



# KHAZAR

**The 6 W's of Khazar Communications**

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**What:** In the sixteenth-century a book collector discovered the correspondence between a Jewish courtier in Spain and the Turkic Khazar king. The letters discussed the conversion of the Khazar king to Judaism, Khazar origins, geography of the Caucasus, the Rus, and other stately matters.

**Who:** Hasdai ibn Shaprut, a Jewish foreign in the Muslim court of caliph 'Abd al-Rahman III (r. 912-61) in Cordoba and King Joseph (ca. 940), the Jewish leader of Khazaria to the north of the Caspian Sea.

**When:** The correspondence occurred between 954-961 C.E. Soon after this time the Khazars were defeated by the Kievan Rus. The messenger carrying Hasdai ibn Shaprut's first letter was intercepted in Constantinople and he never found his way to Khazaria. The letter was sent again with a Croat embassy, but was then handed to Isaac ben Eliezer of Nemetz (Germany) who carried it to King Joseph.

**Where:** Spain and Khazaria. Another letter survives that may have been sent by a Khazar in Constantinople to Hasdai ibn Shaprut. This letter was taken from Spain following the expulsion of the Jews at the end of the fifteenth century and deposited in a *geniza* (storeroom of documents) in the Ben Ezra synagogue in Old Cairo, where it was discovered in 1896 by the scholar Solomon Schechter. This letter is now in the University Library in Cambridge.

**Why:** After he learned of a Turkic tribe practicing Judaism in the Caucasus, Hasdai ibn Shaprut wrote a letter to the Khazars in order to determine if this group were descended from the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. King Joseph's reply contains references to earlier correspondence with Cordoba, but no records of these letter survive.

**Wow:** Scholars debate whether or not the sixteenth-century correspondence is a forgery despite references to it in eleventh- and twelfth-century records.

### Bibliography:

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