

MIGRATIONS AND FORMATION OF THE VOLGA BULGARIAN STATE (VIII-X C.): RESULTS OF THE COMPLEX ANALYSIS

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The formation of the medieval Bulgarian state has always attracted the attention of researchers, as this event provided the Volga-Ural region's breakthrough to civilization and became an important stage in social, cultural and ethno-political history of the region. Relocation of the Bulgarian tribes living on the right bank of the Middle Don at the end of VII century to the Middle Volga was determining in this process. There they contacted with different communities and tribes, both local and from the Central Asia. Bulgarians sought to create their own statehood. With the weakening of the Khazars' power and the sharp increasing of the international trade on the Great Volga route in the IX century the Bulgarians were gradually establishing their hegemony over the population of the Middle Volga in the confrontation with two other tribal associations. A new phase of folding the foundations of the Bulgarian feudal state began in early X century. During this period there was an active urban growth and international trade along the Great Volga route. At the same time Islam was adopted as the state religion. Bulgarians led by the elteber Almysh (who became a supreme corporate landowner) started to be the military-service class in the new state. 922 was the year of diplomatic recognition of Bulgaria. It exchanged embassies with the Baghdad Caliphate. Cities were developing as political, administrative, trade and handicraft centers. During this period a number of elements from the other ethnic groups (Slavic, Finno-Ugrian and Scandinavian) enter into the Bulgarian squad and its own syncretic culture is produced. But in 940 two emirates Bulgar and Suvar were formed. Their state institutions strengthened and Islam spread. The defeat of the Khazar Khaganate (in 980) led to strengthening of the Bulgarians united in a Bulgarian state.

Keywords: history, archaeology, Volga-Ural region, migration, archaeological culture, Oguro-Bulgarian tribes, political genesis in Turko-Bulgarian societies of Eastern Europe, the reconstruction of ethnic and cultural history, the Great Bulgaria, the Khazar Khaganate, Volga Bulgaria.

INTRODUCTION

There are two important factors about the process of formation of the Bulgarian state. First, Bulgarians who came in the Middle Volga region to escape the invasion of Khazars had a long tradition of statehood dating back to pre-Turkic time. Second, ethno-cultural and ethno-political situation was complicated in the second half of I millennium AD in the Middle Volga. These circumstances played an important role in the rise of Bulgarians and became key factors in the formation of a new state on the banks of the Volga.

Gradually by X century Bulgarians colonialized all population of the Middle Volga. Unfortunately, the details of this process remain unknown, but its phases

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have been defined quite clearly. The arrival of the group of Bulgarians from the Don region headed by the clan which had a kinship with the ruling one of the khan Kubrat Duloc caused a number of social changes. They called themselves "Silver Bulgarians" to distinguish from other Bulgarian groups (or Proto-Bulgarians) in the Don region, North-West Caucasus and the Danube. This clan of Bulgarians first consisted of the number of Oguro-Turkic groups and after began to struggle for power and hegemony with other two major United Tribes: Bersuls and Esegel. It is possible that in this fight Bulgarians were supported by Khazars, who found it easier to rely on Bulgarians to support their authority in the Volga region. But the written sources of the beginning of the X century contained information about the situation in the Middle Volga where the Bulgarians became the dominant tribe and the land was the center of unification of the Middle Volga region population.

METHODS

The methodological basis of the work is a comprehensive approach based on the study of archaeological sources. Archaeological sources, primarily cemeteries and settlements of VIII-X centuries became the major source of information. More than fifty tombs and several settlements of this period were studied. The analysis of the Arab-Persian historical and geographical traditions, as well as the data of the Russian chronicles, especially the "Tale of Bygone Years" were also important.

The basic method was a comprehensive analysis of all sources and their comparison aimed at further reconstruction of social and ethno-cultural processes.

RESULTS

The Bulgarian tribes inhabiting the right bank of the Middle Don moved to the Volga region in the end of VII century and were surrounded by population ethnically close to the Turkic tribes who settled there a bit earlier.

The archaeological evidence of the migration of Bulgarians to the Volga-Kama region are tombs and cemeteries of Burakovo, Shilovsky, Brusyansky, Novinkovsky areas which had equivalents in the Northern coast of the Black Sea (Small Pereshchepina) and Bulgaria (Madara). Burakovo is similar to the burial place of Kubrat or someone of his immediate successors: in both cases it is a single tomb. It was suggested that according to the custom of cremation of the deceased such belongings as weapons (swords and daggers), horse equipment (stirrups, bridle with precious plates), ceremonial belt with golden headset and other decorations were placed into the grave. All this makes us think that the leaders of the Bulgarian state, who came to the Volga had a very high social status, possibly even were the descendants of Kubrat. However, in the Middle Volga region they were unable to take a dominant position immediately.

Initially, the Bulgarians occupied the territory along the River Volga from Samara Bend to the mouth of Kama displacing or subjugating Balto-Slavic tribes

(Imenkovo culture). A little to the east in the East Zakamye and West Cisurals the Ugric tribes spread (Kushnarenkovsky-Karayakupovsky culture beams), and in the steppe Trans-Volga region and Southern Urals researchers localize the legendary ancestral home of the Hungarians - "Magna Hungariya". This community wasn't ethnically and politically united, it was a conglomeration of clan and tribal associations.

There is a reason to believe that the territory of the Middle Volga was inhabited by Ogur tribes even earlier. According to the writings of the Arab-Persian authors, except for the Bulgarians there were groups of Bersula (Barsil), Esegel and smaller tribal groups like Suvar (Savir), Barandzhar among them. The population of the future Volga Bulgaria in addition to the Bulgars included Alano-Khazar (Barandzhary), Turkic-Ogur (Savirs/Suvars), Central Asian (Esegel/Chigils) representatives.

The analysis of the names of the tribal groups of the Middle Volga region (preserved in the Arab-Persian historical and geographical traditions) make us suggest that all of these groups were not separate ethno-political associations, they were separate clans. Obviously, the Middle Volga region is a unique example. The basis of the population was not represented by separate tribes but the association which members are related by common descent, internal kinship and sustainable ethnonym. They were quite dispersed teams dropped as a result of military and political events on the periphery of civilization. They established a new association, including groups of a very diverse origin. Consequently those groups that were recorded later in written sources were not groups of blood relatives but associations and territorial-political communities. They can be called "tribes" or "tribal unions". The Turkic term "el" which can be defined as "the state" (headed by the ruling tribe or clan) could be used to indicate them. Such ethno-political formations were the communities, which were functioning in accordance with the Arab-Persian tradition of the X century.

Gradually by X century Bulgarians colonialized all population of the Middle Volga. Unfortunately, the details of this process aren't known, but its phases can be traced quite clearly. The arrival of the group of Bulgarians from the Don region headed by the clan which defined themselves as "The Silver Bulgarians" in order to distinguish from other Bulgarian groups (or Proto-Bulgarians) in the Don region, North-West Caucasus and the Danube. This clan of Bulgarians first consisted of the number of Oguro-Turkic groups and then began to struggle for power and hegemony with other two major United Tribes: Bersuls and Esegel. It is possible that in this fight Bulgarians were supported by Khazars, who found it easier to rely on Bulgarians to support their authority in the Volga region. The written sources of X century contain information about the situation in the Middle Volga where the Bulgarians began dominating and the region itself became the center of unification of population of the Middle Volga region. We do not know the name of

the ruler when this union appeared, but we have evidence that under the rule of Almysh's father Shilki (Silky) it was a *fait accompli*. The ruler of the new Bulgarian state under the authority of Bulgarians united the peoples of the Middle Volga region. He held the title of "Elteber" ("Elteber", "malik of Bulgarian") and it showed his dependence on the Khazar Kagan. The Bulgarians, as a tribal group or clan, became the dominant tribe and formed the military elite. The representatives of other ethnic groups became subordinated starting from the moment when the Bulgarian inhabited the land. Even the old tribal aristocracy was ranked below the Bulgarian nobility and could join the elite only when became family members with the Bulgarians. Apparently, it was the moment when "belonging to the Bulgarian clan" started to mean "belonging to a higher social group".

Recently, they believed that the Turkic-speaking nomads of the Eastern Europe were primarily pastoralists who committed constant meridional migrations. According to the number of Russian researchers, those were Alans, Bulgarians, Khazars. In the national historiography a thesis about Khazaria as "a small semi-nomadic state" was popular. However, the study of the functional model of nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes and the analysis of written sources and archaeological data show that the Khazars' economy was based not only on the nomadic herding. The archaeologist Thomas Noonan held a meticulous analysis of all existent data on Khazars' economy. He proved that the economy in the Khazar Khanate was based on developed agriculture. Even at the periphery of the state they had vine lands, diverse crafts, cattle farms and domestic and international trade centers (Noonan, 1994, p. 331-345; Noonan, 1995-1997, p. 253-318). Records of the written sources are very expressive. They paint a picture of beautiful agricultural districts, stretching between the main towns of Khazars in the Caspian and the Lower Volga regions. It was previously mentioned by some Arab scholars, starting with Ibn Horddebeha and al-Balkhi and Khazars themselves. Kagan Joseph (in his letter to the Jewish co-religionists in Spain) wrote that in summer most of the inhabitants of Itil lived in their suburban houses and were engaged in cultivation of crops. He described his own land as "fertile and rich", consisting of fields, vineyards, gardens and parks. (Pletneva, 1967; Pletneva, 2000; Afanasyev, 1993).

It is possible that this population became the basis of the settled tribes in one of the emerging protocities at the end of IX - beginning of X century. They were established in that period in the area of the Great Volga way. Archaeologically it's extremely difficult to identify these monuments, due to the fact that the older layers have not been identified yet (they occupied a fairly small area) or destroyed by later buildings. However, the early settlements found in Bolgar near Jerusalem can be marked by coins of the beginning of the X century. The early layers (although not so expressive) were discovered during excavations at Bilyarsk settlement and a number of rural communities in the Lower Kama. (Khuzin, 2006).

The information about the settled population fixed by written sources indicates their southern (Ciscaucasian) origin. Ibn Fadlan noted that in Bulgaria he met a group of inhabitants - barandzhars who lived sedentarily and had a wooden mosque. Their name is a clear indication of their homeland place, namely the first Khazar's capital - city Belenjer (Barandzhar). Also their daily activity was described in written sources. Ibn Fadlan wrote: "Their food is panic grass and horse meat, but wheat and barley / they had / a lot, and everyone who sow something takes it for himself". (Kovalevskiy, 1956, c. 136).

Therefore, we can say that the economic background of the Bulgarian state formation became a basis of the Great Volga route functioning as well as the caravan route in Khorezm (Lebedev, 1985; Dubov, 1989; Melnikova, 1999; Kirpichnikov, 2001) (it led to the growth wealth of the Bulgarian clan aristocracy), as well as the massive influx of related Turkic population from the regions of the Don, the Sea of Azov and the North Caucasus. In the context of economic recovery the formation of the Bulgarian state led to establish its governing structure and a segment of military servile nobility.

Their weapons, especially of the Western type, are the most striking indication of the presence of a new type of military organization, namely professional feudal militia with a syncretic culture. This is indicated by findings presented by the ancient Finno-Ugric and Scandinavian jewelry. Also one of the brightest evidence can be one of the burial mounds called Balmersky with obviously hybrid inventory. (Izmailov, 1999; Izmailov, 2000). Based on all these data, X -the beginning of XI centuries were marked by establishment of feudal warriors. They appeared as multiethnic strata with a predominance of Bulgarian substrate, which gradually developed its own class eclectic culture.

The archaeological evidence proved that these troops were mainly concentrated around urban centers - it was also a characteristic of many European states at the time. This process is objectively linked to consolidation of such elements in early cities that in X century's Bulgaria which were centers of political power and residence of princes and their retinues. Some information about it was given by the Arab-Persian sources, which for the first half of the tenth century noted the presence of two cities: Bolgar and Suvar. In these cities, "...Muslims live, 10 thousand people in each city; they fight against the infidels"; and in some sources we can see a mention about the "horsemen". (Bartold, 1973, p.545). There is reason to believe that Bolgar and Suvar cities were the centers of urban settlements with their military administrative structure. The fact that they minted their own coins with the name of their ruler on them indicates this. According to the various written sources in the beginning of the X century the Bulgarian state was a potestary state united by supreme military and political, administrative and judicial authorities of the only Bulgarian dynasty with some limited power of dependent tribal leaders. There is no doubt that the process of

active formation of the state power structure, which was based on military elite, began to establish.

The most important step on the way to consolidation of the society was adoption of Islam by Bulgarians as the state religion. More details are provided hereinafter, but here it is necessary to emphasize that the foundation of the Bulgar state was developing almost simultaneously with the introduction of Islam. Already in the IX century Islam penetrates into the residential environment of the Middle Volga and at the beginning of the X century it was obviously adopted by Almysh and Bulgarian elite. The elite accepted Islam under the influence of the Samanid state, although we cannot exclude the significance of Itil Islamic Guard. In 920-ies Islam became the state religion, which is emphasized by the Arab and Persian authors due to the facts that proved the coin minting. According to the archaeological data, almost all urban population was Muslim. During a certain period of time some Bulgarian tribes - Esegel, Suvar (Savar) remained pagans. But they were sidelined in the public life and from time became Muslims.

The defeat of the KhazarKhaganate by troops of Svyatoslav in 965-968 years led to the strengthening of the Bulgarian emirate Mumin ibn al-Hasan (possibly Almysh's descendant). He placed Suvar under his command and began to mint coins only in Bolgar (976-980/1). Suvar probably became some kind of an administrative unit (vilayet) of a single state. In 980 the unified Bulgarian state appeared in the Middle Volga region.

This new stage in the history of the Bulgarian Emirate' can be characterized by territorial expansion, strengthening the authority of the emir's power and the Islamic ideology, final overcoming of tribal particularism, creation of national institutions of power and establishment of feudal relations based on the state ownership of land.

The unified state was able to create an effective military and political system that was able to withstand the strengthening Kievan Rus. The Bulgarian Emirate resisted the confrontation with Kiev and developed its authority on international arena by signing the peace treaty with the Kievan Prince Vladimir I (985). In the end of X century Bulgaria defeated the Burtasand conquered their lands in Posurye becoming one of the leading medieval states in the Eastern Europe. By that period the state adopted Islam on the whole territory of Bulgaria. Pagan cemeteries no longer functioned. The process of the state formation and its ethnic and political, class and potestary, administrative and legal system was completed. Bulgaria became a medieval Muslim state.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

The process of formation and functioning of the feudal states of Eastern Europe have always attracted the attention of researchers. In general, the success of the national Russian historiography in the study of Bulgaria is largely hindered by

notions of “peace and trade” character of the Bulgarians, who went through sedentarization and therefore loss of traditional nomadic institutions of power. At the same time due to the weakness of the source base and conceptual approaches (common to the national historiography) the majority of researches of this period can be characterized by excessive descriptiveness and factography, as well as the lack of critical attitude toward information sources. As a result, the data indicating dynamics of social and military development of the state were lost.

In the 20-40-ies of XX century a new phase in the development of history began. It can be characterized by active introduction of the Marxist concept of social development. More attention was paid to economy, political system and the institutions of the state power. In this regard, there were new methodological approaches to the history of the Volga Bulgaria state and its institutions. A fundamentally new stage in the study of the Volga Bulgaria began with the end of the 40-ies of XX century marked by extensive archaeological researches and a high level of studies revealing the process of development of the Bulgarian culture.

At the end of XX century based on the integrated approach we received a possibility for a more detailed study of the process of formation of the early state in the Volga region, its evolution, internal structure and social differentiation. (Khalikov, 1989; Kazakov, 1992; Khuzin, 1997).

Thus, the study of the Bulgarian nationhood was developing starting from the issues of its feudal character in order to reveal the functioning of the internal mechanisms and the evolution of Bulgarian society. (Khuzin, 2006).

The process of formation of the Bulgarian state passed through several stages. With the arrival of the Bulgarians in the Volga region in VIII century, they tried to reconstruct their state, but the process was slow, as it was held in conditions of subordination to the Khazar Khaganate. However, with the weakening of the Khazars' power and the sharp increase in international trade along the Great Volga route in IX century, the Bulgars gradually established their hegemony over the population in the Middle Volga during confrontation with two other tribes. A new phase in development of the Bulgarian feudal state began in early X century. That period can be characterized by the active urban growth and international trade along the Great Volga route. At the same time Islam was adopted as the state religion. Bulgarians led by the elite Almysh (who became a supreme corporate landowner) started to be the military class of the new state. In 922 Bulgaria was diplomatically recognized as a state. It exchanged ambassadors with the Baghdad Caliphate. The cities developed as political, administrative, trade and handicraft centers. During this period a number of traditions of other ethnic groups (Slavic, Finno-Ugric and Scandinavian) became the part of the Bulgarian society and its own syncretic culture appeared. The 940-ies were marked by establishment of two emirates - Bulgar and Suvar. Their state institutions were strengthening and helped Islam to spread. The defeat of the Khazar Khaganate (in 980) led to strengthening

of the Bulgarians united in a Bulgarian state. In X century separate groups of Oguz, Kipchak and Pecheneg tribes, as well as the neighboring peoples (Burtases, Madjars / Magyars) were included into the composition of the Bulgarian population. They were actively assimilated by Bulgarians. In 985 the Bulgarian ruler entered into a truce with the Kiev Prince Vladimir, developing equal and mutually beneficial relations. The Bulgarian Emirate becomes a medieval state with relevant institutions and political, administrative and legal system.

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