

The Non-Semitic Origins of Contemporary Jews

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Abstract

Zionism is a political geography idea founded on a theory of racial appropriation of space and time. It is centered on a Jewish exclusive inheritance claim over both the territory of the former British Mandate of Palestine and the cultural heritage and genetic material of the Biblical Israelites. By the same token Zionism denies such exclusive inheritance “rights” to the Muslim and Christian Arabs who are the natives of Palestine. This paper explores and takes issue with the claim: “contemporary Jews are Semitic.” It is based on a broad multidisciplinary geographic synthesis of the critical findings about the Semitic claim. First, it presents the Israeli Law of “Return” as the embodiment of the Semitic claim. Second, it synthesizes the major critical findings about the Semitic claim in history, archaeology, linguistics, and genetics.

Introduction

Zionism* is a political geography idea founded on a theory of racial appropriation of space and time. It is centered on a Jewish exclusive inheritance claim over both the territory of the former British Mandate of Palestine (hereinafter referred to as Palestine) and the cultural heritage and genetic material of the Biblical Israelites. By the same token Zionism denies such exclusive inheritance “rights” to the Muslim and Christian Arabs who are the natives of Palestine. This Jewish ancestry claim (hereinafter referred to as the Semitic claim) is based on a chain of implicit and explicit assumptions and hypotheses: (1) Palestine is the Biblical Holy Land of Canaan (as included in the territories promised to the descendants of Abraham in Genesis 15 and to the Israelite followers of Moses in Numbers 34), (2) Biblical Abraham settled in Palestine in the 17th century BC, (3) Biblical Abraham is the patriarch of the Biblical Israelites, (4) the Biblical Israelites conquered and settled Palestine in the 13th century BC, (5) the Jews of Roman-occupied Palestine were the descendants of the Biblical Israelites, (6) most Jews of Roman-occupied Palestine were forced into exile, (7) contemporary Jews are the descendants and sole beneficiary heirs of those Roman-exiled Palestinians, (8) it is a natural right to return to one’s ancestral homeland even after 2000 years of real or supposed exile, and (9) because of all the above there has always been “one Jewish people” which has constituted a “single nation” through time and space (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2004; Evron 1995). The Semitic claim becomes taken for granted when U.S. culture and media echo the following cheerful but serious proclamation of the President of the United States: “The children of Abraham and *Sarah*, survivors of 2000 years of exile and persecution, were home [in Palestine] at last and free at last” (emphasis added) (U.S. President Bill Clinton 1998).

The Zionists wear the Semitic claim on their sleeves all the time and consider it a God-given “natural” and “historic” right, which was at last sanctioned internationally by the Balfour Declaration (1917), the British Mandate of Palestine (1922-1948), the UN Partition of Palestine (1947), and the creation of the State of Israel (1948). The Semitic claim has a legal entitlement under the Israeli Law of Return of 1950. Whereas there seems to be an agreement among scholars that the Jews are not a race, there seems to be a consensus among the Jews that their claim to Palestine is based on hereditary right (Patai 1975; Kertzer 1996; Tekiner 1991). Even some Jewish critics of Zionism submit to this claim as indicated by Christopher

Hitchens' bighearted statement: I "would never consider asking a Palestinian to move out and make room for me," even though "I can be counted as a member of the ancient tribe," according to the Law of Moses, the Israeli Law of Return, and the Nuremberg Laws.

Politicians involved in the Arab-Zionist conflict have often stressed the Semitic claim in their political discourse, beginning with the 1919 Weizmann-Faisal Agreement's reference to "racial kinship" between the Arabs and the Jews, to the cliché "all the children of Abraham," which U.S. presidents often invoke (Agreement between Emir Feisal and Dr. Weizmann 2004; Reed 2002; The White House Office of the Press Secretary 1994). In other words, the Semitic claim is the cornerstone of the overall discourse and practice of both Zionist separatism and modern Jewish identity. It is the centerpiece of Israel's fundamental laws and the focus of much of Zionism's academic research and political propaganda. Based on the Semitic claim and the Israeli Law of Return, the Israeli Ministry of Interior issues separate IDs for Jewish and non-Jewish Israeli citizens. Likewise the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics collects and publishes annual figures on the demographic balance between Jews and non-Jews in Israel (Sheleg 2002). Chief Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau once warned against "a blurring of the lines of the uniqueness of the Jewish people" (Chief Rabbi Warns Jews against Christmas, New Years 2002). Today non-Jewish Israeli citizens cannot belong to the Labor Party branch of their Jewish neighborhood (Shahak and Mezvinsky 1999, 151). In July 2003 the Israeli parliament voted to block Palestinians who marry Israelis from becoming Israeli citizens or residents. Other examples of legal discrimination between Jewish and non-Jewish Israelis include what an Israeli lawyer calls the "racist traffic lights" in Jerusalem (Whose Land Is It? 2002). Nevertheless in April 2004 President Bush wrote to Prime Minister Sharon that the U.S. is strongly committed to Israel's security and well-being as a "Jewish state" (CNN 2004). This paper explores and takes issue with the claim: "contemporary Jews are Semitic." It is based on a broad multidisciplinary geographic synthesis of the critical findings about the Semitic claim. First, it presents the Israeli Law of Return as the embodiment of the Semitic claim. Second, it synthesizes the major critical findings about the Semitic claim in history, archaeology, linguistics, and genetics.

The Israeli Law of "Return" or the Quintessence of the Semitic Claim

Though the State of Israel has no written constitution and no defined territorial borders, it has a fundamental law called the Law of Return and considered the closest thing to a constitution. It was enacted in 1950 in the aftermath of the UN adoption of resolution 194 of 11 December 1948 calling for the right of return for the then freshly expelled or displaced Palestinian refugees. The Law of Return gives "every Jew anywhere in the world" the right to "return to the land of his fathers" in Palestine as a citizen after an alleged exile of some 20 centuries (Guberman 2004; Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2004). Under the Law of Return, the Israeli government brings Jewish settlers to Palestine from all over the world, including Peruvian Indian converts (Livneh 2002). But the millions of Palestinian Muslims and Christians who were forced into actual exile and refugee camps in and outside Palestine after 1948 are not allowed to return to their homes in 13 cities and well over 500 villages and localities (Abu-Sitta 2000, 9), just because they are not entitled to the Semitic claim (see Figure 1). Israel has recently issued a statement reiterating again its rejection of the right of return for the Palestinians now and in case of any future peace settlement: "both during and subsequent to the political process, the resolution of the issue of the refugees will not include their entry into or settlement within the State of Israel" (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2003a). President Bush and

leading Democratic and Republican Congressmen have declared their support for this Israeli policy (Haartz Service and News Agencies 2004; Guttman 2004).

The enactment of the Israeli Law of Return (a retrospective law) and its enforcement had effectively turned the Semitic claim into a de facto and de jure exclusive inheritance right, which has legally and effectively entitled 3,237,000 Jewish settlers between 1919 and 1999 (Goldscheider 2002, 51). This appropriation of the Palestinians' homeland and heritage is officially referred to as the "reestablishment" of the Jewish people, the "resumption" of Jewish sovereignty, the "redeeming" of the Land of Israel, the "return" of the Jews, and the "reinvention" of Jewish identity through (for example) the Hebraization of Jewish names (see Figure 2). The Law of Return defines a "Jew" as "a person who was born of a Jewish mother, or has converted to Judaism and is not a member of another religion." A "returning" Jew (or *oleh*) becomes automatically an Israeli citizen and national effective on the day of his/her arrival in Palestine. The Law of Return was amended in 1970 to extend the right of "return" to the child and the grandchild of a Jew, the spouse of a child of a Jew and the spouse of the grandchild of a Jew (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2003b). For example, under this amendment members of U.S. Presidential Candidate John Kerry's family can claim the right to "return" to Palestine and become Israeli nationals because Kerry's grandfather was a Czech Jew named Fritz Kohn who changed his name to Frederick Kerry before emigrating from Budapest to the United States in 1905 (Kranish et al 2003; Benn 2004).

Anthropologist Roselle Tekiner has pointed out that the Israeli Law of Return is in fact "Israel's nationality law" (Tekiner 1991:48). The Law of Return does exclude non-Jewish citizens of Israel from nationality rights that are automatically given to Jewish citizens of other countries whenever they choose to immigrate to Israel. Tekiner noted the remarkable absence of the Hebrew word "le'um" (nationality) from the title and the text of the Law of Return perhaps to draw attention away from its exclusion of non-Jews and to show some sensitivity to the well known concern about the nationality status and dual citizenship of Jews living in other countries (Tuchman 1984, 338-339; Cattani 1969, 11-12; Hazony 2000, 174). The Law of Return made the State of Israel a unique state whose nationals include only some of its citizens and some citizens of other countries. Though the Law of Return violates the principles of international law embodied in the UN Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Israeli Supreme Court affirmed its differential treatment in 1972. Israeli lawyer Uri Huppert argues that when using the American Constitution as a yardstick, the Israeli Law of Return would violate fundamental clauses of the First and Fourteenth amendments (Huppert et al. 1992). The inherent discrimination of the Israeli Law of Return against the Palestinians is reminiscent of the inherent discrimination of the Nuremberg Laws against the Jews in 1935 and the Jim Crow Laws against the Blacks in 1896. While some Israelis recognize the "racist and unjust" (Hazony 2000, 56) nature of the Law of Return, the overall Jewish Israeli society did not generate any social or political force in support of the right of return for the millions of Palestinian refugees (Masad 2004).

The Israeli Law of Return is flanked by the Law of Citizenship (*ezrahut*), which states the requirements for citizenship (eligibility for government benefits) as distinct from nationality (eligibility for national benefits) under the Law of Return. Tekiner argues that authoritative books written by reputable scholars translate the Law of Citizenship into English as "Law of Nationality" and the mistake occurs throughout translations of the text of the law itself. The term "Israeli" indicates one's citizenship, not one's nationality. In Israel, you are either a "Jew"

or a “non-Jew” because the state is an extraterritorial nation for the Jews, not an Israeli nation composed of Israeli citizens (as in the U.S. where citizens are also nationals). This unique extraterritoriality of the State of Israel and the overall genesis and geopolitics of Zionism (especially after the British and the Soviets promised two distant territories for the Jews, see Figure 1 and Figure 3) reflect the five complex major bodies of “the world Jewish polity,” which include (1) the World Jewish Congress, (2) the World Zionist Organization, (3) the Jewish Agency for Israel, (4) the Joint Distribution Committee, and (5) the government of the State of Israel (Elazar 2004).

Additional laws that establish the legal basis for differential treatment of Jewish and non-Jewish Israeli citizens include the Zionist Organization-Jewish Agency for Israel Status Law (focused on bringing in and settling Jews in Palestine) and the Prohibition of Transfer of Ownership of Israel Lands (which prohibits the transfer of ownership of “Israel lands” by sale or in any other manner). Tekiner drew attention to the fact that the legal discrimination codified in Israel’s Law of Return countermands the declaration of equality expressed in Israel’s Declaration of Independence, a document which is not a law and had no legal force. In the final analysis the Law of Return is the means by which the Semitic claim has been effectively transformed into a legal entitlement. Because of the obvious injustice of the Law of Return, Zionist scholarship and political propaganda have used the fields of history, archaeology, linguistics, and genetics to prove the Semitic ancestry claim of the Jews and eventually “justify” this unique inheritance right with its extraordinary enforcement, its exceptional privilege, and its tragic consequence for non-Jewish native Palestinians.

The Lack of Historical Documentation for the Semitic Claim

The Semitic claim is a social construct drawing largely on the global dissemination of the Bible, the confusion about the origins of contemporary Jews, and the supposed non-Arabian origins of the Israelites. Its modern construction was rooted in the European geopolitics of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation conflict. The Protestants stressed Jerusalem and the Palestinian origins of Christianity in order to demarcate themselves from the Catholics, win the Jews on their side, and undermine Rome and the pretensions of Roman Catholicism. In this context came German Martin Luther’s Jewish-friendly booklet “That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew” in 1523, English Oliver Cromwell’s readmission of the Jews to England in 1655, French Napoleon’s Jewish Proclamation of 1799 and the Paris Great Sanhadrin of 1807, and the establishment of the London-based Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews in 1809. With the Eastern Question, European powers were competing to use the Jews as a fig-leaf for the colonization of the Holy Land in the heart of the decaying Ottoman Empire and the emerging Arab world. In the meantime the Semitic claim developed a racial turn with French-backed Prussian Jew Moses Hess’ obsession with “race struggle” and British baptised Jew Benjamin Disraeli’s popularization of the new racial term of “Caucasians” (Horseman 1981, 71; Hess 1918).

However, American Jewish writer Lenni Brenner argues that the Zionist claim over (Semitic) “blood” and (Palestinian) “soil” was specifically rooted into the German National Socialist dogma of “blut und boden” (Brenner 1983). The Semitic claim has also roots in the violent Biblical narrative of conquest and the Chosen People-Promised Land paradigm (Deuteronomy 7:6,16 and 20:10-18 and Joshua 6:20-21, 10:28-32) as well as the various social and spatial constructs of Darwinism (including French “Civilizing Mission, English “White Man’s Burden,” and American “Manifest Destiny”) and its justification of European colonialism

(Gobineau 1853-1855; Spencer 1864, 1876-1896; Ratzel 1897; Herzl 1946; Haushofer 1924-1955; Mackinder 1904; 1919; Ali 2002:92; Traubman 2004; Prior 1997). Indeed British Israelism claimed a Semitic ancestry for the English elite (including Queen Victoria) before the proliferation of claimants came to include the Jewish Zionists, the Mormons' Latter-Day Saints, the Black Hebrews from Chicago, the Dutch Afrikaners of South Africa, and some White separatist groups in the United States (Tuchman 1984, 338-339; Duvernoy 1966; Barkun 1997; Beit-Hallahmi, 1993, 167-190). All of these claimants seem to have taken metaphor for reality.

The Jewish Semitic claim owes a lot to confusion between the "Israelites" and the "Jews," who are historically and ethnically separate and different (Harris 2004; Sachs 2004; Shahak and Mezvinsky 1999, 2; Munā 2000, 25). The confusion got worse when the Jewish search for a new identity under Zionism encouraged the tendency to substitute the words "Hebrew" and "Israelite" for the word "Jew" or simply remove the latter from the record (Russo-Jewish Committee 1891, 107-108; The Jewish Encyclopedia 1904, 174-175; Shapira 2003, 81). Religious Jews such as Rabbi Morris N. Kertzer acknowledges the "misty origins" (Kertzer 1996, xxiii) of Jewish history, while non-religious Jews must still be in search for answers to puzzling Biblical questions such as "Can Sarah have a child at ninety?" (Genesis 17:17), or how could the expression "your only son" (Genesis 22:2) refer to Isaac while "Ishmael was thirteen" (Genesis 17:25) when Isaac was born? The confusion was further fueled by exaggerating Jewish historical "independence" and "presence" in Palestine even when the great Greek historian Herodotus who visited Palestine around the middle of the fifth century BC "did not notice an Israelite or Jewish presence in that land; nor did the existence of a Jerusalem or a Judah there attract his attention" (Salibi 1998, 36). King Herod the Great, often presented as a great Jewish king (Harris 2004), was of Arab origin on both sides (Munā 2000, 25). Isaiah Gafni noted that "One of the striking features of Second Temple history is the fact that most Jews, not only in the Diaspora but in Palestine as well, never experienced complete Jewish sovereignty" (Gafni 1984, 2). The 80-year rule exception of the Hasmonean family (or Maccabees, considered Jewish) was largely a reflection of the balance of geopolitical power between the Ptolemies in Egypt and the Seleucids in Syria (Schürer 1891a, 187; Gafni 1984, 6). Moreover, there is no evidence of the Sanhadrin in Jerusalem prior to the Greek rule (Schürer 1891b, 165).

But the most important assumptions encouraging the Jewish Semitic claim reside in the conceptualization of "Semitism" itself and the assumed "non-Arabian" origins of the Israelites. It is widely known that the word "Semitic" was first proposed by August Ludwig Schlözer in 1781 in the phrase "Semitic languages." But the designation "Semitic languages" was incorrect (Renan 1858, 2; Wolfson 1929, 2). Genesis 10 lists the Canaanites as the sons of Ham whereas the Canaanite languages (including Phoenician and Hebrew) are a major branch of the so-called Semitic languages, according to modern linguistics and the Bible (*spt kn'n*, Isaiah 19:18). The Semitic concept is also misleading because the various peoples who came out of Arabia in the course of the past 4000 years never described themselves as "Semitic" or "Semites." A more accurate label for them would be "Arabian" or "Arabians" since they all apparently came from Arabia (whether we call them Akkadians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Canaanites, Chaldaeans, Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Nabateans, or more recently Umayyads and Abbasids, known as Arabs).

The centrality of Arabia to the origin and history of "Arabian" peoples and languages has been overlooked by Western scholarship even though Herodotus has opened his great history by

stating that the Phoenicians (who called themselves Canaanites) came from the Arabian shores of the Red Sea (Abel 1933, 250-254; Boulos 1972, 55; Dib 1998). The Phoenician alphabet and Carthage (813-146 BC) are perhaps their most tangible footprints. The Bible stresses that “King Solomon’s wealth” of “gold and silver” has a lot to do with the wealth of Arabian kings (1 King 10:15 and 2 Chronicle 9:14). Saint Paul became an apostle only after his trip to Arabia (Galatians 1:11-24). Josephus speaks proudly of the “Arabian nation” and could not have sealed his religious education without a three-year seminary in the “wilderness” of Arabia (Schürer, E. 1891a, 78; Josephus’s Ant. 1. 221). Prophet Mohammed’s message was centered on the restoration of “millet Ibrahim” or the old religion of Arabia (Quran 2:130,135; 3:95; 4:125; 6:161; 16:123; 22:78) and the Arabs had elaborate pilgrim rituals centered on Abraham’s sacred sites in and around Mecca well before Islam. Modern Biblical research in Arabia began with Reinhart Dozy’s “Les Israélites à la Mecque” and culminated with Kamal Salibi’s “The Bible Came from Arabia” (see Figure 4) (Goeje 1883; Salibi 1985).

Perhaps the next step in the above direction of Biblical Arabian research would be to suggest that the consonantal spelling and the original semantics of the word `BR (ع ب ر) or (רבע) could be reexamined as perhaps nothing more and nothing less than a metathesis and a transposition of the word `RB (ב ר ע) or (רבע) (see also Wolfenson 1929, 164-165). The two words have the same consonantal roots and are derived from the word “Arabah” (“desert” in Hebrew) which in Arabic refers to “Arabia” as well as to a specific area “near Medina,” according to Arab historians as well as to Ibn Mandhoor’s “Lisaan Al Arab” and Fayruz Abaadi’s “Al Qaamoos Al Muheet.” If such a hypothesis is demonstrated, one can argue that “Arabic” and “Hebrew” were no more than two Arabian variations (with two different scripts) of the same language as Ibn Hazm wrote ten centuries ago. In the Bible, the noun “Arabs” (sometimes “Arabians” or “people of Arabia”) is applied to the Bedouins or Arab nomads (2 Chronicles 17:11; 21:16; 22:1; 26:7; Nehemia 2:19; 4:7; 6:1; Isaiah 13:20; 21:13; Jeremiah 3:2). Genesis 14:13 refers to Abram “the Hebrew” while Genesis 39:14,17 and Genesis 41:12 refer to Joseph as “this Hebrew.” The Quran states that Joseph’s family was brought out of “the Bedouin life” or “from the desert” (Quran 12:100). Moses refers to Israel (Jacob) as a “wandering Aramaean”? (Deuteronomy 26:5), which can mean an Arab Bedouin. South Arabian inscriptions (Margoliouth 1924) refer to the word “Arab” as Bedouin and so does the Quran for the word “A`rāb” (Quran 9:90,97,98,99,101,120; 33:20; 48:11,16; 49:14).

As Biblical history increasingly points to Arabia, the history and ancestry of the bulk of contemporary Jews increasingly point to a non-Semitic history and ancestry. First, the claim of a large-scale Jewish migration from Palestine to Europe during the Roman occupation of Judea in the 1st century A.D lacks historical documentation. It has also been argued that “the fact that Palestinian Christianity spread to Europe in the absence of mass migration of Palestinian Christians to Europe suggests that Judaism also could have taken root in many parts of Europe in the absence of a large-scale Jewish migration” (Wexler 2002, 549). Second, the non-Semitic origins of contemporary Jews has been strongly and consistently argued in scholarly works such as Arthur Koestler’s “The Thirteenth Tribe: The Khazar Empire and its Heritage;” Michael Bradley’s “Chosen People from the Caucasus: Jewish Origins, Delusions, Deceptions and Historical Role in the Slave Trade, Genocide and Cultural Colonization;” and Paul Wexler’s four books: (1) “The Schizoid Nature of Modern Hebrew: A Slavic Language in Search of a Semitic Past;” (2) “The Ashkenazic Jews: A Slavo-Turkic People in Search of a Jewish Identity;” (3) “The Non-Jewish Origins of the Sephardic Jews;” and (4) “Two-tiered Relexification in Yiddish: Jews, Sorbs, Khazars, and the Kiev-Polessian Dialect” (Koestler 1970; Bradley 1992; Wexler 1990; 1993; 1996; 2002). There is also evidence that many

Spanish Jews came originally from the north and many North African Jews came from Spain (Postan 1970; Holmio 1949; Lewis 1986; Aranov 1979). The failure to produce historical documentation for the Israelites in Palestine or to document that contemporary Jews were descendants of Jewish migrants from Roman-occupied Palestine opened the door wide to Biblical archaeology in Palestine.

Biblical Archaeology Found No Trace of the Israelites in Palestine

Zionist historiography asserts that archeology in Israel “has provided a valuable link between the country’s past and present, with thousands of years of history unearthed at some 3,500 sites” (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2003c). Yet these unearthed sites did not show evidence for the Biblical Israelites in Palestine. This was the conclusion repeated by leading American, British, Arab, and Israeli researchers in Biblical archaeology and history. Biblical archaeology was initially led by John Hopkins University Professor of Semitic Languages William Foxwell Albright who came to Palestine in 1919. He must have been encouraged by the “politically correct” atmosphere created by the Balfour Declaration of 1917 and the British occupation and Mandate of Palestine (1917-1948) as well as the subsequent creation of the State of Israel in 1948. His research aimed at “dovetailing” Israelite history with “profane” history and “scientific rationalism” with “evangelical faith” (Long 1993, 37, 42). He was anchored at the American Schools of Oriental Research founded in 1900 and renamed after him in 1970 (American Schools of Oriental Research 2004). But a couple of decades after his arrival in Palestine, Albright could not hide his disappointment with the potential of the whole enterprise of biblical archaeology in Palestine: “The scholar finds himself in an anomalous position as soon as he turns from Egypt and Mesopotamia to Palestine and Syria. Virtually all his comparative data from the former land are derived from written documents and mural reliefs whereas nearly all the material from the latter consists of building remains and artifacts without writing or pictorial representations” (Albright 1938, 3). This candid observation continues to provide the best epistemological explanation for the failure of Biblical archaeology to prove that Palestine was actually the Biblical land of Canaan.

British archaeologist Michael Rice (who worked for decades in the Arab world) concludes that the efforts of Israeli archaeologists and their European and American colleagues “have produced *nothing* of proven archaeological value” that demonstrates that the Israelites were ever in Palestine (Rice 1994, 114). In addition to the lack of archaeological evidence for David or Solomon (in the ardently excavated levels of Jerusalem) or for Moses, the captivity in Egypt, or the Exodus, one also finds that the great Biblical events left no trace in the annals of the Egyptians and the Babylonians (Rice 1994, 114-116). University of Stirling Professor of Religious Studies Kith Whitelam presents Biblical studies within the colonial context as “a discourse of power” and “a rhetoric of representation” passed down without examination and designed to dispossess the Palestinians of their land and their past (Whitelam 1997, 235). For instance, the excavation of at least 23 levels of occupation in Jericho (the first walled city) shows “no sign of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the slavery in Egypt, or anyone wandering in the desert” and no proof that Jericho’s fabled walls “came tumbling down” after Joshua captured the city (Adams 1999). American University of Beirut Professor of History Kamal Salibi comes to similar conclusions: “First, traces of the origins of the Hebrews in Mesopotamia, and their assumed migration from there to Palestine by way of North Syria, have been diligently sought for over a century but never actually found. Second, no incontrovertible traces of an Israelite captivity in Egypt, or of an Israelite exodus from there at any period of antiquity, have yet been discovered” (Salibi 1985, 24). Salibi added that the place-names mentioned in the so-

called “Amarna Letters” were West Arabian place-names and that the Egyptian and Mesopotamian expeditions and invasions of Sheshonk I, Necho II, Sargon II, and Nebuchadnezzar were directed against West Arabia, not against Palestine and Syria (Salibi 1985, 24).

These critical findings about ancient history are deepening the crisis of identity in Israel. Haim Watzman cited one example of the agonizing questions that he thinks haunt the Zionized Jews’ collective and individual identity: “If ABRAHAM, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David aren’t proven, how am I supposed to live with that?” He noted that this question came from the crowded back row of an auditorium at Ben-Gurion University during a conference titled “Has the Biblical Period Disappeared?” (Watzman 2000, A19-A20). Tel Aviv University Professor of Archaeology Ze’ev Herzog’s research on the Canaanite cities in the Late Bronze Age shed more light on how Zionist ideology influences the interpretation of archaeology because the latter “served as a tool in building a national identity of modern Israelis.” He argued that “a thorough examination of the archaeological findings free of preconception displays that the city of the Late Bronze Age is essentially different from the Canaanite city as it was presented, and is still presented, by historians, Biblical scholars and archaeologists” (Herzog 2003). He summed up the major archaeological findings of 70 years of intensive excavations in Palestine: “The patriarchs’ acts are legendary, the Israelites did not sojourn in Egypt or make an exodus, they did not conquer the land. Neither is there any mention of the empire of David and Solomon, nor of the source of belief in the God of Israel. These facts have been known for years, but Israel is a stubborn people and nobody wants to hear about it” (Herzog 1999). Commenting on Herzog’s findings, Tel Aviv University Professor of Archaeology Israel Finkelstein noted that “today more than 90% of scholars agree that there was no Exodus from Egypt” (Finkelstein 2004).

Zionist fear of this consensus among scholars could well have something to do with the mysterious and brutal murder of prominent American clergyman and archaeologist Albert E. Glock after he “became increasingly convinced that Western Biblical scholarship and Israeli archaeology had collaborated in robbing the Palestinians of their history and rightful heritage” (Dever 2002). Albert Glock’s predecessor at the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem was University of Arizona Professor of Near Eastern Archaeology and Anthropology William Dever who too attests to the impasse of Biblical archaeology. Dever has nearly 200 publications and substantive reviews. He has trained a whole generation of archaeologists, supervised 15 doctoral degrees and 6 master’s degrees, won cumulative post-doctoral grants amounting to \$1.3 million, and earned fellowships and academic honors for distinction in archaeology from Israel. After such a long and productive career in Biblical archaeology and a strong commitment to write the history of Israel based on archaeological evidence, William Dever admits that the Biblical “accounts of escape from Egypt, of wandering in the wilderness, and of massive conquests in Transjordan are overwhelmingly contradicted by the archaeological evidence. That may make many uncomfortable, but it is a fact, one from which no open-minded person can escape” (Dever 2003, 227; 2004).

The Linguistic Track Leads Biblical Hebrew to Arabia and Zionist Hebrew to Khazaria

The linguistic track for the Semitic claim consists essentially of tracking down the received consonantal Biblical Hebrew (as distinct from Rabbinical Hebrew) as the language of the Israelites and Modern Hebrew (hereinafter referred to as Zionist Hebrew) as the language of the Israelis. There are two major critical findings in this area. The first considers Biblical

Hebrew “a virtually unknown language to be deciphered afresh” (Salibi 1985, 27). The second considers Zionist Hebrew a Slavic language (Wexler 2002, 4). Already eleventh century Ibn Hazm (994-1064 AD) had compared the linguistic relationship between Arabic, Hebrew, and Syriac to that between dialects of the same languages (Ibn Hazm 1978, 36). The silence of the Hebrew Bible about a separate and specific Arabic language and the silence of the Quran about a separate and specific Hebrew language are quite remarkable and could be interpreted in the context of Ibn Hazm’s comparison. In modern times D. S. Margoliouth saw the linguistic clue as “practically the one which we can follow” to trace the Israelites to Arabia (Margoliouth 1924, 13). He wrote that the “extraordinary persistence of the Arabic language” links its literary forms to remote antiquity and seems to lie behind “the versification” of the Hebrew Bible, as Arabic grammar lies behind Hebrew grammar (Margoliouth 1924, 44-45). Gotthelf Bergsträsser has also noticed a great break between Zionist Hebrew and Biblical Hebrew (Gotthelf 1983, 64).

But it seems that Kamal Salibi was the first to consider both Rabbinical Hebrew and Zionist Hebrew as derivative languages, which “provide no key for unraveling the mysteries of the Biblical Hebrew from which they were academically derived” (Salibi 1998, 6). He stresses that the received consonantal Hebrew Bible has been “consistently mistranslated” and those involved in its interpretation and vocalization between the sixth and tenth centuries A.D. “did not know Hebrew as a spoken language” because it had passed out of common usage about 1000 years earlier (Salibi 1985, 3). Therefore the Hebrew Bible was essentially redacted, compiled, and in some cases authored by scholars and writers (such as the Babylonian and Palestinian Masoretes as well as those who produced the Septuagint in Hellenistic Alexandria) whose day-to-day language was not Biblical Hebrew (Salibi 1998, 5). Naturally those writers faced many problems of interpretation and vocalization while they worked hard to avoid committing the sacrilege of altering the received consonantal spelling of the Hebrew Bible. This is why the Masoretes often resorted to producing notes advising that some words are “written but not to be read” (*kethiybh we lo’qerey*) whereas other words are “to be read but not written” (*qerey we lo’ kethiybh*) (Salibi 1998, 16). Salibi concludes that to read and understand the consonantal Hebrew Bible, Arabic is better equipped than the academically derived and never spoken language of Rabbinical Hebrew (let alone Zionist Hebrew). The correct speech of Arabic was to be learned from the Bedouin Arabs. Quran 33:20 refers to the “A`rāb” and the Bedouins as almost synonymous. Prophet Muhammad’s biography relates that he was sent during his childhood to the desert in order that he should learn the pure form of Arabic from the Bedouins. Tame Bedouins were kept at the court of the early Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad for the purpose of replying to questions on Arabic grammar (Margoliouth 1924). As the linguistic track of Biblical Hebrew and its speakers seems to lead to Arabia, the linguistic track of Zionist Hebrew and its speakers seems to lead somewhere else.

Arthur Koestler described Yiddish as “a curious amalgam of Hebrew, mediaeval German, Slavonic and other elements, written in Hebrew characters” and spoken by Jewish masses in Eastern Europe (Koestler 1970). To be sure, this description of the hybrid nature of Yiddish could well be applied to the ethnogenesis of contemporary Jews themselves. Though Yiddish is now a dying language, it seems that the urgency of the Semitic claim has made it a subject of much academic research in the United States and Israel in an attempt to reconstruct and plot the migration of the Jews (Johnson 1996). The early explanation of the origin of Yiddish says that it began along the Rhine River in Germany. But the most current explanation argues that Yiddish began when Slavs and Turks converted in mass to Judaism in the Middle Ages (Johnson 1996).

Paul Wexler is perhaps the leading linguist under whose scholarship this explanation is gaining ground, especially since demographic studies have undermined the Rhine River explanation by indicating that during the Middle Ages the number of Jews in Western Europe was less than 35,000 (Johnson 1996). Wexler's research took issue not only with the Jewish Semitic claim but also with Semitic claims about Yiddish and Zionist Hebrew (Wexler 1990; 1993; 1996; 2002). Using linguistic and ethnographic data, he conducted a thoughtful investigation on the geography of Jewish ethnogenesis. His findings reject the idea of the continuity of "the Jewish people" through time and space as well as the widely held views that contemporary Jews have an ancestral homeland in Palestine with nearly four thousand years of unbroken history. Therefore, he argued, "it is incorrect to view the contemporary Jews as descendants of the ancient Palestinian Jews or contemporary Jewish religious expression and folkways as uninterrupted evolutions of Palestinian talmudic Judaism and folkways" (Wexler 1993, 244). Moreover, "all contemporary forms of Judaism and Jewish culture are relatively recently 'Judaized' non-Jewish constructs rather than direct evolutions of Old Palestinian Judaism and Jewish culture" (Wexler 1996, 2). Wexler presents his conclusions about Yiddish and Zionist Hebrew and added that Yiddish offers the most reliable indication of the fate of the "lost" Khazar Jewry and the most compelling evidence for the claim that contemporary Ashkenazic Jews are not descendants of Palestinian Jews (Wexler 2002, 4-7):

1. Yiddish is not a variant of High German, as is commonly maintained. Rather it is a Slavic language, specifically a form of Sorbian. Yiddish developed when Jewish speakers of Sorbian made a partial language shift to High German vocabulary between the 9th and 12th centuries. In the relexification of Yiddish only the Slavic lexicon was replaced by German, whereas the original Sorbian syntactic and phonological systems were retained (therefore keeping Yiddish as a member of the Slavic family of languages).
2. Modern Israeli Hebrew (or Zionist Hebrew) is not a "revived" form of Old Hebrew, as is commonly maintained. Rather it is a derivative of Yiddish, and thus is also a Slavic language. Since the "linguistic revival" is impossible, Modern Israeli Hebrew cannot be considered a "revived" form of Biblical Hebrew because it utilizes the syntactic and phonological systems of Yiddish, with only the vocabulary being of mainly Biblical Hebrew. Therefore Modern Israeli Hebrew and its genetic parent Yiddish must be defined as Slavic languages. As a relexified form of Yiddish, Modern Israeli Hebrew differs only in its predominantly Biblical Hebrew vocabulary. Yiddish is the first twice-relexified non-creole language to be so identified (Wexler 1990; 1993, 241-242; 1996, 7-8; 2002, 4-7).

The Genetic Turn as the Last Resort of the Semitic Claim

A closer look at the current genetic turn in Jewish genealogies indicates that it came after Zionist historiography failed to prove the Semitic claim in the fields of history, archaeology, and linguistics. Since the rise of the thesis on the Khazar origin of the bulk of contemporary Jews, Zionist historiography and Jewish studies in general have been pointing to the potential contribution of genetics in handling the puzzling riddle of the ethnogenesis of contemporary Jews (Koestler 1970; Fishberg 1911). Two international symposia on the Khazars and Ashkenazic Jewish genetics were convened in Jerusalem in 1999, but the proceedings were not

published (Wexler 2002, 541). It appears that genetic essentialism is congruent with the Zionist idea of a Jewish race or a chosen people while adding “the cachet of objective science to the notion that one’s identity is an inborn, natural, and unalterable quality” (Brodwin 2004). The genetic turn came also at a time of a general deconstruction of Jewish identities due to the decline and assimilation of world Jewry (around 13 million today). Harry Ostrer (Director of the Human Genetics Program at the New York University School of Medicine) and Michael Hammer (Director of the Laboratory of Molecular Systematics and Evolution at the University of Arizona) attempt to explain or justify the genetic turn by arguing that “the window for studying Jewish history from the Jewish genetic record is closing” due to the demographic decline of world Jewry and the desire to preserve “the oral history” of Jewish familial origins (Genetics Program at the New York University School of Medicine 2004).

Perhaps the most visible manifestation of the genetic turn of the Semitic claim was the creation of worldwide Jewish supporting database institutions to galvanize participants and supply oral histories as well as genetic materials. The 1980s saw the creation of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies to coordinate the activities and annual conference of more than 75 Jewish genealogical societies around the world working “to elevate Jewish genealogy among Jewish people and in the academic community” (International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies 2003). Other genealogy-related projects and databases were also launched, including the Jewish Genealogy internet source (which connects researchers of Jewish genealogy worldwide), the International Jewish Cemetery Project (which works to catalogue every Jewish burial site throughout the world), the Family Tree of the Jewish People (which enhances Jews’ ability to connect and re-connect their families with a growing online database on over two million people), Genetic Analysis of Jewish Origins (which examines the relatedness of Jewish peoples from different parts of the world), and Family Tree DNA (the first genealogy driven DNA testing organization, which had organized the first-ever International Conference on Genetic Genealogy in October 2004 in Houston, Texas) (JewishGen: The Home of Jewish Genealogy 2004; Family Tree DNA 2004). The 1990s saw the creation of the National Laboratory for the Genetics of Israeli Populations as a national repository for human cell lines representing the various ethnic groups of the Israeli populations. The lab provided samples for research about the Semitic claim (Hammer et al 2000, 6774).

The overall findings of the many Jewish genetic research projects conducted by research teams dispersed in Israel, the United States, Britain, and South Africa have been widely reported by the media and have shown contradictory results about the Semitic claim. One study by the Hebrew University in Jerusalem published in the *American Journal of Human Genetics* and reported in the Israeli daily *Haaretz* concludes that “In comparison with data available from other relevant populations in the region, Jews were found to be more closely related to groups in the north of the Fertile Crescent (Kurds, Turks, and Armenians) than to their Arab neighbors” (Nebel et al 2001; Traubman 2001; The Jewish World: This Week in Israel 2001). Another study published in the same journal and reported in *The New York Times* pointed to a “Central Asian genetic signature” in more than fifty percent of Ashkenazic Jewish Levites (Behar et al 2003; Wade 2003). On the other hand, media headlines about other genetic research findings include “Jews and Arabs are genetic brothers” and “Experts find genetic Jewish-Arab link” (The American Center of Khazar Studies 2004; Wade 2002; Siegel 2001, 4; Siegel 1997,1; BBC 2000; Siegel 2000, 4). Yet one research paper showing that “the original Jews” of the Middle East and the Palestinians are genetically almost identical was pulled from the leading journal *Human Immunology* because “it challenges claims that Jews are a special,

chosen people and that Judaism can only be inherited” (McKie 2001). Other findings proclaim that the Falasha Jews of Ethiopia were Jewish converts, whereas the Bantu-speaking Lemba Jews of Southern Africa had Semitic roots (Lucotte and Smets 1999; Shute 2001).

Because a detailed technical critique of these genetic findings requires a detailed scrutiny of parameters such as sample size, genetic markers, and population allele, let’s make a broad epistemological critique of the sample selection, research assumptions, and political implications of these findings. One problem of these findings is their contradiction when claiming that the Jews are at the same time genetically “closer” to the Turks and to the Arabs. Another consists of the kind of assumptions upon which the research questions were formulated and the samples were selected. First, we do not have for sure any genetic material or DNA from the Biblical Israelites to compare and contrast with any existing genetic material or DNA from contemporary Jews. There is no proof that Michael Hammer’s “cohanim markers” were those of Moses’ brother, Aaron. Second, the Jews (like the Muslims and the Christians) were historically bound by religion (and are highly mixed), not by race or genes. Today the percentage of U.S. Jews under 35 who are married to non-Jews is 41 percent (Goodstein 2003). Third, so far genetic research on the Semitic claim tends to focus more on the non-recombining parts of the male Y-Chromosome rather than on the maternally inherited mitochondrial DNA of the Jews, which has defined “Jewishness” since Talmudic times. Fourth, since the bulk of contemporary Jews came recently from the only region of the world in which there was indeed a geographically delimited and historically documented Jewish empire, the selection of research population samples should relate primarily (if not exclusively) to the historical geography of the medieval Jewish-led Khazar Empire and the modern Jewish Pale of Settlement (see Figure 5). The Turkic origin and mass conversion of the Khazars to Judaism are well documented by both medieval and modern scholars (Ibn al-Faqih and Hadi 1996, 593; Ibn Fadlan and Ghaybah 1994; Halévy 1935 and 1936; Ibn Khaldun 1982, 129; Spector 1968, 5; Bradley 1992; Dunlop 1954, ix, x). Fifth, some of the assumptions used by geneticists are themselves based on even weaker assumptions such as “A Middle Eastern origin of the Jewish gene pool is generally assumed because of the detailed documentation of Jewish history and religion” (Hammer et al 2000, 6773).

Additional legitimate questions could also be raised about the ethnic identity, personal motivation, and political dedication of the various genetic research teams, especially the way they wrap their research projects and published findings into broad human genetic studies while they seem to be focused mainly on the Semitic claim. Harry Ostrer was quoted saying that “Jews and Arabs are all really children of Abraham and all have preserved their Middle Eastern genetic roots over 4,000 years” (Science Daily 2004). If this is already “a known fact,” what is the purpose of research on Jewish genetic origins? By the same token Michael Hammer was also quoted as saying that Palestinian and Jewish men are “so closely related as to be genetically indistinguishable” (Shute 2001). Looking at the big picture, it appears that the entire Zionist enterprise of Jewish genealogy by genetics and the brouhaha and cacophony it has created among geneticists, biologists, activists, and the media represent a global-scale political mobilization to rescue the Semitic claim from the specter of an increasingly deconstructed Jewish identity and a declining world Jewry amidst a growing condemnation of Zionist separatism and persecution of the Palestinians. Otherwise, why this new “racial science” of genealogy by genetics is so compelling and so accepted only among Zionized Jews, whereas it could be very suspicious and controversial if adopted by other ethnic groups? (Brodwin 2004).

Conclusion

The conclusion can be summed up in the following points. First, the Jewish Semitic claim made by the Zionists in the name of contemporary Jews remains unsubstantiated according to scholarly findings in history, archaeology, linguistics, and genetics. Second, the Semitic claim is essentially used to justify the dispossession, displacement, and impersonation of the Palestinians by Jewish settlers in one of the most complex form of cultural identity theft. Third, even if contemporary Jews were actually “Semitic,” this will not justify their dispossession of the Palestinians who have nothing to do with any past or present, actual or alleged persecution of Jews in Europe or anywhere else in the world. Fourth, the Semitic claim did not solve the Jewish identity problem created by Zionism as the current genetic turn to a new racial science indicates. Fifth, the growing disillusionment with the Jewish Semitic claim could nurture cynicism or guilt among current and future Jewish generations. Hebrew University Professor of History Yehoshua Porath was quoted: “You can’t build a cultural heritage on a lie. Because when young people discover the truth, they can become cynical” (Fletcher 1995, 16). In light of the failure to prove the Semitic claim, researchers of the origins of contemporary Jews are now forced to think outside the old geographic box of Palestine and the older ethnic buzzword of the Israelites.

*Note

In this article, the term “Zionism” refers to the international colonial movement designed to make Palestine an extraterritorial nation-state for world Jewry. The term “Zionists” refers to the Jewish and non-Jewish supporters of this movement. It should be noted that critical studies of Zionism have often been tabooed, polemicized and/or considered anti-Semitic in mainstream U.S. media, politics, and culture. For example, the unabridged version of the Webster’s Third New International Dictionary of the English Language (1986 Edition) has gone as far as defining *anti-Semitism* as any “opposition to Zionism” and/or “sympathy with opponents of the State of Israel.” This definition and the relentless harassment of Western conscience about Jewish persecution and the Holocaust seem to keep Israel and Zionism above and beyond any serious criticism within the Western world (see Finkelstein 2000 and Novick 1999). The Global Anti-Semitism Review Act of 2004 (signed by President Bush two weeks before the 2004 presidential elections), the [HR 3077] International Studies in Higher Education Act of 2003 (passed by the U.S. House and referred to the U.S. Senate), and the Middle East Forum Campus Watch (which blacklists American university professors who criticize Israel) are likely to make it even more difficult and more intimidating for scholars to criticize the State of Israel or Zionism without being labeled anti-Semitic.

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Figure 1. The Israeli Law of Return and the Dispossession of the Palestinians



*The figure excludes hundred of thousands of Palestinians living outside the Arab World and Israel. The Statistical Abstract of Palestine No. 5 (released in 2004) estimates the total number of Palestinians at 9.6 million, of which 3.7 million in the Palestinian Territories, 1.1 million in Israel, and 4.8 million outside Palestine/Israel. Source: <http://mama.indstate.edu/users/mouldmey/Geopolitical%20Genesis%20of%20Herzlian%20Zionism.PDF>

Figure 2. The Old Surnames of the New Children of Abraham

<p>President of the State of Israel 1963-1973 Zalman Shazar (born Rubashov), originally from White Russia</p>	<p>Prime Minister of Israel 1948-1953 & 1955-1963 David Ben-Gurion (born Gruen), originally from Plonsk in Poland</p>
<p>President of the State of Israel 1952-1963 Itzhak Ben-Zvi (born Shimshelvitzevitz), originally from Poltava in the Ukraine</p>	<p>Prime Minister of Israel 1983-1984 & 1992-1995 Yitzhak Shamir (born Yzernitzky), originally from Ruzinoy in Poland</p>
<p>President of the State of Israel 1973-1978 Ephraim Katzir (born Katchalski), originally from Kiev in the Ukraine</p>	<p>Prime Minister of Israel 1969-1974 Golda Meir (born Mabovitch), originally from Kiev in the Ukraine</p>
<p>Prime Minister of Israel 1984-1986 & 1995- 1996 Shimon Peres (born Perski), originally from Vishneva in Byelorussia</p>	<p>Prime Minister of Israel 1999-2001 Ehud Barak (born Brug), originally from Byelorussia</p>
<p>Prime Minister of Israel 2001-present Ariel Sharon (born Sheinerman), originally from Russia</p>	

Source: <https://www.indstate.edu/cas/sites/arts.indstate.edu/files/Faculty/melyassini/Geopolitical%20Genesis%20and%20Prospect%20of%20Zionism.PDF>

Figure 3. Joseph Stalin's Promised Homeland for the Jews in 1928

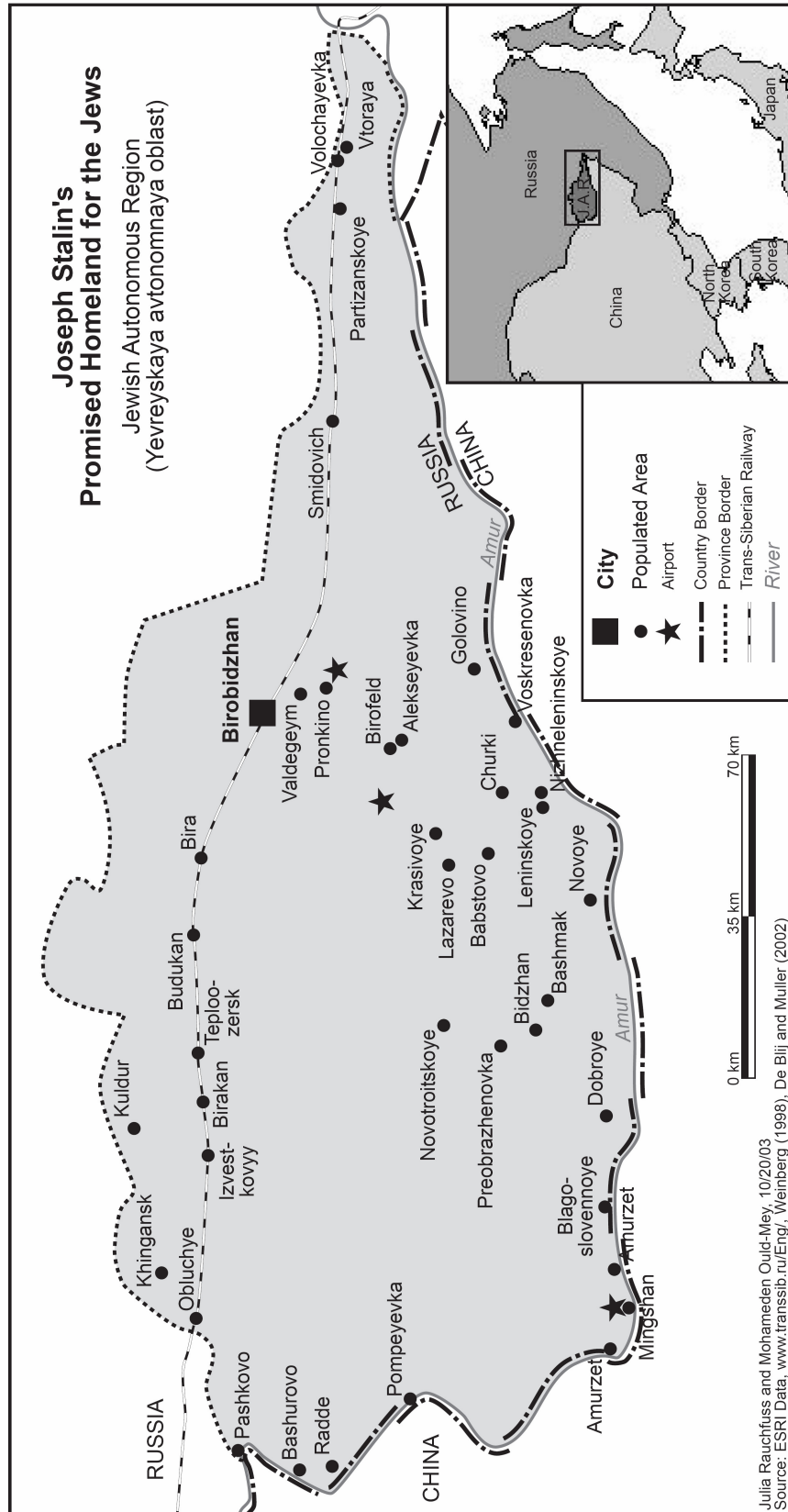
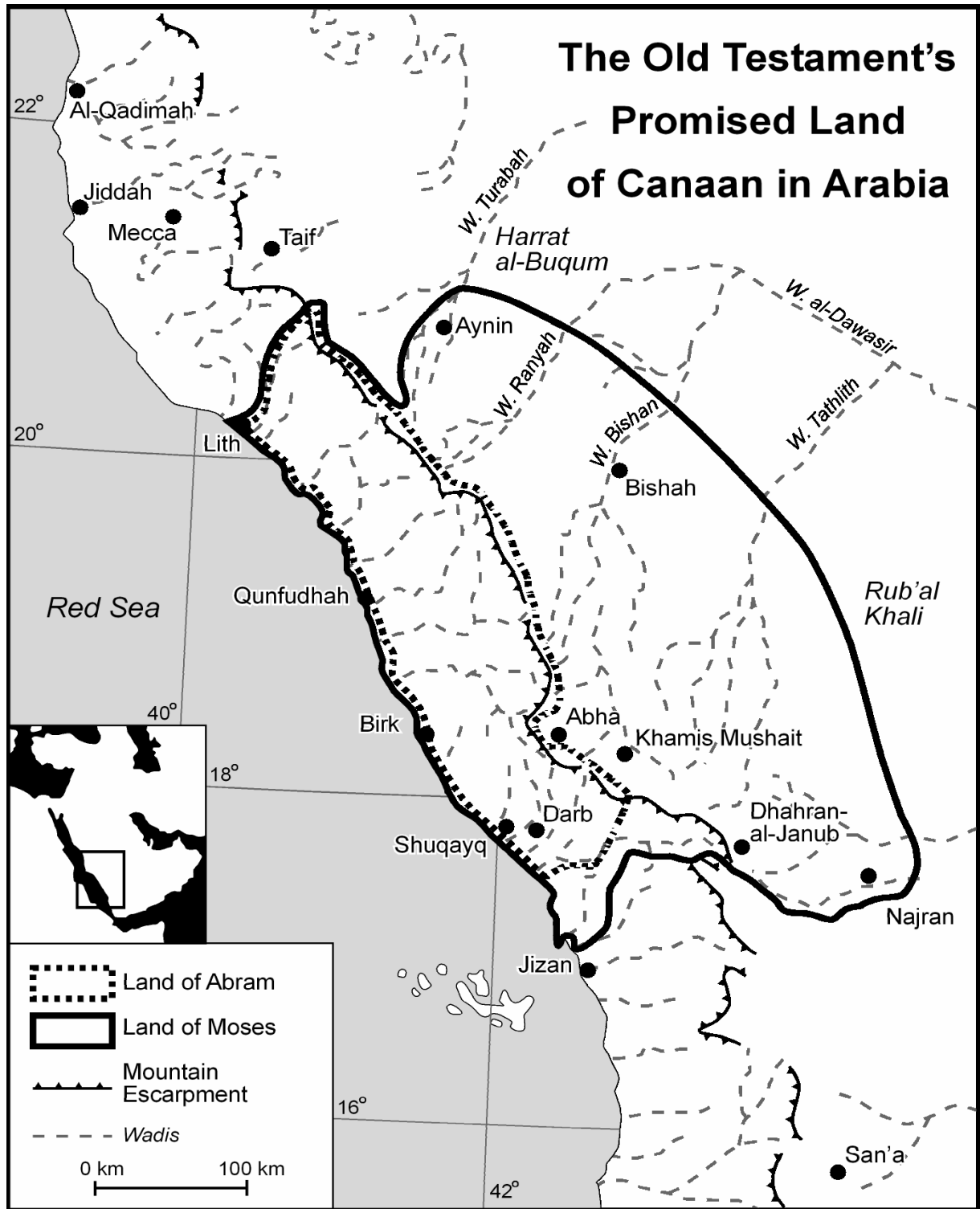
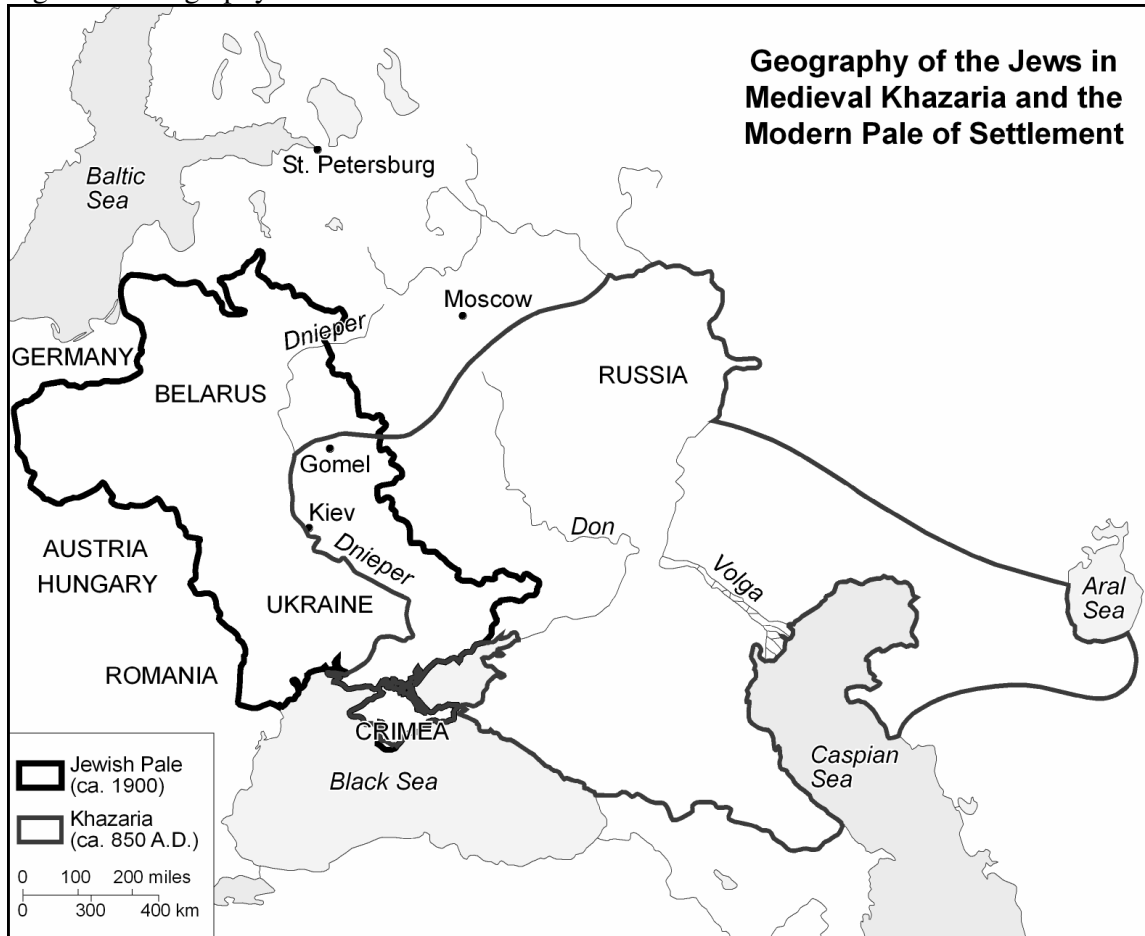


Figure 4. The Old Testament's Promised Land of Canaan in Arabia



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Figure 5. Geography of the Jews in Medieval Khazaria and the Modern Pale of Settlement



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