

Out of the Witches' Cauldron /The Freckled Mashiach

Introduction

His red hair hung in amber knots. As he was dragged out he didn't resist, and accepted his fate. The sky reddened slightly with the soft fall of night, and the dust of the desert kicked up around his bare feet and chained ankles.

Meanwhile, all the talk in the bazaars had been of rumours that the pharaoh had once again refused to give up his flame-haired concubine. His fixation with the woman had been known for some time. Babushka'd old peasant women would complain that she'd used sorcery to bewitch the boyish ruler. Whilst gossiping traders and their jewelled wives would curse the illegitimate harlot. Calling her "dog" and "mongrel."

The temple priests had repeatedly begged the besotted pharaoh to give up his favoured love. That the kingdom was in danger. That ill omens loomed large, and that blood and rebellion simmered in the avenues and fields beneath the palace walls. Even more so, that his deviancy was against the holy laws. An abomination, strictly forbidden by the gods. What sort of message did it send out to the people, if even the pharaoh himself engaged in such sin? "The whole land has fallen into debauchery and licentiousness," they pleaded. Prostitutes in every port, and feral children on every street. Men taking their slaves to wife, or marrying foreign women. Their daughters whored out for trade and riches. Deformity and disease, rife across the kingdom. All ritual abandoned, and every division broken down.

Yet still, the pharaoh refused. Threatening war if anyone dared to remove the ruddy temptress from the opulence that surrounded him.

As the man with amber knots of hair was led to the temple, the streetlamps burned red through the dust. The heat from the distant pyre already warming the cool night air. As he headed through the crowds he inwardly lamented his innocence. But, outwardly, his tea-coloured freckles and leprous skin betrayed him. The baying worshippers seeing in his ugly, freakish appearance only the mark of sin and defilement. A blemish on a troubled and forsaken nation -- that could only be cleansed by fire, before the old and violent gods of Egypt.

Red Hair: Out of the Witches' Cauldron

Red hair is a minority trait today, even in countries such as Scotland and Ireland, where there's a higher incidence of it. However, when people speculate about where it comes from we often think in terms of a specific region, tribe or people. Was there a tribe of people at some point in history that was completely red-haired? Did it spring up independently in one particular place? Either randomly, or as a consequence of some specific circumstance or environment? Or has it sprung up in multiple places, or for multiple reasons?

These are all interesting questions which no one really has a definitive answer to. In this particular piece we're going to explore the idea that redheads are a product of melting pot cultures.

Persecution

Throughout history red hair has often been disliked and distrusted. For instance, take this often repeated observation from Aristotle:

"Those with tawny coloured hair are brave; witness the lions. [But those with] reddish [hair] are of bad character; witness the foxes."

Likewise, the following mediaeval proverb:

"Si ruber est fidelis, diabolus est in coelis" (If the redhead is faithful, the devil is in heaven).

Or this similar variation, found in German:

"Rote Haare, Sommersprossen- sind des Teufels Artgenossen" (Red hair and freckles - are the devil's own kind).

Or, the old Russian proverb:

РЫЖИХ И ВО СВЯТЫХ НЕТ

There are no red-haired saints

The hair colour has also often been associated with the figure of Judas in European folklore, with terms like "poil de Judas," (hair of Judas), and "Judas beard" denoting the colour. Likewise, the fallen figure of Mary Magdalene was often depicted in art

with the hair colour. The colour has even been associated with vampires, witches and lepers. One work published in 1662 stated that Indian Muslims "...have an aversion for such as are red hair'd, out of an opinion they have, that they are Leprous." And the writer Montague Summers stated that there were traditions in Eastern Europe, of "red-haired" vampires, labelled the "children of Judas", that killed their victims with a single bite or kiss.

In the seventeenth century there was even a treatise published that advised against the use of a red-haired wet nurse. Stating that a wet nurse "must not be red-hair'd, nor marked with Spots." Going on to add that the milk from a red-haired nurse often "hath a sour, stinking and bad Scent." It brings to mind the familiar idea that red hair, spots, freckles and moles were viewed as evidence of witchcraft. And likewise reminds us of Shakespeare's description of the deformed slave Caliban, in his play *The Tempest*:

"A freckled whelp, hag-born - not honoured with a human shape"

There are even claims that red-haired people were once sacrificed for possessing the hair colouring. Most notably the claim in Sir James Frazer's "The Golden Bough," that red-haired men were ritually burnt in honour of Osiris, in ancient Egypt. Their ashes "scattered with winnowing fans."

Melting Pot

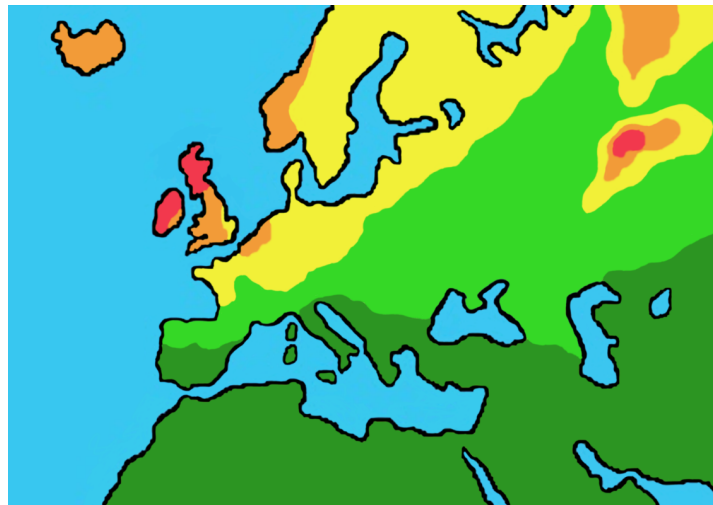
Thankfully, the modern world isn't that bad. If it ever was that bad. Still though, redheads today will often ponder escaping the taunts and sense of alienation that accompanies the trait. The dream being that perhaps somewhere there's a redhead homeland, where everyone looks freckly and ginger. If not in the modern world, at least somewhere in the ancient past. Some distant, romantic land - or forgotten kingdom. As when you feel like an outsider it's only natural to wonder where that outside place was, that you've somehow come inside from.

However ...what if the red hair is coming from inside the building?

If we look at the distribution of red hair we could make the case that red hair occurs where we have cultural melting pots. A classic case in point being Ireland and Scotland.

Though seemingly isolated on the north-western edge of Europe, Scotland and Ireland are perfectly situated for sea travel. A stepping stone between the northern Nordic regions and the Mediterranean. And, this is in fact what we find when we

look at Irish history. With tales of settlers arriving up from Iberia and Vikings coming down from the north.



We could also make the case that the Russian patch we see on red hair maps is similarly situated. A natural melting pot, this time linking the Middle East with the Nordic regions, via Black Sea trade routes.

Another place we see red hair crop up with surprising frequency is biblical history, with figures such as Esau and King David said to have been "Ruddy" or red-haired. Similar to "Judas Beard" we also have the descriptive term "Abram hair." A label said to denote the colour "auburn." Implying that the colour was associated with the biblical Abraham. In fact, it could be said that in ancient times, before the advent of major oceanic sailing, Egypt and the wider Middle East would've been a natural melting pot. A meeting place for tribes, kingdoms and traders.

It's also worth noting that in more recent times it's often been observed that red hair appears more commonly amongst Jewish populations. For example, one 19th century article noted that there were "...thrice as many red-haired [Jewish people] as either Poles, Russians or Austrians, and half as many again as Germans." Likewise, it's also been said that in Russia, red hair was viewed as a Jewish trait.

Another place we seem to see an overrepresentation of redheads is in royalty. Along with King David, other famous redheaded royals include: Elizabeth I, Richard the Lionheart, Henry II, the Holy Roman Emperors Frederick I and II, Ismail the First, Shah of Persia, and even Egyptian rulers like Kleopatra and Ramesses II. On a side note, and returning us to earlier themes, Baldwin the Fourth, the twelfth century King of Jerusalem, was actually described as a "blue-eyed, freckled, leprous evil-doer."

As royals often make marriage alliances with other royals from foreign kingdoms, royal households will naturally likewise be melting pots that cross oceans and tribal boundaries.

A further thing perhaps worth mentioning is Aristotle's quote stating that, "Fishermen, divers for murex, and generally those whose work is on the sea, have red hair." Perhaps this observation taps into a notion that port cities, with their comings and goings, engender a greater degree of tribal mixing, and consequently, a higher incidence of freckles and red hair. The countless pirates nicknamed "Redbeard," or "Barbarossa," also spring to mind.

Pigments

This association of red hair with the sea has a logic to it. If we consider the human colour spectrum, there's a natural gradient from light to dark. A feature of the relative levels of sunlight. In the far north of Europe we have low sunlight, giving rise to blonde hair and fair skin. At the equator, with the sun at its extremity, we get dark hair and skin. Between the two there is a gentle transition, encompassing all the shades in between.

There are two pigments that are responsible for the colour of skin and hair in humans. One is eumelanin. This is responsible for black or brown colouring. The other is pheomelanin, which imparts a range of yellowish to reddish colours. Pheomelanins are particularly concentrated in the lips and genital areas. Hence the red or pinkish colouring.

Humans across the spectrum possess both pigments, and generally in a similar ratio. People with dark skin having high amounts of both. People with light skin, small amounts of both. In each case the eumelanin higher relative to the pheomelanin. However, people with red hair have relatively higher levels of pheomelanin in relation to eumelanin. It could be that "gingerness" is therefore a consequence of diverse gene pools, that have the capacity to produce this otherwise uncommon imbalance.

If we imagine people living in areas of low sunlight, who have low levels of both pigments. If they mate, any potential offspring will naturally inherit only low levels of both. Even if a person marries someone from a nearby tribe, that tribe, being situated in a similar geography, will likewise have similar pigment levels. The same is true for people living in areas of higher sunlight that marry people from a similar background. The potential variation will be mild. However, once you get sea travel,

and the opportunity for humans to meet other humans from much further afield, the possible range of pigment levels any child may inherit increases.

So, for example, someone could potentially inherit the higher levels of pheomelanin from their darker-skinned ancestors, but the relatively lower levels of eumelanin from any light-skinned ancestors on their family tree. Giving rise to red hair or freckles. With some genes being recessive it may take multiple generations for these effects to become apparent.

If we look at how "gingerness" manifests we can see this mixed nature. The brown freckles, a consequence of the pheomelanin, on the fairer skin. The ruddy tinge. The hazel eyes that often accompany it - a seeming meld of brown and blue. And, of course, the hair itself: fair, yet full of colour.

There's also the common misconception that redheads are "paler" than everyone else - even blondes. However, this is no doubt simply an optical illusion. The contrast of the freckles and rusty hair, against the low eumelanin skin, giving the appearance that the fair skin is especially pale. This also explains why not all redheads have the same skin and hair tone. You even sometimes may see dark-skinned people with freckles, whose hair has a slight reddish tinge to it. This is due to the "relative" levels of pheomelanin. So, a person who isn't very light-skinned can still look "ginger" if they've inherited higher levels of pheomelanin than would normally be present for someone of their skin tone.

Interestingly, we can see a good illustration of this when dark-haired people try to bleach their hair. Rather than turning bottle-blond or white, they're often left with hair of an amber or orange colouring. This is because the bleach destroys the eumelanin more readily, leaving the pheomelanin visible and apparent. Showing that darker-haired people do indeed have the pheomelanin that would otherwise produce red hair, were it not masked by the higher eumelanin.

Though this "melting pot" theory dispels the idea that redheads are "paler," it also strengthens some of the other stereotypes associated with red hair. For instance, the idea that redheads are more highly sexual. The redder parts of the human body, such as the lips, nipples and genitals, are also areas with more nerve endings. So it makes sense that higher relative pheomelanin - the red pigment - would be associated with a greater sensitivity to touch. Likewise, this would help to explain why redheads are purportedly more sensitive to pain and changes in temperature. Hence reports of redheads needing more anaesthetic at the dentist. This heightened sensitivity may also help to explain the association with witches and prostitutes. The presence of prostitution in port cities linking us back to sea travel.

Conclusion

So, in conclusion, looking at things through this lens, we can see redheads not as outsiders as such, but as a product of human mixing - and of civilisation, or city living itself. A trait that rises and bubbles up at cultural crossroads.

And the negative stereotypes also have their positive counterparts. Just as Judas has a red beard, we also often see Jesus depicted in art with red hair. His chestnut locks having a Mediterranean tinge. So too, the positive counterpart of the fallen Magdalene, the immaculate Mary. She, likewise, has been portrayed with reddish hair. For example, take the following description, given by the 16th century Jesuit hagiographer, Pedro de Ribadeneira:

"The Virgin was of a middle stature, though some say she was rather tall, her complexion was somewhat swart, her Hair Reddish and Golden, her Eyes Lively and Quick, the Hairs of the Eye-lids somewhat Red, the Eyebrows arched, Black, and comely: The Nose somewhat long, Vermillion Lips, most sweet in speaking[.]"

One thing to note about this description is its compound nature. The Virgin Mary is swarthy, with beautiful black eyebrows. Yet her hair is also red and golden. Almost embodying the whole spectrum of humanity. A symbolic composite of all mothers. Just as Jesus is a symbolic stand-in for all mankind. The symbolic alchemical man. Bringing to mind Cyrano de Bergerac's poetic claim, that redheads possess virtue, due to their "balanced constitution." And that red hair, like fire, contains "the most essence and the least substance." The Freckled Mashiach, or the treacherous Judas. Red hair, a product of our human melting pot. Symbolic of both its good and bad potential.

The Freckled Mashiach

In this follow-up piece we're going to explore the idea that Jewish people are also a 'melting pot' people – a people forged at the centre of human civilisation. Not a tribe separate to all the other nations of the Earth, but a people manifest out of that larger humanity.

People think of Jewish people as a people apart. Think the image of the Orthodox Jew, marrying within the Orthodox community; a community maintaining its distinctness from the wider culture it finds itself amongst.

Historically, this wasn't entirely the case though.

A comparison would perhaps be Amish communities, which have remained separate for centuries, but that originally sprang from the broader German populations of Europe. So, though distinct now, once upon a time they were not. Their strict and separate brand of Christianity not being an unchanged continuation of an ancient Christianity, but an offshoot of the more general Protestant Christianity that existed in Europe in the 17th century. We think of the Amish as "old fashioned;" a people living how Christians would've lived in the very earliest of times. Yet, as the movement is relatively recent, that isn't quite true.

Likewise, we tend to think of Orthodox Jewish communities as being secluded and "old fashioned." A continuation of an ancient Judaism that has retained its separateness - both religiously and ethnically - throughout the centuries and millennia. However, similar to the Amish movement, the Orthodox movement too is relatively recent, being just a few centuries old. Sure, it emerged from a much deeper Jewish tradition and culture, just as Amishness emerged from a deeper and older Christianity, but, as with Christianity, the original Judaism it emerged from was no doubt much more organic and amorphous.

We tend to view strict and literal interpretations of religion as *true* religions, and lax or loose interpretations as deviations from the strict and literal originals. However, in truth, the opposite is generally the case. Religions begin naturally, and only later develop into their stricter forms. Natural behaviours - such as hunting or washing - become ritualised; and natural cycles - such as seasons and celestial events - become the focus of awe and celebration. The particular forms of practising the rituals only becoming habitualised over time.

Likewise it's the case for the various prophets and religious figures. They became celebrated not for living lives of dull routine, but because they went through

interesting experiences, or espoused meaningful ideas. A revolutionary figure - a Moses, or a Jesus - comes along and changes the world. It's only later, after the era of such figures, that synods of men take these stories and turn them into regiment and ritual. The bubbling ferment of human culture and religious experience then whittled down and commodified by more political and dogmatic minds.

So, strict and formal religions tend to be a paler semblance of an original spark. A living God, expressed through living human beings, reduced to a storybook God, taken literally, and expressed through repetition.

The overall point being that strictly defined religions should not be viewed as early, but rather, as more recent. As late-comers. As followers (in the truest sense of the word), not originals.

People see modern Orthodox Jewish people keeping to themselves, and marrying amongst themselves, and assume that this has always been the case. And that therefore, Jews in general have always been ethnically separate and racially distinct - going back to the Old Testament. But this is unlikely to be the case.

In fact, if we look at the Old Testament stories we find many examples illustrating the opposite. With various biblical figures taking wives from outside tribes. Moses married a Cushite woman. Joseph took the Egyptian Asenath as wife, who bore him the sons Manasseh and Ephraim. King Solomon, of course, had many wives and concubines.

People may point to the prohibition in Deuteronomy 7:3, against marrying with the sons and daughters of foreign nations. The implication is no doubt more aimed against marriage with foreign religions than foreign races, but either way, the prohibition somewhat proves the case. In Ezra 9:1-2 we see that Ezra is informed that "the people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the neighbouring nations.. They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, and have mingled the holy race with the peoples around them. And the leaders and the officials have led the way in this unfaithfulness".

And in the Book of Nehemiah 13:23, Nehemiah "saw men of Judah who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. Half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod or the language of one of the other people, and did not know how to speak the language of Judah." The figure Samson also engaged in relationships with Philistine women.

Middle-Eastern Melting Pot

Generally, it makes sense to read the Bible as a history. Of a people wrestling with the idea of God. Rather than as the literal word of God Himself. Naturally, with history, there are ebbs and flows. Different moments, opinions and eras. Both conservative and expansive impulses.

Geographically, it also makes sense that the Middle East itself, the location of biblical history, would be a natural melting pot.

Imagine a world before the age of major oceanic travel - before Columbus has discovered the Americas, and before the Portuguese have navigated the southern tip of Africa. A world where long distance journeys across the world ocean are not an option. In such a world the Middle East and the inner seas, (the Mediterranean, Black Sea, Red Sea, and Indian Ocean), would be the natural centre of the world economy.

Hence, this central area, where three continents meet, would be bustling with trade and travel and empire. Where riches are accumulated, and where people of different tribes and kingdoms meet, marry, and come into conflict. A furnace of ideas and competing interests.

Is it any wonder that such a place would give rise to the world's three great religions? Just as modern economic centres, such as New York and California, act as seeding ground for modern cultural trends and ideas today. In fact, Israel, both historically and in the modern era, could be viewed as a symbolic epicentre of civilisation. With the Jewish people likewise, at the centre of this unfolding human narrative. A people of, and born out of, this churning cultural cauldron.

Returning to the mixing of peoples and cultures, it should be noted that cities naturally lead to more genetic diversity than rural areas. If you live in a city - a populous crossroads where people come and go - it's much more likely you'll meet someone from a foreign tribe or race. Whereas, in a rural setting, the high likelihood is that you'll settle down and produce children with someone from the same tribe or nation as yourself. You only have to visit cities and rural areas today to see this difference.

If we imagine this probabilistic process playing out over centuries, perhaps millennia, of history we can begin to envision a natural dichotomy emerging between town and country. The civilised city people - naturally more mixed and cosmopolitan, and the tribes beyond - more homogenous and insular.

If you look at modern Jewish populations, it's not difficult to see the influence of this process, with the different Jewish ethnic groups tending to look like the peoples they live adjacent to. Ashkenazi Jews look largely European, but with a touch of the Middle East. Sephardic Jews look Mediterranean. Mizrahi look more eastern.

Now, this isn't to say that, therefore, these various Jewish ethnic groups aren't linked and contiguous with each other. Or that, for the most part, Jewish people haven't predominantly intermarried with other Jews. It's more the *relative* frequency of mixing with outgroups that is the difference.

To some degree, all peoples and nations are mixed if you trace the tribal family tree back far enough. For example, in a general sense, you could consider English people to be a distinct ethnic group. However, if you trace backwards you quickly find Danes, Huguenots, Angles, Celts, Saxons and so forth in the mix. That's before you get to all the various odd and occasional incidences of intermarriage that will have inevitably taken place through the centuries. The odd sailor bringing back his foreign bride. Or the stray Frenchman somehow ending up in London and marrying an English girl.

Once again, it's the relative scale of the mixing that's interesting. In fact, Britain is quite a good example. In the previous piece we discussed the idea that red hair is common in Britain because of its geography. Being situated in the North Atlantic, it's a natural melting pot, where blond-haired Nordics from the north meld with darker-haired/skinned settlers from the Mediterranean. We likewise noted the relative commonness of red hair in Jewish populations. It could well be that this red hair has a similar cause. Namely, that Jewish populations too have a wider diversity of skin and hair tone in their collective gene pool.

As a further aside, it's also interesting to note that Jewishness has shared some of the negative stereotypes that are associated with red hair - such as distrust and *devilish* intent. Similarly, Jewishness has also been associated with leprosy. The historian Manetho wrote in his work *Aegyptiaca* (a lost work, quoted by the historian Josephus), about a renegade Egyptian pharaoh named Osarseph, who led an army of lepers against a pharaoh named Amenophis. Osarseph has been equated with the biblical Moses, and the lepers with the Jewish exodus from Egypt. Towards the end of Manetho's story Osarseph even changes his name to Moses.

With King David and Esau being described as "ruddy" in the Bible, and both Judas and Jesus often being portrayed in art as red-haired, we're also reminded of the concept of the sacrificial red heifer. An important Jewish ritual, and in Messianic Judaism an instrumental part of the preparations needed to reestablish the Third Temple in Jerusalem. It's interesting that one place we see variation in hair, or fur

colour is in domesticated animals. Usually, in nature, the appearance of animal species tends to be quite uniform and fixed. However, as we see with dogs, cats, horses, cattle, etc, variation tends to be more common where we have domestication. Dappled greys, blacks and mottled browns, toffee-coloured coats, blondes, sandy whites and reds ..and so on. It seems the domestication process creates conditions where fixed appearance isn't as strictly selected for. Or, perhaps, where it is selected for - for example, if farmers are purposely breeding for such colours.

One can't help but wonder if it's similar with humans. Perhaps the range in human hair and eye colour is due to civilisation removing or limiting factors that select against this variation. A kind of self-domestication process you could say. It's notable that even today in parts of Africa albinos are often killed because of their appearance. An obvious selection pressure against it.

Maybe diverse, melting pot cultures are less likely to persecute such differences. Or, alternatively, it could be the case that, in melting pots, the incidences arising are simply too numerous to eradicate with persecution. The use of albino body parts in ritual and black magic in Africa is likewise reminiscent of some of the strange notions about red hair we see in history. Such as ideas that the urine from red-haired boys was needed to make swords and stained-glass windows. Or that the fat from redheads was needed to make potions and poisons - "three ounces of the red-haired wench." Or, more gorily, the claim that redheads were sacrificed in ancient Egypt, owing to the notion that the evil god Set/Typhon (the god of foreigners, no less) was red-haired.

Similarly, the red heifer is both rare and sacrificial - and needed to manifest some divine work or magic. In Christian thought the red heifer is sometimes equated with Jesus. (Curiously, according to Plutarch, the Egyptians also sacrificed red-coloured oxen as a stand-in for Set.) It seems fitting that both the Christian Jesus and the Jewish Mashiach stand as symbolic of man or humanity in general. Just as Israel and Jerusalem stand as a symbolic central locus of world affairs and history.

The Christian Jesus and the Jewish Mashiach are in essence the exact same concept. One, a vision of perfected man set in the past. The other, a vision of perfected man set in an awaited future. Both, in reality, just ideals to aspire to in the here and now. In the living moment. Perhaps when everyone starts to understand these things symbolically, as opposed to literally, humanity will finally begin to fulfil its bubbling potential.