

From the Editor:

*Slavic Review* publishes letters to the editor with educational or research merit. Where the letter concerns a publication in *Slavic Review*, the author of the publication will be offered an opportunity to respond. Space limitations dictate that comment regarding a book review should be limited to one paragraph; comment on an article should not exceed 750 to 1,000 words. The editor encourages writers to refrain from ad hominem discourse.

D.P.K.

To the Editor:

I have several comments on Sascha Goluboff's fascinating article, "Are They Jews or Asians? A Cautionary Tale about Mountain Jewish Ethnography" (*Slavic Review*, vol. 63, no. 1).

First, the Tat language is usually designated as Caucasian—generic, virtually proto-Caucasian—hence non-Indo-European, thus, unrelated, contrary to the article, to Persian, which is Iranian-Aryan-Indo-European. Is there some esoteric element of the question here that I am missing?

Second, the reference to the possible descent of the Mountain Jews from the Babylonian Captivity "in 589 B.C., after the destruction of the first and second temples" (130) seems quite confused. The first temple was in fact destroyed at about that time (587–86 BCE), but the second was destroyed quite a long time later, in 70 CE by the Romans.

Third, it seems to me a shame that, in spite of such a provocative piece of research, the author did not at least mention, for the sake of brief comparison, another nearby group of very retro-Jews, the Karaites of the Crimea, who repudiate the Talmud and rabbinical Judaism in general—such that they were not considered by the Nazis to be Jews.

Still, Goluboff has given us a wonderful piece of work.

HUGH RAGSDALE  
Charlottesville, Virginia

Professor Goluboff replies:

To the Editor:

I would like to respond briefly to Hugh Ragsdale's comments about my article. Ragsdale makes three points of inquiry. First, he claims that I mistakenly categorize Judeo-Tat, the language of the Mountain Jews, as a Persian dialect. All the research I have read, however, indicates that Mountain Jews speak a form of Judeo-Persian. I refer, for example, to V. F. Miller's research (cited in my article on page 131), the *Tat (Jewish)-Russian Dictionary* that I used during fieldwork (Ia. M. Agarunov and M. Ia. Agarunov, *Tatsko (Evreisko)-Russkii Slovar'*, 1997), and Dan Shapira's description of Judeo-Persian posted on the "Jewish Language Research Website" (see <http://www.jewish-languages.org/judeo-persian.html> [last consulted 2 August 2004]). For instance, Shapira writes that Judeo-Persian, "the common name for both the literary and spoken forms of Jewish Iranian language varieties . . . frequently includes Judeo-Tadjik/Tajik/Tadzhik (otherwise known as Bukharan, Judeo-Bukharan, Bukhari, Bukharit) and sometimes also Judeo-Tat (Cuhuri/Juhuri/Dzhuhuri, the language of the Mountain Jews in Dagestan and Northern Azerbaijan, known in Israel under such misleading names as Kavkazit/Qawqazit, and even Dagestanit)."

Second, Ragsdale correctly called into question my dates for the destruction of the first and second temples as 721 and 589 BCE. He is right; Nebuchadnezzar ordered its demolition in 587 BCE, and the Romans razed the second temple in 70 CE. I mistakenly put

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in the reference to the second temple's destruction, thus obscuring my original intent, which was to highlight the theory that the Mountain Jews were forced to leave the Holy Land twice—once in 721 BCE because, as stated in my footnote 78 (130), the Assyrians broke up the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and then in 587 BCE when the Babylonians tore down the first temple. My mistake, however, is consistent with some Mountain Jewish historical narratives that refer to 722 BCE as the time when their ancestors—"Israel's Lost Tribes"—"began their wanderings after the destruction of Jerusalem's first temple" (see "History of Mountain Jews" posted at [http://www.juhuro.com/pages/english/english\\_history.htm](http://www.juhuro.com/pages/english/english_history.htm) [last accessed 2 August 2004]).

Finally, Ragsdale was disappointed that I did not mention the Karaites of the Crimea as a point of comparison to Mountain Jews, since the former are "another nearby group of very retro-Jews." Ragsdale's use of the term *retro* leads me to believe that he did not fully understand the point of my article. Mountain Jews are thoroughly modern in that they use the rhetoric of preserving their reportedly "primordial" Jewish traditions (as gleaned from ethnographic reports) to forge a rightful place for themselves as Jews in the world today.

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