

# The Origin Of Ashkenazi Jewry: The Controversy Unraveled

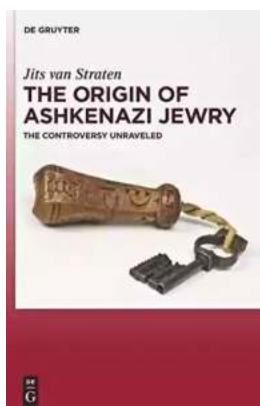


The Ashkenazi Jewry has undeniably played a significant role in Jewish history, culture, and contributions throughout the centuries. However, its origin has been a topic of controversy and debate among historians, scholars, and individuals interested in Jewish ancestry. In this article, we will delve into the layered history

and present various theories surrounding the controversial origins of Ashkenazi Jewry.

## The Khazar Theory: A Controversial Hypothesis

One of the most debated theories regarding the origins of Ashkenazi Jewry is the Khazar theory. According to this hypothesis, Ashkenazi Jews are descendants of the Khazar people, a Turkic-speaking nomadic tribe that converted to Judaism in the 8th century. This theory gained popularity in the 20th century but remains highly contested by many scholars.



### The Origin of Ashkenazi Jewry: The Controversy

**Unraveled** by Jits van Straten (Kindle Edition)

★★★★☆ 4.1 out of 5

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The proponents of the Khazar theory argue that, due to the lack of substantial genetic evidence linking Ashkenazi Jews to ancient Judea, the Khazar hypothesis provides a plausible explanation for their origin. They point out the linguistic, anthropological, and historical connections between Ashkenazi Jews and the Khazar people.

However, critics of the Khazar theory highlight the lack of concrete evidence, such as genetic studies, and suggest alternative explanations. They argue that the theory emerged as a means to undermine the legitimacy of Ashkenazi Jewry,

particularly during anti-Semitic periods. The debate surrounding the Khazar theory continues, and further research is needed to reach a consensus.

## **The Rhineland Hypothesis: An Established View**

The predominant and widely accepted theory among scholars is the Rhineland hypothesis. According to this view, Ashkenazi Jews trace their roots to a group of Jewish traders who migrated from the Middle East to the Rhineland region of present-day Germany during the early medieval period.

These Jewish migrants established prosperous communities along the Rhine River, engaging in commerce and contributing to the economic development of the region. Over time, the Ashkenazi Jewish population expanded and spread across Central and Eastern Europe.

The Rhineland hypothesis finds support in various historical records, archeological evidence, and genetic studies. Genetic studies have shown genetic continuity between Ashkenazi Jews and other Jewish communities, further strengthening this hypothesis.

## **A Complex Genetic Journey: Genetic Findings**

To unravel the controversial origin of Ashkenazi Jewry, researchers have turned to genetics. DNA studies have shed light on the complex genetic journey of Ashkenazi Jews, providing insights into their ancestral history.

Genetic studies indicate that Ashkenazi Jews have a primarily Middle Eastern origin, with genetic traces linking them to the ancient Jewish populations of the Near East. These findings offer support to the Rhineland hypothesis and refute the Khazar theory. However, the genetic influences of other populations, including

the local non-Jewish populations in the regions where Ashkenazi Jews settled, have also played a role in shaping the Ashkenazi genetic profile.

Furthermore, Ashkenazi Jews have a higher prevalence of certain genetic disorders compared to other Jewish and non-Jewish populations. Studying these genetic disorders has assisted in identifying unique genetic markers associated with Ashkenazi Jewry, further confirming their distinct genetic history.

## **The Impact of Historical Events and Cultural Adaptations**

Throughout history, Ashkenazi Jews faced numerous challenges, including pogroms, persecution, and expulsion. These historical events, along with cultural adaptations, have had a profound impact on Ashkenazi Jewry.

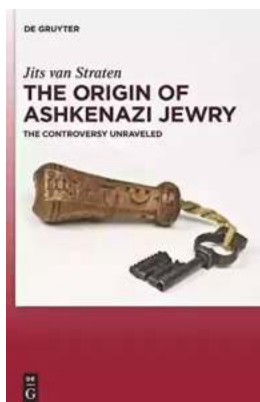
The Holocaust, in particular, tragically decimated a significant portion of the Ashkenazi Jewish population. However, survivors and their descendants have been integral in shaping the identity and perseverance of Ashkenazi Jews today.

Cultural adaptations, such as the adoption of Yiddish as a distinct language and the development of unique religious and cultural practices, have also contributed to the rich heritage of Ashkenazi Jewry.

The origins of Ashkenazi Jewry continue to be a subject of controversy and scholarly debate. The Khazar theory challenges the established Rhineland hypothesis, but further genetic research leans towards supporting the latter view.

Regardless of the origins, Ashkenazi Jews have left an indelible mark on Jewish history and culture. Their contributions to academia, science, arts, and various other fields have had a profound impact on societies worldwide.

In today's diverse world, understanding the origin of different Jewish communities is crucial for fostering inclusivity and embracing the rich tapestry of human history.



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Where do East European Jews – about 90 percent of Ashkenazi Jewry – descend from? This book conveys new insights into a century-old controversy. Jits van Straten argues that there is no evidence for the most common assumption that German Jews fled en masse to Eastern Europe to constitute East European Jewry. Dealing with another much debated theory, van Straten points to the fact that there is no way to identify the descendants of the Khazars in the Ashkenazi population. Using a multidisciplinary approach, the author draws heavily on demographic findings which are vital to evaluate the results of modern DNA research. Finally, it is suggested that East European Jews are mainly descendants of Ukrainians and Belarussians.

UPDATE: The article “The origin of East European Ashkenazim via a southern route” (Aschkenas 2017; 27(1): 239-270) is intended to clarify the origin of East European Jewry between roughly 300 BCE and 1000 CE. It is a supplement to this book.



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