

Competing Discourses: Nazis in Tibet and Jews in India

By Peter Levenda

Argument

From the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, two discourses concerning racial and ethnic origins in Asia have competed for academic and popular attention. The first was the alternately fascinating and outlandish claims for the existence of the ten Lost Tribes of Israel in places as far removed from Israel as China and India, as well as in Great Britain and the New World. The second was the insistence by a group of German and other "Nordic" academics that the origin of the "Aryan" race was to be found in northern India and Tibet. Ironically, it would seem that the origin of the conflict between Jews and non-Jews had been situated in the same part of the world, in Asia—albeit by entirely different schools of thought and with totally different agendas and with horrendous results. In more recent times the former narrative has taken precedence but not without the tragic consequences of the Holocaust as the latter narrative struggled to impose its own view of history, archaeology, and anthropology upon the world.

Historical Background

It is possible that the origin of the debate over ancient origins may one day be traced to the influence of Darwinian theory and its explosive impact on the cosmological and theological systems of Judaism and Christianity. Charles Darwin—in describing the process of evolution—brought into question the cherished beliefs of many Western monotheists in the concept of Genesis: that the world (and with it, humanity) was created in a process that took six days and that human beings were themselves created full blown from clay. Once the basic cosmological structure of Genesis was questioned, the entire edifice of Western religion was in danger of collapsing. Or so it seemed at the time (and still does, to a large extent). We need only refer to the tremendous impact on Western civilization of the theories of Copernicus and Galileo in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to understand how deeply Darwin was considered a threat to established religious thinking in the nineteenth century.

A reaction to Darwin's theories was to be found in the writings of Mme. Helena Blavatsky, a Russian-born medium and philosopher and some time intelligence agent whose *Isis Unveiled* (1877) and *The Secret Doctrine* (1888) were to have such an amazing impact on European (and to some extent Indian) esoteric thought. Taking a page from Darwin, she managed to appropriate the idea of evolution and develop a spiritual dimension to it that satisfied a need in those who were threatened by what appeared to be the wholly materialistic and mechanistic approach of Darwin and to elevate it to a loftier sphere of races, root races, and the concept of spiritual evolution.

Unfortunately, these ideas could be misunderstood and misapplied. If humanity is indeed undergoing a spiritual—as well as physical—evolution, then it may be supposed that some humans are more evolved than others. Darwin's ideas of "survival of the fittest" could then be taken out of context and applied in a pragmatic way: the deliberate and cold-blooded eradication of the weak to ensure the survival of the strong.

Blavatsky's ideas appealed to the esoterically inclined, for the paranoia that is at the root of much occultism can be projected onto such ideas as political conspiracies and suppressed documents and secret texts. If Darwin was correct, then it stood to reason that the Church knew this all along and had decided to keep evolution secret in order to defend its temporal power and to restrict access to the process of spiritual evolution to its own initiates. What Blavatsky offered was a way for those outside the system to peek behind the veil and see the truth for themselves and thus begin their own journey of spiritual evolution. Indeed, her two principal texts—*The Secret Doctrine* and *Isis Unveiled*—promised just this type of access by their very titles.

A population in shock from Darwin's (and other) attacks on organized religion found itself in the position of being able to question *all* received wisdom. During the Renaissance and to some extent the Reformation, this was typified by the attempts of the Christian Cabbalists—including Isaac Newton, who devoted much of his life to an attempt to "decode" the Bible—to peek behind the Veil of Isis to see the inner workings of Nature and the secrets encoded in the Bible. By the *fin-de-siècle*, this had extended to include the works of critics who questioned the basic tenet of Christian faith: the death and resurrection of Jesus.

In the midst of all of this questioning and secret-seeking, two main—at times contradictory, at times complementary—discourses fought for dominance over the popular imagination. The first was the idea, first broached in the eighteenth century but which took on steam by the end of the nineteenth century, that the ten Lost Tribes of Israel lived and worked among us. In part suggested by the claims of Joseph Smith, Jr.—the magician and occultist who became the founder of Mormonism—that the Lost Tribes had found themselves in the Americas, the idea was amplified by armchair archaeologists, etymologists, and epigraphers who claimed to have found evidence for the Lost Tribes in everything from geographical place-names to rituals, beliefs, and artifacts all over the world. It is almost too cruel to describe this as pseudoscience, since the methods employed were those of fledgling disciplines that had yet to find their way as hard sciences. The origins of archaeology as a discipline can only be traced to about 1829 at the establishment of an Institute for Archaeological Correspondence in Rome and, after all, it was the amateur archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann who discovered Troy in 1873. As it became known that discrete groups or clans of Jews had been found in India and China, the idea that the ten Lost Tribes were no longer a romantic notion of biblical history but a verifiable phenomenon took hold. If some heretofore isolated groups of Jews had been found as far away as Cochin and Kaifeng in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, then it could be conjectured that the Jewish exile had dispersed the tribes to the far corners of the earth, corners that might include the Americas as well as Asia and Africa. (Ironically, this concept would be used *against* the Jews by anti-Semitic organizations such as Christian Identity in North America, which would claim that white people were not only the *real* Israelites but the sworn enemy of the tribes of Judah!)

The second discourse was based more specifically on the inspiration of Blavatsky and her disciples, and it focused on the idea of spiritual evolution. Like the former case, this was based on amateur archaeology and etymology but with a serious new twist: the "science" of eugenics.

The romance of the idea of an Aryan race can be traced, ironically enough, to a work entitled *The Remains of Japhet, being historical enquiries into the affinity and origins of the European languages* by James Parsons, a fellow of the Royal Society who, in 1767 published this work: an attempt to prove that the languages of Europe

had as their origin the race of Japhet (as apposed to those of Shem—the Semites, the Arabs and Jews—and Ham—the African Egyptians and Cushites). Thus, it was an interpretation of Genesis that gave rise to a fascination with discovering the origins of the European "race." Parsons was followed by Sir William Jones, a founder of the Royal Asiatic Society who, in 1796 and as Chief Justice of India, proclaimed that Sanskrit was the root of the European languages including Greek and Persian. Thus the die was cast. With Jones asserting that Sanskrit was the root language, and Parsons insisting that languages had their roots in specific races identified in the Bible, the dysfunctional marriage between race and language was blessed with numerous ill-bred and contentious offspring. Jews and Arabs, as Semites, belonged to one branch of the genetic family, Africans to another, and the white Europeans—united linguistically with their Sanskrit roots—belonged to the race of Japhet.

With Blavatsky, the race of Japhet was identified clearly with the Sanskrit language and, by extension, with ancient Sanskrit texts that developed (according to the scholarship of the day) out of northern India and Tibet. With a nod to Darwin, Blavatsky proclaimed that not only was the human race evolving but that the different races on the planet represented different levels of evolution with the Aryan race—that represented by Japhet and Sanskrit—at the highest level. This formed the core issue of her doctrine of *Theosophy*. The Vedas were obviously texts of ancient origin, and Blavatsky's fascination with Hinduism is well known and amply documented, but this reverence extended to the Zoroastrian scriptures as well since they represented texts in the ancient Persian language which—as Sir William pointed out in his 1796 speech—was a descendant of Sanskrit. These scriptures were more ancient than the biblical texts and represented an "Aryan" point of view on cosmology, theology, eschatology, etc. The only elements of Judaism and Christianity worth inspection—according to Blavatsky's writings—were those of the Kabbalah and other encoded systems of secret knowledge. In general, the Jews represented for Blavatsky a "degenerate" race:

The "Semitic" languages are the bastard descendants of the first phonetic corruptions of the eldest children of the early Sanskrit.... The Semites, especially the Arabs, are later Aryans—degenerate in spirituality and perfected in materiality. To these belong all the Jews and the Arabs. The former are a tribe descended from the Chandalas of India, the outcasts, many of them ex-Brahmans, who sought refuge in Chaldea, in Scinde, and Aria (Iran), and were truly born from their father A-Bram (No-Brahman) some 8,000 years B.C. The latter, the Arabs, are the descendants of those Aryans who would not go into India at the time of the dispersion of nations, some of whom remained on the borderlands thereof, in Afghanistan and Kabul and along the Oxus, while others penetrated into and invaded Arabia.¹

In a footnote to this paragraph, we read: "The Afghans call themselves Ben-Issrael, children of Is (sa) rael, from Issa, 'woman and also earth', sons of Mother Earth. But if you call an Afghan Yahoudi (Jew) he will kill you. The names of the suspected twelve tribes of the Jews, and the names of the real twelve tribes of the Afghans, are the same.... Where are the traces of the Jewish twelve tribes? Nowhere. But there is a trace, and a deep one, that the Jews have tried to deceive people with the help of these names."²

Thus, you have the rationale for much of what would happen later, in a book published one hundred years after the pronouncements of Sir William Jones and only twenty-nine years after the publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859). In

a bizarre reversal, Blavatsky refuses to accept that the Lost Tribes of Israel left the region of Palestine and wound up in Afghanistan and India; instead, she claims that Aryans from India and Afghanistan are the real "Israelites" and that the Jews have tried to deceive the world into thinking that they are Israelites when they are really descended from the outcasts of India. Thus, if she is to be believed, the Bene Israel of the Bombay region are not *descendants* of the Jews but are the *ancestral tribe* of the Jews!

In 1883, Sir Francis Galton formulated the concept of eugenics—based in part on his reading of Darwin, who incidentally was his cousin—and provided the scientific parallel (and solution) to Blavatsky's spiritual and pseudoanthropological *weltanschauung*. With Galton we have the introduction of forced sterilization and other forms of racial planning intended to rid the population of the diseased, the mentally disabled, the deformed, etc. With the rise of the Nazi Party in Germany—influenced tremendously by the writings of Blavatsky and the *voelkisch* philosophers Guido von List and Lanz von Liebenfels—we have the combination of "scientific" eugenics, Darwin's theory of evolution, and Blavatsky's concept of Aryan superiority based on language, religion, and occultism providing the impetus for the Final Solution, as the Nazis attempted to purify the human race by eradicating all the non-Aryan—"spiritually degenerate" as well as "physically degenerate"—elements. From this perspective, Nazism is only Theosophy taken to its logical conclusion.

Indian Nationalism and Theosophy

One of Blavatsky's contacts in India during the time she spent in the East (the dates are uncertain, due to conflicting reports and unreliable testimony, but were mostly during the years between 1868 and 1885) was with the founder of the Hindu reformist and nationalist sect, Arya Samaj, Swami Dayananda Sarasvati.³ Indeed, the Theosophical Society (TS) and the Arya Samaj were founded in the same year, Arya Samaj only a few months before the TS. Blavatsky, who would later claim that the orders to found the TS had come from her Masters in the East, had attempted to create the society as a combination of Freemasonry and Hinduism, and it is believed that this impetus came from Sarasvati and her admiration for him and his movement. Indeed, in 1878 Sarasvati would write, "the American Theosophical Society has become a branch of the Arya Samaj,"⁴ but this mutual admiration was soon changed to contempt when the Swami attempted to gain control over the TS and force all its members to swear allegiance to him and to the precepts of strict Vedic Hinduism. Before the alliance had crumbled completely, there was a half-hearted attempt to create an amalgamation of the two groups—something called the Theosophical Society of the Arya Samaj of Aryavart—but this did not last long as Blavatsky sought to form other alliances, mostly with the Vedanta movement and, later, with Mahayana Buddhism and Sikhism. The Arya Samaj, however, continued to thrive and was involved in massive demonstrations in the Muslim state of Hyderabad in 1939, agitating for Hindu nationalism, and was ever-present during India's move toward independence. Today, it has branches in many American cities as well as throughout India and in South America (principally Guyana) as well. Its connection, no matter how tenuous, with the Theosophical Society is not mentioned in its publications or on its website, however.⁵

That Blavatsky's society was involved in Indian nationalism is well known. Her successor, Annie Besant, was active in the Indian National Congress, and even today the Theosophical Society considers itself much more Asian than Western or Western-esoteric. Indeed, the headquarters of the society was moved from New York City, where it was founded in 1875, to India. Blavatsky's Indian influences do

not stop at Sarasvati, but they include a roster of famous and important Indian religious and political figures, among them the Maharaja Ranbir Singh of Kashmir, the Maharaja Holkar of Indore, Swami Sankaracharya of Mysore, and many others. Her support for Indian nationalism was grounded in her belief in the supremacy of the Aryan race, and in that she was not too far off from some of the other apologists for what would later become known as *hindutva*.

An expression coined by Hindu nationalist V. D. Savarkar (1883-1996) in 1923, *hindutva* indicates "Indian-ness" or "Hindu-ness" and was the title of a book Savarkar wrote while in prison serving a sentence for treason.⁶ It identifies what it means to be a "Hindu" by associating Hinduism with the Aryans and with Hindu blood and culture and with the land itself which is seen as sacred to the Hindus. A version of the "blood and soil" doctrine of Nazi philosophers Alfred Rosenberg and Richard Walther Darre, *hindutva* was seen as congenial to Nazism and Savarkar someone to watch. In fact, the Nazi newspaper *Voelkischer Beobachter* ran an article on Savarkar when the latter came out in favor of German occupation of the Sudetenland.⁷

More recently, Hindu nationalist movements allied with the *hindutva* platform such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)—while supporting relations with Israel—also run anti-Semitic articles on their websites, such as "Semitic Monotheism: The Root of Intolerance in India" by S. Gurumurthy,⁸ which argues that monotheism implies a strong central state that was hostile to the type of plurality that existed naturally in India; that "Semitic monotheism," which could as easily be a code word for Islam as for Judaism, lay at the root of India's current religious strife. The BJP's support for Subhas Chandra Bose—himself an Indian nationalist who sought relations with Hitler's Germany—is also manifest in another article on their website that calls Bose the "mascot" of the BJP.⁹ Thus, the relationship between *hindutva* and Nazism, while not necessarily one of close identities, is nonetheless problematic. The deeper similarities in themes of Aryanism, race, and religion that are exemplified by such individuals as Blavatsky, Savarkar, Sarasvati, and others would seem to indicate a common world-view, one that is molded more by accidents of genetics and geography than by choice or free will.

The former ambassador of Chile to India—the Nazi author Miguel Serrano—takes the idea of *hindutva* even further when he writes:

The secret language of the Quiche-Maya was Zuyua and that of the Incas was Scandinavian-Sanskrit. It is well-known [*sic*] that the Inca rulers were white and that among their blood relatives they spoke a private and sacred language, which they never taught to the population of the "slaves of Atlantis". Certain words will give us the key. *Inka* is really *Inga*, as the Spanish conquistadores spelt it. In old High German, *Ing* means derivation, ancestor, lineage. *Merovingian*, for example, has this root, meaning "he who comes from Mount Meru"; because *Mero* is Meru and *ving* is *weg*, the German for road. Thus, the *Inga* and we who are his descendants are *those who journey from Mount Meru*, in the Great Exodus, from far away, from the Nuptial Homeland, from the lost land of Avalon.¹⁰

Waddell and the Sumer-Aryan Theory

The proponents of the Aryan theory were not all crank eugenicists or armchair archaeologists. One of the more infamous supporters of the Aryan supremacy—or perhaps we should say "Aryan primacy"—concept was himself a noted Tibetologist,

L. A. Waddell (1854-1938) who developed a "Sumer-Aryan" theory of the origin of civilization stimulated by his decipherment of the Indus Valley seals. The author of such works as *British Edda* (1930), *The Phoenician Origin of Britons, Scots & Anglo-Saxons* (1924), and *Aryan Origin of the Alphabet* (1927), his reputation had been made, initially, on the strength of such works as *The Buddhism of Tibet* (1895), *Among the Himalayas* (1899), and other works on the subject of Tibet, including ethnographic and anthropological studies. He entered the British medical service in India in 1880, at the age of twenty-six, and spent the next twenty years in Asia, during which time he accompanied military incursions into Burma, China (during the Boxer Rebellion of 1900), Chitral, and with the Malakand Expeditionary Force, among other campaigns. He was editor of the *India Medical Gazette* and contributed papers to scientific journals on the fauna of northern India and Sikkim. He explored legendary sites, such as Pataliputra and the Buddha's birthplace on the Nepalese border. In addition, he accompanied the British expedition to Tibet in 1904 and began a collection of Tibetan literature and artifacts that eventually found homes in the great libraries of India and England.

Waddell's renown as a Tibetologist (he was professor of Tibetan at University College in London from 1906-1908 upon his return from Asia) was stained by his involvement in Mesopotamian studies, particularly in the putative relationship between the newly discovered civilization of Sumer and that of the Indus Valley civilization. His *The Makers of Civilization in Race and History* (1929) explored the Sumer-Aryan hypothesis in great detail and was critically praised in the *New York Times* and in the *Daily Mail*, which gushed, "Startling book on our Sumerian ancestors—where the British came from."¹¹

Christine Preston of the University of Wales, Swansea, has written an intellectual biography of Waddell as her Ph.D. dissertation in the Classics and Ancient History.¹² In this work, she explores Waddell's personal history and makes a brave attempt to rescue his reputation by pointing out the groundbreaking work he performed on the decipherment of the Indus Valley seals and his identification of some of them as Sumerian in origin—a claim that had been ridiculed in the postwar years but that has now been given a reappraisal by a new generation of scholars.

Waddell's scholarship and insight aside, his views on Aryanism were not much different from other pro-Aryanists of his day. When his views were attacked in printed form by Julian S. Huxley in 1935, Waddell reacted with characteristic venom. Although lengthy, this previously unpublished letter is worth quoting in full as it is a time capsule of pre-World War II Aryanism and anti-Semitism:

Ever since that startling basic discovery of such far-reaching world-importance was made a few years ago, namely that the Aryan Race, already known to be the foremost & most highly evolved of the five races of mankind, was also in fact the Originator, Chief Developer & Chief Diffuser of the world's civilisation down the ages—as conclusively proved & established by an overwhelming mass of positive, concrete & unshakeable scientific evidence, including the earliest known historical inscriptions & other authentic records—there has been evoked a hurricane of windy protests against the Aryans by writers mostly of Non-Aryan Race & of rival richly endowed Semitic coteries & propagandists. This was, perhaps only, to be expected, human nature & Jewish pretences being what they are. Hence, individuals of races & sub-races who cannot themselves personally claim to be of Aryan Race descent & physical type, the type illustrated for instance in the classic Greeks & purer

Britons, Scots & Anglo-Saxons, might nevertheless enviously strive to disparage & discredit their great benefactor, the Aryan Race.

But the latest of these futile & unfounded diatribes against the Aryan Race "out-herods Herod", & goes one (or two) better than any of the wildest ever perpetrated or imagined by them before. In their desperation, presumably at their total inability to disprove one iota of the solid mass of concrete proofs for the new scientifically established historical Truth that the Aryan Race originated & chiefly developed the World Civilisation, the two joint authors of a new booklet, "We Europeans: the Race Question: Theory & Fact", by Julian S. Huxley & A.C. Haddon, (Sept. 1935) audaciously & arbitrarily; without giving any valid evidence whatsoever, assert in effect that there never was any division of mankind into different races, & in particular, that there never was, nor is, any Aryan Race at all!

Such ridiculous & unfounded assertions might ordinarily be passed unnoticed as beneath contempt & due to the pitiful ignorance of the writers. But, as the two joint authors of this grossly misleading booklet in question are, strange to say, professed ethnologists, & the book is addressed to the general and educated British reader, it becomes imperatively necessary to expose not only the astounding ignorance of these writers in regard even to the physical traits of the Aryan Race & their persistence, but also their trotting out of & acceptance of the long-exploded ancient theories of Aryan origins, as well as their culpable suppression of the new epoch-making discoveries mentioned above. Significantly, the chief of the two joint authors in question is a grandson of the great comparative anatomist & ethnologist, Thomas Huxley, who was the ardent disciple & chief upholder & propagandist of Darwin, & the first establisher of the racial division of mankind on a scientific basis, by exact measurements of the skull, colour &, into separate & definitely distinct races of which the Aryan Races was found to be the most advanced in evolution. But Huxley himself repeatedly lamented in his lectures that he personally could not boast of being a pure Aryan in Race, because, as he expressed it, he was "only a mongrel". His grandson, however, less scientifically minded & unbiased, rebels against the stigma of "Non-Aryan"; &, in trying to escape from it, actually declares without a shadow of proof & against all the established facts, that different races do not exist, & more especially that there is no such thing as an Aryan Race.¹³

Waddell died in 1938, before the full range and scope of Aryanism could be demonstrated to the world in the form of the Nazi invasions and the Holocaust. That same year, however, the Third Reich decided to walk in Waddell's footsteps to the very doors of Lhasa, itself.

The SS-Tibet Expedition

One of the activities undertaken by the Third Reich that most specifically illustrates how deeply the Nazis believed in the ideas of Blavatsky and her admirers was the highly publicized expedition to Tibet by a branch of the SS known as the Ahnenerbe, the "Ancestral Heritage Research Bureau." While the Nazis had been developing ties with Indian Nationalist leaders such as Subhas Chandra Bose who were considered sympathetic to their program and who were, obviously, anti-British, they were also committed to proving their claim that the Aryan race had its origins in northern India

and Tibet. Politically, Bose was willing to support Hitler; from a religious perspective, however, the Nazi Party's adoption of the swastika as their emblem emphasized Germany's intended spiritual affiliation with the tradition of Hinduism. Anti-British, pro-Nazi publications during the war years spoke of Hitler as an *avatar*, a spiritual leader who would help rid India of its British colonizers. During the author's own residence in Malaysia (1996-2003), Bose was still spoken of with reverence; pictures of Bose still adorned some Indian homes and no apology was made for the leader's association with the Nazi Party and its goals (as, indeed, none were made by Malay Muslims for the close collaboration between the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and the Third Reich). Indeed, on one recent visit to Mumbai the author also noted a street named after the Nazi collaborator, which caused him to realize that in every conflict there is always more than one point of view and usually more than three.

Thus, the expedition to Tibet by the SS in 1938—before the actual outbreak of hostilities between Germany and the United Kingdom—had a dual purpose. In the first place it was seen (rightly or wrongly) as an intelligence-gathering mission and as an approach to the Tibetan leadership for support in the event of a Nazi-led or –sponsored attack on British interests in India. More important, however, from the point of view of the expedition members this was an opportunity to collect Tibetan racial and religious data in an effort to demonstrate the validity of the Aryan racial theory. Film footage taken by expedition members clearly shows their preoccupation with measuring Tibetan skulls on the one hand and with taping Tibetan religious ceremonies on the other. The expedition also made off with a complete collection of the *Kangschur* (*bKa' 'gyur* in standard Tibetan transliteration but usually spelled *Kangjur*), the 108-volume Tibetan sacred texts,¹⁴ which they carried off on the backs of nine donkeys through the perilous passes of the Himalayas and onto a steamship bound for Germany just as World War II was about to break out.

Yet, as the author himself pointed out in *Unholy Alliance*, this expedition had other reverberations. Instead of merely collecting flora, fauna and, as well as religious and cultural artifacts and literature, the SS Tibet expedition was informed by the Aryanism of the Nazi Party. Film footage exists¹⁵ of SS Tibet expedition members measuring the skulls of living Tibetans and recording the data, a procedure familiar to anyone who has studied the "ethnographic" methodologies of the pre-World War II eugenicists as well as the present-day methods of the white supremacy groups. The skull-measuring did not stop when the expedition members made their way back to Germany in the full glare of newspaper reporters and exploding flashbulbs; instead, one of the expedition's most important members, Bruno Beger, would begin collecting human skulls from living specimens at the Dachau KZ in his attempt to create a museum of the human races showing the evolution of skeletal structures in Jews, Slavs, Africans, Asians, various indigenous peoples and, of course, Aryans.

Lost ... and Found

On the other side of the academic argument were those who were certain they had located—not the root of the Aryan race but—the Lost Tribes of Israel. This romantic notion had appealed to many armchair archaeologists since at least the eighteenth century in England, as noted above. Fueled by reports that Jewish tribes and trace evidence had, indeed, been located in India and China it seemed that one of history's great mysteries had been solved, but in what way?

The *Book of Mormon* provided support for the idea that the Lost Tribes had found themselves in the New World. Based on hieroglyphic engravings on miraculous plates that had appeared to the young sorcerer, Joseph Smith, Jr., in the

early nineteenth century in upstate New York, the sacred scripture of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints weaves a complex tale of truly biblical proportion. There is not enough space to explore all of the themes in any detail, but it should be enough to stipulate that the central idea that the Lost Tribes had made it to the Americas was enough for some adventurers to begin looking.

Their task was rendered all the more important and relevant when it became known that certain artifacts of a purportedly ancient Jewish provenance were discovered buried in various locations throughout North America. A stone containing an ancient Hebrew inscription "For Judea" was found during the excavation of the Bat Creek burial mound in eastern Tennessee in 1889; an engraved tablet was discovered during an excavation of the Grave Creek burial mound in West Virginia in 1838, said to be written in the Punic characters common in the Iberian peninsula of 2,000 years ago. In addition, there is a stone boulder in Los Lunas, Mexico, covered in an early (c. 1000 B.C.E.) form of Hebrew writing. Called The Decalogue Stone, it is said to bear an abbreviated form of the Ten Commandments.

Thus, in the nineteenth century there was ample evidence—albeit some of it quite controversial—that the Lost Tribes had somehow made it to North America. This gave rise to various questions. For instance, were Native Americans members of the Lost Tribes? This idea was usually rejected on racial grounds, unless it could be proved that the existing Native American tribes were the result of intermarriage between the Asian peoples who supposedly walked across the land bridge that separated North America from Asia more than 10,000 years ago and members of the Lost Tribes who came to North America after the invasion of Israel by the Assyrians in the eighth century, B.C.E.

Eventually, the position solidified in the writings of the British Israelites who claimed that they (the English) were the true descendants of the Lost Tribes, as evidenced by etymological traces to be found in place names, names of rivers, and topological features, etc., that were believed to be bowdlerizations of Hebrew names. Compounded with this idea was the persistent story that Jesus, as a child, was taken to England by his wealthy relative, Joseph of Arimathea, who was an international trader. If Joseph had trading partners as far away as Glastonbury Tor (one of the sites where Jesus was allegedly taken), why would the Jews have not already been there years, maybe even centuries, before?

In both these cases—Nazi origins in Tibet, Lost Tribes in Tunbridge Wells—there is a common theme: *We come from somewhere else*. We are not really Englishmen, we are members of the Lost Tribes! We are more than Germans, we are inheritors of the mantle of Aryan civilization, the builders of Mohenjo Daro and Ur! In this desperate attempt to find identity—and therefore meaning—in ancient sources and foreign discourses, there is more than a hint of dissatisfaction with life, with society, with the existing cultural narrative. Like UFO abductees, pointing to the stars and claiming they really belong *there* in space, the Nazi Aryans and the British and American Israelites point to a *there* in time. We might almost forgive them their dreams if it were not for the havoc they caused and the danger they still represent; for even some UFOlogists are not immune to charges of racism and anti-Semitism (as William Dudley Pelley's Silver Shirt organization of the 1940s demonstrates; Pelley was a fascist and pro-Nazi who believed in outer space contact). The American manifestation of the British Israelites can be found in the Christian Identity movement, which claims that the "white race" is composed of the survivors of the ten Lost Tribes of Israel and that, therefore, they are the mortal enemy of the Jews.

So, we have come full circle. How did this happen?

An Attempt at Understanding

Stefan Arvidsson, in an article for the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* entitled "Aryan Mythology as Science and Ideology"¹⁶ correctly links Aryan mythology with the works of Richard Wagner on the one hand, and the philosophy of Georges Dumézil on the other, but fails to notice the tremendous importance of Blavatsky and the *voelkisch* philosophers on the development of Hitler's own *weltanschauung*. Arvidsson sees a rebirth of some form of Aryan mythology in the works of Eliade and his circle, including Joseph Campbell, Carl Jung, Karl Kerényi, and Paul Tillich and Gershom Scholem!¹⁷ He connects Eliade's phenomenological approach to religion with the desire to "re-enchant" the world by restoring a sense of mythology, which could be seen as the font of human values and meaning. With spiritual experience viewed as something immediate, personal, and essentially irreducible Eliade sought to rescue religion from history and historical relativism. This desire to transcend history—and in a sense transcend the legalisms of organized Christianity and Judaism, which can be seen as regulating the human spiritual impulse and robbing it of the immediacy of divine contact—was not confined to Eliade and the universalists. Hitler himself described that his approach to politics was to impact the human psyche directly, without bothering it with too many words, concepts, or complex ideas. Both the Nazis and a generation of scholars of religion—including some in the New Age movement—understood the value of direct experience of the divine; what they did not appreciate, perhaps, was the Talmudic injunction against the practice of "descending to the chariot."

A reaction against the technology preserved in the *ma'aseh merkavah* (the "works of the chariot") concerning methods of meditation and mystical practice that bring one on a journey through the seven heavens to a direct confrontation with the heavenly Throne; the Talmud warns that such practices are dangerous and could lead to madness, death, or apostasy. The burning desire of the Aryan apologists to restore a sense of magic and meaning to decadent Western society was just as reckless, perhaps. Soon, it seemed as if no excess was to be avoided in the attempt to create the perfect human society on earth.

Note

¹ Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine*, p. 210.

² Ibid.

³ See, for instance, K. Paul Johnson, *The Masters Revealed* for a comprehensive investigation of Blavatsky's Asian influences and personalities.

⁴ Ibid., p. 114.

⁵ Goodrick-Clarke, in *Hitler's Priestess*, recounts the involvement of the pro-Nazi Savitri Devi with Arya Samaj, pp. 60-63 and Savitri Devi's relationship with the Chilean Nazi and former ambassador to India, Miguel Serrano.

⁶ See also the cover story in the April 2007 edition of *Little India* (an Indian publication in the United States) entitled "Indian-ness" by Sudhir Kakar, which asks essentially the same question.

⁷ Goodrick-Clarke, *Hitler's Priestess*, p. 59.

⁸ On <http://www.bjp.org/history/htvgm-10.html>, retrieved April 13, 2007.

⁹ See <http://www.bjp.org/history/htv-netaji.htm>, retrieved April 13, 2007.

¹⁰ Serrano, *NOS: Book of the Resurrection*, p. 103.

¹¹ Waddell, *Phoenician Origin*, front matter.

¹² Preston, Light on W. A. Waddell.

¹³ Preston, in Appendix VIII: "Fact versus Fiction on the Aryan Race: typed draft and reply by Waddell to Julian Huxley's and Professor Haddon's 'Fanciful Vapourings.'"

¹⁴ It is not specified if these were the traditional Tibetan Buddhist texts or those of the Bon-po tradition, which had a different canon but was also referred to as the *bKa' 'gyur*. My assumption is that the former were the texts carried out of Tibet: translations into the Tibetan language of the Sanskrit Buddhist canon as it was known in Tibet at the time. Discovering the present whereabouts of this specific collection would be valuable.

¹⁵ Viewed by the author at New York City's Tibet House in 1993.

¹⁶ Arvidsson, *Aryan Mythology*, p. 327.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 345 fn.

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