The Ten Lost Tribes

A World History

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Introduction

Ten Lost Tribes and Their Places

Upon retiring from professional life, Avigdor Shahan, a prolific writer, historian, and educator, embarked on the greatest journey of his life: following in the footsteps of the ten lost tribes. The ensuing voyage culminated in a book, *El 'Ever ha-Sambatyon* (Towards the Sambatyon), which is half a history of the tribes and half a travelogue for which Shahan had a deeply personal impetus. As he explains:

> I was eight years old [in 1940] when our teacher at the traditional Jewish school told us with trembling voice about the exile of the ten tribes: Reuben, Shimon, Zebulun, Yissachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Ephraim, and Manasseh—by the kings of Assyria and their cruel soldiers. He described the formidable river they crossed in their wanderings, the *Sambatyon;* and the fearsome mountains of darkness behind which they disappeared. He told us about that great country where they live a life of freedom and liberty; the commanders of their armies alert and ready, their swords sparkling, and their legions ordered in columns behind their banners and flags.

The young pupils, children of the Jewish quarter of Komarov, Romania, listened with "breathless anticipation." Finally, one of them exclaimed, "Why don't we send messengers to let them know about our misery?"

"Indeed, throughout the generations many messengers set out towards the tribes," the teacher answered solemnly. "[T]hese messengers climbed high mountains and wandered in desolate deserts, but their traces were also lost."

That very day, Shahan and two young friends, Moishe'le and Leibe'le, set out themselves in search of the ten tribes. They decided that the nearby Dniester River was in fact the Sambatyon. They undertook to leave Komarov, but never got to cross even the limits of its Jewish quarter. A large black dog standing at its edge frightened them back home.[1]

Just one year later, in September 1941, the Jews of Komarov went on their own terrible march. Following the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, Romanian soldiers deported Komarov's Jews to Transnistria, a mass death zone created by the occupying forces across the Dniester.[2] Shahan recalls how his friend Moishe'le likened the Romanian soldiers leading the forced march to the ancient Assyrian military that had so cruelly deported the ten tribes. Growing frantic, the boy fled the ragtag column of marchers, and ran for the Dniester—the "Sambatyon." As he had the year before, Moishe'le wanted to seek the help of the ten tribes, which he imaged to be on its far bank. He never reached them; a soldier murdered him beside the river. Shahan later learned that Romanian soldiers had also killed his other friend, Leibe'le, by drowning him in the Dniester. Of his own experiences during the march and the war, Shahan does not tell. Many years later, Shahan wrote: "I have remembered the dreamers and the visionaries who throughout generations have set out searching for them. I remembered Moishe'le and Leibe'le also, who marched towards the ten tribes until they died without reaching them."[3] Indeed, these are powerful memories about millennia-old powerful visions and dreams.

The book that you hold in your hands is about the messengers, visionaries, and dreamers who over the centuries have searched for the lost tribes—through scholarship and travel, through both scientific and religious means. *The Ten Lost Tribes* is particularly concerned with the speculation that has evolved over the past two millennia over the precise identity and location of the ten lost tribes. Where and who "today"—that is, at any given moment of asking—are the descendants of the Israelite kingdom deported by the Assyrians? The question of the ten tribes emerged from the very beginning as a geographical problem. Adolf (Adolphe) Neubauer (1831–1907), an early scholar of the tribes, put it pithily: his collection of tribes-related documents bears the simple title "Where Are the Ten Tribes?"[4]

Why have so many different people searched untiringly for the ten lost tribes for such a long time? The answer is at once simple and profound: because they are lost. One of this book's central arguments is that the lostness represented by the ten tribes is, in Western historical consciousness, one of the

most acute and oldest known instances of loss still "alive" today. This is because it is also globe spanning in nature—closely related to the world's spatial, temporal, and human dimensions. The ten tribes are not merely a random group of people who disappeared following the destruction of their homes. They are permanent exiles, a missing limb from the body of the "people of Israel," lost to Jews and Christians alike. The history of this question—the multiple contexts and frames in which it was posed and the multiple answers that have been given—together constitute nothing less than a map of the world and a world history. The tribes have been a marker for defining the world, laying out the *oikoumene*—the known inhabited world—at any given moment in world history. In this regard, this book is a history of the absent, the missing—that which becomes present when expressed as lost.

The ten tribes are lost *to* and lost *from* the world in converging ways, corresponding to the three meanings of the word "world": the world as "all humanity" (as in *tout le monde*), the world as the physical face of the earth, and the world as temporality (as in "end of the world").[5] The peculiar way in which the ten tribes were removed from the world—from its space, times, and humanity—is, as we shall see, one of the main thrusts at work in the various attempts at positioning and locating the ten tribes on earth.

This peculiar condition of lostness corresponds with the main features of the ten tribes. They are described as superhuman or as "off-human" (outside humanity); placed at the edges of the earth or beyond its boundaries (beyond its physical borders); and associated with the end of the time, the end of the world. This threefold condition is what makes the lostness of the ten tribes so acute and so rich. This is the first and main reason that this book is a "world history" of the ten lost tribes.

Those asking the question, throughout history and today, make up a huge and by no means homogeneous group. Avigdor Shahan understood himself to be a link in a long chain of previous seekers. The famous Jewish traveler Benjamin of Tudela (fl. twelfth century) came close, or so he thought, to finding the tribes somewhere in Asia. The seventeenth-century Jesuit missionary and scholar Diego Andrés Rocha (1607–1688) was "certain" that the tribes were in South America.[6] The Irish nobleman Lord Edward Kingsborough (1795–1837) lost his fortune looking for them in pre-Columbian Mexican art. He died, age forty-two, in the Dublin Debtor's Prison, but his passion left us with a codex of Mesoamerican arts in nine massive volumes.[7] The Scots missionary Nicholas McLeod (fl. 1868–1889) spent decades in Japan and Korea, searching for the true Israelites. He wrote Japanese history as a history of the ten tribes in the Japanese isles.[8] The European nobleman Alexander Beaufort Grimaldi (b. 1839) thought some of the tribes were in Scotland and

constituted its royalty.[9] The reverend and scholar Charles Forster (d. 1871) used ancient Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian monuments as keys to identifying the lost tribes in Asia.[10] Joseph Wolff (1795–1862), a convert son of a rabbi from Bavaria, won fame as a globe-trotting British missionary and Orientalist and spent many dangerous decades in Central Asia searching for the tribes. Enslaved in the Caucasus, he once walked naked 900 kilometers through Central Asia looking for the tribes.[11] Wolff's son Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, appointed to be the British delegate to Tehran in 1888, organized several expeditions to find the tribes. In an indication of the excitement the quest for the tribes generated in Victorian England, scores of Londoners donated £10 apiece for young Wolff's expeditions. His approach to Lord Palmerston (1784–1865), asking for the £10 contribution, produced a classic Palmerstonism: famous for his scathing wit, Palmerston declared, "I will give you £100 if you will [simply] lose the remaining two!"[12]

Lord Palmerston's disdain for tribe searchers is itself a reflection of the craze the phenomenon had generated in his day. Everyone, it seemed, was on the hunt. Across the Atlantic, Rabbi Uziel Haga of Boston convinced President William McKinley (1843–1901) to allow him to tag along with the U.S. forces sent to suppress the Boxer Rebellion in China, just so he could look for the tribes there.[13] On the Continent, politicians, scholars, and clergy alike pondered their whereabouts; just one example is the German diplomat and Orientalist Friedrich Rosen (1865–1935), who toured the Middle East, Africa, and East Asia, debating the likelihood of an encounter with some of the long-lost exiles.[14]

These travelers, and many others discussed in this book, were not roaming the world within a cultural vacuum, nor without intelligence. Over the course of 2,000 years, Jews, Christians of various denominations, and, to a lesser extent, Muslims had used the tribes as a point of reference, tying historical developments to their exile and return. Clerics, theologians, missionaries, biblical and Qur'anic commentators and exegetes—all were concerned with the simple question: where are the ten tribes? Such late antique historians as Flavius Josephus (37–c. 100) had similarly speculated on the tribes' whereabouts. From early modernity on, geographers, cartographers, ethnographers, linguists, and, most recently, geneticists and natural scientists joined the growing circle of tribal scholars and seekers.[15] Together, they have created an impressive edifice of ten tribes "knowledge," with imbricated pieces of information, lore, and "fact" resting one upon another, which can be found among anthropological, mythological, and even sci-fi literature. The Library of Congress demarcates a sizable special category for books related to the lost tribes. One can find many volumes about them on the shelves, next to books on the Samaritans, an *existing* ethnic

group whose origins are traceable, according to their own traditions, back to peoples deported *to* Palestine by the Assyrians after the latter supposedly emptied the Israelite kingdom.

The ongoing debate and speculation about the location of the ten tribes and the active search for them are this book's pivot. This book is, paradoxically, a history of a nonexistent place, a place conjured into being only through its designation as a tribal home. It is a history of places with meanings charged or transformed by the designation that they were home to a specific group of people. Thus, while this volume proceeds more or less in chronological order, the story leaps from one location on the surface of the earth to another, following the ten tribes' appearances. Changes, shifts, and expansions in world geographical knowledge have relocated the tribes from one place to another to yet another. Searchers for the tribes have accompanied this changing world geography with adjusted, updated, increasingly "scientific" speculation as to the tribes' whereabouts. No sooner were new terrains discovered than were the tribes relocated to them in the seekers' calculations in an ongoing process of accommodating the earth's physical geography to the ten tribes' story.

Speculation over the location of the tribes has been in close dialogue with scientific, geographic knowledge, upon which tribe seekers—travelers and scholars alike—have drawn and to which in turn they have contributed. New geographic discoveries inspired new speculation and further accommodation. One can picture this geographic dialogue as a layer of writings spreading across the world's map, at times prompting geographic expansion and at others feeding off of it. This ongoing process in a way constituted a history of the world, one based not on what was in it, but on what was supposed to be in it.

Another key component to the history of the search for the lost tribes is the numerous cases of identifications of various ethnic groups all over the world as descendants of the tribes. Already in 1903, Albert Hyamson (1875–1954), a prolific English Jewish intellectual, declared that "no race has escaped the honour, or the suspicion, of being descended from" the ten tribes.[16] Today, more than a century later, various groups around the world, from the Zebulunites in Japan, to various African-American groups in the United States, to Latin American indigenous peoples, claim that they are the descendants of one or all of the tribes.[17] Claims of ten tribes descent played a role in the imperial expansions of Spain, Portugal, and, chiefly, Britain.

At least three royal houses—those of England, Scotland, and Japan—are said by some to be descendants of ten tribes royals.[18] Some have come to believe that the ten tribes are the most distinguished race among humanity—"God's covenant race."[19] Political claims regarding the ten tribes status of various groups have been made since the early modern period, attaching themselves

to real and imagined peoples from, literally, A to Z. The Afghans (both Pashtuns and Phathans), Armenians, Berbers, Celts, Eskimos, Estonians, Finns, Ibos, Laps, Lembas, Mayans, Native North Americans, Scythians, Tartars, and Zulus, among many more, have been variously claimed as the descendants of the long-lost tribes. In earlier periods, such religious movements or groups as the ancient Christian Nestorians and the medieval Muslim Almohads were attached to the story of the ten tribes; their claims are replicated in modernity in the instance of the Mormons.[20] In sum, in the words of one modern observer, "traces of the Tribes are popping up all over!"[21]

The histories and stories of the various contemporary claimants in different places of the world have become over the years a topic well researched by both professional and amateur scholars. The story of the ten lost tribes "was invoked by colonial powers and missionaries in their efforts to remake the histories of indigenous peoples, and is the basis for continuing efforts to locate descendants of the missing ten tribes."[22] That is to say, the ten tribes story is present among the many other features that meet, clash, and intersect in colonial "contact zones"—locations "of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other." The ten tribes are to a certain extent also present in some instances of "autoethnographic expression"—"instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that *engage with* the colonizer's own terms."[23]

These observations still leave the question of why the ten tribes story is so powerful and globe spanning in nature. While they might explain ongoing efforts to locate the tribes, they do not explain how and why these efforts began. As Hyamson states, "The total absence of all evidence of their fate has cleared the ground for innumerable theories." In fact, he says, "with the beginning of their captivity [the ten tribes] seem to have passed from human knowledge, and the mystery of the lost tribes has almost from that day to this been the lodestone that has attracted and bewildered students of many races and varied beliefs."[24] How has this total lack of evidence created such a huge edifice of related knowledge? The relationship between loss and knowledge is a central concern of this book.

Introducing the History of the Ten Tribes: Prophecy Complements History

Sociologist Stanford Lyman observed that "the ten tribes of Israel have been lost from—and lost to—conventional modes of secular temporal historiography."[25] This observation is a central challenge inspiring this book. Indeed, the

first comprehensive book dedicated exclusively to the *history* of the tribes appeared only in the early modern period and drew exclusively on scripture. In 1683, Herman Witsius (1636–1708), a professor of divinity at Leiden, published *Dekaphylon: Sive De Decem Tribubus Israelis*.[26] Witsius was a reform theologian and Hebraist.[27] Certainly not the first to discuss the tribes, Witsius *was* the first systematically to discuss what he considered their history, an approach derived from his methodologies for reading theology and its derivation from the Bible.

Witsius took pains to explain his study's organization and made particular reference to his method. The history of the tribes, he explained, falls into four periods: the tribes existed, they disappeared, they exist somewhere right now, they shall return. This underlying framework of loss and redemption is applicable whether the source in question is Jewish or Christian—indeed, whether the source is religious or secular. Witsius's corresponding periodization was:

1. the time before their deportation and their departure for exile
2. during the Babylonian captivity of the Jews
3. after the Jews' return to Zion and during the Second Temple
4. the time of their restoration with the rest of Israel and their restitution in latter days[28]

Strikingly, the only portion of Witsius's history that corresponds with actual historical time is the first—deportation and exile. The second and third periods correspond with the "present" time of the tribes' history, about which we have no concrete information, during which we have no connection with the tribes, and which has not yet ended. The fourth and final period corresponds with prophecy, with the preordained future of the tribes. In this formulation—shared by the majority of ten tribes seekers—fully three-quarters of the ten tribes' "history" is invisible history, for which we have no evidence.

Witsius was well aware that most of his history lacked corroboration, and he relied on prophecies or fleeting allusions to the ten tribes in the Old and New Testaments. Witsius addressed this head-on with his view of the complementary relationship between history and prophecy (*prophetiae respondet historia*).[29] The history of the tribes is made of two corresponding layers, the "historical" (in the biblical context) and the prophetic. Both layers enjoy the same status as "truth," and the absence of either renders this history incomplete. This argument stands as an imperative for understanding the theological platform upon which the search for the lost tribes has long rested. This link between history and prophecy generates the tension that feeds the story told in this book.

A digest of the biblical narrative that serves as the historical kernel lying behind the story of the tribes is in order. Derived mainly from the first and second books of Kings, the story has been universally regarded by ten tribes seekers as historical truth. Of course, nearly two centuries of probing biblical criticism and contested biblical archaeology have taught us nothing if not that the biblical narrative cannot be treated as a chronological history narrating the past as it happened. Indeed, in the case of the biblical narrative with which we're concerned here, it is important to bear in mind that at least the first part of the actual (as opposed to the prophetic) history of the ten tribes story (the first book of Kings, which tells the story of the united kingdom created by David and its split into two under his grandson) is considered by biblical scholars to be almost entirely fictional. The second part, found in 2 Kings (which covers the history of the two kingdoms and the deportations of the Israelites), is thought to have been heavily edited and full of interpolations. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this book, it is imperative that we follow the biblical narrative as it tells the story. For this is the truth of the tribes as their various seekers have understood it.

In the beginning, there was one unified kingdom under the great kings, David and Solomon, in the land of Israel, home of the twelve tribes, who had descended from the third patriarch, Jacob. Things were good under Solomon and the kingdom enjoyed prosperity and many years of peace. However, as Solomon aged, he began to sin. He married foreign women and worshipped their gods. He even built altars for these gods in Jerusalem, next to the temple he himself had built for the Lord God. As a result, God becomes angry with him and sends his messenger Ahijah the Shilonite to a "mighty man of valor" from the tribe of Ephraim, Jeroboam, son of Nebat. He is to lead the Ephraimites out of the kingdom and tear it into two.

As the biblical account has it, on his way out of Jerusalem, Jeroboam encounters Ahijah, who in a dramatic gesture tears his own new garment into twelve pieces. He then turns to Jeroboam: "take thee ten pieces: for thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee." Ahijah explains that one tribe, Judah, will remain in the hands of the Davidic house, "for my servant David's sake and for Jerusalem's sake, the city that I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel." The prophet soon repeats this message, again speaking of God's plan to divide up the united Davidic kingdom: "But I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand and will give unto thee even ten tribes" (1 Kings 11:30–36).

This prophecy is the first mention in the biblical narrative of the "ten tribes"—indeed, it coins the term, which appears nowhere else in the Hebrew

Bible or the New Testament. Here, it appears twice within a few verses. God chooses a man specifically from the tribe of Ephraim for the job of leading the ten tribes. Ephraim and Manasseh, sons of Jacob's most beloved lost son, Joseph, receive a deathbed blessing from the patriarch. Like Judah, they belong in the category of "blessed tribes." But while both of them are blessed, in a significant dramatic gesture, Jacob crosses his arms and places his *right* (indicating greater blessing) hand on the head of his youngest grandson—Ephraim.

Ahijah's prophecy quickly becomes reality. Solomon's son and successor, Rehoboam, is far less smart than his father and grandfather. He rules tyrannically and foolishly and abuses the dominion over the rest of the tribes given to the tribe of Judah. Schisms and unrest spread among the people of the kingdom. Armed with God's promise, Jeroboam rebels and leads his tribe of Ephraim to secede from the united Davidic kingdom, creating a separate dominion in the northern part of the Holy Land. Nine other tribes follow him, and the Ephraimite monarchy becomes the kingdom of Israel, home of the ten tribes. The great united kingdom of Israel no longer exists. Instead, there are the smaller Israel and Judah. The new Israelite kingdom controls an expanse of land from a point only a few kilometers north of Jerusalem to the mountains of Lebanon. In the south, the house of David remains with only two tribes, Judah and its smaller neighbor, Benjamin, and with the temple in Jerusalem, which is still the cultural and religious center of all twelve tribes.

But the story does not end there. Fearing that the people of the new secessionist kingdom might revert to Judah's dominion when they go to worship in Jerusalem, Jeroboam decides to build a new center for worship within the boundaries of his own domain. The Bible tells us that he "took two calves of gold" and said to the people: "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (1 Kings 12:28). Jeroboam's political and cultural shrewdness proves to be a grave error with everlasting consequences. Worshipping the two calves is the "original sin" of the ten tribes, and it never leaves them. (Witsius calls the episode the "separation of the tribes from the House of the Lord.")[30]

In a typical burst of wrath, God vows to destroy not only the clan of Jeroboam, but his entire kingdom. The same Ahijah the Shilonite delivers another horrifying prophecy: "For the Lord shall smite Israel as a reed is shaken in the water and he shall root up Israel out of this good land which he gave to their fathers and shall scatter them beyond the river because they have made their graves provoking the Lord to anger" (1 Kings 14:15). This banishment from the divine domain, perhaps a historical recasting and transposition of the story of the expulsion from Eden, is crucial in the later

formulations of the tribes' location. It would come to be understood as expulsion from the inhabited civilized world.

In the wake of Ahijah's prophecy, the Israelite kingdom is plunged into 200 years of political turbulence that culminate in its destruction. The house of Jeroboam falls first, and the kingdom sees many dynasties rise and fall. None

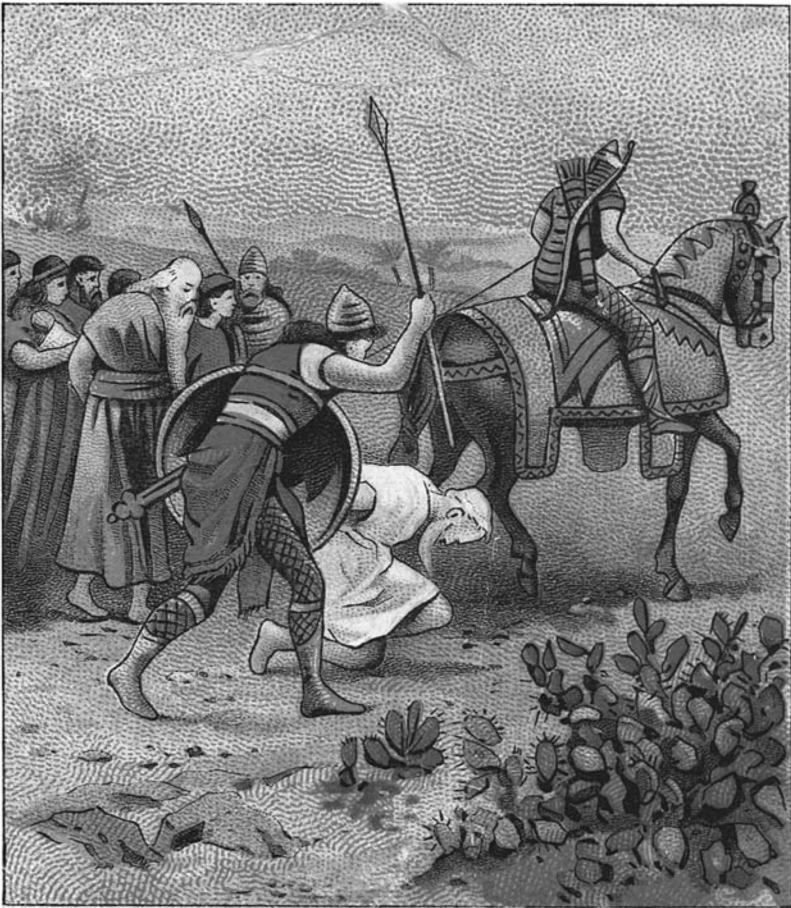

FIGURE 1.1. "Captivity of the Tribes," *Little People's Lesson Pictures (LPLP)*, The American Sunday-School Union, Sept. 18, 1898. Courtesy Zvi Ben-Dor Benite

of the kings removes the golden calves that had made God so angry. On the contrary, they begin worshipping even more foreign gods. The country continues to suffer from chronic political instability. Israel's end finally comes when the Assyrian Empire, the "Rod of God," as the prophet Isaiah so loved to call it, conquers Israel and deports its people. The biblical narrative laconically reports, "In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away into Assyria and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan and in the cities of the Medes" (2 Kings 17:6).

The authors of 2 Kings hasten to remind the reader why it all happened: because Israel had sinned against God and deserted him. "Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel and removed them out of his sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah only" (2 Kings 17:18). The episode concludes with a summary of the deportation and its ongoing status: "the Lord removed Israel out of his sight, as he had said by all his servants the prophets. So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day" (2 Kings 17:23).

A "Little People's Lesson" picture, produced by the American Sunday-School Union in 1898, depicts this horrible moment clearly (see figure 1.1). On the back of the card were nine related vital points that the children could learn. Item 9 on the list asks: "How did he [God] punish them?" The answer: "Removed all from his sight." How to write the history (and the geography) of what was "removed from God's sight" is a question with which many featured in this study have struggled.

Fantasies and Fantastic Literature

The fascination with the tribes has generated, alongside ostensibly nonfictional, scholarly studies, a massive body of fictional literature and folktale. In this literature, the tribes appear in various ways, most often as formidable warriors of the sort Shahan's teacher described. One particularly popular motif derives from the centuries-old portrayal of the tribes as superhuman beings of extraordinary physical proportions, possessed of incredible abilities. This theme owes a lot to apocalyptic and millenarian texts that depict the tribes as a mass of great warriors accompanying the return of the Messiah or the arrival of the Antichrist. A common early modern interpretation of their role during the latter days is found, for instance, in the physician John Floyer's (1649–1734) systematic exposition of the "return of ten tribes at last" that accompanies or precedes, among other things, "the burning of the world, and the resurrection of the body."[31]

The tale Shahan heard as a child displays the main features of the ten tribes as imagined over centuries: martial, strong, always ready to show up or to be found, never coming, and intimately connected to apocalyptic and messianic visions dating back to the Middle Ages.[32] Such rumors were not exclusive to Jews. Christians and Muslims, too, subscribed to them. And over time, an array of peoples who were identified as being the tribes came to subscribe to them as well.

The ten lost tribes story also lies behind a distinct genre of Indiana Jones-type adventure fiction, on the rise since the early twentieth century. A good instance is *Quest for the Lost Tribes,* a film by Simcha Jacobovici and Elliott Halpern, one of the first in a career that has also produced a film on the lost tomb of Jesus.[33] While not a focus of this book, some other examples are illuminating. In one instance, Mark Lee's 1998 *The Lost Tribe,* an expedition comprising a relief worker, an anthropologist, a "black shaman," and an American journalist searches for the tribes in contemporary war-torn Africa, encountering a variety of adventures and misadventures along the way.[34] Somtow Suchairtkul, in his 1988 sci-fi novel, *The Aquiliad: Aquila in the New World,* imagines a Roman Empire that has expanded globally thanks to the invention of steam power. The fictional Romans arrive in America, where they experience a series of troublesome encounters—with Bigfoot, with space aliens, with a time-traveler, and of course, with the ten lost tribes.[35]

The origins of this specific literary *topos* lie in the nineteenth century. In some cases, the ten tribes served to promote a utopian social or religious order. In 1901, Father Thomas McGrady, a Catholic socialist priest from Kentucky, situated a historical/utopian novel in "New Israel," a "trans-arctic" kingdom founded by the ten tribes, which had struggled against tyranny during Jeroboam's time.[36] In another "arctic" novel from 1903, the Mormon *Trip to the North Pole,* a boat leaving San Francisco on April 16, 1879, drifts off course; its sailors find themselves at the North Pole, where they find a mysterious kingdom inhabited by the lost tribes, which "were sent to the Northwestern part of Asia, and from there sent into the North Country." The young widow of King Manasherous (a clear allusion to the biblical Manasseh) rules. Her husband had been murdered by the evil Captain Shenakeribous (an allusion to Sennacherib, the Assyrian king who laid siege to Jerusalem in 701 BCE), who serves as the story's villain. One Joe B. Lothare, a youth serving on the boat, is the main hero and narrator. He immediately suspects that these are the lost tribes and turns into a sort of anthropologist, whose main source of ethnographic information is the Bible: "I refer to my Bible to investigate if perchance this not be the Ten Tribes of Israel and I shall at least call them so, from all these Bible readings and also on account of other information."[37] The

adventure ends with Lothare not only learning Hebrew, but also affirming his faith in Christ, whose truth emerges through the biblical readings that accompany the boy's search for the identity of his hosts—who turn out to be good, upstanding, decent Christians.

It was not only the fictional Lothare who stumbled on adventure and spiritual experiences. The book's author, Otte Julius Swanson Lindelof (b. 1852) of Salt Lake City, a Mormon, tells us that he himself had learned of the story when, on a visit to a village in "Northern Europe," he encountered a dying man to whom he administered the last rites. In "his last moment," Lindelof claims, this man had given him Lothare's records.[38] Thus, this allegorical fairy tale is presented at one and the same time as a novel and as a truthful account, ripe with the suggestion that the lost tribes might be there still, waiting to be rediscovered.

Jewish tradition has generated a vast number of stories and folktales revolving around the theme of the lost tribes. One example is the famous nineteenth-century fictional traveler Binyamin the Third, whose travels took him to "those distant islands beyond the mountains of darkness" where the tribes were thought to live. A Tunisian Jewish folktale tells of one figure, "a merchant and a scholar," en route from Portugal to India, who was captured by "almost naked dark skinned men" after a shipwreck threw him into the sea. After "three days of drifting," he was tossed up on the shore of an unknown island. The strange inhabitants were "almost like the negroes" and armed with bows and arrows. The Jewish castaway, certain that "these cannibals" were going to eat him, began to cry out the Shema' Yisra'el—the opening words of the centerpiece of Jewish prayer. Upon hearing him, all the men around him joined in, completing the prayer. The men turned out—surprise!—to be members of two of the ten lost tribes. Soon thereafter, they all assemble in the local synagogue. The guest beseechingly asks the local king if the time has come for the lost tribes to come out of hiding and rescue their Jewish brethren. The king, dressed in his prayer shawl, prays for an answer from the Almighty. Eventually he reports, weeping, that the "time of redemption has not yet arrived."

Another tale tells of a Jew whose goat used to disappear mysteriously into the woods every Sabbath night. One week, the Jew decided to follow as it went "deeper and deeper into the forest" that lay outside his village. Suddenly, the man saw "a very tall man . . . as tall as Goliath . . . coming towards him." By now, of course, we know the end of the story: sure enough, after a few scary moments, the giant turns out to be a "ten triber," who congratulates the Jew for being so "righteous" that he could accomplish the impossible task of finding him, "for we are the Ten Tribes and this is the land beyond the

Sambatyon River." The giant invites the Jew to spend the Sabbath with "the Ten Tribes." After the Sabbath ended, "the giant threw him into the air" and the Jew found himself instantly across the river, where his loyal goat was waiting to lead him home. Similar stories from the Muslim tradition tell of the discovery of the ten tribes en route to Arabia; there, they are presented as the protectors of Muslims on pilgrimage to Mecca.[39]

While the characteristics of the tribes differ from tale to tale, in all such stories they are annoyingly, tauntingly elusive. The tribes are at once distant and very close. Only the bravest and cleverest can find them, yet once found, they are revealed to have been right next door all along. This simultaneous proximity and distance is mirrored in their appearance, which is both alien and familiar. They may be almost naked and armed with bows and arrows, yet they pray in the synagogue wrapped in their *talith*. They live in the North Pole, isolated for millennia, but they are good Christians. At issue here, in part, of course, is the question of (ethnic, racial, and religious) purity. The lost tribes hold out the promise that, while we, the seekers, may be degenerate, may be far removed from the true greatness of our origins, the tribes, in their isolation, remain pure.

Against the millennia-old backdrop of the frustrating, fruitless, and tantalizing quest for these lost ancestors, the contemporary American Jewish poet Chana Bloch, for one, has tried to cool the fantasies of ten tribes seekers, pouring cold water on the supposed mystery of their location and suggesting that perhaps the time has come to let the lost tribes disappear once and for all, this time from our minds and imaginations: "What happened to the ten lost tribes / is no great mystery: / they found work, married, grew smaller, / started to look like the natives / in a landscape nobody chose. / Soon you couldn't have picked them out of a crowd."[40]

Bloch's lovely poem, perhaps deliberately, misses the point. The tribes are the tribes precisely because they are identifiable as such—indeed, because it was thelogically preordained that they *will be identified as such*.

The Ten Tribes as a Theological Loophole on Earth

"Theology has its 'Lost tribes of Israel,' history has its 'lost arts,' and Johnson County [Iowa] has its lost record," mused the county's historian: the treasury records from the years 1859–1861 had disappeared.[41] The rather inelegant relationship between the lost tribes and the word "theology" in this sentence seems bizarre, but there is lot of truth in it. The undying fountain from which the ten lost tribes draw their mystery and allure is their theological significance and

the theological anxieties they generate.[42] Their absence is (differently) significant for Jews and Christians alike, and its theological implications are many.[43]

Any discussion of the tribes and the searches which they've inspired must begin with the scriptural foundations of their story: the biblical narratives that provide the history of the tribes and the prophecies understood to relate to them. Theology—in the sense of both the application of doctrine and dogma to reality, and more so as a set of tools designed for the interpretation and shaping of reality according to the word of God—guides the search, informs it, and shapes it. The power of the tribes as a mystery, unlike, say, the myth of the lost Excalibur, owes its persistence to the authority of the biblical narrative—the *ur*-text of the tribes' story.

The biblical narrative not only describes the tribes' history "as it happened." It also lays out the present and future of the lost tribes as read into the various biblical prophecies concerning them. Moreover, biblical authority plays a crucial role in the history of searches for the tribes. For centuries, the Bible was seen as proof of the facticity of the ten tribes' story, and the validity of the related biblical prophecies remained beyond doubt throughout most of the history discussed here. For many, it is beyond doubt even today. The theological referents of the story of the ten lost tribes is taken as evidentiary, and the Bible provides recourse to "facts"—a feature of ten-tribes-ism that bridges the supposed divide between the religious and secular realms. For centuries, to talk of the ten tribes was to talk theologically, but it was also to talk scientifically and factually—and for many, it still is.

Similarly, the sense of loss is embedded in the historical core of the story. The ten tribes fleetingly appear in the biblical narrative only to disappear definitively from it thereafter. The story begins with the tearing apart of a whole people into two, vividly and viscerally echoed in the tearing of Jeroboam's robe, and continues with the deportation of one part to somewhere else. How are the pieces to be put back together? The sense of loss that pervades the story derives not so much from any termination of the tribes, but rather from their ongoing—but unreachable—existence. This, then, is the true and most wrenching loss of the story—the history of this unknown-but-known and missing people, which is unfolding in a distant-but-close and unfound place. As the history of the remaining children of Israel, the people of Judah, unfolds, unfolding silently alongside it is the ever-present if unknown history of the missing tribes. The river that must be crossed is the river that divides those parallel histories.

The people of Judah fared only slightly better in comparison to their brethren from the north. They also went into exile—the Babylonian captivity—in 586 BCE. However, the Judahite exiles do not disappear from

the Bible itself. While we never hear from the ten tribes after their deportation, the period of the Babylonian captivity is present, loud and clear, in the biblical narrative. In this sense, the Babylonian captivity highlights the disappearance of those other, earlier exiles. Where did *they* go, and what became of *their* story?

Against the backdrop of destruction and exile, prophecy provided an element of consolation. And it was not simply those expelled during the Babylonian exile, but those of the earlier exile, too, who were promised resolution. The biblical prophets admonish the people for their sins but also promise them return and restitution at some point in the future. All of the great prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel—promise an end to exile. They emphasize that God will not leave forgotten *any* of the scattered exiles.[44]

The prophet Jeremiah, for example, declares (31:7): "Behold I will bring them from the North Country and gather them from the coasts of the earth." (Here, we find the inspiration for Lindelof's North Pole.) Ezekiel (37:15–22) elaborates on how God shall reunite Judah and Ephraim again. The Lord "will take the children of Israel from among the heathen whither they be gone and will gather them on every side and bring them into their own land . . . and they shall be no more two nations neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all." Most famously, the prophet Isaiah declares in one of his famous latter-days visions: "And it shall come to pass in that day that the great trumpet shall be blown and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria and the outcasts in the land of Egypt and shall worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem" (Isaiah 27:13).

Here, Isaiah coins a conceit that has become central to the ten tribes quest. They are, as the Hebrew has it, "lost in Assyria." The translators of the King James Version render the Hebrew *ovdim* (lost, pl.) as "ready to perish," implying (imminent) destruction—another meaning of the word "lost." The Vulgate, however, retains the geographical dimension of that loss: qui perditi fuerant de terra Assyriorum, "those lost *from* the land of Assyria" (how the original "in Assyria" turned into the Vulgate's "from Assyria" becomes clearer later in this book). Speaking of this, Rashi, the great eleventh-century biblical commentator and exegete, wrote, "Because they were dispersed in a distant land beyond the River Sambatyon, he [Isaiah] called them *lost* [*ovdim*]." This understanding of *ovdim,* which emerged as dominant, suggests at once a past and a present state and provides a glimpse of an ongoing present in which the lost tribes are still lost, but still present (and hence "ready to perish" in King James and not "perished"). The tribes are lost twice over—once as a collective torn away from the body of Israel and a second time as a group physically lost in the wilderness of exile.

Yet absence is just another layer of this loss laid upon loss. More important is the promise of return, which has yet to be fulfilled. Here is the pivot that turns past history into prophecy, into predictive history. Fatefully, the prophets also provide an image of the future. They tell how a unified crowd, representing *all* twelve tribes, shall worship in Jerusalem at some future point. This future moment will mark the end of the tearing of the ten tribes from the people and land of Israel.

Quite miraculously, in the last decades of the sixth century BCE, not long after the fall of Judah, the exiles did in fact return to build the House of God in Jerusalem. However, the returnees came only from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin—the exiles in Babylon. The ten tribes did not return. The book of Ezra tells us, "Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:5). The other ten tribes never resurfaced throughout the long years after the return from the Babylonian captivity and the restoration of the temple in Jerusalem. As one nineteenth-century tribes fan put it, "the records of the Scriptures, which include the return of the Jews from Babylon [2 Chronicles 36:21–23; Zechariah 7:5], declare most emphatically, that though the Jews had returned from the Babylonish [*sic*] captivity the Ten Tribes had not."[45]

Not returning was the tribes' third and most profound loss. It opened "a huge wound that does not heal," as one rabbi put it over a century ago.[46] With the other two tribes returned, the loss of the remaining ten seemed greater still. This rabbi was not alone. Barbara Simon, an early nineteenth-century tribes scholar, discovered the anonymous scribbling of a student in the margins of a Christian theology book dealing with the tribes: "Judah returned:—but where was Ephraim still? / Where are the lost ten of Jacob's race? / Roam they through distant deserts wilds and vast / Without home or resting place. / Is theirs the fettered captive's hopeless doom? / Find they no refuge but the silent tomb?"[47]

The palpable sense of loss here can be likened to that of a family searching for a long-lost loved one. Even a dead body in a grave would be better than nothing, no knowledge at all, of what ultimately befell them. What torments the seekers is the idea that the tribes are out there still, lost, wandering, and unknown.

To understand the hole created when the tribes did not return, one must recognize the promise of return as the main legacy of the Babylonian captivity. Israel Yuval has commented on the centrality of the Babylonian captivity in Jewish and Christian historical consciousness.[48] He convincingly argues that this has framed the ways in which the dispersal of the Jews came to be seen as

the product of an exile, specifically as the effect of the Roman exile of the Judeans. We know that there was *no* mass deportation after 70 CE, when Titus took Jerusalem and destroyed the Second Temple. Furthermore, we know that significant Jewish communities existed outside the region well before its conquest and destruction by the Romans. In short, the dispersal of the Jews, even in ancient times, was connected to an array of factors, none of them clearly exilic. Yet, as Yuval shows, the traumas of the loss of independence and the destruction of the temple that came with the Romans were collectively described as a third "event," a grand expulsion that subsumed everything else under the term "exile." Yuval shows how this process took place in the long centuries after the destruction of the temple, reaching completion during medieval times. He invokes the emergence of this narrative of exile as the quintessential example of the power of the Babylonian chapter as a frame and as prefiguring for subsequent events in Jewish history. The sequence of events surrounding the Babylonian captivity as the Bible describes it—destruction, exile, and return—was superimposed on the Roman episode, which came to be understood in later generations as reenacting the same pattern.

Similarly, albeit for different purposes and in different ways, Christian theology also processed the loss of Judea and the temple into a story of exile. After Augustine, Christian theology held that "[e]xile [as dispersal], not [as] loss of political sovereignty, was the punishment for the crucifixion."[49] As Yuval concludes, superimposing the parameters of the Babylonian captivity onto the Roman story is the basis for the centrality of the notion of return in both Christian and Jewish traditions: "An old concept of historical time, shared by Christians and Jews, helped create a justification for—an understanding of the necessity of—the Jewish return to Zion."[50] When the Roman occupation of Jerusalem in 70 CE becomes an exile story, a happy ending is implied—fulfilled in the case of the Babylonian captivity, but yet to come in the case of the Roman exile. Thus, "conceiving of the destruction of the Second Temple as the beginning of a new exile made it possible for the Jews to turn their historical time into messianic time."[51] In the wake of the Babylonian captivity, the story of the ten tribes is transformed in several ways. First, the return that ended the Babylonian captivity accentuates the fact that the ten tribes did not return and enhances the sense of lostness associated with them. At the same time, the myth of return makes the question of the complete return (for the Jews, now from the Roman exile) a much more urgent issue. If the Jewish return to Zion is yet to be fulfilled, what of the return of the rest of the children of Israel, the ten tribes? No return is complete until *all* of the tribes return. Syllogistically, if the tribes are bound to return *someday,* that means that they are *somewhere* on earth *right now*. This basic logic is exemplified by the standard interpretation

of the biblical verse telling us that the tribes are somewhere in their place of exile "to this day" (2 Kings 17:23). According to this interpretation, this phrase refers not to the specific moment when it was written, but to (any) day of reading. This implies a sort of continuous present condition of being lost, but not completely lost. Paradoxically, the lostness is mitigated by the text's insistence on the ongoing knowledge of the ongoing existence of the lost tribes.

Like the stories and folktales we have seen, 2 Kings hints at the ambiguous worldliness of the missing tribes, lost but findable, distant but close, unreachable but available. The guarantee that they exist is as important as the fact that they are lost. Adam Rutherford, a strong proponent of the notion that Britain, the "Greatest of all World Empires," is made up of the ten tribes, wrote in 1934: "The ultimate re-union of the House of Israel and the House of Judah is repeatedly prophesied in the Bible (e.g., Jer. 3:18; Jer. 31:27–31; Ezek. 37:15–23). But how can Israel and Judah be re-united if Israel is non-existent or not identifiable?" Note that "identifying" and "finding" are analogous in Rutherford's phrasing. But more important, to deny the existence of the tribes is tantamount to blasphemy. Rutherford explains: "The idea that the above prophesies . . . are not only unfulfilled, but impossible of fulfillment owing to Ephraim-Israel having 'disappeared' has proved to be one of the principle [*sic*] causes of modern infidelity." Rutherford identifies "such noted infidels as Thomas Paine and David Hume."[52] Paine actually debated the existence of the tribes with the famous Elias Boudinot, the lawyer and statesman who presided over the Continental Congress, and with the Jewish theologian David Levi (1742–1801).[53] During the so-called Age of Reason, the tribes were deployed as a tool for proving biblical truth in a rational and scientific way. It is impossible to prove or to find scientifically accepted evidence for distant past events such as the law giving at Mount Sinai. One could, however, validate scripture by finding the tribes. The ten tribes' story was provable according to the parameters set by modern rational science. This made them a very tempting topic for debate during the period. It also made the search for them more feverish.

A variety of concerns, then, were attached to the specifically locative dimensions of the story of the ten lost tribes. Yet no less important, though less self-evident, are its temporal, chronological dimensions. These have already been alluded to in the predictive, messianic/apocalyptic framework, which foretells the return of the lost tribes, in either a dreadful or a paradisiacal future moment. As we have seen, the ten tribes belong in the messianic package; all the prophets lump their return together with the other signs of the end of time. If the central question about the ten lost tribes has long been: where are they? then the central question concerning the messianic age is:

when will it happen? An untold number of thinkers have undertaken to answer that question.

The integration of the ten tribes into the messianic/apocalyptic narrative fuses a spatial framework with a temporal one. The discovery and subsequent return of the ten lost tribes as an expected apocalyptic, prophetic event brings geography and space together with history and time. Moreover, the insistent worldliness of the tribes, the avowal that they are here among us, somewhere on earth, creates within the messianic/apocalyptic schema a sort of loophole by suggesting that at least one aspect of the messianic age may be with us already. Access to the messianic age is as easy as finding the lost tribes. All one has to do to set the promised end times in motion is to find the tribes and bring them home—a much more worldly, almost masterable task compared to what one has to do in order to bring the Messiah himself. Rutherford fretted, "how can Israel and Judah be re-united if Israel is non-existent or not identifiable?" The question's happy obverse is: how can the prophetic messianic age not come if Israel and Judah are reunited?

This dimension of the abiding fascination with the ten lost tribes is related to what Moshe Idel and others term "natural redemption," that is, a redemption that takes place not after or beyond, but *within* history.[54] The tale of the man's wandering goat, which leads him to the tribes; the novelistic account of the boat that drifts off course to the North Pole; Somtow's Roman steam-driven, world-conquering boats—all entertain the possibility of a wrinkle in space, a strange step across the map that will suddenly, instantly, unexpectedly lead to the ten lost tribes. The geographic dimensions of the story render redemption accessible and worldly, in Idel's terms, "natural." This aspect of the tribes' lostness, in particular, inspired many travelers to search for them. And it is this aspect in particular that has made the subject of the ten tribes compatible with modernity and rationality, rather than weakened by them. So it is, for instance, that with the appearance of modern sea navigation, making leaps in space more and more plausible, a new round of ten tribes mania burst forth, just as other developments and discoveries had spurred it on at other times. It is also this dimension of the redemptive narrative offered by the myth of the lost tribes, the natural dimension, that has allowed it to endure right down to the present day, woven into the national narratives of more than one contemporary polity.

The lostness of the ten tribes is thus both loaded with and derived from an acute theological anxiety created by this loophole. Stanford Lyman aptly described the tribes as presenting an "existential controversy and epistemological conundrum."[55] Unlike other prophetic/messianic conundrums, however, the solution of this one does not call for esoteric practice, but rather its opposite.

Thus, the theological quest has often become a political one. As historian Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin has shown, in the modern period interpretations of the notion of exile, in both Jewish and in Christian circles, have often given rise to political theologies or theologically based politics.[56] The ten tribes' exile is an integral, if not always salient, feature of many of these, most potently in Britain, the United States, and the state of Israel.

History and Loss, History of Loss

Theological anxiety is a chief dimension of the history told in this book. Another is loss itself. Put in the simplest words, a sense of loss is the experience of knowing that something is no longer present. How is the historian to write the history of a lost entity, the lostness of which is experiential and subjective?

One example is Sumathi Ramaswamy's groundbreaking study, *The Lost Land of Lemuria*, which contends that loss is a "category of knowledge."[57] Lemuria is a "land that is declared to have once existed but that is no more," which was thought to lie in the Indian Ocean.[58] Lemuria has been a preoccupation through the modern period and particularly since the 1800s. A sort of Tamil Atlantis, it supposedly vanished at some point in the Paleolithic era. Long ago above the ocean's surface, Lemuria in some unclear but clearly catastrophic manner disappeared suddenly beneath the waves. Lemuria has long existed in Tamil myth, but during modern times received renewed interest as a panoply of searchers began to look for its traces. As Ramaswamy shows, scientists, cartographers, geographers, and historians, along with occultists and individuals who could be best understood simply as romanticist scholars, Indian as well as English, engaged in intense speculation as to Lemuria's whereabouts, its catastrophic end, its possible connection to the origins of humanity, and its general significance in world history and geography. Ramaswamy calls these endeavors *labors of loss*—"those disciplinary practices, interpretive acts, and narrative moves which declare something as lost, only to 'find' them through modernity's knowledge protocols, the very act of discovery and naming constituting the originary loss."[59] Labors of loss produce knowledge. And this book offers a history of the knowledge that the loss of the tribes produced, a knowledge that further nourished the sense of loss itself. It is a study of the labors of loss around the ten tribes. As Ramaswamy argues, focusing on the "productive potentiality of the rich structure of [the] sentiment of loss" allows us to write about it "without too hastily reducing [it] to a pathology."[60]

The search for the ten tribes has provoked nothing if not anger and pathologizing. In their lostness, the tribes share the basic quality that attaches itself to other losses: Lemuria, Atlantis, the kingdom of Ophir, El Dorado, the Holy Grail, aliens from outer space, Prester John, Noah's Ark, the lost ark of the covenant—even the lost records of Iowa's Johnson County. These are often dismissed as legendary, as mythic, or as "noble lies," concern with them understood, at least tacitly, as pathology or, at best, as a sort of parlor pastime.

The ten lost tribes have long invited such dismissals. Chief among them is Allen Godbey's monumental 1930 study, *The Lost Tribes a Myth: Suggestions towards Rewriting Hebrew History,* which took issue with the proliferation of ethnographies suggesting or "proving" the claims that one or another ethnic group was a lost tribe. Godbey's 800 pages refuted the work of ethnologists and anthropologists of all sorts who claimed to have discovered the lost tribes in various corners of the earth, or to have identified traces of Jewish ritual in the practices of certain ethnic groups. More hostile still was archaeologist Robert Wauchope, who in 1962 published *Lost Tribes & Sunken Continents: Myth and Method in the Study of American Indians.* "Charlatan, clod and scholars alike—[most] have shared . . . attitudes and personality traits that give them as a group, a certain identity. . . . [W]hat theories are these that so capture imagination and fierce allegiance, and what sort of man [is] so obsessed with mystic and religious interpretations."[61] Yet often, outright dismissal of the tribes brings to the fore the history of the labors of loss surrounding them. In a way, Wauchope and Godbey have in fact paved the way for this study, by struggling to find the meeting point of academic study and the various forms of "labors of loss" represented by the predecessors they find vexing.

The Geographical Theology of the Ten Lost Tribes

> Suppose an extensive continent, a new world, should have been recently discovered, north east of Media, and at the distance of a year and half's journey from thence, inhabited by people whose religion is pure Theism.
>
> —Barbara Simon, *Hope of Israel* (1829)

Where are the ten lost tribes? There is a strong complementary relationship between theology and geography. Theological considerations frame the tribes' condition of simultaneous lostness and findability. The place of exile, while difficult to find, is real—it is somewhere on earth, a real, if occluded, geographic terrain. The possibility, indeed promise, that the tribes will be

found is encoded in biblical prophecy. The prophets place the tribes beyond human *reach,* but not completely beyond our *control*—after all, our scripture says that, one day, they shall return. Even to say that the tribes are beyond our reach is a form of locating them.

The quality of being locatable is dual. On the one hand, there is the possibility of finding the tribes by physically searching: exploration, navigation, travels. On the other, there is the possibility of locating them through study, deduction, and sleuthing—placing them on the map, as it were. The locatibility of the tribes marks the interface of theological and geographical knowledge, what might broadly be termed religious and scientific modes of thought. The most basic version of this was the identification and mapping of the concrete locations identified in the biblical *ur*-text. Where, for instance, nineteenth-century tribalists wondered, was the "River Gozan," alluded to in 2 Kings 17:6? Could it be the Ganges? The river's location (in the generic "east"), along with its vaguely similar name, were at play here. (More recently, the Gozan has been identified by other seekers as the Volga.)[62] Similar were painstaking attempts to identify specific named groups as the ten tribes, in light of prophecies that described them as "scattered among the nations" (Joel 3:2 and passim). Somewhat more sophisticated were attempts to pinpoint the "islands of the sea" mentioned by the prophets. Were they the Canaries? The British isles? Other attempts—like the Romanian child Shahan's—rested on the knowledge that the tribes were to be found behind "the mountains of darkness" and across the River "Sambatyon." Countless candidates emerged, with one mountain range or river giving way to the next as each possibility was exhausted in turn.

These fabled locales merit attention not only as the settings for fantastical tales of adventure and travel, but also as geography. Ramaswamy's key term, "fabulous geography," the product of "the process of thinking imaginatively—and enchantingly—about places not actually present or existing," is clearly at play in the placing of the ten lost tribes.[63] But while the lost land of Lemuria is a place no one has seen, nor ever shall see, the lands inhabited by the lost tribes are defined by the opposite: their resolute and inevitable findability as dictated by theological concerns. The putative locations of the ten lost tribes are understood by the seekers as real, actual; and their geography is at once fantastical and literal. The fabulous geography of the ten lost tribes is the geography of territories as yet unfound, constantly examined, tested, and interpreted against theologically guided parameters. In the enduring search for the lost tribes, theology and geography work in tandem, mutually inform each other, and produce knowledge that is a fusion of the two. This geographical theology is the product of theologically implied mappings of territory, through imagination,

attempted empirical verification, and the accommodation of prophecy. The search is an exercise in thinking theologically about geography.

Roberto Rusconi, editor of Christopher Columbus's *Book of Prophecies*—a collection of biblical prophecies that Columbus annotated between his third and fourth voyages—comments that, as his "eschatological awareness" matured, Columbus sought to find "a historic and theological context in which he could locate his geographical discoveries."[64] The principle applies to other bodies of knowledge as well. Central are Columbus's attempts "to locate his geographical discoveries within a historic and theological context." The discoveries carried for Columbus a theological meaning because they took place not only in a specific moment in time, but also in a special geographic location. Columbus was thinking theologically about geography. Geographical theology provides a mechanism for charting the evolution of the labors of loss connected to the lost tribes over a long span of time. We will see that, up until the early modern period, labors of the tribes' loss consisted almost exclusively of locating the tribes at a fixed but unreachable spot upon the earth. All of the unseen places "beyond the Sambatyon" were candidates in this process. Geographical imagination and place making were at play, but not simple enchanted thinking. Serious theological considerations were at work.

During the early modern period, as the world's geography became both ontologically and epistemologically destabilized, geographical theology did not disappear. It did, however, acquire and develop new meanings and tools in the search for the tribes. During the age of discovery, the possibility of finding the tribes became more and more real. Again, the rise of modernity with all of its signature trappings—science, rational thought, technology, navigation—increasingly fostered the search for the tribes, its techniques deployed in the service of finding them, accounting for their dispersion across the globe, and paving the way for their ostensible repatriation.

Scholar of religion Mircea Eliade famously argued that, "for religious man, space is not homogeneous; he experiences interruptions, breaks in it; some parts of it are qualitatively different from others."[65] Geographical theology is a spatial parallel; the topography it produces is nonhomogeneous. But its objective is not to transform space into specifically sacred space. Instead, it aims at interpreting space and *spatial* (as opposed to temporal) events according to theological considerations.

The exile of the lost tribes; the exile of the remaining tribes under the Romans; migrations, displacements, transformations of terrains; and, above all, the discovery of new lands—all of these spatial events created an uneven *topos* that would be made smooth only with the repatriation of the tribes. The coming of the Messiah, the second coming of Jesus—apocalyptic events—were

brought, through the search for the ten lost tribes, into a spatial as well as temporal domain.

The geographical theology that operates in this book belongs in the realm of what geographer John K. Wright called *geosophy:* a form of knowledge that "extends far beyond the core area of scientific geographical knowledge or of geographical knowledge as otherwise systematized by geographers."[66] This opens the door to thinking creatively about geography and theology or religion. I am not, of course, the first to observe that, as one writer has put it, in "ancient and modern times alike, theology and geography have often been closely related studies because they meet at crucial points of human curiosity."[67] This relationship is already suggested in Immanuel Kant's conceptualization of "theological geography," that is, "the distribution of religions" on earth.[68] Speaking of various definitions of geography, Kant put this term to use in describing different religions in varying geographical contexts.[69] An important dimension of geo-ethnographic inquiries about the ten tribes has been the meticulous examination of indigenous peoples' religious customs in an attempt to trace them back to an "Israelite source." The geography of the ten lost tribes as it emanated from centuries of discussion as to their location also relates closely to the practice of *geographia sacra*—an early modern, biblically based antiquarianism that eventually gave way to scientific geography. Sacred geography was also "a geography that is global in scope and founded on the Holy Scriptures."[70]

Yet, the potential salvation that was encrypted in the search for the tribes itself distinguishes the geographical theology presented here from Kant's theological geography and sacred geography. *Geographia sacra* contained elements of this messianic promise, but theological geography did not. Sacred geographers were intensely interested, for example, in the location of the earthly paradise. But, as one of the sacred geographers admitted in 1630, "knowing where the Terrestrial Paradise was located is not necessary for salvation."[71] In sharp contrast, knowing where the ten tribes reside is arguably the sine qua non of salvation, be it spiritual or political. This is not to say that finding the tribes was sufficient for salvation. Rather, finding the tribes had redemptive possibilities attached to it. It was at once one of the signs of and the preconditions for redemption.

In this important regard, the numerous attempts to identify Great Britain as the "isles of the sea" mentioned in Isaiah were not an exercise in sacred geography. The positive identification of Great Britain with the lost tribes was an explicit instance of geographical theology, linked as it was to the potential for salvation, in turn providing the underpinnings for a political theology that justified—mandated—imperial expansion. Personal pursuits no less than national and imperial ones were driven by the specifically redemptive promise of

the search for the lost tribes. When Uziel Haga, who sought McKinley's permission to travel to China, set out with his "soul . . . yearning" to make a "new covenant" with the "children of the Ten Tribes,"[72] he was engaged in his own form of geographical theology. Haga, the righteous Jew and his goat, the British Empire—all set out not just to find the tribes, but to find (or bring) salvation. Moishe'le's tragic, desperate attempt to cross the Dniester/Sambatyon and call upon the tribes to rescue the Jews of Komarov is but the most vivid and crushing example.

Theology has guided both travel and abstract thinking about geography. In his messianic opus *Netzah Israel* (Eternity of Israel), Rabbi Juda Loew (Maharal) of Prague (c. 1525–1609) had geography uppermost in his mind in thinking about the ten tribes:

> And there are people who say that the learned men of the gentiles wrote [mapped] each and every place in every inhabited location on earth, and [they say that] there is no place not written in their books, and that they know of every [location on earth], and that there is no place known as [the location of] the Ten Tribes. However, there is no proof for that claim, and their mouths utter nonsense, because it is very possible that there is a place on earth that they do not know of, because it is disconnected from civilization by mountains etc. Here, only recently they found a place that they call in their language "new world," of which they did not know before. And so, just as they did not know about this new world, it is possible that they do not know of other worlds.[73]

In the context of rapidly changing world geography and ever more destabilized sacred geography, this was unassailable logic. If a whole new world could be discovered, why not one new small place, tucked away behind mountains or across an unknown river? Maharal is sanguine in the face of a new world geography, one far different from that described by scripture. What is unacceptable, to his mind, is not that the world may not look as we have long thought, but the idea that this newly mapped world has no room within it for the ten lost tribes. It is evident that Maharal is well abreast of the geographical discoveries of his day, fully informed of the new scientific proof they represent.[74] What he rejects, decidedly and angrily, is that this new mapping might lead to the abandonment of the notion that the tribes are out there. A doubt about the ten tribes is tantamount to uncertainty about the messianic vision as a whole. This same logic persists for diehards down to the present day. Perhaps, some now argue, the tribes are in a real world we have yet to discover, on a different planet or in a distant galaxy.

Maharal's conclusion was not only logical. It also proved correct, up to a point. Since his time, other new, albeit smaller, worlds have indeed been discovered. At a deeper level, though, Maharal's desire, common in the literature, is to rescue the question of the ten lost tribes and their location from the hands of cartographers. This replicates the very condition of the tribes' exile as first described in the Bible: at once close to hand and set at a remove. By Maharal's logic, the thing that stands as the most incontrovertible evidence of the tribes' existence is the very fact that they are lost. Their very hiddenness is the basis of the promise that they shall be found. Thus, the tribes constantly recede beyond the horizon, just beyond our grasp. Maharal effectively immunizes the tribes from any such further threat: who cares if the entire world is mapped? Another new world can always be discovered, scientific facts can always be rewritten, the map redrawn, on and on, ad infinitum. Here, Maharal reveals the dynamism of geographical theology, its ability to accommodate ever-greater spatial shifts, its infinite capacity for accommodating nonhomogeneous space. Indeed, this relentless dynamism and infinite ability to accommodate all new evidence is arguably the most consistent characteristic of the theological encounter with temporal events.

Maharal's insistence that other worlds will be found brings to mind historian Amos Funkenstein's observation that eschatology tends "to postpone the end of history indefinitely into the future" so that the "embarrassment" caused by the failure to predict the "First (for the Jews) or Second Coming (for the Christians)" is avoided.[75] Maharal postpones not only a moment in history indefinitely into the future but also, and more important, a moment in the ongoing process of revealing the world's geography.

The Ten Lost Tribes as World History

In 1652, the theologian Thomas Thorowgood wrote that the lost tribes were "a nation lost in the world." This marked the first time that the tribes' location in "the world" had been so explicitly designated. The world is, after all, the quintessentially "mundane" and "worldly" space. Yet at the same time, it is the world that is home to the most otherworldly of peoples, the lost tribes. In *Islands of the Mind: How the Human Imagination Created the Atlantic World*, John Gillis devotes a chapter, "Worlds of Loss," to a discussion of the perpetual quest for "secret islands," a leitmotif in Atlantic (and other) histories. This quest continues "despite the fact that the world is now mapped in the minutest detail."[76] The perpetuity of the quest is, for Gillis, testimony that the "island of the mind is not just a passive contemplation. It has been an incentive to action,

an agent of history."[77] Similarly, the case of Lemuria demonstrates the power and vitality of the geography of what is not visible, a *topos* that escapes "the hegemony of the real and the visible."[78] These works suggest a new way to write world history. Absences, they propose, are vital to our understanding of the visible and present world.

Arif Dirlik observes that a "fundamental problem with World History as a historical genre is an inability to define its boundaries."[79] The boundaries of the world are too elusive. Loss presents itself as a useful vehicle for world historical inquiry in at least two important respects. First is the fact that loss (or, otherwise put, spatial absence), since it is not real and visible, allows for the easy transcendence of boundaries. The second utility of the concept rests on the paradoxical fact of its being the obverse referent for the actual, physical, visible world. It can be taken as that world's complementary image.

This leads us to the second spatial problem inherent in world history—not that of defining spaces *within* the world, but grasping and defining the space that is the world itself, an entity that claims in its very name all-encompassment, a goal beyond the reach of any history or historian. What, in thinking of an entire world, is that world's point of reference? Might it not be this world's counterpart, a lost world, its photographic negative? "Lost-world" histories help us to "perform" world history more fully by offering us the "view from nowhere,"[80] a look at the world as at once "seen from nowhere" and from anywhere.[81] They offer a way to see how the *oikoumene,* the known world, makes itself present through its laboring over and around that which is known but absent—here, the ten lost tribes.

In the case of the ten lost tribes, it is a lost ethnos—a category that denotes both a human group and a geography—that encompasses the geographic and mythical loss so evocatively described by Ramaswamy and Gillis. Its discovery, reconstitution, and repatriation are understood as vital—indeed, definitive—steps on the path to making the world whole, complete. Here, it is not only a geographic *topos* that is at issue—a lost island, or continent. It is also a human landscape—of races, nations, and human origins. The labors of loss surrounding the ten tribes—lost in the past, continuously present, to be found in the future—present themselves ultimately as speculation about the world itself, its geography and humanity, its borders, limits, and ends. Indeed, in the centuries-long hunt for the lost tribes, the unit of analysis, always, has been the world as a whole. The geographical theology involved in the search for the tribes always has had as its ultimate frame of reference the world. It is always global in scale. The pattern is classically world historical—while having the world as a whole as the "ultimate frame of reference,"[82] the seekers of the lost tribes, like the world historian herself, never really cover the entirety of the

world at one go. The focus on a subset, framed by a whole world, is a defining characteristic of world history and of ten-tribes-ism alike. *The Ten Lost Tribes,* too, like the seekers it describes, has the world as its ultimate frame of reference, but this book is a history of only some of the world's parts.

With the world as its ultimate frame of reference, *The Ten Lost Tribes* moves from the pivotal locations of the story of the ten tribes—ancient Israel and Assyria, Judah and Babylon, Judea and Palestine under the Romans—outward, following the ever-widening radius within which knowledge of the ten tribes was generated. Rome and the Mediterranean, Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, Great Britain, and, finally, the United States and Israel—each in turn has become a potent *topos* in the quest. The motion in this book follows the literal movement of the seekers of the tribes, the constant recalibration of the location the tribes were thought to occupy, and the ever-elusive, ever-receding quality of the tribes themselves. This book tracks the emergence in different world locations of ten tribes knowledge and, as such, is a sequence that reflects shifts in the (largely Western) understanding of the notion of a political and cultural center. As each site in turn became the new hub for the global dissemination of knowledge, it became in turn the center for a new wave of ten tribes speculation, study, and investigation. This study proceeds chronologically, albeit with frequent forays into different times, from the moment a group of people was indeed deported from the capital of the Ephraimite kingdom during the eighth century BCE up to the relatively recent moment when another group of people was "repatriated" to the very same place.