History of the Proto-Bulgarians north and west of the Black Sea. The Proto-Bulgarians in the East-European steppes prior to VII c. AD


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Documentary evidence about the Proto-Bulgarians and other akin to them tribes:

- Bulgars, Unogundurs, Onogurs, Utigurs, Kutrigurs
- Sabirs, Barsils, Belendzheris, Khazars

Archaeological evidence about the Proto-Bulgarians from:
- North-Eastern Fore-Caucasus and Northern Dagestan:
  - Pit graves, artificial skull deformation, Sarmatians, Northern Bactria
  - Huns, Alans, Proto-Bulgarians, Dagestan, Belendzer

- East of the Sea of Azov (VI-VII century AD):
  - Unogundurs, Kuban, kureni, auli, Great Bulgaria, Phanagoria

- North of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov (VI-VII century AD):
  - Kutrigurs, Severski Doneck, Zlivka necropolis, Sarkel

  "Old Great Bulgaria":
  - Khan Kubrat, Theophanes, Nicephorus, Malaja Preschepeina, Voznesenka

  The Pereschepina treasure of Khan Kubrat, VIIth c. (Hermitage Museum Collection)
  The Saltovo-Majack culture

The Proto-Bulgarians in the VIII-IX cc. AD:

- East of the Sea of Azov
- North of the Sea of Azov
- In the Crimea

The migration of the Unogundur-Bulgars of Asparukh to the Lower Danube
Fortresses
Necropolises
Bulgars, Unogundurs, Onogurs, Utigurs, Kutrigurs

It is commonly accepted that the documentary evidence contain only data about the European period of the history of Proto-Bulgarians. Recently, although, B. Simeonov advanced the hypothesis that their ethnicon had been known much earlier to the Chinese, but in a rather altered form because of the peculiarities of the transcription of foreign names in Chinese. In modern Chinese the Bulgarians are known as 'ba-go' or 'bao-guo', and B. Simeonov concludes that the ancient word 'bulgar' should occur as 'pu-ku' or 'bu-gu'. Exactly the same name of a tribe or a group of tribes is repeatedly mentioned in different Chinese sources from 103 BC up to the 8-th century AD. They speak about a people or tribe pu-ku/bu-gu inhabiting the western as well as the eastern parts of Central Asia, the lands to the north and north-west of Tien-Shan, the Semirech'e and west of the rivers Sur Darya and Amu Darya [1]. Interestingly enough, one of the tribal lords of the people pu-ku - Sofu sulifa Kenan Bain, bears the title sulifa, attested later among the Dagestan Proto-Bulgarians.

While the evidence of the Asiatic period of the Proto-Bulgarian history is still hypothetical, there are, still short, but reliable sources about their live in Europe. Most numerous are the records in Latin and Greek. Few, but very important, are the data from some historical, geographical and other works by eastern authors - Armenians, Arabs, Syrians, Persians, etc. Their use, however, is accompanied by serious difficulties because of the rather free way they convey the events and facts and because of the peculiarities of the phonetic systems of their literature, in which the foreign names are sometimes changed beyond recognition.

The earliest European record about the Proto-Bulgarians is the so called Anonymous chronograph, a list of tribes and peoples written in Latin in 354 AD by an unknown chronicler. He mentions among the offspring of Shem a certain 'Ziezi ex quo Vulgares'[2].

The Proto-Bulgarians as inhabitants of the lands north of the Caucasus are mentioned by the Armenian writer Moses Horenaci. In his History of Armenia, written in the 80's of the 5-th century AD, [3] he speaks about two migrations of Proto-Bulgarians from Caucasus to Armenia. The first of them is mentioned in connection with the campaign of the Armenian ruler Vaharshak to the lands, 'named Basen by the ancients... and which were afterwards populated by immigrants of the vh'ndur Bulgar Vund, after whose name they (the lands) were named Vanand.' The second migration, according to Moses Horenaci took place during the time of the Armenian ruler Arshak, when 'great disturbances occurred in the range of the great Caucasus mountain, in the land of the Bulgars, many of whom migrated and came to our lands and settled south of Kokh.' The migrations are dated to the second half of the 4-th century AD. It appears that the 'disturbances' which caused the Proto-Bulgarians to migrate to the south are linked to the expansion of the Huns in the East-European steppes. The authenticity of the settlement of groups of Proto-Bulgarians in Armenia is confirmed by some toponymic data: a river flowing though the Mungan steppe in South Azerbaijan and emptying in the lake Mahmud-chala, is called Bolgaru-chaj (Bulgarian river), one of the tributaries of the river Arax near the town of Kars (the land Vanand) is even now called Vanand-chaj (river of Vanand).

With the Hunnish invasions, the documentary evidence about Proto-Bulgarians cease for a while. They appear again in the beginning of the 5-th, this time from the north-western slopes of the Carpathians. According to the 8-th century Langobardian chronicler Paulus Diaconus [4] the Bulgars dwelling in those places attacked their neighbours the Langobards, killed their king Algemund and captured his daughter. After that they had two more battles, first of which they won and the second lost. Apparently, the Proto-Bulgarians reached Central Europe together with the Huns. It is well known that in their
drive to the West the Huns carried away many of the subdued by them peoples. After the defeat of the Hunnish tribal union, the Proto-Bulgarians, as well as the remains of the Huns, returned back and settled near the borders of Byzantium, entering in active, both friendly and hostile, contacts with it. The first record of Proto-Bulgarians from the Balkans mentions the help they have rendered to the Byzantine emperor Zeno against the Goths of Theodoric, the son of Triarius [5].

In 486 and 488 they fought again against the Goths, first as allies of Byzantium [6], and later - as allies of the Gepids [7]. At those times the Proto-Bulgarians had been regarded as a brave and invincible in war people [8].

Later, since the 90's of the 5-th century, they, independently or accompanied by the Slavs, repeatedly invaded the territories of the Byzantine empire and were among its greatest enemies till the middle of the 6-th century.

Some indications about the territory, occupied by them during these centuries, are found in 'Getica' of the Gothic historian Jordanes[9]. According to Jordanes 'beyond the Akacires ... above the Pontus (Black Sea) coast are the dwellings of the Bulgars, who became famous because of the bad consequences of our sins.' Their neighbours were the Huns Alcnagiri and Saviri, and further the Hunugurs (Onogurs), who trade with sable pelts. Thus, the Proto-Bulgarians occupied the steppes to the north and north-west of the Black Sea.

In the time when north of the Black Sea, next to the Balkan territories of Byzantium, lived a significant and strong Proto-Bulgarian group (5-6 century AD), another group of the same people lived in the steppes to the east, in the north-eastern Caucasus. The 'Church history' of Zachariyah the Rhetor, compiled in Syrian language soon after the middle of the 6-th century AD [10] contains reliable data about the Proto- Bulgarians. Utilising first-hand accounts the compiler produced a list of the peoples, who had inhabited the lands north of the Derbend pass (the Caspian gates) during the first half of the 6-th century: "The land Bazgun ... extends up to the Caspian Gates and to the sea, which are in the Hunnish lands. Beyond the gates live the Burgars (Bulgars), who have their language, and are people pagan and barbarian. They have towns. And the Alans - they have five towns. ... Avnagur (Aunagur) are people,
who live in tents. Avgar, sabir, burgar, alan, kurtargar, avar, hasar, dirmar, sirurgur, bagrasir, kulas, abdel and hephtalit are thirteen peoples, who live in tents, earn their living on the meat of livestock and fish, of wild animals and by their weapons(plunder)."

The Bulgars and the Alans are mentioned twice - once as a settled populations with towns, and once more as nomads. Zachariah the Rhetor points out that the Proto-Bulgarians who have towns inhabited the lands immediately next to the Caspian gates, while the others - the steppes north of the Caucasus.

Besides the Proto-Bulgarians the sources speak about other ethnic groups who were more or less connected with the Proto-Bulgarians, and some of them later joined the Proto-Bulgarian people. Important among them are the Onogurs (Unogurs). They appear in the European chronicles in the middle of the 5-th century. According to Priscus in 463 Byzantium was visited by an embassy of Saragurs, Urogs and Onogurs, who, dislodged by the Avar's drive to the west, conquered the lands of the Akacirs and asked for a union with Byzantium [11].

Most probably the Onogurs lived in the lands east of the Proto-Bulgarians, along the northern coast of the Black Sea. According to the Syrian compilation of Zachariah the Rhetor, Avnagur-Avnagur inhabited the steppes north of Caucasus, living as nomads. However, Theophilactus Simocatta [12] informs us that they had towns - in earlier times they had built the town of Bakat. More precise about their dwellings is the 'Cosmographia' of Ravennatis Anonymi [13] who locates 'Patria Onogoria' above the Pontus near the lake of Meotida (the Sea of Azov).

Judging from some eparchial lists from the end of the 7-th or the beginning of the 8-th century, in the 7-th century there was an Onogurian episcopate in the Gothic eparchy. This attests the early spread of the Christianity among the Onogurs [14].

The Onogurs are also known to some eastern authors, but there their name is so altered that their identification is very difficult and sometimes even impossible. Most numerous are the records about the Onogurs in the Armenian sources. The earliest are in the work of Egishe, written between 458 and 464 [15]. Egishe mentions that to the north of the land Chora (the Derbend pass) lived the Huns Hajlandur(hajlandur'k). They already had a 'royal clan', that is, tribal aristocracy, and Christianity was beginning to spread among them. They maintained connections with the Kushans - in 454 a young Hajlandur at the service of the Persian ruler Yazdgird II (438-457) ran away to the Kushans, warned them about the forthcoming Persian attack and thus contributed to the victory of the Kushans. According to A.D. Gadlo the identification of the Hajlandurs with the Onogurs is confirmed by a fragment of the history of Egishe, preserved in the 10-th century Armenian author Moses Kagankatvaci, where the country of the Hajlandurs is called Aguandria (Aluandria), that is, country of the tribe Aguandur. This name resembles the ethicon auangur-avnagur by which the Syrian texts call the Onogurs.

The texts also locate north of the Caucasus the Unogundurs, a name that is very similar to that of the Onogurs. Almost all chroniclers connect the Unogundurs with the Proto-Bulgarians. For example the Byzantine patriarch Nicephorus calls the ruler of Great Bulgaria khan Kubrat "the ruler of the Unogundurs", [16] and both Theophanes the Confessor and Constantinus Porphyrogenus explicitly state that the Bulgarians, settled in the Balkans, had been called earlier Unogundurs [17], [18].

The Armenian geography, written at the end of the 7-th century and attributed to Ananj Shirakaci, also attests the Bulgarian affiliation of the Unogundurs. It says that north of the Caucasus "live the peoples Turk and Bulgar (Bulgark), who are named
after the local rivers: Kupi-bulgar, Duchi-bulkar, Oghondor(Ohontor)-blkar - the immigrants and Chdar-bolkar." [19]

The name Oghondor-blkar in the Armenian geography is a variant of the older Vh'ndur-bulgar in the History of Moses Horenaci and the both works give the Armenian form of the ethnicon transcribed in Greek as Unogundr or Unogur. Because of the similarity of the two names as well as the location of the two tribes, it is generally accepted that Unogundurs and Unogurs are two written forms of one tribe. This is confirmed by the deacon Agathius - hartophilacs of the Constantinople patriarchy and compiler of the acts of the VI-th ecumenical council in 680-681 AD, who in a rider to the council's acts from 713 AD names the Bulgars of khan Tervel "Unogurs-bulgars".

The localisation of the other three tribes in the Armenian geography is not so clear. Using the remark in the Geography that the Bulgarian tribes were named after names of rivers, the historians try to find these rivers. They are almost unanimous that Kupi-bulgar are the Proto-Bulgarians of the river Kuban, the old Kuphis. Many of them accept that Duchi-bulkar should be read as Kuchi-bulkar, pointing to the ancient name of Dniepr (Kocho) also attested in the Armenian geography. Most unclear is the location of the Chdar-bolkars - they are put in the basins of Big Rombit (Eja) or Don, in the eastern part of the Crimea or in Northern Dagestan. It is remarkable, that in all four cases the tribal name of the Bulgars is slightly different. This is an indisputable evidence of dialect differentiation in the language in the various Proto-Bulgarian tribes which had affected even their common ethnicon.

Thus, sources speak that not later than the 4-th century AD in the steppes north of Caucasus there was a considerable Proto-Bulgarian mass, in which the tribe of Unogundurs (vt'ndur) played the leading role. During the Hunnish invasions ('the great disturbances') part of the Unogundurs-bulgars were forced to cross the Caucasus and take refuge in Armenia; another group moved westwards to the shores of the Sea of Azov. After the departure of the Huns for Central Europe, a group of Unogundurs occupied the plains of maritime Dagestan and became known to Egishe under the name Hajlandurs. At the beginning of the second half of the 5-th century part of the Onogurs from the Eastern Fore-Caucasus was pushed out by the Sabirs to the west and settled at the plain at the north-eastern corner of the Black Sea. Agathius (second half of the 6-th century) informs that these Onogurs long time ago had attacked the Colkhis at the Black Sea coast, but were defeated. On this occasion the place of the battle and a fortress nearby were named Onoguris [20].

Another tribe, akin to the Proto-Bulgarians, were the Utigurs. They are mentioned only by the Byzantine historian Procopius Caesariensis and his continuators Agathias and Menander in connection with events that took place during the middle and the second half of the 6-th century. Most detailed is the record of Procopius: "Beyond the Sagins dwell many Hunnish tribes. The land is called Evlisia and barbarians populate the sea-coast and the inland up to the so called lake of Meotida and the river Tanais (Don). The people living there were called Cimmerians, and now they are called Utigurs. North of them are the populous tribes of the Antes." [21]

Thus the Utigurs have occupied the lowlands of the river Kuban. Probably it is their lord (prince) who is mentioned in the story narrated by Ioanis Malalae, Theophanes and John of Ephesus. In 528 AD (534 according to John of Ephesus) this lord, called Gord (Grod), with a large suite arrived in Constantinople. In the Byzantine capital he was baptised by emperor Justinian himself, who endowed Gord with rich presents and sent him back home with the task to protect the city of Bosporus from the neighbouring barbarians. After his return Gord, as a zealous Christian, ordered
the venerated by his people golden and silver idols to be melted down. Outraged by this action, the priests together with his brother and the army revolted and killed him [22].

Later the Byzantines at the expense of many gifts were able again to win the friendship of the Utigurs. In 551 Justinian turned the Utigurs against their relatives the Kutrigurs, whose army of 12,000 in that moment devastated the Balkan provinces of the empire. Using the absence of the main enemy’s forces, the Utigur khan Sandilkh crossed the river Don and invaded the lands of the Kutrigurs, who were badly defeated and many of their women and children - enslaved. In this war thousands of captured by the Kutrigurs Byzantines were able to return to their homes. In 558-559 again the Utigurs and Kutrigurs were at war. As a result the two tribes were weakened so much that they lost even their tribal names, according to Agathius. Still, the Utigurs continued to play some role. For example, their army, subjected to the Turcuts, took part in the taking of the Byzantine city of Bosporus.

The Kutrigurs were an akin to the Utigurs tribe. This is evident from the genealogical legend, preserved by Procopius: "In the old days many Huns, called then Cimmerians, inhabited the lands I mentioned already. They all had a single king. Once one of their kings had two sons: one called Utigur and another called Kutrigur. After their father's death they shared the power and gave their names to the subjected peoples, so that even nowadays some of them are called Utigurs and the others - Kutrigurs." This is also confirmed by the words of the Utigur khan Sandilkh [23] when he was asked by Justinian to attack the Kutrigurs: "It is neither fair nor decent to exterminate our tribesmen (the Kutrigurs), who not only speak a language, identical to ours, who are our neighbours and have the same dressing and manners of life, but who are also our relatives, even though subjected to other lords." The Kutrigurs occupied the lands west of the Sea of Azov and the river Don. In the middle of the 6-th century they had the leading role in a powerful tribal union which was able undertake massive attacks against the Balkan provinces of Byzantium, returning home with great spoils and tens of thousands of enslaved Byzantines.

The bloody internecine war between the Utigurs and Kutrigurs during the whole fifth decade of the 6-th century sapped their strength. They were relatively easy subjugated by the Avars who crossed Volga in 558. After a short stay in the East-European steppes the Avars, carrying away with them a considerable number of Kutrigurs, were forced by the Turcuts (tu-cu) to leave for Central Europe and to settle in Pannonia. An evidence for the Kutrigur's presence in Central Europe is the information of Menander that in 568 a 10,000 strong army of Kutrigurs, following orders of the Avar khan Bajan, attacked and sacked Dalmatia.

There is a great variety of opinions among the historians regarding the origin of the Utigurs and the Kutrigurs. Some of them (V. Zlatarski, V. Gjuzelev, Iv. Bozhilov) think the Utigurs and Kutrigurs represented correspondingly the eastern and the western branches of the Proto-Bulgarians, another (D. Angelov) think the Utigurs and Kutrigurs were akin but different from the Proto-Bulgarian tribes. Particularly close were the contacts between the Proto-Bulgarians and the Kutrigurs, who inhabited adjacent territories. During their combined attacks on Byzantium and their joining, first in a Proto-Bulgarian, and later - in a Kutrigurian military-tribal union, the Kutrigurs were gradually incorporated in the Proto-Bulgarian group. Since the 7-th century the tribal name of the Kutrigurs was generally substituted by the name of the Proto-Bulgarians, although they are still mentioned in few cases as 'Kotrags'. In fact, Kutrigurs and Utigurs are mentioned by very few authors and only during three decades (50s to70s) of the 6-th century. And since the end of the 6-th century the name of the Kutrigurs in Central Europe was replaced by that of the Proto-Bulgarians. For example, Theophilactus Simocatta [24] when speaking about the campaign of the Byzantine general Peter against the Slavs in 596, informs us that in the environs of the town Asimunt near the
mouth of the river Osum, there was a 1,000 strong detachment of Proto-Bulgarians, subjects of the khan of the Avars. The replacement of the name of the Kutrigurs is shown even clearer in *Fredegarius* [25] who narrates about the contest for power over the Avar khaganate, kindled between the candidates of the Avars and the Proto-Bulgarians in 631-632. This also evidences about the great number of the Proto-Bulgarians. The victory of the Avar pretender forced 9,000 Proto-Bulgarians to leave Pannonia and to find refuge in Bavaria of king Dagobert.

**References:**


[10] N.V. Pigulevskaja, Sirijskie istochniki po istorii narodov SSSR, Moscow-Leningrad, 1941, pp.3-9


Sabirs, Barsils, Belendzheris, Khazars

Another associated with the Proto-Bulgarian ethnic group were the Sabirs. Initially they had lived in Western Siberia, which was named after them. According to Priscus, in the mid-fifth century the Sabirs conquered the lands of the Onogurs, Saragurs and Urogs in the steppes around the north-western Caspian coast. Especially active they became in 6th century when they created a powerful federation of akin tribes, usually know as the "Kingdom of the Huns". They were quite populous and could organise an army of 20,000 well equipped cavalrymen. They were masters of the art of the war and could build siege machines unknown even to the Persians and the Byzantines.

Very early on the Sabirs were in close contact with the Khazars, and some eastern authors confuse them. After the defeat of their main forces by the Avars, the Khazars took the lead in the Sabir-Khazar federation. It is unknown when and what forced part of the Sabirs to move to the north, in the region of Middle Volga, among the settled there Proto-Bulgarians tribes. Their main city Suvar was later among the greatest centres of Volga Bulgaria.

Another tribe in close contacts with the Proto-Bulgarians were the Barsils. They are mentioned in the documents only in the second half of the 6th century in connection with the crossing of the East-European steppes by the Avars (pseudo-Avars). According to Theophilactus Simocatta, [26] when the Avars appeared in their lands "the barsilt (the Barsilians), the unogurs and the sabirs were struck with horror ... and honoured the new-comers with brilliant gifts." The ethicon bagrasik, included in the list of the steppe peoples north of Derbend in the Syrian compilation of Zachariah the Rhetor, most probably represents their ethnic name. More accurate data about the Barsils contains the so called New List of the Armenian geography from the 7-th
century. It narrates that in the Volga delta "there is an island, where the people of basli (the Barsils) take shelter from the bushki (bulhi - the Bulgars) and from the khazars... The island is called Black because of many basli living there together with their numerous livestock." The 'island' in question is probably the land between the river Eastern Manuch and the present Volga mouth. The region is called 'black lands' since a long time and it is even nowadays an excellent winter grazing ground for the population of Northern Caucasus. Very important is the note of the Armenian geographer that the Barsils possessed numerous livestock, that is, they were a typical nomadic people.

M.I. Artamonov [27] locates the country Bersilia in present Northern Dagestan, but his view is not supported by the available data. The archaeological material from that region points to the presence of a settled population that lived in permanent settlements and created impressive fortresses. At the same time the Armenian geography portrays the Barsils as a nomadic people even in the 7-th century. It was their remoteness from any cultural centres that they appeared so late in the documentary sources. Also, Theophanes tells us that the 'populous people of the Khazars came out from the innermost parts of Bersilia in Sarmatia Prima.' It is well known that the lower course of Volga was the eastern frontier of Asiatic Sarmatia. That is why the country Bersilia was probably located near the mouth of Volga. To the same region points the other informer about the coming of the Khazars - patriarch Nicephorus. According to him "the tribe of Khazars lived near the Sarmatians." When the Barsils left these lands they settled in the Middle Volga region and merged with the Volga Bulgars. Ibn Ruste (the beginning of the 10-th century) [28] says that they represented one of the three branches of the Volga Bulgars: "the first branch was called Bersula, the second - Esegel, and the third - Bulgar." What drove the Barsils to run away to the Volga Bulgars is implicitly mentioned by the Khazar khagan Joseph in the description of his domain (main territory) in a letter to the Jewish dignitary Hasdaj Ibn Shaprut. The domain included also the territory which most probably was the land of the Barsils. This shows that in their expansion the Khazars drove out their intermediate neighbours.

Main Proto-Bulgarian groups in Eastern Europe in VI-VII c. AD. The supposed boundary of Old Great Bulgaria is given by a dashed line.
(After D.Dimitrov, The Proto-Bulgarians north and west of the Black Sea, Varna, 1987; The map was produced using XEROX Map Viewer)

Another very important for the early medieval history of Northern Dagestan problem concerns the people, the country and the town whose name is given in the Arab sources
as Belendzher or Balandzhar. The ethicon is mentioned for first time by the Arab historian at-Tabari in connection with events from the 60s of the 6-th century [29]. First, he informs that the vassal to Iran Armenia was invaded by four peoples - abkhaz, b-ndzh-r (bandzhar), b-l-ndzh-r (balandzhar) and alan. Later, between 566 and 571, the khagan of the Turks (Turcuts) Sindzhibu (Istemi) defeated the peoples b-ndzh-r, b-l-ndzh-r and khazar, who agreed to serve him. A.V.Gadlo [30] concludes that the name "bandzh" refers to the Ogurs, and 'balandzh' is a Perso-Arabic form of the ethnicon of the Onogurs=Utigurs.

Besides the information about the people balandzhar-belendzher at-Tabari informs also that "beyond Derbend there is an entire kingdom with many towns, which are called Belendzher" [31]. According to the same author the Arab general Abdurahmen ibn Rabi'a "penetrated 200 miles into the country (Belendzher), converted many towns to the law of Mohamed and returned to Derbend". Obviously, that country extended over a large territory.

Most disputed, however, is the location of the town of the same name. Later documentary sources [32] tell us that during his campaign of 652-653 the Arab general Abdu-ar-Rahman ibn Rabi'a reached the town Belendzher which had a considerable garrison and a watch-tower. The other great Arab campaign of 721-722 under Dhzarrah also "reached the Khazar town of Belendzher. The inhabitants had tied together and positioned around the town more that 3,000 wagons." Belendzher was taken after several brave Arabs cut the ropes holding the wagons, thus eliminating the defence line. The invaders found great spoils which they shared among them. After its taking by the Arabs Belehdzher is not mentioned anymore.

The story of at-Tabari shows that Belendzher was rather a military camp, not a real town. The Arabs of Dhzarrah captured many Belendzheris, among them the family of the ruler of the town, called sahib (mihtar). He had been subordinate to the Khazars but still independent enough: Dhzarrah bribed him and he switched his allegiance to the Arabs. Other documentary sources contain indications about the ethnicity of the ruler and the population of Belendzher. For example in the Turkic copy of the history of at-Tabari, used by Kasem Beg, the name of the town is given as Bulkhar- Balkh, which could be also read as Bulkar-Balk [33]. That makes Kasem Beg to believe that there was not any town with the name Belendzher and that because of transcribers' negligence and misunderstanding that name was transferred to another town, called Bulkar-Balk [34]. The same name for the town is preserved in a local history of Derbend, compiled from older documents and local traditions [35].

The description of the campaign of the Arab general Salman in 652-653 (based on a manuscript of Ahmed-bin-Azami) mentions: "After leaving Derbend, Salman reached the Khazar town of Burgur... He continued and finally reached Bilkar, which was not a Khazar's possession, and camped with his army near that town, on rich meadows intersected by a large river." [36]

That is why several historians connect that town with the Proto-Bulgarians. The Arab missionary Ahmed ibn-Fadlan also confirms that connection, as he mentions that during his trip to the Volga Bulgars in 922 he saw a group of 5,000 Barandzhars (balandzhars) who had migrated long time ago to Volga Bulgaria [37].

According to Ibn al-Nasira, after capturing Belendzher-Bulker, Salman reached another big town, called Vabandar, which had with 40,000 houses (families?). M.I. Artamonov links the name of that town with the ethnicon of the Bulgars Unogundurs, which is given as v-n-nt-r by the Khazars (in the letter of their Khagan Joseph), as venender or nender by the Arabs, and as Unogundur-Onogur by the Byzantines. Interpreting the documentary evidence Artamonov concludes that the early medieval population of
Northern Dagestan consisted of Proto-Bulgarian tribes, so that the mentioned by several authors Kingdom of the Huns and their country should have been rather called Kingdom of the Bulgars [38]. He regards as Proto-Bulgarian also "the magnificent town of Varachan", the main centre of the Huns, located by Moses Kagantvaci north of Derbend [39].

We know details about Varachan thanks to a member of the embassy of the Albanian missionary bishop Israel, who visited the Kingdom of the Huns in a proselytising mission in 682. According to the description, preserved in the work of Moses Kagantvaci (10-th century), Varachan was different from the typical nomadic strongholds in its architectural setting. There was a central square which accommodated important assemblies, streets at whose crossings were executed some of the pagan priests. There was also a 'Royal court'. Especially interesting is the information about the religion of the inhabitants of Varachan. Next to the town there were wooden barracks and rich presents were offered to the magicians serving in these heathen shrines. Especially venerated were the sacred trees, notably a giant oak tree. Horses were sacrificed to that oak, their blood poured on its roots, while their heads and skins were hanged on its branches. Horse races and wrestling contests, fought under the beating of drums and timbales, accompanied the sacrifices. The people wore golden and silver amulets, depicting dragons. Besides the priests there were plenty of shamans - soothsayers and medicine-men healing wounds and making charms. The thunder god Kuara was especially held in reverence. Tangrikhan, called Aspandiat by the Persians, was the main deity, who helped in need and cured the ill. Animals, mainly horses were sacrificed to him. There are both Persian and Turkic characteristics in this cult of Tangrikhan-Aspandiat.

Besides towns like Varachan, the story about the bishop Israel's mission speaks of "numerous royal camps", that is - typical nomad settlements. On the order of the ruler of the "Huns" Alp-Ilitver churches were built both in the towns and in the villages.

A direct relation to the history of the Eastern Fore-Caucasus in those centuries has the late (12-th century) chronicle of the Jacobite patriarch of Antioch Michael of Syria, based on earlier sources. [40]Particularly important is the excerpt narrating about the three brothers 'Scythians', set out on a journey from the mountain Imaon (Tien-Shan) in Asia and reached the river Tanais (Don). Here one of the brothers, called Bulgarios, took 10,000 people with him, parted from his brothers and with the permission of emperor Maurice (582-602) settled in Upper and Lower Moesia and Dacia. "The other two brothers came to the country of the Alans, which is called Barsalia (Bersilia) and whose towns were build by the Romeans, as Caspij, called Torajan Gates (Derbend). The Bulgars and the Pugurs (puguraje), who had inhabited those places, were Christians in the old days. And when a foreign people started to reign over that country, they were named Khazars after the name of the older brother, who was called Khazarig (Kazarig). And that people became strong and expanded." The story comprises facts pertaining to several events of different age, all of them united around the story of the expansion of the Khazarian political power in the second half of the 7-th century. The earliest event, described in the chronicle, is the coming of the three brothers to the lowlands between the Caspian Sea and the river Tanais (Don). Here Bulgarios occupied the lands next to Tanais, and Khazarig and the unknown brother - the Alan country of Barzalia. Also, there were pre-Khazarian towns in the outlying southern parts of Barzilia. Only one of them is mentioned in the chronicle - Caspij and it is identified by most historians as Derbend, which other name is Caspian Gates. This town, built by Persia with a Byzantine assistance as a stronghold against the pressing from north steppe peoples, was well known to the Byzantines. That is why its name appeared in the chronicle. The author had only vague ideas about other towns, but still he informs us that their inhabitants were Bulgars and Pugurs. It is difficult to decipher which ethничal group is lurking under the ethnico Pugurs. Perhaps the key to the problem is the above mentioned hypothesis of B.Simeonov,
according to which the Chinese documentary sources have written down the ethnicon of the Bulgars in the form \textit{pu-ku/bu-gu} [41].

A ruler of a big group of the tribe \textit{pu-gu} was called \textit{Sofu sulifa Kenan Bain} [42]. The same title - \textit{salifan} (sulifan) - bore also the king of the town Semender, which according to Al-Masoudi in the 10-th century was the main town of the vassal to the Khazars Kingdom Dzhidzhan (the Kingdom of the Huns) [43].

The second historical event in that Syrian chronicle is the 'parting' of Bulgarios from his 'brothers'. Important here is the clear indication that on his way to the Balkans Bulgarios had to cross the river Tanais. The third event is the increasing power of the Khazars, leading to the 'departure' of Bulgarians and to the imposing of a foreign rule over the older inhabitants of the country. Only then "they (the Bulgars and the Pugurs) were named Khazars after the name of the older brother". The text unambiguously States that not the Khazars, but the Bulgars and the Pugurs were the main population of the East Fore-Caucasus, especially of the towns. The became Khazarian only when the Khazars established their political power over that region.

As the history of the Khazars closely interweaves with that of the Bulgars, it is worth to provide more info about the Khazars' past.

In Northern Caucasus they appear no earlier than the 6-th century [44]. The first unequivocal information about them is found in At-Tabari, who wrote that between 566 and 571 the Turcut ruler Sindzhibu (Istemi) subjugated the peoples bandzhar, balandzhar (belendzher) and khazar. To that time refers also the Church history of Zachariah Rhetor, where the Khazars are mentioned as a nomadic people north of Derbend. Their influence apparently increased after the Turcs (Turcuts) conquered Northern Caucasus, as the Khazars became their closest allies and assistants. The close ties between the Turcs and the Khazars are confirmed by the fact that after the collapse of the Turcic khaganate the ancient Turcic clan of the Ashinas headed the newly formed Khazarian state.

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Thus the available documentary sources provides evidence about the social and economical structure and about some peculiarities of the spiritual life of the various Proto-Bulgarian groups and tribes. They clearly show that up to the 7-th century AD, when the Unogundurs-Bulgars led by Asparuh, were forced by the Khazar expansion to leave Eastern Europe and to settle in the Lower Danube, most of the Proto-Bulgarian tribes were nomads with mobile husbandry who "\textit{dwell in tents and live on the meat of domestic animals, fish and game, and on their weapons}" [45].

The social differentiation was in progress - above the average stock-breeders there was a tribal aristocracy, appropriating the costly goods, slaves, and other spoils of the numerous military campaigns. The social and political developments of the Proto-Bulgarian society as well as some external factors contributed to the creation of military-tribal alliances, the most important of which was the military-tribal union Great Bulgaria of khan Kubrat.

The social and economical development of the various Proto-Bulgarian groups went on different pace. The Proto-Bulgarians who migrated to the near-Caspian low-lands of Dagestan started to settle down since early times. They had a permanent settlements, some of them called "towns", even in the first half of the 6-th century. The notes of mission of bishop Israel (682 AD) give us an idea about "the magnificent town of Varachan" - it had streets and squares, there worked "skilful carpenters" who made a
huge cross and decorated it with images of animals; goldsmiths manufactured golden and silver idols.

As the bishop Israel's mission showed, not later than the second half of the 7-th century the Christianity was intensely preached among the Dagestan Bulgars. After Israel's insistence "Christian churches were built in the Kingdom of the Huns". Referring to the data about the missions of the clergymen Kardost and Makar among the "Huns", Pigulevskaaja thinks that the activity of Christian missionaries in Northern Dagestan started as early as in the first half of the 6-th century [46].

Besides the new religion, the missionaries taught to the local population the techniques of massive brick building and how to grow cultivated plants. Artanomov is rather inclined to think that the activity of Kardost and Makar took place in the Western Fore-Caucasus - the lands of Gord. No matter who is right, the Proto-Bulgarian tribal societies in both Eastern and Western Fore-Caucasus were developed high enough to adopt not only the Christianity but also a number of characteristics of the cultures of the neighbouring Byzantium, Persia and Armenia.

References

[27] M.I. Artamonov, Istorija khazar, Leningrad, 1962, s. 229
[32] B.N. Zahoder, Kaspijskij svod svedenij, I, s.176
[33] M. I. Artamonov, Op.cit., p.120.
[36] Tarihi Derbend-Name, s. 131-132.
The main difficulty in utilising archaeology in the study of the Proto-Bulgarian history arises from the fact that till the beginning of the 8-th century most of them lived nomadic life, with no permanent settlements or necropolises and they had left scarce archaeological material. Furthermore, very often they had borrowed or even appropriated elements of the material culture of their more advanced settled neighbours, which impedes even more the recognition of their material remains.

Nevertheless, even at that early stage there are some features characteristic for the Proto-Bulgarians. First, the burial practices distinguish them from the neighbouring peoples and, as the results show, they was established long before their settling down. Typical to some extend are also their dwellings and pottery. And finally, despite of the very active mixing at times with other peoples, Proto-Bulgarians had preserved a certain physical characteristics, and this also helps in their archaeological recognition.

Inhumation was the most common way of burial. However, a part of the Proto-Bulgarians or most probably, some of the accompanying them to the Balkans tribes, practised cremation. The Proto-Bulgarian necropolises, investigated up to now on the territory of the former USSR, contain almost exclusively inhumations. The (usually) stretched bodies of the dead rest in rectangular, not too deep pits, most often on their backs. In the Soviet literature this type of burial is called 'yamnij' (pit graves) [1]. Very characteristic is the scarcity of the accompanying objects - one, rarely two, earthenware pots and a spot of meat. Sacrificed animals - dogs and horses, are exceptions. The first researches of the pit burials had explained their scarcity with the low social status of the buried people. But the subsequent archaeological excavations revealed that such are all of the burials in some necropolises, and that these necropolises outline clear-cut territories. Thus the pit burials represent an ethnographic characteristic of that population and reflect the religious ideas about 'the other world', where the souls of the dead have everything they need. Sometimes there is a primitive sarcophagus built of rock or thick wooden slabs, or a cover of boards or stones. Rarely there is a niche dug along one of

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39. Istorija agvan ..., s. 190-191. The Armenian geography from the 7-th century also puts Varachan/Varadzhan north of Derbend. However, its exact location is unknown at present. According to S.T.Eremjan, Moisej Kalantukijskij o posol'stve albanskiego knjaza Varaz-Trdata k hazarskomu hakanu Alp-Iltveru. - Zap. I-ta vostokovedenija SSSR, VII, M., 1939, s.134, Varachan corresponds to the modern town of Bujnaks.

40. V. Zlatarski, Izvestieto na Mihail Sirijski za preselenieto na bylgarite. - V: Izbrani proizvedenija, I., S., 1972, s.52

41. B. Simeonov, Prozhod, struktura i znachenie na imeto bylgari, s.71-73; Istochni izvori za istorijata i imeto na Asparuhovite bylgari, s.54

42. B. Simeonov, Istochni izvori..., s.55

43. M.I. Artomonov. Istorija Khazar, s.229 and 339 and the references therein.

44. M.I Artamonov, op.cit. s.116. s.128


46. M.N. Pigulevskaja, Sirijska istochnika..., s.85-86

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Pit graves, artificial skull deformation, Sarmatians, Northern Bactria

The main difficulty in utilising archaeology in the study of the Proto-Bulgarian history arises from the fact that till the beginning of the 8-th century most of them lived nomadic life, with no permanent settlements or necropolises and they had left scarce archaeological material. Furthermore, very often they had borrowed or even appropriated elements of the material culture of their more advanced settled neighbours, which impedes even more the recognition of their material remains.

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the faces of the burial pit, and the dead is laid inside it. It is Important that the pit burials followed strictly a given orientation. In some of them it is western (the dead’s head points to the west), and in others - northern. A classical example of the burial rituals of the Proto-Bulgarians in Eastern Europe is the Zlivka necropolis near the village of Ilichevki, the district of Doneck [2].

All of the buried pertain to a single anthropological type - brachio cranic europoids with small Mongoloid admixtures. Specific to the Danube Proto-Bulgarians is also the artificial deformation of the skulls, in some necropolises found in 80% of the material.

While still nomads, the Proto-Bulgarians lived in portable leather tents - ‘jurts’. When they started to settle down and to built permanent dwellings of clay and wood, these still followed the old forms and internal design, and are again called jurts. Later, under foreign influence, the oval jurts were abandoned at the expense of more comfortable quadrangular dwellings, usually semi-dugouts, while the characteristic open fire-place at the centre was preserved for much longer. Strong foreign influence is also seen in the produced ceramic articles. Specific to the Proto-Bulgarians were the earthen cauldrons with inner lugs, which are not found among the neighbouring peoples and could be used for determination of the ethnic origin of archaeological finds where such cauldrons occur [3].

Using the above specific features of the material culture of the Proto-Bulgarians, which were established in archaeological remains from the in VIII-IX c., but doubtless representing earlier beliefs and practices (especially the funeral rites), it is worth trying to trace out their (eventual) earlier occurrences. We must focus our attention on the regions of the Eastern Fore-Caucasus and the Lower Volga region. First, it is there where the documentary evidence locates the Proto-Bulgarians for first time. Almost all researches consider the influence of the Sarmatians, who had inhabited the lands of the Northern Caspian and the Lower Volga region, as the main factor shaped the Proto-Bulgarian material culture [4]. Some historians (A.P. Smirnov, V.T. Sirotenko, Al. Burmov) even claim Proto-Bulgarians to be of Sarmatian origin[5]. Also, it must be taken into account that in their later history in Eastern Europe the close cohabitation of the Proto-Bulgarians with the Alans - another Iranian-speaking group, led to the formation in the VIII-IX c. of their common Saltovo-Majack culture.

There are three stages in the development of the Sarmatian culture according to the Soviet archaeological literature - a) Early Sarmatian (IV-II c. BC); b) Middle Sarmatian (I c. BC - I c. AD); c) Late Sarmatian (II-IV c. AD). The Proto-Bulgarians appeared in these places during the Late Sarmatian period. Exactly at that time profound changes in the material culture of the Lower Volga Sarmatians occurred. Most affected were the structure of the graves and burial rites. The type of the graves was unified, and then it represented predominantly narrow pit graves with a niche dug along one of the long faces of the burial pit, and seldom - by catacombs. The orientation of the graves also changed to northern. Wide spread became the practice of artificial deformation of the skulls, in more than the half of the skulls in some places. In several necropolises, as that at Kalinovka, sprinkling of chalk on the grave’s bottom - one of the most characteristic features of the Sarmatian burials of the earlier period, ceased [6]. Simultaneously, the Sarmatian contacts with Central Asia intensified. Archaeologically detected is the introduction of Central Asian objects - weapons, luxury goods and pottery, especially red-clay polished pottery, similar to that of the Kushans. It is important that the newly adopted burial practices are characteristic for Central Asia since the end of the first millennium BC. Graves with niches and examples of artificial skull deformation are attested in a number of necropolises in Central Asia - near Tien-Shan and Pamir-Altaj [7], in the Talas valley and in Khoresm. Thus the changes in the Sarmatian culture point to a penetration and settling of Central Asian peoples.
Despite these abrupt changes, K.F. Smirnov considers the group of Alano-Aorian tribes in Lower Volga to have preserved its ethnical purity, but the work of L.G. Nechaeva [8] on the catacombs and the pit graves with niches, advanced well-grounded arguments that there are principal differences between these two types of grave structures. Only the catacombs could be considered as belonging to Alans, the burials in niches must be connected with the penetration of new ethnical groups. Examining several similar to that from Lower Volga graves with northern orientation from the lower course of the river Kuban (stanitsa Novo-Labinskja), she comments that these burials confirm the early penetration of a tribe of the Hunnish tribal union, which after the collapse of the Huns settled in Kuban and led to the formation of the Kuban Proto-Bulgarians. V.P. Shilov joins the opinion that in a Late Sarmatian time (II-IV c. AD) groups of Central Asian tribes penetrated the Lower Volga region, bringing with them the peculiarities of their burial practices [9]. It is confirmed by the anthropological studies of V.V. Ginsburg from Lower Volga - in the Late Sarmatian there was a considerable change in the racial type, evidencing a penetration of people of anthropological type characteristic for the region between the rivers Amu Darya and Sur Darya - brachyocrany, wide-spread artificial skull deformation, in some cases - weakly expressed Mongoloid features [10].

A sketch of a pit grave with a niche from the Bishkek valley, Tajikistan. (After D.Dimitrov, The Proto-Bulgarians north and west of the Black Sea, Varna, 1987, p. 63)

All this is found at the classical Proto-Bulgarian necropolis at Zlivka. Very important are also the archaeological excavations of several necropolises in the Bishkek valley in Southern Tajikistan, in the basin of the river Kafir-nigan, a right tributary of Amu-Darya. Most of the graves show striking similarities with that from Lower Volga [11]. A niche had been dug along one of the longer faces of the graves and the entrance to the niche had been carefully blocked by rock slabs. Sometimes the grave pit, which itself serves as an entrance to the niche, is completely filled with stones. In all cases there are stones above the grave pit, forming a peculiar lid, closing the grave. That double 'shutting' of the dead reveals the religious ideas trying to prevent dead man's soul from escaping the grave and harming the live, i.e. it was a kind of 'making harmless' the soul of the dead, especially widely practised among the Turkic peoples. Seldom another type of graves is found - quadrangular pits with no niches, but with a lid of stones at the top, sometimes with a primitive sarcophagus. Sometimes along the long sides of the pit there are widenings, steps, which are also very characteristic for the Volga Bulgars [12].

A sketch of a pit grave No 91 with a niche from Devnja necropolis No1, Bulgaria. (The lid of stones had been removed before drawing the sketch.) (After D.Dimitrov, The Proto-Bulgarians north and west of the Black Sea, Varna, 1987, p. 64)

Another important site is the Babashov necropolis, located on the right bank of Amu Darya, not far from the Bishkek valley. All graves are oriented to the north and usually
they are individual. The objects accompanying the dead are few - one or two earthenware pots, and little meat (almost exclusively mutton). About 50% of the skulls are artificially deformed. The buried are mesobrachiocranic europeids with slight Mongoloid features [13]. Thus the necropolises in Central Asia (Northern Bactria) have much in common with those from Lower Volga. Another very important moment is that the excavations of the Old Bulgarian necropolis No 1 near Devnja, Bulgaria found a grave (No 91), strikingly similar to these from the Amu Darya basin.

The grave is covered by stone lid, there is a niche with the dead on the western side of the northerly oriented grave. The skull is artificially deformed, the niche - tightly closed by big stones with sheep bones laying nearby [14].

The necropolises in Northern Bactria are well dated. Those in the Bishkek valley had existed from the end of II c. BC till the beginning of I c. AD, the Babashnov necropolis - from I c. BC till III c. AD [15].

A map of the Amu Darya - Caucasus region. (The map was produced using XEROX Map Viewer)

They are attributed to unidentified nomads who at the end of the II c. BC attacked the Greko-Bactrian kingdom and put an end to its existence. According to Mandel’shtam they had come from the northern or north-eastern parts of Central Asia. These necropolises ceased to function during the II-III c. AD, exactly during the time when profound transformations of the material culture and burial rites of the late Sarmatians in Lower Volga took place. This makes us conclude that during the general unrest among the nomadic peoples, which followed the rout of the empire Hu-Nu (the eastern Huns), the population maintaining these necropolises moved westwards and settled in the lands north of the Caspian Sea. There they entered in very active relations with the local Sarmatian population. If we accept the authenticity of the identification of the people bugu/pu-ku, who according to Chinese documents inhabited the basin of Amu Darya during the first centuries AD [16], then we could attribute at least part of the Late Sarmatian material remains in Lower Volga to penetrated from south-east ancestors of the Proto-Bulgarians. Subjected to an intensive process of Sarmatization, in result they became bearers of an essentially Sarmatian culture with some elements of Central Asian, especially Kushan, culture [17].

The anthropological data can be interpreted as pointing to assimilation processes between the local population and the newcomers. It seems that in the first half of the IV c. AD a heavily Sarmatized Turkic people moved to the steppes of eastern Fore-
Caucasus, where they became known as Unogundurs/Unogurs-bulgars or only Bulgars. It is quite possible that the Hajlandurs (hajlandurkh), who according to Egishe occupied the lands of Northern Dagestan, are part of the same Unogundurs. The information of the Armenian historian about the active contacts of the Hajlandurs with the Kushans is also indicative.

References:

[1]. S.A. Pletnjova, Ot kochevij k gorodam, Saltovo-Majackaja kul'tura. - Materialy i issledovaniya po arheologii SSSR, 142, 1967, s. 91-100.


[6] V.P. Shilov, Kalinovskij kurgannyj mogil’nik. - Materialy i issledovaniya po arheologii SSSR, 60, 1959, s.494. For more information on that feature of the Sarmatian burials, preserved later in the Alanian catacombs, please refer to K.F.Smirnov, Sarmatskie plemena ..., s. 102.


The invasion of the Huns in Eastern Europe in the IV c. AD (the so called ‘great disturbances’ of Moses Horenaci) had profound consequences upon the population north and north-east of the Caspian. The archaeological studies reveal that most of the monuments of the Late Sarmatian culture were destroyed and they were replaced by another culture [18]. Especially heavily affected were the Iranian-speaking Alans - one of the greatest Sarmatian tribes, characteristic by its catacomb burials. According to the documentary evidence, a large part of them offered resistance and were slain, other were scattered in various parts of the steppes and in the foothills of Northern Caucasus [19]. Since V c. AD they started to settle down and there appeared numerous material monuments - settlements, ruins of strongholds, and necropolises. The Hunnish invasion affected also the situated in the Fore-Caucasus ‘Land of the Bulgars’ of the Unogundurs-bulgars. Some of them were forced to move south to Armenia, other moved to the west or to the south-east. Perhaps the few graves near stanitsa Novo-Labinskaja are their earliest material remains in the lands east of the Sea of Azov.

The chronicle of Zachariah Ritor points us the earliest places where the Proto-Bulgarians started to settled down - the plains of northern Dagestan, north of the Derbend pass. Indeed, exactly in that part of maritime Dagestan, in the valley of the river Sulak near the village of Verhnij Chirjurt, was found a necropolis bearing the characteristic features of Proto-Bulgarian burial monuments. The necropolis of Chirjurt (necropolis No 1) was excavated by the Dagestani archaeologists as early as in 1957-69 but nothing was published yet except one preliminary report [20].

70 of the totally investigated 101 graves are catacombs, 30 are pit burials and 3 - burials in niches. The catacombs are isolated in the northern part of the necropolis and, generally, they exhibit the characteristics of Alanian catacombs from foothills of Northern Caucasus and in the upper courses of Don and Severski Donec. Sometimes they contain more that one person (in one catacomb - up to 7). However, there are some deviations from the typical Alanian style - the dominant northern orientation; the isolation of the burial chambers from the burial corridor (dromos) by rock slabs (in some cases the entire dromos is filled with stones); the scarcity of the material remains, especially of pottery [21].

The pit and niche graves group in the southern part of the Chirjurt necropolis and according to the excavators most of them had been destroyed before the start of the excavations. Single stretched skeletons, in some cases with crossed legs (obviously tied together) are placed in shallow and narrow quadrangular pits with very few, if any, material remains.

Next to the village of Verhnij Chirjurt there are 3 more necropolises, contemporary to n. No 1. Necropolises No 2 and No 3 are generally similar to n. No 1, although show a somewhat higher portion of niche burials. Necropolis No 4 is notable for its larger and richer in material remains catacombs, covered by mounds.
Only necropolis No 1 was anthropologically studied up to now. Unfortunately, the skeletons were not identified and now there are no data which skeletons come from the catacombs and which from the pit graves. Generally, most of the skull are brachiocranic, with slightly Mongoloid features, some artificially deformed. There are also dolichocranes.

Necropolis No 1 is dated reliably to the VII-VIII centuries AD by 3 golden coins of emperor Iraklius (610-641 AD), the are more 5 golden coins of Maurice (582-602) and of Iraklius in n. No 4. Most researches assign the catacombs to Alanian, and the pit graves - the Bulgar-Sabir groups, settled in Dagestan after the Hunnish invasions [22].

M.G. Magomedov [23], however, questions the Alan identity of the catacomb burials. First, neither the stable northern orientation, nor the filling of the dromos, nor the placing of only a single person in each catacomb is characteristic for the Alans. Secondly, the material remains, especially the weapons (slightly curved sabres, chain armours, composite bows) are very similar to that of the nomadic population of Central Asia, Siberia and Lower Volga. Furthermore, the anthropological type of necropolis No 1 is also not Alanian. Utilising the documentary evidence from VII-VIII c. AD speaking about the presence in Northern Dagestan of (later arrived) Khazars, and Bulgars-Barsils and Sabirs, Magomedov attributes to the later the pit and most of the catacomb burials, and to the Khazar aristocracy - the rich tumuli catacombs of necropolis No 4. Still, the presence of family catacombs, the sprinkling of coal on the floor and especially the dolicochrany of some skulls, speaks about the Alanian character of at least some of the catacombs of the Chirjurt necropolis.

Pit burials are predominant also in the large necropolis of the Bautugaj ruins of stronghold, on the left bank of river Sulak. These data confirm the documentary evidence about the presence of a significant Proto-Bulgarian population in Northern Dagestan in VI-VII c. AD. But the newcomers did not settle down in empty lands. The burial grounds of the older local population, for example the rock tombs, continued to function, although objects of the new nomadic culture as well as artificially deformed skulls, began to appear in them as well. The active relations between the old and new population can be traced even clearer by the archaeological investigations of the permanent settlements in Dagestan, especially the settlements and the ruins of strongholds between the rivers Terek and Sulak.

The Andrejaul gorodishte (‘ruins of stronghold, of town’) is located 2 km to the north of the village of Andrejaul, the district of Hasavjurt, on the 50 m high steep bank of the river Ak Tash (White Stone) in the transitional zone between the Caspian coast and the foothills of NE Caucasus [24]. It is 700 m long and 450 m wide, fortified by massive 8-10 ms high earth ramparts, and 30 m wide, 6-7 m deep ditches. The soil beneath the ramparts had been removed and replaced by pure clay in order to prevent ramparts erosion. The highest, inaccessible inner part is isolated by additional fortifications and forms a citadel (150x60m), allocated most probably for the upper stratum of the society. On the other bank of the river there is an extensive (1km x 0.5 km) unfortified settlement. Only a small part of the gorodishte was investigated up to now, but the results reveal much of its history. The cultural layer in the central part is more than 3 m thick, with 3 main horizons separated by signs of fires - an evidence of repeated destructions. The life in the settlement started in II-II c. AD and came to an end as a result of the Khazar-Arab wars in VIII c. AD.

Both the gorodishte and the unfortified village were inhabited by a settled population, whose main occupation was agriculture and stock-breeding. Along the river Ak Tash there were discovered VII-VIII c. irrigation channels, speaking about the intensive agriculture practised even at those early times. The investigator L.B. Gmirja [25] describes three main periods of development: 1) early - “Sarmatian” (I-III c.
Numerous wheel-turned pottery as well as 20 two-storied pottery single-type ovens, grouped in three workshops, are found. The temperature achieved within them was high enough in order to glaze the walls and the vaults of the ovens. The pottery of Andrejaul and other centres between the rivers Terek and Sulak is described as the earliest example of the Saltovo-Majack pottery type. There were also forge shops judging by the great quantities of iron slag. Thus the Andrejaul gorodishte was not a mere military stronghold but an important centre of production, but despite its imposing proportions and strong fortifications, not even a single massive building was discovered within it. Both in the citadel and in the town itself the dwellings are single-room, oval, with walls of thick clay putty laid on a light wooden frame, and with an open fire-place in the middle of the room. Such dwelling are also called jurts by the archaeologists. The inadequate knowledge of the building techniques reveals the steppe origin of the inhabiting people. This type of dwellings is also characteristic for the steppe (Proto-Bulgarian) variant of the Saltovo-Majack culture. According to the Dagestani archaeologists D.M. Ataev and M.G. Magomedov [26] the Andrejaul gorodishte may be identified as the town Vabandar, which according to the Arab writer Ibn as-Asir numbered 40,000 houses (families?) and was taken by the Arabs of general Dzharrah in 722 AD.

25 km to the east of Andrejaul are situated the ruins of the largest stronghold in the Terek-Sulak region - the Chirjurt gorodishte, which necropolises were described already. It was also inhabited for a long period of time and has a 3 m thick cultural layer. The fortifications are built of stone and are up to 6 m thick and 10 m high. Together with the nearby Sigitmin gorodishte, and the Bautugaj gorodishte and the fortress Isti-Su on the left bank of Sulak, they formed a strong line of defence, blocking completely the way from the Caspian plain to the Sulak valley. The building techniques applied in Chirjurt gorodishte are far more advanced when compared to these at Andrejaul. Most of the walls are built of stones joined by clayey solution, using the specific Caucasian tilling (panzer) technique. The 6 m thick walls consist of two walls, the space between which is filled by coarse stones, clay and earth. Along the walls and perpendicular to them are built special anti-seismic belts. Here, on the territory of necropolis No 4 were found two small stone churches without roofs, similar in type to the early-Christian buildings south of Caucasus and in the Near East [27].

The most common type of dwellings are small jurts, similar to those at Andrejaul. Dwellings of two and more rooms on stone foundations also appear, but again in middle there is the typical for the nomads open fire-place. The stone foundations of the more elaborately constructed buildings at Chirjurt, Sigitmin and Miatlin are built in the specific Caucasian ‘imbrication’ (‘pine’) technique - the rock slabs are laid slantwise and resemble fishbone (‘pine tree’). Thus the influence of that traditional, survived even nowadays, Caucasian building technique is quite evident. A few skilfully made stone crosses from two stone churches point to the existence of masters stone-cutters. The Chirjurt gorodishte may be identified with the mentioned in the chronicle of at-Tabari town Belendzher, also known as Bulkhar-Balkh in the Turkic copy of the work of at-Tabari.

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2 km to the south of Chirjurt is the Sigitmin gorodishte in whose northern end there is a 10-15 high rock escarpment. On its smooth surface, 4 m above the ground are scratched several graffiti of horses and a horseman, nearly identical to the graffiti on rock slabs, pottery and metal objects from many Proto-Bulgarian sites from the steppes of South Russia and from Danube Bulgaria [28].
The Sigitmin graffiti are drawn on a vertical rock surface, as is the Madara rock bas-relief in north-eastern Bulgaria. Similar graffiti were also found on rock slabs from the Derbend fortress. Especially these from the lower slabs of the eastern barrier wall are absolutely identical to those found on rock slabs from the Majack gorodishte, from Pliska and Preslav, and on bricks and tiles from Sarkel and Pliska [29].

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The archaeological finds point out that during the V-VIII c. an original culture developed in northern Dagestan. It was greatly influenced by the Late Sarmatian cultures and differed significantly from that of the mountainous southern Dagestan. The bearers of that culture came from the northern steppes and entered in active relations with the local population. As a result of the intensified political and cultural contacts with the countries south of Caucasus as well as with Byzantium and Persia, the primitive earthen military structures were replaced by solid stone fortresses. The development of the crafts transformed the strongholds into centres of production, that is - ‘towns’. The inner fortresses - the citadels, speak about the social stratification of the society. In many aspects that original, Sarmatian in essence culture resembled the urban culture of the peoples south of Caucasus, and is regarded by most researches as the earliest manifestation of the Saltovo-Majack culture. During the Arab military campaigns of the first half of VIII c. many of the settlements were destroyed and many people perished or were enslaved. The survived Proto-Bulgarian and Alanian population had to move westward to their still nomadic brethren occupying the steppes near Don and the Sea of Azov, bringing with them part of their cultural traditions. The data are still too scarce to conclude that the Saltovo-Majack culture was created here, in Northern Dagestan, and only here, but it cannot be denied that the steppe population developed a comparatively advanced culture in this part of Dagestan, later known in the Arab sources as ‘the Country Belendzher’.

References:


Documentary sources attest that at the end of the IV c. - V c. AD a part of the Unogunds-bulgars (vh’dur-bulgar), previously inhabiting the region of the eastern Fore-Caucasus known as 'Land of the Bulgars’, moved westward and occupied the low lands of the river Kuban along the north-eastern Black Sea coast and the eastern coast of the Sea of Azov (Meotida). The V-VI century authors located there the Unogurs, and Procopius and his successors in the mid-VI c. - the Utigurs. Contrary to the Dagestan Bulgars, who started to settle down comparatively early, their compatriots in the eastern Meotida continued the life of nomads till VII c., which makes more difficult the recovery of their material remains.

In 1947 a necropolis near stanitsa Novo-Labinskaja in the middle course of Kuban was investigated. The graves exhibit many details characteristic for the Dagestan Bulgars - narrow, oriented to the north pits, with virtually no artefacts (which make difficult a more exact dating), and artificial skull deformation in some cases. The investigator Nechaeva [1] attributed this uncharacteristic for the earlier inhabitants of that region necropolis to penetrated in IV-V c. from the east nomadic tribes, which later formed to the Kuban Proto-Bulgarians.

Another necropolis which, on the basis of the anthropological data and the ways of burial, can be attributed to the Proto-Bulgarians is that near the resort village of Borissovo, ten kilometres to the north of the town of Gelendzhik. A half of the 135 graves contain inhumations, the rest - cremations, the two types being separated in different parts of the common necropolis. Very characteristic is that the body remains were put in cameras built of rock slabs. The northern orientation is predominant, all burials are individual, contrary to the collective Alan burials, and are relatively rich in objects accompanying the dead - dress accessories, pottery, sometimes weapons (axes, swords, arrows, etc.).

The excavator V.V. Sahanev [2] dated the Borissovo necropolis to the VI-VIII c. while the modern investigators accept its existence till the beginning of the IX c. M.I. Artamonov attributes the Borissovo necropolises to the Goths-tetraksites who were neighbours of the Utigurs, but it is well known that those Goths were Christians since the IV-V c. and consequently that pagan necropolis could not be their work. During the early stages of functioning of the necropolis the graves with inhumations were predominant, while later the share of the cremations apparently increased [3].

The inhumation burials with their primitive sarcophagus-like cameras of rock slabs and the accompanying the dead objects (amphora-like pottery, belt ornaments) show great similarities with a numbers of pagan necropolises from the Lower Danube, especially from the eastern part of north-eastern Bulgaria and Dobrudzha [4]. Other similar to the above are the Pashkovski necropolis near the city of Krasnodar and the necropolis at the river Djursju, near the city of Novorossijsk.
As it was already mentioned, the nomadic life of the Proto-Bulgarians left scarce material remains, but thanks to the long and patient work of Pletnjova [5], we have some idea about their life and social structure. The archaeological investigation of great areas along the eastern and western coast of the Sea of Azov and the lower Don basin revealed that the earliest traces of the Proto-Bulgarians (pottery fragments, bones of domestic animals) are confined to a narrow (50-300 metres wide) strip of land along these basins. The finds are very scattered, sometimes 3-5 pieces of pottery or bone per one kilometre. No cultural layer could be found, pointing to the mobile character of the nomadic camps, founded on a different place each spring after the migration of the flocks. 70% of the pottery fragments represent amphorae, speaking about active Proto-Bulgarian contacts with Crimea and Byzantium since the VI c. The amphora fragments are also the best tool to date the phases in the development of the Proto-Bulgarian society - from a nomadic life to a settling down in permanent dwellings. With the time some camps were transformed in seasonal, and later - in permanent dwellings. These seasonal camps (kureni) were quite large - 1.5 km x 0.2-0.3 km and were inhabited by several hundred families.

Later, since the VII c. on, the camps were reduced in size to accommodate only 20-30 families, reflecting the social and economical changes - the differentiation of enriched families who, together with their poor relatives, parted from the kureni to form smaller auli. The economical organisation of auli, as well as additional factors (the Khazar expansion, the Arab-Khazar wars), contributed to a further impoverishment of a significant part of the Proto-Bulgarian population. The deprived of their cattle nomads had to look for new means of support - agriculture and crafts, and to settle down more or less permanently. Thus in the VIII-IX c. some of these small auli were transformed in permanent villages. Another factor facilitating that process was the Proto-Bulgarian conquest of several urban centres as Phanagoria and Kepi as early as the first half of the VI c. [6]. Byzantine amphorae are always found, even in the most remote mobile camps. Favourable for the creation of permanent villages conditions appeared at the end of the VI c. and in the first half of the VII c. when the Azov Proto-Bulgarians under the leadership of Khan Kubrat shaked off the yoke of the Turcuts and created the military tribal union Great Bulgaria [7].

It was quite probable that they had utilised some of the conquered antique centres on the coast. After the WWII Soviet historians, using the documentary sources and accepting the proposition of the prominent Russian armenist Patkanov that Khan Kubrat was buried in Phanagoria, advanced the hypothesis that this city, situated on the Taman peninsula on the coast of the Straits of Bosporus, was the capital of Great Bulgaria [8]. The subsequent archaeological excavations indeed revealed that at the end of the IV c. the flourishing by then city was destroyed by the Huns. In V-VI c. its population left virtually no traces, and Phanagoria was revived back to life only in the second half or even at the end of VII c, that is, after the break up of Great Bulgaria and the conquest of the eastern Azov lands by the Khazars [9]. At the end of the VII c. Phanagoria was one of the most important administrative and military centres of the Khazar khanate, which during the years 698-704 gave refuge to the dethroned Byzantine emperor Justinian II.

The fact that up to now in Phanagoria no unequivocalProto-Bulgarian artefacts were found makes Pletnjova think the Proto-Bulgarians did not ‘master’ the city, but rather used it as an intermediate for their commercial contacts with Byzantium and the cities in Crimea.

Similar to that of Phanagoria was the fate of the other important urban centre on the Taman peninsula - the Taman gorodishte (the antique Hermonasa, the medieval Tamatarkha-Tmutorokan). In its thin V-VI c. cultural layer there are no Proto-Bulgarian artefacts. Only during the VII c. hand-made pottery characteristic for the Proto-Bulgarian camps along the Sea of Azov and the lower Don, started to appear, and it evidences the VII-VIII c. significant influx of Proto-Bulgarians [10].
Thus in the VI-VII c. the Proto-Bulgarian population east of Azov generally preserved its nomadic way of life and primitive material culture. Their contacts with the Black Sea cultural centres were reduced mainly to the acquiring of the necessary agricultural and craft products. Quite probable is, however, the early settling down of some Proto-Bulgarian, especially along the Black Sea coast. To such groups probably belong at least part of the graves with inhumations at Borissovo, at the river Djursju, at the Artuganov, Pashkov and Jasenopoljanskij necropolises. These of them which were studied anthropologically, contain artificially deformed skulls.

The necropolises with northern orientations of the graves (at Novolabinka, Artuganovi, Borissovi) are similar to Proto-Bulgarian necropolises of Northern Dagestan and confirm the ethnic unity of the population in the eastern and western fore-Caucasus (Unogundurs-bulgars). At the same time, necropolises with the same burial artefacts and the characteristic artificial skull deformation, but with western orientation of the graves (at Pashkov, Jasenovopoljanov) have to be attributed to another Proto-Bulgarian tribe, most probably to the mentioned in the Armenian geography Kupi-Bulgars.

References:


Kutrigurs, Severski Doneck, Zlivka necropolis, Sarkel

The documentary sources indicate that the steppe regions west of the river Don, along the northern coast of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, were populated in the VI-VII c.
AD by the Bulgars-Kutrigurs. They were akin to the Proto-Bulgarians of the eastern Azov and lived under similar social and economic conditions. The information of Procopius and Agathius reveal that they were nomads, to whom the wars and the plunder were the main way of acquiring of luxury goods and agricultural goods. However, since the mid-VI c., under favourite conditions, they tended to to settle down. Indicative is the fact that after being defeated by the Utigurs, 2000 Kutrigurs, led by Sinion, settled in Thracia as Byzantine subjects during the reign of emperor Justunian [1].

Because of their nomadic way of life, there are no visible traces left from the Kutrigurs. Pletnjova's investigations along the northern coast of the Taganrog bay show a picture, similar to that from the eastern Azov - temporary camps with few artefacts, concentrated around the steppe rivers' mouths [2]. There are no necropolises found from that period, but from the later period - VIII-IX c., there are more than 20 necropolises and isolated graves [3].

Unfortunately, the data for the Proto-Bulgarian necropolises are incomplete, for most of them we have only brief messages. The 'classical' Proto-Bulgarian necropolis at Zlivka, however, reveals the main features of these complexes. The Zlivka necropolis is situated at the middle course of the river Severski Doneck, near the village of Ilichevskya. The burials are in shallow pits (0.6-1.0 m), with simple vertical faces and no signs of niches, step-like widenings or covers of any kind. The dead were laid directly at/on the ground. All graves are single, of western-eastern orientation (the head points to the west). The accompanying objects are few - one or two pots and animal bones. Weaponry and instruments of productions are not present at all. The buried were brahiochranic with barely detected Mongoloid signs [4].

These features are characteristic for almost all necropolises in the region, where the western orientation, the general scarcity of the burial objects and the brachiochranic anthropological type predominate. There are some deviations in the way of burial, for example, in several graves from the pit necropolis at Sarkel, and in one burial in the catacomb necropolis at Dmitrievka the pit is circular in shape. In isolated cases in the same two necropolises there are niches. And contrary to the predominant western orientation of the common pit burials, these with niches are south-north oriented (the head points to the south). The orientation is also unstable in the late burials in necropolises found next to large settlements, such as the Semikarakorskoe gorodishte and the fortress of Sarkel.

Another peculiarity is the presence of primitive sarcophaguses - rock slabs along the pit faces. They are especially common for the necropolis of the Rigin gorodishte, near the town of Kamensk-Shahtinsk on the lower course of Severski Doneck. Similar burial structures are characteristic for the Proto-Bulgarian necropolises of Crimea [5]. This fact made some researches suggest that that feature attests a migration from Crimea to the region of Severski Doneck and Lower Don rivers [6], but their proposition cannot be accepted, because some necropolises, such as the Rigin necropolis, are older than the Crimean ones and furthermore - such constructions are widely spread. In some cases the rock slabs are substituted by wooden planks, or a wooden trough, covered by a wooden plank. The function of all these constructions is the same - the close the dead, to isolate him from the living. The niches (the necropolis at Zholtoe) serve the same purpose.

The idea of confining the dead or rather, his spirit, within the grave and to prevent him from harming the living people, is implemented in various ways: binding the legs (Volokonovski and Dronovka necropolises), pressing down the body with stones (Zholtoe, Dronovka necropolises), ritual amputation of the feet (Majack gorodishte necropolis).
The archaeological data show that in the steppe regions north of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov in the VI-VII c. were occupied by a homogeneous ethnical group. Some necropolises, indeed, show deviations from the 'classical' Zlivka type of burial, but it must be stressed that these cases come from comparatively late finds, and that at least some of them reflect the sizeable displacements of Proto-Bulgarian tribal groups after the Khazarian invasion and the Khazaro-Arab wars of the second half of the VII c. and the first half of the VIII c. The results of these displacements are most clearly seen in the border regions between the different Proto-Bulgarian groups. The necropolis of such a large centre as Sarkel shows significant deviation in the burials, affecting even the orientation. It is both western and northern [7]. Northern orientation is also found in other places along the eastern bank of the Don river (Artuganov necropolis, Semikarakorskoe gorodishte, at the mouth of the river Manuch).

Generally, the anthropological type and burial practices of the population north of the Black Sea were similar to that of the Unogundur-Bulgars from the eastern Azov. The main difference is in the orientation of the graves - northern for the Unogundurs and western for the Proto-Bulgarians north of the Black Sea. Besides that, the artificial skull deformation was widely spread among the Unogundurs but was virtually unknown to the Proto-Bulgarians north of Meotida. The border between these two Proto-Bulgarian groups was the Sea of Azov and the Lower Don. According to Procopius, it was exactly Azov and Don, which in the mid-VI c. separated the Kutrigurs from the akin to them Utigurs. Thus the archaeological evidence confirms the documentary one.

References:


[2] S.A. Pletnjova. Ot kochevij k gorodam, s. 16-18; Nomadski poselishta prez VII-IX b. ..., s. 3-5.


"Old Great Bulgaria"

In the VI c. the northern and the eastern coast of the Sea of Azov was occupied by two large Proto-Bulgarian groups, still living nomadic life under the tribal system. The lower course of the river Don served as a boundary between them. The campaigns for plunder from the first half of the VI c. contributed to a further social differentiation in the society and to a strengthening of the economical and political power of the tribal aristocracy. The letter of the Utigur leader Sandilkh to emperor Justinian reveals that the nomads were already seeking to settle down and to use the advantages of the settled life [1]. The mid-VI c. evidences a process of consolidation of the various Proto-Bulgarian and akin to
them groups and the creation of larger formations such as the Kutrigur and Utigur confederations. But the process of unification did not proceed further, on contrary - there were bloody wars between the two confederations. Weakened, the Kutrigurs and, partly, the Utigurs were conquered by the Avars in 558 AD, and in 576 AD the Utigurs fell under the sway of the Turcuts. The foreign yoke provoked a liberation movement, headed by the leader of the Unogundurs-Bulgars khan Kubrat. The successful end of the struggle led to the creation of a tribal union, known to the medieval authors as ‘Great Bulgaria’.

The documentary data about Great Bulgaria are very scarce and contradictory, giving rise to debates, continuing and nowadays. The eminent Bulgarian historian V. Zlatarski, using the data of the Old Bulgarian 'List of the Bulgarian Khans', dated Kubrat’s ascension to power to 584 AD [2]. Indeed, in the beginning of the 80’s of the VI c. the West Turcut Khaganate was torn by a fierce internecine war which diverted Turcut’s attention from Eastern Europe and facilitated the subjugated peoples in their drive for freedom [3]. Byzantium seized the opportunity and retook the Crimean city of Bosporus (today’s Kerch), taken earlier by Turcsant. The Ugrs also threw off the Turcut domination. The Soviet scholar M. Artamonov, however, rejects such an early date for the formation of Great Bulgaria, pointing out that after the end of the civil war in 593 AD Turcuts defeated again the Ugrs and reasserted their authority over the previously conquered territories (except Bosporus) [4]. According to Artamonov, much more likely is the appearance of Great Bulgaria to have taken place in the 30’s of the VII c., when the Turcut Khaganate plunged in one even more violent civil war, stripping it forever from its European possessions. In any case, not later than 635 AD, when the Proto-Bulgarians under the Avars also got free, Great Bulgaria was already into being with khan Kubrat as its leader [5]. According to the List of the Bulgarian Khans Kurt (Kubrat) reigned for 60 years, post probably from 580-590 AD till his death in mid-VII c.

Highly debatable are the borders of Kubrat's union. The data come from the brief and often confused notes of the Byzantine chronicler Theophanes the Confessor (end of VIII c. and beginning of IX c.), complemented by his contemporary Patriarch Nicephorus and the Armenian geography from the VII c. Theophanes writes:

"It is necessary to mention the past of the Unogundurs-Bulgars and the Kotrags. In the northern parts of the Euxine (Black) Sea, in the so called Lake of Meotida flows an enormous river, called Atel (Volga), descending from the Ocean through the land of the Sarmatians. The river called Tanais (Don), which has its beginning in the Iberian gates in the Caucasus mountains, empties into it (Volga). The jointing of Atel and Tanais creates the river, called Kuphis, which runs into the Pontus, near the Necropiles (the modern Karintski bay, near the southwest coast of Crimea), near the cape called Krioproson (Sheep snout). From the above mentioned lake begins a strait-like sea, running into the Euxine Pontus thought the land of the Crimean Bosphorus (the modern Straits of Kerch). The so called fish Murzuli and other similar fish is fished for there, and along the eastern coast of that lake, around Phanagoria and the dwelling there Jews, live many peoples. From the same lake up to the Kuphis river, where the Bulgarian fish xiston is fished for, is situated the old Great Bulgaria and the so called Kotrags, who are also of the same tribe." [6].

Patriarch Nicephorus account is brief: "We must say something about the origin of the so called Huns and Bulgars and about their way of life. Around the lake of Meotida, along the Kuphis river, is situated the old Great Bulgaria and the so called Kotrags, who are of the same tribe" [7].

The Armenian geography contains two passages relevant to the position of Great Bulgaria. The first excerpt reads:
"In Sarmatia are situated the Keraunian and the Hipian mountains, where five rivers flowing into the Meotian sea have their sources. Two rivers flow out from Caucasus - Valdanis, from the mountain Krax, which (the mountain) starts in Caucasus and extends to the north-west between Meotida and Pontus. The other river - Psevhros - separates the Bosporus from the lands of the small town Nikops. Northward from this place live the peoples Turcs and Bulgars, who are named after the local rivers: Kupi-bulgar, Duchi-bulgar, Oghontor-bikar - the immigrants, and Chdar-Bolkar. These names are unknown to Ptolomeus. And the son of Hudbadr ran away from the Horse Mountains." [8]

The sources are not only brief, but confusing as well. Especially the text of Theophanes, which is the most detailed one. Recently, I. Chichurov made an attempt to trace out the territory of Great Bulgaria by a textual analysis of the information of Theophanes [10]. He divided the text of Theophanes into two parts - a geographical description of the North Black Sea lands and the Sea of Azov, and an account of the historical facts and the location of Great Bulgaria. Chichurov argued that the two parts are non-equivalent, only the latter, which is similar to the information of Nicephorus, being of historical value, while the former is a later and unnecessary inclusion of confused geographical data which can be discarded. Thus, he concluded the Great Bulgaria was limited to the lands east of the Sea of Azov up to the river Kuban.

There are, however, weak points in Chichurov's argumentation. For example, it is not explained why after stating that he will narrate the past of the Unogundurs-Bulgars and the Kotrags, Theophanes proceeds with a description of the lands they inhabit. And here he puts a particular stress on the river Kuphis, which according to him starts at the point where Atel and Tanais join each other, above the lake of Meotida, and after running northward of it, empties in the Black sea near the Necropiles. Theophanes has a clear idea about the exact location of the Necropiles. For example, in his description of the escape of Justinian II from Phanagoria to Bulgaria in 704 AD he correctly states that after passing along the lighthouse of Hersones, the escapee swam across the Necropiles and the mouths of Dnepr and Dnestr [11]. On another occasion he chronicler locates the river Kuphis next to the Necropiles. Describing the cold winter of 763 AD he remarks that the sea froze along the northern coast of the Pontus and 100 miles inland "from Zinhia to the Danube and to the river Kuphis, Dnepr, Dnestr, Necropiles." [12] Therefore, the Kuphis of Theophanes is not Kuban, but another river flowing into the Black Sea. As F. Westberg pointed out very early that the Southern Bug river was given the same name by the ancients - Hiphanis, as the river Kuban [13]. Thus Westberg located Great Bulgaria from the Sea of Azov to the river Dnestr. His argumentation was accepted by Artamonov.

The restriction of Great Bulgaria only to the lands to the east of Sea of Azov meets more difficulties as that land could hardly accommodate the (at least) three tribal groups - the Unogundurs of Batbajan and Asparuh, and the Kotrags. The numerousness of the Proto-Bulgarians is attested in the letter of the Khazaric King Joseph, according to whom the Bulgars were far more humorous than the Khazars, as numerous as the sand in the sea. Furthermore, Nicephorus mentions that in 634-635 AD Kubrat rose against the Avars and drove them away of his land [14]. The point is that the Avars could not held territories east of the Don river and the Sea of Azov, because these lands were previously a West Turcut's domain, and they were liberated after an uprising of the Unogundurs. Nicephorus' information obviously refers to the Kutrigurs, who inhabited the lands north of the Sea of Azov, from Don to Dnepr and maybe even further westwards. Since 558 AD they were under Avarian political domination, which obviously continued after the withdrawal of the main Avarian forces to Central Europe. The actions of the Proto-
Bulgarians of Kubrat were obviously directed against these remains of the Avars. After their defeat, the region north of Azov was incorporated in Great Bulgaria. As both Procopius and Agathius describe exactly the lands north of the Sea of Azov and west of the river Don as the land of the Kutrigurs, the identification of the Kotrags with the Kutrigurs is almost universally accepted. We will not dwell upon the question whether the Kutrigurs were part of the Proto-Bulgarians or an isolated, akin to them tribe.

Thus the Unogundurs-Bulgars lived east of the Azov, and the Kotrags - north, north-west of it, the latter being "of the same tribe" (οὐμοιον λοιπον). The remarks of Theophanes and Nicephorus that they were close to each other, but not identical, are confirmed by the archaeological data.

The western boundary of Great Bulgaria run along the lower course of Dnepr from its firth up to the elbow of the river. Southern boundary was the lower and middle course of Kuban and the mountains of Fore-Caucasus. The northern boundary is most uncertain, reaching probably the region of mixed forest and steppe north and north-west from the Sea of Azov. There is no consensus on its eastern limits. The Armenian geography provides the main reference saying that the son of Hubraat Haspar-Khruk run away from the Khazars from the Bulgarian (Hipian) mountain. It was Patkanov who found that the compiler of the Armenian geography used the data of the ancient geographer Ptolomeus. According to the map of Ptolomeus the Hipian mountain started from the elbow of Volga and run southwards, in the same direction as the ridge Ergeni. Consequently that ridge and the connected to it Heights of Stavropol were the eastern boundary of Great Bulgaria.

The Proto-Bulgarian group of Asparuh was the first one to face the Khazar expansion and after failing to hold out against the pressure, it had to migrate westwards. The emptied land was incorporated into the ethnic Khazarian territory and the Khazars inhabited it up to the end of the Khazarian Khaganate. Judging from the letter of king Joseph, this territory did not extend to the river Don and was not too extensive. Therefore the Asparuh's domain was located to the east of the lower Don, reaching the ridge Ergeni. The other group of Unogundurs-Bulgars which was under Batbajan did not migrate and had to pay tribute to the Khazarians. The eastern location of the Proto-Bulgarians of Asparuh is confirmed by the archaeological data. The burials in the necropolises north of the Sea of Azov are of western orientation, while those from Proto-Bulgarian necropolises south of Danube (Dobrudja) and North-Eastern Bulgaria are of northern orientation. The same northern orientation is found in eastern Fore-Caucasus and to the
east of Don. The artificial skull deformation is also characteristic for the latter territories as well as for Danube Bulgaria, but not for the lands north of Azov.

Notwithstanding its large territory, the core of Great Bulgaria were the lands along the eastern coast of the Sea of Azov and the lower and middle course of Kuban. The Unogundurs-Bulgars along the Black Sea coast were in close contacts with the Byzantium since the VI c. Joan Nicius narrates: "Kubrat, the prince of the Huns and a nephew of Organ, was baptized as a child and was educated in Constantinople in the heart of Christianity and he grew up in the emperor's court. He was a close friend of emperor Heraclius." [16] Some Soviet scholars advanced the idea that part of the Proto-Bulgarians settled down and mastered the declined antique town of Phanagoria, which became their capital. The archaeological investigations, however, did not find any massive Proto-Bulgarian influx in the town before the mid-VII c. At least till to the end of the VII c. the Unogundurs-Bulgars led the life of nomads, their tribal union did not evolve into a state. That is why soon after Kubrat's death in mid-VII c. the union, held together by the undisputed authority of its founder, broke apart. Theophanes and Nicephores speak about five sons of Kubrat. The close examination of the texts, however, reveals Great Bulgaria disintegrated into three pieces - two Unogundurian, led by Batbajan and by Asparuh, a a third, Kotragian one, led by an unknown leader, perhaps son of Kubrat as well, called Kotrag in the chronicles. According to Theophanes after Kubrat's death his sons "parted and moved apart, each of them with the people he had in his power. And the first son, called Batbajan ... remained in the lands in his forefathers. ... And after the partition ... and becoming weak in numbers, appeared the large people of the Khazars ... and occupied the whole land up to the Pontus." [17]

The account cannot be accepted, because even after the partition the sons of Kubrat would not leave their lands voluntarily. The true reasons for the 'migration' are known from other sources. The Armenian geography maintains that Asparuh ran away from the Hipian (Bulgarian) mountain, pursued by the Khazars. The coercive nature of the 'migration ' is clearly seen from the letter of the Khazarian king Joseph to Hasdai ibn Shaprut from the mid-X c.:

"We have a record that when our fathers were few in number, the Holy One blessed be He - gave them strength and power. They were able to carry on war after war with many nations who were more powerful and numerous than they. By God's help they drove them out and occupied their country. The land in which I live now was formerly occupied by v-n-nt-rs. Our ancestors, the Khazars fought with them. The v-n-nt-rs were more numerous, as numerous as the sand in the sea, but they could not withstand the Khazars. They left their country and ran away, and the Khazars pursued them and reached them at the river called Duna. Up to this very day they are located along the river Danube, close to Costandin (Constantinople)." (see the whole text of the letter at http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/khazars1.html)

The people fleeing from the Khazars, were obviously the Unogundurs-Bulgars of Asparuh. The name v-n-nt-r is a later form of the original W-n-g-d-r- or W-n-g-r- [18]. It is identical to the Armenian renderings vh’ndur (Moses Horenaci) and oghondor (Armenian geography) of the ethnicon of the Unogundurs-Bulgars. It led to the Arabian transcription of the name of the Bulgars - Venenders or Nenders[19]. It is important that king Joseph's letter does not speak about the conquest of the lands of the Bulgars, whose name was well know to the compiler (Bulgars b-lg-r), together with Khazars and Sabirs, are mentioned by Joseph among the ten sons of the mythical ancestor of the Turcs - Togarma), but only about these of the v-n-nt-rs - the Unogundurs. It confirms once again that the Proto-Bulgarians of Asparuh dwelled in the lands east of Azov.
The Khazarian expansion to the west did not halt at that point. The next blow was directed towards the Unogundurs of Batbajan, who accepted the Khazarian supremacy and became their tributaries [20]. By the end of the VII c. the Taman peninsula and a part of the Crimea also fell into Khazar hands [21]. Most obscure is the spread of their power to the lands north of Azov - the territory of the Kotrags. Utilizing the information of Theophanes and Nicephorus that Kubrat, together with his people, crossed Tanais, we can conclude at least one part of this defeated by the Khazars group left its native places and moved in a search for new lands. Most researches assume that the fleeing from the Khazars Proto-Bulgarians moved later to the Middle Volga and Kama rivers, where they founded the famous Volga Bulgaria. There are striking similarities in the way of burial between the Bolshetarkhansk necropolis at Middle Volga and the Proto-Bulgarian necropolises from the middle course of Severski Doneck (Zholtoe, Novolimarevka): western orientation of the dead, almost identical burial artefacts, around 30% of the graves have step-wise widenings [22].

The resistance the Khazars met in their conquest is evident from the rich archaeological finds - treasures along the left bank of Dnepr. The largest find comes from the village of Malaja Pereschepina, the district of Poltava [23]. It consists of golden and silver vessels, decorations, weapons, etc. and represents the largest treasury in early medieval Europe. The total weight of the golden objects is nearly 25 kg, and of the silver objects - more than 50 kg. Most of them are Byzantine and Sasanian in origin. Only some of them, such as the undecorated tall cups and most of the belt decorations reflect the art of the native population [24]. The treasure was buried in the second half of the VII c., judging from the 18 golden coins of emperor Constans II (641-668 AD). The Pereschepino treasure evidences the wealth of the VI-VII c. of the barbarian steppe princes of Eastern Europe, wealth which was acquired as spoils of war, contributions and presents. Most of the researchers attribute the Pereschepino treasure to the Proto-Bulgarians or to the Kutrigurs [25], most probably a Proto-Bulgarian (Kutrigur) prince, who had died fighting against the expansion of the Khazars and who was not able to collect back his buried possessions. We may recall the rich spoils the Kutrigurian aristocracy collected in its campaigns against Byzantium and the presents the 'Hunic' princes received from Byzantium at the beginning of the VII c.[26].

The question of the origin of the Pereschepino treasure was brought forward again recently by the Munchen archaeologist and historian Joachim Werner. He relied on the decipherment of the Greek monograms of the two golden rings from the treasury, made by W. Seibt, a philologist from Vienna. Seibt read the inscriptions as: ‘To Hovrat’ (Kоβρατου) and ‘To Hovrat the patrician’ (Kоβρατοπατριακίου), which made Werner believe that the rings as well as the whole treasure belonged to khan Kubrat. Werner stressed the fact that many of the objects have been made in Byzantium on Kubrat's request/order or they have been given as presents of emperor Heraclius, who was in friendly terms with khan Kubrat [27]. After a careful study of the details of the discovery, he concluded that the treasury comes from the grave of the founder of Great Bulgaria, khan Kubrat.

Another significant find of similar objects comes from the village of Voznesenka, which is incorporated into the town of Zaporozhie nowadays. It is a grave with cremation situated in a rectangular camp (81x51 m), fortified by earth ramparts. The burned remains of at least three people together with the artefacts have been put in two round pits, surrounded by a belt of stones. Some of the objects bear the signs of fire, while others - mainly weapons and harnesses, were put in the grave afterwards. The 40 reins found pointed to the sacrifice of at least 40 horses. Most numerous are the military equipment and horse trapping's decorations - more than 100 buckles and around 1500 golden and silver applications (1.2 kg gold and 1.7 kg silver). Most interesting are the two silver points of Byzantine military standarts, one in the form of a lion, the other in the form of an eagle and a snake, dated to the V-th century. The buried were most
probably barbarian princes (prince) died in a battle at the end of the VII or the beginning of the VIII c. Recently the Bulgarian archaeologist St. Vaklinov advanced the hypothesis that at Voznesenka was buried the founder of the Bulgarian state, khan Asparuh [28]. The hypothesis is supported by some late Bulgarian legendary sources [29] but there are no serious archaeological proofs.

A map of the Proto-Bulgarian finds on middle and lower Don river from VII-VIII c. AD
(The map was produced using XEROX Map Viewer)

The rich finds of the type 'Pereschepino' reveal the way of life and culture of the steppe inhabitants along the middle and, partly, lower Dnepr river, in the VII and the beginning of the VIII c. Besides the nomads however, that region was inhabited by less numerous settled people, who left traces too. The most important of them is the ceramic centre at Kancirka, 20 kilometres to the north of Voznesenka [30]. Most of its production bears parallels with the Alanian production from Northern Caucasus. Thus the ceramic centre was attributed to a North-Caucasian Alanian population, migrated to the Dnepr at the end of VII or the beginning of the VIII c. after the Arabian expansion. But the analysis of the material remains at Kancirka revealed it was inhabited by steppe peoples; pottery from Kancirka is found in the rich burials of type Pereschepino at Voznesenka and Kelegejskie hutori.
The centres for 'Kancirka' type pottery production (Kancirka, Mahucha) are not the only one attesting the settling down of a part of the nomadic population at middle Dnepr. Another producing centre is the Pastirskoe gorodishte, which was an important production, and perhaps also an administrative and trade centre in the right bank of Dnepr. The dwellings are semi-dugouts, dug 0.5 m deep into the ground, all of them destroyed in a fire. The unnatural pose of one skeleton found under their remains evidences that the settlement was destroyed by enemy's hands. Under the threat of the attack many inhabitants have dug their most precious possessions into the ground. The retrieved objects allow a correct reconstruction of the economical life. There are agricultural tools, forge, smelt-furnace, numerous golden articles. Most numerous is the wheel-made pottery, similar to the Saltovo type. It is almost completely analogous to that along the both banks of the lower Danube [31]. The hand-made pottery - simple pots, is characteristic to the later 'Prague-Penkovka' type.

The material culture at Pastirskoe is a result of the mixing of the cultural traditions of the Slavs, the Alans-Bulgars and the remnants of the older Chernjahovo population (i.e. the bearers of the Chernjahovo culture, which existed in Eastern Europe in the III-IV c. AD. That advanced for that time culture included tribes of Slavonic, Thracian, Germanic, Iranian, etc. origins. The Chernjahovo culture was put to an end by the Hunnic invasion of the IV c.) The semi-dugouts and the hand-made pottery are characteristic for the Slavs which made some Soviet researches attribute Pastirskoe gorodishte to the Slavs. Other researches speak about the mixed Slavo-Bulgarian population of Pastirskoe gorodishte. And Artamonov, using the documentary data and the eastern features in Pastirskoe culture, attributed it to the Kutrigurs - Proto-Bulgarians [32]. The question whether the Penkovka culture represents the mixing of coming from north Slavs with the remnants of the Chernjahovo culture, or just Slavs who had occupied the emptied lands of Middle Dnepr is highly debatable. There are other opinions that it belonged to the Antes, but it is not clear whether the Antes were a Slavonic tribe, which had assimilated the remains of the earlier Iranian population, or they were Slavicised Iranians. The early Penkovka type villages with their rectangular dwellings show that their bearers were already Slavicised in the IV c. Later, in the mid-VII c., there was an influx of steppe peoples (Alano-Bulgars) who brought with them Pastirskoe type furnaces and wheel-made pottery.

Thus since the VII c., in the time before the creation of the Bulgarian state and the formation of the Saltovo-Majack culture, part of the Proto-Bulgarians from the region of the river Dnepr have adopted some crafts, as metal-working and pottery, and have achieved a comparatively high level of craftsmanship. Important were also the close contacts between Slavs and Proto-Bulgarians in this region, leading to some equalizing of their material culture.

All researches point out that at the end of the VII c. or, more probably, at the beginning of the VIII c. the large producing centre at middle Dnepr - the Pastirskoe gorodishte was destroyed during a military operation, undoubtedly a result of the Khazarian expansion. Most probably it happened in the first decades of the VIII c., but certainly before the beginning of the 20's of the VIII c., when the Khazars were tied in a hard and continuous war with the Arabs. That blow put an end to the development of the Pastirskoe culture. Some of its traditions continued to function in a barbarised, rural form, and some of them spread far to the west and south-west.

**References**


Indicative is the story if Nicephorus of the year 619: "Some time passed and the ruler of the Hunic people, together with his notables and spear-bearers, came to Byzantion (Constantinopolis) and asked from the emperor (Heraclios) to be
baptised. The emperor gave a cordial welcome and the Roman archonts adopted the Hunic notables, and their wives - the Hunic wives. The baptised were presented with rich gifts and titles." (Nicephorus, Op. cit., p. 12).


[28] St. Vaklinov. Formirane na starobylgarskata kultura, s. 35.


[31] O.M. Prihodnjuk. Arheologichi pam'jatniki Serednego Pridniprov'ja VI-IX st. n. e. K., 1980, s. 103.


The Proto-Bulgarians and the Saltovo-Majack culture

After the rout of Great Bulgaria there were significant displacements among the Proto-Bulgarian groups. The Unogundurs of Asparuh had to retreat westwards. After unsuccessful attempts to stop the Khazars, part of Kotrags had also to migrate north-north eastwards [1]. Others moved to Crimea, near the Byzantine centres on the sea coast [2]. Nonetheless, the main body of Proto-Bulgarians stayed where they were, they acknowledged the Khazar supremacy and turned into tributaries. The sources state, that the Batbajan, the ruler of the Unogundurs, was among them [3].

Because of the fierce Khazar-Arab wars of VIII c. the sedentary population of central Fore Caucasus moved northwards and settled down in the mixed forest-steppe region along the upper courses of Don and Severski Doneck. Both documentary [4] and archaeological data [5] confirm the harsh treatment of the Caucasian population by the Arabian invaders, which caused the migration. The migrations were probably directed both to the Don steppes and forest-steppes, and to the region of middle Volga and Kama, the territory of the later Volga Bulgaria [6].

Most important, however, was the intensive process since mid-VIII c. of settling down of the yesterday's nomadic Proto-Bulgarians over the vast territory of Don, Doneck, Crimea and the lands of Azov. The explanation of this phenomenon by Pletnjova is quite convincing - the continuous wars and the increased tributes paid to the Khazars deprived the nomadic Proto-Bulgarians from their major livelihood - the cattle breeding. As a result they had to look for other means for maintenance - the crafts and the agriculture [7]. The process was facilitated by the increasing social stratification in the Proto-Bulgarian society.

In the mid-VIII c. the Khazarian tribal union developed into a state, with the establishment of permanent settlements and the development of the crafts and agriculture. In a surprisingly short period of time the vast area from Dagestan to Dnepr and from the Fore-Caucasus to the upper courses of Don and Doneck evidenced the birth of a comparatively uniform culture. It is generally accepted that the V-VII c. Sarmato-Alanian culture of Eastern and Central Fore-Caucasus provided the basis of the
Saltovo-Majack culture. But the latter culture spread to much larger territory than that inhabited by Alans. Generally, it encompassed the areas occupied by various Proto-Bulgarian tribes. That is why it is universally accepted that it was the work of both Alans and Proto-Bulgarians [8].

Proto-Bulgarians had great contribution to that culture as the same or similar to it culture is found in the other two state formations where they played an important role - Danube Bulgaria and Volga Bulgaria[9]. Ljapushkin distinguishes two variants of the Saltovo-Majack culture on the territory of the Khazar Khaganate - northern (Alanian) and southern (Proto-Bulgarian), while Pletnjova distinguishes five variants - forest-steppe (northern), Dagestanian, Don-Doneck, Crimean and Azovian [10]. She attributes the first one to the Alans, the second - to the Khazars, and the next three - to the Proto-Bulgarians. In order to obtain a clearer impression about the influence of the Saltovo-Majack culture on Danube Bulgaria, it is important to analyse its three Proto-Bulgarian variants - the Don-Doneck, the Azovian and the Crimean one.

References:

[1] Theophanes. Op. cit., p. 357: "Soon after his (Kubrat's) death his five sons parted and moved apart, each of them with the people he had in his power. And the first son, called Batbajan adhered to his fathers' will and remains in the lands in his forefathers up to the present. The second, his brother, called Kotrag, crossed Tanais (Don) and settled in the lands opposite to his first brother." The finds along the left bank of Dnepr of the type Pereschepino are evidence of the resistance of the Kotrags-Kutrigurs against the Khazars.


[3] Theophanes. Op. cit., p. 358: "And after their (of the Bulgars) splitting in five groups and becoming weak in numbers, the large people of the Khazars appeared from the innermost parts of Bersilia and occupied the whole land up to the Pontus. And the first brother Batbajan, the ruler of Bulgaria prima, became their tributary and the Khazars receive tribute even nowadays".

During the expansion of the Khazars most of the Proto-Bulgarians remained in their lands and submitted to the Khazars. The Arab invasions of the 20’s and the 30’s of the VIII c. did not influence significantly the situation either. Most severely affected were the Alans of the central Fore-Caucasus. A part of the Proto-Bulgarian population of the eastern Fore-Caucasus, from the lands between the rivers Sulak and Terek, also had to migrate to the lands of their kinsmen along Don and the Sea of Azov. It is quite possible that the Barandzhars, who were mentioned in 922 AD by ibn-Fadlan as living among the Volga Proto-Bulgarians, had been immigrants from Northern Dagestan, where they have been known to the eastern chroniclers as Belendzheris. As it might be, up to now there are no sound archaeological proofs attesting the presence of Proto-Bulgarians from Dagestan in Volga Bulgaria. It makes us conclude that at that time the Unogundur-Bulgars of the khan Batbajan still occupied the lands to the east of the Sea of Azov.

The documentary sources do not reveal the exact location of the Unogundurs of khan Batbajan, they had probably occupied the lands along the eastern coast of Azov as well as the lower course of Don. The latter is confirmed by the northerly oriented graves in Sarkel, in the Semikarakarskoe gorodishte and especially in the Artjuganski necropolis. These graves, although, might also belong to remains of the retreated to the west Unogundurs of khan Asparuh. There cannot be a definitive answer to this problem, the Armenian geography, besides the Unogundurs, mentions other, less numerous Proto-Bulgarian groups in the lands of eastern Fore-Caucasus, but the area is still poorly studied and any further delineation of the various Proto-Bulgarian groups is not possible at present.

The principal data about the Proto-Bulgarians of Azov come from the early medieval horizons of the two towns of the Taman peninsula - Phanagoria and the Tamanskoe gorodishte. The end of the VII c. and the beginning of the VIII c. evidenced the revival of Phanagoria, there was a massive influx of a new population, the streets of the town were re-planned. New buildings with stone foundations and brick or clayey walls appeared. The foundations were constructed in the new 'pine-tree' technique [1], characteristic for Caucasus (and for the Chirjurt gorodishte on the river Sulak). The town flourished in the VIII-IX c., when it became an important centre of administration and crafts. During that period the Proto-Bulgarians were its major inhabitants, as it is evident by the brachyocranic skulls of type 'Zlivki', by the pottery type and by the widely practised 'pine-tree' building technique. Phanagoria existed up to the end of the IX c. when it was destroyed by fire and abandoned, most probably after a Pecheneg invasion.
Almost identical was the picture in Tamanskoe gorodishte [2], but contrary to Phanagoria, it was revived to life and continued to exist as an important centre in the next centuries under the name Matarkha - Tamarkha - Tmutakaran.

In the scholarly literature the Kuban Bulgars are often identified with the Kupi-Bulgars of the Armenian geography [3] and are clearly distinguished from the Unogundurs-Bulgars (Oghondor = Olhontor-Blkar), the latter thought to be the Bulgars of Azov. Therefore, the Kupi-Bulgars had probably inhabited the lands south of the Unogundurs, along the lower and the middle course of Kuban up to the foothills of the central Fore-Caucasus. It seems that the Pashkovski and Jasenovopoljanski necropolises belong to the Kuban Bulgars, because of the western orientation of the graves.

To them are often attributed the frequently found in the central Fore-Caucasus ceramic cauldrons with inner lugs [4]. Kuznecov assumed that these cauldrons, found in many locations around Kislovodsk were left by Proto-Bulgarians, who settled in these abandoned by the Alans lands at the end of VII c. The idea of the penetration of proto-Bulgarians in the central Fore-Caucasus was further developed by J. Fjodorov and G. Fjodorov, who pointed that similar caudrons are also found in Karachaevo-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria [5]. Kovalevskaja, however, dated these cauldrons to the X-th c. and attributed them to later nomads - Pechenegs or Cumans [6]. Although Kovalevskaja may be right to a certain extent, her negation of the Proto-Bulgarian character of some of the cauldrons fails to explain the fact that similar cauldrons with inner lugs appeared no later than at the end of the IX c. in Danube Bulgaria - at the pottery production centre near the village of Topola, the district of Dobrich (Tolbuhin) [7]. There is no doubt that some of the fleeing from the Khazars Proto-Bulgarians from Azov settled in the suitable
for cattle-breeding lands of central Caucasus, which were emptied by its previous inhabitants - the Alans. As Proto-Bulgarian are interpreted three pit necropolises on Kabardino-Balkaria - near the aul of Zilgi, at the right bank of the river Kardan and at the hill of Keshene aly near the village of Sovietskoe (Kashkatau) in the valley of the river Cherek [8]. The graves are of western and south-western orientation. In one grave at Keshene aly the legs of the deceased were apparently bound. The way of burial and the grave artefacts in these necropolises are quite distinct from the local culture of north Caucasus and have parallels with the ‘Zlivka' type necropolises [9].

A map of the Proto-Bulgarian necropolises in Eastern Europe in the VII-IX cc.
(The map was produced using XEROX Map Viewer)

Up to now the finds from the mountain valleys of Kabardino-Balkaria are scarce and insufficient to confirm the Proto-Bulgarian presence. But there is remarkable centre of the Kuban Bulgars in the upper course of Kuban - the Humarin gorodishte. It is situated at the high right bank of Kuban near the aul Humara and at 11 km to the north of the town Karakachaevsk. The fortress guarded the approaches to the Kluhor pass, connecting the Kuban valley with Sukhumi at the Black Sea coast [10]. The gorodishte occupies a narrow and long hill surrounded by deep ravines and is linked with the high plateau by a narrow neck. The enclosed by the walls area was up to 840 m long and 480 m wide, or nearly 250 decares. Kuznecov published several runic inscriptions and symbols from Humarin in 1963 [11] and since 1974 there began systematic archaeological excavations [12]. The excavations revealed a 5-6 m thick fortified wall running at the edge of the hill, built of ashlar blocks with dimensions 0.9 x 0.4 x 0.3 m and 0.5 x 0.35 x 0.2 m, sometimes up to 1.4 x 0.3 x 0.2 m. The blocks were larger near the towers and at the lower part of the walls. These were no foundations - the walls were laid directly on the levelled ground. The facing was always of carefully cut rock blocks, the inner volume of the wall being filled with not so regular blocks. Usually the first row of ashlars was laid breadthwise, the next row - lengthwise, and so on. Clay was the main soldering agent, mortar being used only for the outer lower facing wall. There were 20 equidistant towers along the wall and the high point in the eastern end of the fortress was modelled as a citadel.

Next to a rectangular tower in the south-western end of the fortress, at the foot of the citadel there was unearthed a small, but intriguing building, built later than the fortress. It represents a rectangular single chamber, 7 m long and 6.2 m wide. Its 0.75-1.0 m thick walls consist of very elaborately cut ashar blocks. In the centre of the room there was a levelled square platform (2.5 x 2.4 m), shouldered by a double line of ashar blocks. The clayey platform bears the signs of fire and the whole building is oriented towards the summer sunrise. All points it had religious functions, it can be compared with the Zoroastrian shrines in which the altar with a burning fire occupied the central place. The described previously pagan beliefs of the population of the town of Varachan, the capital of the 'Kingdom of the Huns' illustrated the religious syncretism between the principal Turkic deity Tengri-Tangrikhan and the Iranian god of the sun Kuara. We may suppose that the worshipers of Tangrikhan had adopted the plan of the religious building as well as some elements of the fire cult of the Zoroastrians. It is confirmed by a number of archaeological finds from the political and religious centres of Danube Bulgaria. In its first capital Pliska, the residence of the Bulgarian rulers, there is a similar building - two entered one into another squares of ashlars [13]. A second, much larger building,
oriented towards the sunrise, was excavated near the Throne palace in Pliska. Its religious utilization is confirmed by the fact that after the adoption of Christianity the building was transformed into a Christian church (the so called Palace church) [14] Similar buildings are also found in Preslav [15]. Similar in plan is the pagan sanctuary at the Proto-Bulgarian religious complex of Madara, near the location Daul tash [16].

Scheme of the sanctuary of Humarin.

A feature of the Humarin gorodishte are the many runic symbols, letters and words found on the walls and other buildings. They have been written not only after but also during the process of construction of the fortress - graffiti were found embedded into the wall ashlar blocks [17], some symbols were found even under the mortar coat. Most frequent are bipods and tridents, swastikas, the letter X and H as well as the very characteristic for the Proto-Bulgarian finds along the Danube letter Y.

The Humarin gorodishte. The tower next to the gate with ashlar blocks. At the far end - the citadel of the fortress.

Even the first investigator Kuznecov pointed out that the finds of Humarin are close to those of the Saltovo-Majack culture, which belong to the Proto-Bulgarians. The pottery does not differ from the Saltovo-Majack examples from the Azov lands. The numerous runic letters and even words, as well as the specific graffiti also point to the Proto-Bulgarians. The Humarin gorodishte was dated by its pottery to the VIII-X c. [18]. The insufficient excavations and the absence of a studied necropolis do not allow to determine exactly to which Proto-Bulgarian group Humarin belonged, but the traces of an earlier Alanian settlement (IV-VII cc.) beneath the fortress show that this Proto-Bulgarian group reached the upper course of Kuban after the Khazar expansion of the VII c. and as a result of that expansion.
The Humarin gorodishte is a very important example of the Proto-Bulgarian culture. It represents the earliest occurrence of the monumental Proto-Bulgarian constructions of the quadra type technique. That technique differs sharply from the coeval and the earlier local, mainly Alanian, fortresses of the central Fore-Caucasus. The building technique was apparently borrowed from the countries to the south of the Caucasus and from the Near East, where the quadra technique was quite common. Similar to Humarin is also the fortress of Derbend, where some Proto-Bulgarian presence, even if episodical, is attested by the pottery and the characteristic graffiti of horses and riders. Indeed, there are differences between Derbend and Humarin - the quadras of Derbend are much more uniform in size and form perfectly horizontal rows, tied by mortar and with good foundations. In Humarin the size of the quadras varies, the rows are uneven, mortar is rarely used. The constructors could not even lay foundations, they had just levelled the ground without even removing the soft soil layer. That made them build the walls very thick - 5-6 m. The barbarian way of building points that the construction was a work of former nomads with no previous experience. Only the Proto-Bulgarians could be these nomads.

As early as at the end of the last century F. Miller advanced the hypothesis that the name of one of the Turkic peoples of the region - the Balkarians, has preserved the ethnicon of the ancient Bulgars [19]. His argumentation was accepted almost unanimously by the scholars, who admitted the Proto-Bulgarian contribution to the ethnogenesis of the Balkarians [20] and the akin to them Karachais, inhabiting the upper course of Kuban [21], where Humarin is situated. The archaeological and documentary data unambiguously confirm the presence of Kuban Bulgars in the valley of Kuban and in Balkaria, where they mixed with and assimilated the remains of the earlier Alanian population [22] There are, however, disagreements between the scholars who give prominence to the Proto-Bulgarian contribution [23] and those scholars, who think that the later Cumans (Kipchaks) have played the predominant role in the ethnic make up of the Balkarians and the Karachais and their language [24].

References:


[20] The modern Balkarians inhabit several mountain valleys in the central Fore-Caucasus, at the territory of Kabardnino-Balkarian ASSR. They number around 50,000 people.
Karachais inhabit the upper course of Kuban, the highest part of Caucasus next to Elbrus. According to the census of 1970, they number 112,711 people.


The Proto-Bulgarians north of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov in the VIII-IX cc.

The continuous excavations in the lands to the north of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov reveal that during the VIII-IX cc. they were inhabited by numerous population, who had created the so called Saltovo-Majack culture. Its bearers had been mainly Proto-Bulgarians and Alans. Particularly important is the fact that while the nomadic Proto-Bulgarians had left virtually no traces prior to the VIII c., in the middle of the VIII c. there appeared many permanent settlements and fortified sites. The appearance and development of the Saltovo-Majack culture were stimulated by the settlement down of the Alans and the Proto-Bulgarians and by the internal stabilization of the Khazar Khaganate. The highest concentration of Saltovo-Majack finds occurs in the lands along the rivers Don and Severski Donec, and they show many similarities with the culture of Danube Bulgaria.

It is generally assumed that the Alans of the upper courses of Don and Severski Doneck were immigrants from the Fore-Caucasus, which they were forced to leave after the Arabian expansion. Immediately after reaching their new lands they settled down. This is an evidence that they were sedentary people even before the migration. It seems that some Alans-nomads, who before that lived the same nomadic life as the Proto-Bulgarians of the north Black Sea steppes, also settled down. This increased significantly the number of settled Alans.

More complicated is the question about the origin of the Proto-Bulgarians, who occupied the lands to the south of the forest-steppe belt, along the lower Don and the middle and the lower courses of Severski Doneck. Up to now there are no reliable data about any Proto-Bulgarian migration from that region caused by the Khazar expansion other than the "movement" of a part of the Kotrags. More seriously was affected the population of the steppe belt along the left bank of lower and middle Dnepr, as evidenced by the "Pereschepino" type finds. Recently some scholars proposed that the Proto-Bulgarian population of lower Don and middle Doneck appeared there only in mid-VIII c., after the Khazar-Arabian wars. According to them great masses of Proto-Bulgarians left the Caspian steppes and the foothills of Fore-Caucasus and migrated in north-west direction. There is no doubt that the Arab campaigns cause significant displacements among the north Caucasian peoples. We mentioned the Alans already. It is quite possible that the wide steppes north of the Azov and of Crimea had accommodated some immigrants from the eastern Fore-Caucasus, but their numbers could not be great and they were quickly assimilated by the older Proto-Bulgarian populations there. Evenmore, it is assumed that the central Fore-Caucasus was occupied by immigrants from the eastern Fore-Caucasus. This would reduce further the possible influx of Proto-Bulgarians.
to lands along Don and Doneck. It is indicative, that necropolises of northern orientation, which are characteristic to the east of Don and for Northern Dagestan, do not appear in the lands west of Don. But they are found on the left bank of Don - in Artjuganovo, Sarkel and Semikarakorskoe gorodishte. These necropolises might belong to immigrants from Northern Dagestan, as evident by the vine-growing developed near the right-bank Cimljanskoe gorodishte.

The investigations of Pletnjova, complemented by several later works allow the reconstruction of the process by which the former nomads-Proto-Bulgarians were transformed into settled farmers, craftsmen and builder, who had created several impressive monuments.

It was already mentioned earlier that the earliest Proto-Bulgarians archaeological finds from lower Don are the extensive collective nomadic camps (kureni). Fragments of Crimean and Byzantine amphorae, found there are dated from the VII and even VI c. Similar is the picture from the middle course of Severski Doneck. Remains of extensive temporary nomadic camps are found in the upper courses of its small tributaries. The finds are very scarce - mainly hand-made pottery and imported amphorae, which points out that these camps had been visited only episodically [4]. Almost simultaneously another type of temporary camps appeared - camps which were situated in the protected against the cold steppe winds valleys of the rivers. Here the finds are 2-3 times more numerous and the share of wheel-made pottery is increased. Most probably the latter camps served as a winter shelters for the nomads.

During the next phase of reclaiming the land the stock-breeders founded small permanent settlements along the middle and upper courses of the small tributaries. First there appeared small temporary settlements, which were located at non-inundated terraces near the river banks. They already had clear cultural horizons, up to 0.3-0.5 m thick, and they were inhabited for much longer. The excavations at Podgaevka and Novokilimarevka show that these temporary settlements consisted of 8-10 houses, built in semicircle and forming an inner yard. The wheel-made pottery predominates. Such small camps (auli) belonged to less numerous semi-nomadic groups, created after the disintegration of the tribal structures (kureni).

The temporary settlements, which were suitable for settled life, developed into permanent ones. The latter were fundamentally different both in topography and in structure. While the temporary ones occupied the upper valleys' bottoms with abundant grazing grounds around them, the permanent settlements were situated as a rule on the high right banks of the middle and lower courses of the rivers, suitable for agriculture. In contrast to the temporary ones, they have distinctive cultural layers containing numerous artefacts. The pottery is almost exclusively wheel-made, there are also found millstones, sickles, scythes, axes, ploughshares, etc. The light transportable jurts were replaces by circular or close to circular dwellings, some of them dug in 0.4-0.5 m up to 1.0-1.5 m into the ground, thus transformed into semi-dug-outs.

The settling down of the Bulgaro-Alanian population in mid-VIII c. led also to the appearance of fortified strong-holds. The earliest ones were situated on naturally protected promontories along the river-banks, they were surrounded by earthen ramparts and encompassed relatively large areas - 40-70 decares. They were permanently occupied.

Another type fortified settlement were protected by stone walls (up to 5 metres thick), but the area encompassed was much smaller. They also occupied promontories. Often (in 5 out of 12 gorodishta) the inner most inaccessible part - the citadel, was additionally protected by another stone wall. Two of the these gorodishta - the Majackoe and the
Right-bank Cimljanskoje are very important for the study of the Saltovo-Majack and the Old Bulgarian culture.

The **Right-bank Cimljanskoje gorodishte** (see Map) is some 250 km to the north-east of the mouth of Don. The fortress occupies a triangular promontory with steep slopes and connected by a very narrow isthmus to the main plateau.

The **Scheme of the Right-bank Simljanskoje gorodishte** (according to Pletnjova).

The 4 m thick stone wall consist of an inner and outer facings, built of regular white ashlar blocks (dimensions 0.6 x 0.3 x 0.3 m), the space in between was filled with smaller stones and pebble. One row of ashlers was laid breadthwise, the next row - lengthwise, etc. The high of the walls was 4 metres, and there were 5 towers - two of them guarding the isthmus and other two - above the river Don. The inner space was inhabited, but no massive building are found. The dwellings were light jurs or semi-dug-outs. One jurt however stands out with its dimensions - 6.5x5 m. It has three rooms, interpreted by Pletnjova as a male and female part and a linking central room, and most probably it belonged to the local feudal, the ruler of the fortress.

A suitable building material is not found locally, the nearest quarries which could provide the necessary building material are some 100 km higher along Don. The white fortresses high on the steep hill must have been an impressive sight.

The excavations yielded abundant iron agricultural tools - sickles of different types, light and heavy ploughshares, scythes, etc. Very interesting are and iron vine sickles. This find in a fortress which is in the centre of one of the most important vine-growing regions in Southern Russia speaks about the early origin of the vine-growing in this region.

The inhabitants abandoned the fortress fleeing from some enemy. They buried some of their possession never to return afterwards. Today the excavations unearth these hidden 'treasures', the agricultural, fisherman's and other tools characterize the occupation of the inhabitants. Many are items of parts of the military equipment - iron arrow-heads and spare heads, reins stirrups, etc. One 'treasure' consists of part of the blacksmith's (an anvil, pliers, chisels, files), the carpenter's (axes, saws, various chisels) and goldsmith's (a smaller anvil, nippers, small hammers) equipment. The pottery is representative for the Saltovo-Majack culture, characteristic are the numerous cauldrons with inner lugs.

The fortress was built during the final quarter of the VIII-th c. Notwithstanding its defences and protected environment, it was taken by assault and destroyed by an enemy, who did not spare the population, mostly women and children. Beneath the fire-burned walls of the dwellings at many places were discovered skeletons. The end of the Right-bank Cimljanskoje gorodishte is dated by the find of some 50 Sassanid and Arab coins from the first quarter of the IX-th c. Research showed that the other settlements the vicinity, although far less protected, were not destroyed which excludes an external enemy. Pletnjova proposed that the right-bank Cimljanskoje gorodishte was destroyed
by the ruler of the neighbouring Khazar fortress of Sarkel, who would not accept an independent Proto-Bulgarian ruler in his region [5] Artamonov, however, does not share her opinion. According to him the first quarter of the IX-th c. evidenced the adoption of Judaism by the Khazars, which led to prolonged internecine wars. The Cimljjan ruler obviously took the side of the Khazar enemies and was punished accordingly. After the destruction of the right-bank Cimljanskoe gorodishte the Khazars built another fortress - Sarkel, which became their stronghold in the region.

One part of the population returned to Cimljjan after the debacle, however the fortress lost its military importance and was transformed into a casual village of fishermen. It was taken and destroyed again by the Pechenegs in the end of the IX-th or in the beginning of the X-th c.

The other ruins of particular interest, the Majackoe gorodishte (see Map) is situated at the northern edge of the steppe, near the lessos-steppe belt and it is the northernmost example of the Saltovo-Majack culture.

![Scheme of the Majackoe gorodishte.](image)

The ruins occupy a 80 m high hill - promontory on the lower inundated terrace of the river Tikhaja sosna, at its confluence with Don. The relative accessibility of the place required great volume of additional work on the fortifications - the neck of the promontory was cut off by a ditch 6 m deep and 12-13 m. wide. The rectangular fortress (100 m by 85 m) was built of regular ashlar blocks with dimensions 0.6 x 0.3 x 0.3 m, the same as in the Right-bank Cimljanskoe gorodishte). As in the other two cases the walls had no foundations, they were laid directly on the levelled ground. The blocks formed two walls, the inner space being filled with not so regular blocks and pebble. The total thickness of the walls was 6 m, somewhere up to 7 m, and the height - 6.0-6.5 m. The entrance was of the NW wall, guarded by a massive rectangular tower. An inner 42 m x 27 m rectangular fortification, contiguous to the SW wall, served as a residence for the local ruler.

To the east of the ruins there is a large catacomb necropolis. The characteristics of the burials (few artefacts, the predominance of single burials, some differences in the structure of the dromos, etc.) link them with the Proto-Bulgarian pit burials and, especially, with the Chirjurt catacombs. Another peculiarity are the numerous signs and graffiti chiselled or scratched on the limestone quadras of the fortification. Besides the drawings of horses, donkeys, deer and other animals; scenes of a fight between a horseman and a footman, etc.) there are many symbolic signs - swastikas, pentagrams, crosses, etc. as well as runic inscriptions. The drawings, the signs and the runic inscriptions are absolutely similar to those from Bulgaria and from the treasure from Nagy Saint Miklos. All this evidence made Pletnjova to attribute the Majack gorodishte to the typical Proto-Bulgarian monuments. Plausible also looks her hypothesis that Majack was built by immigrants from Cimljanskoe, who took refuge in these northern lands among the friendly Alans after their own town was destroyed by the Khazars.
Proto-Bulgarian presence was also attested in Sarkel, the principal Khazar stronghold in the area. Sarkel, now under the waters of the Cimljanskij reservoir, was built some 15 km to the east of the Right-bank Cimljansko gorodishte. The excavations [6] revealed that the Proto-Bulgarians were the main inhabitants of Sarkel during the Khazar period - the drawings, signs and the runes in Majack and Sarkel are very close, they also have counterparts on the quadras and bricks from the first Bulgarian capital of Pliska. As in Danube Bulgaria many if the signs were scratched on the walls and handles of the pottery, especially amphorae. The very name of Sarkel ("White house, White fortress") does not fit to its red wall, built of bricks. Artamonov is very convincing in saying that Sarkel, built after the destruction of the white fortress (Righ-bank Cimljansko, which was probably called 'White town, White fortress') on the other bank of the river, took the name of the opponent.

The numerous runes and symbolic signs on the bricks of Sarkel are very important having in mind the scarcity of such material in Right-bank Cimljansko. The latter was virtually destroyed in 1744, when its quadras were re-used by the military.

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Immigrants from Dagestan had obviously influenced the pottery production in the Lower Don region - the structure of the local pottery kilns is identical to that from Andrejaluskoe gorodishte. However, it was the traditions of the Alans who had the greatest influence over the development of the Proto-Bulgarian pottery.

The two built of white quadras fortresses along Don are distinctively different from the stone fortifications of the Alans as well as from the Khazar centre of Sarkel. They are unequivocally related to the Humarin ruins on Kuban and a number of fortifications in Danube Bulgaria.

It was mentioned already that the Proto-Bulgarians believed that under certain conditions a man could be possessed by an evil spirit. Consecutively, there was number of "safeguarding measures" (as evident in the burial rites). In similar terms was also explained the unnatural behaviour of mentally ill people and epileptics. In order to "drive away" the evil spirit, besides the ordinary repertoire of incantations and religious-magical procedures, there were another, more radical measures, performed by a specialized category of medicine-men. They performed trepanations of the skull, usually near the sagittal suture. A significant number of such trepanations, sometimes several on one skull, is attested among the Proto-Bulgarians of this group and especially among the Volga Bulgars [7] But the Proto-Bulgarians from Severskij Doneck went further - in the necropolis of Zholtoe, near Voroshilovgrad, were discovered two skulls with not symbolic, but medical trepanation: the skulls were bored by a silver plate, in one case the patient had a haemorrhage of the brain and in the other - a brain tumour [8].

References:

[5] S.A. Pletnjova, Ot kochevij k gorodam ..., s. 39. The Proto-Bulgarian character of the inhabitants of the fortress is confirmed by the anthropological material from the burned dwellings - it belonged to brachyochranic europeids with slight Mongoloid features - the characteristic features of the Zlivka Proto-Bulgarians.

The Proto-Bulgarians in the Crimea in the VIII-IX cc.

The Crimea and the peninsula of Kerch were also affected by the migrations of the first half and the middle of the first millennium - the destruction, accompanying the Gothic and, especially, the Hunic invasions left to the abandonment of the smaller towns and
almost all unfortified villages. Among the big towns only Chersones survived relatively intact and preserved its previous position. The town of Panticapeus, the capital of the local Kingdom of Bosporus, also survived and was renamed into Bosporus - the present Kerch. Its population and size decreased significantly, and its culture was barbarized [1]. Similar to the other survived coastal settlements, Bosporus began to supply the steppe inhabitants with artisan's goods - pottery, decorations and other luxury goods.

In the VI-th c. new steppe people started to settle down in some of the declined villages or the ruins of the abandoned towns. But this process was very slow till the mid-VII-th c. After the disintegration of Great Bulgaria and especially towards the end of the VII-th c. there was a new massive influx of nomads towards the flat country of the Crimea. The process was further intensified in the VIII-th c., when the new settlers occupied not only the plains but penetrated into the central part of Taurida and reached the NW coast of the peninsula [2]. Thus for a relatively short period of time the ethnic character of the area was significantly altered and a new culture appeared. The archaeological investigations in the last decades discovered more than 100 villages and 10 necropolises and threw new light on the ethno-cultural processes in the area [3].

Most of the settlements were unfortified which is easily explained by the political stability existing in South-Eastern Europe after the consolidation of the Khazar power. The villages were situated mainly near water, in the river valleys or on the sea coast. The inhabitants obviously were looking for the most favourite conditions for agriculture and stock-breeding. Another feature is the the new builders did not take into account the previously existing buildings. Usually new grounds were used, but even in case of overlapping, the new buildings were dug in within the older ones. The settlements were large - 200-250 decares on average and up to 1600 decares (Tau-Kipchak), but it did not mean they were populous - they consisted of several clusters of buildings some 50-200 metres apart. The researcher (Baranov) pointed out that this planning is similar to that of a number of mountainous villages in Caucasus and corresponds to the patriarchal family structure, where the head of the family occupies the central building with the other members taking the lesser buildings next ot it.

The traditional structure of the semi-dug-outs, however, could not be preserved in the climate of Crimea - the underground parts of the dwellings had to be strengthened by a stone wall. Another stone wall was erected above the ground. The builders, former nomads, without the necessary experience in masonry, could not joint the walls and rounded the corners instead. The dug-outs also became shallower - up to 0.3-0.4 m, and later the whole buildings were erected above the ground.

Under the influence of the local Crimean traditions the whole buildings started to be built of stones. But the unifying feature of all buildings of the "Saltovo-culture" Proto-Bulgarians in Crimea is the 'pine-tree' (imbrication) building technique. The researchers are unanimous that it spread in the Crimea and the neighbouring Taman peninsula only after the coming of the Proto-Bulgarians [4]. Pletnjova thinks that the 'pine-tree' technique was brought in here from the Caucasus, where it was well known in the VI-IX-th centuries. Her supposition is quite plausible, having in mind that the migration of a significant part of the population of the Northern Dagestan as a result of the Khazaro-Arab wars. It is also indicative that the 'pine-tree' technique appeared almost simultaneously in Taman and in the Crimea, which was also accompanied by a sharp increase in the number of the "Saltovo-culture" Proto-Bulgarian villages - 82 out of total number of 109 discovered Proto-Bulgarian settlements belong to the period between the second half of the VIII-th and the IX-th c.

The settlements of the later period in contrast to the previous period more often appear above the ruins of the previous towns. This increased the possibilities of contacts between the newcomers and the older population, which had preserved the traditions of
the antiquity. The cultural influence of the latter increased further when a sizeable group of Greek population from Asia Minor was resettled in southern, coastal Crimea in the second half of the VIII-th c. The semi-dug-outs were replaced by dwellings (sometimes above the ground), consisting of one or two rooms. Such two-chamber dwellings from the IX-th c. are discovered in all more or less important agricultural settlements in the Crimea and Taman - Ilurat, Bakla, Alekseevka, Planerskoe, Phanagoria, etc.

Schemes of the rectangular semi-dug-outs with rounded corners and stone wall from the Proto-Bulgarian settlements at Tau-Kipchak (1) and Geroevka (2) in the Crimea.

There were, however, differences between the Byzantine and the Saltovo two-chamber buildings. The Byzantine ones consisted of two rooms, with a door between them and fireplaces in each of the rooms, which indicated that both rooms were inhabited. The roof was covered with tiles. The Saltovo examples only one of the rooms had fireplace and the two rooms were not connected. Therefore, only one of the rooms was inhabitable while the other served economic purposes. The floor was dug a little bit and the walls were constructed of clay laid on a wooden framework, with stone foundation built in the 'pine-tree' style and a straw roof. The differences with the Byzantine buildings are also displayed in the two Proto-Bulgarian churches in Planerskoe and in Kordon-Oba. The church in Planerskoe is built of bricks arranged in the 'pine-tree' style [5]. The church in Kordon-Oba displays the same construction and the inability to joint the walls at the corners. These two churches illustrate the increased Byzantine influence and the adoption of Christianity by part of the population but also their conservatism.

The conservatism in the material culture is also displayed in the pottery, which preserved the main characteristics of the steppe variant of the Saltovo-Majack culture. An interesting development is observed in the manufacturing of roof tiles. First, in the VIII-IX-th cc. it was concentrated in the towns where the buildings were constructed in the 'pine-tree' style. Later - in the IX-X-th cc. its centre moved to the Byzantine-held Chersones. The tiles bear various embossed signs, up to 1 cm high. Most of the signs are Greek letters or combinations of letters and obviously indicated the work of certain masters or production centres. In the smaller and the older centres the signs, however, resemble runic letters, animal figures or symbols of trees, crosses, pentacles [6] and are never found in Chersones. Jakobson pointed out that these relief signs are characteristic only for the lands to the north of the Black sea and especially for the Crimea. They are not found during this period of time (VIII-X cc.) in Byzantium. In the earlier centuries (VI-VII cc.) these signs were not found in the Crimea either. According to him it is not a coincidence that the tradition of embossing such signs spread in the VIII-th and IX-th centuries, and exactly in those villages where life was resumed after the influx of the new population with noticeable signs of nomadic culture. The drawings and signs on quadras
from Crimes also much resemble those from the Proto-Bulgarian artefacts from Don and Kuban. All this points that the practice of putting signs of the roof tiles in Taurida was brought by the Proto-Bulgarians who settled there in the VIII-th c.

The necropolises, although still poorly studied, show that the pit burials in Crimea are closely related to the typical Proto-Bulgarian burials of the 'Zlivka' type. Europide brachyocranic types, rarely with Mongoloid features, predominate [7]. This anthropological type is not found in Chersones, although it is characteristic for the cave monasteries of the Crimea [8]. All collected data make the researchers conclude that in the VIII-IX-th centuries the Proto-Bulgarians, frequently mixed with the remains of the local population, were the main inhabitants not only of Eastern, but (apart from several larger towns) also of the Southern and SW Crimea [9].

At the end of the IX-th c. or in the beginning of the X-th century almost all Proto-Bulgarian settlements were destroyed and abandoned by their inhabitants [10]. The most plausible explanation is that it was caused by the invasion of the Pechenegs, who destroyed almost all Saltovo-Majck type settlements [11]. The Pecheneg invasion also affected the cave monasteries, built in the mid-VIII-th c. by immigrants from Asia Minor. The affected population had to flee, some of them found refuge in the coastal towns, while others had to leave the Crimea and to look for safer places farther in the west, where they spread many characteristics of the Crimean culture.

References:

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5. V.P. Babenchikov. Itogi issledovaniia srednevekovogo poselenija na holme Tepsen'. - V: Istojiia i arheologija srednevekovogo Kriima, M., 1958, s 147.


11. I.I. Ljapushkin. Pamjatniki saltovo-majckoj kul'turii..., s. 148
The migration of the Unogundur-Bulgars of Asparukh from the lands of Azov to the Lower Danube

The Bulgars of Asparukh occupied the easternmost part of Great Bulgaria, which disintegrated after the death of Asparukh's father khan Kubrat. Asparukh had for eastern neighbours the Khazars and thus his Bulgars were the first to face the Khazar onslaught in mid-VII-th c. Unable to resist, they had to retreat to the west.

The Byzantine chroniclers Theophanes and Nicephorus provide evidence for the settling of Asparukh in the Lower Danubian lands:

'At last the third of them (the brothers), called Asparukh, after crossing Dnepr and Dnestr rivers which are to the north of Danube, and after capturing the Oglos (Onglos), settled in the lands between it and the aforementioned rivers, because he noticed that that place was protected and difficult to attack from any side; being swampy in the front and from the other sides - surrounded by a ring of rivers, it offered great security against enemies for the weakened by the parting people.' [1].

Almost identical is the information of the patriarch Nicephorus [2]. According to him the place of refuge was called Onglos (Oglos) [3]. The story of the subsequent battle of Asparukh against the Byzantine emperor Constantine IV provide more info about the location of the Onglos:

'And the emperor Constantine, learning that a ungodly and filthy people settled in the lands beyond the Danube, in the Oglos, and that they attack and devastate the lands near the Danube, i.e. the presently held by them country, previously held by the Christians, was very upset and ordered for the departure...
of all troops to Thrace. And after arming the fleet, he set against them by land and by sea with the intention to make war with them and to chase them out. The infantry moved in battle lines towards the so called Oglos and the Danube and the fleet was ordered to anchor nearby. The Bulgars, seeing the dense and numerous lines, became desperate, fled in the aforementioned fortification and prepared themselves for defence. In the next 3-4 days nobody of them dared to show up and the Romans did not seek a battle because of the swamps. The filthy people, seeing the Roman weakness, recovered themselves and became bolder. The emperor suffered from a fit of gout and had to return to Messembria to take baths, leaving his generals to start the fighting and to engage them in a battle if they leave their fortifications. Otherwise, to put them under siege and to check their advances. The cavalry, however, spread the rumour that the emperor was deserting them, and fled on their own, without being chased by anybody. The Bulgars, seeing this, attacked and chased them and killed most of them by swords, and many were wounded. And after chasing them up to the Danube, they crossed it.'

Particularly important in the above passage is that the Onglos was a system of fortifications, which the Byzantines could not overcome despite their numerical superiority. This information significantly facilitates the localization of Onglos, which otherwise could be placed anywhere - in the south, in the north from the Danube delta or even in Wallahia.

The archaeological investigation revealed that the earliest type of Proto-Bulgarian defences in the Lower Danube region (the second half of the VII-th c. - VIII-th c.) were the earthen ramparts and ditches. The earliest ones, undoubtedly built before the year of 680 (the year of the Constantine debacle) are the Southern Bessarabian rampart and the Galac fortified camp. The total length of the north-facing Southern Bessarabian rampart is 126 km, its mean width - 31 - 41 m. Its western end is 35 km, and its eastern end - 28 km from the Danube. Immediately next to its western end is situated the fortified camp at Galac, which encompasses the land between the rivers Seret and Prut and is surrounded by water from three sides. The more vulnerable NW side was protected by a rampart and ditch with total length of 27 km, very similar in structure and dimensions (42-43 metres mean width) to the Southern Bessarabian rampart. Two more fortification are situated to the south of Danube: the Little Dobrudzhan rampart and the Nikulicel fortified camp. The Little (Southern) Dobrudzhan rampart covers the narrowest part of Dobrudzha, between the Danube and the town of Konstanca, and it is the oldest of the
three earthen ramparts in Dobrudzha. The other two - the Large earthen rampart and the Stone rampart are to the north of it and face the north, while the the Little Dobrudzhan rampart faces the south. The Nikulicel fortified camp in Northern Dobrudzha was protected by an intricate system of earthen ramparts, it encompassed an area of some 48 km2 and could serve as an excellent refuge for a numerous population.

All these data show that an identical in structure system of defences was built on the both sides of the Danube. Both in the south and in the north there was a fortified camp and it obstructs the equivocal location of the Onglos, used as a refuge by the Bulgars of Asparukh. Most popular is its identification with that part of Southern Bessarabia, which is surrounded by the South Bessarabian rampart. Others identified the Onglos with the Galac fortified camp. K. Shkorpil [4] proposed that initially, up to the 60-s of the VII-th century, the Bulgars of Asparukh settled in Southern Bessarabia and built the Southern Bessarabian rampart for defence against the Khazars. Later, they occupied Northern Dobrudzha and built the Little Dobrudzhan rampart against the Byzantines. His opinion was further elaborated by R. Rashev [5] and this is the generally accepted reconstruction at present. According to R. Rashev the Nikulicel fortified camp was the centre of the Asparukh territory, some 15,000 km2.

The archaeological and textual evidence reveal that the led by Asparukh Bulgars, who settled on the both banks of the Danube delta, were a relatively numerous group of nomads, with a robust military organization and significant experience in the military engineering, which allowed them to built an extensive system of defences in a relatively short period of time.

References:


3. That name is found in the two forms: Oglos (ογλος) and Onglos (ογλος). Its etymology is still a matter of debate. Some researchers derive it from the Slavic (pronounced "ong'l" = angle, corner). According to them it covered the lands between the rivers Prut, Dnestr and Danube, which were later to be called Budzhak, a Turkish translation of 'corner'. Others think that O(n)glos comes from the Turkic agyl (αγγυλ), meaning "yard, an enclosed place".


Proto-Bulgarian Fortresses in Eastern Europe and on the Lower Danube
Map of the Proto-Bulgarian fortresses in Eastern Europe and on the Lower Danube, built of ashlar blocks and with drawings-fraffiti


**Fortresses from the Caucasus, the Ukraine:**

*The Humarin gorodishte. The tower next to the gate with ashlar blocks. At the far end - the citadel of the fortress.*

*Part of the fortified wall of Humarin and the pagan sanctuary next to it.*
Part of the built of quadras wall of the Majackoe gorodishte.

Majackoe gorodishte. Part of the inner side of the wall with the typical ashlar blocks.

Fortresses from Bulgaria:
Part of the wall of the Early Bulgarian fortress of Drystyr (Silistra), built of limestone quadras.

Part of the wall of the Early Bulgarian fortress of Devnja.
The Western gate of the Inner town of Pliska, built of large limestone quadras.

The Western gate of Pliska.
Part of the wall of the Preslav fortress.

The walls of Preslav, built in the typical quadras.
Proto-Bulgarian Necropolises on the Lower Danube:

Map of the Proto-Bulgarian necropolises on the Lower Danube (VIII-IX cc.)
Grave with inhumation covered with stones from the Proto-Bulgarian necropolis at the village of Zholtoe, the middle course of Severski Doneck (Ukraine).

Grave No 40 from the Proto-Bulgarian necropolis at Devnja I, covered with stones.
Grave No 71 from Devnja.

Grave No 147 from Devnja III with a ritually destroyed skeleton.
Grave No 149 from Devnja III with a dog laid next to the dead.

Grave No 13 from Devnja I with ritually amputated feet.