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The Kingdoms of Ararat: Zvi Kasdoi, the Ten Lost Tribes, and Jewish National Identity

Summary: Zvi Kasdoi (1862–1937) was a Russian Jewish traveler and Zionist who, along his travels, encountered unfamiliar Jewish communities like the Jews of Georgia. Kasdoi's 1912 book *Mamlekhot Ararat* [*The Kingdoms of Ararat*] is an account of the author's travels in the Russian Empire's Transcaucasus region, during which he encountered and observed Georgian Jews. As a proponent of Jewish nationhood, Kasdoi set out to explain how the Jews he encountered could be so culturally, linguistically, and even historically different from the Russian Jews with whom he was familiar, yet still be part of the same nation. Alongside the ethnographic observations that typically characterize travelogs, Kasdoi draws on the range of the Jewish canon, as well as classical Greco-Roman literature, and employs exegetical methodologies to argue that the Jews of Georgia were descendants of the ten lost tribes of Israel. The legend of the ten tribes allows Kasdoi to explain the differences between Russian and Georgian Jews while reifying their shared belonging to the Jewish nation. Additionally, through invoking the legend of the ten tribes, Kasdoi fuses the project of Jewish national revival with messianic expectation and proposes that, in the context of the Jewish national revival and Zionist movement, redemption was not only possible, but imminent. A study of Kasdoi's *Mamlekhot Ararat* sheds light on the use of the legend of the ten tribes to bridge intercommunal Jewish boundaries and brings attention to the role of eschatological hopes within the discourse of Jewish national revival in late Imperial Russia.
Keywords: Zvi Kasdoi, Georgian Jews, Ten Lost Tribes, Zionism, National Identity, Messianism, Russian Empire

Царства Арарата: Цви Касдой, Десять потерянных колен и еврейская национальная идентичность
Резюме: Цви Касдой (1862–1937), еврейский путешественник и сионист из России, во время своих поездок встретил малоизвестные еврейские общины, в том числе евреев Грузии. Его книга *Мамлехот Арарат* (1912) представляет собой рассказ о путешествии по Закавказью в пределах Российской империи и содержит наблюдения автора о грузинских евреях. Будучи сторонником идеи еврейской нации, Касдой стремился объяснить, каким образом эти евреи могли казаться столь отличными в культурном, языковом и историческом отношении от знакомых ему российских евреев, и в то же время принадлежать к одному народу. Помимо этнографических описаний, характерных для жанра путешествий, Касдой обращается к еврейскому канону, а также к классической греко-римской литературе и применяет экзегетические методы, чтобы доказать, что грузинские евреи являются потомками десяти потерянных колен Израиля. Легенда о десяти коленах позволила Касдою одновременно объяснить различия между российскими и грузинскими евреями и подтвердить их общую национальную принадлежность. Более того, апеллируя к этой легенде, Касдой соединяет проект еврейского национального возрождения с мессианскими ожиданиями и утверждает, что в контексте сионистского движения избавление не только возможно, но и близко. Исследование *Мамлехот Арарат* проливает свет на то, как легенда о десяти коленах использовалась для преодоления межобщинных границ внутри еврейского мира, и подчёр-

кивает роль эсхатологических надежд в дискурсе еврейского национального возрождения в поздней Российской империи.
Ключевые слова: Цви Касдой, грузинские евреи, десять потерянных колен, сионизм, национальная идентичность, мессианство, Российская империя

KRÓLESTWA ARARATU: ZVI KASDOI, DZIESIĘĆ ZAGINIONYCH PLEMION I ŻYDOWSKA TOŻSAMOŚĆ NARODOWA
Streszczenie: Zvi Kasdoi (1862–1937) był rosyjsko-żydowskim podróżnikiem i syjonistą, który w trakcie swoich podróży napotkał nieznane mu społeczności żydowskie, takie jak Żydzi gruzińscy. Jego książka z 1912 roku, *Mamlekhot Ararat* [*Królestwa Araratu*], to sprawozdanie z podróży autora po regionie Zakaukazia, będącym częścią Imperium Rosyjskiego, podczas której spotkał i obserwował gruzińskich Żydów. Jako zwolennik żydowskiej tożsamości narodowej, Kasdoi starał się wyjaśnić, w jaki sposób Żydzi, których spotkał mogli być tak bardzo różni kulturowo, językowo, a nawet historycznie od znanych mu rosyjskich Żydów, a mimo to nadal stanowić część tego samego narodu. Obok etnograficznych obserwacji, które zwykle charakteryzują dzienniki podróży, Kasdoi czerpie z bogatej żydowskiej tradycji i klasycznej literatury grecko-rzymskiej. Wykorzystuje również metodologie egzegetyczne, aby argumentować, że Żydzi gruzińscy są potomkami dziesięciu zaginionych plemion Izraela. Legenda o dziesięciu plemionach pozwala Kasdoiemu wytłumaczyć różnice między Żydami rosyjskimi a gruzińskimi, jednocześnie umacniając ich wspólną przynależność do narodu żydowskiego. Ponadto, przywołując legendę o dziesięciu plemionach, Kasdoi łączy projekt narodowego odrodzenia żydowskiego z oczekiwaniami mesjanistycznymi. Sugeruje, że w kontekście narodowego odrodzenia i ruchu syjonistycznego zbawienie jest nie tylko możliwe, ale także nieuchronne. Badanie *Mamlekhot Ararat* Kasdoiego rzuca światło na wykorzystanie legendy o dziesięciu plemionach do łączenia międzywspólnotowych żydowskich granic oraz zwraca uwagę na rolę nadziei eschatologicznych w dyskursie narodowego odrodzenia żydowskiego w późnym okresie Imperium Rosyjskiego.
Słowa kluczowe: Zvi Kasdoi, Żydzi gruzińscy, dziesięć zaginionych plemion, syjonizm, tożsamość narodowa, mesjanizm, Imperium Rosyjskie

Introduction

At the dawn of the nineteenth century, the Russian Empire expanded south into Transcaucasia bringing two very different Jewish communities, East European Russian Jewry and Georgian Jewry, into the same Empire. Georgian Jews spoke the Georgian language and were fairly well acculturated into their surrounding society, while the majority of Russian Jews were linguistically and culturally distant from their non-Jewish neighbors. While Russian Jewry numbered in the millions, the Georgian Jewish population was comparatively miniscule, counting no more than 10,000 at the turn of the nineteenth century. These communities, with pronouncedly different cultures, relations with non-Jewish neighbors, economic circumstances, legal statuses, and historical pedigrees, found themselves brought together by Russian Imperial expansion. In the eyes of Russian Jews, their Georgian coreligionists were a curiosity: nearby, yet alien.

Over the course of the century, various phenomena in the Russian Empire occasioned contact between members of these two communities. The expansion of railroads and Black Sea shipping eased the previously lengthy and hazardous journey between

Russia and Georgia, so Jews more frequently traveled back and forth, and encountered members of the other community in the process. Communication infrastructure like telegraphy, as well as growing press and publishing, facilitated the flow of information between and about the two communities, acquainting Jews with their unfamiliar coreligionists. As Georgian Jews increasingly faced forms of antisemitism that mirrored the persecution Russian Jews experienced, efforts to navigate resemblant challenges prompted engagement. The relationship between these two Jewish communities took on particular significance in the context of the Jewish national revival, as observers sought to understand how two communities with such disparate material circumstances and histories could be part of the same nation. One Russian Jew concerned with the national question, Zvi Kasdoi, employed the framework of the ten lost tribes of Israel to provide a common historical basis and visions of a shared future in order to foster national unity between Russian and Georgian Jews.

"In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria. He deported the Israelites to Assyria and settled them in Halah, at [the River] Habor, at the River Gozan, and in the towns of Media...So the Israelites were deported from their land to Assyria, as is still the case."[1] These verses detail the destruction of the Kingdom of Israel at the hands of Tiglath-Pileser III and Shalmaneser V, and the subsequent exile of the ten tribes of Israel to Assyria and the lands beyond. As the ten tribes passed from history to legend, they came to constitute the mystery par excellence as people over the centuries asked: Where are the ten tribes?

Like many before him, Zvi Kasdoi was intrigued by this mystery and sought to find the ten tribes. As a committed Zionist from the early days of the Hovevei Zion movement, Kasdoi's search for the ten tribes was colored by the Jewish national revival, aiming to define and promote a pan-Jewish identity in a bid to demonstrate the existence of a single, worldwide Jewish nation.[2] Skeptics of Jewish nationhood pointed to the substantially different material circumstances that set diaspora communities apart. Pan-Jewish identity, however, defines the whole Jewish collective as bound by the spirit of Jewishness, history, and fate which transcend intercommunal differences. For Kasdoi, this Jewish unity was ideologically charged as the fate that bound

[1] *II Kings* 17:6, 23. All biblical translations are JPS 1985, unless otherwise indicated.

[2] I borrow the term "pan-Jewish" from Matthias Lehmann, who employs it as a neologism for the Hebrew term *klal Yisrael*. M. Lehmann, *Emissaries from the Holy Land: the Sephardic Diaspora and the Practice of Pan-Judaism in the Eighteenth Century*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2014, p. 14.

the pan-Jewish collective included the Jews' return to the Land of Israel. Using the legend of the ten tribes, Kasdoi emphasized shared Jewish history and sought to cultivate intercommunal co-identification, while also accounting for diversity within the Jewish nation. This reflects what Alanna Cooper has referred to as the *Edah* [community] Paradigm of understanding Jewish unity. This framework derives from the tribal relationships in ancient Israel, in which tribes were assigned different territories and characteristics, but bound to one another as descendants of the patriarch Jacob. In understanding Jewish unity through the lens of the ten tribes, Kasdoi employs the Edah Paradigm which "allows for a great range of diversity among Jews while maintaining the notion that they belong to a single people." [3]

Viewed through the lens of the lost tribes of Israel, Jewish national revival and identity construction also take on eschatological significance as the return of the ten tribes and its reintegration into the rest of the Jewish people are a core feature of the messianic drama, signaling the imminence of redemption.[4] Kasdoi's oeuvre is characterized by assertions that numerous communities, including the Caucasian Jews, are the remnants of the ten tribes and efforts to foster a shared identity between them and the Jews with whom Kasdoi was more familiar. The project of constructing a pan-Jewish identity, particularly the articulation and promotion of bonds between European and Caucasian Jews, is most clearly expressed in Kasdoi's 1912 *Mamlekhot Ararat* [The Kingdoms of Ararat]. [5] Though he addresses the two fully distinct Caucasian Jewish communities, Georgian and Mountain Jews, the present work focuses on how Kasdoi used the framework of the ten tribes as he eyed Georgian Jews.

The myth of the ten tribes was remarkably long-lived and dynamic because it fulfilled two functions: making legible the exotic, and promising the imminence of redemption.[6] Through identifying Georgian Jews as members of the ten lost tribes, ripped apart and long estranged from the rest of the Jewish collective, Kasdoi clearly articulates a kin-based relationship that stretches

[3] A. E. Cooper, *Bukharan Jews and the Dynamics of Global Judaism*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2012, p. 121.

[4] For example, "Save, oh Eternal One, your people, the Remnant of Israel. I will bring them from the Northland, gather them from the Ends of the Earth." *Jeremiah* 31: 7–8. See also: *Ezekiel* 37: 12–19; *Ezekiel* 38: 14–16; *Isaiah* 11: 11–12.

[5] Zvi Kasdoi, *Mamlekhot Ararat*, Moriah, Odessa, 1912.

[6] The functions of the legend of the ten tribes are explored in: T. Parfitt, *The Lost Tribes of Israel: the History of a Myth*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 2002; Z. Ben-Dor Benite, *The Ten Lost Tribes: a World History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009.

back to hoary antiquity, and accounts for the chasms between the two communities. Simultaneously, through demonstrating the existence of the ten tribes, Kasdoi draws upon a long tradition that identified the discovery of the ten tribes with the end of days and *kibbutz galuyot*, the ingathering of exiles. Thus, at stake in the project of national revival is messianic redemption.

Kasdoi's *Mamlekhot Ararat* is a travelogue, replete with ethnographic observations of contemporary Caucasian Jewish life that are punctuated by proofs of Caucasian Jewry's ten-tribe origin. Employing exegetical methodology, Kasdoi draws on the range of the Jewish canon, as well as classical Greco-Roman literature, to demonstrate that his subjects were indeed the remnants of the lost tribes. To be sure, Kasdoi's thinking is eccentric, and his work is characterized by unlikely logical leaps, poorly cited claims, and the odd geographic error. Nonetheless, his work is worthy of attention for how it employs the myth of the ten tribes to understand the relationship between Georgian and Russian Jews, with an eye on the promise of messianic redemption. As Kasdoi identifies Caucasian Jews with the ten lost tribes, he renders alien Jews familiar, and demonstrates that messianic redemption is not only possible, but imminent.

Zvi Kasdoi was born in 1864, in the Hasidic stronghold of Dubova, near Uman. His father, a merchant and *melamed*, died when Zvi was eight years old, leaving his mother to support him and his five siblings. As a child, he attended a local *heder*, with the traditional Jewish education system's characteristic emphasis on *halakhic* literature. From a young age, however, Zvi was drawn to studying the Bible, which was generally reserved for young children, and learning the weekly Torah portion on Friday afternoons. Owing to his disinterest in the legal texts that his teachers emphasized, he struggled at school. When a Lithuanian Jew arrived in Dubova and opened a new *heder*, the young Kasdoi switched to this school and was taken aback by his new teacher. Unbeknownst to local parents, this Lithuanian was no regular *melamed*. He was a maskil.

In this new *heder*, Kasdoi enjoyed the opportunity to spend more time studying the Bible and learned about the haskalah. He was particularly struck by the Hebrew writer Abraham Mapu's novel *Ahavat Zion* [The Love of Zion], foreshadowing his later commitment to Zionism. Despite facing opposition from his mother and the local Hasidic rabbis, Kasdoi established contacts with the Uman chapter of the Society for the Promotion of Culture among the Jews of Russia (OPE) and snuck haskalah literature back to Dubova. At the age of 16, Kasdoi left home in search

of secular education and the opportunity to attend university.[7] Although Kasdoi left the traditionalist Judaism of his childhood behind in Dubova, Jewish religious observance, tradition, and the Bible remained important to him for his entire life.

After completing his education, Kasdoi worked as an agent for wealthy merchants, which gave him the opportunity to travel across the Russian Empire on business. Drawn to Zionism, Kasdoi took advantage of his business travels to represent the Hovevei Zion movement as a traveling preacher, promoting the cause of Jewish national revival wherever he traveled. He was also deeply fascinated by the different Jewish communities he encountered during his travels, and published articles about his experiences in the Russian-Jewish press.[8] These ethnographic observations from his travels as an itinerant preacher and business agent would form the basis of Kasdoi's most significant scholarly works. *Mamlekhot Ararat*, for instance, is based on articles that he published in the Hebrew language newspapers *HaMelitz* and *HaTsefira* when he visited the Caucasus in 1887 as a young man. Kasodi was not the first Russian Jew to publish the claim that Caucasian Jews were descendants of the ten lost tribes, but he gave this theory far more credence and attention than anyone else.[9] Owing to the centrality of the legend in Kasdoi's attempt to define the relationship between Georgian and Russian Jews, a brief overview of the legend is in order.

The legend of the ten tribes was often cited by Christian Europeans in order to understand the alien, or to lend credence to the promise of messianic redemption and the end of days. The legend of the ten tribes functioned to familiarize the exotic because stories typically identified the exiles as dwelling in a mysterious land beyond the mythical River Sambatyon, just over the horizon and out of reach.[10] During the age of exploration, Europeans identified new-found peoples beyond the horizon in the New World, Africa, or Asia with the ten tribes in order to better understand these un-

[7] Z. Kasdoi, *Keta'ei-Zikhronot me'et Zvi Kasdoi,* in H. N. Bialik, A. Druyanow, Y. H. Ravnitsky, eds., *Reshumot: me'asef le-divrei zikhronot*, vol. 4, Dvir, Tel Aviv, 1925, pp. 216–30.

[8] *Davar* 1937 no. 3775, p. 3; Examples of Kasdoi publishing about his journeys in the press include: *HaMelitz* 1892 no. 267 about Crimea, *Der Yud* 1901 no. 23 about Akhaltsikhe, Georgia, and a series of articles in *HaMelitz*, over the course of Spring, 1902, "Yam ve-Darom" on Siberia and other distant parts of Russia.

[9] J. J. Chorny, *Sefer ha-Masa'ot be-erets Kavkaz, ha-Hevrah le-harbot haskala etsel Yehude Rusiya*, St. Petersburg, 1884, pp. 34, 54, 75, and 211. In the Russian Jewish press, see: *HaCarmel* 1862 no. 17; *HaMelitz* 1867 no. 4; *Razsvet* 1879 no. 14; *HaTsefira* 1894 no. 93. This claim is also found in David Maggid's essay on Caucasian Jewry: D. Maggid, "*Evrei na Kavkaze*: Istoriia Evreiskogo Naroda," 1921, 13.1, Moscow, pp. 85–97.

[10] Parfitt, *The Lost Tribes*, pp. 5–7.

known people.[11] Yet, for all the unfamiliar peoples that Europeans encountered, none of them turned out to be the ten tribes.

As the age of exploration drew to a close and the ten tribes remained hidden beyond the River Sambatyon, doubt was cast on the promise of redemption. In the disenchanted nineteenth century, divine revelation and miracles no longer sufficed to prove the Bible's veracity, but if the tribes were out there somewhere, discovering them might demonstrate the truth of the biblical narrative.[12] In the nineteenth century a number of scholars, missionaries, and travelers took to the search for the ten tribes, hoping both to demonstrate the veracity of the Bible, as well as hasten the coming of the Messiah. These searchers reasoned that because much of the Earth and its peoples were already known to Europeans, the ten tribes must have already been found. They just had not yet been identified as such.[13]

While Christians employed the ten tribes for the purposes of familiarizing the foreign or reinforcing the promise of redemption, Jews were periodically recording references to the tribes on their travels. One finds these in the writings of Benjamin of Tudela and the Italian Rabbi Ovadia ben Avraham of Bertinoro (Bartenura), among others.[14] Although these Jews showed great interest in rumors about their long-lost brethren, they did not actively seek out the ten tribes in order to bring about redemption. The Three Oaths, an idea found in the Babylonian Talmud, traditionally forbade Jews from attempting to actively bring about the messianic age on the condition that non-Jews did not "subjugate them excessively."[15] Following the upheaval and disillusionment associated with the messianic pretensions of Shabbetai Zvi, as well as the fear of another Sabbatean disaster, the passive attitude towards messianism grew stronger. Amidst the social and political tumult of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, however, messianic discourse began to change shape. Haskalah, emancipa-

[11] For example, in his 16th century *Historia Generale de las Indias*, Spanish historian Francisco López de Gómara described the inhabitants of the New World as "all very like Jews in appearance and voice, for they have large noses and speak through the throat," cited in *The Lost Tribes,* p. 25.

[12] Ben-Dor Benite, *The Ten Lost Tribes*, p. 19.

[13] Among the most prominent of these were Josef Wolff and Jacob Samuel, both Jews who converted to Christianity and sought to identify the ten tribes in order to missionize among them. See: J. Wolff, *Researches and Missionary Labours among the Jews, Mohammedeans, and Other Sects*, Orrin Rogers, Philadelphia, 1837; J. Samuel, *The Remnant Found, on the Place of Israel's Hiding Discovered*, J. Hatchard and Son, London, 1841.

[14] A. Ya'ari, *Igrot Eretz Yisrael: she-katvu ha-Yehudim ha-yoshvim ba-Arets le-aḥehem sheba-golah mi-yeme galut Bavel ve-'ad shivat Tsiyon shebe-yamenu*, Masada, Ramat Gan, 1942, pp. 140–1.

[15] *Talmud Bavli, Ketubot* 111a.

tion, the Napoleonic Wars, and the increasing persecution of Jews in Russia inspired this resurgence.[16]

The ten tribes came to occupy a central place in this reinvigorated messianic discourse, which assigned a decidedly more active role to humans in the messianic process. This was most clearly expressed by some of the Vilna Gaon's students, most prominent among them Rabbi Israel of Shklov, who rejected the Three Oaths on the basis that the gentiles had violated their side of the agreement by excessively persecuting the Jews. Inspired by the idea that humans could impact the actions of God, they came to articulate the active messianic belief that redemption was characterized by an "interactive dynamic of divine and human deeds."[17] As part of their efforts, the group migrated from the Russian Empire to Safed between 1808 and 1812, seeking to bring about redemption through dwelling in the Land of Israel and fulfilling commandments that were contingent upon being there. As Rabbi Israel understood it, his group required the assistance of the ten tribes in efforts to bring about the messianic age.

In an 1830 letter that Rabbi Israel of Shklov dispatched to the ten tribes, he sought to recruit them to participate in putting the redemptive process in motion. First, he entreated these Jews to pray for the Messiah to come. More significantly, he assigned the ten tribes an active role in the reestablishment of the Sanhedrin, a part of the messianic process. Classical rabbinic ordination, constituting a chain that stretched back to Moses, was severed over the centuries of tumultuous Jewish history. The ten tribes, isolated from Jewish history beyond the Sambatyon, managed to preserve this institution and would be instrumental in establishing the Sanhedrin, which required ordained rabbis. Rabbi Israel, therefore, requested that the ten tribes choose "several ordained sages who…will kindly come to the Land of Israel…and ordain some of our scholars, so that a court of ordained judges will exist in the Land of Israel, on which the beginning of the redemption is contingent."[18] This idea was revolutionary because the Sanhedrin was essentially a political body and, therefore, the role of the ten tribes in the redemptive process took on a political dimension. Though this movement appears to have had limited

[16] For a survey of the ten tribes in Jewish literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see: S. Werses, "Legends about the Ten Tribes and the Sambatyon in Modern Hebrew Literature," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore*, 1986, vol. 9, pp. 38–66. Werses does not address Kasdoi, and he only briefly addresses the use of the legend of ten tribes in Zionist discourse.

[17] J. Myers, "The Messianic Idea and Zionist Ideologies," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, 1991, 7, p. 5.

[18] A. Morgenstern, *Hastening Redemption: Messianism and the Resettlement of the Land of Israel*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2006, pp. 103–5, 110; Ya'ari, *Igrot*, 347–53.

influence beyond a small circle of Rabbi Israel's adherents, the ten tribes clearly remained present in the reservoir of messianic yearning as connected to the Land of Israel.

The legend of the ten tribes and messianic language surged as they came to occupy a space in Zionist discourse. Secular Zionist thinkers and activists often "translated into Jewish political idiom methods used to inspire and rule traditional Jewry," as a means of minimizing the break between modern Zionism and traditional Judaism. But though invoking messianism and redemption, many secular Jews used this language in a manner emptied of traditional eschatological meaning and as an expression of romantic nationalism rooted in Judaism rather than age-old messianic yearning.[19] Religious Zionists in the late nineteenth century, meanwhile, tended to be non-messianic in outlook. They saw Zionism as a practical solution to the worldly plight of the Jews and left messianic language to the secular. In the early twentieth century, however, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook introduced a strain of active messianism into religious Zionism, asserting that messianic redemption is not "to be understood as the driving force behind the historical process, but its outcome."[20] This would gradually overtake non-messianic religious Zionism, as Zionism and messianism came to be understood as overlapping phenomena, both involving the gathering of Jews in Israel and their liberation from subjugation to the non-Jewish nations. [21] Religious Zionists would employ the same messianic language used by earlier secular Zionists, but laden with the redemptive meaning that the secular Zionists had jettisoned.

Kasdoi's religious commitments are not entirely clear from his work. On the one hand, his intellectual milieu included secular Zionists like Chaim Nachman Bialik, Ahad Ha'am, and Micah Joseph Berdichevsky. Indeed, *Mamlekhot Ararat* was published by Bialik's Moriah publishing house, situating Kasdoi's work within a cultural Zionist project that was oriented towards a secular Jewish identity. On the other hand, he corresponded with Rabbi Kook, and the rhetoric and thought processes in his book share a great deal with

[19] S. Zipperstein, "Symbolic Politics," *Religion, and the Emergence of Ahad Haam*, in S. Almog, J. Reinharz, and A. Shapira, eds., *Zionism and Religion*, University Press of New England, Hanover, 1998, p. 60; E. Ledernhendler, "Interpreting Messianic Rhetoric in the Russian Haskalah and Early Zionism," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, 1991, 7, pp. 29–30; Myers, *The Messianic Idea and Zionist Ideologies*, p. 8.

[20] A. Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, M. Swirsky and J. Chipman, trans., University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1996, p. 88.

[21] Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, 37; Myers, *The Messianic Idea and Zionist Ideologies*, p. 10. The widespread adoption of this strain would be a drawn-out process, involving the traumas and triumphs of the mid-twentieth century, the Balfour Declaration, the Holocaust, and the establishment of the State of Israel.

the active messianism of the religious Zionist camp. Regardless of Kasdoi's particular religious beliefs, there is no doubt that he ascribed to the discovery and integration of the ten tribes profound significance tied to the spiritual fate of the Jewish people. When Kasdoi appeals to the ten tribes and the ingathering of exiles, he sees the integration of the ten tribes into the pan-Jewish collective as part of the steps humanity must take to initiate a vaguely defined redemptive process.

One of Kasdoi's primary aims in *Mamlekhot Ararat* is to assert that Caucasian Jews are the remnants of the ten tribes, which he argues by drawing support from local legends, observations about the characteristics of those Jews he encountered, and his conversations with non-Jewish Georgians. Kasdoi makes extensive use of his childhood religious education, incorporating prooftexts from biblical and rabbinic literature to support the evidence that he identifies. Along his travels, Kasdoi reports, Georgian Jews often told him that they believed their community first arrived in Georgia during the Assyrian Exile as part of the ten tribes, though, they did not claim belonging to any one of the ten tribes in particular. In the town of Surami, Kasdoi finds that the local Jews "believe, like all Jews here, that they too are of the ten tribes, which were brought here by the armies of Assyria and settled here until the end of time, and didn't return to the land of Israel…in the time of Ezra and Zerubbabel, because their enemies erected an iron wall and did not allow them to unite with their brothers."[22] During his stay in another Georgian town, Akhaltsikhe, the Russian Jewish traveler heard similar stories from the locals who knew "with full strength of confidence" that their ancestors were exiled to the region by the Assyrians.[23]

In search of providing a historical basis for these legends, Kasdoi sheds light on why the Assyrians might have settled the ten tribes in Georgia. According to Kasdoi, at the time of the exile the southern Caucasus was at the far northern extremity of the Assyrian Empire. If one assumes that the Assyrians wanted to exile these Jews to as far from the Land of Israel as possible, the southern Caucasus was a sensible choice.[24] As further support, Kasdoi claims

[22] Kasdoi, *Mamlekhot Ararat*, pp. 93–4.

[23] Kasdoi, *Mamlekhot Ararat*, pp. 96–7.

[24] Kasdoi, *Mamlekhot Ararat*, p. 94n. This land, occupied by the Kingdom of Urartu, was frequently at war with Assyria, and the territory periodically held tenuously by the Assyrians. Kasdoi mentions that *the Georgian Chronicles* contain references to "records of Assyrian and Babylonian governments in this country." Additionally, Kasdoi refers to a verse in Isaiah reading: "he [Sennacherib] was struck down with the sword by his sons Adrammelech and Sarezer. They fled to the land of Ararat… ." *Isaiah* 37:38.

that Nebuchadnezzar later exiled Jews to Georgia as punishment for their rebellion, under Jehoiachin, against Babylonian rule. The Babylonians were, thus, following the Assyrians when they settled the upstart Jews in a distant and isolated region to punish them and prevent others from following the Jews to rebel. As he draws attention to Georgia's physical isolation, a result of its mountainous character, Kasdoi invokes the phrase "mountains of darkness" which commonly describes the location of the ten tribes.[25] This description of the Jews being settled in a distant and isolated region is consistent with many expressions of the legend of the ten tribes which place these mythical tribes just beyond reach.

Although the legends Georgian Jews told about themselves seem reasonable when considering historical circumstances and motivation for expulsions, Kasdoi understood that readers might look with skepticism on Georgian Jews' self-perceptions and deem them insufficient to conclusively demonstrate their lineage. Addressing readers' skepticism, Kasdoi voices the hypothetical question: "Surely in the intervening years they've lost their tribal pedigree [*yichus*] and do not know which tribe they belong to?" In response, Kasdoi turned the issue back on his incredulous readers, noting that "if we discuss whether they have lost this pedigree, then we should also doubt the pedigree of our *Kohanim* and *Leviim*."[26] In traditional Judaism, the descendants of the Tribe of Levi, and those of the High Priest Aaron among them, retain a unique identity. This status, passed down through families from generation to generation, is rarely questioned. If his readers accept these lineages without question, Kasdoi asserts, then Georgian Jews' analogous claims need not be doubted.

To further support the tradition circulating among Georgian Jews, Kasdoi combines Biblical and Talmudic exegesis with toponymy and etymology as a means of piecing together a narrative of Jewish history.[27] One of these explorations begins with the narrative of the Assyrian Exile, which names the places where the Tribes were resettled. Kasdoi cites the retelling of the Exile in *I Chronicles*, which reads "[Tiglath-Pileser] carried them away, the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe Manasseh, and brought them to Halah, Habor, Hara, and the River Gozan, to this day."[28] In the first narration of the Assyrian Exile, found in *II Kings* 17, there was no

[25] Kasdoi, *Mamlekhot Ararat*, p. 103.

[26] Kasdoi, *Mamlekhot Ararat*, p. 137.

[27] Kasdoi's methodology was definitely inspired by the work of Abraham Harkavy, see for example, A. Harkavy, *O pervonachal" nom obitalishche Semitov, Indoevropeitsev i Khamitov*, 2nd ed, URSS, Moscow, 2016.

[28] *I Chronicles* 5:26.

mention of "Hara." Rather, in the place of the "Hara" mentioned in the *I Chronicles* text, one reads "the towns of Media," in the *II Kings* version. Because Hara replaced Media while the rest of the list remained unchanged, there must be some connection between the two locations. Kasdoi proceeds to evaluate the name Hara, which he asserts is derived from the word *Hari'im* (mountain dwellers), suggesting that Hara was a mountainous region. Finally, Kasdoi refers to Herodotus and other unnamed classical writers who describe sections of Media as mountainous, reinforcing his contention that Hara and Media somehow related to one another.[29] According to this line of reasoning, Hara must have referred to a mountainous region of Media, which he identifies as the Caucasus. Through this interpretation of the Biblical source texts and classical literature, characteristic of Kasdoi's scholarship overall, he concludes confidently that the ten tribes "were exiled to [the Caucasus] direct from the Land of Israel."[30]

Additionally, Kasdoi attempts to strengthen his claim by arguing that the Caucasus, and Georgia in particular, actually occupied an important place in the Bible. Turning to the prophet Ezekiel, Kasdoi cites the biblical text describing that the prophet "came to the exile community that dwelt in Tel Abib by the Chebar Canal, and… remained where they dwelt."[31] While it is clear from the text that Ezekiel's "exile community" was made up of Jews exiled by the Babylonians, Kasdoi argues that Tel Abib was also home to those exiled by the Assyrians long before. Tel Abib and the Chebar Canal are traditionally understood to be in Mesopotamia because the text identifies them as lying "in the Land of the Chaldeans."[32] Kasdoi boldly elects to neglect this, however, and instead asserts that the Chebar was really the Kura (*Mtkvari*) River which runs through Georgia.

The Russian Jew finds the idea that Ezekiel's community of exiles was persuasive in Georgia because Tel Abib was on the Chebar, which he identified with the Kura. Meanwhile, near a river in Georgia there is a town named Telavi, remarkably reminiscent of Tel Abib, suggesting that perhaps this Telavi is the biblical Tel Abib. There are two flaws in this argument, only one of which Kasdoi

[29] Though Kasdoi does not provide a specific citation, he appears to take this claim from Herodotus, *Histories* VII: 62, in which it is explained that "the Medes were formerly called by everyone Arians." Thus, Kasdoi plays with Arian, which can be phonetically connected to *hari'im* in Hebrew.

[30] Kasdoi, *Mamlekhot Ararat*, p. 10. Kasdoi's analysis here relies to a great extent on Isaac Ber Levensohn's 1841 philological work *Shorshei Levanon* [Roots of the Lebanon], in particular the entry on the Hebrew root *h-r-r*.

[31] *Ezekiel* 3:15.

[32] *Ezekiel* 1:3.

addresses. He acknowledges that in the present Telavi is situated a few kilometers from the nearest river but assures readers that in antiquity the city was directly on the river.[33] The second flaw, which undermines his entire claim, is that the river nearest Telavi is not the Kura, but the Alazani River. Though a tributary, the mainstream of the Kura River is quite distant from Telavi itself, casting great doubt on the identification of Telavi with Tel Abib.

Nonetheless, Kasdoi waxes poetic about the beauty of this land, and the mountains, drawing on the language of Ezekiel's *Merkava* revelation that occurred on the Chebar. "Seeing with his eyes the great and lofty mountains, the 'terrible ice' [*Ezekiel* 1:22] resting upon them, on their flanks and slopes…the strength of the mountains, the tenderness of the sky, and the tranquility of the valleys… We can easily assume that a man of God and a seer like Ezekiel saw all this in his mind's eye when he left the material world to soar to the skies and see visions of God."[34] If Ezekiel had dwelled in Georgia, and this land was the site of the Merkava revelation, Georgia would occupy a place of deep significance in the Bible. It would then be even more reasonable that one might find remnants of the ten tribes here, where there had been Babylonian Exiles, and where a prophet had lived and seen God. The improbability of these arguments aside, one gets a clear sense of the significance that Kasdoi placed on toponymical phonetic similarities, and his openness to unorthodox ideas that might serve his argument.

Much of *Mamlekhot Ararat* is devoted to Kasdoi's observations of the religious customs and everyday lives of the Georgian Jews that he encountered during his travels. These observations lead Kasdoi to sweeping conclusions about the characteristics of Georgian Jews, which he then recruits to substantiate his claim that the Georgian Jews were the remnants of the ten tribes. Kasdoi's visit to Surami, for instance, coincided with *Tu B'Av*, a joyful minor holiday usually falling in mid-Summer. He observes that this holiday was a great communal affair, with exuberant dancing and songs that "sounded Arab because [he] could not understand the language." In this typically gender segregated society, women rarely participated in public celebration, but on this occasion they took part in the festivities, decked out in their nicest outfits and jewelry. Kasdoi writes that he was particularly taken aback by the amount of wine and public drunkenness with which the Surami Jews cele-

[33] Kasdoi, *Mamlekhot Ararat*, p. 10.

[34] Kasdoi, *Mamlekhot Ararat*, p. 18. In his 1928 work on the ten tribes, Kasdoi asserts the same theory despite the geographic error underlying this logic. Z. Kasdoi, *Shivtei Ya'akov u-Netsure Yisrael*, Defus N. Varhaftig, Haifa 1928, p. 46.

brated the occasion, and he recruits it as evidence of their lineage of the ten tribes. Kasdoi cites the prophet Isaiah, admonishing the "proud crowns of the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty is but wilted flowers on the heads of the bloated with rich food, who are overcome by wine!"[35] With this prooftext, he turns the exoticism and effusiveness of Tu B'Av celebrations and the Surami Jews' fondness for wine into "a record of traces of the traits of Ephraimites," one of the lost tribes of Israel.[36]

Kasdoi also characterizes Georgian Jews as aggressive, hot-headed, and eager to fight. Among his proofs, this Russian Jew observes the Georgian tradition (shared by Jews and non-Jews) of being always armed with a small sword, a *kindjali/khanjali*. To lend a Jewish particularity to the general perceived aggression, Kasdoi writes that these Georgian Jews still practice the *goel hadam*, the blood avenger, as described in *Numbers* 35: 9–30, just "like the Israelites did two thousand years ago." Their aggression is excessive in Kasdoi's view, and he expresses disapproval that they are so "quick to spill blood." Regardless of his value judgments, he cites their belligerence as proof of ten-tribe origins, citing a description of the Tribe of Ephraim in *Psalms* as "armed with spear and bow." Additionally, in Hoshea's prophecy, the Ephraimites are castigated: "Ephraim enraged [God] bitterly, and his blood cast upon him."[37] Consequently, Kasdoi concludes that their "hot and boiling blood…[represent] traces of their ancestors' features."[38]

That Georgian Jews exhibit the same character traits and the blood redeemer institution like the ancient Israelite tribes is clearly of great significance to Kasdoi. Recall Rabbi Israel of Shklov's attempt to recruit the assistance of the ten tribes because they maintained classical rabbinic ordination, a result of living in isolation from the vicissitudes of Jewish history. Though the institution in question here is the blood redeemer and not classical rabbinic ordination, the same principle applies that the continuity with antiquity attests to their ten-tribe lineage.

In addition to writing about Georgian Jews, Kasdoi describes his interactions with non-Jewish Georgians. These conversations

[35] Isaiah 28:1.

[36] Kasdoi, *Mamlekhot Ararat*, pp. 95–6.

[37] *Psalms* 78:9; *Hoshea* 12:15. Here, the translation is my own. JPS 1985 renders *Psalms* 78:9 as "Ephraimite bowmen" and *Hoshea* 12:15 as "Ephraim gave bitter offense, and his lord cast his crimes upon him." These translations render words like *hikhis* (from the root כ–ע–ס meaning "anger") and *damav* (meaning "his blood") in more mild terms, while altogether omitting the word *romeach* ("spear") from the verse in *Psalms*. Thus, they do not adequately illustrate Kasdoi's point of associating Ephraim with anger and militance.

[38] Kasdoi, *Mamlekhot Ararat*, p. 123.

further contribute to his argument that the Jews of the Caucasus were of ten-tribe origin, though not in the way that his interlocutors thought. To Kasdoi's surprise, many of the Christians with whom he spoke while in Tiflis believe that they had some ancient Jewish connection and "are proud [that] their genealogies connect them to their Jewish ancestors." Some, for instance, cite Georgian surnames as evidence that they were the descendants of Jews who had converted to Christianity in antiquity. The Georgian noble Bagration-Mukhranski family's name was supposedly derived from the name "Ben-Mechir," while the Melkisedikovitz surname came from "Melchi-Tzedek."[39] In addition to these surnames, Kasdoi notes that the ubiquity of Old Testament first names among Georgians suggests to them that they are descendants of Jews. As one Georgian explains to Kasdoi, their Jewish ancestry differentiates them from their Armenian neighbors. The Georgians claim to feel that the Jews "are like brothers and feel a familial connection from the depths of their hearts, and the Armenians hate them both – Jew, and Georgian."[40]

While in Tiflis, Kasdoi met the Russian Jewish Rabbi, Weinschal, who had noticed that many Georgian words were remarkably similar to their Hebrew equivalents and undertook to catalogue these suspected cognates. At the time of Kasdoi's visit, Weinschal had recorded over 500 examples, including mustard (Heb: *khardal* and Geo: *khardali*), human (Heb: *adam* and Geo: *adamiani*), and hour (Heb: *sha'ah* and Geo: *saati*).[41] Keeping in mind the extensive lexical connections between Georgian and Hebrew, and the many common names, as well as these Georgian Christians' self-perceptions, it would appear that there had been some profound connections or interactions between Jews and Georgians in antiquity. Kasdoi is convinced that Georgians were related to a population that had dwelled in the Holy Land in antiquity, but not the Jews.

Georgians, in Kasdoi's view, are not descendants of Jews who converted to Christianity as many Georgians supposed, but rather

[39] Kasdoi, *Mamlekhot Ararat*, p. 120.

[40] Kasdoi, *Mamlekhot Ararat*, p. 120. Kasdoi proceeds to explain that the Georgians and Jews hate Armenians as well, citing a tradition among Georgian and Ottoman Jews which identifies Armenians with *Amalek*.

[41] Similarities between the Semitic languages and Georgian was investigated by Nikolai Marr, a student of Daniel Khvol'son, who proposed that the Georgian language was in a family of languages closely related to the Semitic language, which he referred to as the "Japhetic" branch of the larger "Noetic family." This theory helps Marr explain the ethnogenesis of the Georgian nation and buttress the Biblical pedigree of the Georgian people as proposed in foundational texts like the *Kartlis Tskhovreba*. N. Marr, *Predvaritel'noe soobshchenie o rodstve gruzinskogo iazika s semiticheskimi*, 1908; addressed in Y. Slezkine, "N. Ia. Marr and the National Origins of Soviet Ethnogenetics," *Slavic Review*, 1996, 55(4), pp. 826–862. The same issue is addressed in F. Makharadze's essay on Marr's work in *Kvali*, 1898, no. 22.

of one of the Canaanite nations who fled the Israelite conquest of the land, namely the Girgashites. His exegetical attempt to prove this theory is based on an *agada*, a Rabbinic legend found in the Jerusalem Talmud: "Rabbi Samuel bar Nachman said, Joshua sent three orders before [the Israelites] entered the land: those who want to evacuate should evacuate, those who want to make peace should make peace, those who want to go to war should go to war. The Girgashites evacuated, believed in the Holy One… and went to Africa. 'Until I come and take you to a land like your land' (*Isaiah* 36:17) that is Africa."[42] Though "Africa" in the literature of late antiquity is typically associated with the Roman province Africa, on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, Kasdoi argues that it refers to the Caucasus. In order to demonstrate the connection, Kasdoi cites the exegetical works *Targum Yonatan* and *Bereshit Rabbah* in *Genesis* 10:2, both of which he interprets as revealing proximity of "Africa" and "Media" owing to the fact that the places are mentioned close to each other.[43] Additionally, Kasdoi draws upon the phonetic similarities of Africa and Iberia, the name of ancient Georgia, to equate the two. The logic is as follows: the ancient Georgian kingdom Iberia was sometimes rendered *Iberike*. Meanwhile, the word that is typically translated as "Africa" is more precisely transliterated from the Hebrew or Aramaic text as *Afriki* or *Ipriki*. In accordance with the phonetic *b-p/f* similarity and the fact that the Hebrew writing system is an abjad, typically written without the diacritic marks that serve as vowels, there is a plausible connection between *Afriki/Ipriki* and "Iberia."[44] Finally, Kasdoi argues that the description of Africa as "a land like your land" in the agada is a reference to Georgia's "similar climate with the land of Israel."[45] With these proofs, Kasdoi expresses confidence that the Africa referred to in the agada about the flight of the Girgashites was the Caucasus.

Kasdoi then connects Georgians with Girgashites, using the same kind of phonetic similarity that premised the identification

[42] *Talmud Yerushalmi, Sheviit* 6:1:13.

[43] *Targum Yonatan* on *Genesis* 10:2 and *Bereshit Rabbah* 37:1. The verse from *Genesis* lists the sons of Japhet as "Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras," understood as the forefathers of many nations of the world. The commentaries describe that these sons of Japhet "settled in what is now Africa, Germany, Media, Macedonia, Bithynia, Asia, and Persia." The presence of Germany [*Germania*] would seem to undermine Kasdoi's theory, though in his text the word is rendered *g-i-r-m-m-i*, perhaps in error or as an attempt to obfuscate this clear flaw in the argument.

[44] Abraham Harkavy drew the same connection between "Africa" and the Caucasus in A. Harkavy, *ha- Yehudim u-sefat ha-Slavim: midrashot ve-hakirot be-korot bene yisrael be-erets Rusiya*, Vilna, 1867, pp. 120–25.

[45] In addition to this *agada* in *Sheviit*, this description is also employed in *Vayikra Rabbah* 17:6. In a slightly different form, "a land as beautiful as his land, called Africa" appears in *Devarim Rabbah* 5:14.

of Africa with Iberia. This argument is based on the fact that earlier works of geography and travelogs referred to the inhabitants of the region as *Gurganim* or *Gargans*. Kasdoi cites, in particular, the twelfth century Benjamin of Tudela, who used this name and described them as "the Girgashites who follow the Christian religion."[46] Taking into account the similarities of sound and plausible phonetic shift over time, one might reasonably assume that the *Gurganim/Gargans* of the past, who Benjamin of Tudela read as descendants of Girgashites, are the Georgians of the present. Furthermore, his reference to Benjamin of Tudela is significant because it lends this theory legitimacy by providing it with a basis in the Jewish tradition stretching back to the Middle Ages. Though less developed than his excursus on the Georgian/Girgashite connection, Kasdoi uses similar logic to identify the Amorites, another Canaanite nation, with the region Imeretia in Western Georgia. Lexical similarities between Hebrew and Georgian, then, stem from the Semitic languages spoken by the Amorites and Girgashites, not from Hebrew itself.

The equation of Georgians with Canaanites serves Kasdoi as another proof that Georgian Jews are the remnants of the ten tribes. Kasdoi uses the Canaanite retreat to the Caucasus to establish a connection between the Land of Israel and the Caucasus that dates to centuries before the Assyrian Exile. As a result, when the ten tribes were expelled "they were brought along the path and trail [established] before them from the Land of Israel to the Caucasus," a trail carved by the Girgashites during their flight from Canaan. Additionally, the Girgashite/Georgian connection is predicated on the association between Africa and Iberia, meaning that the texts describing the ten tribes as exiled to "Africa" now support Kasdoi's contention that they were actually sent to the Caucasus.[47] Through his conversations with both Jews and non-Jews, as well as his observations of the Jews' characteristics and practices, Kasdoi confidently argues that these Jews are the descendants of the ten tribes and, therefore, have a kin-based relationship with the Russian Jews. To better understand how Kasdoi perceives the boundaries of that relationship, and the pan-Jewish identity, it is instructive to turn to Kasdoi's assessment of the Subbotniks that he encountered in Tiflis.

[46] Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, M.N. Adler, trans., Joseph Simon/Pangloss Press, Malibu, 1987, p. 101. Strabo wrote about Gargareans, though he noted that they lived on the northern slopes of the Caucasus, not the region that Kasdoi knew as Georgia. Strabo, *Geography*, XI:5.1.

[47] *Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin* 94a. Kasdoi also cites *Tamid* 32a, describing Alexander the Great's campaign in "Africa," which is also believed to be the Caucasus.

Kasdoi's work is situated within the project of Jewish national revival, and fulfills the function of fostering intercommunal Jewish co-identification, while drawing on messianic redemptive concepts. As a commitment to a pan-Jewish identity is at the core of Kasdoi's work, it is instructive to grapple with how he attempts to define the boundaries of the Jewish collective. Unsurprisingly, Kasdoi places a strong emphasis on lineage, which is underscored as he encounters *Subbotniks*, a sect of Russian Judaizers, in Tiflis. The precise origins of the Subbotnik sect are unclear, though there is evidence of Russians practicing aspects of Judaism dating back to the first half of the eighteenth century. There was a range of adherence to Jewish law and custom within the Subbotnik community, and while some considered themselves Christians who observed the Sabbath on Saturday and privileged the Old Testament above the New, others observed Rabbinic law, prayed in Hebrew, and considered themselves fully Jewish. In order to isolate the Judaizing Subbotniks and restrict their perceived pernicious influence on the Orthodox population of Russia, many were exiled to the South Caucasus in 1830, and built communities in the region, which Kasdoi would encounter on his travels decades later.[48]

Kasdoi writes that he attended a Subbotnik prayer service and found the whole affair to be unalike the services he knew: "they are different and very distant from the Jewish character, they don't have the Jewish feeling."[49] Part of the problem for Kasdoi is that they had not converted to Judaism in accordance with tradition. He also writes with intensity that they "don't have one drop of Jewish blood" and Jews must "guard the purity of our blood – the blood of our ancestors, the holy fluid that flows through our veins… the blood of our 'blood covenant.'"[50] Additionally, Kasdoi explains that Judaism does not have a tradition of proselytizing, further articulating a Jewish identity based on unbroken lineages, with all Jews being "of the seed of Abraham, [in] flesh and blood."[51]

Despite his interest in ancestry and use of language about blood as a defining factor of Jewishness, Kasdoi does not assign any physiological, racial, or anthropological significance to it. Blood indicates family, not race. As such, one sees that the ten-

[48] N. Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers: Forging Russia's Empire in the South Caucasus*, Cornell University Press, Ithica, 2005, p. 12; V. Chernin, *ha-Subotnikim*, Merkaz Rapaport, Ramat Gan, 2007, pp. 7–8.

[49] Kasdoi, *Mamlekhot Ararat*, p. 108.

[50] Kasdoi, *Mamlekhot Ararat*, p. 111–2

[51] Kasdoi, *Mamlekhot Ararat*, p. 111–2. There is no evidence of formal conversion, *giyur*, in the Empire but owing to the fact that conversion to Judaism was not permitted under Imperial law, if instances of such conversions occurred, they would have been hidden and evidence of these conversions might not exist. Chernin, *The Subbotniks*, p. 8.

tribe origins of Georgian Jews serves as a framework for the relationship between Georgian and Russian Jews, a decidedly kin-based relationship. That these two Jewish communities have such divergent histories is divinely ordained, a result of the exile and isolation of the Tribes over a long period. Their very estrangement then serves to underscore their shared history, and the promise of reunification as a part of the messianic redemptive drama.

Kasdoi's interest in tribal lineage and ancestry as a marker of Judaism highlights a shared past, but he is also interested in fostering national consciousness in the present. As such, lineage is supplemented by the significance he attributes to the more nebulous concept of spirit. The Subbotniks in Kasdoi's description constitute "a foreign limb on our spiritual body" because they did not go through the requisite conversion process to become Jews. He reads this as a lack of seriousness about their place in the Jewish collective, describing that becoming Jewish for them was more like "flitting from sect to sect" than displaying a commitment to Jewishness. Similarly, Kasdoi describes at length the hatred Subbotniks directed at Jews, exhibiting a spirit of not being part of the pan-Jewish collective. One of the Subbotnik leaders Kasdoi writes about, for example, exclaims: "We [Judaizers] live only by faith, and we have the faith that the God of heaven decided that we *Gerim* [lit. "converts," meaning "Judaizers"], the real Jews, will replace the sinning Jews (sinning yids, in his words)." In addition to their supersessionism and hatred of Jews, Kasdoi notes that the Subbotniks he encountered also practice Judaism in Russian, thereby distancing themselves from the pan-Jewish community by eschewing the common religious language.[52]

[52] Kasdoi, *Mamlekhot Ararat*, pp. 105, 108. Later in life, Kasdoi would develop a more complex attitude to converts and their role in the redemptive, as described in his book *ha-Mityahadim*. He began to see converts to Judaism as fulfilling the words of Isaiah: "But the Lord will pardon Jacob, and will again choose Israel, and will settle them on their own soil. And strangers [*gerim*] shall join them and shall cleave to the House of Jacob" (14:1) and "As for the foreigners [*bnei nechar*] who attach themselves to the Lord … All who keep the Sabbath and do not profane it … I will bring them to my sacred mount." (56:6–7). He upholds his critique that Subbotniks did not properly convert and were "still Christians [who] switched their day of rest from Sunday to Saturday," and their conversion was "really a great danger … for the very essence of Judaism and its purity, and they were rightly rejected at the time. Which is not the case nowadays." The difference relates to the fact that the new *mityahadim* he discusses are sincere in their practice of Judaism and strive to be a part of the Jewish people. According to the verses in *Isaiah*, these people are still 'others,' not included in the boundaries of Jewishness, as being *bnei nechar* and *gerim*. Kasdoi, however, argues that they should be welcomed. Ambiguity remains as to what exactly Subbotniks' relationship to Jewishness would be. Kasdoi writes with pride that the Subbotniks "come from nations greater and more powerful than ours" but, nonetheless, desire to join the Jews, which he sees as an expression of their admiration for the Jews. Z. Kasdoi, *ha-Mityahadim*, Yeshurun, Haifa, 1926, pp. i–iv, 3–5.

Though Kasdoi's attempts to articulate the basis of Jewish identity are not terribly systematic, it is clear that he emphasizes both ancestry and a spiritual sense of belonging to the Jewish collective as key factors defining Jewishness. The ancestry element is clear, as the Jews of the Caucasus are part of the Jewish collective because they are the remnants of the Assyrian Exiles. They share a common history with the Russian Jews that stretches far into antiquity, with members of both communities being of the seed of Abraham. The nature of the spiritual connection is derived from both a consciousness of belonging to the Jewish collective, as well as the act of participating in Jewish religious rituals, which all Jews shared. Consequently, Kasdoi includes many observations that demonstrate clearly to his readers that Georgian Jews, though foreign, were a part of the pan-Jewish collective.

The Jewish national revival and the ingathering of exiles required Jews from vastly different cultures, speaking languages unintelligible to each other, and even practicing Judaism quite differently, to kindle a shared sense of identity. It is clear, on one level, that the legend of ten tribes plays a unifying role as it describes a people, ripped apart in antiquity, with a common basis on which to reunite again in the future. Though significant, this was a somewhat unembodied approach to identity building. Cultural and religious observations, highlighting certain shared material circumstances of life, serve as a more immediate and impactful device. Even when writing about the present, the legend of ten tribes still looms over Kasdoi's work as his effort to foster a shared identity is ultimately oriented towards the ingathering of exiles and the messianic age. Here then, we turn from the function of the ten tribes that familiarizes the exotic, to the function which promises the imminence of redemption.

In order to foster a shared identity between Georgian and Russian Jews, Kasdoi describes Georgian Jewish religious practices that Russian Jews would find familiar, while highlighting unique differences that were a product of the Georgian context. Kasdoi's descriptions of a Passover *Seder*, which he observed in Akhaltsikhe, is particularly illustrative. Russian Jewish readers would have been familiar with Kasdoi's descriptions of pre-holiday preparations, cleaning homes, searching for and disposing of *hametz*, or the food prohibited on Passover. Like Jews around the world, on the night of the Seder all the Akhaltsikhe Jews dress in their nicest clothing. Kasdoi's narrative of the Seder night becomes less recognizable as each family gathers all their food, "skewered goose, chicken, fattened swan, matzah, copper pots full of *charoset* [and

brings it all] to the home of the haham [rabbi] where all gather to hear the Haggadah."[53] Kasdoi's readers would recognize the practice of hearing the Haggadah, which would have been nearly identical to a Russian Jew's Haggadah, though the tradition of gathering as a community in the Haham's home was foreign.

About ten or fifteen families might congregate in the home of the haham, sitting on their nicest and most expensive Persian or Turkish carpets. Gathered around their spiritual leader, the community listens to him read the Haggadah and translate it into Georgian so that the people might hear and understand the Passover narrative. This scene, no doubt, appeals to the imagination in depicting Georgian Jews as exotic and oriental, sitting on the ground and listening to their leader read out the Haggadah. Culinarily, there is a great deal that is firmly rooted in common tradition, but with a local twist. For example, Kasdoi notes that Georgian Jews "drink four glasses of wine like us," but "they completely finish each cup in one gulp."[54] Russian and Georgian Jews also have *charoset* in common, though Kasdoi informs curious readers that Georgians make this dish with ginger and a variety of spices. Like Russian Jews, they eat charoset with matzah, but they also "pull the *charoset* out of the pot with their hands." Because the ceremonial meal is guided by the Haggadah, these rituals are somewhat standardized, and although the tradition to gather in the haham's home and sit on the ground is foreign, much of the content would have been familiar.

Not all Passover practices that Kasdoi describes bear resemblance to those of Russian Jews, as there are also rituals that have no analogue in the Russian Jewish Seder. One such practice involves a ritualized exchange between a young boy dressed as a traveler and his family. Throughout the exchange, the traveler must demonstrate that he was a Jew in order to be invited in to celebrate the holiday. The family, Kasdoi explains, requests to see the boy's *tzitzit,* and his *peyot* as a demonstration of his Jewishness. In some cases, they even demand to see that the boy is circumcised. The exchange always concludes: "If you are really a Jew, why are you traveling today? Don't you know that it is Passover?" The boy explains in response that he has come from Jerusalem and has had a long and difficult journey. The crowd then welcomes him, eager to "host" a guest from Jerusalem, asking him questions

[53] Kasdoi, *Mamlekhot Ararat*, p. 97. Descriptions of the same Passover Seder can also be found in: Kasdoi, *Mamlekhot Ararat*, pp. 32–3; *Der Yud* 1901, no. 23, pp. 5–6; *HaMelitz* 1903, no. 75, pp. 2–3. All descriptions refer to the same evening, but some are truncated and leave out details that the others include.

[54] Kasdoi, *Mamlekhot Ararat*, p. 98; *Der Yud* 1901, no. 23, p. 5.

like "How is Jerusalem, our holy city? How are our brothers that dwell there? When will the redeemer bring about the redemption?"[55] Though this ritual is dissimilar to Russian Jewish Passover observance, it abounds with shared concepts, values, and practices: *tzitzit*, *peyot*, circumcision, Passover hospitality, connection to Jerusalem, and yearning for redemption.

The conclusion that Kasdoi intends the reader to draw from this and other depictions of religious life is pithily expressed in a realization he has one Shabbat evening in a synagogue with Georgian Jews in Tiflis. Upon hearing the same prayers and seeing the same rituals that he was familiar with from home, he expresses wonder at seeing "our brothers lost and cast off in this land of despotic nations and savage men, in lions' dens and the mountains of darkness, without losing their Jewishness!"[56]

Alongside his observations of Georgian Jewish practice, Kasdoi eyes the community like a maskil and critiques what he interprets as the Georgian Jews' shortcomings. Many of these are related to backwardness and superstition, like his observation that Akhaltsikhe Jews "don't care for the sick…[the sick] lie in bed until they recover" or die, and "they don't seek doctors, and think pharmacies are completely unnecessary."[57] The Kutaisi Jews, Kasdoi observes, were also ignorant and irrational, "believing in all sorts of nonsense: in demons, spirits, magic, and sorcery; just about all of them wear Arab amulets and talismans around their necks, and cure every illness and ailment with incantations…." Such practices were no doubt reminiscent to Kasdoi of Hasidic practices that he would have seen around him in his childhood in Dubova. Though Kasdoi's criticism of the Kutaisi Jews is biting, the harshness is blunted by the very next sentence: "But also the good qualities that were hewn into *our* [emphasis added] people from the beginning are on display here, more or less. They love the stranger, they welcome the guest to the fullest extent of the phrase, and [guests] live with them in fraternity and friendship, in the most lofty sense."[58] Thus, even as he critiqued the Georgian Jews, it was in a manner that emphasized unity and their shared core values which, even if they fell short, were visible.

Indeed, communal cohesion appears to be the foundation in much of Kasdoi's critiques of Georgian Jews. Kasdoi most harsh-

[55] Kasdoi, *Mamlekhot Ararat*, pp. 34–5; *Der Yud* 1901, no. 23, p. 6; *HaMelitz* 1903, no. 75, p. 3.

[56] Kasdoi, *Mamlekhot Ararat*, p. 124. The "mountains of darkness" is a reference to the traditional description of the ten tribes being exiled to the mountains of darkness, addressed above.

[57] Kasdoi, *Mamlekhot Ararat*, p. 98.

[58] Kasdoi, *Mamlekhot Ararat*, p. 126.

ly criticized the Judaizers that he encountered in Tiflis for hating Jews and not seeing themselves as part of the Jewish people. Unity, therefore, is clearly important to Kasdoi and he expresses great pain at the discord and division he finds among Jews in Georgia. He identifies rampant deceit and trickery and warns readers that if a Georgian Jew "swears to you 'on his life, and the lives of the sages,' know that this is a lie, pure and simple. And if he adds [to his promise] 'on the life of Jerusalem' you can be sure that it is deceit and trickery."[59] Even in synagogues, "they, *like us* [emphasis added], fight for honors, seemingly until they start beating each other, and owing to the fact that they are always armed with knife or sword, they begin pounding their brothers outside the synagogue… [with] the passion of the sword."[60] Georgian Jews are divided amongst themselves, and as such present a major challenge to advancing Jewish unity.

Kasdoi also discusses the tensions he observes between Georgian Jews and Russian Jewish migrants to Georgia. The Jews of Akhaltsikhe, for example, "are only friendly among themselves, and look with scorn upon the Ashkenazic Russian Jews with the kind of disdain the boor has for the intellectual."[61] From the other side, Kasdoi supposes that "the true reason the Ashkenazim distance themselves from [Georgian Jews]...is because it is difficult for the European Jew to look coolly on the cruelty and savagery."[62] While Kasdoi's comments clearly betray a bias towards the Russian Jews, and position Georgian Jews as boorish and savage, he also blames his fellow Russian Jews, writing "what can one expect from the remains of the Nicholaevan cantonists who were raised by non-Jews, and who make up much of the Ashkenazic population here?"[63]

The division between Georgian and Russian Jews, and within the Georgian Jewish community leads Kasdoi to despair that these communities were so divided. "No matter how much wise and honest people attempt to unite the communities – something which would be greatly beneficial to both sides, they are unable."[64] Russian and Georgian Jews share the blame for the dis-

[59] Kasdoi, *Mamlekhot Ararat*, p. 115.

[60] Kasdoi, *Mamlekhot Ararat*, p. 115.

[61] Kasdoi, *Mamlekhot Ararat*, p. 102.

[62] Kasdoi, *Mamlekhot Ararat*, p. 124.

[63] Kasdoi, *Mamlekhot Ararat*, p. 116. This is a reference to the fact that many of the earliest Russian Jews to settle in Georgia came as soldiers in the Russian Army, drafted under the draconian terms instituted by Nicholas I in 1827, which pulled Jewish children away from their families. Reforms under Alexander II eased the prior statute, but many Russian Jews in Georgia were still retired soldiers, or their descendants.

[64] Kasdoi, *Mamlekhot Ararat*, p. 116.

cord between their communities, and the "baseless hatred [*sinat chinam*]" that is harmful to the Jewish people. But if both communities bear responsibility for the divisions between them, this means that both have it in their power to improve relations and work towards reconciliation.

Examined more closely, the roots of this mutual antipathy are located externally and are foreign to Jewishness. As Kasdoi describes it, they constitute the harmful effects of a long history of exile and diaspora. Russian Jews' hatred for Georgians is credited to their experiences as Cantonists, torn away from their Jewish communities and brought up in the Russian army. Georgian Jews, who share the aggression and violence of non-Jewish Caucasians, are also impacted by alien influences that ultimately sow division between these communities. As such, the rancor is not eternal and inevitable. The fact that their relationship is built on the shared core of Jewishness, and the divisions are only a byproduct of diaspora life, distinguishes these divisions from the more fundamental disdain for Jews exhibited by Judaizers. The act of shedding the depredations of diaspora and more fully embracing shared Jewishness can close the gaps that divide these diverse and varying Jewish communities.

At the conclusion of *Mamlekhot Ararat*, Kasdoi reminds the readers of the religious and historical significance of developing a unifying pan-Jewish identity. He writes: "Many scholars and sages have argued that the ten tribes were swallowed up and blended into the Jewish body already, and the small remainder that had not…they are being engulfed and merged with us even now. Those who know and recognize our brothers of the Mountains, Dagestan, Georgia… are marrying us now, as we are getting to know each other more – a result of the opening of their places of dwelling, and their 'Mountains of Darkness,' which had been closed to us until now, and they will continue to intermix with us without any suffering or pain."[65] Kasdoi shows then that while there is this discord between the Jewish communities, there is also a process of coming together, and he describes unification as the telos, with messianic consequences. Kasdoi quotes from Ezekiel: "I am going to take the stick of Joseph – which is in the hand of Ephraim – and of the [ten] tribes of Israel associated with him, and I will place the stick of Judah upon it and make them into one stick; they shall be joined in My hand… My servant David shall be king over them; there shall be one shepherd for all of

[65] Kasdoi, *Mamlekhot Ararat*, pp. 136–7

them."[66] The outcome of building this relationship between the Jewish communities Kasdoi travels among is the redemption and the messianic age.

In sum, as Kasdoi identifies Caucasian Jews with the ten lost tribes, he integrates the legend of ten tribes into the Zionist project. He is certainly not the only person to do this, but he employs the myth to craft a shared intercommunal history and promote co-identification more extensively than anyone before him. The legend serves as a framework through which Kasdoi understands how the Georgian Jews could be so alien yet part of the same community. Through this lens, he crafts a historical narrative which presents a community torn apart and estranged deep in antiquity, but with undeniably shared origins. Additionally, Kasdoi's work looks to the future and aims to encourage the development of stronger bonds between Georgian and Russian Jews. His lengthy descriptions of Georgian Jews' rituals emphasize practices that his Russian Jewish readers would identify from their own lives, despite exotic, Georgian peculiarities. Emphasizing these commonalities would thereby promote an identity shared by Russian and Georgian Jews alike. Similarly, one reads in Kasdoi's social criticism of the Georgian Jews an emphasis on unity, both among the Georgian Jews, and between Georgian and Russian Jews. As Kasdoi joined the Russian Jewish discourse around the existence and nature of a pan-Jewish nation, he recognized the Georgian Jews as a useful lens through which to examine this question. Through employing the legend of ten tribes in his assessment of Georgian Jews, Kasdoi unambiguously concludes that there does indeed exist a pan-Jewish nation.

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[66] Kasdoi, *Mamlekhot Ararat*, p. 116; *Ezekiel* 37:19–24.

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