

# Khazars and judaism

Religion



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In his essay entitled “ O dvoystvennosti verkhovnoy vlasti u khazarov”, Vasili V. Grigoriev described the Khazar as follows: “ The Khazar people were an unusual phenomenon for Medieval times. Surrounded by savage and nomadic tribes, they had all the advantages of the developed countries: structured government, vast and prosperous trading, and a permanent army.

At the time, when great fanaticism and deep ignorance contested their dominion over Western Europe, the Khazar state was famous for its justice and tolerance. People persecuted for their faiths flocked into Khazaria from everywhere. As a glistening star, it shone brightly on the gloomy horizon of Europe, and faded away without leaving any traces of existence."

This paper introduces to a reader who the Khazar people are and their role in Jewish history.

## **Khazars and Judaism**

Originally, the Khazars practiced Shamanism and phallic worship with the sky god Tengri as the focus. Subordinate Gods whom the Khazars worshipped include fertility goddess Umay, Kiara, a thunder god, and Erlik, the god of death

Due to the persecution of Jews under Heraclius, Leo III, Justinian II, and Romanos I, Jews fled to Khazaria. The Mazdak revolts also caused Jews from Persia to flee to Khazaria. It was said that Jewish merchants from this age regularly traded in Khazaria. They may have wielded strong economic relations in Khazaria.

Sometime in the 8th century or 9th, the Khazar royalty converted to Judaism and most of the population followed. The reason for the conversion, as some

historians say is that the King cannot anymore endure the nasty forms of sexual excesses of his people. King Bulan abolished shamanism and the worship of phallic objects. He decided against Christianity and Islam and selected Judaism.

The King and his nobles were converted immediately by the rabbis from Babylonia. Phallic worship was then forbidden. Kings requested for rabbis to open schools and synagogues in the nation. Judaism has become the religion of Khazaria.

The conversion of King Bulan started the new policy that only a Jew can occupy the Khazar throne. The kingdom became a theocracy where the leaders imposed religion as the guide to everyday life. Judaism provided not only religious but also civil laws.