difference is less important than the larger sequence: the destructive campaigns of the 960s came earlier. [S01, S09, S10]

The expedition conventionally dated to 1016 against a later polity associated with Khazaria belongs to the later Byzantine narrative tradition. In specialist discussions it concerns a remnant or regional context associated with Khazaria, not a straightforward repeat of the large tenth-century state. This edition does not claim a new adjudication of the expedition's commanders, extent or the ruler's genealogy; those details require closer work on Skylitzes and related evidence. [S08, p. 78 and references]

Vladimir's conversion is itself a narrated process involving religious judgement, political relations and dynastic marriage. The teaching edition of the Chronicle preserves its strongly Christian presentation and competing traditions about the baptism's location. Reading this account critically does not deny that Christianisation occurred; it distinguishes the event from the literary means used to explain it. [S09, section 6]

The key causal test is simple. A later religious alignment cannot by itself explain an earlier collapse. Nor does an attack by Christian forces demonstrate that every subsequent descendant of the defeated polity acquired and transmitted the same hatred. To establish that second claim, one would need a documented chain of communities, ideas, institutions and actors over time.

Thus 1016 deserves a place in the chronology. It should neither be omitted because Beter mentions it nor promoted into the single event that proves his entire modern interpretation.

Sources / source notes: S01, S08, S09, S10

14 / After the state: people do not disappear

The loss of independent Khazar power is not evidence for the physical disappearance of every inhabitant. Later references to Khazars, and changing uses of the geographical name, have to be read individually. A later occurrence may identify a community, an inherited regional label or a political title. It need not mean that the earlier empire continued intact. [S02, S08]

Migration is a plausible part of any history of conquest and political fragmentation. But a plausible movement cannot be turned into a documented mass migration without numbers, routes and dated evidence. The question “Could some Khazar descendants enter later Jewish communities?” is much weaker than “Were most Ashkenazi Jews descendants of the Khazars?”

Nor can a present-day language by itself settle the issue. Language shift, marriage, conversion and political assimilation operate through different mechanisms. A community can adopt a language without all of its ancestors coming from the place where that language developed. The detailed discussion belongs to RA02 and RA04.

The genetic study by Behar and colleagues did not find a significant Khazar-region contribution supporting a predominantly Khazar origin of Ashkenazim, and explicitly notes the difficulty created by the absence of an unambiguous modern Khazar reference population. This is not a proof that no individual could ever have a Khazar ancestor. We use the study here only to illustrate the limits of the inference, not as a full genetics review. [S12]

Even an established genealogical link would not demonstrate inherited political intentions. Ancestry, cultural memory and coordinated action require separate investigation. Descendants do not inherit moral guilt, and a modern group cannot be treated as an unchanged medieval government.

Sources / source notes: S02, S08, S12

15 / Reading Beter on his own terms

In Topic 3 of AL50, Beter moves from a real medieval kingdom to a modern theory of conflict. He recommends Arthur Koestler's 1976 book, highlights conversion and the attack of 1016, and attributes later Zionism and Bolshevism to a continuous Khazar legacy. These are his claims, not conclusions established by this volume. [S01]

Beter's topic title is "THE 1000-YEAR WAR BETWEEN RUSSIA AND THE KHAZARS". A useful analysis should neither rewrite this as a merely archaeological lecture nor replace the stated theory with an accusation the text never makes. The task is to locate the transitions: an event becomes a remembered grievance, that grievance becomes a transgenerational disposition, and the disposition becomes coordinated twentieth-century politics. [S01]

Each transition needs a different source trail. Evidence for a military defeat does not identify its later interpreters. Evidence for a remembered defeat does not prove the attitudes of everyone sharing a descent label. Evidence for similar rhetoric in two periods does not establish one organisation operating throughout the interval.

The 1983 Bird's-Eye View is useful for understanding how the distributor summarised the framework. It should not be silently substituted for a dated Audio Letter. Later AL56 likewise shows Beter continuing a political interpretation; it does not supply independent evidence for the medieval events. [S13, S14]

The most productive reading respects both the author's wording and the burden of proof. We can acknowledge the genuine historical subject that prompted the theory while declining to promote its unsupported continuities into facts. Conversely, finding an error in the modern framework does not make the Khazar polity fictional.

Sources / source notes: S01, S13, S14

16 / Testing continuity rather than assuming it

The strongest version of a thousand-year continuity claim would require identifiable carriers: communities, institutions, texts, leaders and mechanisms of transmission. The researcher would need dated connections across the intervening centuries, not simply a medieval defeat at one end and a modern revolution at the other.

A useful evidentiary chain has at least four links. First, establish the medieval event. Second, identify the people who preserved a particular memory of it. Third, show how that memory affected identifiable later actors. Fourth, connect those actors to a documented plan or action. A failure at one link is not repaired by making the earlier event more vivid.

Alternative explanations matter. A modern movement may arise from conditions in its own period even if a commentator places it in an ancient genealogy. To favour the ancient explanation, evidence should distinguish it from more immediate political, economic or ideological causes. Otherwise the account may be a retrospective pattern rather than an explanation of causation.

There must also be a possible disconfirming observation. An argument that treats cooperation as proof of a hidden alliance and conflict as proof of its camouflage can absorb every outcome. It no longer tells us what would count against it. A historically testable claim must expose itself to contrary evidence.

For RA01, the medieval record does not supply the required chain to the twentieth century. That is the reason for withholding confirmation; sensitivity of the subject is not the reason. The detailed comparison of Beter's political axis belongs in RA11, where it can be tested against the other volumes rather than asserted at the outset.

Sources / source notes: Editorial analysis.

17 / Criticism without collective blame

A critical edition can examine a religious or political claim without treating the ancestry or faith of a reader as a verdict. We evaluate what an identifiable person or institution did and what a particular source supports. Neither conversion nor descent assigns virtue, guilt, loyalty or hostility automatically.

Beter distinguishes the people he accuses from some other Jews and invokes Jewish opposition to Zionism. That distinction should be represented fairly. Yet a narrower ancestry-defined collective can still be the target of an unsupported inherited-hostility claim. The logical problem does not disappear merely because an author exempts other members of a broader population. [S01]

Likewise, criticism of a government or movement and hostility to a religious or ethnic group are not identical categories. The relevant test is the specific language and evidence: is the claim about an institution's decisions, or does it attribute an enduring malign nature to people by birth? We should not decide that question by either automatic condemnation or automatic acquittal of an author.

The same standards apply to Christian, Muslim and Jewish accounts, to rulers and to modern commentators. A favourable source must be scrutinised; an unfavourable source must not be discarded just because it is uncomfortable. Historical context is a tool of explanation, not a permission slip for injustice.

Human dignity and civilian protection do not depend on establishing an ancient pedigree. This is an ethical boundary of the publication, not a conclusion derived from population genetics. Our motto invites patient inquiry. It does not promise that elapsed time alone will turn an allegation into truth.

Sources / source notes: S01

18 / Findings and the next questions

The medieval Khazar state is not the doubtful part of the story. The difficult questions concern the precision of our reconstruction and the modern conclusions attached to it. A historical polity can be real while a proposed genealogy of political enmity remains unproved.

The sources support a substantial regional power, a mixed social and religious landscape, and major changes in the tenth century. The Jewish character of a ruling circle remains the prevailing interpretation in the full specialist works consulted, with a scholarly dissent that must be acknowledged. Exact conversion dates and population-wide claims should remain qualified. [S02, S03, S05, S06]

The chronology also matters. The 960s, the Christianisation associated with Vladimir and the expedition of 1016 are different historical moments. Joining them into one undifferentiated destruction by “Christian Russia” loses information essential to causal analysis. The sources’ disagreements should be displayed, not silently harmonised. [S08, S09, S10]

Beter identified a real but little-known historical subject and directed listeners to further reading. The leap from that subject to a continuing transgenerational political war is not established by the evidence examined here. This assessment concerns the claim; it does not claim knowledge of his private intentions. [S01]

The next useful work is specific: compare manuscript traditions; assess archaeological identifications and coin attributions; distinguish later uses of the Khazar name; and trace any proposed migration or ideological connection with dated records. RA02 explains identity and language, RA04 examines Koestler and ancestry, RA10 examines Beter’s source practice, and RA11 tests the larger political construction. Until issued, these are planned companion studies, not additional evidence.

Sources / source notes: S01, S02, S03, S05, S06, S08, S09, S10

Claim register / I

Includes source claims and common interpretive overextensions. Paraphrases and analytical tests, not a list of verbatim Beter quotations.

C01 A major Khazar state existed.

Well supported

Independent source traditions describe its rulers, places and regional relations.

S02,S03,S05

C02 Khazaria was a single, homogeneous population.

Not supported

Political names, languages and religious communities do not coincide one-to-one.

S02,S05

C03 Rulers adopted Judaism.

Substantially supported; challenged

Prevailing specialist reconstruction in consulted full studies; Stampfer's dissent is recorded from the abstract.

S03,S05,S06

C04 Conversion happened in one certain year and included everyone.

Not established

Dating and extent are separate problems; court evidence is not a population census.

S03,S05,S07

C05 Tribute was the only activity of the khaganate.

Materially incomplete

Sources also describe commerce, farming and urban life; this does not excuse coercion.

S04,S05,S08

Claim register / II

Includes source claims and common interpretive overextensions. Paraphrases and analytical tests, not a list of verbatim Beter quotations.

C06 Khazar–Byzantine relations were always hostile.

Contradicted as an absolute claim

Sarkel is an example of cooperation. Alliances and religious differences changed over time.

S03,S08

C07 1016 alone explains the collapse of Khazar power.

Chronologically misleading

Major tenth-century attacks preceded it; regional survivals need separate treatment.

S01,S02,S08,S10

C08 The end of the state proves the disappearance of its people.

Invalid inference

Statehood, community continuity and later geographical names are not identical.

S02,S08

C09 Medieval evidence establishes a thousand-year coordinated political war.

Not established

The necessary intermediate chain of documented actors and institutions has not been supplied by the medieval record reviewed here.

S01; editorial analysis / redakčná analýza

C10 Ancestry establishes inherited hatred or guilt.

Invalid inference

A genealogical proposition cannot replace evidence of a person's beliefs or actions.

editorial analysis / redakčná analýza

Chronology: separate the events

7th c.	Emergence of independent Khazar power in the western Turkic political setting. [S02]
730	Ardabil victory and Marwān's campaign: different phases of Arab–Khazar conflict. [S02]
8th–9th c.	Competing conversion chronologies; no universally established single year. [S03,S06,S07]
9th c.	Sarkel constructed with Byzantine assistance; precise dating discussed. [S03,S08]
837/838	Special dirham issue discussed as evidence for a Jewish court message; attribution matters. [S03]
860/861	Mission of Constantine–Cyril; hagiographic and conversion narratives require critical reading. [S03,S07,S08]
Mid-10th c.	Correspondence associated with Hasdai and King Joseph. [S04]
965	Sviatoslav's Khazar campaign in the Primary Chronicle; sequence and city identifications debated. [S02,S08]
968/969	Destruction associated with Rus' attacks in the geographical tradition; relation to 965 debated. [S02,S08]
988 (traditional	Vladimir's baptism and Christianisation narrative; Beter gives 989. [S01,S09]
1016 (traditional	Later Rus'–Byzantine expedition associated with Khazaria; not the start of the khaganate's collapse. [S01,S08]
1976	Koestler's book; AL50; the distributor's later Bird's-Eye View. Modern reception, not medieval testimony. [S01,S13]

Sources / source notes: S01, S02, S03, S04, S07, S08, S09, S13

Glossary and edition notes

Khagan. A sovereign title of the steppe world; in Khazar descriptions often distinguished from an executive deputy.

Beg. Title conventionally used for the executive or military ruler; vocabulary differs between sources.

Rus'. A medieval historical designation, not a synonym for the present Russian Federation.

Tribute. A payment expressing dependence or imposed obligation; not necessarily a voluntary commercial fee.

Geniza. A repository for worn or disused Jewish writings; manuscripts from Cairo are important to this subject.

Recension. A recognisable version or reworking within a text's transmission.

Hagiography. A saint's life, composed with a religious purpose; it may preserve history without being a neutral report.

Numismatics. The study of coins, including inscription, attribution, chronology and find context.

Ethnonym. A name for a people or group; its meaning and scope may change.

Continuity. A demonstrable connection through time; biological, cultural and institutional continuity are different claims.

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Sources / source notes: S02, S03, S05, S09

Sources and access notes / 1

S01 · Peter David Beter
Audio Letter No. 50 (30 September 1979).
Topic 3; online transcript, not a new transcription from the tape.
https://www.peterdavidbeter.com/docs/all/dbal50.html

S02 · Dan D. Y. Shapira
Khazars — Encyclopaedia Iranica (2020).
Sections Origins; Conversion to Judaism; Khazar cities; Khazar economy; The fall of Khazaria. Specialist synthesis.
https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/khazars/

S03 · Peter B. Golden
The Conversion of the Khazars to Judaism (2007).
The World of the Khazars, pp. 123–162; especially pp. 130–149, 153–162. Author-text copy consulted.
https://www.academia.edu/44128777/THE_CONVERSION_OF_THE_KHAZARS_TO_JUDAISM

S04 · Hasdai ibn Shaprut; King Joseph; translated excerpts in Jacob R. Marcus
The Medieval Jewish Kingdom of the Khazars (letters conventionally dated to the mid-10th century; sourcebook 1938).
Fordham Internet History Sourcebooks. Excerpts, with modern bracketed commentary; not a critical manuscript edition.
https://sourcebooks.web.fordham.edu/source/khazars1.asp

S05 · Aḥmad ibn Faḍlān / Yāqūt; James E. Montgomery, editor and translator
Yāqūt's Quotations From The Book of Ibn Faḍlān (2014 online supplement).
Library of Arabic Literature, Mission to the Volga. "Khazar", printed pp. 17–23; layered transmission and editorial notes matter.
https://www.libraryofarabicliterature.org/assets/Mission-to-the-Volga-Yaqut-corrected-2014-03-14.pdf

S06 · Shaul Stampfer
Did the Khazars Convert to Judaism? (2013).
Jewish Social Studies 19(3), pp. 1–72. DOI: 10.2979/jewisocistud.19.3.1. Abstract and bibliographic record consulted; full article not independently audited for this edition.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272587276_Did_the_Khazars_Convert_to_Judaism

S07 · Constantine Zuckerman
On the Date of the Khazars' Conversion to Judaism and the Chronology of the Kings of the Rus Oleg and Igor (1995).
Revue des études byzantines 53, pp. 237–270. DOI: 10.3406/rebyz.1995.1906. Opening page/record consulted; the proposed conversion chronology is also discussed by Golden, pp. 154–156.
https://www.persee.fr/doc/rebyz_0766-5598_1995_num_53_1_1906

Sources and access notes / 2

S08 · Alex M. Feldman
The Decline and Fall of Khazaria — Might or Money? (2022).

Vostok (Oriens), no. 4, pp. 75–84. DOI: 10.31857/S086919080021412-0. Author-uploaded full text consulted, especially pp. 76–79. Economic interpretation, not an uncontested reconstruction.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/365511913_The_Decline_and_Fall_of_Khazaria_-_Might_or_Money

S09 · Primary Chronicle; University of Oregon teaching edition
Excerpts from Tales of Times Gone By (medieval compilation; modern online selection).

Sections 1, 4 and 6. Modern brackets and links are editorial additions. Vladimir's conversion account is a Christian narrative, not a neutral stenographic report.

https://pages.uoregon.edu/kimball/chronicle.htm

S10 · Mykhailo Zhdan; Arkadii Zhukovsky
Sviatoslav I Ihorovych (Encyclopedia of Ukraine, vol. 5, 1993; online edition).

Biographical chronology and eastern/Balkan campaigns.

https://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CS%5CV%5CSviatoslavIIhorovych.htm

S11 · Juan Pedro Pascal
Fuentes hispano-hebreas sobre los jázaros: aproximación a las fuentes existentes. Siglos X–XV (2021).

Trabajos y comunicaciones 54, e146. Abstract and bibliography consulted as a guide to Iberian Hebrew sources.

https://www.trabajosycomunicaciones.fahce.unlp.edu.ar/article/view/tyce146

S12 · Doron M. Behar et al.
No evidence from genome-wide data of a Khazar origin for the Ashkenazi Jews (2013).

Human Biology 85(6), pp. 859–900. PubMed abstract. Used only for the limited ancestry-methodology note; detailed genetics belongs to RA04.

https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25079123/

S13 · Audio Books, Inc.
A Bird's-Eye View of the Dr. Beter Audio Letters (Reference Digest excerpt, 1983).

Distributor's retrospective overview. Distinguish it from Beter's individually dated Audio Letters.

https://www.peterdavidbeter.com/docs/all/dbeye.html

S14 · Peter David Beter
Audio Letter No. 56 (30 July 1980).

Online transcript; a later example of Beter's political framework, not a medieval source.

https://www.peterdavidbeter.com/docs/all/dbal56.html

Access notes are part of the evidence: a title in the bibliography does not mean that every page or original witness was examined.