

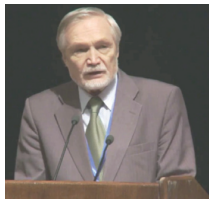
In book analyzed the two main versions of the origins and formation of the Chuvash people – the Savir and Bulgar hypotheses. The tribes of Eurasia were all connected with each other to one degree or another; yet each people travelled its own historical road. For the ancestors of the Chuvash the genetically nearest tribes and closest neighbours up until the middle of the first century AD were the Ugrians and Iranians, in the second to fifth centuries the Huns. After that came the Bulgars, Khazars, Eastern Finns, Tatars and Russians. Originally the Savirs were closest to the Ugrians and Iranians. According to the primary sources and in my own opinion, the Savir hypothesis is closest to the truth. Nevertheless the present-day Chuvash cannot be called direct descendants of the Savirs because their history, anthropology, traditional rites and beliefs as well as their language have to one extent or another absorbed components from all their historical neighbours.

Savirs - Bulgars - Chuvash

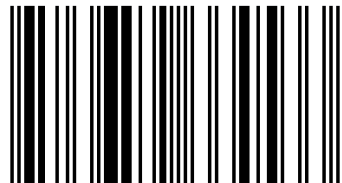


Anton Salmin

# Savirs – Bulgars – Chuvash



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**Savirs – Bulgars – Chuvash**

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*Front cover illustration:*Detail of Asia from the great World [atlas] described by Gerardus Mercator (published in 1595) showing the city of Sibier on the River Sibier  
<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:CEM-15-Asia-Mercator-1595-Russia-2533.jpg>



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## PREFACE

This work is devoted to the complex, frequently politicized and occasionally disputatious subject of ethnogenesis, in particular the formation of the Chuvash people, and the related topic of ethnic identity. The theme of ethnogenesis has, of late, again drawn considerable interest from historians of antiquity and the medieval world [Poo, 2005; Gruen, 2011; Gillet 2002; Garipzanov, Geary, Urbańczyk, 2008, Gat, 2013]. The results of these studies and the differences of opinion regarding the conclusions adduced in these researches have blended with the work of historians of the Modern Age who argue over “primordial” versus “imagined” or “constructed” ethnic (and national) identities [Gat, 2013]. The theme is rich and ongoing, with new studies appearing annually. Close examination of an ethnic group or nation at a particular time gives us a snapshot of that grouping and perhaps of the elements that came to constitute it. Ethnic groupings, peoples, can enjoy relatively long periods of stability and then undergo dramatic changes. In that sense, ethnicities – and nations – are continuously in a state of becoming.

The Volga zone sitting astride what is in essence an imaginary “dividing line” between Europe and Asia, is a particularly interesting region for such studies as it has and continues to contain a variety of ethno-linguistic groupings, which have met, interacted over centuries, formed a number of ethno-national groupings and ultimately the peoples or national groupings that are found there today. The Chuvash, the primary focus of this work, present an instructive example of the complexity of the process. Presently located in the middle Volga zone and adjoining regions, speaking, as has often been argued, a Turkic language that is the only linguistic survivor of Western Old Turkic also termed “Bulgharic” or “Oghuric,” surrounded by speakers of Eastern Turkic, Finno-Ugric and Slavic languages, and historically in contact with the Iranian world as well, the Chuvash, in many respects, are an excellent, illustrative example of the complexity of ethnogenesis, the blending of ethnic groupings, languages and cultures that come to constitute a people.

In the pre-Modern era, the peoples of this part of Eurasia (and elsewhere), following a variety of economic pursuits (settled agrarian life, pastoral nomadism, hunting-gathering) in the steppe, forest-steppe and forest zones were organized into clans, tribes, tribal unions/supra-tribal confederacies, states and on occasion into empires. All of these terms have become highly nuanced or contested in recent anthropological studies, but for want of a new (and convincing) technical vocabulary, must continue to be used today. These groupings were rarely homogeneous. They often contained under a common political name a variety of heterogeneous groups with differing ethno-linguistic profiles. Ruling elites did not necessarily speak the same language as some of their “confederated” tribes [Johanson, 2006: 163]. Over time, the ethno-linguistic components associated with a particular ethnonym could change. Such changes impacted ruling elites as well.

These were highly fluid, frequently unstable political entities, whose names, or rather the names by which they become known in our sources, were influenced by external as well as internal factors. As Juha Janhunen, the eminent Mongolist and historian of Manchuria, wrote: “Most ethnic groups have several ethnyonyms, and the ethnonym used for a given ethnic group in historical records is normally based on some name by which it was once known to its neighbors.” These names were transportable to various “levels of ethnic and social organization” [Janhunen, 1996: 25]. Patrick Geary, one of the leading historians of Medieval Western Europe, suggests that: “Names were renewable resources. They held the potential to convince people of continuity, even if radical discontinuity was the lived reality” [Geary, 2002:118; see also Pohl, 1991: 39-49]. Political cohesion was based on ideologies promoted by the ruling stratum (usually a “royal” clan), kinship, real and fictive, and successful military action that secured access to lands and goods, the latter often prestige items, from neighboring states and polities. The size of these entities varied greatly over time, as they expanded, shrank or were subsumed by yet other polities. In Inner Asia, tribal populations ranged from 500 to the 1000s. Nomadic empires in the same region, often reflecting a super stratification of tribes and conquered

agrarian lands, contained populations that ranged from the 100,000s, at the lower end of the scale, to millions [Christian, 1998: 58].

A further complication in sorting out the pre-Modern groupings and polities, most of which lived in the “tribal borderlands” of empires, is their frequent internecine strife, segmentation and reconfiguration, often provoked, promoted and encouraged by their imperial neighbors.

The author, a distinguished scholar of Chuvash culture, traditional belief systems and folklore, takes a holistic approach, making use of all the disciplines, history, cultural studies, geography, archaeology, ethnography, folklore, sociology and linguistics that help to shed light not only on the complex phenomenon of Chuvash ethnogenesis, but on the shaping of peoples in the Volga-Ural zone and elsewhere in Eurasia. His conclusions on specific issues, in particular his contestation of the Bulghar theory of the origins of the Chuvash and related Turkological philological problems, differ sharply in some respects from the more widely held views. Nonetheless, he offers fresh perspectives and new approaches to long-standing problems.

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Mu-chou Poo, *Enemies of Civilization. Attitudes toward Foreigners in Ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, and China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005

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## INTRODUCTION

*The writing of history is the greatest, most sacred matter,  
ranking above any other pursuit*  
[Agathias 1996: 83].

The history of the origins and formation of the Chuvash people contains too many obscurities. To this day the truth remains a sealed book that one longs to open. The readers' excessive desire to know on the one hand and the writers' grand intention to place their ideas quickly before the public on the other have given rise to fiction, compilation and confusion. The majority of works that presently exist on the ethnogenesis of the Chuvash are on the level of amateur studies of local history. The reason for such a lack of success is the absence of direct sources relating to the historical ancestry of the Chuvash. In situations of this kind historical science always turns for assistance to retrospection and a comparative-historical methodology. After all, any tribe, no matter how mysterious its history had to have neighbours. It must have had dealings with other tribes and have belonged to alliances. One recognizes what is distinctive about oneself only through comparison with other cultures. In the process both general and particular features of an ethnos "suddenly" become noticeable. There is only one solution then – to seek out and study the ancestors of the Chuvash in connection with neighbouring communities. That is how the idea for the structure of this research emerged. At times it will seem to the reader that the author has strayed from the subject, become distracted by neighbouring and related tribes. However, any picture of events can be presented only in the context of space and time. Peoples do not exist in isolation. Without understanding who the neighbours of a particular ethnos were it is impossible to answer the main question. Without knowing the reason, it is impossible to talk about the crux of something that took place. The contextual study of those who were neighbours to the ancestors of the Chuvash is not an end in itself. The main thing is to use it to shed the light of truth on

the question that concerns us. The approach selected makes it possible to use a method of elimination and approximation. The methodology proposed will, I hope, facilitate correction of the degree of kinship with the tribes, peoples and religions being compared.

The term “adjoining tribes”, which I use often in this book, may prompt the question: why that expression and not the frequently-used expression “adjoining territories”? Because in prehistoric times, Antiquity and the Middle Ages the territories occupied by tribes and nations did not as a rule have precise boundaries. Those lines of contact were, moreover, fluid, shifting very frequently. Not only were tribes constantly migrating, their names might change as well. Even the Great Wall of China at the time when it was built was no more than a convention, primarily performing not the role of a frontier between states, but that of a front line advanced beyond the main places of settlement. As for the territories ruled over by Attila, there are all sorts of estimates. Some believe that Attila’s rule extended from the Volga to the Rhine, from Macedonia to the Eastern Sea. Others have asserted that his realm extended along the Danube and Black Sea from Moravia to the Volga. In the interpretation of the Byzantine Empire, frontiers were firstly the limits of the sphere of activity of its administration in the lands divided into Roman province and secondly the boundaries of countries that had local rulers but were within the sphere of Byzantine jurisdiction. However, those boundaries between the Hellenic and barbaric worlds were also extremely arbitrary, indistinct and, moreover, often shifting. Although they were arch-enemies, the Huns and the Byzantines had an agreed region set aside for diplomatic negotiations and trade. Volga Bulgaria had no precise borders. In the expanse between Khazaria and Burtasia there were no permanent settlements. From Atil, the capital of Khazaria, to the neighbouring Burtas there was steppe land that took 20 days to cross [Bartold 1973: 37; Al-Idrisi 2006: 120]. Besides, there were also no man’s lands between tribes and peoples (for example between the Huns and the Chinese, the Huns and the Eastern Romans, as well as the Bulgars and the Suvars). In the ninth and early tenth centuries the distance

between the Bulgars and the Bashkirs subservient to Bulgaria was 25 days' journey [Bartold 1968: 494]. The term “adjoining territories” is used here, as a rule, in reference to fully-formed peoples and states. In principle I could have used the term “adjoining territories”, but then the book would have taken on a historico-geographical bent, while I wanted it to contain more historico-ethnographical elements.

A key term in this work is the word “tribe”. As a rule, the tribes caught up in the vortex of the Migration Period that are studied here were among those that their more civilized neighbours called barbarians. This term is in essence identical with the Greek *ἔθνος* that was used in Byzantium to refer to those same “barbarian” tribes, that is to say, those who had not adopted Christianity. Similarly the Tartars (= Mongol-Tatars) called foreigners that they did not respect “barbarians”, saying that they saw with one eye, while the Tartars themselves saw with two [Vitsen 2010: 4]. At the same time it is not correct to replace the terms “tribe” and “barbarians” with the concept of “a people”, as often occurs in the works of quite serious historians. It is “incorrect in principle to translate the expression *hominum genus* with the word ‘people’” [Anfertyev 1994: 141]. In such cases the terms “clan” and “tribe” are more suitable. For example, the inscription on a bilingual Turkic and Chinese monument to Kul Tigin (the Bilgä Khagan Stela, 730s) includes the phrase *qayanin anta ölürtümüz elin altimiz* – “we killed their khagan there and conquered their tribal union” [Nadelyayev et al. 1969: 168]. Here the word *el* is properly translated as “tribal union, state”, while for the concept of “a people” Ancient Turkic used the word *bodun* [Nadelyayev et al. 1969: 108]. Moreover, in a clan-tribal system the language factor could not yet play an ethnos-separating role [Veresh 1984: 371].

In presenting the material I have tried to follow the primary sources and original ideas expressed by my predecessors. I might be accused of quoting at excessive length, but that is better than “bringing forth” dubious facts and events oneself. When all is said and done, quoting serves as a reference to finding support in a source document, especially if it is a primary source. I am presenting primary sources and



critical literature on the subject solely with the aim of clarifying the genetic links and contacts between the ancestors of the Chuvash and the tribes and peoples mentioned. It was necessary to carry out such laborious work in order to systematically study the authentic material. To discover the historical truth it is important to know with which tribes the ancestors of the Chuvash had contacts, at what periods, and where. A study of the history of former neighbours is vital to establish and correct the history of the Chuvash ancestors themselves. The study of sources in context does after all increase their informational output (Nikolai Kradin's term [Kradin 2001: 8]). The goal of the present research is to systematise the existing sources and literature on the subject and to draw an appropriate conclusion from them. The chapters may have turned out excessively long-winded in places: that was done to avoid accusations of being too laconic or categorical. Although I could have written even more.

Sergei Tokarev, Valentin Sedov, Valery Alexeyev, Viacheslav Molodin, Péter Veres and Vladimir Napol'skikh all point out the need for a complex (or interdisciplinary) approach to interpreting ethnogenetic processes. No matter how excellently presented, the individual view of, say, an archaeologist on the origin and formation of a people will always be inferior. Firstly, it encompasses a particular segment of time and space. Secondly, it leaves aside all the other aspects of the historical process. As a result one more hypothesis is added to the innumerable quantity and cannot therefore lay claim to be fully convincing [Alekseyev 2009: 208-209]. For that reason "in the work of archaeologists a comprehensive approach is absolutely vital, one that combines ethnographic, linguistic and anthropological data as well as written sources" [Molodin 1985: 5]. In Vladimir Napol'skikh's opinion, besides linguistic data, such research should draw upon information provided by archaeology, physical anthropology, ethnography, palaeobiogeography and so on. All "these data should be connected with each other within the framework of the historical model" [Napol'skikh 1997: 107]. For example, the highland groups of Georgians, Karachais, Balkars and Ossetians are classic representatives of a mountain culture – but they speak different languages. Some of them (the Karachais and

Balkars), however, adopted their present (Turkic) language quite recently in historical terms. At the same time there are strong grounds for believing that the ancestors of all these peoples once spoke Caucasian languages. Meanwhile these central Caucasian peoples are characterized by a particular combination of anthropological features. In this case, therefore, the boundaries of ethnic and anthropological commonality coincide. Precisely for the reasons indicated, putting forward data from just one discipline is always inadequate. For example, Fedot Filin viewed questions of the origins of the Eastern Slavs solely from the angle of linguistic data, considering that the key ethnic determinant was language. Alexander Briusov, by contrast, based his works on the ancestral homeland of the Indo-Europeans exclusively on comparisons of archaeological artefacts, while ignoring achievements in the field of linguistics. Sometimes anthropological characteristics remain constant: there is continuity of the population, but the language and culture change [Alekseyev 2008: 28,155-156]. However, despite the calls for a multidisciplinary approach to the study of ethnogenesis, there have been no major shifts in that direction. Each researcher has remained chiefly within his or her own compartment.

In this work the concepts of “history” and “historical” are taken broadly. Apart from history proper, when necessary and when available I employ arguments based on geography, anthropology, archaeology, religion, linguistics, ethnography, art and folklore. Thus I have made an attempt to study the history of a people as a single whole, as a system. The use of sources and scholarly works that obviously do not belong to the fields of ethnography or history is not an indication of any desire on my part to assume full responsibility in those disciplines. From them I have taken sources and researches mainly of a generalizing type. They perform an ancillary role in the monograph, intended to construct the most complete system possible. I have to concede that the division of facts and events from the past into, say, purely historical and geographical sections is highly arbitrary and simply for working convenience. For example, when writing about the appearance of colonies of Bulgar tribes on

Armenian soil in the late fourth century it is impossible to separate time from topography.

Naturally facts are the building-blocks of history. However, the present research also calls for the assessment of the facts and a preliminary conclusion proceeding from the facts cited. To what extent I have succeeded in meeting the tasks set is for the reader to judge. In general the study of the tangled history of the Chuvash is an extremely difficult business. It was not for nothing that the Hungarian academician András Róna-Tas gave one of his works the title *Nutshell Chuvash*, implying that the question was a hard nut to crack, while Peter Golden called the subject “one of the largely neglected and vexing problems” [Golden 2011: 146]. At the same time it should be remembered that “in the present-day world the historian and the ethnologist are unavoidably among the key figures in ethno-nationalist discourse and that imposes an enormous responsibility upon them” [Shnirelman 2002: 145].

The time span of the events examined is from the third century BC to the middle of the twentieth century, although isolated facts encompass the whole period from earliest times to the present day. Sadly, however, it has not yet proved possible to reliably identify relevant sources going further back. Objectively more attention is devoted in the book to the events of the first millennium AD, which were to be decisive in the fate of the forebears of the Chuvash.

The book gives a brief analysis of the two main versions of the origins of the Chuvash: the Savir and Bulgar alternatives (altogether there are around a dozen hypotheses – Ugrian, Iranian, Hunnic, etc.). In doing so I pay particular attention to the most disputed episodes in the history of Chuvash ethnogenesis.

x x x

I take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to all those who over the course of many years have assisted the creation of the present work. Above all, I acknowledge my colleagues at the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera) and the N.N. Miklukho-Maklai Institute of Ethnology

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## Chapter1: THE SAVIR VERSION

**Ethnonym.** There is a firmly established opinion, among some scholars, that the ancestors of the Chuvash were known as Savirs/Suvars [Taimasov 2001: 7-33; Mukhamadiyev 2011: 80, 86; Salmin 2013: 195-199]. Although that statement is still open to question, it provides sufficient grounds for historico-philological inquiry.

Among the Khanty of Berezovo there were a number of variants of the tribal name: *saber*, *Saper* and *Soper*. The people and the land (country) were called *Šaber-mām* and *Šaber-mure* respectively. In the Kondinskaya volost' of Tobolsk *uyezd* there was a field known as *Sébèr-jaḡ nēp* – “the cemetery of the Sèbèr people” [Patkanoff 1900: 264; Patkanov 1900: 340; 1901: 302,439]. According to Valery Chernetsov, there was a *Siopyr* clan living near Berezov. The Khanty distinguish a *šebar-hul* – a “Sebar or Mansi fish”. The same fish is also known as *jogan-hul* – “river fish” – (corresponding to the Chuvash *yuhan pul*) [SUS. Kotelo 54: 9; Patkanoff 1900: 265].

The term *Sipyras* the name of an ethnic group in Western Siberia occurred persistently until the final centuries BC. Zoya Boyarshinova wrote in the mid-twentieth century that the time had come to reject the view that the term Sibir' [Siberia] had been brought from outside (by the Mongols or the Russians). “The ethnic group that bore the name *Sipyrr* (*Siovyrr*, *Sabir*) were the ancestors of the ancient Ugrians who engaged in a long and complex interaction with other ethnic elements of Western Siberia, Kazakhstan and Central Asia.” [Boyarshinova 1959: 106]. Boyarshinova was absolutely right and her opinion was not new among scholars. A century before, Gavriil Destunis noted that the name of the tribe that very late writers called the *Sabeiroi*, was probable the source of the name Siberia [Destunis 1860, note 98]. Bernát Munkácsi believed that *Siberia*, like *Yugra*, *Perm*, *Viatka*, *Bolgar* and *Murom* are simultaneously both toponyms and ethnonyms [Munkácsi 1895: 349-387; Dmitriyeva, Agyagási 2001: 19]. We should, of course, include *Suvar* in the Tobolsk area in this list as well. In Gyula Németh's opinion before the Avar

invasion that locality was inhabited by the Sabir. He was in no doubt that the ethnonym *Sabir*, *Savir*, *Sībīr* derives from the word *Sibir*. *Savir* and *Sabir* are variants of one and the same ethnonym: the phonetic shift  $v \rightarrow b$  turned the Bulgaro-Turkic form into the Turkic *Sabir*. In confirmation he cited a parallel example  $*tävā \rightarrow *täbā$  – “camel”.<sup>1</sup> The successive phonetic shifts were, he believed,  $sapīr > sabīr > savar$ . He derived  $> sabīr > savar$  from Turk. *sap-* “to go astray” [Németh 1991: 130,150,153,265; 1929: 81-88]*sab-/sav-* with the Aorist/Present suffix *-ar*. The same idea was expressed by Gyula Moravcsik [Moravcsik 1983: 262].<sup>2</sup>

The Sipyrs who remained in the Tobolsk region were assimilated to a considerable degree, but retained their ethnonym until the thirteenth or fourteenth century. Serafim Patkanov wrote that the proper names *Saber*, *Saper* and *Soper* existed among the Khanty and the Mansi, as do the surnames *Sabarev*, *Seburev* and *Savirov* today. The Ostyaks of the Konda basin called the earlier inhabitants of that land *sébēr* or *sébēr̄gadox* – “the *Sébēr*people”. Informants told the ethnographer Yelena Fyodorova during an expedition that in the distant past there had been people who were called the *Sapyr*. They inhabited the taiga and were originally hunters and fishers [Fyodorova 1998: 129]. Other variants of this very ancient ethnonym are also known *Seper*, *Šaper*, *Šaber*, *Šoper*, *Saper*. It is also known that in the late fifteenth century the principedom here was called *Seber* [Novitskii 1999: 20-21]. All these strongly resemble the Chuvash name for Siberia – *Šěpěr*. The records made by Antal Reguly near Obdorsk include the name of a Khanty clan *Saber-mam* – “the Saber people”. *Sipyr ma* in the meaning “Siberia” is recorded in the Mansi language [Balandin, Vakhrusheva 1958: 95]. József Papay was told about the Obdorskarea being *Saber-mu* – “the Land of the Saber”. Patkanov wrote: “The native inhabitants of the former territory of ‘Sibir’ must, therefore, have been called Sabars (Sabaren,

<sup>1</sup>*Tävā* (or *tävāy* or *tävāy* or *tüye*) was the original Eastern Old Turkic form [Clauson 1972: 447-448; Sevortyan 1980: 313-315; Starostin *et al.* 2003: 1424]: Altaic  $*t'ib̄ŋe$ : Yung.  $*t'ib̄ŋa$  “male deer” Mong.  $*tēme-yen$  “camel”, Turk.  $*debe$ . This is a problematic word and may not be the best example to illustrate this point. [PBG]

<sup>2</sup>*Sap-* however is first attested in this meaning in Middle Qipchaq and its usual form is *sapar* [Clauson 1972: 784] [PBG]

Saparen, Saberem) and have lived in the Tura, Tiulinskoye, Tobolsk and Berezov districts of Tobolsk province” [Patkanov 2003: 383].

The actual ethnonym *Savar/Savir/Suvar* derives from the Persian *sāvar* – “horseman, rider, skilled person” [Miller 1953: 294]. On Sabir etymology, see also: *Šābir* < \**šāfir* ~ \**šāfir* < Old Iran. *aśšaβâra* (*aśva-bâra* or \**aśšaβârya*, cf. Saka *aśša* “horse,” Old Indic *bhârya*, “servant, soldier” [Harmatta 1992: 257-258], but see [Bailey 1979: 11,278] *aśša-bârai* “horse-rider”, [Rastorguyeva et al. 2000: 243-244]: \**aśya* “конь, лошадь” Avest. *Aspa*, Old Pers. *asa*, *asa-bâra* “всадник” (< \**aśya-bâra* “всадник на лошади,” Old Pers. *asabâra*, Middle Pers. *asvâr* “всадник,” Bactr. *asbaro*, Class. Pers. *savâr*, Mod. Pers. *sāvâr*). Harmatta also connects the On Oq/Western Türk subdivision, the Nushibi 弩失畢 (MC *nuo śi pjiet*) with this name. \**Nu Šābir* < Iranian \**nu* < Old Iran. *naiba*, Middle Pers. *nēvak* “outstanding, hero” + \**šāfir* ~ \**šāfir*. As a whole *sāvar* means “one who moves about on horseback”. We should bear in mind here that people used carts before they rode on horseback.

According to one version, the ethnonym *Syvyr/Seper* arose among the Saka tribes who lived in Central Asia from the sixth century BC. The Saka called their northern neighbours *Asabars*, meaning “horsemen, those carried by horses”, because in the early Iron Age the Syvyrs inhabited the Western Siberian forest-steppe and were constantly in contact with the Saka tribes. In the Sassanid armed forces there were elite corps known as *asawîra* (*asbâr/aswâr*, New Persian *sawâr/suwâr/uswâr/iswâr*, *asâwira* (the Arabicized plural, “horseman” 5: 57 [Zakeri 1995: 57]). They were recruited from the aristocratic classes and comprised the main strike force of the army. The *asawîra* were in constant combat readiness. For example, in AH 32 (AD 654) Al-Ahnaf Ibn Qays wrote to Bazan, the Persian shahs’ governor in Armenia, and also to the horsemen (*asawîra*) and Iranians (*‘ajam*) with a proposal to adopt Islam [At-Tabari 1987: 34]. From the letter it is clear that the *asawîra* occupied a privileged position in Persian society and that the fortunes of the state depended on their loyalty. Later the word *asvar* came to mean “a man of courage”. From the history of Persia it is clear that *asawîra* and *asavar* are

grammatical variants of one and the same word. Therefore it is possible to state that the form *Savar*, as recorded by Ptolemy, is a phonetic variant of *Savir*.

According to one more version, the Shughni word *sawor* translates as “marsh, swamp, low-lying place” (cf. the Iranian anthroponym *Savor*, pronounced in Greek *Σαβώρης/Σαπώρης* [Theophan. Chrono. AD 659]). This version accords with the data provided by Ob-Ugrian ethnography: some clan groups of Khanty and Mansi venerate the frog – a typical marsh-dwelling creature – as an ancestor and protective spirit. “For example, one of the groups of Sosva-basin Mansi, the Naras-makhum (“Marsh People”) considered their ancestral mother to be Naras-nai (“the Great Marsh Woman”), who appears in the guise of a frog” [Parkhimovich 1999: 293].

The deity of the “Huns called Savirs” was K’uar” (very likely Iranian name Khwâr “sun”); a prince of that tribe was Alp-Ilitver;<sup>3</sup> among the unbaptised Chuvash one can find the men’s names Irevli, Irtesh and Irtush.

In Armenian sources (John V the Historian and others) one finds the form *Sevordik*. Popular etymology holds that *Sevordik’* means “black children”. Regarding this explanation, Kerpe Patkanov, a great specialist on Armenian history, ethnography and religion, was at a loss and admitted: “I don’t know why... It’s unlikely” [Patkanov 1877: 51].

The Arabs called the same tribes *Sawardiya*. Joseph Marquart wrote of the Savirs and the Magyars as if they were one people – *Sevordik’ (Magyaren)* [Marquart 1903: 428]. Gyula Németh indicated that the Hungarians were known by the ethnonym *Savardi*, which he equated with the name *Savir* [Németh 1929: 81-86;

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<sup>3</sup>Alp Ilituer (Alp’ ilit’uēr/Alp’ ilut’uēr, the latter is the Central Eurasian title *ältäbär* - *Eltäbär/Eltäbir/Xielifa*: Chin. 額利發 EMC *yet li<sup>h</sup> puat*, LMC *xhjiat li` fjat/fa:t* [Pulleyblank 1991: 341,188,89; Schuessler 2009: 296 [29-1r], 280 [26-24ab], 237 [21-30c]], MC *yet li<sup>c</sup> pjwət* LH *get li<sup>c</sup> puat*, OCM *git rih! pat*. Com. Turk title *eltäbär, eltäbir* (title given to subordinate rulers), North Caucasian Hunnic *ilutuer* and Volga Bulğar بلطوار \**yiltavâr* or *yel tävâr* [Golden 1980: 147-150; Zimonyi 1990: 127]. Cf. the Bactrian υλιτοβηρο [*hilitbēr*], Sogd. *rytppyr/dytppyr* Sogd. *rytppyr/dytppyr (lätēbir)* [Lurje 2010: 336], Arabic رُنَيْبِل see [Sims-Williams 2003: 235]. All of these are transcriptions of Turk. *eltäbär/eltäbir*).



Dmitriyeva, Agyagási2001: 62-63]. In the form *Savard* this ethnonym survived in the Hungarian tradition proper as the old personal name *Zuard/Zoward/Zovard*. Vladimir Shusharin believed that the Savarts were Magyar tribes that had remained in the East, in “Greater Hungary” [Shusharin 1997: 112,157,159]. If in Constantine Porphyrogenitus’s terminology *Savartoi-Asphaloi*, we take the *t* for a potentially feasible Proto-Turkic plural affix [Mukhamadiyev 2011: 60], then the word *Σάβαρτοι* becomes *Savar* + *t* Turkic plural affix + another plural ending *-oi* from the Greek language. Németh [Németh 1991: 155f.] views the *-t* as Hungarian suffix, *-d* found in many names, including words taken from Turkic, e.g. *Árpád* ).

The word *savardī* also occurs in Mahmud al-Kashagari’s dictionary. It is found in the context *'ardam yimā savardī 'azhun bak zhatilūr* – “The people of this era lost their virtue with the passing of the Ruler of the World (i.e. Afrāsīāb)” [Al-Kāshgari2005: 773]. In the given sentence *savardī* has the meaning of “virtue”. It corresponds to the Chuvash word *sav* – “to love, caress”.

This form *sāv-* is present in Mahmud al-Kashagari’s dictionary as well: *'ulmanī savdī* (ol māni sāvdi) – “he fell in love with me” [3306] (Chuvash – *vāl mana savrĕ*); and *bilik 'ariyāgisii yālik savār* правильно: *bilig āri yağīsini nālik sevār* – “why should a clever man love his enemy?” [6462]. Thus, the word *sāvārdi* has a purely Turkic and Chuvash root, meaning “to love, caress”. In mediaeval Armenian and Arab sources it was used for a tribe with the semantic sense “the loving, virtuous ones”. Evidently it is not even an exonym, but an endonym.

Stephanus of Byzantium wrote in the fifth century: “The Sapirs [*Σάπειρες*], a people of the Pontian region, now called Sabirs [*Σάβειρες*] with a *β*.” Elsewhere in his work we find the variants *Σάπειρ* and *Σάσπειρ* [Stephani 1849: 555,166]. Undoubtedly the reference is to one and the same tribe – the Sapirs/Savirs/Suvars in the Caucasus. It is simply that the Byzantines pronounced the letter *β* (Classical Greek “b”) as *b* and *v* as a *b*. Late Roman/Byzantine authors were aware of this and regularly used *β* for “b” (in Modern Greek now written *μπ*).

Roman, Greek, Iranian, Armenian, Syrian and Arab authors all wrote about this people, each distorting the name in their own way. In ancient and mediaeval manuscripts the ethnonym was conveyed by the consonants *s.v.r*, with the vowels being supplied by the reader in accordance with the rules of consonantism. As for vocalization, only Syriac, Arabic (and Hebrew) writing systems do not have full vocalization. They usually write only long vowels. Short vowels are indicated (sometimes) by diacritics.

In Ibn Khordadbeh's work, in the writings of Joseph ben Aaron, the ruler of the Khazars, and in an authentic document produced by the Khazar Jews of Kiev it is written in just that way – *SWR* [Pritsak 2003: 56]. As a result of the collapse of the Western Turkic Khaganate in 658, in the north-eastern foothills of Daghestan the state of Suvar formed on the basis of early feudal relationships with Varachan as its capital. This date should be considered the moment of transition from the ethnonym *Savir* to *Suvar*. The shift probably took place due to Arab-Islamic expansion into the Caucasus (cf. the Arab anthroponyms and toponyms *Suvar*).

Ibn Faḍlān quite distinctly mentions the ethnonym *Suvar/Suvaz* within the make-up of Volga Bulgaria. “r” and “z” are often confused in Arabic manuscripts as they are distinguished only by a dot: سُوار / صُوار and سُواز.

Departing from his winter quarters, the king Almish<sup>4</sup> “wanted there to be a mass movement [of tribes] and sent for the people called the Suvaz, ordering them to migrate together with him. [They] refused him and split into two parties” [Kovalevskii 1956: 139]. We know that the Suvars were taken away from Almish by their leader, Vyrāh (Arabic وُيرَغ, *wuyrgh*) a Bulgar-Suvar form of the Proto-Turkic-Common Turkic *bujruq* – a title and a position [Nadeliayev et al. 1969: 121], also rendered as *byruq* and *buryuq*. The Arabic text says that the *Buyruq/Vuyrugh/Vuyriḡh* was the “son-in-law” of the king (*malik*) and that he ruled over the Suvar. The *wuyrugh* declared himself “king” (*tamallaka*). Ibn Faḍlān mistook his title [Vuyrugh/Vuyriḡh] for his name. In note 604 Kovalevsky comments “The word

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<sup>4</sup> Vocalisation of this name (المش) is uncertain: Almish? Almush?

[*malik*]itself as Ibn Faḍlān uses it means not only the king of the Bulgars [because a “king” is also a prince, only the most senior.– *AS*],but also the tribal chieftains of his realm.”Thus, the Bulghar ruler is called “king” (*malik*) and the Arabic term *malik* is also used to denote the other tribal/tribal union chieftains.

Those four rulers, representing the four main tribes – Bulgars, Suvars, Eskels and Barsula, attended all official ceremonies: they all four met the embassy at the distance of a day and night’s journey from the monarch’s camp; on another occasion, since the tribes were disposed at a considerable distance from one another, people waited four days (from Sunday to Thursday) for their arrival; at the reception given by Almish they are again mentioned as being at the ceremony of the distribution of the meat and, we note, are called kings. The Suvar king and ethnarch Vyrāh was undoubtedly present at these ceremonies. Moreover, Kovalevsky believed that the meeting between the embassy and the local rulers took place on the territory of that people [Kovalevskii 1956: 37]. From the context of Ibn Faḍlān’s manuscript it is clear that the Suvar were located in the southern part of Bulgaria. Ravil Fakhrutdinovbelieves that Ibn Faḍlān wrote about the Suvars and not the Suvaz [Fakhrutdinov 1986: 97]. Nikolai Marr and Anatoly Novoseltsev wrote about the succession of ethnonyms *Savir* → *Suvar* → *Chuvash* [Marr 1935: 401; Novoseltsev 1990: 97]. In Peter Golden’s opinion the Suvar had ties of kinship with the Sabirs (Savirs/Savars), who are also associated with the North Caucasian steppes [Golden 2008: 235]. Gyula Németh saw a direct historical connection between the ethnonyms *Savar*, *Savir*, *Savir*, *Sabir*, *Sabar*, *Suvārin*, *Suvār* and the Magyar anthroponyms *Szavárd*, *Szovárd* and *Zuard*. In his opinion, the variant Magyar ethnonym *Szavardi* also derives from the ethnonym *Sabir*. Phonetic changes have taken place in the speech of present-day Siberian Tatars in the form of *a* > *ī*, so thatthey now pronounce the previous *Sabir* as *Sibir* in accordance with Common Turkic rules [Németh 1991: 17,131,150]. On the basis of the aggregate of the premises cited, Mikhail Fedotov postulated a historical line of succession between the Mari *suvas* and the Chuvash *t’šāvaš* [Fedotov 1996: 399].

Yusuf Khass Hajib's ninth-century poem *Qutadğu bilig* ("The Wisdom that Brings Happiness") features the Arabic terms *şabîr* and *şabur* in the meanings "tolerate", "patience". [Nadelyayev et al. 1969: 479]. In the Chuvash language the Arabic word survived in the form *sapăr*, meaning "quiet, gentle, meek". Secondary meanings are "peace-loving, considerate, indulgent". In Tatar the equivalent is *sabyr*. Mahmud al-Kashgari also mentions a tongue (i.e. tribe) called *Sūvārīn*. He records as well a town, *as-Sūvār*, located close to *Bulgār* [Al-Kāshgari 2005: 409]. Regarding the town Suvar, Vasily Bartold made a substantial qualification, taking it to be the name of a tribe [Bartold 1968: 66].

A work written by the Moroccan geographer al-Idrisi in 1154 states: "The Burtas come after the Khazars and there is no other people between them and the Khazars. They have wooden houses and also felt tents. They have two towns, Burtas and Suvar" [Kovalevskii 1954: 25]. Let us leave for the moment the clarification of the historical circumstances and the exact location of those towns and merely note that in AD 1154 the name of the town of Suvar was recorded, naturally transferred from the tribe of the same name. Of course the word *Suvar*, just like *Bulgar* was at one and the same time the name of both a tribe and a settlement. Johannes Benzing's view of the matter is also extremely noteworthy: he reckoned that the ethnonym *Savar* (Chuvash *săvar*, Tatar *suar*, still surviving in the toponym *Savar* = *Suar*) might be the result of the phonetic development of the ethnonym *Sabir* [Benzings 1986: 26]. He places on a single line the ethnonym *Săvar* and the first name *Savar*, recorded in 1322 on a gravestone in Volga Bulgaria (*Savar ivli Aġnab* – "Aġnab, son of Savar).

The Chuvash-Suvars formed as a people in Volga Bulgaria and that process was concluded in the tenth to fifteenth centuries on the right bank of the Volga. From the start of the tenth century Volga Bulgaria included Cheremis, Votiaks, Mordvins and Rus'. Traces of the Suvar substrates have endured to this day in Chuvashia in the form of toponyms. For example, in the Krasnoarmeisky *rayon* there is a village called *Supar* (pronounced *Subar*). Among the recorded Chuvash anthroponyms there are ones which point directly to the ethnic composition of Volga Bulgaria: *Bulgar*, *Savir*,

Savirka, Savrik, Savrila, Chuvash, Akhvan, Avarin, Aver, Khosar, Kasar and others [Magnitskii1905].

After the year 922 *Suvar* largely disappears from the written sources as an autonomous ethnonym, with the exception of very brief notices in Kashghari [Al-Kāshgari 2005: 70,71]. That is not taking into account toponyms that appeared earlier and continued to be used or numismatic artefacts. From *The Tale of the Ruin of the Russian Land (Slovo o pogibeli Russkoi zemli)* we know that the Burtas, Cheremis, Veda and Mordvins gathered wild honey and beeswax for Grand Prince Vladimir (970–988) [Slovo 1969: 326]. The Veda people mentioned here, situated between the Cheremis and the Mordvins, are undoubtedly the Chuvash. The term then crops up in the form Veda-Suar on Fra Mauro's world map of 1459 at the location of the present-day city of Cheboksary, the capital of Chuvashia [Dimitriyev 2003: 16]. *Veda* is a corruption of the Chuvash word *vāta* – “middle”; *Suar* means *Suvar*. In Chuvashia today there are many place names containing the word *vāta*: *Vāta Pukash*, *Vāta Upa kassi*, *Vāta el* and so on. The founders of the settlement of Veda-Suar were fisherfolk, the ancestors of the Chuvash. Regarding the modern name of Cheboksary, *Shupashkarin* Chuvash, Marr wrote: Evidently this *Shupashkar*, that is town of the Shubashes or Suvars is that town from the period of Bulgar dominion that the Arab geographers call Suvār, that is Chuvash” [Marr 1935: 369]. Note that while recognizing the *Shupashes* and *Suvars* as one and the same, Marr at the same time pointed out the transition of an *r* sound to an *sh* at the end of the ethnonym. He also equated the ethnonyms *Suvar* and *Chuvash*. However, an *r* > *sh* shift is unknown in the Turkic languages and Marr's conclusion requires further explanation.

Karl Fuchs asserted that the ethnonym *Chuvash* first appeared in 1469. In that year Khan Ibrahim carried out a census of the Khanate of Kazan. According to it, the inhabitants of the Upland Side (Taw yağı in Tatar or Viryal in Chuvash – the higher right bank of the Volga), the hill people, include the Chuvash, Cheremis, Mordvins, Mozhars and Tarkhans. Fuchs references the Complete Collection of Russian

Chronicles [*Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei, PSRL*], the actual citation reading “Suzd[al]. VI. 234. Tsarstv[ennaya] kn[iga] 772” [Fuks 1914: 4]. However, neither in the places indicated, nor indeed anywhere in the PSRL, can a mention of the Chuvash relating to the year 1469 be found. Evidently Fuchs had at his disposal some unpublished document that we have not yet found. Nevertheless, there are indeed grounds for considering that year of 1469 the date of the first written mention of the Chuvash. The sources are the chronicles. They contain an entry made in 1469 under the heading “The Grand Prince sent a shipborne host against Kazan”. This is an account of a campaign of Russian forces against Kazan moving along the Volga. On the eve of battle and afterwards the Muscovite ships made a halt “at Irykh’s [*Irykhov*] Island in the Volga” [PSRL 8: 156; 12: 122; 18: 222]. Moreover on the way from Novgorod to Kazan, the Muscovite forces “spent the night at Cheboksary and from Cheboksary they marched a whole day and all through the night and came up to Kazan” [PSRL 12: 121; 18: 221; 22,1: 472]. According to the Sofia and Lvov Chronicles, in 1470 Russian forces led by Ivan Runo again put in “at Irykh’s Island in the Volga” [PSRL 6,2: 168; 20,1: 281]. The Patriarch’s (or Nikon) Chronicle reports events in 1552 “on the Volga by Irokh’s Island” [PSRL 13: 175]. The historian Vasily Dimitriyev rightly took the word Irykh to be the name of the Chuvash deity *Yěřeh*. *Yěřeh utravě* – “Yěřeh Island” is situated 20 versts (22 kilometres) above Kazan [Dimitriyev 2003: 44]. The word is indeed pure Chuvash: if it were Tatar, we would have *Iryk* instead of *Irykh*. Thus it can be stated that in 1469, twenty versts above Kazan on the Volga an island with a Chuvash name was recorded. Evidently no-one lived on the island. It served the Chuvash as a sanctuary, a place of prayer. Slightly upriver, in present-day Cheboksary *rayon*, by the settlement of Shomikovo, there was another similar island sanctuary called *Amaksar* that was “drowned” when the Cheboksary hydroelectric power station was put into operation in 1980.

The Chuvash were recorded for a second time (the first time explicitly) in 1508. Here is the description of events in that year near Kazan: “At that same time the ungodly king with all his princes and nobles [*murzy*] and with many heathens, not

only those living in the city, but also ones who had come from distant places, went out of the city into the fields, staying in tents near the city, during their heathen festival, there came Tatar and Cheremis and Chuvash people and spent many days there drinking and making merry, and buying things from each other. The Russian army meanwhile attacked the heathens, killed many and took the whole great camp prisoner [Lyzlov 1787: 96].

The ethnonym *Chuvash* occurs for a third time in 1510 in a charter issued by Vasily III granting the rights to villages in the Cheptsa *stan* of the Khlynov *uyezd* to the Karino Tatar Devlechyar, the son of Magmet Kazyyev (Russian State Archives of Ancient Documents, Ufa *prikaznaya izba* fund, schedule 1, document 862: 9-10) [Grishkina 1988: 35-36]. The document states that in the Cheptsa *stan* “our Chiuwash people lived at Yakimtsovo and Ishtinnikovo.”

After that the form *Chiuwash* (чювауш) occurs in the chronicles and in a charter granted by the Tsar with the dates 1524, 1548 and 1551 [PSRL 6: 307; 31: 127; Akty 1836: 209]. In 1552 the island *Ierekh* crops up in a chronicle in connection with relations between Moscow and Kazan. The reference is to events “on the Volga by Irokh’s Island [PSRL 29: 71, 170]. The copy of the cadastres [*pistsovye knigi*] for the city and *uyezd* of Kazan for 1567 also mentions an Irekhov backwater of the Volga at its confluence with the little River Sumka [Nevostruyev 1877: 73]. On a present-day map, it is somewhere near the town of Zelenodolsk.

Thus, so far we have the following abbreviated scheme of the origin of the ethnonym *Chävash* (Chuvash): *Seper* → *Sapir* → *Savir* → *Suvar* → *Suvas* → *Suvash* → *Chävash*. Here is an example from Radlov’s dictionary: *Kiräk suvash, kiräk chirmish, kiräk är, kiräk nidī kishi bulsyn barysyda allanyh, mändäläri ikän!*– “Be they Chuvash, Cheremis, Votiaks or any other people, they are all God’s creatures” [Radlov 1899: 1354-55]. Radlov recorded the ethnonym in the form *Čävaš [Čävaš, S”ävaš]* [RAN, f. 177, op. 1. 107: 2833]. In Nikolai Ashmarin’s opinion, the word *Ṭävaš* went successively through the stages *juas’*, *s’uas’*, *tsuas’*, *tsuash (chuash)*, *tsyvash (chyvash)* [Ashmarin 1902: 132]. Through a comparison of *Suvas*,

*Shupashand* Chuvash, V.G. Egorov determined a characteristic of the language of the pre-Turkic ancestors of the Chuvash: in it, as in the Mari language, the sibilants *sh* and *ch* predominated [Egorov 1954: 19-21]. Oleg Bolshakov also considers the chain indicated correct. In particular, he clarified that in Arabic an *s* (represented by the letter *şad*) is often substituted for the *ch* sound that is not present in the language; thus *Suvaz* → *Chuvaz* → *Chuvash* [Bolshakov 1971: 67]. Bolshakov is correct regarding the use of *şad* for *č*, but Ibn Faḍlān has سُوز with the letter *sin*, not *ص*, *şad*.

The Bashkirs and Tatars still call the Chuvash *Syuash*. Examining the mention of the town of *Suvar*, Irina Konovalova notes that “the initial *şad* in the word *Suvar* in al-Idrisi’s work can be regarded as conveying the *ch* sound that is absent in Arabic” [Konovalova 2006: 244]. Konovalova is also correct, depending on what sources al-Idrisi was using. By his day, the letter *ج* *jim* had shifted from its original *g* (*gim*, still pronounced that way in Egyptian Arabic) to *j* and often used to render *č* in foreign words. The Arabic use of *şad* was following a Syriac and Hebrew tradition in which, by late antiquity or the early Middle Ages, *š* had come to be pronounced *ts* (*u*). Citing grave monuments from Volga Bulgaria, Azgar Mukhamadiyev notes that the letter *şadis* usually written in a distinctive manner, with three dots below it. This is a clear indication that the letter was pronounced in a peculiar way in-between the *s* and *ch* sounds [Mukhamadiyev 2011: 87; 2011a: 37]. As we see, there was a historical transition of the *s* sound into *sh* and *ch*. This is also borne out by Chinese and Mongolian sources from the early eighteenth century where *Sibir* → *Shibir*.

In the long series of linguistic differences there is *z* – *r* and the actual ethnonym *Suvas* and *Suvar*. Andrei Kovalevsky called them dialectal variations [Kovalevskii 1956: 21,35]. The letter *nounnûn* (*n*) could appear instead of *zay* (*z*) and *ra* (*r*) in Arabic script, giving *Suvan* – the third form of the ethnonym. Incidentally, it is this variant reading that some Tatar researchers, such as Ravil Fakhрутdinov, consider to be correct [Fakhрутdinov 1986: 97]. Similar variants can perhaps be found historically. For example, *Tatar* ~ Chinese *datan* or *tan’-tan*; *taçwâr* (Tocharian) ~



Chinese *davan* or *dayuan*. However, Middle Chinese *-nis* often used to reproduce a foreign final *-r*. The *Suan* form can also be found in the work of Priscus of Panium. Describing the events of AD 468, he wrote, among other things: “The Romans and the Laz were in a deep strife with the Suans [Σουάννων]. That people [the Suans?] was preparing for battle. When the Persians wanted to make war on him [the Laz ruler?] over the castles that the Suans had taken from them, he sent an embassy to the Emperor [of Byzantium] and requested that the army guarding the boundaries of Roman Armenia be sent to him” [Prisc 1829: 164-165]. Most probably these were the Kartvelian Svans. There is an opinion that *Suan* corresponds to the Chinese *chuban*’ and applies to one of the Hunnic tribes. The *Suans/Chuban*’ were the remnants of the Huns after they were routed by the Xianbei. It is interesting to note the *Suan* is also a variant of the Georgian clan-name *Svan*. Possibly it was the Laz exonym for the Savirs. Linguists point to a number of correspondences between Georgian and Chuvash, for example Georgian *shen* – “you (sing.)” and Chuvash *san* – “your (sing.)”; Georgian *me* – “I” and Chuvash *man* – “my”. The ethnonym *Suan* was recorded by Rashid-ad-Din, who called the Suans one of the Mongol tribes. Descendants of the *Suans/Suvans* still live in Kazakhstan and Kirghizia today. In the Udmurt language *suany* means “to smear, to soil, to dirty with soot”, that is to leave a mark. In my opinion, Gerhard Friedrich Müller was not justified in believing that the phrase *rudera urbis Bulgan* “the remains of the city of Bulgan” written by Philip Johann von Strahlenberg was a mistake and that he should have written *Bulgaras* Eastern authors did [Miller 1791: 4-5]. Most probably, however, Strahlenberg in the early eighteenth century recorded a rare instance of the name of the capital of Volga Bulgaria being written as *Bulgan*, in other words an example of the phonetic variation *r-z-n*.

The Bulgars referred to their neighbours by the exonym *Suvaz*, of which *Suvar* was a variant. Transcription of the names with the letter *v* should be considered more authentic than using the letter *b*. Nonetheless, Serafim Patkanov wrote that some of

the non-Russians of Tobolsk province still in his time called the natives of the region *Syvyrs*, while others called them *Sybyrs*[Patkanov 1892: 134].

The Old Chuvash form of the endonym was \**šávaš* – “maker of sacrifices”, Egorov writes. He believes that the Old Chuvash \**šávaš* ultimately derives from the Ancient Tatar appellative \**jaŋučı* “maker of sacrifices” (<*jaŋu* “the act of sacrificing” <*jay-* “to sacrifice”) [Egorov 2009: 156]. Vasily Dimitriyev did not accept this hypothesis: “Even highly qualified Chuvash philologists began to assert that the ethnonym Čávaš derived from the similar-sounding word *šáva* – ‘grave’ and supposedly denoted a pagan” [Dimitriyev. Fal’sifikatsiya].

There are also other, albeit dubious, versions regarding the *Savir/Sapir/Sabir* ethnonym. That it comes, for example, from *sap-* “nomads that have lost their way”, which is what Gyula Németh believed. This version’s degree of acceptability is indicated by the same scholar’s other hypothesis: that the ethnonym *Chuvash* comes from the Volga Tatar *d’živaš* – “a quiet, modest, peaceful person” [Németh 1991: 94, 97; for criticism see Golden 2011: 147] András Róna-Tas considers the *Suvaz* form erroneous and does not associate the ancestors of the Chuvash with the ethnonym *Sabireither* [Róna-Tas 1996; Dmitriyeva, Agyagási 2001: 156].

The neighbouring Mordvins called the ancestors of the Chuvash *Vetke*. Johann Georgi wrote on this score: “The Chuvash, as they are called by themselves and the Russians, are called *Wiedke* by the Mordvins and *Jurk Mari* (mountain people) by the Cheremis” [Georgi 1776: 38]. According to Müller, the Chuvash were “the ancient Viatichi that are often mentioned in the Russian chronicles, because still today one can hear that the Mordvins call them *Wiedke*, which name was, however, later transferred to the Votiaks and to the River Viatka that they settled” [Miller 2009: 39]. In Mordvin folk songs the Chuvash land is called *Vetken’ mastor*. The Mordvins who live in the Chuvash Republic (the villages of Malye Karmaly and Atrat’) also call the Chuvash *Vetke* [Mokshyn 1978: 282]. Müller gave one other variant, according to which the Mordvins called the Chuvash *V’edene* [Miller 1791: 33].

In the second half of the sixteenth century, many of the Chuvash from Kazan province were forcibly resettled in the western regions of European Russia – Novgorod, Pskov and Smolensk provinces. This was the response to discontent with the system imposed by the tsarist government. The Chuvash dragged out a miserable existence in those new places and were soon assimilated. In this period the local populace called them *Chuvásha* and then that sobriquet was applied to others in the meaning of “a slovenly person” [Dal’ 1982: 611].

In documents from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries (chronicles, petitions, charters) the Upstream Chuvash living in the northern part of the present-day Chuvash Republic were called “Highland Cheremis” or simply “Cheremis” and in some instances “Tatars” as well. Take, for example, descriptions of events connected with the confrontation between Moscow and Kazan in the mid-1500s. Those documents refer under the years 1551 and 1553 to the capture of Highland and Lowland Cheremis, about the Highland Cheremis helping in the construction of the town of Sviazhsk “between the two rivers Shchuka and Sviyaga”; about the Highland Cheremis “living not far from the town of Sviazh”; about Highland Cheremis swearing allegiance to the *voevody* (military governors) of Sviazh [PSRL 19: 62-64]. The Kazan Chronicle contains descriptions of the subjugation of the Cheremis and Mordvins, but makes no mention of the Chuvash, who occupied the lands between those two peoples, for example in the coverage of the events of 1553 [PSRL 19: 407]. The historical context and geographical references give grounds for believing that in these instances the account refers to the Chuvash of the Sviyaga area. The same occurs in documents relating to law suits involving Chuvash inhabitants of the Kozmodemyansk *uyezd* of Kazan province. A document from 1506 states that the Highland Cheremis Urazmetko Kalikov and others request the Great Sovereign, Tsar and Grand Prince Feodor Ivanovich to return to them Kineyarsky island on the Volga where they had always made hay. In another petition the Chuvash Kidishko Altushev and Memeiko Karabuyev with others from the village of Anat-Kiniar’ (today Anat-Kiniary in Cheboksary *rayon*) humbly beg for that same Kineyarsky island. At the

end of the petition, however, the Chuvash from that village are called Cheremis [Magnitskii 1893: 4-6] and entirely without grounds

The hypothesis that *Savir* and its variants is an exonym, while *Chavash* is an endonym, is also feasible. For example, in Greater Armenia there was the toponym *Chuash*, the name of one of the administrative districts by Lake Van. It also occurs in Armenian historical sources [Iovannes. Ist. XXXIX,LXI; Bagratuni 1971: 94,112]. The toponym *Chuash* was recorded in connection with the events of 579–590, when Hormisd, the son of Khosrau I Anushirwan of Persia, entered the province of Vaspurakan and caused much damage there. In 904 Ashot Artsruni, the *ishkhan* of Vaspurakan, died. According to Tovma Artsruni, Ashot's brothers, Gagik and Gurgun, divided the territory between themselves, with Gagik receiving *Chuash* among other places. In 908 the *ostikan* (a member of the Persian king's retinue) Sbuk advanced his forces over the border of *Chuash*. The inhabitants were taken unawares. Much looting and plundering took place, with many people being taken into captivity. Gagik I Artsruni, recognizing that he could not defeat Sbuk, sent a monk to the *ostikan* with a large amount of gifts and tributes, requesting peace. Sbuk accepted the proposal. So the raids stopped and the country began to live in peace and quiet. A chronicle of events tells of the Armenian ruler Derenik being taken prisoner by foreigners. He was released from slavery by the valiant military leader Abgarib. "This took place in the Armenian region of *Chuash*, in the village of Bak that borders with Vaspurakan," the chronicle states [Sparapet 1974: 10]. Thus in Armenia between the sixth and tenth centuries, we have an administrative district called *Chuash*. It is entirely feasible that the name of the *gavar* came from the endoethnonym *Chuvash* whose exoethnonym was *Savir*. The inhabitants of the *gavar* Utik were called *Sevordik* by the Armenians [Iovannes. Ist. XLV]. Evidently, a part of the *Savir-Chuvash* settled in Armenia and were eventually assimilated. Incidentally, it is the form *Chuash* that has survived to this day in the language of the Tatars and Mari when referring to the present-day Chuvash. Sixteenth-century sources record a town of *Chiuwash* in Tobolsk district [Kratkaya 1880: 18,37].

Russian sixteenth-century chronicles also unequivocally use the term Chiuvasch as an ethnonym and not to refer to a social stratum without ethnic distinction, as some historians would have us believe. For example: “They killed many men of Kazan and took prisoner Tatars, Cheremis and Chuvash, 740 prisoners” [PSRL 6: 37]; “and in that battle many princes and nobles [*murzy*], Tatars, Cheremis and Chuvash were killed”; “And Mahomet and his fellows humbly petitioned the Sovereign on behalf of the whole Upland Side, on behalf of the princes, high and lesser nobles [*murz i sotnykh kniazei i desiatnykh*] and Chiuvasch, Cheremis and Cossacks [*kazaki*]” [PSRL 13: 44,164]. In any case there is a direct link between the ethnyonyms *Savir* and *Chuvash* in both historical and etymological terms.

Thus the ethnonym *Chuvash* underwent a long historical course of transformation in the form *Seper* (*Seber*) → *Syvyr* (*Sāvār*) → *Savir* (*Savar*, *Sapir*, *Sabir*) → *Suvar* (*Suvas*, *Suvan*) → *Suvash* → *Chāvash* (*t’šāvaš*)

**History.** In the middle of the 2nd century Ptolemy records the Σάυαγοι in the Caucasus, below the Aorsi and the Pagyritae [Ptolemaei 1843: 171].

In the early period of the Caucasian history of the ancestors of the Chuvash they were often confused with other peoples, primarily the Huns. Things get clearer from the fifth century, when, as active participants in the Perso-Byzantine wars, the Savirs (*Σάβειροι*) were drawn into interaction with the Persians, Eastern Romans, Ugrian tribes, Avars, Armenians, Alans and Laz [Prisc 1829: 158; Procopi 1905: 74,292,294,300]. In the 400s Stephanus of Byzantium wrote about the Sapirs/Savirs (*Σάπειροι*/*Σάβειροι*) living on the River Akampis (Chorokh) between Colchis and Persia [Stephani 1849: 166,555]. Jordanes writing in the mid-sixth century makes note of the tribes that made up the core of the Hunnic confederation [Jordan 1861: fr. 37]: “From here the Huns, like a kind of very fertile sod of exceedingly strong tribes, expanded with two-pronged ferocity against other peoples. Some of these are called Altziagiri, others Sabiri; and they have separate dwelling places,” In actual fact, the Huns themselves comprised only a small fraction of their forces. The great mass was made up of allies and conquered tribes.

After the death of Attila in 453 and the break-up of the Hunnic union into autonomous tribes in the Caucasus, the Savir confederation acquired a dominant role. The Onogur state fell apart and was replaced by a new military and political union led by the Savirs. It included Huns and Bulgars. “The disintegration in the Northern Caucasus of the first Hunno-Bulgarian amalgamation led by the Onogurs caused the start of a parallel process of unification among the nomads of eastern Ciscaucasia and the emergence of a new military and political union led by the Sabirs” [Dzhafarov 1985: 69]. In 463 the Savirs attacked the Saragur, Ugor and Onogur. This action was prompted by the Savirs themselves being encroached upon by the Avars, while the Avars had been driven out by tribes living on the coast [Prisc 1829: 158]. The Saragur in turn invaded the lands of the Akatzirs. In the second half of the fifth century the Savirs settled in the region of the River Kuma along the Caspian Sea. So, we see that the ethnonym *Σάβειροι* crops up in Byzantine sources immediately after the death of Attila. I remind the reader that he became the sole leader of the Hunnic union after violently ousting his own brother, Bleda (*Βλήδα*), in 445. Then Attila united many tribes and fully usurped power. Until Attila’s death only isolated episodes are recorded in which the Savirs/Sabirs displayed particular bravery in combat. On all other occasions the Savirs acted as part of Attila’s forces and were called Huns, or at best “Hunno-Sabirs” or “the Huns called Sabirs”.

Because of the constant wars between Iran and Byzantium, and above all because the Savirs shifted their support from one side to another, two groups formed within the Savir amalgamation: pro-Iranian and pro-Byzantine. The Savirs were at that time made up of a number of separate tribal sub-groups. “But already in the early sixth century the position in Savir society changed. A hereditary dynasty emerged from the tribal nobility and laid claim to rule all the Savirs. Members of this dynasty engaged in an open struggle with the separatism of tribal chieftains” [Fyodorov 1972: 21]. The Derbent and Daryal Gaps served as the main military and trade routes across the mountains. Knowing this, in the early sixth century the Savirs gained control of the eastern and central regions of the Northern Caucasus. They occupied the areas of

both strategic “gates”. In his Chronicle for the year 516/517 (6008 by the Byzantine “Era of the World” calendar), Theophanes of Byzantium wrote: “The Huns called Savirs penetrated beyond the Caspian Gate [the Derbent passage], raided Armenia, plundered Cappadocia, Galatia and Pontus and almost reached Euchaita” [Theophan1980: 49].<sup>5</sup>

The Savirs were then one of the most powerful tribes in the region. According to Theophanes and Ioannes Malalas, in 528 the Savir leaders could field more than 120,000 warriors at one time [Theophan1980: 26,50; Malalas 1831: 430-431]. From this we can extrapolate the total number of the Savirs, adding to the warriors their wives, children and parents. It comes to a million people. There was practically no other force of that strength in the Caucasus at the time. In 527/528, Boarix, “a woman of the Huns called Savirs” (*Οὔνωτωντῶν λεγομένων Σαβήρη*) allied herself with the Romans. The name of this woman – *Βωα/Voa/Boa* + *-ρῆζ/-rix* meaning “queen” – has an evident resemblance to a tributary of the River Phasis (Rioni), the *Boa(s)*, which, it has been suggested, means “a cry, shout” in Georgian.<sup>6</sup> Today, this is the Chorokh, in Turkish Çoruh River. Boarêks’s name remains highly problematic, unlike the few other Savir names known to us, which are Turkic [Golden 1980: 257-258]. Németh’s suggestion [Németh 1991: 154] is quite shaky. She began to rule in the Hunnic lands after the death of her husband, Valakh (*Βαλαχ*). She had 100,000 warriors under her control. The Persian king Kavadh persuaded two tribal rulers, relatives of Boarix, to help him in his war against the Romans. When they passed through Queen Boarix’s lands she attacked them. One, Styrax, was captured and sent in chains to Constantinople. The other, Glonex, fell in battle. Thus she became an ally

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<sup>5</sup>In contrast to this view, it has long been held as a working hypothesis (cf. Artamonov, Golden, among others) that the Savirs, coming from Inner Asia > Siberia, did not reach the Volga region until the early sixth century and only then, coming from the lower Volga - North Caucasian steppes, appear as raiders into Transcaucasia and Anatolia (as noted by Theophanes above). In addition, see the views of D. Sinor, 1946-1947: 1-77 and Ligeti, 1986: 344-347.

<sup>6</sup>Such an etymology, however, is doubtful. One would have to demonstrate a pattern of borrowing of terms from Georgian into Savir for which we have no evidence. Moreover, *boa* in Georgian in the meaning “cry, shout” is not attested.

of Justinian [Theophan 1980: 50]. Regarding this episode, Peter Golden writes that the Savir queen Boa ruled over 100,000 people and could have had an army of 20,000 on the battlefield [Golden 2011: 91]. In actual fact, Malalas states that Boa had “a hundred thousand under her command” [Procopii 1998: 470], without specifying whether he meant subjects altogether or only warriors. Gyula Németh was inclined to reckon 100,000 soldiers, but at the same time suggested that that this number meant all the members of the tribe [Németh 1991: 151]. Theophanes asserted that Boarix had “a hundred thousand Huns with her” (“Huns called Sabirs”) [Theophan. Khrono]. Neither Malalas nor Theophanes states that Boarix has 20,000 warriors. In fact not a single source makes it clear what 100,000 means – the number of warriors or the total amount of the Savir population. We do, however, know that two commanders from among the inner Huns (from the context we can suppose that they were also “Huns called Sabirs”) went on campaign to aid the Persians with 20,000 (the term “Hun” is very loosely applied. It may refer to non-Savir groupings). Naturally in this case the reference is to warriors and not the ordinary populace. Boarix completely routed both detachments. In that case her forces should have outnumbered the enemy many times over. That is a further argument in favour of a large number of warriors under Boarix’s command. Peter Golden is therefore right to note that there was nothing surprising in Byzantium seeking means by which to make the Savirs allies in their constant skirmishes with Sassanid Iran in pursuit of dominance in the Caucasus [Golden 2008a: 259]. Regarding the calculation of the implied size of the Savir army and population, Jordanes’ report of the strength of the Hunnic forces is extremely useful. Here are the lines: “For after his brother Bleda, who ruled over a great part of the Huns, had been slain by his treachery, Attila united all the people under his own rule. Gathering also the multitude of other tribes which he then held under his sway, he sought to subdue the foremost nations of the world the Romans and the Visigoths. His army is said to have numbered five hundred thousand men” [Jordan 1861: fr. 180-181]. As we can see, Jordanes’ figure takes into account the warriors of all the tribes included in the Huns; army. Yelena Skrzhinskaya believed, however, that



Jordanes exaggerated the true size of the Hunnic forces [Skrzhynskaya 2001: 310]. In that case we can suppose that there were less than 500,000 warriors on the Hunnic formations. Of them 120,000 were Savir warriors, i.e. roughly a quarter. This proportion also favours my calculation because within the Hunnic forces the Savirs were overwhelmingly more numerous than any other tribe.

In the course of his description of the Perso-Byzantine War, Procopius noted that “Cabades [Kavadh] sent another army into the part of Armenia which is subject to the Romans. This army was composed of Persarmenians and Sunitae, whose land adjoins that of the Alani. There were also Huns with them, of the stock called Sabiri (*Σάβειροι*), to the number of three thousand, a most warlike race” [Procopi 1905: 74]. We can calculate the year in which this event took place on the basis of the names mentioned in the text. We know that Kavadh I (Cabades) died in 531, so the event took place before that year. Sittas, whom Procopius mentions in the same paragraph, “held the office of general in Byzantium and had authority over the whole army in Armenia” in 528–531. Dorotheus, meanwhile, was general of Armenia. He commanded at the Battle of Satala in the summer of 530 [Adonts 1971: 135]. In the year 530, therefore, 3,000 Savirs fought in the Persian forces in Armenia against the Byzantine army.

Together with the Khazars, the Savirs “made up one and the same military and political amalgamation that was, however, headed by the Savirs since in the first half of the sixth century in the majority of historical reports it is their name that serves to designate the barbarians who dwelt north of Derbent” [Artamonov 1962: 127].

In 541 hostilities between Iran and Byzantium took place in Lazica. This was a strategic area for both sides. An important bone of contention was the mighty maritime citadel of Petra, built on Justinian’s orders to the south of the River Phasis. The local populace was, however, unhappy with the Byzantine occupation. The Laz turned to the Persian Shah for aid. He prepared well and took the fortress. In 545 a truce was concluded between Persia and Byzantium. But then the Laz *appealed* to the Byzantines for help. In the year 549 Justinian sent a 7,000-strong army.

Gubazes(Gouvades), the ruler of the Laz, ordered Dagisthaeus, the commander of Armenia, to send some men to guard the pass leading to Petra. Gubazes himself proceeded to the borders of Lazica to guard the passes there. Before doing so, he concluded an alliance with the Alans and the Savirs. “The Emperor Justinian at this time sent to the nation of the Sabiri (*Σαβείρων*) the money which had been agreed upon” [Procopi 1905: 300]. As Alexandra Chekalova rightly noted in her commentary on Procopius, “the alliance with the Hun-Sabirs was indeed important, since they were a warlike people and well acquainted with siege warfare” [Chekalova 1998, note 189]. Procopius himself commented on this characteristic of the Savirs in his book on the Gothic War. Early in 551, with the aid of the Hun-Savirs, the Byzantine commander Bessas finally retook Petra. In this attack the Savirs used rams (*κρίός*) of a special construction that played a decisive role in demolishing the walls of the fortress. These battering rams differed substantially from the heavy, clumsy types of construction that were drawn by oxen. Procopius informs us that in this Roman army there were a number of barbarians from the Savir tribe. When they arrived beneath the walls of besieged Petra, the Savirs saw that the Romans did not know what to do under the circumstances that had arisen and had reached a stalemate. At that point the Savirs (*Σαβείροι*) “devised a contrivance, such as had never been conceived by anyone else of the Romans or of the Persians since men have existed, although there have always been and now are great numbers of engineers in both countries” [Procopi 1905a: 538-540]. Procopius gives a detailed description of the Savir invention. This machine did not have supporting beams; they were replaced by “thick wands”. Only in the centre did they place a freely moving beam with a pointed tip. The Savirs prepared three of these machines. Around forty of the Romans, clad in armour, easily moved the rams up to the walls of Petra. Soldiers stood either side of the machine equipped with poles that had iron hooks on the end. When blows from the log loosened courses of masonry, they dragged the crumbling stones out with these hooks and tossed them aside. That is how the walls of Petra were demolished. Soon, at the siege of Archaeopolis, it was the Persians who used the services of the

Savirs' light battering rams. The Persian commander Mermeroes (Mihr-Mihroe) "first commanded the Sabiri (*Σαβείροις*) to built a great number of rams, of the sort which men would be able to carry on their shoulders, because he was quite unable to bring up the customary engines to the circuit-wall of Archaeopolis, lying as it did along the lower slopes of the hill ; for he had heard what had been achieved by the Sabiri who were allies of the Romans at the wall of Petra not long before, and he sought by following out the method discovered by them to reap the advantage of their experience. And they carried out his orders, constructing immediately a large number of rams, such as I have said were recently made for the Romans by the Sabiri... So then the Persians and Sabiri together, by shooting rapidly at the wall so that they filled the air round about it with their arrows, came not far from compelling the Romans there to abandon the parapet." [Procop.BG. IV. 11, 4-5,11].

In 552 the Persian forces under the command of Mermeroes took the Laz stronghold of Uchimerion by cunning. The Persians had over 70,000 hand-picked soldiers and a large number of Savirs (*Σαβείρους*). As a result all the fertile lands "from Mocheresis to Iberia" became inaccessible to the Romans and Laz [Procopi 1905a: 570-572].

At the end of winter 552/553 a truce was established between the Persians and Romans, but Khosrau I was unwilling to give up Lazica. He distributed the money obtained by selling silkworm eggs to the Romans as a gift to the Hun-Sabirs (*Οὐννων των Σαβείρων*) and recruited large numbers of them into his army. He sent them all to Mermeroes as well as many war elephants and ordered him to press ahead vigorously in Lazica. Mermeroes moved against the Laz strongholds with all his Persian and Hunno-Savir army. The Romans held a strong position and did not engage in an open fight. They were joined by King Gubazes of the Laz. Having discovered that the King's sister was in a particular fortress, the Persians resolved to capture it, but the Romans put up a resolute defence. They were assisted in this by the narrow mountainous approach to the fortress and the Persians turned back. The Romans pursued the withdrawing enemy, attacking at an awkward place for the Persians and

killing many, including the leader of the Savirs. Fierce fighting ensued around his body, which resulted in the Persians overcoming their foes and putting them to flight [Procopi 1905a: 578-579].

In the campaign of 554–555 the heavily-armed Savirs under the leadership of “their most illustrious people”, Balmakh (*Βαλμάχ*), Kutilzis (*Κούτιλζις*) and Iliger (*Ἰλιγερ*), played an active part in the war on the Byzantine side and routed a strong force of the warlike Dilimnites, allies of the Persians. In the next battle in Iberia, however, a force of Hunno-Savirs (*Ούννοι Σάβειροι*) numbering 500 men was fighting on the Persian side [Agathi1996: 108-110,143-144].

As of the year 555 the immediate neighbours of the Savirs were the Onogur, Ogur, Burgar, Kothrigor (Kutrigur) Avar, Khazar, Dirmar and other tribes.. They all lived “in tents, existing on the meat of livestock and fish, on wild animals and by their arms,” Zacharias of Mytilene reports of them [Zakhar. Khronika. XII.7, Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor 2011:448-449].

“By the middle of the sixth century the Savirs, being the most powerful and numerous people in the Caucasus, seized the whole of Northern Albania (Shirvan and Arran) in the area of Derbend-Kabala, the former centre of Savir settlements, and stayed there more than 100 years” [Ashurbeili 1983: 62]. At that time the Savirs had control of the Caspian Gates that Armenian historians call Chora and where slightly later the city of Derbent arose [Merpert 1958: 565-566]. In 552–558 there is mention of Savirs on the River Tekhuri in Western Georgia. Agathias Scholasticus, in particular, wrote: “Mercenaries from among the Huns who are called Sabirs [*Σαβείρων*]... made camp by Archaeopolis and the adjoining localities” [Agafii 1996: 108], that is to say, in the land of the Laz. As Menander Protector wrote, in 558 “the Avars soon started a war with the Utigurs, then with the Zaloï who are of the Hunnic tribe, and smashed the forces of the Savirs” [Menandr. Hist. 5], i.e. inflicted heavy losses on their military units.

In 559, during the siege of Chersonesus, the Savirs made small boats from long, sturdy reeds for which they improvised rowlocks and made outriggers on both sides [Golden 2011: 113].

The year 572 was marked by the outbreak of profound differences between Persia and Byzantium over the Caucasus. On learning that the Huns had sent an embassy to Justin II, Khosrau became concerned. Up until then, the Emperor had been paying the Persians an annual amount in gold to keep invading tribes from disturbing either of their states. Now Justin abrogated the treaty, saying that it was shameful for him to pay tribute to the Persians “Because of this, that great war took place between the Persians and Romans” [Theophan. Khrono.]. The Byzantist Igor Chichurov said that we should take the expression “invading tribes”, which Theophanes did not clarify further, to mean first and foremost the Caucasian Huns, in particular the Hunno-Savirs [Chichurov 1980: 89]. It is indeed true that at that time the Huns, meaning the Savirs, were in possession of Derbent and were eastern neighbours of the Alans. The Savirs also troubled the Byzantines by mounting daring attacks on their Anatolian provinces.

In 576 the Persian and Roman armies engaged in tactical manoeuvring for superiority in Caucasian Albania. The Emperor was angry with his commanders, Cursus and Theodore, reproaching them for not having moved the Savirs and Albanians elsewhere after they entered Albania. The commanders, though, restricted themselves to taking hostages from those tribes. The Savirs did indeed immediately overthrow Roman dominance. Then the Roman commanders returned to Albania and forced the Savirs and Albanians to relocate to the east side of the River Cyrus (Kura) [Menandr. Hist. 43]. In this way the Byzantines wanted to keep these tribes on their side. In 578 Khosrau moved cavalry, heavy infantry and archers, 20,000 men in total, from the Caucasus to Mesopotamia. Of these 12,000 were Persians, the rest Saracens and Savirs [Menandr. Hist. 52].

An Armenian source describing the events of 579–590 tells of the invasion of a large Persian force into the lands of Vaspurakan. A lot of fortresses were captured

and set on fire; inhabitants were taken into captivity. Many areas suffered at that time, including the district of Chuash. The captured lands were given over to the *ishkhans* (nobles) [Bagratuni 1971: 94].

In roughly the year 613 an armed contest broke out for the fortress of Beiudaes in Upper Mesopotamia (present-day south-eastern Turkey) between the local inhabitants, the Persian and Roman armies. The Romans laid siege to the stronghold in exceptional strength. Their forces included a warrior named Sapeir/Sapir (*Σάπειρ*). Theophylact Simocatta gives the highest possible characterization of him: for physical strength Sapir was like Tydeus extolled by Homer, in intellect he excelled Tydeus, in spirit he was a Heracles and in valour even greater than Heracles. This Sapir snatched up some sharpened stakes and by inserting them in the wall climbed up onto the fortress. One of the Persian warriors appeared on the fortress tower, though, and pushed a large stone onto Sapir. Sapir tumbled down along with that stone and he came down head first. Yet the wounded Sapir again quickly began to climb up the wall. He grabbed hold of the battlements, but the enemy pushed him off together with a loosened merlon. The daredevil slid down, “holding in his embrace that merlon like a dearly beloved woman”. Still Sapir made a third attempt. This time he managed to get onto the wall and cut off the Persian’s head. One of Sapir’s brothers, who had witnessed his valour, repeated his feat. Other warriors went after them. The gates were opened, the fortress taken [Theophyl. Hist. II.18,7-25]. In her commentary on Theophylact Simocatta, K.A. Osipova opined that Sapir in this instance is not a proper name and the reference is to a man from the Hunnic Sabir tribe. Besides, from the context we learn that this Sapir had several brothers in the troop. Theophanes does indeed state more precisely: “One of the brothers of this Sapir (he was the eldest of them)”. Most probably this name was being used for warriors of a single tribe – the Savir/Sapirs.

In 658-659, the Western Turkic Kaganate was defeated by the Tang and finally fell apart. At the same time in the north-eastern foothills of Daghestan the state of Suvar formed on the basis of early feudal relations with Varachan as its capital. By

inertia the Armenian sources continued to call it the Kingdom of the Huns and Arab chroniclers still used Jidan.

Immediately after Varaz-Trdat ascended to the throne of Caucasian Albania in 670, a large force of Hunno-Savirs led by Alp-Ilituer invaded the country and began laying waste to the regions at the foot of the Caucasus mountains and the settlements in the *gavar* of Kapitalak. Alp-Ilituer himself crossed the River Cyrus and entered the *gavar* of Uti and set about rustling cattle, looting and taking the people away as prisoners. Then the Hunno-Savirs set up camp in a valley by the northern slopes of the Caucasus. When he heard this, Varaz-Trdat sent an envoy to Alp-Ilituer with peace proposals. The envoy managed to incline Alp-Ilituer to peace and friendship and the Hunno-Savirs returned to their own country [Kalankatuatsi. Ist. II. 26].

In 723 the Arab military commander al-Jarrah arrived on the territory of Wabandar, i.e. Varachan. At that time there were 40,000 houses in the city [Al-Kufi. Book VIII]. In 737 the Arab commander Marwan, with the support of Ashot, the Prince of Armenia, undertook a campaign into the land of the Huns. He captured the city of Varachan and returned triumphant, having seized great booty [Ghevond 1862: 81-82; Vardan 1861: 96]. Of course, the “Daghestani Huns” in this case is a reference to the Savirs. By that time the Huns were neither a single ethnos, nor a single military and political union. The Savirs were called Huns by inertia. It is believed that their capital, Balanjar–Varachan, ceased to exist after 737. The Savirs did indeed leave the area. They went, however, some historians suggest, not to the Volga, but to the Don, where, together with other tribes, they formed the Saltovo-Mayaki archaeological culture. But part of the Bulgars did indeed go off to the Volga after 737 and they formed the core of Volga Bulgaria. The role of political dominance over the neighbouring tribes passed to them. At the same time, though, a large group of Bulgars at the very end of the eighth century sojourned in the steppes around the Don. In the late ninth or early tenth century the Elteber of the Volga Bulgars began to also control the Barsils and the Savirs [Komar2010: 192-193].

In the eighth century, the military and political situation shifted still further in favour of Khazaria. The Khazars imposed tribute on both Suvar and the Bulgars. The land of Suvar became federated with the Khazaria with its capital at Semender in the lower reaches of the River Terek. By the middle of the eighth century, however, Derbent was in the hands of the Arabs. The Khazars could not accept this and made several attempts to overcome its fortress walls, but without success. The Caliph ordered Yezid, the governor of Derbent, to renew the old fortifications. A few fortresses destroyed earlier, including Suvvari, were renovated and garrisoned. Besides that, Yezid put a thousand guards on each of the borders, especially in the fortress of Suvvari. So all the fortifications around Derbent were packed with warriors and the city protected from the Khazars [Mukhammed-Avabi 1898: 83-84]. As we see, long before the eighth century, close to the city of Derbent there was a fortress named Suvvari, originally undoubtedly constructed by the Sabirs/Suvars

In the second half of the ninth century Ibn Khordadbeh recorded a kingdom of Suvar on the northern side of Bab (Derbent) [Ibn Khordadbekh. Book 124]. In 863 the Suvars who lived in the Northern Caucasus-Don area moved up the River Itil (Volga). Thus the Savars/Sabirs/Suvars spent exactly seven centuries in the Caucasus and on the shores of the Pontus (100s–800s). In two centuries of that period, from the death of Attila to their entry into the Khazar Kaganate (453 – circa 650), the Savirs held eastern Ciscaucasia in their sway. The Savirs fought sometimes on the side of Persia, sometimes on the side of Byzantium; they belonged at one time to the Hunnic confederation, at another to the Bulgar one, led by turns an autonomous nomadic life and a settled one. They also had their own state in the Caucasus with Varachan as its capital. Throughout all of this, the Savirs preserved their cohesion, strengthened their tribal union and derived benefit from their allies of the moment. The sources continue by inertia to call the Savir state with its capital at Varachan “the country of the Huns”. As Liudmila Gmyrya justly observes, in its level of socio-economic development the “country of the Huns” (i.e. Savirs) was “on the way to the establishment of statehood of an early feudal type” [Gmyrya 2007: 111].



Of course, the settlement of Suvar on the Volga was constructed after 922 and a stone town cannot realistically have appeared before the mid-1200s. That is why in 1135/36 al-Gharnati wrote simply “the inhabitants of Suvar” [Al-Garnati. Puteshestviye.5], that is, the inhabitants of the country (or locality) Suvar. In anycase, the town of Suvar that sprang up on the left bank of the Volga “in the Golden Horde era ... no longer played an economic or political role” [Egorov 1985: 96]. The Mongol-Tatar invasion prompted a migration of part of the population of Bulgaria into lands further to the north. “In the eastern part of the territory beyond the Kama, in the basin of the River Omarka, a whole group of new towns sprang up, foremost among them Kermenchuk (the Chuvash *Kermen čyk* – “Palace of Sacrifices”)[Fakhrutdinov 1984: 117]. In Common Turkic *Kermenčük* means “little city”. It is interesting to note that in their long history the Savirs/Savirs never suffered calamitous defeats on the battlefield. *In extremis* they changed their place of habitation.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the Chuvash, who formed part of the population of the Khanate of Kazan, suffered badly from the confrontations between Kazan and Moscow. In 1524, for example, Prince Vasily III of Vladimir and Moscow, sent a great army against Kazan. Twenty versts from the city the Prince’s forces clashed with the men of Kazan. “And in that battle many princes and nobles, Tatars, Cheremis and Chiuvasch were killed and many other princes and nobles were captured alive,” we are informed by the Resurrection, Patriarch’s, Lvov and Mazurin Chronicles and the Book of Degrees [PSRL. 8: 270; 13: 44; 20,1: 403]. “And they slew many princes and nobles, Tatars, Cheremis and Chiuvasch,” another source confirms [Kniga 18]. As a result the pro-Crimean khan Sahib Girai fled from Kazan and the pro-Muscovite Safa Girei was installed in his place. In May 1551 a delegation was sent to Ivan IV to speak on behalf of the Upland Side. This embassy comprised the highland men Magmet Bozubov (Bezzubov), Akhkubek Togoyev (Togayev) and their fellows, as well as Grigory Pleshcheyev, son of Semion. In 1552 Ivan the

Terrible visited Sviazhsk in person. He was met by the Russian *voevody* and the local population – Cheremis and Chuvash [PSRL 13: 200,497; 20,2: 514].

**Geography.** Since some researchers identify the ethnonym *Seper/Savar/Savir* with the name *Sibir* (Siberia), it makes sense to also investigate the territorial boundaries of the ancient toponym. A large portion of the reconstructions of the history of the Savirs/Sabirs connects them in one way or another with Western Siberia. Their time here left an imprint on the local Ugrian cultures and gave the name *Sabir* > *Sibir* to the region itself, Peter Golden writes [Golden 2011: 146].

The Arab writer Al-Omari, among others, wrote about the boundaries of the domains Sibir and Ibir. According to this early fourteenth-century source, Sibir and Ibir are located beyond Bashkyrd and Chulyman. It also asserts that Sibir and Ibir lie beyond the Voguls, and that to the east of Sibir and Ibir lies Chulyman. And if you travel farther to the east, you come to the Khatai land [Elomari 1884: 238]. The aforementioned toponym Chulyman is used by the Chuvash as a hydronym in the form *Čulman Atāl* (Chulman + Volga) – the Chuvash name for the River Kama. There is a river called *Chulyshman* in the Altai; the *Chulym* is a right-bank tributary of the Ob. Thus in the early 1300s Sibir and Ibir, taken broadly, occupied an expanse from the Kama to the Ob, taken more narrowly from beyond the lands of the Voguls (Mansi) to the River Chulyman. Vladimir Velyaminov-Zernov recalled that in olden times the Tatars had said simply *Tura* instead of Siberia, while the Tiumen and Tobol Tatars were called *Turali*, and in Russian documents *Turalintsy*. Documents and popular tradition associated the whole ancient history of the Siberian realm and legends about the masters of Siberia with the rivers Tobol and Tura. Later the sovereigns of Russia also called themselves on some occasions Tsars of Siberia, on others Tsars of Tura. The Bashkirs have no other name for the Tiumen and Tobol Tatars but *Turali* [Kratkaya 1880: 28; Velyaminov-Zernov 1887: 4; Miller 1999: 189]. In other words, the concepts Sibir and Tura are interchangeable. In the works of Johann Gottlieb Georgi, Foat Valeyev, Nikolai Tomilov and Khanisa Alishina, the *Turaly* are defined as Tatars living along the Rivers Tobol and Tura, between the

Tobol and the Irtysh. The word itself, according to their inferences, means “settled” [Alishina. Analiz] (cf. Chuvash *tār* – “to stand”). In other words, the term *Sibir* originally applied to the natives of the Rivers Tobol and Tura.

The first surviving written reference to Siberia, in the form *Shibir*, dates from 1206. It occurs in a Chinese source, the *Yuán Shǐ*, an official chronicle of the history of the Yuan dynasty. There, in a biography of Yuwashi, it is stated that that Chinese general gave battle in the land of *I-bi-rh Shi-bi-rh* [Bretschneider 1888: 37]. It is not difficult to recognize the name Siberia in that. Victor Vasilyev and Nikolai Berezin reckoned that the word *Sibir* was of Chinese origin and meant “the Western back of beyond” [Berezin 1894: 122]. In 1207, the *Secret History of the Mongols* states, Jochi, the eldest son of Chingis Khan, subjugated the forest peoples living in the south of present-day Siberia, including a tribe called the *Shibir* [Sokrovennoye. 239]. In his *Altan Tobchi* for that same year Guush Luvsandanзан gives the variant *Shiber* [Danzan XI. 22]. Apparently the reference is to a remaining part of the *Siber/Seper* tribe, or else the term is a geographical name. Rashīd al-Dīn wrote at the very start of the fourteenth century about the land of *Aber Sibir* [*Ibir Sibir*]. The name that interests us appears in the form *Sebur* in the Catalan Atlas of 1375. In 1410 Johann Schiltberger himself visited the land of *Ibissibir* [Alekseyev 2006: 54-57]. The ancient history of Siberia before the Russian conquest of its territories was shrouded in mystery. We know that in the sixteenth century: on the right side of the River Irtysh, 2½ geographical miles [Dilthey, Hübner 1771: 135-137] (in another source 16 versts) above present-day Tobolsk [Kratkaya 1880: 6,26], in the mouth of the little river Sibirka there was a town called *Sibir* that was taken by Yermak in 1582. Apparently both the *Sibir/Seper* tribe and the town of *Sibir* got their names from this small river *Sibir(ka)*. The town of *Sibir* is mentioned from the fourteenth century. Before Yermak it was known as a Tatar stronghold. However, Gerhard Friedrich Müller wrote that if you asked the Tobol Tatars about this, the meaning of the word *Sibir* was wholly unknown to them. They themselves called the town Iskerom and in the Remezov Chronicle it is called *Kashlyk*, that is “winter quarters” (a corruption of

*Qishlaq*). Müller supposed that the name *Sibir*’ came from the language of the people who provided the first information about that country (by which he meant the Komi-Permyaks or Komi-Zyrians) and later passed into Russian. The ruins of that town were still visible relatively recently [Miller 1999: 191]. The name of the river *Sibir* is, however, most probably from a Ugric language. The Russians began to apply the name to the whole of northern Asia. In 1587 the main city of Siberia, Tobolsk, was founded. It originally consisted of a small wooden stockade and a few buildings for the men serving there. Soon the whole of the hinterland of Tobolsk and *Sibir* was cleared of hostile elements. “Since that time the town of *Sibir* was never resettled [Miller 1999: 271] and it gradually fell into oblivion. There is also a small River *Sibirka* near the town of Verkhniy Tagil, a left-bank tributary of the River Tagil.

In the archives of the Library of the Russian Academy of Sciences there is a hand-made map drawn up in 1806. It includes a plan of the remains of the town of *Sibir* [RASL, Manuscript Dept., № 67, l. 13]. “This place is 19 versts from the city of Tobolsk along the provincial highway to the city of Tomsk,” says a note accompanying the map. One verst off to the side of the highway is the crumbling bank of the River Irtysh and upon that what is left of *Sibir*. The map places it in a triangle between the Irtysh and the mouth of the *Sibirka* flowing into it. Old residents said that up to 40 sazhen of the town’s fortifications had collapsed into the Irtysh. “Now the banks down to the Irtysh and the *Sibirka* are so steep, almost perpendicular to look at, measured at a height of 33 sazhen.” Around the town there had been a ditch two arshins wide and one deep. Visible too are pits that were once filled with water and also alongside the remains of one more collapsed fortification. Beyond the *Sibirka* there was a cemetery. Serafim Patkanov also wrote of the existence near Tobolsk of a place by the name of Suvar – “sogar im Städtchen am Suwarysch”. In the late nineteenth century traces could still be seen there of the ruins of an urban-type settlement. The cultural level of the settlement was considerably higher than that of the neighbouring Ostyaks and Voguls [Patkanoff 1900: 272]. Perhaps there is a complete geographical coincidence between the ancient Suvar site and the mediaeval

toponym *Chuvashsky mys* – “Chuvash Head/Point” (located, according to the Remezov Chronicle, two versts above the mouth of the River Tobol) that may be a late folk explanation for the name of the place. Caspar Zeuss and Gyula Németh wrote about the unquestionable traces of the Sabirs in the River Irtysh region of Western Siberia. If the tribes with that same name are the Sabirs mentioned by Priscus of Panium, there are no grounds for doubt: the Sabirs lived in Western Siberia around where Tobolsk is today and were in close contact with the Ostyaks and Voguls. Their name was not one given to them; they used it themselves as inhabitants of Western Siberia who had lived from time immemorial in the *Šabar* region and it reflects a local geographical name, Németh observed [Németh 1991: 141,150,151].

Tribes known as the *Sabeiroi* were located to the south and east of the Urals, Gavriil Destunis observed [Destunis 1860, note 98]. Igor Chichurov reckoned that the Savirs/Sabirs probably lived in Western Siberia, between the Altai and the Urals [Chichurov 1980: 76]. As has already been stated, on the River Irtysh 16 versts above present-day Tobolsk at the mouth of the *Sibirka* there was a town called *Sibir*. It was much better fortified than nearby Abalak. From the town of Sibir to where the River Vaga joins the Irtysh the distance was 100 versts [Miller 1999: 227,234,251].

As we see, the Savir ancestors of the Chuvash came from the south of Western Siberia. At that time they occupied territories between Ugric and Iranian tribes. It makes sense to date the Savirs’ departure from Siberia to the time after the breakdown of Proto-Ugric unity, more precisely to the middle of the first century BC. It was then that, due to severe changes of climatic conditions, the ancestors of the Savirs moved westward.

In the middle of the second century, Ptolemy (circa 90 – circa 168), as we know, recorded the *Σαύραροι* in the Caucasus, below the Aorsi and the Pagyritae [Ptol. Geogr.III.5, 22]. We can get a better idea of the location from Strabo’s (64/63 BC – AD 23/24) *Geography*. If we begin with the northern peoples, we have the following picture: the Sarmatians, then the nomadic Scythians who lived in tents, then the Aorsians and the Syracians, extending south as far as the Caucasus Mountains. “The

Aorsians live on the banks of the Tanais,” Strabo wrote [Strabon. Geogr.XI. 5, 8]. Although more than a century separates Strabo and Ptolemy, there was no great movement of *ethne* between the second half of the first century BC and the second half of the second century. Neither is it difficult to determine the space occupied by these tribes – from the River Tanais (Don) to the Riphean (Ural) Mountains west to east and from the lower reaches of the Itil (Volga) into the Caucasus Mountains from north to south. Judging by the sources and historical literature, the reference is to the eastern coast of the Black Sea.

At the very start of the fifth century the tribes of the Hun-led union were living a nomadic existence on the Danube. For example, at the end of the year 400 the Hun leader Uldin was on the north bank of the Danube. However, it was not the case that all the tribes belonging to the Hunnic union lived cheek by jowl on the great river. In particular the Savirs continued at that time to be located in the Caucasus. Stephanus of Byzantium wrote in the fifth century about the Sapirs/Savirs (*Σάπειροις/Σάβειροις*), living on the River the River Akampis (Chorokh) between Colchis and Persia [Stephan. Ethnic.166: 11.555, 13].

In his commentary on Theophanes, the researcher Igor Chichurov suggested that the name of the queen of the Savirs Boarex (*Βωαρήξ*) comes from the River Boas [Chichurov 1980: 78]. According to Procopius that river springs from the Tzani mountains and is one of the tributaries of the Phasis. Thus, it becomes clear that in the 520s the Savirs controlled the east coast of the Black Sea and established friendly relations with the Eastern Romans (Byzantines). The Savirs actions are localized along the Black Sea coast of the Caucasus: to the north of the Laz along the sea, where the Abasgi (Abkhazians), Zechi (Adyghe) and Sagini. The lands around the Sea of Azov were inhabited by the “Utrigur Huns”, while on the other side (north) of the Caucasus range the Alans led their nomadic life.

In descriptions of the tribes that in 550–552 populated the regions of the Caucasus range and the Caucasus mountains as a whole, Procopius wrote of the Huns known as Sabirs (*Σάβειροι*) and some other Hunnic tribes. They lived to the east of

the Zechi, who inhabited the northern part of the coast of Pontus [Procop. BP. II. 29, 15; BG. IV.3, 5; 11,23]. In other words, the Savirs were located on the other side of the Caucasus range from the Zechi, next to the Alans. On a modern map this places them roughly in Ossetia. In the middle and start of the second half of the sixth century the Sabirs are still being called Black Sea tribes. In the second half of the fifth century Sabirs settled in the area of the River Kuma along the Caspian Sea. In its struggle against them the Byzantine Empire mainly used Arab tribes, who by that time had forced their way into the steppes of the western Caspian Basin and even the northern Black Sea region [Akimova 1991]. Agathias Scholasticus described events in which individual detachments of Sabirs took part. The actions took place by Archaeopolis (Tskhegoji, the capital of the Colchians) on the fertile Rioni plain and in Iberia [Agathi. Hist. III. 17-18; IV. 13-14].

Zacharias Rhetor recorded the disposition of the tribes as of the year 555. He listed them from south to north: Armenia with Arran (Albania), Sisgan, then Bazgun, whose land extends as far as the Caspian Gates and the sea. There Huns lived. Then came the Avnagur (Ūngūr/Onogur), after them the Agars (Ūghar/Oghur) and the Sabirs. They are all within the bounds of Dadu (present-day Daghestan) [Zachar. Chronicle 12.7]. Further to the north were the Burgars, Alans, Kurtargars, Avars, Khazars and so on. In this period the Savirs were in possession of the Caspian Gates, i.e. Derbent. In the year 576 Savir tribes are recorded in Albania. Soon, however, the Romans managed to drive the Savirs back to the west side of the River Cyrus (Kura). In 578 several thousand Savirs were sent to Mesopotamia as part of a Persian army [Menandr. Hist. 43; 52].

Characterizing the times in which Varaz-Trdat ruled Caucasian Albania, Movses Kalankatuatsi (Kaghankatvatsi) also mentions the splendid city of Varachan, then the capital of the Sabirs. A log from the felled sacred oak of the Hunno-Sabirs, worshippers of the deity *Kuar*, was brought there. Envoys of the great prince of the Hunno-Sabirs Alp-Ilituer asked Bishop Israel to agree to be their teacher and to establish his throne in their city of Varachan [Kalankatuatsi. Ist. II]. In 682 the

Hunno-Savirs request was met. Suren Yeremian and Mikhail Artamonov placed Varachan on the site of the present-day town of Buinaksk. Vladimir Kotovich pointed to the Urtseki archaeological site near the village of Ullu-Boinak [Kotovich 1974: 182-196]. Evidently Varachan was situated close to Derbent, but its exact location has not yet been established [Novoseltsev 1990: 123]. Drawing upon the seventh-century *Armenian Geography*, Igor Semionov considerably expands the established conceptions of the distribution of the Savirs. On the modern map of the north-western Caspian basin, the territory inhabited by the Savirs should cover an area from the lower reaches of the Terek to the lower Volga. “This is taking into account the level of the Caspian Sea and the different hydrographic picture of this zone of the Caspian basin in the sixth and seventh centuries” [Semyonov 2001: 83].

Liudmila Gmyrya gives geographical pointers to the dwelling places of the Caspian basin Huns, which also helps to pin down the areas inhabited by the Hunno-Savirs. The latter comprised “a flat region extending for 300 km, bounded by the channels of the Rivers Aksai and Samur with a mainly narrow shape, 10–30 km wide, determined by the location of the southern part between the shoreline of the Caspian and the most advanced line of the mountain ranges of the Caucasus... The southern part of near-Caspian Daghestan (from the city of Makhachkala to the Samur delta) includes the 160 km-long coastal plain that has constrictions at three places formed by the mountain ranges approaching the sea – by Makhachkala (3.5–4 km wide), the town of Izberbash (4–5 km) and Derbent (3.5 km)” [Gmyrya 2007: 112].

In the late ninth or early tenth century, Yovhannes Draskhanakertsi recorded part of the ancestors of the Chuvash in the Armenian provinces of Uti and Chuash. The local population called them *Sewordik*[Iovannes. Ist. XLV, LXI]. All of this constitutes unquestionable indications that ancestors of the Chuvash dwelt in Armenian lands.

Folklore and linguistic data also give a positive answer to the question of historic ties between the Chuvash and the Caucasus. Chuvash folk songs and folk



tales mention Mount Ararat. The language displays etymological and semantic matches with Armenian, Georgian and Ossetian words.

It is important to determine the location of the Suvar tribes within the composition of Volga Bulgaria. A reliable source in this regard is the journal of Aḥmad Ibn Faḍlān. In the south of Volga Bulgaria Ibn Faḍlān listed the rivers that their caravan encountered in order: Irkhiz (Irgiz), Bachag (Mocha), Samur (Samara), Kinal (Kinel), Sukh (Sok), Kiunjiulu (كُونْجُولُو for كُنْجُولُو Kunjulu) (Kundurcha). On this last river the Arab mission met the Bashkir. After the Kundurcha came the Jaramshan (Bolshoi Cheremshan), where the Suvars lived. The reception of the Arab embassy took place a day and a night's journey from the quarters of the King. Representatives of Almish spent four days there, awaiting the arrival of all the princes of Volga Bulgaria to meet the guests [Kovalevskii 1956: 131]. These princes represented the four main tribes of the country, Bulgar, Suvar, Eskel and Barsils. Ibn Sa'id al-Maghribi (=al-Gharnati) remarked that the city of Savdā (Suvar) lay on the same latitude as Bulghār [Ibn Sa'id2009: 31-32]. Regarding the habitation of the Suvar tribe, Kovalevsky made an entirely logical suggestion: "Since the very late city of Suvar is undoubtedly connected with this people, the region of their settlement at that time was located to the south of the Bulgars in the valley of the River Utkā and westwards along that river to the bank of the Volga" [Kovalevskii 1954: 39]. The city was located 4 km to the west along the River Utkā from the present-day village of Kuznechikha. In modern terms the lands of the Suvars consisted of a small southwestern part of the Spassky *rayon* of the Republic of Tatarstan and the Staromainsky *rayon* of Ulyanovsk region. It follows that the welcoming of the Arab mission took place on Suvar territory. It also indicates that at the time of Ibn Faḍlān's visit the Suvars lived as a compact group in the southern part of Volga Bulgaria and were not incorporated into the Bulgars and other tribes. "Besides, he [Almish] wanted there to be a mass movement [of tribes] and sent for the people called the Suvaz, ordering them to migrate together with him. [They] refused him..." [Ibn-Fadlan 1956: 139]. In other words, the king of Volga Bulgaria communicated with the Suvars through an

envoy. That implies that the Suvars were not only politically, but also territorially independent from the Bulgars. Soon, in that same year of 922, the bulk of the Suvars, discontented with Almish's policies (mainly the religious reorientation), crossed to the right bank of the Volga under the leadership of *Vyrāh*, to the lands of today's Steppe (*Hirti*) Chuvash. In effect the Suvars separated from the state of Volga Bulgaria.

In the eleventh century, as reflected in Mahmud al-Kashgari's map, Suvar is located on the right bank of the Itil – without clarification of whether it is a city or a people [Umnyakov 1940: 103-131]. Of course, it refers to the ethnos.

Deciphering an epitaph found at the bishop's dacha in Kazan enabled Nikolai Ashmarin to conclude that in the late thirteenth century in the environs of Kazan there existed a cultural community speaking a language close to that of the present-day Chuvash [Ashmarin 1905: 23].

According to a charter granted by the Tsar in 1548, there were "Chiuvasch" living on the River Cheptsä together with the Votyaks [Akty 1836: 209]. In descriptions of the events of 1551 outside Kazan, the chronicles mention *Chavasha Ar'skaa*, *Chiuvascha Ar'skaya* or *Chiuvascha Arskaya*, i.e. from the *Arskaya Storona* (Tatar *Arça yağı*), the area north-east of Kazan [PSRL 13: 166,467; 29: 63]. In 1552 the chroniclers also recorded a Chuvash Road [PSRL 13: 214; 29: 200,227], leading from Kazan to Siberia. This passed through Chuvash villages. Later it was renamed the Ziuri Road after one of those villages. In the mid-1500s settlement of the lands around Kazan with Russian people began. For example, in the cadastre and survey book for the town and *uyezd* of Sviyazhsk for 1565–67 the Chuvash village of Bezhbatman is already listed as exclusively Russian [Spisok 1909: XI]. Today that Russified village is in the Zelenodolsky *rayon* of Tatarstan. According to the cadastres for the city and *uyezd* of Kazan for 1566–68, beyond the River Bulak by Lake Kaban there were 150 households, Tatar and Chuvash. In summer many of these were deserted, while the owners came to live there in winter. And on the River Kazan there were 33 Chuvash households. Besides, Archbishop German of Kazan

and Sviyazh possessed in Kazan *uyezd* 106 households of Tatar and Chuvash peasants [Nevostruyev 1877: 53,69,74].

In the eighteenth century there was resettlement of the Chuvash from the right bank of the Volga to the fertile meadows of the Cheremshan basin, in other words to practically the same lands that the Suvars had occupied back in 922. According to the description by the eighteenth-century traveller and naturalist Ivan Lepiokhin, there were extensive rich fields on the lower bank and on the right-hand side scattered woodland covered with wild roses. Lepiokhin's expedition stayed in the Chuvash village of Yakushkino. Around the villages whole fields were covered in melons and watermelons, which according to the locals gave a fair harvest. It emerges from the expedition report that the Chuvash worked the ploughland, while the melons and tobacco were grown by Kizilbashes (evidently the ancestors of the present-day Mishars). The Chuvash village of Biliar came 11 versts after Novaya Maksimkina, alongside was the Tatar hamlet of Biliar. Both were situated on a lake of that same name [Lepyokhin 1771: 121,131].

Today we find topographical traces of the Savirs' geographical range in the Caucasus – the towns of Sabir and Sabirabad (Azerbaijan), in Ukraine – the village of Savarka (on the River Ros') [Atlas 1967: 23, 24; Semyonov 1873: 386]. We can also include the name of the village of Savrushki (Chuvash *Savrāsh*) in the Aksubayevo *rayon* of Tatarstan.

**Anthropology.** Tatyana Trofimova believed the main anthropological types that went into the formation of the Chuvash ethnicity were: 1) Lapanoid, 2) EuropidEastern Mediterranean, 3) Europid of the relatively broad-faced type, 4) a platyrrhine, prognathic type with “Negroid” characteristics, 5) a Mongoloid dolichocephalic type with a relatively narrow face [Trofimova 1950: 64]. Georgy Debets discerned four types in the make-up of the Chuvash people: 1) Western Siberian Mongoloid, 2) Uralo-Lapanoid, 3) tentatively Sarmatian, 4) Steppe Central Asian Mongoloid [see Kozlova 1950: 179]. As we see, the opinions of the two scholars to a large extent coincide.

Researchers note the exceptional diversity of anthropological types among the Chuvash. For example, in the first half of the nineteenth century Alexandra Fuchs observed that among the Chuvash between twenty people it was impossible to find two “identical” faces [Fuks 1840: 95]. According to visual observations in the second half of the eighteenth century the hair on the heads of the Chuvash and their beards were yellow or ginger, their height average [Miller 1791: 11]. Data on the Chuvash from the late 1800s relating to the Ufa eparchy revealed the following distinguishing characteristics: skin colour yellowish; hair predominantly light brown; prominent cheekbones, low forehead, narrow eyes, sparse beard growth, middle height, delicate build [Zlatoverkhovnikov 1899: 34]. According to data from 1911 the Chuvash are characterized by a mixed type in hair and eye colouring, but with a strong preponderance of the dark type over the light. By cephalic index there are more brachycephalics (42%), but also significant percentages of dolicephalics (32%) and mesocephalics (26%) [Ivanovskii 1911: 387].

In 1936 an expedition from Moscow State University’s Research Institute and Museum of Anthropology worked in the Chuvash Republic. The results indicate that on the whole the Chuvash are characterized by short height, long heads of middling width, mesocephaly, nasal bridges of middle height and reduced beard growth. In some traits they resemble the left-bank Meadow Mari, Izh Udmurts and Komi-Permyaks, in others the Tatars [Alekseyeva2004: 50-51]. Studies of the Downstream and Upstream Chuvash in the middle of the twentieth century show that on aggregate the population displays average values for many parameters. They are of middle height, have in the main dark hair, weak beard growth and a very sparse covering of body hair, a face of middling height and width, with an average protrusion. Their nose is also of middling height and width, with the bridge slightly lower than average, the profile of the nose and of its bony part is straight. The head, however, is brachycephalic; the forehead of average slope and the brow ridges average [Alekseyeva 1955: 94].

Two racial elements lie at the basis of the anthropological type of all the Finnic and Turkic populace of the Volga basin: the Ural (or Sub-Ural) and the Baltic (or Valdai). The Ural element is the more ancient [Bunak 1924; 1924a].

Among the north-western groups of the Bashkirs, and to a somewhat lesser degree among the south-western ones, there is a noticeably strong influence of the craniological type of the Finnic and Turkic populace of the Volga and Kama basins and the strongest link with the Chuvash. The series of female skulls are close in the main to the craniological material of the Finnic and Turkic populace of the Volga-Kama region and, in part, of the Ugrians of Western Siberia, i.e. peoples of the Uralian race. Rinat Yusupov believed that the set of characteristics of the Uralian race (fairly small skull size, a relatively low face of middle breadth, a low nasal bridge and light colouring) was common to the Bashkirs, Udmurts, Mari, Chuvash and part of the Tatars [Iusupov 2002: 22-24]. I myself believe that on this matter the most correct assertion comes from Valery Alexeyev: Even from a superficial morphological description it is evident that craniologically the Chuvash resemble their Finnic-speaking neighbours and hence that their anthropological type formed with the intensive involvement of that combination of traits that is characteristic for the Finnic peoples of the Volga basin and has been given the name Sub-Uralian” [Aleksyev 1971: 248]. Cranioscopic and cranimetric indicators testify to the closeness of the Chuvash to the Mordvins and Meadow Mari, and also to the presence of a considerable Finnic substrate in them [Kozintsev, Moiseyev 1995: 85,86]. Measurements taken by Tatyana Alexeyeva speak of the Chuvash’s closeness to the Mountain Mari as well [Aleksyeva 1955: 94]. Studies of the present-day population of the northern *rayony* of the Chuvash Republic make it possible to state that the Chuvash show the closest genetic kinship (practically identity) with the Mari, two sub-ethnic groups of the Komi and Tatar population [Spitsyn et al. 2009: 1274]. This conclusion was virtually to be expected. And the Chuvash’s genetic kinship with those ethn has been determined above all not so much by factors of contact as by broader reasons (common history, anthropological substrates, linguistic roots and so

on). Broadening the study area would bring in other people having a genetic affinity. A study made in the 1950s found that population of the Chkalovskoye *rayon* (now part of the Batyrevo *rayon*) of Chuvashia were the most Europid. On the whole they came close to the Valdai or Baltic type. Nearest of all to the Chkalovskoye folk were those of Yalchiki *rayon*. These people had their own set of characteristics: darker colouring, taller than middle height, a large percentage of high nasal bridges and a strongly profiled face. All this reveals traits of the Pontic type in them. The population of the Pervomaiskoye *rayon* (mainly incorporated into the Batyrevo *rayon* in 1959), although more southern, display the same characteristics as the population of the northern *rayon*y. They differed from the inhabitants of the Chkalovskoye and Yalchiki *rayon*y in being of lesser height, but like them, they are somewhat more Europid than the Upstream Chuvash [Alekseyeva 1955: 94].

The Mongoloid characteristic is expressed unevenly across the whole of Chuvashia. It manifests itself least often in the horizontal profile of the face and the presence of the epicanthus. In the steppe regions this trait is very weakly expressed: the population of those parts tend towards the Europids of the Middle Volga, and the Mordvins in particular. The Mongol characteristics of the Chuvash are not the consequence of the physical intervention of the Golden Horde. Anthropologists believe that the mixing of Europid and Mongoloid types took place on the Middle Volga at an earlier historical stage. The appearance of a Mongoloid element in the area may have occurred at the turn of the first millennium AD [Alekseyeva 1955: 94,96,97].

**Archaeology.** The Barabinsk Tatars attribute the greater part of the archaeological monuments in their area to the Syvyrs. They call the ruins of settlements *syvyr-kala* – “Syvyr town” and the tumuli *syvyr-tuba* – “Syvyr mound” [Patkanov 1999: 10].

When we are attempting to reconstruct the Asiatic life of the Sepers/Syvyrs/Savirs, archaeological material from neighbouring territories is a great

help. We should assume that Peter Simon Pallas's description of Serpent Mountain (Zmeyeva Gora) in the Altai closely accords with the archaic culture of Western Siberia as well. In that place there are clear traces of ancient ore-mining with deep ditches and shafts up to five sazhen deep. Such work is impossible without strong tools and picks and other mining implements are indeed found in the pits. In addition the burials yield copper knives, daggers and arrow heads. The ancient inhabitants of the Irtysh region ground grooves into hard stones and fastened a strap to them so that they could be gripped. This gave them a hammer. The skeleton of an ancient miner was also found in a shaft with concentrated ochre in his leather pouch. In those parts the prospectors washed gold from ochre and crushed soft ores. The eighteenth-century Russians in Siberia called those ancient miners *Chudy* or *Chudaki*. Pallas reckoned that these tribes could not be placed among the Mongols or the Tatars because since very ancient times the Chudy had known how to smelt iron, but were unable to mine and smelt copper and other "higher" metals. It is possible, Pallas wrote, that the nomadic Mongols and Tatars completely eradicated or drove out those tribes, but their gold and jewellery survived in the graves. Perhaps those tribes were the Parthians, the academician mused [Pallas 1786: 353-356]. I myself think it possible that the Savirs were miners of this same kind.

Archaeologists confirm the Suvars' settlement of the right bank of the Volga in the early tenth century, i.e. at the time of Ibn Faḍlān's expedition [Fyodorov-Davydov1962: 67-86].

Through the efforts of Shihabetdin Marjani and Gainutdin Akhamrov, the location of the town of Suvar was determined to be a site 4 km to the west along the River Utka from the village of Kuznechikha. Then came Alexei Smirnov's planned excavations. It was discovered that a two-storey brick palace, the manor of a rich feudal lord and the town as a whole were constructed in the tenth to eleventh centuries and destroyed in the fourteenth. In Suvar there were also wooden and wattle-and-daub buildings. Around 90 storage pits for grain lined with oak boards were discovered. Smirnov's expeditions uncovered elements that make it possible to

picture Suvar's defences. They consisted of ramparts, with double oak walls 3.5–4 metres apart with tightly packed earth between, and watch-towers. Outside that was a water-filled moat booby-trapped with sharp boards. The fortress was guarded by warriors with spears and long-range bows. "These fortifications were the first serious obstacle on the Mongol horde's route to Europe in 1236. Suvar, located farther south than the remaining cities of Volga Bulgaria was undoubtedly among the first to feel the onslaught of the enemy army" [Fakhrutdinov 1986: 102].

**Religion.** Religion is a direct reflection of a people's traditional views of the world around them. It is where we should look for the prime causes of the daily way of life. It contains the original foundations for economic and cultural behaviour in the past and present.

In order to strengthen its influence the Byzantine Empire constantly maintained relations with the peoples of the Caucasus and willingly accepted members of them into military service as *foederati* or auxiliaries. Christianization was a peaceful means of subjugating tribes. Bishop Grigoris, the first head of the Caucasian Albanian Church in 330–337, already devoted exceptional attention to the conversion of the nomads. According to the sources, though, Grigoris's mission did not extend to the lands of the Hunno-Savirs. At that time the Maskuts were the leading force in the political life of the eastern Caucasus. The Caucasians took a strong dislike to Grigoris's preaching and he was put to death near Derbent on the orders of the Maskut ruler.

One of the means of attracting men into military service was straightforward payment. "Warriors would be recruited and paid on certain conditions. Both Byzantium and Iran acted in this way" [Pigulevskaya 2011: 308]. In 515 the Savirs again invaded Byzantine territories, but this time in Armenia, Mesopotamia and Asia Minor. The Byzantines managed to carry out deep reconnaissance in the Hunnic lands. Their agents even got as far from Bosphorus (Panticapaeum) as the nomad camps of the Hunno-Savirs and the efforts of the Byzantine intelligence service were not in vain. "The consequence of this was the emergence among the Savirs of a



strong pro-Byzantine grouping that was headed by Boa, the widow of a chieftain of the Savirs” [Gadlo 1979: 80]. A relatively detailed account of what happened to this woman of “the Huns called Savirs” is provided by John of Nikiû and Theophanes of Byzantium. The events took place in the year 520. At that time the Persians, who had resumed their war against the Romans, asked the Huns to provide them with 20,000 warriors. Boarex (i.e. Queen Boa) was a woman of exceptional courage and also endowed with considerable wisdom. She had been the wife of the ruler Balach and after her husband’s death took the reins of power fully into her own hands. She had 100,000 Huns under her. Two other princes, representing the “inner Huns” were named Styrax and Glonex. Kavadh I of Persia had managed to persuade both of them to provide him with military support against the Romans. Then the woman made her way to the Christian Emperor Justinian and presented him with gifts: a large amount of gold, silver and precious stones. The Emperor asked her to attack the other two Hunnic leaders, Styrax and Glonex, who wanted to ally themselves with the Persians against the Byzantines. When they were proceeding to Persia with their 20,000 warriors through the domains of Queen Boarex, she routed their army. She killed Glonex and his family, but captured Styrax and sent him in chains to Constantinople, where he was sentenced to death. In that way she became an ally and friend of Emperor Justinian [Theophan. Khrono; Jean 1883: 152-153]. Naturally this alliance also became a convenient opportunity to implant Christianity in the lands of the Hunno-Savirs.

In 522 the ruler of Lazica broke off relations with Shah Kavadh and went over to the Byzantine side. At that very time a war was brewing between Persian and the Eastern Roman Empire. Good preparations needed to be made for it, above all through the recruitment of forces. The Byzantine envoys pinned great hopes on the churchmen who were active among the Hunno-Savirs as elsewhere. To this end an embassy was sent to Bosphorus (the Sea of Azov area) headed by the patrician Probus. Shortly before, however, Byzantium had seized the strategic city of Bosphorus (the former Panticapaeum on the Kerch Strait) from the Huns, which had naturally

displeased the latter. As a result Probus failed to recruit the Huns, despite bringing large amounts of money. When he learnt of his fellow countrymen being held prisoner, he insisted on seeing them. On his return he told the Emperor what he had seen. Then Justinian had “caused thirty mules to be loaded by the administration of the Roman cities that were near, and sent them with flour, wine, and oil, garments and other wares and sacred vessels. He gave them the animals as a gift, because Probus was a believing and kind man” [Zachar. Chronicle.XII. 7].

Testimony dating from the early sixth century indicates that the Hunno-Savirs venerated figurines of deities made from silver and an alloy of silver and gold [Zachar. Chronicle.XII. 7; Theophan. Chrono.AD 527/528].

The first missionary to reach Hunnic territory was Bishop Kardutsat of Arran (Albania) accompanied by three priests and four followers. This was in the year 537. The official purpose of the mission was to perform religious services for the Roman prisoners, who had been there 34 years. As Joseph Marquart wrote, we should probably assume that the Huns that Kardutsat visited were the Sabirs. According to Zacharias Rhetor (and Joseph Marquart) the Albanians spent seven years among the Sabirs instructing them and produced books in the Hunnic tongue. Zacharias asserted that he had all this from the mouths of first-hand witnesses, the captives Thomas and John, who had spent over thirty years with the Huns. In that time they took wives and had children [Zachar. Chronicle.XII. 7; Marquart 1903: 302; Pigulevskaya 2011: 306,383].

After 14 more years Kardutsat was replaced by a bishop from Armenia named Maku. “He went to the country of his own accord and some of his priests with him. And he built a brick church and planted plants and sowed various kinds of seeds and did signs and baptized many” [Zachar.Chronicle.XII. 7]. Maku stayed with the Hunno-Savirs until 555. When the rulers of those lands saw the innovations, they admired the newcomers and asked them to give instruction in their territories.

The Savirs’ neighbours were the Zikhs, and also the Alans and Abasgi, who were both Christians [Procop. BP. II. 14].

After the death of Emperor Heraclius (610–641) a struggle for the throne broke out. Among those suspecting of intriguing was a man named “Kuernāka”. According to the Chronicle written by the Egyptian Coptic Bishop John of Nikiû in the late seventh century, Kuernāka was a chief of the Huns who had received power from his uncle Qetrādes (Organa). He had been in Constantinople since childhood and was a baptized Christian [Zachar. Chrono.]. Most probably Kuernāka is a corruption of the name Kubrat(os) (for the latest view on this matter see Ziemann 2007: 144-146). In the *Miracles of the Demetrius of Salonica* this same personage is called the Bulgar Kuver (*Κούβερα*) [Ivanova1995: 169-179]. He held the title of archon and had been given patrician rank by the Emperor. The approximate period of his actions is 680–685. As Aleksei Komar argues, Kuernāka, who laid claim to the throne, belonged to the elite of the nobility and could have had a large amount of the army under his command. The chieftain of some nomads from the basin of the Danube, the Dniester, or, worse still, the Kuban could not have aspired to that exalted office. “Kuernāka undoubtedly lived in Constantinople and, even if by origin he was the chief of nomad confederates, by upbringing and lifestyle he was already a Byzantine” [Komar. Ranniye]. It is entirely possible that Kuernāka was an ethnic Savir, an immigrant from the Hunno-Savir confederation. His name also speaks in favour of this (compare the Savir deity *Kuar* and the Savir *Kavar* tribe). So we have the Constantinopolitan Kuernāka – a Savir by ancestry and a Christian by faith – setting his sights on the throne of Byzantium. However, the idea of a link between Kuernāka and the *Kavar/Savar* tribe is no more than a hypothesis. More reliable sources are needed here.

According to the *History* of Theophylact Simocatta, in the 590s the confederation of Turkic tribes included the Huns, Barsils, Onugurs, Savirs (*Σαβίροι*) and many other tribes. They all, he wrote, “esteem fire, venerate air and water, sing hymns to the earth, but worship solely the one who created heaven and earth” [Theophyl. Hist. VII. 8.14]. They sacrificed horses, bulls and lesser beasts to their

supreme deity. They elected as priests those among them who could foretell the future.

Movses Kalankatuatsiretold events of the 600s in his *History of the Country of Albania* [Kalankatuatsi.Ist. II].At that time the grand prince of Caucasian Albania was Varaz-Trdat (670–706). Movses refers also to the Hunno-Savirs whose capital was the city of Varachan in the Caucasus and whose ruler was Alp-Ilituer. They worshipped the god of lightning *Kuar*. According to Movses, that people esteemed their religion a great one. They offered roast horses in sacrifice to fire, water and a tall oak with dense foliage. The head and skin of the sacrificial animal was hung on the boughs of the tree. At that time Armenia was suffering adversity from two quarters: from the Tachiks (Islamized Tajiks in service with the Arabsin the south and from the Huns in the north. Varaz-Trdat decided to send his bishop, Israel, to the Huns in Varachan and thus convert them to Christianity. Which is indeed what happened.The new religious practices were introduced primarily in the many-thousand-strong royal army in a way that was planned and organized by Bishop Israel. And Israel was appointed spiritual leader of the land of the Hunno-Savirs.

As Alexander Gadlo, a researcher into the ethnic history of the Caucasus, believed, “the faith defended by the party that Alp-Ilituer defeated with the aid of the Albanian mission comprised a whole system of religious views” [Gadlo 1979: 145-146]. It is interesting that the followers of the age-old Savir rituals and beliefs were in favour of a religious symbiosis; they expressed willingness to compromise with the missionary Israel, but proposed preserving the old cults in doing so. Alp-Ilituer also thought that way, but the determination of the Albanian mission and Bishop Israel’s resolution left the Hunno-Savirs with no chance of having two religions co-existing in their country.

It was the year 685 (the precise date calculated by Suren Eremian [Eremian 1939: 134]) that the Albanian delegation headed by Bishop Israel arrived in the Savir capital Varachan. Despite the general resistance by the worshippers of *Kuar* – Huns and Savirs – Israel managed to persuade the ruler Alp-Ilituer and other members of

the elite to accept Christianity. The ruler's name can be deciphered as the Chuvash *Ulāp-El'teper* – “Giant Leader”. The sacred groves were set on fire and crosses erected on their sites. Alp-Ilituer of the Hunno-Savirs and his nobles heeded the admonitions. “He also saw that nothing of what the sorcerers had threatened had come about: the trees near the sanctuaries caused him [Israel] no harm and he suffered neither grave afflictions nor death, but on the contrary [the Bishop] grew brighter still and zealous in his efforts in the service of Christ. At that they too became stronger in their faith and began to harken to his teaching” [Kalankatuatsi. Ist.II. 41]. The introduction of Christianity as a state and meta-ethnic religion furthered the consolidation of the centralized power of the supreme suzerain of Suvar, the Grand Prince of Varachan [Fyodorov 1972: 24]. History presents a number of similar examples. For example, Almish, the ruler of Volga Bulgaria, in 922 and, slightly later, Grand Prince Vladimir Sviatoslavich of Kievan Rus'. In all three instances the rulers renounce ethnic traditions for the sake of strengthening the state, uniting tribes around a single religion and, of course, to the benefit of their own personal power.

In the seventh and eighth centuries Gardezi called the realm situated in the lowlands by the Caspian the Kingdom of the Huns, while Ibn Khordadbeh and Ibn al-Faqih called it the Kingdom of Suvar from the name of the Hunno-Savirs. After the Arab invasion the country was divided into two parts. The Suvars occupied the south. Their main city was now Khamzīn/Ḥamzīn (Ḥaydān or Khaydhān, according to various readings in Ibn Rustah, Jandān according to one of the possible readings in Gardezi, perhaps also Khaydāq<sup>7</sup>). The ruler and people of Khamzīn followed three religions at once: on Fridays they prayed with the Muslims, on Saturdays with the Jews and on Sundays with the Christians [Bartold 1897: 124; Artamonov 1962: 228]. This was no whim on the ruler's part. His behaviour was dictated by the presence of adherents of all these religions and each group was convinced that theirs was the true one. Ancient forms of religion also survived in the country. For example, each

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<sup>7</sup> Minorsky, 1958: 92, considered the various readings in Arabic and Persian sources to be corruptions of Khaydāq (خَيْدَاق), the later Qaytāq.

Wednesday the inhabitants of the cities of Ranhas(the reading is uncertain<sup>8</sup>) and Khamzin gathered by a huge tree, hung their offerings upon it and worshipped it.

Vasily Kakhovsky pointed to similarities between the folk religion of the Chuvash and those of a number of peoples in the Caucasus, citing as examples the cults of the rainbow, stars, the Sun, Moon and iron. He noted a number of similarities in the realm of cosmology and mythology. The heavenly bodies were imagined to be living creatures. During eclipses Georgians, Bulgars, Gagauz and Chuvash made noise, beat the dampers of their stoves and tossed burning brands into the air in an effort to scare off the evil spirit that was trying to swallow the moon [Kakhovskii 1965: 260-262].

According to Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, in the late ninth century there were four sorts of Pechenegs (Πατζινακίται) living in the area between the Dnieper and Chersonesus. These included the Cuartzitzur (Κουαρτζιτζουρ) [Bagryanorodnyi. Ob upravlenii.37]. Although Constantine assigned the tribes named to the Pechenegpeople, it is possible that this name conceals the worshippers of *Kuar* already known to us from Movses Kalankatuatsi's work.

At the Tigashevo archaeological site on the River Bula a Suvar-Chuvash place of sacrifice and prayer from the tenth or eleventh century was discovered. A dog cult can be detected quite distinctly there [Fyodorov-Davydov1962: 67,83,86]. Religion is an all-embracing ideology with a strong influence on economic and cultural life. The mediaeval Bulgars, still adhering to nomadic traditions, were in power and they needed a monopolistic religious ideology to gain greater control. The Chuvash, long-time farmers, did not want to abandon their way of life and follow the Bulgar ruler Almish. As we see their differences were fundamental: a clash of old and new religions in the state, a difference of economic and cultural types, the preservation of tradition for one group and a change of state interests for another.

The Suvars managed to avoid the bitter fate of disappearing from the face of the Earth as a separate people by refusing to adopt Islam, the new religion of Volga

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<sup>8</sup> See discussion in Lewicki, 1977: 44-45, 148,n. 313

Bulgaria. Religion became the motive for discord between the ruler of Bulgaria – the Bulgar Almish – and the Suvars. The bulk of the latter, settled tillers of the soil, retained their old rites and beliefs [Kovalevskii 1954: 51; Denisov 1959: 74]. After the events connected with the Arab embassy, the established religion of Islam did not apparently persecute infidels too strongly. Sacred places and springs continued to exist and so did festivals with sacrifices [Khalikova 1986: 149]. Admittedly they did begin to display certain accretions that originated in the ancient cults of the Arabs (the Ka’aba in the form of the *Kepe*, Kurban as *Härpan*, Malem Hodja as *Valem huša* and certain others). In the sixteenth century the Russians found the Chuvash firm in their old faith. They did admittedly already employ Muslim expressions (*pěsmelle*, *Pihampar*, *Kiremet*), but all those terms had a meaning completely different from the original. For example, *kiremet* means “miracle” in Arabic, but among the Chuvash it is the chief earthly deity. That is why Bartold expressed surprise at some scholars’ desire to make a direct link between the Chuvash and the Bulgars, who in the tenth century already had an immediate relationship to Islam. “If the Chuvash did indeed come from the Volga Bulgars,” the Academician wrote, “who were town-dwellers, and obtained these expressions from their ancestors, then that would be evidence of an incredible return to savagery that is unlikely to be found anywhere else in the Muslim world” [Bartold 1968: 520].

Epitaphs from the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries have preserved examples of the vocabulary and morphology of the Suvars – in essence the Chuvash of the late Middle Ages. In them we find such phrases as *Savar ivli* – Chuvash *Sävar yvälě* “son of Savar”; *ğiäti ğür ğirimi ikiniš ğal* – Chuvash *şıč şēr şirēm ikkēměš şul* “the year 722 [=AD 1332]” and *avıxi van küän* – Chuvash *uyäh(än) vun(näměš) kun(ě)* “the tenth day of the month” [Bentsing 1986: 20]. As we can see, the modern Chuvash are in many instances the only living speakers of the language used in the epitaphs of Volga Bulgaria. Therefore when studying the folk religion we should take into account that “the beliefs of the Suvars coincide with the pagan religion of the Chuvash of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries” [Dimitriyev 1983: 33].

According to contemporary information, in the second half of the eighteenth century many of the Chuvash followed the Tatar custom of shaving their heads. They were fond of horse meat and some did not keep pigs [Miller 1791: 11,22].

The study of the traditional forms of a folk religion requires a proper cautious attitude to the material. I refer, of course, to the impermissibility of transferring terms from other areas of religion (such as Islam or Christianity). Researchers' concern on this account is understandable [Salmin 2007: 23-32]. Yelena Glavatskaya, for example, rightly considers that it is not entirely proper to use the term "paganism" (*yazychestvo*) to denote the religious traditions of the Khanty. The same applies to terms invented by missionaries such as "idol-worship" and indeed *shaitan* and *idol* instead of the specific names of deities and spirits –instead of the Khanty's *Longkh*, for example. "... it was understood that the pagans would sooner or later convert to Christianity, while the independent development of every religious tradition in parallel with Christianity was not anticipated" [Glavatskaya 2005: 17].

**Language.** The Huns, who appeared in Europe at least 300 years before the Türks were, it turns out, neither Turkic nor Mongols. Gerhard Doerfer argues that the Huns, like the Apars (Avars/Obri) that came after them, spoke a language belonging to a now-extinct family [Doerfer 1973: 1-50]. The language of the European Huns and that of the Xiongnu of Inner Asia are still hotly debated questions. Since we cannot say with assurance what language they spoke (and certainly more than one was used in their states), we cannot state that the language they spoke is from a now extinct family. There were probably Turkic speakers (of both West Old Turkic/Oghuric/Bulgharic and Eastern Old Turkic) among the Xiongnu. There is the hypothesis that European Hunnic may have been some early form of West Old Turkic, but one has to be very cautious here. Suggestions that the Chuvash are Huns and that the Huns were Turkic and so the Chuvash are early Turks are fundamentally wrong. Incidentally the correspondence of the Chuvash *r* and *l* to the Turkic *z* and *š* is also true for the Mongols and the Tungus. And generally the so-called terms *rhotacism* and *lambdacism* are derived from the Greek letters  $\rho$  – *rho* and  $\lambda$  –



*lambda* and were used originally in describing the Latin language. The Chuvash and Yakut languages, as is well known, deviate from the Common Turkic system of consonants. This was a characteristic feature of the ancestral Chuvash even back in deep antiquity as is demonstrated by some of the Chuvash words that have come down to us as borrowings from Hungarian (Magyar) and also the few remnants of the languages of the Danube Bulgars and Huns [Ashmarin 1928: 60-61].

Within the land of Dadu (Daghestan) 13 tribes live, Zacharias Rhetor wrote describing events of the fifth and sixth centuries, and he listed their ethnonyms. Nina Pigulevskaya, who made translations of and commentaries on Zacharias, observed that “Nine names out of the thirteen have a common type of ending in *-ar*, *-ur* or *-ir* and are undoubtedly variations of one and the same common root with different prefixes. These are the names Ūnugūr, Ūghar/Ūghur, Augar (recte: Ogar, i.e. Oghur), Sabir, Burgar, Kutargar, Avar, Khazar, Dirmar and Sirurgar” [Pigulevskaya 1939: 111].

According to Priscus of Panium’s *History* the wife of the chief of the Huns was named *Κρέκα* [Prisc. Hist. 8]. Many researchers identify that named with the Chuvash pre-Christian name *Hērkkē*. That makes it possible to postulate that she was of Sabir origin. Attila had three children by her, the eldest of which was the ruler of the Acatiri and the other peoples who dwelt in Pontic Scythia. Procopius, Priscus and Theophanes recorded the names of the Savir rulers: Βαλαχ (Volakh, Valakh, Bolakh) < bala-q “child, young of an animal”, Βαμάχ/Βαρμάχ < barmaq “finger” (Chuvash*pürne*), Ἰλιγερ < ilig “prince” + er “man”, Κοτύλιζις < qut “divine luck” + elči “emissary” [Golden 2011: 147]. Procopius believed that the name *Boa* (*Voa*, *Boa*) came from the River Boasthat springs from the Tzani mountains, adding that the Huns called Savirs live along the course of the river [Procop. BP. II. 29, 14, 16]. Denis Sinor’s suggested etymology of the ρηξ в Βωαρήξ as the Germanic *reiksis* rejected by some researchers [Maenchen-Helfen2010: 485]. In the events attributed to the 520s Boarix became ruler after the death of her husband Valakh. Agathias

Scholasticus also wrote of Savir leaders named Balmas, Coutilsis and Iliger, who displayed valour in the war of 554–555 [Agathi. Hist. III. 17].

Describing the movement of his delegation around the Hun lands, Priscus noted among other things: “The attendants who followed us received millet, and a drink made of barley, which the barbarians call *kámos* [κώμησις]” [Prisc. Hist. 8]. I suggest that this is the mildly alcoholic drink that is called *kāmās* in Chuvash. The word is still employed even now among the southern Chuvash, while *kumyshka* is actively used by the Udmurts. Confirmation that by *kámos* Priscus meant some fermented drink comes in the previous sentence: “In the villages we were supplied with food – millet instead of corn, and mead (*médos*), as the natives call it, instead of wine.” Incidentally, barley was cultivated by the ancestors of the Chuvash on the Volga as well. Alongside millet it was considered a staple foodstuff. The method of making beer from barley is included in the lengthy traditional speech of the senior groomsmen at a Chuvash wedding [Salmin 2010: 184]. There a number of other words common to the Savirs and the Huns. For example, *var* in both languages means “gully, river” and *tan* is “water”. *Tan* is most probably Iranian, cf. the root *dn/dan* as in Dnepr, Don, Danube etc. cf. Tanais Τανάϊς for Don.

The Avars are also known to have been tribes of different origins. In 555 they passed through the Northern Caucasus and in 568 occupied the Carpathian region. Their first ruler was called Bayan. The name is Oghur (compare the Chuvash *puyan*; in all Oghur languages *bai* means “rich”). Between 670 and 700 the Bulgars were neighbours of the Avars in Subcarpathia [Róna-Tas 2007].

The present-day lexical and grammatical patterns of the Chuvash language were also in operation back in the second half of the seventh century. For example, in Movses Kalankatuatsi’s *History* we find this passage: “Everyone jointly approved this advice and he [Alp-Ilituer, the ruler of the Hunno-Sabirs] sent to Bishop Israel some nobleman named Avchi, who had the title of tarkhan, and his chamberlain Chatkasar” [Kalankatuatsi.Ist. II]. Firstly *Avchimay* be nothing other than the Chuvash *evčě* “matchmaker, go-between, envoy”. It may also be the Common Turkic

*avchī* “hunter”. It had already had time to acquire a Turkic coloration: the root *ev* + the Turkicized word-forming affix *-čĕ*. *Avchi* here is, of course, not a proper name, but “envoy”. Moses, writing in the tenth century about events in the seventh, may not have known the name of the noble and so he used the term *avchi* as an anthroponym. Another semantically equal word is *av* in the meaning of “home”, i.e. to marry, to acquire a home (= Ottoman *evlen*). The true Savir sound of the word (before the seventh century) may well have been *evčĕ* (*ç* → *č*). Secondly, the same sentence contains the active word *tarkhan* (or *turkhan*) “a nobleman among the steppe nomads” that had come with the ancestors of the Chuvash from their Siberian days. Thirdly, there is the word-forming suffix *-sar* in the word *Chatkasar* (compare *yumansar* – “an oak wood or grove”: *yuman* + *sar*).

Joseph Marquart wrote of the Savirs and Magyars as one people *Sevordik’ (Magyaren)* [Marquart 1903: 428]. I would suggest that this variant of the ethnonym contains the Armenian hypochoristic affix *-ik*.

Lexical correspondences between Georgian and Chuvash can, of course, be explained by the Caucasian period of their joint history. Researchers cite a whole list of such words, for example: Chuvash *sivĕ*, Georgian *ts’iv-i* “cold”; Chuvash *čir*, Georgian *čir-i* “plague, severe illness”; Chuvash *šimĕš*, [Marr 1935: 279,329-330].

It is a known fact that Hungarian preserves the earliest survivals of West Old Turkic. András Róna-Tas proved the West Old Turkic origin of almost 400 Hungarian words. For example, the Hungarian word *tenger* “sea” occurs in all Turkic languages in the form *tengiz*, i.e. with a *z* at the end. Hungarian alone has preserved the ancient West Turkic form. Hungarian has also retained 115 West Turkic words that are not present in the Chuvash language [Róna-Tas2012: 7]. To put it another way, Chuvash has retained fewer West Old Turkic words than Hungarian. From this we can conclude that before the tenth century the ancestors of the Chuvash came into contact with the Turks far less than the forebears of the present-day Hungarians.

Regarding the history of the Volga basin in the ninth to eleventh centuries, Vasily Bartold observed: “The middle and lower reaches of the Volga were occupied

by the Bulgars and Khazars, who spoke one and the same language unintelligible for both the Turks and the Finns; in all probability this refers to the language that now survives only among the Chuvash” [Bartold 1928: 10]. In other words, the proto-Chuvash language of the Savirs/Suvars was the foundation for both Bulgar and Khazar. At that time, in the 800s–1000s throughout the Middle and Lower Volga one could have made oneself reasonably understood in the language of the ancestors of the Chuvash.<sup>9</sup>

The Savirs, and all the population of the Volga basin, were dealt a terrible blow by the Black Death of the 1340s–50s. Those years brought depopulation, the collapse of authority, anarchy and a general cultural decline. Uli Shamiloglu’s statements regarding the demise of the Volga Bulgarian language at the time of the Black Death [Shamiloglu 2002: 18-19] are equally true for the Suvaro-Chuvash people.

Many eighteenth-century scholars listed the Chuvash among the Finnic-speaking peoples. For example, Sergei Domashnev, the director of the St Petersburg Academy of Sciences, considered the Finns of present-day Leningrad region, Estonians, Livs, Saami, Komi, Udmurts, Mari, Chuvash, Teptiars, Mordvins, Khanty and Mansi all to be Finns [see Teryukov 2011: 79]. A number of researchers (Nicholas Poppe, for example) believed that the Chuvash language belonged to neither the Turkic nor the Finnic group and should be allotted to a third branch and classed as pre-Turkic. On the basis of the factual data, however, the Chuvash language could equally well be called akin to both the Ugric and Iranian languages. Ugric and Iranian elements can also be explained as loanwords resulting from long-standing contacts.

A group of words exists, however, in Chuvash, Mari and certain other languages of the Volga basin that cannot be explained etymologically with reference to Turkic or Iranian or Finno-Ugric languages. For example, the Chuvash word for a beetle is *nără*. The word also occurs in the Mari language in the same meaning as *nor/nār* and in Bashkir also as *nor*. This word cannot be connected to any one of the known

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<sup>9</sup>The Arab sources have contradictory notices on this, but all place the Khazars among the Turkic peoples. The linguistic evidence and their socio-political organization point to that as well, see Golden, 1980.

language groups. A study of words of this sort would reveal new pages in the history of the Chuvash [Róna-Tas 2007].

**Ethnography.** Some researchers consider the Savirs to have originated in south-western Siberia [Artamonov 1962: 69; Golden 1980: 34-36]. Serafim Patkanov and Mikhail Artamonov saw them as Ugrians who had later been Turkicized [Patkanoff 1900: 269; Artamonov 1962: 66]. People also reckon that in western Siberia the Ugrian Savirs were a tribal amalgamation of significant size [Novoseltsev 1990: 82]. As late as the end of the nineteenth century the Southern Ostyaks considered some ancient sites to be the property of Seper or Sybyr tribes, for example the cemetery two versts from Pushtinskiye Yurty in the Malo-Konsinaskaya *volost'* of Tobolsk *okrug* [Patkanov 1999: 11].

In their Caucasus period the ancestors of the Chuvash were often called a Hunnic tribe, Huns from among the so-called Sabirs or Hunno-Sabirs. Jordanes, for example, wrote distinctly that the *Saviri* made up the main core of a powerful Hunnic alliance of tribes. “From here the Huns, like a kind of very fertile sod of exceedingly strong tribes, expanded with two-pronged ferocity against other peoples. Some of these are called Altziagiri, others Saviri” [Jordan. *Getica*. 37]. Jordanes’ elegant phrase, Alexander Anfertyev suggested, derives from a text by Cassiodorus, while the information comes from Priscus. We should not take this to mean that the Altziagiri and Savirs emerged as two branches of the Huns (Douglas Dunlop’s interpretation [Dunlop 1954: 27]). “The image here is a different one: just as many plants grow from a tree, from its tangle of roots, so among the Huns many very powerful peoples grew up, two of which the author (Priscus?) found it necessary to mention” [Anfertyev 1994: 142]. Anfertyev also believed that behind the spelling *Saurilies* the Greek *Σάβιροι*, as in Priscus. In his description of tribes living the vicinity of the Caucasus range in the mid-fifth century. Procopius also, among other things, noted: “Here live the Huns known as Sabirs [*Σάβιροι*] and some other Hunnic tribes” [Procopi. BG. IV.3, 5]. He also wrote specifically: “The Sabirs [*Σάβιροι*] are a Hunnic tribe” [Procopi. BG. IV.11,23]. In chapter 17 of book III Agathias speaks of

“the Huns that are called Sabirs [*Σαβείρων*]”. Elsewhere (Book IV, Ch. 13) he indicates that the Persians had auxiliaries recruited from the Hunno-Savirs [*Οὔννοι Σάβειροι*] (552–558). George Kedrenos wrote of them as “the Huns called Savirs” (*Οὔννοι οἱ λεγόμενοι Σαβήρ, Οὔννων τῶν λεγόμεων Σαβήρ*) [Cedrenus 1838: 633,644]. In the opinion of Theophylactus Simocatta, in 589–596 the Barselts, Unugurs (i.e. Onoghurs) and Sabirs [*Βαρσηλιτ και Ονονγοῦροι και Σαβίροι*] were Hunnic tribes [Theophyl. Hist. VII. 8,3]. Moses Khorenatsi wrote under the year 682 that Huns lived north of the Derbent wall and they had a city called Varachan [Khorenskii 1877: 38]. However, historians and ethnographers have long known that in this period, the Huns no longer had their own country, still less a capital. The Savirs, who more than two centuries previously had belonged to the Hunnic confederation, were called Huns by inertia. Furthermore, researchers identify Varachan with the capital of the Savirs. The “Huns” who, together with Khazars, defended the fortress of Derbent against Armenian forces in 785 [Ghevond 1862: 112] should also be taken to be Savirs. Evidently the frequent mentions of the ethnonym “Hunno-Sabirs” in historical sources enabled some researchers to speak of the Huns as the direct ancestors of the Chuvash. Shiro Hattori, for example, wrote: “The Chuvash tribes may be one of the branches of direct descendants of the Huns, who in the 370s provided the impetus for the ‘Great Migration of Peoples’ and departed from the historical stage in the late fifth century” [Khattori 1980: 94]. However, the opposite is correct – in the post-Attila period the Huns of Daghestan were a part of the Savir tribes [Klyashtornyi 2009: 205]. To put it more simply, after disintegrating, the Huns were absorbed by the Savirs. Many tribes belonging to the Hunnic union were ethnically close to the Savirs – the Utigurs, Kotrigurs, Hunugurs, Onogurs, Barselt, and Zals. In Yelena Skrzhinskaya’s opinion, the Hunugurs were a Hunnic tribe that was close to or merged with the Savirs who inhabited the Northern Caucasus [Skrzhinskaya 2001: 219]. The tribes known as *Sabirs* and *Sabeiroi* were believed by Gavriil Destunis to be related to the Huns [Destunis 1860, note 98]. In the writings of Theophanes of Byzantium, the name “Huns” is used not only for the

Huns themselves but also for the Hunno-Savirs, Avars, Bulgars, and Türks. Movses Kalankatuatsi calls Varachan the metropolis of the Hons, which should be read as the capital of the Hunno-Savirs. The Savirs were indeed ethnically very close to the Huns. But we should remember that the Huns in Europe are not the Huns in Asia. The ethnic mix of the Hun horde in Europe included many tribes. Among them were the Oghurs (Onogurs, Utigurs, and Kotrigurs) and the Savirs.

The primary sources confuse the Savirs not only with the Huns but also with the Khazars. For example, in chapter 43 of Book II of his *History of the Country of Albania*, Movses Kalankatuatsi states that the great and pious prince of the Huns Ilituer sent two nobles of his country, Irt'gin-khursan and Chat-khazr, for the saintly Israel with a request to be allowed to appoint him the spiritual leader of the land of the Huns. In chapter 45, under the heading “The Reply to the Huns’ Letter,” we learn that Eliazr, the Catholicos of Caucasian Albania, and Prince Varaz-Trdat turned down the envoys’ request and were unwilling to let Israel go to be a spiritual leader of the Khazars. Clearly, there is a substitution of the concepts “Huns” and “Khazars” here. Meanwhile, in actual fact, the text is referring to the Savirs, whose prince at that time (682 AD) was Alp Ilituer, and who believed in the might of their god of lightning, Kuar. In 724, an Arabic source noted that the 300,000-strong army of the Khāqān (Qaghan) was made up of “Khazars and other tribes of infidels” [Al-Kufi. Book VIII]. Most probably the “other tribes of infidels” referred to the Savirs. The ethnonym *sabartoi asphaloi* (Σάβαρτοι ἄσφαλοι) that occurs in the writings of Constantine Porphyrogenitus is usually translated as “invincible Sabarts.” Anatoly Novoseltsev identified *asphaloi* as the Persian word for “white” and proposed that this name should be translated as “the White Sabirs”. This solution undoubtedly establishes a link between the Hungarian tribes and the Savirs/Sabirs.

In the sixth and seventh centuries the Savirs residing in Armenia were called Sevordik. On the basis of the sources Novoseltsev theorized that a part of these Savirs became Armenianized [Novoseltsev 1990: 83].

The Savirs were also recorded by Ibn Khordadbeh: “Beyond the limits of al-Bab lie the lands of the rulers of the Suvars, Lakz (Lezgins), Alans, Maskuts and (the country of) Sarir (Sarir is not an ethnonym, but the title of the ruler of this territory in Daghestan, the *Ṣāhib al-Sarir* “Lord of the Throne”) and the city of Samandar” [Ibn Khordadbeh. Book 63]. The Persian author was presumably writing in this passage about the situation in the first half of the 8th century. In any case, he was referring to the Northern Caucasus and the Stavropol-Astrakhan steppe and not the Volga basin as Naila Velikhanova indicates in her commentary on Ibn Khordadbeh (note 133). Moreover, by the 10th century, Samandar was already known as Djidan. Hence, the time frame for Ibn Khordadbeh’s account of the Suvars is the 8th century to the first half of the 9th. The phonetic form of the ethnonym clearly reflects the Arabic pronunciation of the tribal name. The context allows us to place them between the cities of Derbent and Atil. Semender, a town belonging to Khazaria, was inhabited by Savirs. And between Bāb al Abwab and Semender were numerous vineyards belonging to Semender [Al-Istakhri. Book 221]. So the Savirs of Semender cultivated grapes.

It is known that by the mid-6th century the Savirs had become the most powerful and numerous tribe in the Caucasus. They captured the whole of Northern Albania (Shirvan and Aran) and consolidated their hold on the Derbent-Kabala area. They spent more than 100 years in these places. Sara Ashurbeili believes that at this time the Savirs adopted a settled way of life, becoming assimilated with the native population of the country [Ashurbeili 1983: 62].

Agathias Scholasticus wrote of the temporary camps established by the Savirs: “Around 500 Savirs (*Σαβείρων*) installed themselves on some elevated spot.” The walls of such temporary fortifications were not very high – the face of a mounted man outside the enclosure could be seen. The camp consisted of a fence of stakes within which were “huts made of poles and hides” [Agathi. Hist. III.18; IV.14]. Such settlements of framed shelters could be set up very quickly. This passage relates to the events of the year 554 in Lazica (Western Georgia). Commenting on it, Alexander



Gadlo correctly observed that these types of dwellings and fortifications are typical for the forest and forest-steppe tribes of Siberia. “Thus the description of the wartime life of the Savirs provides information about their ancestral homeland—the forest-steppe part of Western Siberia” [Gadlo 1979: 88]. In 555, a Syrian source recorded the Savirs’ having tents [Zakhar. Chron. 12.7] In the late 17th century, the Dutch traveller Nicolaes Witsen observed that in winter, the Ostyaks lived in dugouts roofed over like huts. In the summer, they moved into small houses [Witsen 2010: 788]. As we see, the Ostyaks had the same kind of winter habitation as was used by the *Syvyrs*.

According to Priscus of Panium, who visited Attila’s residence at the end of the first half of the 5th century, “benches stood by the walls of the room” there [Prisc. Hist. 8]. A similar placement of long benches made of floorboards the full length of the wall is typical of the Chuvash (especially the southerners). Benches began to be supplanted by purchased furniture only in the late 20th century [Salmin 2010: 158f].

The Suvar engaged in close interaction with the surrounding world. Common cultural traditions developed, especially in clothing, such as “elongated toggle-buttons with little cubes at the ends and loops in the middle to sew them to the clothing” [Fyodorov 1972: 37]. This tradition can also be traced in the archaeological sites of Volga Bulgaria. As Yury Shevchenko correctly noted, the impulse that brought items belonging to the Hunnic legacy (buckles and bone arrowheads) to the Volga-Urals region is associated with the Sabirs [Shevchenko 2001: 218].

According to Zacharias, in 555 the Sabirs carried weapons, hunted wild animals, and ate the meat of cattle and fish [Zachar. Chron.12.7] as, indeed, did their neighbours (the Burgars, Alans, Kurtargars (Kutrigurs), Avars, Khazars, and so on). The population of the city of Suvar was living in tents in the year 985. They had plenty of land under cultivation and an abundance of grain [Al Mukaddasi 1994: 289]. In Volga Bulgaria, the inhabitants hunted squirrels and beavers for their fur [Ibn Sa’id 2009: 32]. They used Armenian carpets there – Almish had them in his yurt. “They all [live] in yurts, with the difference that the king’s yurt is very large, accommodating a thousand souls and more, the floor covered for the most part with

Armenian carpets” [Ibn Fadlan 1956: 137]. Stories about Armenian silk (*ermen purşānē*) can still be recorded among the Chuvash today. Of course, the silk was delivered to Bulgaria by Armenians, who had their colony there.

Undoubtedly valuable are the written descriptions of banquets given for the Byzantine embassy to Attila, the leader of the Huns, in 448 and for the Arab mission to Almish, the ruler of Volga Bulgaria, in 922. A comparison of the associated ceremonies is particularly interesting. The first occasion was recorded by Priscus of Panium, the second by Ibn Faḍlān. Both were describing what they had seen personally and there are no grounds for disbelieving their testimony. Priscus gives a fuller account than Ibn Faḍlān. I shall cite a few of the details. Priscus: “When all were arranged, a cup-bearer came and handed Attila a wooden cup of wine. He took it, and saluted the first in precedence, who, honoured by the salutation, stood up, and might not sit down until the king, having tasted or drained the wine, returned the cup to the attendant. All the guests then honoured Attila in the same way, saluting him, and then tasting the cups; but he did not stand up. Each of us had a special cupbearer, who would come forward in order to present the wine, when the cup-bearer of Attila retired. When the second in precedence and those next to him had been honoured in like manner, Attila toasted us in the same way according to the order of the seats. When this ceremony was over the cup-bearers retired, and tables, large enough for three, four, or even more, to sit at, were placed next to the table of Attila, so that each could take of the food on the dishes without leaving his seat. The attendant of Attila first entered with a dish full of meat, and behind him came the other attendants with bread and viands, which they laid on the tables.” Ibn Faḍlān: “The rulers [sat] to his right and he invited us to sit on his left, while his sons sat in front of him and he alone [sat] on a throne covered with Byzantine brocade. He ordered that a table [with food] be brought and it was presented to him. There was nothing but roast meat upon it. And so he began – he took a knife, cut off a slice and ate it, then a second and a third. Then he cut a slice and gave it to Susan the ambassador. When he had received it, a small table was brought to him and placed before him. And such was the rule, that

no-one touched the food until the ruler had presented him with a slice. And as soon as he had been given it, he was brought a table. Then he gave [meat] to me and I was brought a table. Then he cut a slice and presented it to the ruler who was on his right and he was brought a table, then the second ruler and he was brought a table...then the fourth ruler and he was brought a table; then he gave to his sons and they were brought tables and so it went on until each of those before him had received a table and we ate, each from his own table, without sharing a table with anyone else, and beside him no-one took anything from his table” [Ibn-Fadlan 1956: 132]. Nuances aside (Attila’s simplicity and Almish’s pomp, etc.), both meals followed the same pattern. In other words, at Almish’s court, they did the same as the Huns had done five centuries earlier.

Traces of the banqueting ceremony described by Priscus and Ibn Faḍlān can clearly be detected in the Chuvash ritual meals known as *čükleme* and *al valli* [Salmin 2011: 327–337]. The guests are seated at the table in the corner that is the place of honour. Here, the preliminary part of the performance takes place. In the *čükleme*, the women occupy a certain place. The wife of the host, for example, repeats the actions and words of her husband. In the ritual, she is seated at the table straight after her spouse. Immediately, beer is brought and placed on the table in a large wooden vessel, and scoops (up to nine in number) are provided. Each of the participants has to have ritual food and drink presented by the host. It is these that serve as the official permit to participate in the ritual generally and the shared food in particular. Each share, received in the hands, is called *al valli*, literally, “for/in the hand.” Both those seated at the table and the other participants face the door. At a wedding, the praying begins with the serving of beer, from a fresh cask, and bread. The head of the household or his wife gives each of the company a piece of bread spread with butter. Both this process and the piece of bread received are known among the Chuvash as *al valli*. Everyone stands up. They look toward the door, which is left slightly ajar, and hold the bread in their right hand. A candle is lit. First they address *Turā* and *Pülēh*, then other deities. They ask for health for the new

couple and for offspring to be born to them, wishing them a whole field of lambs and a benchful of children. They also ask *Turǎ* for the opportunity to pay visits to one another. Effectively, it is after this collective act of prayer and the eating of the pieces of bread and butter that the marriage contract is considered to have been concluded.

Did the Savirs adopt this ritual from the Huns? Did the Huns follow Savir ceremonies? Or perhaps the Bulgars and Savirs, while part of the Hunnic confederation, developed a common practice for banquets. All three things are possible, and the questions remain open.

Researchers into the history of the ethnic structure of the Chuvash have noted the term *turhan*. Pavel Kokovtsev and Anatoly Novoseltsev regarded it as a borrowing from Iranian, in the meaning of “judge” or “translator.” Then the word found its way into the Khazar, Turkic, and Russian languages. *Tarqan/tarkhan* is an ancient Inner Asian title of unknown origin or etymology – and very widespread. It has been connected with the Xiongnu title chanyu/shanyu *Chanyu* 單于, = Old Chin. *dan wa*, Later Han *džan wa*, Middle Chin. *žjān ju* [Schuessler 2009: 255(#24-21az, a)], or Early Middle Chinese \*dzian wua’ [Pulleyblank 1991: 48, 381]. Tremblay [Tremblay 2001: 185,n.5] suggests \**dān hwāh* < Kettic, *d’ej* + *qa*. Bactrian has ταρχανο. In reality, the question is far from resolved. Evidently, it was combined with a personal name, in the same way as, for example, the title *pasha* in Turkey. In Khazaria, the term denoted the privileged class [Novoseltsev 1990: 117–119]. It also exists as a personal name; the name of settlements, urban districts, streets, and other toponyms; and the name of deities, spirits, and holy places. In Kazan province there were 15 settlements with that name. One was Tatar, another Cheremis, and all the rest Chuvash. For that reason Artemyev suggested that the tarkhan class consisted predominantly of Chuvash [Artemyev 1866: LXXIV]. In present-day Chuvashia there are settlements called *Turkhan* in the Batyrevo, Krasnye Chetai, Shumerlia, Tsivilsk, Morgaushi and other districts. Rail Kuzeyev noted that ethnonyms and toponyms incorporating the element *tarkhan* occur across almost all the territory west of the Altai and Central Asia. With regard to ethnogenesis, the ethnonym

*Tarkhan* establishes ties between the Danube Bulgars, Hungarians, Volga Bulgars, Chuvash, and Bashkirs. “Contacts between these formations may have taken place in the Northern Caucasus and the region of the Sea of Azov, where ethnonymic parallels formed that were then carried to the Danube and Volga” [Kuzeyev 2010: 323]. Movses Kalankatuatsi’s *History of the Country of Albania* does indeed confirm that in the 7th century, the Hunno-Savirs used *tarkhan* as a title [Kalankatuatsi. Ist. II.42]. However, it is conceivable that a tribal name *Tarkhan* existed in southern Siberia and the Urals area in the previous millennium. Kuzeyev, for example, pointed to subdivisions of the Bashkir Tangaur and Katai tribes that were called Darkhan.

The year 922 should be considered the date when the ancestors of the Chuvash acquired their third homeland. The first was the basin of the River Tobol with the town of Sibir as its centre; the second was a part of the Khazar Kaganate with the city of Varachan. The third was the basin of the Cheremshan, the southern districts of today’s Chuvash Republic and the northern parts of Ulyanovsk *oblast’*. Evidently the Tigashi archaeological site should be considered the centre. The period from 922 to 1469 is the time of the formation of the Chuvash people and the strengthening of its self-awareness. The motives that inspired this people over its long and far from simple history are also far from simple. After all “the drift of ethnicity bears more resemblance to situational reactions than to linear evolution and its direction does not copy the zigzags of political history: an upsurge of ethnicity is often born in a time of political troubles, while a decline occurs in a phase of social prosperity” [Golovnyov 2009: 120]. It is paradoxical but true. One thing is clear: people, tribes and nations live while they retain their ethnic identity.

An early thirteenth-century source contributes some details to the ethnography of the Savirs. It tells about the tribes that had settled on the Sibir and Ibir, where the Savirs had lived in the years BC. Perhaps in the 1200s the same traditions followed by the Savirs may have survived there. Among other things it was noted that the people boiled the bones of some animal up to seven times, until no fat was left in

them [Elomari 1884: 238]. Peter Golden writes of the ethnic continuity between the Savirs and the Suvars of Volga Bulgaria [Golden 2011: 146-147].

The Chuvash of the Cheremshan basin in the eighteenth century mainly planted rye, oats and emmer wheat. They grew just as much flax and hemp as they needed. Buckwheat was not popular and they sowed little common wheat [Lepyokhin 1771: 144].

In the Volga basin Chuvash and Cheremis lived “without distinction, in such a way that for all purposes they can almost be regarded as a single people” [Miller 1791: 6].

Traditional culture in a broad sense, as we know, preserves the vocabulary, etiquette, mentality, dwelling, food, clothing and the religious side of an ethnos. All these age-old elements of culture can be found in living form only among the still unbaptized Chuvash (mainly along the Cheremshan). Study of their ways in particular promises the most fruitful scientific and practical results.

**Folklore.** During the three years he spent in Tobolsk province, Serafim Patkanov heard and recorded from the local Tatar population a number of legends about the *Syvyr/Sybyr* people that had at one time inhabited places on the middle Irtysh. Patkanov noted that “these legends are so widespread among the Tobol Tatars that one is despite oneself surprised how they could have escaped the attention of scholars who have studied this region” [Patkanov 1999: 10]. A phonetic variant of the word *Seper* is *t’apər/šapər*, which, Kustaa Fredrik Karjalainen explained, referred to an ancient mythological people. According to the legends of the Irtysh Ostyaks, the bear is the son of the deity *Tūrəm* and a woman of the *t’apər* [Karjalainen 1996: 12,15]. It was said that the *Syvyrs* had lived a very long time ago, according to some traditions even at the time of Noah, and then disappeared to somewhere. Siberians relate legends about the ancient population of the Tobol area who built settlements and lived in them. The accounts from the eighteenth century and those from the twentieth completely coincide. The Mansi called them *serne-khum* – “earth man”, while the Barabinsk Tatars spoke of *Syvyrs*. For example, the legends of the local Tatar

population say that when alien barbarian tribes appeared in their land, the *Syvyr*s dug pits and hid with all their property. When the incomers took possession of the country, the *Syvyr*s chopped down the posts supporting the roof, on which there was a thick layer of soil, and perished. The basis for such stories was provided, Patkanov suggested, by “the existence in that area of the remains of former dugout houses and small tumuli that quite often contained human bones and metal artefacts” [Patkanov 1892: 130]. The local Tatars attribute the greater part of the archaeological monuments in their area to the *Syvyr*s. They call the ruins of settlements *syvyr-kala* – “*Syvyr* town” and the tumuli *syvyr-tuba* – “*Syvyr* mound” [Patkanov 1999: 10].

In the late 17th century, Nicolaes Witsen wrote that in winter, the *Ostyaks* lived in dugouts roofed over like huts. In the summer, they moved into small houses [Witsen 2010: 788]. As we see, the *Ostyaks* had the same kind of winter habitation as was used by the *Syvyr*s. In all probability settlements with earthen roofs existed in Antiquity and the Middle Ages over a wider area than just present-day Tiumen *oblast*. For example, *The Secret History of the Mongols* when telling of events at the very start of the thirteenth century, paints a picture of Genghis Khan distributing newly-conquered lands. In particular the tribes living in towns with earthen roofs were given to Shikhikhutag: “Shikhikhutag said, ‘What other foster brother could receive the same kind of share as I? May the Great Khan deign to give me of the towns with earthen roofs!’ The Great Khan answered, ‘You have determined your own share. Go rule!’” [Sokrovennoye. 204].

We have to assume, Damir Iskhakov writes, that in all cases the names were based on the appellation Seber/Sibir (with Ibir/Ibir’ being merely variants). The town and the land were most probably named after the *Savyr* ~ *Sabyr* ~ *Sypyr* tribe that, according to the legends of the Tobol Tatars, lived in the middle reaches of the Irtysh long before the Tatars arrived there. During an expedition Iskhakov recorded several texts according to which informants identified the *Sybyr* with the *Khanty*, but not consistently. In any case, these tribes lived in the area a very long time ago. Iskhakov

concluded that “in the person of these Sybyrs~Sypyr we are dealing with the Savirs” [Iskhakov 2002: 33], i.e. the ancestors of the Chuvash.

According to tradition, the Chuvash came to the Volga from beyond the Black Sea, from beyond the distant mountains. They consider their forefather to have been a man named Chuvash [Rittikh 1870: 46]. Moreover Chuvash legends contain mentions of the ancient homeland of the ancestors of the Chuvash in a place called *Ararat tuhuri* – literally “the mountains of Ararat foot”. This toponym directly coincided with the Armenian *Aragatsotn* – “the foot of (Mount) Aragats”. Chuvash legends have a large number of stories in common with the folklore texts of the peoples who have lived or still live in the Caucasus – the Bulgarians, Georgians and Gagauz, for example. These are tales about a low sky that you can reach up and touch; legends about why wheat has a single ear; stories about the Milky Way [Kakhovskii 1965: 259-260].

Chuvash, Kalmyk, Bashkir and Russian tales about fighting serpents (more broadly heroic wooing) are marked by archaism, ethnocultural realia and an abundance of imagery. Heroic wooing – a journey beyond seventy-seven seas in search of one’s beloved – resembles a hunt. The parallelism “hunting-wooing” testifies that the concepts “hunt” and “woo” here get as close as ever they can, becoming sort of synonyms. The style of heroic tales [Salmin 1994: 187-313] preserved realia that reflect ethnocultural specifics of the past. Such aspects as “the old woman was kneading dough” or “went hunting in the forest” speak, one should assume, of the ancient occupations of the Chuvash, while the phrase “the old woman with [her] old man” is a hint at the role of women in society. According to folk conceptions, the epic hero accomplishing the age-old aspirations of the masses, cannot possibly be an earthly being of ordinary origin. The idea of the exceptionality of the folk hero – *bogatyr*, *patty*, *batyr*, *nart* – runs through the artistic fabric of the epic.

While carrying out a series of excavations on the River Utka, the archaeologist Ravil Fakhruddinov recorded oral folklore from elderly locals that was permeated



with love for their ancient town. They called Suvar *Sham-Suar*. The Tatar epithet is used to convey grandeur and glory. *Sham* is a symbol of beauty and light. Practically the same word – *shams* – means “sun” in Arabic [Fakhrutdinov 1986: 96-97]. Among the Chuvash legends about the origins of villages are common. One example is a surviving archive record from 1905 of a recital by Feodor Alexeyev, a peasant from the village of Bolshiye Kryshki, Cheboksary *uyezd*, Kazan province. It tells of the formation of several settlements in today’s Cheboksary and Tsivilsk *rayony*. In the centre of events are three brothers, Pichurin, Aitarin and Chinkei. This basis of the plot is their following after a bull in search of better lands, abundant springs, forests, meadows and fields suitable for growing crops [ChGhI 154: 172-177].

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The ancient ancestors of the Chuvash, the *Sepers* lived in the south of Western Siberia. A more specific location would be the lands to the east of the Mansi as far as the River Chulym. The ethnonym and the name of the region came from the name of the little River *Sibir*. Due to changes in climatic conditions, in the middle of the first century BC the Sepers left for Eastern Europe. Then in the second century AD the *Savars* were recorded by Ptolemy in the Northern Caucasus below the Aorsi and the Pagyritae. In the 520s they were located on the Black Sea coast of the Caucasus. In the late ninth or early tenth century Hovhannes Draskhanakerttsi describes a part of the ancestors of the Chuvash in the Armenian provinces of Uti and Chuash. In 922 the Arab scribe Ibn Faqlān saw the *Suvars* in Volga Bulgaria. Hence *Seper/Sipir* is an ethnonym of Ugric origin; *Syovar* is an exoethnonym given to them by the neighbouring Iranians; *Chu(v)ash* appears in the Caucasus in the eighth century with the coming of the Arabs.

In the early sixth century the Savir ancestors of the Chuvash were drawn into the Persian-Byzantine confrontation. Boarex, a female ruler of the Savirs, took the side of Emperor Justinian and laid the foundation for the introduction of Christianity in the lands of the Hunno-Savirs. By that time the Savirs’ neighbours were already

Christians. Nevertheless, the bulk of the Savirs still continued to perform their old rituals. In 685 the Hunno-Savirs were formally converted by Bishop Israel of Caucasian Albania. In 922 Volga Bulgaria officially adopted Islam. The Suvars withdrew from the Bulgars to the right bank of the Volga and there preserved their traditional rituals and beliefs. In the thirteenth century the Suvaro-Chuvash were subjected to a powerful Islamic influence. From the sixteenth century Orthodox Christianity has been gaining strength in Chuvash areas

Before the Mongol-Tatar invasion the ancestors of the Chuvash were not subjected to any sort of serious influence from either the Turki or the Mongols. Grave inscriptions from Volga Bulgaria still preserve the Chuvash *r/l* dialect. The works of Vasily Radlov (Friedrich Wilhelm Radloff) and other linguists confirm the idea that the Chuvash language was not originally Turkic and only became Turkic with time. The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries saw the Kipchakization of the Bulgar and Suvar languages (the shift from the *kh* sound to *k*, for example). Although the ancestors of the Chuvash had managed to form as a people before complete Kipchakization. Kipchak and Tatar elements left indelible traces in their language, religion and ethnography.

## **Chapter 2: THE BULGAR VERSION**

Pursuing the Bulgar theory in examining the question of the origins of the Chuvash will ultimately bring us back to the dead-end issue of how the Bulgar legacy should be divided between the Tatars and the Chuvash. That is one thing. Secondly, the question of the Suvar legacy in the history of the Chuvash has remained wholly unexamined, although I believe it is the only way and the correct route to shed light on the history of the ancestors of the Chuvash. It is simply that to this day a fascination with the Turkic roots of the Chuvash people has been the dominant tendency in Chuvash studies. For example, Mikhail Khudiakov with good reason suggested that the Chuvash cannot possibly be considered either the creators or the bearers of Bulgar culture. Meanwhile the Bulgar theory of the origins of the Chuvash is itself founded on one-sided, poorly interpreted linguistic material [Khudyakov 1927: 136]. Nevertheless, having set themselves the goal of demonstrating the autochthony of the Volga-basin Tatars, some researchers fall back on the study of the Ananyino culture. Of course, there are no direct ties between that archaeological culture and the Tatars. Nor indeed can the question be put that way. It is simply impossible to speak seriously in that prehistoric era of any specific ethnos, or sometimes even of anthropological uniformity. Nor are there grounds for identifying all the inhabitants of Volga Bulgaria in the tenth to thirteenth centuries with the ancestors of the Chuvash. Thirdly, in the present work we shall not touch upon the history of the formation of Danube Bulgaria.

In order to get closer to the issue under discussion, let us turn to Sergei Tokarev's arguments regarding the Chuvash and the Bulgars. In a theoretical paper about the statement of problems of ethnogenesis he wrote, among other things: "It would be difficult to bring any objection to the fairly convincingly proved historical link between the ancient Bulgars and the present-day Chuvash" [Tokarev 1949: 13]. However, Tokarev went on to reason, even the most direct historical link is far from

being identity – people sometimes forget that. It is necessary to realize that even the entirely convincing connection between a modern people and its ancient ancestors still does very little to help us understand that people's origins. It is more the explanation of the known through the unknown. That is why the solidly proven tie between, for example, today's Chuvash and the ancient Bulgars is far from being the answer to the question of their origins. Can we consider the "Bulgar theory" a solution to the problem of the ethnogenesis of the Chuvash people? The opposite is more the case – this theory might provide an answer to the question of who the Bulgars themselves were. It is not possible to unconditionally link a single modern people with any one ancient tribe.

**Ethnonym.** In the opinion of Anatoly Novoseltsev the Bulgars were originally connected with the Ugrians [Novoseltsev 1990: 72]. In the literature it is customarily reckoned that the first mention of the Bulgars, in the form *Vulgares*, occurs in the anonymous Latin *Chronography of 354* [Mommsen 1892: 105], although the Bulgars are mentioned in Caucasian sources as far back as the second century. The word itself is an exonym derived from the Turkic *bulya* – "to mix; muddle; harm; sow confusion" (cf. Chuvash *pālhav* "revolt", *pālhat* "to muddle"). Ignoring the Chuvash reading of the ethnonym *Bulgar* people still ask questions of the type "Were the Bulgars 'the mixed ones' or 'those that rebelled'?" [Maenchen-Helfen 2010: 451], while we should accept both meanings in the one word. According to Gyula Németh, the Bulgars were formed from Oghurs and Huns and the name *Bulgar* "mixture" reflected this process. This was his view in the first, 1930 edition of his book on Hungarian origins. Towards the end of his life, however, the same scholar favoured the "rebel" interpretation [Németh 1991: 129-130]. Therefore *Bulgar* should be considered a politonym. Latin variants of the name are *Bulgari*, *Bulgares* and *Vulgares*. See additionally [Golden 2011: 143].

In the 1070s the word was recorded by Mahmud al-Kashgari as the name of both a people and a city. It is included in his compendium of the languages of the Turks

[Nadelyayev et al. 1969: 123]. He also makes some very brief comments on the nature of Bulghar Turkic and the Turkic of the Suwâr/Suvârîn in areas of phonology.

In the Patriarch's (Nikon) Chronicle there is a reference in the description of the events of 1229 to "the Bulgars called Kazanians" [*bolgare, glagolemii kazantsi*], and in 1236 to "the Bulgar land called Kazanian" [PSRL 9: 98,104].

In 1370 Prince Dmitry Konstantinovich of Suzdal and Nizhny Novgorod sent "an army against the Bulgar prince Asan that are [*sic*] now called Kazanians" [PSRL 11: 12].

In 1431 Grand Prince Vasily II sent an army led by Prince Feodor Pestry against the Bulgars. "He went, took them and all their land captive," the chronicler succinctly reported [PSRL 27: 102]. On that occasion the city of Bulgar was completely destroyed [Khlebnikova 1974: 18-23]. The capital of Volga Bulgaria practically ceased to exist. The southern territories of Bulgaria passed under the control of Muscovy, while Kazan became the centre of the northern territories. This moment was the start of the formation of the Khanate of Kazan and at the same time of a new ethnos – the Kazan Tatars.

In the description of the events of 1524, the chronicles already refer to the population of the city of Kazan and its hinterland at one point as "Kazanians" at another as "Tatars" [PSRL 23: 203]. In 1552 Ivan Vasilyevich, the Tsar and Grand Prince of All the Russias, seeing that the blood of Orthodox Christians was being spilt, assembled many forces and took the great city of Kazan, the hagiography of Tsar Feodor Ivanovich tells us. Besides the chronicle calls the population of Kazan and the surrounding area "impious Bulgars" and "the Bulgar country" [PSRL 14: 3-4], while the *Russkii Khronograf* uses the phrase "Bulgars that are called Kazanians" [PSRL 22,2: 175].

All these facts, naturally, speak of the identification in the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries of the Bulgars with the Kazan Tatars. In scholarly literature the tendency to use a double ethnonym also persists – "the Bulgars (Tatars)" and "the Bulgars (Tatars of the Volga and Pre-Urals)" [Mukhamadiyev 2011: 80,81].

**History.** An *a-priori* enthusiasm for the Bulgar origins of the ancestors of the Chuvash coupled with a direct identification of the Bulgars with the Ancient Turkic world leads to highly unscientific generalizations. Although we should agree with the established opinion that the original homeland of the Bulgar tribes was southern Siberia (probably extending into Mongolia as part of the Tiele). It has been suggested that the Bulgars moved to Europe from the Altai [Kunik 1878: 147]. However their history before the second century AD is shrouded in mystery.

We know that during the reign of Vologases II (186–198) in Armenia, on the green meadows near the Shara appanage (the Upper Basean), a colony of Bulgar tribes appeared (these are the Vndur Vund). Then in the days of King Arshak disturbances arose in the Great Caucasus chain on account of which many Bulgars arrived in Armenia and “settled for a long time below Kola (the headwaters of the Cyrus/Kura), on fertile land, in places abundant with grain” [Khorenatsi. Ist. II. 6, 9]. As his source for this Movses Khorenatsi cites Mar Abas Katina, who lived in the late third and early fourth centuries.

The early fifth century was marked by events that affected the history of the Lombards/Langobards. The Germanic Langobard tribes were peacefully sleeping, Paul the Deacon wrote, on the night when they were attacked by the Bulgars (*Vulgares*). They fell upon the camp with such fury that many were slain and they even killed the Langobard king Agelmund. The new king, Lamissio, was young and strong. He longed to turn the tables on the Bulgars, but at the first encounter the Langobards fled the field. The king exhorted his warriors that it was better to risk their lives than to become a mean nation of slaves. The Bulgars were indeed defeated and the Langobards gained great booty [Paulus. Lang. I. 16-17].

At the time of Attila, the Bulgars were, of course, within the Huns' sphere of influence and even fought in the Hunnic army [Németh 1991: 147], although the relationship fell short of complete subjugation. In her commentary on the *Getica*, Yelena Skrzhinskaya noted that when relating events involving the Huns in the second half of the fifth century and the first half of the sixth Jordanes calls them

Bulgars on some occasions, Antes on others, and Sclavenes on others again [Skrzhynskaya 2001: 218]. In 493, 499 and 502 the Bulgars (Βούλγαροι) carried out devastating campaigns into the northern border regions of the Byzantine Empire [Chichurov 1980: 75; Moravcsik 1983: 108]. Theophanes the Confessor, however, gives the clarification that (in 501/502) “they return back before people learn about them” [Theophan. Chrono.]. From the context it follows that until the late fifth century the Bulgars did not make long distance campaigns and were not known in the Byzantine lands. By the early sixth century they were already acquiring experience in hit-and-run tactics.

Under the year 538/539 Theophanes recorded major armed clashes between the Bulgars and the Byzantines. However, when telling of those actions, John Malalas, whose compiler Theophanes was, wrote not of the Bulgars, but of the Huns. Of course, in that period the Huns as such no longer existed. The following year Bulgars who had mounted attacks in Illyricum were taken prisoner. In the second half of the 560s the Langobards under the leadership of their king, Alboin mounted successful campaigns against Byzantium and Rome. Alboin brought with him to Italy people of a great variety of ethnicities that had been conquered by him and his predecessors. That is why, Paul the Deacon wrote, the places in which they live are called Gepid, Bulgar, Sarmatian and so on [Paulus. Lang. II. 26]. So a part of the Western Bulgars (if it was not the remnants of the Huns that were meant) ended up in the Roman provinces in the second half of the sixth century as part of the Lombard army and there they settled. In 555 Zacharias Rhetor wrote that the Bulgars had towns [Zakhar. Khronika.XII. 7]. According to Michael the Syrian (d.1199), who drew upon the Ecclesiastical History of John of Ephesus (died 586), the Persian usurper Bahrām VI Chōbīn decided to rise up against the Byzantines’ young protégé in the Caucasus Khosrau II. So Khosrau turned for help to the Byzantine Emperor Maurice (582–602). Maurice sent in support of Khosrau an army that included Armenians and Bulgars numbering 2,000 men [Siriyets. Khronika.386]. Judging by the context, this event took place in 590 or immediately afterwards, but no later than 602. This means

that in that period the Eastern Roman forces in the Caucasus included Bulgars (most probably on the territory of Armenia).

In 626 the Bulgars were among the Avar-led forces that laid siege to Constantinople [Chichurov 1980: 98]. In 631 a violent conflict broke out between the Avars and Bulgars in Pannonia over who should have primacy in that territory. Their armies met in battle, Nine thousand Bulgars were driven out of Pannonia together with their wives and children. They sought sanctuary with Dagobert I, the King of the Franks. He found them winter quarters among the Bavarii and began to confer on what to do afterwards. It was decided to annihilate the Bulgars in their dwellings together with their families in the course of a single night. The order was carried out, but Alzeko (Alzeco), the leader of the Bulgars, escaped with just 700 men. They found refuge with the Veneti [Fredegar. Khronika IV. 6.72]. Under the leadership of Kubrat, in 635 the Bulgars crushed the power of the Avars in the Black Sea region. With the extinction of the might of the Türks in the western steppes in this period, the Bulgars and Khazars gained in power. Thus a new state arose – Great Bulgaria with Phanagoria as its capital [Klyashtorny 2009: 171-172; Golden 2011: 148]. Kubrat/Krovat/Kuvrat, the ruler of the Bulgars and Kotrags died in about 665, leaving five sons. As he was dying he exhorted his sons never to separate from each other and to live together so that they might rule over all and not become slaves to some other people. Those sons, however, did just the opposite. They withdrew from one other, each with his own subjects. Researchers have different opinions of this tale: some consider it no more than a legend; others maintain Theophanes' trustworthiness. The first son, Batbayan/Bayan (= the name of an Avar kagan), following his father's behest, stayed where he was. Then Batbayan became a tributary of the Khazars. The second son, Kotrag, crossed the River Tanais (the Seversky Donets) and settled across from his eldest brother. The third, Asparukh, crossed the Dnieper and Dniester, reaching a place called Ogl (in Old Slavic *Жль*, pronounced *Ongl*, modern Russ. *угол* = *Turkic Bucak/Буджак* with the same meaning) north of the Danube and settled there. He judged that place to be



inaccessible and easily defensible as there were rivers and marshes all around. Evidently Asparukh feared the Khazars. He took up arms against the Byzantines and drove them back as far as Varna. The Bulgars subjugated the Severi and the “Seven Slavic Tribes”. The frightened Emperor was obliged to conclude peace with the Bulgars. The fourth and fifth sons crossed the Ister (Danube). One stayed in Pannonia as a subject of the Avars, while the other reached Pentapolis and came under the rule of the Christians (i.e. Byzantines) [Theophan. Chrono.679/680; Nicephor. Hist. 673; Chichurov 1980: 60-62]. A brief report about Kubrat’s fifth son, Alzeko/Alzeco is contained in Paul the Deacon’s *History of the Lombards*. Paul calls him “a duke of the Bulgarians, Alzeco by name”. In the 660s he and his army left the rest of his people and moved to Italy. He promised to serve King Grimoald and asked to be settled on Roman lands. The King sent him to his son Romuald with instructions to help these people find somewhere to live. Romuald received the Bulgars cordially and settled them on the deserted lands of Sepinum, Bovianum and Isernia. Alzeko himself had to take the title of *gastaldius* instead of duke. At the time when Paul was writing, Bulgars still lived in those parts [Paulus. Lang. V. 29]. In 670 the Khazars in alliance with the Hungarians routed the Bulgars [Róna-Tas 2005: 117]. The Bulgars left Scythia and rampaged in one place then another. They committed outrages in Thrace, Sigebert of Gembloux stated with indignation in his *Chronicon sive Chronographia* under the year 680. The army that Emperor Constantine IV sent against them was shamefully put to flight. The Emperor was obliged to conclude peace and to pay them an annual sum. In 689 Justinian tore up the treaty with the Bulgars and went into battle against them. He won a victory, but soon was defeated himself and barely escaped with his life [Sigebert. Chron.].

After the disintegration of the Hunnic empire, in the fifth to eighth centuries the Savirs had no rivals with regard to military might in the Caucasus. It was at this time that the Bulgars were hard pressed by the Savirs [Gumilyov 2007: 261] and the Khazars [Golden 2008: 235]. Moreover, even before their arrival on the Middle Volga these tribes lived separately. The historian Vasily Dimitriyev believed that the

change in the ethnic make-up of the population of the Middle Volga was the result of the invasion of Bulgar tribes in the seventh century and Suvar tribes in the eighth [Dimitriyev 2003: 7]. Archaeological data, however, indicate that the Bulgars reached the Middle Volga in the middle or second half of the eighth century. The cause is said to have been the Arab-Khazar wars [Kazakov 1982: 390]. Anatoly Novoseltsev also considered that the Bulgars' move to the Middle Volga took place in the eighth century [Novoseltsev 1990: 75]. See also [Zimonyi 1990, p.180 concludes that a series of migrations took place at different times in the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> and end of the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries]. The views on Bulgar chronology expressed by András Róna-Tas are trustworthy and close to the historical reality. In his opinion the Bulgar empire was located not in the basin of the River Kuban and Ciscaucasia, but between the Donets and the Southern Bug. The Bulgars were, in his opinion, in subjection to the Khazars. In 737, exploiting the Arab attack on the Khazars, they moved up the Volga [Róna-Tas2012: 6]. After defeat at the hands of the Arabs, they continued up the Volga until, around 750, they reached the Samara Bend. On the evidence of numismatic finds in the late eighth century they were in the region of Bolshiye Tarkhany. There archaeologists have excavated the earliest Bulgaro-Turkic burials. Around 900 they turned up on the Kama [Róna-Tas 1996; Dmitriyeva, Agyagási2001: 155]. In the early 860s, the Savirs, who had been living between the bounds of the Northern Caucasus and the Don, moved up the Volga. Thus the difference in time between the arrival of the Bulgars and the Suvars on the Middle Volga is more than 100 years, and that testifies to the autonomy of each of the tribes, above all in ethnic terms. At the same time we should agree with Bernát Munkácsi's opinion regarding the strong self-awareness of the ancestors of the Chuvash. It was that characteristic that prompted the Suvar tribe to break with the Bulgars in the early tenth century and to withdraw to the right bank of the Volga under the leadership of Vyräh. As we have seen, the Bulgars arrived on the Volga in the 750s and the Suvars in the late 860s. Let me stress that again: the Bulgar and Savir tribes reached the Volga separately. Moreover, after the break-up of the Hunnic union, the Savirs greatly oppressed the

Bulgars. That may even have been a reason (whether main or additional is an open question) for the Bulgars withdrawal from the fertile lands in the Northern Caucasus–Don region. The sources claim there was a second wave of Bulgar migration to the Volga in the first half of the ninth century. The suppression of the uprising by adherents of the old religion in Khazaria – the Kavars (and apparently also Bulgars and Suvars) – in 830 gave rise to another historical event: disaffected Bulgars (i.e. the remaining part of them) headed off for the Danube and the Volga-Kama area [Pletnyova 1997: 46].

Volga Bulgaria's chief enemy at the time of Almish's reign was Khazaria. Almish paid an annual tribute to the ruler of the Khazars of a sable pelt for each household in his realm. For Ibn Faḍlān's account it is evident that the son of the Bulgar ruler was being held as a hostage by the Khazars. “[news] came to the king of the Khazars of the beauty of the daughter of the king of the ‘Slavs’<sup>10</sup>, so he sent to ask her hand in marriage. But he spoke against him and turned him down. At that he sent [an expedition] and took her by force... Well then she died while with him. Then he sent to demand his second daughter. As soon as this [news] reached the king of the ‘Slavs’ he forestalled that by marrying her to the chieftain of the Esegel [tribe] that is under his power, fearing that he would take her from him by force as he had done with her sister” [Kovalevskii 1956: 141]. The Bulgar ruler decided to build a fortress and defend himself from the “Jews that had enslaved him”.<sup>11</sup>

By the early tenth century the tribal system had had its day in Volga Bulgaria. By that time a class structure of the pre-feudal type had formed: the producers were members of communes, although slave labour was also used. The country had four universally recognized kings (=princes) [Kovalevskii 1956: 27,35,132]. Evidently they were supposed to occupy the throne in a particular order.

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<sup>10</sup>The term used here is *Ṣaḡāliba*, which entered Arabic from Greek Σκλάβος and usually denoted «Slav», but as used by Ibn Faḍlān, it means any of the northern peoples (Slavs, Finns et al.). It points to the fact that Almish was ruling in the north, and very probably had Slavic and Finno-Ugric groups under his rule. – P.G.)

<sup>11</sup> The Khazar elite and elements of their core tribes had converted to Judaism in the first-half of the ninth century [Golden, 2007:123-162]

The centre of the state of Volga Bulgaria was the city of Bulgar. “Up to 20,000 horsemen come from it,” the anonymous source known as *Hudūd al-‘Ālam* reported [Bartold 1930: 32]. According to that same manuscript, close to Bulgar there was another city – Suvār. In Ibn Faḍlān’s account, however, there was still no city of Suvar. Crossing the River Utkā, he makes no mention of a city in that spot, since it did not yet exist in his day. Evidently the reference is not to a city, but to a settlement, the Suvars’ tribal centre. Later the city was only nominally “Suvar” as the bulk of the tribe was across on the right bank of the Volga. The city of Suvar was inhabited by that small part of the Suvars that had adopted Islam. Soon they were all Bulgarized and then Tatarized.

Researchers note that almost from the moment of its foundation Volga Bulgaria became a centre of transit trade. In descriptions of events of the 940s–960s the city of Bulgar is described as quite small; it did not have many districts. It was known, first and foremost, as a port where merchants from the neighbouring states put in. After Prince Sviatoslav of Kiev’s defeat of the Khazars in 965, Bulgaria’s role as a commercial hub increased even more. Three trade directions became established – with the East, with Rus’ and with neighbours. Towns were built; handicrafts developed. Furs, grain and honey were extensively used as both commodities and media of exchange.

The period between the second half of the tenth century and the early thirteenth saw repeated invasions of the Bulgar lands. In AH 358 (AD 968/969), for example, the Rus, who hunted wild animals in those parts for their skins and fur, destroyed Bulgar [Ibn Ḥawqal. Book 1.6.2.4,9]. In the late 900s the Princes of Kiev waged war on the Volga Bulgars with the Turkic Ghuzz as their allies [Semyonova 2011: 191]. According to Al-Bekri, by that time the Bulgars were few in number, with only around 500 male heads of households [Al-Bekri 1879: 63]. In 997 Vladimir Sviatoslavich took arms against “the Bulgars of the Volga and Kama, conquered and took them prisoner” [PSRL 9: 66]

In 1117 the Polovtsy came to the Bulgars. The ruler of the Bulgars gave them a drink with poison in it and Khan Aepa and other Polovtsian chiefs were killed [PSRL 2: 285]. In 1164 Prince Andrei Bogoliubsky, his son Iziaslav and brother Yaroslav, together with Prince Georgiy (Yury) of Murom, waged war on the Bulgar land. They captured the renowned Bulgar town of Briakimov (Briakhimov) and set fire to three others. They slew many Bulgars, took their banners, and Andrei himself returned in triumph, the chronicles report [PSRL 1: 352; 20,1: 122-123]. In 1172, Sain, the ruler of the horde, founded the city of Kazan to be the capital instead of the Bulgar city [PSRL 19: 13]. In 1182 Russian cavalry approached the great city of the Silver Bulgars. The Bulgars, having seen the large numbers of the enemy, shut themselves up behind the walls [PSRL 2: 625].

In 1202 the Tatar-Mongols approached the borders of Volga Bulgaria and stopped for the winter [PSRL 20,1: 155]. In 1220 Prince Sviatoslav with a large force and *voevody* besieged the Bulgar town of Oshel and burnt it down [PSRL 1: 444; 20,1: 150; 23: 67]. According to the Simeonov Chronicle this event took place in 1221 [PSRL 18: 51]. Either one of the chronicles is in error or a similar event occurred in two successive years, which is highly unlikely. In 1229 the Mongols drove the Bulgar patrols from the River Yaik. In the face of this serious threat the Bulgars sent envoys to Rus' with an offering of peace. Evidently there were ideas of mounting a joint defence against the formidable foe. No agreement was reached and the Bulgars had to repulse the attack alone, which they did with temporary success [Ollsen 2008: 356].

In 1231 the Tatar-Mongols came within reach of the Great City of Bulgar, but again they halted and wintered where they were [PSRL 28: 209]. Other sources say that this happened in 1232 [PSRL 23: 73; 30: 87]. In 1236 the main Mongol forces by Bulgar met up with the sons of Jochi: Batu, Orda, Shiban and Tangqut. All four branches of the Jochid lineage took part in the campaign. And in the winter Subedei Bahadur was also sent there (to fight the Bulgars) [Rashid-ad-din 1960: 37-38; Danzan XIII. 84]. "Within Bulgaria the Princes joined up. The ground groaned and

hummed from the multitude of warriors and the size and noise of the hordes petrified wild beasts and predators. First they [the Princes] took by force and storm the city of Bulgar that was known to the world for its inaccessible location and large population. As an example to others they slew or took captive the inhabitants [Dzhuveini 1941: 23]. The godless Tatars came, set fire to their city and conquered the whole land of Bulgaria. Their great city was taken and all the women and children slaughtered, while others were taken prisoner, the chroniclers deplored [PSRL 1: 514; 4,1: 214; 6,1: 287]. The total rout of the Bulgars at the hands of the Tatars in later 1236 is also attested by the Hungarian monk Julian [Anninskii 1940: 83]. “Bulgaria fell, being incapable of repulsing even the vanguard of the Mongol forces that went under the command of Subedei [Grumm-Grzhymailo1926: 463]. Soon, however, Bulgar was rebuilt. This took place within Batu’s lifetime and the Khan himself lived in the city in 1242–46. In roughly that same period a number of other towns were built. Astrakhan, for example, appeared in the Volga delta. Khan Berke (1257–1266) had his headquarters in Bulgar and Sarai [Polo. Prolog.III]. So, Bulgar, the capital of Volga Bulgaria, was destroyed in 1236, but it soon rose again. That is why “all the structures and inscription that survive there today date from the period of Mongol domination” [Bartold 1968: 136].

In 1370 a Russian principality installed its puppet on the Bulgar throne and he started to control matters of trade. Much harm was done to the Bulgar capital and the entire state by *ushkuiniki*, highly mobile Novgorodian river pirates who plundered the towns. In 1374, for example, they took Bulgar and threatened to burn it. The city was saved by payment of a cash ransom [PSRL 28: 239; 34: 121]. In 1376 a Russian army attacked Bulgar and a ferocious battle ensued. The Bulgar rulers Osan and Makhmat came out to the Russians and bought them off [PSRL 25: 192]. In 1382 Khan Tokhtamysh sent his forces into Bulgaria with orders to plunder Russian and other merchants, to take their vessels and goods and to bring the booty back to him [PSRL 4,1: 327; 6,1: 471-472]. In the account of this event, the Patriarch’s (Nikon) Chronicle equates the cities of Bulgar and Kazan: “the city called Bolgary, which is

Kazan on the Volga” [PSRL 11: 71]. This passage evidently indicates that at that time Kazan was already becoming the centre of the Bulgar state and not the city of Bulgar. In 1395 Russian *voevody* took the cities of Bulgar (*Blgary Velikaya, Bol'gary Veliky*), Zhiukotin, Kazan (*Kozan*) and Keremenchiuk (*Kormen'chiuk, Kremen'chiuk, Kermenchiuk, Keremenchik, Kermenchük*), stayed for three months, did some fighting and returned “with much profit”, according to the chronicles [PSRL 4,1: 380; 17: 46-47]. The Book of Degrees places this event in 1396 [PSRL 21,2: 417-418]. In one version of the Patriarch’s Chronicle the cities of Bolgary and Zhukotin were taken, in another Kazan and Keremenchiukh [PSRL 11: 164]. Other chronicles date the capture of Bulgar, Zhukotin, Kazan and Kormenchiuk to 1399 (6907) [PSRL 6,2: 5-6; 18: 280]. As we see not only different cities, but also different dates and variant renderings of the Bulgar city names are mentioned in connection with that campaign.

“In the second half of the fourteenth century and early fifteenth, 32 towns and around 2,000 settlements in the Bulgar land were destroyed by the Khans and Emirs of the Golden Horde, nomadic hordes, Tamerlane, who made campaigns there in 1391 and 1395, the attacks of the Russian princes and the Novgorodian *ushkuiniki*... The territory of the Bulgar land turned into wild steppe where the Manghit (Nogai horde) began to live as nomads” [Dimitriyev 2003: 10].

During the period of the Khanate of Kazan trade still occupied an important place. Tatar merchants became known in Eurasia as active traders [Valeyev 2011]. The Suvars for their part tilled the soil and kept animals, exchanging their surpluses for goods brought by the Bulgars and then by the Tatars as well.

Regarding specifically the Tatars of Kazan, the most appropriate term for this period (1400s–1500s) is not *Kipchak-Tatars* but *Kipchakized Bulgars*. The difference is enormous. Very much to the point here is the observation that “historians, archaeologists and ethnographers usually regard the Bulgar period with a certain disdain and conversely exaggerate the role of the Horde period in the formation of the Tatar people” [Mukhamadiyev 2011: 44]. Evidently we should also take into consideration the fact that at that time (and indeed later) almost the entire non-

European population of Eurasia was called Tatar/Tartar. Nicolaes Witsen's writings are just one example. Therefore the question of the ethnonym of the Kazan Tatars is still not entirely settled.

The Dutch traveller Cornelis de Bruijn, who journeyed around Muscovy at the very start of the eighteenth century, named Bulgar among the Russian cities. According to his writings, the city of Kazan was located between the country of Bulgaria and the Cheremis [Bruin. *Puteshestviya* IX, X]. This means that at that time the names "Bulgar" and "Bulgaria" were still in use.

The identification of the Bulgars as ancestors of the Kazan Tatars was certainly not made only yesterday. At a conference in 1946, for example, Alexei Smirnov, when answering questions, stated with ample clarity: "The chief reproach was that I put an equals sign between Bulgars and Tatars. Neither in my theses nor in the paper have I done that. I spoke of the Bulgars as predecessors of the Tatars, as one of the main components that went to make up the Tatar people" [Smirnov 1948: 148].

**Geography.** Seeking to determine the place where the Bulgars (*Vulgares*) were first mentioned by the Latin chronicler in 354, Novoseltsev settled on Western Ciscaucasia. In doing so he also cites Jordanes [Novoseltsev 1990: 73]. However, Jordanes, describing events of the fourth and fifth centuries, noted: "...above the Black Sea stretch the lands of the Bulgars" [Jordan. *Getica*. 37]. Yelena Skrzhinskaya construed that by Bulgars Jordanes meant the Hunnic tribes of the north-eastern Black Sea basin, but Jordanes evidently did mean the Bulgars, who in conjunction with the Antes and Sclavenes attacked the border regions of Illyricum and Thrace [Skrzhinskaya 2001: 217-218]. Therefore we should take the Bulgar tribes mentioned by Jordanes to have been that part of the people that later went off to the Balkans. That was Lomonosov's understanding too [Lomonosov 1952: 188].

The Syrian historian (Pseudo) Zacharias Rhetor, named the Burgars (i.e. Bulgars) among the first peoples beyond the Caspian Gates (Derbent) in 555. Their immediate neighbours were the Savirs and the Alans [Zakhar. *Khronika* XII. 7]. In the 590s the bulk of the Bulgars lived in the Northern Caucasus. There their neighbours were the



Onogurs and the Savirs. The Savirs lived and moved around on the eastern coast of the Caucasus, the Bulgars on the western one. They were neighbours and belonged at different times to different confederations. This fact indicates that in the Caucasus (second to ninth centuries) the Savirs and the Bulgars did not merge.

For the year 631 a source talks about Bulgars in Pannonia [Fredegar. *Khronika* IV. 6.72]. However, we should already be distinguishing them, the Bulgars in Central Europe, from those living in the south of Eastern Europe. It is believed that Kubrat's Bulgaria was in the region of the Dnieper and not the Kuban [Róna-Tas2005: 117]. In writing of the events of 673, Nicephorus noted that near Lake Maeotis (the Sea of Azov) along the River Kofin (Kuban) was the location of the Great Bulgaria (*Βολγαρία*) [Nicephor. *Hist.*]. As for the Black Bulgars, they were a part of the Bulgar tribes that emerged after the break-up of Great Bulgaria in the second half of the seventh century. They were the descendants of the horde of Kubrat's eldest son, Batbayan. Regarding their location, scholars point to various regions around the Sea of Azov, the Kuban and the country between Dnieper and Don. Novoseltsev suggested that the Black Bulgars of the Azov area became subjected to the Türk Kaganate [Novoseltsev 1990: 73]. The Silver (or Nukhrat) Bulgars, meanwhile, are mentioned in Russian chronicles as living in the basin of the Akhtai, a left-bank tributary of the Kama.

In the eighth and ninth centuries the Bulgars settled along the right bank of the Upper Kuban and further to the east [Kuznetsov 1992: 102-103; Konovalova 2009: 45].

As of the late ninth – early tenth century, Bulgaria was adjacent to the land of the Burtas. It was reckoned to be three days' journey from the land of the Bulgars to that of the Burtas. The river along which the Bulgars lived was called the Itil (Volga, Atil/Ätil). It flowed between the lands of the Khazars and Slavs and into the Khazar Sea. The territory of Bulgaria consisted of marshland and primaeval forests [Ibn-Dasta. *Izvestiya* III. 1,5]. According to Abu Zayd al-Balkhi, in 920 the domains of Rum also bordered with Bulgaria, while the town of Bulgar was a small settlement

serving as a harbour. An Arabic source from 922 reports that the city of Bulgār was located on the bank of the Itil with the city of Suvār nearby [Bartold 1930: 32]. Al-Bekri also placed the land of the “Bulḳâr” with the land of the Furdās (Burtas) and Slavs. Between the Burtas and the Bulgars it was a three-day ride. The dwellings of the Bulgars were on the bank of the Itil [Al-Bekri. *Izvestiya* 1879: 62-63].

Good points of reference for determining the location of the Bulgars in the tenth century are the small rivers Jaushyr (Yaushirma) and Utkā. In the middle of the summer Almish himself and the nobility with all the herds moved from the Three Lakes area to the basin of the Jaushyr. So this area served as pasture while the grass around the Three Lakes was regenerating. Andrei Kovalevsky calculated that the ruler stayed by the Jaushyr for a full two months [Kovalevskii 1954: 32]. Regarding the location of this river, Kovalevsky wrote: “I believe it is the present-day River Gausherma further up the Kama, not far from the former Bulgar town of Şākatu – ‘Zhukotin’ and today’s Chistopol” [Kovalevskii 1954: 33]. Evidently he is referring to the River Shentala that flows into the Kama between the present-day district centres Alexeyevskoye and Chistopol. According to Ibn Faḍlān there was extensive steppeland there, but trees as well. Naturally it was an ideal area to keep livestock in the summer.

Ibn Hauqal identifies the Bulgars immediate neighbours as the Slavs, Rus, Bashkirs, Burtas, Khazars and Pechenegs [Ibn Ḥawqal. Book 1.6.2.1, 2]. Note that this source does not speak of the Suvars as close neighbours of the Bulgars. At that time (the middle to late tenth century) the Suvars were indeed on the opposite (right) bank of the Volga to the Bulgars. One source, covering events in 985, observed that Bulgar was situated on both sides of the river [Al-Mukaddasi 1994: 289]. He does not, however, specify whether he means the city or the country. Most probably it was the country as a whole, because by that time the borders of Bulgaria had indeed expanded. While the Bulgars had remained on the left bank, almost the entire Suvar population was living across the river. Later he states that Bulgar (the city) is on the Itil and Suvar is on the same river.

According to a source of 1100–65 “from [the city of] Ithil/Athil, i.e. Atil/Ätil – the Volga)to [the city of] Bulgar it is about a month by the route across the steppe, and by water two months, going upstream, but downstream it is around twenty days’ journey” [Al-Idrisi 2006: 120]. The same author names the city of Suvar as close to the city of Bulgar. Between those places it was a two-day journey. All of this indicates that Suvar was 70 kilometres south of Bulgar.

In his *Book of the Extension of the Land on Longitudes and Latitudes* Ibn Sa‘id gave the geographic co-ordinates of the city “that they call al-Bulgār” – 45°30' longitude, 57° latitude [Ibn Sa‘id2009: 29], which on a modern map differ considerably from the co-ordinates of the generally accepted location of the capital of Volga Bulgaria and almost coincide with those of Cheboksary (47°15'E, 56°08'N). This raises many questions and further research is needed in the geographical sphere. We should, for example, compare the calculations for the thirteenth century and the present day and establish the flaws (deviations) in the measurements.

According to the Arabhistorian and geographer (of Kurdish origin from the Ayyūbid dynasty) Abu al-Fida (1273–1331), the city of Bulgar was situated near the River Atil, on the north-east side. According to the inhabitants, the evening twilight does not end there at the start of summer and the nights are very short. The scholar accepts this as true because to the north of latitude 48°30' the twilight does persist in summer and the latitude of Bulgār is greater than that [Abu-l-Fida2009: 125].

The geographical distribution of Volga Bulgarian coins was fairly extensive. “As part of rich hoards they have been found at various times in the Upper Volga basin, the lands of Novgorod and Pskov, in the Baltic republics, Scandinavian peninsula and Denmark (the coin found in Denmark was struck in Suvar)” [Fakhrudinov 1986: 100].

**Anthropology.** In Alexei Smirnov’s opinion the Bulgars were unarguably not autochthonous. The presence of a southern and northern Caucasian influence in the archaeological culture of the Volga Bulgars has been established convincingly enough [see: Kozlova 1950: 179]. Of course that took place during the Caucasian -

period of their history. This picture indicates that the Bulgars migrated as a compact group from the Caucasus to the Volga. Tatyana Trofimova's researches show a predominance of the Pontic type among the Tatars [Trofimova 1948: 34]. This indicates that the Volga Tatars are the successors of the Bulgars who formed their anthropological type in the Caucasus period of their history. Craniological data also demonstrate a positive link between the Volga Bulgars and the Balkan Bulgarians.

The Chuvash anthropological type differs quite obviously from the Tatar. For this reason Karl Fuchs rightly wrote: "The Chuvash differ greatly from the Tatars in face and stature and even stand out from all the Finnish strains" [Fuks 1840: 119]. Palaeoanthropological data indicate that the inhabitants of the city of Bulgar were not ancestors of the Chuvash because they present differences from them in many characteristic traits. "The Bulgar skulls have lower eye sockets and wider noses; the face is wider both in absolute terms and, in the main, relatively, since it is at the same time lower than in the Chuvash" [Debets 1932: 56]. From an anthropological viewpoint a genetic link between the Chuvash has not been confirmed on the basis of the material that was available to Maria Akimova [Aleksyeva 2004: 51].

Besides, an ancient Mongoloid element is present in both the Bulgars and the Tatars [Smirnov 1948: 149].

**Archaeology.** The discovery of the Pereshchepina Treasure in the Dnieper basin makes it possible to assert that the ruling House of Dulo, which received expensive gifts from the Byzantine emperors, accumulated immense riches. The find included two rings bearing the monograms of Organa and Kuvrat. Svetlana Pletnyova theorized that the hoard was buried under some extreme circumstances in the late seventh century.

Very important too is the question when the Bulgars first penetrated into the middle reaches of the Volga. Being in the main nomads, they did not leave traces for archaeologists. Nevertheless, following Pletnyova's logical reasoning, after getting to the middle reaches of the Dnieper and Donets the Bulgars could have also gone across the steppes to the wooded steppe of the Volga-Kama region [Pletnyova 1997:

42]. The presence of the Bulgars on the Volga is demonstrated by archaeological finds from both settlement sites and burials. The Bolshiye Tarkhany and Kaibely burial grounds are evidence of the very start of Bulgar settlement. They are exceptionally distinctive in terms of both rite and contents. There are typical features that are familiar from sites in the territory of Danube Bulgarian, where burials of Asparukh's Bulgars have been excavated. After their arrival on the Volga the Bulgars became dominant politically, culturally and linguistically [Smirnov, Merpert 1955: 52-53]. Later a process of unification would take place in the region that was, however, resisted by certain tribes, above all the Suvars.

Besides this, Ravil Fakhruddinov wrote, the Bulgars who moved to the Middle Volga in the late eighth century, mixed there with the last representatives of the Imenkovo culture [Fakhruddinov 1986: 80].

Coins were struck in Volga Bulgaria between 907 and 980. A dirham from 907 bears the Islamic name Ja'far ibn Abdullah adopted by Almish, the ruler of Bulgaria. By 976 coins ceased to be minted in the city of Suvar, testifying to a loss of political and economic independence and complete subordination to the city of Bulgar [Fakhruddinov 1986: 100].

Archaeological investigations have shown that the city of Juketau (Zhukotin in Russian chronicles), which existed in the tenth to fourteenth centuries, was located on the outskirts of present-day Chistopol. Early fourteenth-century grave monuments bearing eloquent epitaphs have been found there [Nabiullin 2010: 373].

**Religion.** Zacharias Rhetor described the Bulgars in the mid-sixth century as "a pagan and barbaric people" [Zakhar. Khronika XII. 7]. This clearly indicates that at that time the Bulgar tribes had not undergone either Christianization or and not yet Islamization. Evidently Bernát Munkácsi was also correct in his view of the spread of Islam. He hypothesized that the Bulgars became acquainted with the main elements of Islam in the Caucasus, but only adopted the faith on the Volga [Munkácsi 1926: 42-64].

Before their arrival on the Volga some of the Bulgars were also familiar with Christianity. In 619, the Bulgar ruler Kubrat and his uncle were baptized in Constantinople. Kubrat's successors, however, adhered to their old faith [Golden 2008: 331].

Al-Mas'ūdī described events connected with a skirmish between Khazar Muslims and Rus [Mas'ūdī. Murudzh 8]. This took place in the year 912 (or immediately thereafter, but clearly before 922). The Rus came in boats down the Khazar (Volga) river as far as the city of Atil, sailed out into the Khazar (Caspian) Sea and made raids on the coastal towns. As the Arab historian wrote, the Rus shed blood, plundered and acted as they pleased. Thousands of Muslims were killed. The coastal peoples were alarmed. When the Muslims of the Khazar realm learnt of this, they appealed to the king of Khazaria to let them repulse the Rus and take revenge for the blood of brother Muslims. The battle between them lasted three days. The Rus were put to the sword, slain and drowned. The 5,000 of them that survived went in boats in the direction that leads to the land of the Burtas. "Some of them were killed by the Burtas; others found themselves among the Muslim Burgars, who [also] put them to death." What is very important for us in this passage is that al-Mas'ūdī calls the Burgars/Bulgars Muslim. The reference is, of course, to the Volga Bulgars and the date was still some ten years before the Arab mission. It emerges that even before Ibn Faḍlān the Bulgars had contacts with the Muslim world and some of them had adopted Islam.

Ibn Faḍlān read out a letter from the Caliph and Almish listened standing. There is no mention of an interpreter being present and, since we can take it for granted that Ibn Faḍlān did not know the Bulgar language, Almish must have understood Arabic. Therefore he already had ties with Islam. The purpose of the embassy in which Ibn Faḍlān participated, was to help in the furtherance of Islam in Almish's lands. We are also told that even before the arrival of the delegation there were muezzins in Bulgaria and the prayers prescribed by Islam were in use. On the basis of the sources Daniil Khvolson (Chvolson) made the feasible suggestion that the

Bulgars had been acquainted with Islam since 912 [Khvol'son 1869: 8], but there are grounds for shifting the date even further back. Excavations in Novgorod produced a dirham dated 907 bearing the name Ja'far ibn Abdullah. The numismatist Svetlana Yanina and the archaeologist Ravil Fakhrutdinov both believe that this name was adopted by the Bulgar ruler Almish [Fakhrutdinov 1986: 100]. The proposed date is indirectly supported by Ibn Rustah as well. The Persian geographer wrote that Almish, the king of Bulgaria, professed Islam. He also stated that in that country there were mosques and elementary schools with muezzins and imams. Even the Bulgars' clothing and cemeteries were of the Islamic kind. Round silver dirhams reached them from the Islamic countries. The followers of the ancient traditions bowed to the Bulgar Muslims when they met [Ibn-Dasta. *Izvestiya* III. 1,4,7]. Khvolson recalled the spread in early tenth-century Bulgaria not only of Islam, but also of the learning known to Muslims [Khvol'son 1869: 89]. A few years after Ibn Faḍlān, al-Bekri already confidently asserted that the king of the Bulgars was named Almas and that he was a Muslim [Al-Bekri 1879: 63]. It follows that Almish invited the Arab mission to officially consolidate the steps that had already been taken in the direction of Islam. We do not know for certain in what year the invitation was issued for a Mission from Baghdad to visit Bulgaria. It was clearly before 922.

The feudal relations that were coming into being in the early tenth century dictated to Almish the idea of uniting his subjects around a single religion. The ruler gave preference to Islam as a state ideology. In order to see exactly how and from where Islam arrived on the Middle Volga it is sufficient to look at the routes taken by the missionaries. The delegation from Baghdad did not choose the most direct geographical course. They made first for Bukhara, went from there to Khorezm and only then headed for Bulgaria, although the most direct way from Baghdad to the Volga is via the Caucasus. Vasily Bartold rightly put this choice of route down to the fact that the Bulgars had come into contact with Islamic culture through Khorezm and the Samanid Empire. He also considered that there may have been ties of kinship between the Bulgars and the Khorezmians [Bartold 1968: 66]. This is also suggested

by the minting of coins of a Samanid pattern in tenth-century Bulgaria. Although we should not forget that the direct route from Baghdad to the Bulgars would have lain through the lands of the Khazars.

Like any new religion, Islam was imposed upon the population of the Bulgarian kingdom by force [Denisov 1959: 73]. We know, for example, that the Bulgars waged a *jihad*, a “holy war”, against the neighbouring Burtas. Almish also threatened the dissenting Suvars with the sword. The final acceptance of Islam in Bulgaria took place not in the country of the Suvars but closer to the Bashkir steppes, on the River Jaushyr (the present-day Yaushirma) [Kovalevskii 1954: 51]. I am therefore more than dubious regarding Vasily Kakhovsky’s suggestion that the Bulgarian ruler wanted financial support from the Muslim Caliph and not the “magical” symbolism of Arab money. Almish made it known that the embassy need not have come since it had not brought money [Kakhovskii 1983: 27-28]. So the Bulgar ruler needed funds to construct a fortress. He did indeed need money, but as a symbol of benediction. After all, a single faith in the state is worth far more than money and Almish understood that perfectly. But let us look at the dialogue between Almish and Ibn Faḍlān, the clerk of the mission: ““Your realm is extensive, your funds are abundant and your sources of income many, so why did you ask the Caliph to build a fortress on money supplied by him, of which he has a boundless supply? He said, ‘I believed that the realm of Islam would bring happiness and their funds are taken from sources that are permitted [by religious law]. That is why I made this request. Truly, if I wanted to build a fortress on my own funds, on silver or gold, then it would, of course, present no difficulty at all for me. Truly, I only wanted to obtain benediction from the money of the ruler of the faithful and asked him for this.’” [Ibn-Fadlan 1956: 141]. As you can see, the primary source leaves no room for doubt.

Commenting on this episode, Igor Dubov rightly states that it is a question first and foremost of Bulgar’s political and religious orientation towards the Arab Caliphate [Dubov1989: 150]. I would add that in taking the name of the ruler of the faithful Ja‘far, Almish was not, of course, striving to please the Arabs and save the



cost of a fortress. His intentions were more serious: to establish Islam as the state religion in his realm, observing all the formalities. A monopoly of faith would indeed have brought the ruler control over tribes with a variety of beliefs and united them around a single religion. Almish was seeking to kill two birds with one stone: to put an end to feudal fragmentation and to form a concentrated force against external enemies, primarily Khazaria, which was then powerful. It was religion that became the grounds for the Bulgar ruler's refusal to let his daughter marry the Kagan of the Khazars ("He is a Jew and she is a Muslim"). Proof of Almish's decision to adopt Islam is also provided by the following episode from the Mashhad manuscript: "Truly Allah, the great and mighty gave me Islam and the supreme power as ruler of the faithful and I am his [Allah's] slave this is the task that he entrusted to me" [Ibn-Fadlan 1956: 139]. And Ibn Faḍlān, as a missionary, calls the non-Muslim Suvars "rabble". It was, incidentally, not only the Suvars who rejected Islam: part of the Eskel tribe did the same. In general, Ibn Faḍlān himself also exaggerated the significance of the embassy in establishing Islam in the country.

"In the city of Bulgār all the inhabitants are Muslim," the tenth-century manuscript *Hudūd al-Ālam* informs us [Bartold1930: 32]. This assertion hides the picture that the city was inhabited by the upper strata of society – clergy, merchants and craftspeople. In the second half of the tenth century Bulgār's congregational mosque was situated on a busy spot – the marketplace [Al-Mukaddasi 1994: 289]. In 949–952 in the city of Suvar they minted silver coins of the Bulgar ruler Talib ibn Ahmed [Bartold 1968: 516], which again indicates Islam was strengthening its roots in Bulgaria. In the same way, Muslims were the largest grouping in the Khazar capital Atil/Ātil. Foreign Muslims –and other non-indigenous people- took up residence in the capital cities.

I should point out one very important fact. All the Eurasian nomads that had been converted *en masse* to new religions (such as the Uighur, Khazars, Volga Bulgars, Oghuz, Seljuks and Karluks) by this time had their own states, were organized in tribal unions or were at the stage of acquiring statehood. As Peter

Golden correctly observed, “the new religion could have functioned as a unifying force, a means of ideological distancing, a symbol of independence and all this furthered the process of state-formation” [Golden 2008b: 334].

During the reign of the Magyar grand prince Taksony, somewhere around the year 970, a multitude of Muslim Bulgars arrived in Hungary under the leadership of two brothers, Billa and Boksu. Slightly later another group arrived led by Heten. In Hungary these people were known as Bilers – apparently they came from the Volga Bulgarian city of Bilär. They all received a cordial reception and settled on the left bank of the Danube, where the city of Pest was founded. The migration of these Bulgars was a consequence of the raid by the Rus in 968 against the lands of the Bulgars and Khazars. Despite suffering persecution, the Bulgars went on to play an important role in Hungary as tax-farmers and financial managers [Khvol’son 1869: 108-109].

According to the chronicle, the Bulgars strove to thrust their new faith upon the Rus as well. In 986, for example, they came to the Grand Prince in Kiev and invited him to adopt the Mohammedan faith. When asked what their religion was like, the Bulgar envoys replied, “Circumcision, no eating pork and no drinking wine.” Vladimir did not like those rules. however: “Drinking,” he said, “is the joy of the Rus. We cannot exist without that pleasure” [PSRL 4,1: 60; 16: 251; 33: 25].

The authorities in Volga Bulgaria kept a strict watch on attempts to influence the population’s religious thinking. This is evidenced by the life story of Saint Avraamii (Abraham), the Martyr of Bulgaria, who was “of another tongue and not Russian” [PSRL 30: 87; 33: 65]. Avraamii was a Christian convert who engaged in missionary work with some success. In his old age, in 1229, he paid for this with his life [PSRL 1: 453; 9: 97; Medvedev 1878]. According to the Simeonov Chronicle his martyrdom took place in 1230 [PSRL 18: 54].

So, religion played a historic role in Volga Bulgaria. It became from 922 an additional and decisive interethnic barrier. It would seem most probable that in Volga Bulgaria Islam spread among the feudal elite, the merchants and craftsmen. Later

these formed the core of the Tatar people. The agricultural populace, meanwhile, adhered to their former religion. A number of scholars are inclined to believe that these farmers became the basis for the formation of the present-day Chuvash. As Andrei Likhachev stated “the Muslim religion took root for the most part only within the dynasty ruling Bulgaria and among the inhabitants of the city of Bulgar. The mass of the people, though, retained their former religion that has survived to this day among its now limited number of adherents” [Likhachyov 1876: 3]. The same idea was later expressed by Vasily Kakhovsky, Vasily Dimitriyev and other historians.

In the late twelfth and early thirteenth century the inhabitants of the city of Bulgar professed Islam of a Hanifist variety [Abu-l-Fida'2009: 125]. Ibn Sa‘īd al-Maghribī stated that the majority of Bulgars were Muslims, but there were also Christians among them [Ibn Sa‘īd 2009: 31]. He was probably referring to the start of the thirteenth century. We should, however, also remember the testimony of the Hungarian Friar Julian, who in 1236 asserted that in “Great Bulgaria” everyone was devoted to folk rituals and beliefs [Anninskii 1940: 80]. Of course, Julian was writing about the southern fringes of the Volga state, and his impressions apply still less to the city of Bulgar. Already in 1253 a Flemish monastic traveller had every cause to complain that “Those Bulgarians are most wicked Saracens, more earnestly professing the damnable religion of Mahomet, then any other nation whatsoever” [Rubruk. Puteshestviye XXI].

The strong roots that Islam put down in the city of Bulgar are also attested by the well known fourteenth-century Arab traveller Ibn Baṭūṭah. On arriving in Bulgaria, he joined the locals in prayer at sunset. Then he obeyed the call to evening prayer. The Tarāwīḥ, Shaf’ and Witr prayers were also performed [Ibn-Batuta 1884: 297]. In 1323 another Christian was martyred for his faith in Bulgaria. He was called Theodor [PSRL 28: 67]. In a story dated AH 731 (AD 1330/31) Bulgar is called one of the most famous cities of Kypchakia. There the cause of Islam was alive and victorious. There was, for example, a special official in the city to determine the times for prayer. This man’s name was Mas‘ūd. He made active use of instruments to

calculate precise astronomical time [Elomari1884: 237]. In relation to the events of 1376 the chronicle calls the inhabitants of Great Bulgar Besermans (i.e. Muslims) and their rulers are called Osan and Maakhmat Saltan in an Islamic manner [PSRL 18: 117].

Exactly three centuries after the execution of the Orthodox martyr Avraamii, in 1529 a similar event took place in Kazan. This time the victim was a certain Ivan, a Christian prisoner from Nizhniy Novgorod. He was invited to abjure Christ but preferred a martyr's death [PSRL 19: 261-262].

It would not, however, be true to say that Christianity was totally suppressed in Volga Bulgaria. As far back as the ninth century there was a colony of Christian Armenians in the country. Their inscribed gravestones have been found by the Greek Chamber in Bulgar. There are graves of Armenians from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The monuments are inscribed using the Arabic script in both an *r*-language (*khir* "girl", *tokhur* "nine") and a *z*-language (*kyz*, *tokuz*), that is, using modern parlance, in both official languages [Lepyokhin 1771: 272-283; Mukhametshyn, Khakimzyanov 1987].

It would be stretching things to claim that Islam became established on a mass scale among the Bulgars from the early tenth century. Firstly, the new Arab religion was initially adopted only by the urban populace, craftsmen, merchants and other wealthy sections of society. The bulk of the population adhered to their old traditions. Even in the eighteenth century there were cemeteries alongside Tatar villages that were covered in greenery. Archive sources indicate that in the 1920s Tatars (including baptized ones) held collective prayers in the fields to express gratitude to the deities for the harvest that had grown and the prosperity of the village. For the same purpose they slaughtered bulls and rams with combined effort and boiled cereal. They would choose a site for the sacrifices away from the village by a stream. They also prayed to the deities to ask for warm rain that the sprouting plants badly needed. Even in the mid-1900s it was possible to record in Tatar villages legends about *Kirimet* prayer groves. *Simek* and *üle çykkan kön* are among the old traditions that

could still be seen in the twentieth century. The rituals of seeing people out of this world and into the next followed not Islamic but age-old folk traditions. Records of this kind exist, for example, from the settlements of Verkhniye Meretiaki, Platonovka. Akhmetyevo, Vladimirovka (Tatarstan) and Starye Kurbashi (Tsvil'sk *uyezd*) [ChGhI 216: 442-443; 309: 21]. In this respect the rural Volga Tatars fitted in with the general religious culture of the region. Then, in the twentieth century, the remnants of the *kirimeti* were destroyed at the insistence of the Muslim clergy due to their incompatibility with Islam [Vorobyov 1948: 65].

Historical sciences not fond of “what ifs?”. Nevertheless, it must be conceded that the change of religion on the part of the national elite did, ironically enough, badly weaken great Volga Bulgaria. One of the country's key tribes, the Suvars, was unwilling to give up its ancient faith and moved to the right bank. That left Bulgaria clearly unable to resist its powerful neighbour Khazaria. As the Russian saying goes, what they fought for was their undoing. From that moment we can begin to track the decline of Volga Bulgaria and also of the Bulgars as a people. If the Bulgars had not adopted Islam in 922, then the name of the tribe would still survive as the name of a people. And there would be no reason to discuss who the descendants of the Bulgars are or who the Volga Tatars are. It is equally true (on a retrospective-reconstructive level, of course) that the Suvars might well have retained their ethnonym in the form it had in the early tenth century. And with it both their faith and their traditional culture.

**Language.** Writing about the pattern of correspondence between the sounds *z/r*, *š/l* in the Turkic and Chuvash languages, András Róna-Tas pointed out one nuance. In the case of the Turkic *baş* “head” и *köz* “eye”, he observed, we should expect *-r* and *-l* in Chuvash, but in actual fact we have *puś* and *kuś*. This is because these words were not influenced by the process  $z \rightarrow r$ ,  $š \rightarrow l$ ; they retain the more ancient phonetic character from before the *z/r* and *š/l* shift. It follows that the replacement of *z* with *r* and *š* with *l* was not a rigid phonetic rule: it was merely a strong tendency in that territory where the Bulgar languages later formed [Róna-Tas 1970: 209-228].

See also [Róna-Tas *et al.* 2011: 1104–14] re the Western Old Turkic *balč-* “head”. That means that the modern Chuvash language has retained genuine traces of the Bulgar and Savir tongues of the pre-Turkic period. The final *r* in the ethnonym Bulgar indicates, of course, their original belonging to the *r*-language tribes.

Nikolai Merpert devoted a number of works to the Bulgars, tribes related to the Savirs. He particularly stressed that the Bulgars represented a tribal grouping independent of both the Avars and the Türks. “Kubrat successfully continued and completed the work begun by Organa of liberating the Bulgars from the rule of the Western Turkic Kaganate” [Merpert 1957: 17]. Incidentally, the name Kubrat should be translated as “to gather, to accumulate”. That is just the meaning with which it appears in the fifth to eighth centuries in a Turkic translation of the Iranian *Penitential Prayer of the Manichaeans* found in north-west China and the monument to Kul Tigin in Mongolia. These texts contain two forms of the word – *qubrat* и *quvrat* [Nadelyayevet *al.* 1969: 462, 475]. Both forms are reflected in Byzantine sources. At various times such non-Türk tribes as the Alans, Kutrigurs, Onogurs, Khazars and Savirs were part of the Bulgar union. All this clearly speaks in favour of the Savirs, like the Bulgars, not having belonged to the Türk-led confederation (other Oghuric tribes were brought into the Türk confederation). The main Oghur tribes – the Oghurs, Saragurs and Onogurs in the Azov area and the Western Caucasus rarely acted together. It was in precisely this region that the Bulgar tribal union arose from several Oghuro-Oghuz tribes [Klyashtorny 2009: 171]. In this connection I should point to one of Bernát Munkácsi’s works [Munkácsi 1927: 131-135; Dmitriyeva, Agyagási 2001: 30]. In it, based on borrowings from the Bulgar language in Hungarian, he concluded that in the Caucasus Bulgar tribes spoke in several dialects. Of course, we should be speaking here not of dialects of the Bulgar language, but of Magyar borrowings from the languages of their neighbours and related tribes – the Huns, Khazars and Suvars, as well as the Bulgars.

As Peter Golden maintains, many of the peoples of Eurasia were acquainted with runic writing. These included the Kimaks, Bulgars, Khazars, Pechenegs and Uighurs [Golden 2008b: 311].

With good cause Daniil Khvolson objected to al-Mas‘ūdī’s assertion that in the early tenth century the Bulgars were a Turkic tribe. The respected Orientalist wrote that he did not wish to challenge al-Mas‘ūdī, but the testimony of Arabs is for the most part worthless as they were unable to distinguish Finnic tribes from Turkic ones. He also suggested examining the name of the Bulgar ruler *Almish/Almush*. He considered the correct pronunciation to be *Álmus* or *Álmos*, which was also the name of Arpad’s father. Therefore we should first clarify whether this is a Finnic (or rather Ugric) name or the Turkic *Álmus* [Khvol’son 1869: 81,91, see also discussion in Róna-Tas et al. 2011, II: 1171-1172 of Hung. *Álmos*, from West Old Turkic \*Almuč?].

The facts indicate that in Volga Bulgaria there were two closely related main languages that can even be regarded as dialects. They were, however, two separate languages, each with its own history. I am, of course, referring to the Bulgar and Suvar tongues. Scholars have always paid heed to the differences between the two. Andrei Kovalevsky took as an example the names of the river *Jaushyz* and *Jaushyr* – these reflect two different pronunciations of one and the same appellation by the two local tribes (if these are not manuscript/copyists’s errors, very common in Arabi-script mss. r ʃ and z ʃ). Another example that Kovalevsky gave was the name of one more river in the south of Volga Bulgaria – *Kundurcha* and *Kunduzcha*. Today the Chuvash call this river *Häntärča* (*häntär* – “beaver” + the Turkic word-formative affix *-ča* indicating a place; i.e. “the river abundant in beavers”). Ignoring such differences in the two kindred languages has been producing and perpetuating confusion and variant readings for more than a century now. Of course, there were other differences between the Bulgar and Suvar languages. For example, the language of the Suvar ancestors of the Chuvash did not have voiced consonants. Sergei Malov, Nikolai Ashmarin and other linguists noted this characteristic of the Chuvash

language and decided that the lack of voiced consonants is a sign of its antiquity. On this subject Kovalevsky concluded: “In this way the old Chuvash dialect nonetheless differed from the Bulgar in its unvoiced consonants and there are no grounds for suggesting that this was an Old Turkic peculiarity” [Kovalevskii 1956: 17]. All the historical indications are that in the Middle Volga the Suvar language formed separately from that of the neighbouring Bulgars. This is my position and it is supported by others who have researched the Bulgars. In Azgar Mukhamadiyev’s opinion the language of the Suvars took shape “in isolation from the other Hunno-Bulgar tribes” [Mukhamadiyev 2011: 36].

In the tenth century the population of the Middle and Lower Volga (mainly inhabitants of Bulgaria and Khazaria) spoke mutually intelligible languages. Traces of those languages, Vasily Bartold believed, have in all probability only survived among the Chuvash [Bartold 1968: 204]. In András Róna-Tas’s view, in the early tenth century the Volga Bulgars still spoke a language of the Chuvash type. Their speech is also reflected in the epitaphs found on the territory of Volga Bulgaria that date from 1281–1350. Perhaps, Róna-Tas suggests, this language is not the ancestor of modern Chuvash, but it is very close to it [Róna-Tas 1996; Dmitriyeva, Agyagási2001: 156]. It follows therefore that we should look for traces of the former Bulgar language in Chuvash. An example of the Bulgars using purely Chuvash words is the place name *Helleče* – the busiest spot in Volga Bulgaria, alongside the mighty river. *Helleče* was famed as a trading place visited by the Rus, Turkic tribes, Arabs and, evidently, northern neighbours too. It was here that Almish and his entourage spent the greater part of the year. The word *Helleče* was formed from the Suvaro-Chuvash *hěl(le)* + the Turkic word-formative affix *-če*. Together they mean “winter quarters”. This place between the Rivers Volga, Utká and Niyasna has three lakes – Chistoye, Kuryshevskoye and Atmanskoye – and is now accordingly called *Tri Oziora* – “Three Lakes”.

The presence of a Bulgar element in the Chuvash language and culture, and equally of Chuvash elements in the language of the Bulgars/Bulgarians, is in part



indicated by the fact that certain Old Slavonic words in Bulgarian dialects and individual words that have survived among the Danubian Bulgarians from ancient times are absolutely identical in meaning to the corresponding Chuvash words. For example: Old Slavonic *бѣльць* “sign”, Chuvash *palāk*, modern Bulgarian *белок*; Chuvash *těkěr* “mirror” (Old Rus’-Church Slavonic/Old Bulgarian – it is no longer found in modern Bulgarian – at least not in dictionaries known to me, cf. Hung. *tűkőr* < West Old Turkic \**tikār*, \**tūkār*, East Old Turkic \**tägir*, ultimately stemming from a term meaning “round, circular,” – many mirrors were round/circular in shape, see Róna-Tas et al. 2011, II:877-882, 959-960) Bulgarian *микъръ*; Chuvash *sum* “bill”, Bulgarian *самъчи* “treasurer”; Chuvash *osă*, Bulgarian *осохъ* “benefit”; Chuvash *kap* “shape”, Bulgarian *капъ* “idol” »; *čavka* means “jackdaw” in both languages; Chuvash *kětes*, Bulgarian *кѣтъ* “corner” and so on [Egorov 1950: 83]. Here too we should include the Chuvash *türe* “judge, righteous person, deity” and the Balkar *tiore* (*töre*) “popular assembly” (it also means “обычай, порядок» and comes from Turkic *törü*).

Johannes Benzing believed that, while counting the tongue spoken by the Danube Bulgars among the Turkic languages may be debatable, the language of the Volga Bulgars was undoubtedly Turkic. By way of sources he cited the eleventh-century lexicographer Mahmud al-Kashgari and Volga Bulgar grave inscriptions from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Of course, we should take account of the observation by Mahmud al-Kashgari, who considered the Bulgars Turks and their language akin to that of the Pechenegs. Benzing backs up his thesis with examples from the Khazars’ language, believing that it was common to them and the Bulgars. The number of Khazar-Bulgar parallels is, however, scanty: the city of *Sarkel*, the river *Ātil*, the personal name *Bulan* [Benzing 1986: 18-19]. All three examples are, meanwhile, purely Chuvash words: *sar kil* “yellow (white) house”, *Ātāl* “Volga”, *pālan* “deer”. Those words were undoubtedly in the active lexicon of the Savirs/Suvars. Thus arguing for the Turkic nature of the Bulgar language by way of the Khazars is not entirely proper. It is more appropriate to speak of the influence of

Oghur languages on Bulgar. Additionally Benzing for some reason separates the Bulgars from the Bulgarians, considering the former Türks but not the latter. Yet in the Northern Caucasus, before they split and went off to the Danube and the Volga, they were a single people. For a later period, though, his pronouncement is entirely fair. It is very appropriate here to remember that Professor Konstantin Josef Jireček of Prague University was in no doubt whatsoever that the Danube Bulgars turned from Uralic Finns into Transbalkan Slavs. Among other things, he wrote: “The blood of the Finnic Bulgars that flowed predominantly in the veins of the noble clans has in the actual Bulgarian country – between the Danube and the Balkans, it seems, long since evaporated... The old Bulgar Finnic language never had any influence on the Slavonic” [Jireček 1878: 168,169].

The language of the Volga Bulgars has not survived. The reason lay in its not being used in diplomacy, education, public worship or literature, Stanislav Maliutin wrote. “If that had taken place in the tenth to twelfth centuries, the Bulgars’ language would not have disappeared in the fifteenth. The Bulgar language ceased to exist because its public functions were limited. Its displacement in the Middle Volga, in the Muslim milieu, by a language of the Kipchak type that was used in all spheres of life took place entirely naturally” [Malyutin 1996: 60].

Tatar linguists consider that Nikolai Ashmarin’s brochure *Bolgary i chuvashi* (*The Bulgars and the Chuvash*) is marred by one-sidedness. Latyf Zaliyai, for example, stated that Ashmarin based his conclusions on merely a few Chuvashisms on gravestones, while completely ignoring the linguistic material in the texts of those epitaphs, which display a direct link with even the modern language of the Tatars of the Volga basin. “Prof. Ashmarin was well aware that in those inscriptions alongside the Chuvash form ‘*Dzhiat dzhur dzhal*’ (AD 700) there is, even in greater quantity, the form ‘*Yete yüz utuz yete*’ (AD 737) and so on – a purely Tatar form. Yet despite this, in his findings he came to the conclusion that the direct descendants of the Bulgars are the Chuvash” [Zaliyai 1948: 157]. In this context I can also mention a gold scoop that came into the *Kunstkamera* in the eighteenth century. It carries the

number 617 in words – *alti yyr un iti*[*alti yüz un yiti?*], where instead of the expected Bulgaro-Tatar *yz*[*yüz?*] we find the Suvaro-Chuvash *yir* for “hundred” [Mukhamadiyev 2011: 46]. Linguists do admit, though, that Tatar (still more the modern language) is not entirely a continuation of the Bulgar language. Like any language, Tatar has undergone major changes over its history. Nevertheless, it is a continuation of Bulgar. Alexander Rittikh considered the “real Tatars” (i.e. Kazan Tatars) the descendants of the Bulgars [Rittikh 1870: 28,54]. A large number of epitaphs of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries in the Volga-Kama region have Arabic texts containing Turkic phrases. In the literature they are called Volga Bulgar inscriptions. A portion of the inscriptions are, however, in a language of the Chuvash type, while the rest reflect a dialect of a Turkic (common Turkic/Kipchak) language. Inscriptions in the Chuvash language containing Turkic elements did not appear before the mid-fourteenth century, while other types of inscriptions continued to occur after that.

As early as the eleventh and twelfth centuries Volga Bulgar elements were being borrowed into Russia. The word *tovar* “commodity, merchandise” comes from the Bulgar *\*tavar*. It is also present in Hungarian in the form *tár* “container”, and also as a part of some compound words, such as *kincstár* “treasure house”. The same word is the root of the Russian *tovarishch* “comrade, companion, assistant”, which is also paralleled in the Hungarian *társ* “business associate, comrade”. Another Russian borrowing is *khoziain* “host, proprietor” from the root *hozja* that existed independently in early Russian. This is the Persian *ḫwāja* mediated through Volga Bulgar (cf. Chuvash *huşa*). According to some sources the famous Arbat district in Moscow was originally the trading place of the Volga Bulgars (then the Tatars). The name goes back to a Volga Bulgar form of the Arabic word *rabat* “suburb, quarter” (cf. the name of the Moroccan capital, Rabat) [Róna-Tas 2007].

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries there was a powerful Kipchak influence on the tribes of Volga Bulgaria with the adoption of numerous words of Mongol, Arabic and Persian origin. It is generally accepted that the Tatar language

formed on a Bulgaro-Turkic substrate. By the mid-1200s, when the Golden Horde came into being, the Bulgars had begun to feel the influence of the “Turko-Tatars” and finally they adopted their language.

We know that coins of the Mongol khans were minted in the city of Bulgar. From the inscriptions on them it is clear that the population of Volga Bulgaria retained their pre-Mongol language, the remnant of which is now spoken by the Chuvash. However, this Bulgaro-Suvar was subject to the steady, powerful influence of Turko-Kipchak. The transformed language gradually but firmly became the language of the state, while in the cities founded on the Middle Volga under the Mongols (for example, Kazan) the Tatar-Kipchak language became the primary one from the outset [Bartold 1968: 136]. In Shiro Hattori’s opinion, the Bulgars adopted the Turko-Tatar language on the basis of their own vowel system that endured as a substratal element and later transformed into the vowel system of the modern Tatar and Bashkir languages [Khattori 1980: 93]. A similar view was expressed by Gábor Bereczki [Bereczki 1983: 207-236; Dmitriyeva, Agyagási2001: 101]. In the early period the Bulgaro-Turkic influence on the Tatar language was stronger, later the Tatar influence on Chuvash.

The Bulgars suffered enormous losses genetically, demographically and linguistically from the Black Death of the 1340s–50s. The Golden Horde was never the same again either [Shamiloglu 2002: 18-19].

A large part of the Kipchak population appeared in the Volga-Kama region together with the Mongols and in their wake. Nevertheless, it cannot be ruled out that some groups of Mongols made contact with the Bulgars in earlier times. The modern Tatar and Bashkir languages contain a certain number of words of Volga Bulgar origin. For example, the Tatar and Bashkir word *izge* has the meaning “holy, most sacred”. The word also exists in Kazakh and some other Turkic languages in the meaning “good, sacral”. This form derives from the Volga Bulgar \**ezgi* < *ezgü*. This was a Volga Bulgar version of the Old Turkic *edgü* “good”. It was adopted into Hungarian, where it acquired the meaning “holy”. Cf. *egyház* “church” *egy* “holy

sacred” < West Old Turkic \**edü*, East Old Turkic *ädgü*, + *ház* “house,” Róna-Tas et al., I: 307-310. In many Turkic languages, the change was *edgü .edgü > ezgü > eygü* {cf. Modern Turkish *iyi*}.<sup>12</sup> Many words often receive a second life. The Chuvash word *šărpă* [k] “fishbone” is a borrowing of the Tatar *širpi*, which was itself adopted from the language of the Volga Bulgars (*širpi*). The word *šărpă* could have entered Mari from either Tatar or Chuvash [Róna-Tas 2007].

From all this we can conclude that among the Volga Bulgars there were tribes speaking a language of the Chuvash type that were later assimilated by the Kipchaks who penetrated into the area in the thirteenth century [Zimonyi 2007]. Evidently there is a degree of historical truth in this. So “the heirs to the Bulgar culture are the Kazan Tatars, in whose Kipchak language in the best case a couple of dozen borrowings from the Bulgar tongue remain” [Napolskikh. Permsko-ugorskiye]. In that case the thesis identifying the Bulgars as the historical ancestors of the Volga Tatars becomes even more obvious.

**Ethnography.** After the death of Attila, the Bulgars, who had been part of the Hunnic confederation, begin to crop up in the sources under their own name.

Among the events of the year 539/540 Theophanes mentioned unrest caused by Bulgars in Illyricum (the western Balkans). The forces of the Gepids, who were allies of Byzantium, wiped out almost all the insurgent Bulgars. The ringleaders and a number of warriors were despatched to Constantinople and led through the hippodrome in a triumphal parade, while the Bulgars that had been taken prisoner were sent to serve in Armenia and Lazica. At this point Theophanes added: “And peace came to Thrace because the Huns no longer dared to cross the Danube” [Theophan. Chron.]. So Theophanes called the Bulgars Huns. In reality the Bulgars (the “mixed people” or the “rebels”) were a large conglomerate of Oghurs, Huns and other elements [Golden 2008a: 259]. Bernát Munkácsi rightly believed, however, that the military and political link between the Bulgars and the Huns does not provide

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<sup>12</sup>In Middle Turkic there are forms *azaq <ađaq >adaq* “foot,” cf. Chuvash *ura*. A presumed Volga Bulgar form is possible, but it also existed in this form in Middle Qipchaq which has: *eygi, egi, eygü, eyi, eyü, igi* and, *izgü*, see Recept Toparlı, et al. 2003:78, 118.

grounds for equating them on an ethnic level. In his opinion the Bulgars were not Huns either by origin or by language, but together with other nomadic tribes in the Black Sea area they ended up subordinated to the Huns and under the influence of their culture [Munkácsi 1903: 67-68; Dmitriyeva, Agyagási2001: 23]. Some scholars believe that the Bulgars were originally a Ugrian people like the Magyars. They may, however, have already been Turkicized by the Huns and then, in any case, by the Türks-Khazars [Beyer 2009: 481]. As for the Onogur tribes, that name appears both in Chinese sources and on ancient Turkic monuments. The Onogurs were not initially Bulgars, as some researchers assert, but, most probably, of Ugrian origin. The main part of them formed the proto-Bulgars. The name Unogundur is a variant of Onogur [Moravcsik 1983: 167; Chichurov 1980: 107-108,111] (*on ogur* – Chuvash *vunã yãh* – “ten tribes”). Sources (Theophanes, for example) and ethnographers (such as [Beyer 2009: 481]) identify the Bulgars with the Unogundurs and mention them in conjunction with the Kotrags and also consider those tribes to have had a common origin. When the Bulgars in the northern Black Sea region became part of the Türk kaganate, people began to call them Türks, although they retained their language and tribal name [Mukhamadiyev2011: 14]. In the eighth and ninth centuries the Bulgars made up one of the ethnic components of Alania [Kuznetsov 1992: 102-103].

The list of tribes in Volga Bulgaria that we know from Aḥmad Ibn Faḍlān’s manuscript is not long: the Bulgars, Suvars, Eskel, Bashgard (Bashkirs), Rusiya (Rus), Wisu (Veps) and Baranjars – members of a single household (apparently a reference to a large patriarchal clan). Despite the fact that many Arab sources and scholars take the term Bulgar to be a city, in Ibn Faḍlān’s time it meant the country. In Najīb Hamadānī’s encyclopaedia *The Wonders of Creation* Bulgar is described as “a large region”. Scholars rightly translate it as “land” [Kovalevskii 1956: 153,161]. There is doubt about whether there was a city of Bulgar as such by the time of Ibn Faḍlān’s visit. In a source dating from 895 Bulgar is presented as consisting of wood and reed buildings [Al-Mukaddasi 1994: 289]. According to twelfth-century information in the city of Suvar the buildings were wooden. The inhabitants took

shelter in them in winter, but in summer they lived in tents [Al-Idrisi 2006: 120]. In other words, it was only more than two centuries after Ibn Faḍlān that wooden houses and tents appeared in Suvar. There is no mention of brick buildings. “All the buildings and inscriptions that survive in [Bulgar] now date from the period of Mongol dominion” [Bartold 1968: 136]. Those researching the legacy of Volga Bulgaria would do well to remember that fact and not transpose information from the 1200s–1500s back to the 900s–1100s. For example, in the first half of the twelfth century al-Gharnāṭī saw a completely wooden city of Bulgar. He wrote: “And Bulgar, also a huge city, was all built of pine, and the city walls of oak... And the cold of winter can be very strong, so much so that wood splits from the harshness of the frost” [Al-Garnati 1971: 30]. We must keep in mind that the present masonry ruins of the city of Bulgar are from buildings that appeared after 1236 and of a later period. At the least, the existing historical monument, the Bulgar Museum-Preserve, is not the legacy of the Suvars. In the late 1200s – early 1300s there were three bathhouses in the city of Bulgar. In the first half of the fourteenth century Bulgar consisted of houses built of pine wood, while the fortress walls were of oak [Khvol’son 1869: 87]. As of the year 1220 the town of Oshel was also entirely wooden. A chronicle digest testifies that in that year the forces of Prince Yuri Vsevolodovich surrounded Oshel. “Around the town there was a stockade, oak paling ... they cut through the paling... set fire to it... cut through the paling and the stronghold... set fire to the town,” the chronicler reported. “And Sviatoslav stood there while the town burnt and captured Oshel” [PSRL 28: 48,205-206]. For comparison: in 1437 the towns of Riazan and Kolomna were fortified with wooden rather than masonry walls, because in those parts there is little stone [Barbaro. K ist. 9]. In other words, up to the fifteenth century wooden buildings predominated in the towns and cities of the region as a whole.

In the early tenth century the Bulgars wore long jackets. In that they resembled the Khazars and Bajanaks (Pechenegs) and differed from the Rus, who wore short jackets [Al’-Balkhi. Book7; Ibn Ḥawqal.Book1.6.2.14]. In 985 the Novgorodian *voevody* Vladimir and Dobrynia defeated Bulgaria, but, seeing that they were all

wearing boots, refrained from demanding tribute. In other words, the Russians knew in advance that such a people would not accept oppression. And peace was concluded between them. Both sides decided that “There shall be peace between us until stone begins to float in water and hops to sink” [PSRL 4,1: 60; 6,1: 71; 16: 250]. Khan Berke of the Golden Horde wore, among other expensive clothing, a gold belt with precious stones on green Bulgar leather [El‘-Mufaddal‘ 1884: 193]. Bulgar leather, better known as *bulgari*, was famed well beyond the Volga basin in the Middle Ages. “It is an absolute certainty that the Tatar national patterned coloured footwear has deep, Bulgar, traditions” [Fakhrutdinov 1986: 67].

In the late 1200s – early 1300s the Bulgars had no fruit trees or grapevines. The sources put this down to the strong frosts in the area. Black radish did ripen, though, and it grew to an enormous size [Abu-l-Fida' 2009: 125].

The Bulgar state lived mainly from trade. Khazaria and Rus' did business with it, as well as all the tribes living on both banks of the Volga. The main commodity was fur – sable, ermine and squirrel. Visiting merchants paid duty in the form of a tenth of their goods. The Bulgars accepted minted imported coins in exchange for their main wealth – marten pelts. Expensive furs of various kinds were sent to southern lands, the Crimea, for example. In Bulgaria there was heavy cultivation of grain and string animal husbandry. The sources most often mention wheat, barley and millet [Ibn-Dasta. Izvestiya III. 3,4,6; Rubruk.Puteshestviye 7]. “They met us carrying with them bread, meat, millet,” Ibn Faḍlān wrote [Ibn-Fadlan1956: 131]. Gardizi wrote of Bulgaria having grain, meat, pumpkins, lentils and beans. In 1024 a great revolt took place in Suzdal and a famine broke out. Many regions of the upper Volga basin were similarly starving. “The whole population went along the Volga to the Bulgars from whom they bought grain and thus sustained themselves,” the Laurentian Chronicle tells us [PSRL 1: 148]. The same story is repeated in the Novgorodian and Sofia Chronicles, only instead of *zhito* “grain” they state more specifically *pshenitsiu i zhito* “wheat and grain” [PSRL 4,1: 112]. As we see, agriculture was the main branch of the Bulgars' economy. Nevertheless, animal



husbandry also played a significant role in the life of the population [Grekov 1959: 523].

Minted dirhams were broken into pieces and given to the Rus and Slavs as they would only sell their wares for dirhams [Bartold 1973: 58]. The ruling class bought up agricultural produce and craft goods from the non-Bulgar inhabitants of the Middle Volga and other lands and then exported them to the countries of the East. To Khorezm, for example, they exported sable, squirrel, ermine, fox, marten and beaver fur, hare and goat skins, as well as wax, arrows, caps, fish glue and “teeth”, honey, hazelnuts, swords, chain mail, sheep and cows [Al-Mukaddasi 325]. “Fish teeth” were mammoth and walrus tusks that the Bulgars acquired from the ancestors of the Mansi (Voguls) [Fakhrutdinov 1986: 67]. Bulgaria imported articles from the East, selling them on to its northern and western neighbours. Acting as brokers brought the merchants profit [Firsov 1866: 14]. Particularly close commercial relations were established with the Khazars and the Rus [Al-Bekri 1879: 63]. This sort of activity was later typical of the Tatars of the Volga basin. The Suvars, and later the Chuvash, as a people tied to the soil were also purchasers of goods from the Bulgars and then the Tatars. The culture of the Bulgars of the Golden Horde period formed on the basis on a foundation of local traditions. “If you make a comparison of the Bulgaro-Tatar culture with that of the Khanate of Kazan and present-day Tatars, it is not difficult to realize that Bulgar culture was the basis for the culture of the Kazan Tatars” [Smirnov 1948: 16].

In the second half of the ninth century and early tenth the Bulgars rode on horseback, wore chain mail and were fully armed. Any man wanting to marry had to pay the ruler a tax in the form of a saddle-horse [Ibn-Dasta. *Izvestiya* III. 5-6].

In 1172 the city of Kazan was founded. A convenient site not only geographically but also economically was found for the new settlement. “The place is most convenient and most beautiful, well pastured, with many bees, all kinds of grain and vegetables in great abundance, with wild beasts and fish, and lands of all sorts,” the chronicler enthused [PSRL 19: 10].

“The traditional material and spiritual culture changes radically, mainly due to interferences from Central Asia, chiefly from Khorezm. From the middle of the thirteenth century the city of Bulgar becomes the summer residence of the khans of the Golden Horde, who had settled in the lower reaches of the Volga” [Egorov 2009: 155]. Since the Mongol-Tatars held sway over the most powerful tribes and countries they enjoyed absolute esteem and as a way of expressing such exceptional honour both they and their subject peoples began to be called Tatars.

As has already been said, in 1395 Russian *voevody* took the cities of Bulgar, Zhiukotin, Kazan and Keremenchiuk. The chronicles call all the lands in question “Tatar”. In other words, by that time the concept “Bulgars” had already been superseded by “Tatars”. The Laurentian Chronicle states under the year 1229 that “the Polovtsians fled from the lowlands to the Bulgars ahead of the Tatars” [PSRL 1: 314], i.e. they sought refuge from the Mongol-Tatars. Kazan ethnographers quite correctly comment on this episode: “The Kipchaks would scarcely have come to the Bulgars unless they hoped for some sort of support... Already in the pre-Mongol era the ethnic interaction between Kipchaks and Volga Bulgars had already begun. This is also indicated by isolated toponymical data [Iskhakov, Izmailov 2000: 50]. Such toponyms are said to be Tuxhchin, Sobekul’, Kaibych, Chitaim Shyrdan and Tarlau.

The Bulgars undoubtedly comingled with the Tatars [Kunik 1878: 146]. With the shift of the centre of the Bulgar state to Kazan this state of affairs was consolidated. “From that time the name Tatar became attached once and for all to the population of the Middle Volga” [Smirnov 1948: 16]. That was, however, only a change of exonym, because the Bulgars continued to speak of themselves as Bulgars. The Russian chronicles of the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries continue to call the Bulgars by their own name. Among the titles of the rulers of Russia official documents include the name of the country of Bulgaria, for example: “Vasily III – Sovereign of All the Russias and Grand Prince of Vladimir and Moscow, of Novgorod, Pskov, Tver, Yugra, Perm, Bulgar, Viatka and others...” Or “Ivan Vasilyevich – Grand Prince of Vladimir, Moscow, Novgorod, Pskov, Tver, Yugra,

Perm, Bulgar, Smolensk and many other lands, Tsar and Sovereign of All the Russias” Peter the Great similarly styled himself “Tsar of Moscow, Kiev, ... Kazan, ... Bulgar,…” “The local population that now call themselves Tatars, up to the nineteenth century inclusively, indeed not only up to the nineteenth century but right up to the October Revolution, called themselves Bulgars. It was precisely the common people that laid claim to that appellation” [Raimov 1948: 145]. The tendency endures to this day among a certain section of the population.

As we can see, the question of continuity between the Bulgars and the Tatars receives a positive answer. At a symposium on the origins of the Kazan Tatars in 1946, Alexander Yakubovsky came out with a definitive formulation: “The ethnic foundation of the Kazan Tatars ... comprises the ancient Bulgars, who also absorbed new elements that have as yet been poorly studied and were only subsequently given the name Tatar” [Iakubovskii 1948: 133]. At that same time Alexei Smirnov expressed a similar idea. He believed that the Bulgar culture had been the foundation for the creation of the later Tatar culture [Smirnov 1948: 150]. We should, however, undoubtedly take into consideration the circumstance that in the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries the historical ties with Volga Bulgaria had almost become extinct in the communal consciousness of the peoples of the Middle Volga. And the desire of certain present-day Kazan Tatars to get the name *Bulgars* back for themselves has justly been called “the invention of traditions” [Shamiloglu 2011: 280]. Too extensive changes have taken place in the history of the peoples that once inhabited Volga Bulgaria. The time has passed. The wish to give the Kazan Tatars back the Bulgar ethnonym is today just an academic theory and a bureaucratic procedure [Tishkov 2013: XLV].

It is indeed the case that “at the time of the Bulgar state the Volga Bulgars and the ancestors of the Chuvash, although they were genetically close to each other, were different peoples” [Khattori 1980: 93]. During the period when Volga Bulgaria was in existence the Suvars had still not managed to form as a people. Later, too, there were strong differences between northern and southern groups. This specific –

the existence of two basic cultural dialects of the forest and steppe Chuvash – has survived in rudimentary form down to the present. It did not, however, even to any degree hinder the formation of a single ethnos.

A detailed examination of the ethnographic sources makes it possible to confirm the thesis that the Chuvash could not have arisen from a Bulgar tribe. Even with a retrospective, purely theoretical look it is impossible to construct such a scheme. Lines from Ibn Faḍlān's book confirm the hostile relations between the Suvars and Bulgars. The manuscript *Ḥudūd al-‘Ālam*, compiled in the late tenth century and telling about the beginning of that century, testifies not only to antagonism between the Bulgars and the Suvars, but also to the Bulgars being in a state of war with the Barsul and Eskels. Peter Golden writes about the same thing in his works [Golden 2008: 236]. Vasily Bartold asserted that the present-day Chuvash could obviously not have come from the inhabitants of the cities on the Volga but only from those parts of the population of Bulgaria that always lived in the forests and were little affected by the Islamic urban culture [Bartold 1968: 520]. Of course, we should add that the Suvars tilled the soil, raised animals and continued to follow the traditional rituals and beliefs of their ancestors – some up until the Mongol invasion, some up to the adoption of Orthodox Christianity, some even to the present day.

In response to the question of whether the Bulgars were the ancestors of the Chuvash, Bernát Munkácsi gave a very reasoned answer. In the Chuvash ethnic question the main consideration is that they never call themselves Bulgars, the Hungarian scholar wrote. Undoubtedly the ethnonym *Čuvaš* is not evidence of past identity with the Bulgars. However, considering all the other circumstances, it must be admitted that *Čuvaš* is the name of a people that was historically connected with the Bulgars. Really there is nothing to add and nothing to take away here. Nevertheless, Munkácsi did make an obvious historical mistake. He stated that the ancestors of the Chuvash were in all probability subordinate to the Bulgars and as such exchanged their own language for the Bulgar tongue [Munkácsi 1903; Dmitriyeva, Agyagási2001: 24]. The result is an amusing discrepancy. Of course that

is not what happened. Although Munkácsi does not specify what period in the history of the ancestors of the Chuvash he is referring to, for any chronological era his idea of the regeneration of the Chuvash tribe as Bulgars is incorrect. Yes, in the Caucasus and on the Volga the Savirs/Suvars did from time to time belong to a single political or military conglomerate together with the Bulgars, but the two tribes never mixed to the point of a loss of identity. Although in the process of the formation of the Bulgaro-Tatar ethnos there was undoubtedly also a partial assimilation of the Suvars.

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A comparative study of the history and culture of the Bulgars and the Kazan Tatars leads scholars to conclude that they are genetically connected. However, the main role in the formation of the Volga Tatars as an ethnos was played by the cultural traditions of the Bulgars, which were continued and developed in the culture of the Kazan Tatars. It was the tribes of Volga Bulgaria, primarily and predominantly the Bulgars, who made up the bulk of the Tatar ethnos. It is the popular masses and not the tribal elite which was connected with the Golden Horde that we should have in mind when we speak of the history of the Volga Tatars. I want to stress once again that we have to separate the two concepts “Bulgar” and “Suvar” and not hyphenate them as “Bulgaro-Suvars” or “Bulgar-Suvars”. There is neither a “Bulgaro-Suvar” individual nor a “Bulgaro-Suvar” tribe. We should speak of a Suvar person or of the tribe of Suvars only in a concrete meaning. It is possible to write “the Suvars living in Bulgaria”. The Bulgars and the Suvars, and also the Bulgars and the Chuvash, are separate concepts and entirely independent however closely related they might be to each other. When they fail to identify the ancestors of the Chuvash, scholars “resort to cunning” and write “Bulgaro-Suvars”, safeguarding themselves, as it were, by pointing just in case to both tribes as ancestors. As if to say, “Let the readers choose what they prefer.” None of this bears any relation to scholarly research. Meanwhile researchers into the history of Volga Bulgaria make a clear-cut classification of the Bulgars as nomadic pastoralists and the Suvars as skilled crop-growers.

## CONCLUSION

In this book I have analyzed the two main versions of the origins and formation of the Chuvash people – the Savir and Bulgar hypotheses.

The tribes of Eurasia were all connected with each other to one degree or another; yet each people travelled its own historical road. For the ancestors of the Chuvash the genetically nearest tribes and closest neighbours up until the middle of the first century AD were the Ugrians and Iranians, in the second to fifth centuries the Huns. After that came the Bulgars, Khazars, Eastern Finns, Tatars and Russians. Originally the Savirs were closest to the Ugrians and Iranians. According to the primary sources and in my own opinion, the Savir hypothesis is closest to the truth. Nevertheless the present-day Chuvash cannot be called direct descendants of the Savirs because their history, anthropology, traditional rites and beliefs as well as their language have to one extent or another absorbed components from all their historical neighbours.

Those who research history and religion (whether on a world or a national level) will inevitably find themselves in the firing line. Attacks might come from the guardians of state policy, from zealous adherents of major religions or from nationalist camps. None of them will accept fully as the truth the writings of a historian and ethnographer who is doing no more than systemizing the real picture of what took place. We should not, however, fall into thinking that politicians and politics decide the fate of people. Religion, language, ethnography, art, folklore, the leaders of tribes and nations – those are the factors that cement and determine an ethnic identity. We know that bilingualism foreshadows the assimilation of one tribe or people by another. In the realm of traditional culture (for example, economic-cultural type) there may be mutual influences, enrichment and absorption. However, dual faith and still more the adoption of an outside religion means a sea change in ethnic consciousness and embarking on a course of rejecting original values

accumulated through centuries of ancestral experience. For that reason the years from the eighteenth century to the present do not look so successful against the background of ethnic history. The facts indicate that the *Sepers – Sepirs – Sapirs – Savars – Savirs – Suvars* correctly assessed situations along their strategic journey. The Suvars who went off to the right bank of the Volga in 922 were the ancestral nucleus of today's Chuvash that managed on its long historical path to hold on to original traditions and to avoid the fate of being swallowed up by Islamic or Orthodox culture. The path travelled by the ancestors of the Chuvash has been the story of a search for themselves.

A love of one's history elevated to the level of blind fanaticism, unmindful idealization and the desire to set one's own ancestors higher than those of other tribes and nations is akin to extremism. And generally speaking a strong sense of ethnic identity can manifest itself differently in different situations. In some cases it can help people to adapt; in others it can become a threat to the integrity of the state.

Any piece of research is incomplete. Especially if it attempts the near-impossible – the comprehensive study of the history of the provenance of a people. Like any scholarly work, this essay cannot be considered the final word. If only because material that might lead to amendments has been left outside the bounds of the book. Those amendments would, however, only affect individual paragraphs and not the general tenor. The conclusions put forward are based on a reliable corpus of primary sources and on the works of leading scholars.

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## CONDITIONAL REDUCTIONS

ChGhI – arkhiv Chuvashskogo gosudarstvennogo instituta gumanitarnykh nauk

PSRL – Polnoye sobraniye russkikh letopisei

PSZRI – Polnoye sobraniye Zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii

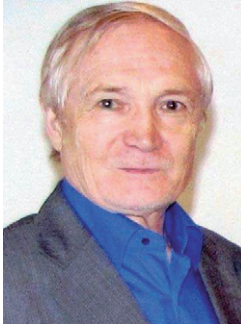
RAN – arkhiv Sankt-Peterburgskogo filiala Rossiiskoi akademii nauk

RASL – The Library of the Russian academy of sciences

SE – zh. "Sovetskaya etnografiya"

SUS – Suomalais-Ugrilaisen Seura arkisto. Helsinki

VDI – zh. "Vestnik drevnei istorii"



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